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"Spirit of Place" as Process: Archaeography, Dowsing and Perceptual Mapping at Belas Knap

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Liz Poraj-Wilczynska is an English artist and archaeographer. She trained as an archaeological illustrator at Crickley Hill Archaeological Trust, producing finds illustrations and reconstruction drawings for publications such as *Prehistoric Gloucestershire* by Professor Timothy Darvill and *Village Fortress Shrine* by Dr Richard Savage, and a mobile exhibition for Crickley Hill which was a finalist for the Hepworth Heritage communication award 1988. She is currently working on a multi-media project at Belas Knap long barrow.

The latest book by Tom Graves and Liz Poraj-Wilczynska is *The Disciplines of Dowsing* (2008)

Abstract

"Spirit of place," or *genius loci*, is both an abstract concept and a profoundly personal experience of relationship with place. Each place and district and region has its own characteristics, both explicit and implicit, that make

it "locally distinctive," to use the term coined by the English charity Common Ground. As such, it provides a rich seam of interest for archaeography—archaeology's artistically-oriented cousin.

Using examples from a long-term archaeography project at and around the Belas Knap long-barrow in south-west England, this paper explores an approach in which, by combining the formal rigor of archaeology with disciplines from a variety of other sources, "spirit of place" can be transformed from metaphor to method, yielding not only new insights about past and present, but also concrete archaeological evidence about habitation and use.

Keywords: archaeography, spirit of place, sensory archaeology, art, methodology, subjective investigation

Introduction

What is "spirit of place"? How would we interact with it? And what can we learn from such interactions, in relation to the past at that place?

For much of the past century, such questions would have made little sense in archaeology—indeed, they might well have been derided and dismissed as "lunatic fringe" (Daniel 1981; Williamson and Bellamy 1983). In recent years, though, there has been increasing academic interest not just in the objective facts and artifacts of the past, but also in the subjective *experience* of the past—phenomenology. This interest is evidenced in new modes of research such as experimental archaeology (Butser 2008; Percival 1980), acoustic archaeology (Devereux 2001; Watson 2007), sensory archaeology (Skeates 2008), and the audio-visual survey described by the Landscape and Perception Project team (2008) as "attempting to look and listen as if with Stone Age eyes and ears."

Intersecting with formal archaeology in this new approach is another relatively recent discipline, exploring the subtle, complex boundaries between archaeology, art, and culture. A common generic term for this process is "archaeography" (Shanks 2008), though other terms are also used, such as "deep mapping" (Shanks and Pearson 2001), reflecting different styles and emphases within the same overall approach.

This paper aims to describe the rationale, methodology, activities, preliminary outcomes, and suggested implications of an archaeography project primarily focused on Belas Knap, a Neolithic long-barrow near Cheltenham in the Cotswolds region of south-west England.

Archaeography

As in many other scientific disciplines, artists have worked alongside archaeologists for decades, perhaps for centuries. Skilled illustrators have extracted visual meaning and subtle detail from corroded, crumpled archaeological artifacts; and other artists, such as the great Alan Sorrell, have interpreted the available evidence to perform near-miracles of precise yet imaginative reconstruction, clarifying the confusions of complex, multi-layered sites (Sorrell and Sorrell 1981). Yet archaeologists too have long been interested in art itself, both of the past and present; other artists have long been inspired by archaeology; and on occasion the boundaries between them will seem to blur, with results that may sometimes seem strange but are

usually insightful, as Renfrew (2003), for example, describes from an archaeologist's perspective, and Lippard (1983) from that of an art-historian.

