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Evaluation of biological remains from A66 improvements (archaeological trial trenching), Greta Bridge to Stephen Bank and Carkin Moor to Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire (site code: ASS99)

by

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Summary

Five sediment samples from deposits revealed by excavations associated with improvements to the A66 (archaeological trial trenching), Greta Bridge to Stephen Bank and Carkin Moor to Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

The very few ancient biological remains recovered were limited to very small fragments of charcoal and other charred plant remains (including charred cereals) of no interpretative value beyond that discussed in the text.

No further work is recommended on the current material.

KEYWORDS: A66 IMPROVEMENTS; GRETA BRIDGE TO STEPHEN BANK; CARKIN MOOR TO SCOTCH CORNER; EVALUATION; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

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Introduction

A series of archaeological excavations was carried out by Northern Archaeological Associates along the proposed line for the upgrading of the A66 between Greta Bridge and Stephen Bank, and Scotch Corner and Carkin Moor, late in 1999. These revealed only a little archaeology associated with the known Iron Age and Romano-British sites at Scotch Corner and Rock Castle, and the presumed Dark Age linear monument of Scot's Dike. Sediment samples from five contexts ('GBA' and 'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were recovered from the deposits and submitted to the EAU for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

All of the sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory. Descriptions of their lithologies were recorded using a standard *pro forma*. All five samples were processed following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Table 1 lists the samples delivered for assessment and gives notes on their treatment.

Results

The results are presented in context number order by trench. Archaeological information (provided by the excavator) are given in

square brackets. Where sample numbers have not been allocated by the excavator these have been derived from the Context numbers (by suffixing '01') for EAU internal record keeping purposes.

Trench S1/14

Context 1401 [fill of ditch at NE corner of trench]
Sample 140101 (20 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm)

Dry, light orange-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated, sandy silt with small and medium-sized stones (6-60 mm) and modern rootlets present.

The small washover of about 50 cm³ consisted of modern roots with some charcoal (to 10 mm maximum dimension), including fragments of ash (*Fraxinus*) and oak (*Quercus*), one or two poorly preserved charred barley (*Hordeum*) grains and some modern uncharred wheat chaff. There were also traces of charred rootlet/twig material probably of heather, *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull.

The small residue (dry weight 2.35 kg) was of stones, sand and gravel with a few modern rootlets.

Trench S1/15-16

Context 1601 [gully fill]
Sample 160101 (20 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm)

Dry, light brown (to light grey-brown internally), brittle to crumbly (working soft and slightly sticky when wetted), slightly clay silt. Very small and small stones (2-20 mm) and modern rootlets were present in the sample.

The tiny washover (of only a few cm³ in volume) was mostly of modern roots and earthworm egg capsules, with traces of charcoal and charred ?heather root/twig (both to 5 mm).

The small residue (dry weight 2.2 kg) was mostly stones, gravel and sand with a few modern rootlets, a tiny fragment of ?coal (to 3 mm), and a few earthworm egg capsules.

Trench S6/33

Context 3302 [fill or E-W linear feature]

Sample 6 (13 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm)

Moist, mid grey-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated (working just soft when wetted), slightly clay silt with small and medium-sized stones (6-60 mm) and modern rootlets present.

The very small washover (of about 50 cm³) comprised modern roots and uncharred weed seeds (of several kinds), a little charcoal (to 10 mm) and a few very 'battered' charred cereal grains, amongst which at least one was tentatively identified as wheat (*Triticum*). There were also traces of charred ?heather root/twig material (to 5 mm).

The small residue (dry weight 2.25 kg) was mostly stones, gravel and sand with a little charcoal (to 15 mm) and a few modern rootlets.

Trench S7/39

Context 3921 [primary fill of linear ditch cut 3920]

Sample 392101 (8 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm)

Just moist, mid to dark grey-brown to mid orange-brown, brittle to crumbly (working soft and slightly sticky when wetted), clay silt. Small stones (6-20 mm) and modern rootlets were present in the sample.

The washover was a few cm³ of charcoal and charred ?heather root/twig fragments (both to 5 mm) with some modern roots.

The tiny residue (dry weight 0.2 kg) was mostly stones and sand with some gravel and a little charcoal (to 6 mm).

Context 3925 [fill of linear cut 3924]

Sample 392501 (19 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm)

Moist, mid grey with mid brown patches, crumbly to unconsolidated (working soft and sticky when wetted), slightly sandy clay silt/silty clay with small patches (to 8 mm) of light grey sand. Modern rootlets were present in the sample.

The washover consisted of about 25 cm³ of charcoal (to 15 mm) and modern roots. There were a few 'battered' cereals (barley, ?wheat and ?oats, cf. *Avena*), a single charred pod fragment of the cornfield weed wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum* L.) and some charred root/rhizome fragments, including ?heather (to 10 mm) which might represent material originating in burnt turves. Although the overall concentration of these vegetative remains was low, several types were represented.

The very small residue (dry weight 0.75 kg) was mostly sand and gravel with some charcoal (to 25 mm, including charred twig fragments), and a few stones and lumps of undisaggregated sediment (to 2 mm).

Discussion and statement of potential

The ancient biological material recovered from these samples was restricted to charred plant remains; these are probably too sparse and poorly preserved to justify further work either on the material already processed or on further samples from the site. However, should further excavation reveal deposits with obvious concentrations of charred material an effort should be made to sample and examine them archaeobotanically.

Recommendations

No further investigation of the biological remains from these deposits is warranted.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining sediment samples may

be discarded unless they are to be sieved specifically for artefact recovery (though such an exercise is unlikely to prove fruitful given that no artefacts were recovered from the material processed for this evaluation).

Archive

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

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Table 1. List of the sediment samples evaluated from A66 improvements (archaeological trial trenching), Greta Bridge to Stephen Bank and Carkin Moor to Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire (with notes on their treatment).

Context	Sample	Context description	Notes
1401	140101	fill of ditch at NE corner of trench	20 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm
1601	160101	gully fill	20 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm
3302	6	fill or E-W linear feature	13 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm
3921	392101	primary fill of linear ditch cut 3920	8 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm
3925	392501	fill of linear cut 3924	19 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover to 500 µm