In recent years a formal discipline of archaeography has been created to exploit this bridge between archaeology, art, and culture. For example, Stanford-based archaeologist Michael Shanks and colleagues have explored the use of art-photography and theatre-performance to describe themes such as the socio-political archaeology of Franco's Spain (González-Ruibal 2007) and nineteenth-century rural Wales (Shanks and Pearson 2001), while Aaron Watson has used photo-collage, paintings, and mixed-media for a similar purpose in exhibitions on Neolithic archaeology (Watson 2007). Coming from another direction, the current pilot project for the Landscape and Perception Project—an archaeological and archaeographic study of the Preseli region in south-west Wales—is being funded under the auspices of London's Royal College of Art (Landscape Perception 2008).

In yet another approach, pioneer landscape-archaeologist Peter Fowler has turned to oil-painting as a way to explore alternative perspectives on sites such as Avebury, because, as he describes,

> In—I would say not a post-archaeological phase but in a plus-painting phase—I now see that there are things about the landscape that cannot be explained by entirely rational means. They can't just be explained and understood by entirely scientific methods. (Fowler 2008: 80)

In his classic *The Art of Scientific Investigation*, William Beveridge (1950) shows that the same applies in the biological sciences, and to other sciences in general. He demonstrates that the most important instrument in research is the mind of the researcher, and thence the need to develop an awareness of the value of chance, of intuition, of the hazards and limitations of an over-reliance on reason: "the origin of discoveries is beyond the reach of reason," he says. And Fowler also emphasizes the "*aesthetic sense* … the very subtle and sensitive placing of the elements and sites and the interrelation between them in a great landscape like Avebury."

The approach to archaeography taken by the authors of this paper likewise comes more from the artist's perspective, but is also anchored in formal methods: one author has worked for almost two decades as an archaeological illustrator, while the other has a professional background in systems-analysis and methodology design.

Perhaps the key theme in archaeography is an emphasis on subjective response to the past as experienced in a place—in effect, an intersection of place, time, and mind. Fowler warns, though, that this should be viewed as an adjunct to the science of archaeology, and neither separate from nor a substitute for it: "if you don't have the science, you're

Fig 1 Airview of Belas Knap (photo: Paul Devereux)

talking absolute nonsense," he states baldly (2008: 81). In archaeography, then, subjective "deep exploration" of an archaeological context acts as a complement to the more conventional objective research, often providing unexpected hints and clues that open up new possibilities for scientific inquiry. Shanks and Pearson, for example, summarize their approach to deep-mapping as follows.

> Reflecting eighteenth-century antiquarian approaches to place, which included history, folklore, natural history and hearsay, the deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the discursive and the sensual; the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place… (Shanks and Pearson 2001: 64–5)

In this there are strong parallels to the work on "local distinctiveness" by the English charity Common Ground, which states that

> [it] is characterized by elusiveness, it is instantly recognizable yet difficult to describe … It is as much about the commonplace as about the rare, about the everyday as much as the endangered, and about the ordinary as much as the spectacular … everyplace is its own living museum, dynamic and filled with sensibilities to its own small richnesses. (Clifford and King 1993)

Other parallels can be drawn from research on landscape perception in the forestry context:

> landscapes *surround*—they permit movement and exploration and force the observer to become a participant;
> landscapes are *multimodal*—information is received through multiple senses and processed (broadly speaking) simultaneously;
> landscapes provide *peripheral* vision as well as central, from *behind* and in front, in and out of *focus*;
> landscapes provide *more information than can be used*—they can simultaneously provide redundant, inadequate, ambiguous, conflicting and contradictory information;
> landscape perception always involves *action*—landscapes cannot be passively observed, they provide opportunity for action, control, manipulation. (Ittleson 1973, quoted in Ward-Thompson 1998)

And there are also some parallels with psychogeography and the practice of the *dérive*, as a process of subjective observation in the built environment (Debord 1956). Psychogeography places a strong emphasis on the urban context and the politics of the present rather than on the cultures of the past, but the same principles can be seen to apply to the layered views of archaeography and archaeology:

> [The] city is built upon physical pockets of forgetfulness. Forgotten places, forgotten spaces. Covered up because the city, by its nature, builds upon itself, continually upon itself—creating a series of different layers. Layers that are mixed together, layers that are no longer distinct, layers that are altogether forgotten amongst each other. Especially in Manchester, where the medieval covers over the Victorian, where the 21st century rests inside the

> Edwardian and where the Cold War lies beneath us all. (Rainey 2007)

A similar layered perspective is provided by the foresight/strategy tool of Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah 1998). Described as "postructuralism as method," this reviews a context by a disciplined technique of moving between four distinct conceptual or perceptual levels, depicted as "the litany" or everyday, "social causes," discourse or worldview, and metaphor or deep-myth. The resultant contrasts provide a richness and depth that would not otherwise be available from the usual tools and techniques used in each individual layer.

The practices described later in this paper incorporate all of the above, and add two further tools: archaeological dowsing and perceptual mapping.

Archaeological Dowsing

Dowsing is most commonly associated with water-divining, but is more generically a set of techniques for structured primary sensing at a defined location, in most cases using a pair of bent wires, a pendulum, a forked twig or the like as a hand-held "instrument." It would be fair to say that it has had a troubled relationship with archaeology: while some well-known archaeologists have themselves been practicing dowsers (Allender-Smith 1939; Latham 1957), others have been scathingly dismissive (Williamson and Bellamy 1983), though sometimes perhaps more from prejudice than from practical experience.

It is true that proponents of the purported "New Age" will present an excess of excitable and often ill-founded claims about "energies" and the like that are supposedly perceived at sites of archaeological interest. (For examples, visit any "New Age" bookshop.) There is enough corroboration between different parties to suggest that *something* is perceived, but exactly what is far from clear, and there is rarely any means to identify what is "'real" and what is the product of hype, hope and wishful thinking. Even the best will often display an amateurishness so akin to that of the classic dilettante antiquarian as to make almost any archaeologist wince. But rather than rejecting all of this outright, we can sidestep any argument by noting that we have no means to link these supposed "energies" to the physical record: so the simple solution is to politely declare all such ideas as out of scope for formal archaeology, and leave it at that.

It can be different, though, where the dowsing literally stays grounded. Despite "occasional forays into the overly implausible" (Graves 1986), there has been a steady accumulation of concrete archaeological evidence initially sourced by dowsing. Examples include a Roman fort and Tudor culvert beneath the site of Kensington Barracks (Bell 1947); Iron Age defensive ditches at Mellor hill-fort (Andrews 2007); Roman roads in Lancashire (Plummer 1976) and Essex (Ingram 2007); and mediaeval farm-buildings at Cressing Temple (Hillman-Crouch 1999). Presentations at recent conferences have also shown an increasing engagement in industrial archaeology. The British Society of Dowsers now runs a formal special-interest group on archaeological dowsing (BSD ADG 2008); there is a much stronger emphasis on operational discipline (Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008) and survey-technique (Fortlage 2006); Essex

County Council also runs occasional courses on archaeological dowsing at its Cressing Temple site (ECC 2008).

So although often unacknowledged, there seems to be a growing consensus that dowsing can have a useful role to play in support of archaeology, especially in large-scale surveys. An experienced dowser can scan a much larger area than is feasible with most current geophysics equipment, and with sufficient accuracy to at least be able to pick out potential areas of interest for more detailed assessment. The dowsing work can thus provide a useful "first-pass" review, perhaps as a follow-up to an aerial survey, for example, and in turn point to smaller areas for geophysics and excavation. The key to quality here is a strict discipline to separate information from interpretation. One anecdote, from a recent survey at Wiggold Farm near Cirencester, should illustrate this: "What I'm finding," said the dowser, "has the same kind of characteristics as a large hut-circle, or even a small henge; but it doesn't feel like either of those." This caution was well-founded: the geophysics resistivity survey had identified the same circular feature, but subsequent excavation showed it to be a periglacial effect—geological, not archaeological (Timothy Darvill, personal communication).

Another aspect of potential interest is in dowsing's traditional use as water-divining. Every habitation would need water; where there is no obvious supply such as a stream or spring, dowsing could perhaps be used to identify probable sources. There is also an apparent pattern that perceived "knots" of water-lines—often referred to as "blind springs," a pattern similar to those associated with preferred locations for wells—tend to occur at certain sites such as round-barrows and the chancel-end of older churches (Figure 2). This has been consistently recorded by many dowsers since at least the 1930s (Boothby, 1935; Allender-Smith, 1939; Underwood, 1947; Lamb, 1965). Any interpretation, such as a purported causal relationship (Underwood, 1969), may be questionable, but from the dowser's perspective the perceived pattern itself does seem beyond doubt.

As for how it works, the various scientific studies over the past century all seem to indicate that no single mechanism is involved (Barrett and Besterman 1926; Maby and

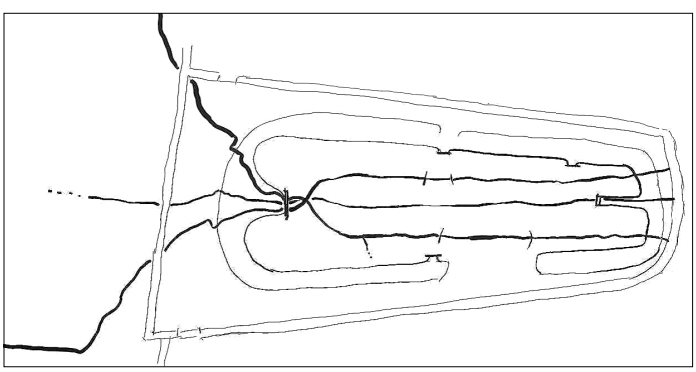

Fig 2 Sketch diagram of water-lines along spine of Belas Knap

Franklin 1939; Tromp 1949; Maby 1966). Instead, it seems more likely that a "weighted sum" is derived from multiple perceptual mechanisms, akin to pattern-recognition in neural networks (Bishop 1995). What is also clear from the studies is that, despite appearances and the users' impressions, the instrument moves only because the hand moves; the hand moves in response to a nervous impulse arising from that "weighted sum;" and the response conforms to that of a mediated or semi-voluntary learned reflex. The result is that dowsers will find it relatively easy, for example, to identify, and trace, any items with distinct edges, such as buried walls or ditches, but will have more difficulty in recognizing smoothly-changing gradations, such as an ill-defined area of residual ash. This leads, too, to useful but occasionally misleading perceptual adaptations: underground water, for example, will usually be perceived as a distinct "water-line," whereas in reality it may only represent a region of seepage centered on the apparent line.

One problematic issue arises from the fact that although dowsing may look simple, it is also a genuine skill. The basics can be learned in a matter of minutes (Graves 1990), but developing reasonable competence on archaeological targets may well take months or years of practice. A solid grounding in archaeology is definitely advantageous: to paraphrase Louis Pasteur, dowsing may at first appear to be chance, but such "chance" favors the prepared mind. In this it resembles the practical skills required in fieldwalking surveys: an experienced fieldwalker would have little difficulty in distinguishing between fragments of chert and flint, for example, while the "untutored eye" will struggle to identify anything. In short, the quality of results will depend on the skill, experience, and background of the dowser; and discipline is essential.

Perceptual Mapping

For archaeography, a separate concern is that, while useful and relevant, dowsing can in some ways be too "mechanical": it permits precise answers at precise locations, but the process of searching for a defined target can itself inhibit the more open "aesthetic sense," to use Fowler's term. For the latter, it may be useful to use the instrument more as one of several means to maintain a kind of meditative focus on the overall "feel" of the place while retaining an open awareness of context—"thinking narrow, being wide" (Graves 1989). This leads in turn to a set of techniques that could be described as "perceptual mapping."

Much like dowsing, perceptual mapping is a structured process of sensing at identified locations. The main difference is that the sensing is explicitly subjective. It may be about perception of sound, as in acoustic archaeology; it may be about touch, or scent, or synaesthesia, as in sensory archaeology; it may track the sensing via external instrumentation, such as the galvanic skin-response measurements used in biomapping "emotion maps" (Nold 2004); it may simply be a note of what is felt in the body or elsewhere (Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008: 112–15). In each case, though, the location is recorded with as high precision as practicable, using photographs, survey-techniques, or GPS, providing an objective anchor for subjective impressions.

The methodology used by the authors of this paper splits the perceptual process into four distinct modes, referred to as "Artist," "Mystic," "Scientist," and "Magician" (Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008). Each of the modes has explicit rules and tactics which are often inherently incompatible with those of other modes: it is therefore essential to focus on only one mode at a time, to be clear as to which mode has priority at any given moment, and also to be clear as to when and how and why to move between the modes.

In the "Artist mode," the emphasis is on sensing, on identifying what is being felt or experienced. Whatever is sensed is recorded exactly at face value, in whatever medium is available, but attempts at interpretation are expressly disallowed in this mode. In principle, this is strictly subjective, but a kind of objectivity may well develop over time when comparisons are made with others' experiences in the same place. For example, in a discussion about a pair of dolmens in the Portela do Meizo Neolithic complex in northern Portugal (Figure 3), at least three experimenters reported the same experience: the reconstructed dolmen 6, the southernmost of the pair, seemed "bright and cheerful," whereas a specific point some ten meters south-east of the peak of the ruined dolmen 5 felt "very bad, depressed … a very unhealthy place to be." But again, the experience itself has no intrinsic meaning in this mode: it simply *is*.

In the "Mystic mode," the emphasis is on belief and belonging. Beliefs are used as tools, in accordance with a guideline attributed to the psychologist Stan Gooch, that "things not only have to be seen to be believed, but also have to be believed to be seen." This is a central theme in the underlying psychology in dowsing, in that a focused belief that the rods will cross over above water, for example, is known to be critical to success (Graves 1989). In effect, the belief—or set of beliefs, as metaphor—acts as a perceptual filter, closing off some possibilities but heightening awareness of others (Lakoff and Johnson 1981). It seems that only one belief-set can be held at any one time, but by switching between beliefs, a more rounded view can be constructed. For archaeography, the notion of a personified "spirit of place" is particularly useful as a guiding metaphor,

Fig 3 Meizo complex, Portugal. Dolmen 6 (top), dolmen 5 (bottom)

as it also heightens a sense of belonging and connection with the place, enhancing sensitivity to the subtle details that make up its "local distinctiveness."

In the "Scientist mode," the emphasis is on verification, measurement, and concrete fact. This mode would be at the fore in formal archaeology, of course, and needs to be so in all reviews and assessments of results, but is often intentionally held back *during* a perceptual-mapping session to allow the Artist mode a freer rein. The main direct uses of the Scientist mode in this process are to identify location and to manage a discipline of record-keeping.

In the "Magician mode," the emphasis is on use and usefulness. Paralleling the quantitative concerns of the Scientist, the focus here is on qualitative issues—efficiency, reliability, appropriateness, and the like—and also, as in industrial quality-management, on continuous improvement of process and skill (Deming 1982). For perceptual mapping, this mode comes to the fore in selecting and switching between different beliefs and metaphors to match the changing needs and context.

To summarize. In perceptual mapping, sensing in any form (the Artist) takes precedence, and the location of each impression is recorded (the Scientist). The sensing is guided and filtered via focus on a chosen belief or metaphor (the Mystic), with the choice and the overall practice monitored in real time (the Magician). The distinct rules of each mode are applied only to the appropriate aspect of the context, and their mutual incompatibilities resolved within the method itself. For archaeography, the end result is a process which permits full expression of the "aesthetic sense," but in a form which can also be reused in part for formal archaeology.

Archaeography and "Spirit of Place"

> When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think, to pay attention rather than constantly pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person, by opening an intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a fully dilated experience. We will always be rewarded if we give the land credit for more than we imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language. (Lopez 1990)

In the Belas Knap archaeography project, one of the core metaphors used was that of "spirit of place," enabling the possibility of a *conversation* with place: "there is an interaction between people and place, and the place has choices too" (Graves 1986). The same principle occurs in the use of Masks in improvisational or "impro" theater, in which the Mask is deemed to have a kind of personality and vocabulary of its own—"spirit of mask," metaphorically speaking. (The capital "M" is used in impro theater to indicate this specific usage of an otherwise ordinary mask.) Each actor who wears a particular Mask enters into relationship with it, resulting in a performance which reflects characteristics of the Mask as much as of the person (Johnstone 1981:143ff). This in turn opens new approaches to explore the "Neolithic mind," by cross-reference to cultures which use masks in ritual, or which use the concept of "spirits" inhabiting ritual or natural objects.

As the archaeographer engages in this "conversation," place becomes Mask, and metaphor becomes method. The felt response (Artist mode) is triggered by the sense of belief and belonging in and to and with the place (Mystic) that arises from the interaction, while still keeping track of the overall purpose (Magician), which in this context is around linking the subjective "experiencing" with concrete artifacts and other objective information (Scientist). Probably the hardest part of the discipline is switching into and out of the Scientist mode to identify locations and the like—more precisely, easy to slip into the Scientist, and much harder to return to the Artist/Mystic—so it is often easier to work in pairs, with one person taking on the entire Scientist or "recorder" role, leaving the other free to concentrate on the Artist/Mystic. The process itself can also be surprisingly tiring: as with dowsing, it can strain the senses to the limit, much like driving in fog (Graves 1989), such that some practical precautions are advisable for safety reasons (Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008). Working in pairs wherever practicable is one such safeguard, likewise keeping glucose tablets or similar high-energy food sources on hand to rapidly "ground" the self out of an overstretched Artist/Mystic mode where necessary.

The belief in "spirit of place" is held *as if* true, which is not the same as saying that it *is* "true"—the distinction is somewhat subtle, but extremely important, once again for safety reasons if nothing else. Some interactions with place in this mode can be emotionally intense and personally challenging; on occasion, as with impro Mask-work (Johnstone 1981:165), it may be necessary to disconnect rapidly from the "conversation," which would not be possible if the belief is held *as* "true." For the same reasons, it is usual to set explicit boundaries around an archaeography session of this type, opening and closing the session and delimiting it as a bounded "special world" in a manner similar to that used in ritual magic (Dukes 1974) or, again, in impro theater.

Although the method is powerful, in several senses of the term, it does require significant skill in observation and self-observation—probably on a par with those of a skilled excavator, but where both the physical context and the self are the subject. Another drawback is that it does take a significant amount of time to establish the "conversation" with place:

> For the first few months I usually entered the site the same way, coming in along the flat bit of the Cotswold Way from the west, from the back-road half a mile away. But then one day I found myself turning to the right, to south, as soon as I entered the field, as if the barrow told me to. Almost immediately I found the first of the flint waste-flakes, near the southwest side, as if I'd been led to it. It feels [as if] that was when the conversation really started. (Belas Knap project notes)

Peter Fowler alludes to the same need for time in which to develop the relationship with place, commenting that he has visited the Avebury region at different times of day and at different seasons for more than half a century:

> After spending hundreds of days on Overton Down since 1959, I've tried to paint what it is like up there … what it feels like to be in the place rather than the place itself. (Fowler 2008:77–8)

Fig 4 Artifacts: flint waste-flakes or proto-implements

And Common Ground (1991) make much the same point in one of their "Rules for Local Distinctiveness": "Slow down, wisdom comes from walking, talking and listening"—in this case, walking, talking, and listening with whatever is perceived as "spirit of place."

Belas Knap—Archaeography in Practice

The Belas Knap archaeography project arose from a recognition that there was nothing to help visitors to the site to interpret and interact with the place, other than the single English Heritage information-board (Figure 5). This presents a brief summary of the known archaeology of the site, but does not place it within its culture or landscape, or the present-day context. To quote Common Ground, "places are process and story as well as artifact, layer upon layer of our continuing history and nature's history intertwined" (Clifford and King 1993): in that sense, it seemed that Belas Knap deserved more than it had.

The intended end product of the project is an interactive exhibition, to engage all of the senses and to get people thinking differently about place. The exhibition itself should not be the end-point: rather, it should be the start of an open-ended conversation, in which, in common with deep-mapping, the archive will always remain open—a "sandpit" for people to enter into conversation about place.

The Archaeology of Belas Knap

As indicated by Peter Fowler's comment earlier, all archaeography needs to be

Fig 5 Belas Knap and information-board

grounded in the formal archaeology of the site, otherwise it risks being meaningless other than as "art for art's sake."

Belas Knap is a "Cotswold-Severn" Neolithic long-barrow, trapezoidal in shape, some 55m in length, about 18m wide near the northern end, and just over 4m high at the same point, tapering both in width and height toward the south. Its axis is aligned approximately north-south—unlike most Cotswold-Severn barrows, which are more usually aligned east-west. Construction and use date from around the start of the fourth millennium BCE, and it seems to have been in use for several centuries thereafter. It has three side-chambers—one on the west, two on the east—with another small chamber at the south end now reconstructed as an open cist, and an impressive "false portal" in a forecourt at the northern end (Figure 6). It is surrounded by a shallow drystone retaining wall, rising to almost 2m either side of the false-portal.

The barrow is located just south of the village of Winchcombe, at 51° 55.62' N, 1° 58.17'W, or SP 0210 2543 on the British National Grid, at the lip of a steep ridge above a valley with many Roman and Romano-British sites. The 1923 Ordnance Survey map shows the location of a later round-barrow about 100m to the south-west; this is also visible as a white blob of a crop-mark in some air-photographs, but no evidence can be seen on the ground in the present plowed field.

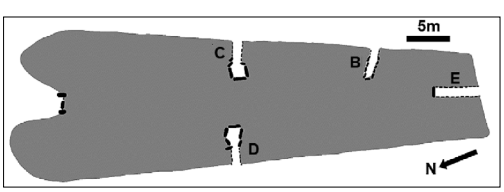

Fig 6 Belas Knap ground-plan

As with many barrows, Belas Knap has had a somewhat checkered archaeological history. Excavations in the mid-1860s by Winterbotham and Chamberlayne were perhaps more thorough than many in that period—as evidenced by contemporary engravings in the Cheltenham Museum—but left the mound in a ruinous state. Further excavations by C.J. Hemp (1929) and Sir James Berry (1929; 1930) guided the reconstruction led by Ralegh Radford (1930) under the auspices of the government Office of Works—a predecessor to the current authority, English Heritage.

The excavations showed that, as with other mounds of the period, Belas Knap is structurally complex, evidencing considerable architectural skill. The chambers were originally blocked off, rather than open as in the current reconstruction, though it seems probable that the blocking could have been removed and replaced many times. In his later excavation report, Berry also suggested that the mound may have been covered with slates or stones rather than the present-day turf, which would have made it stand out even more against the skyline, especially in moonlight.

Some thirty-eight burials were found, within the chambers and directly behind the false-portal. These, along with a few scraps of broken pottery, some flints and a couple of much later Roman coins, were almost the only artifacts found; these were lodged with the Cheltenham Museum, where they can be viewed today.

Beyond basic geology and topology, little or nothing seems to have been recorded

about the archaeology of the immediate area around the site—the fields to the north, west, and south, or the woodland to the east.

Standard reference-works for the site include OGS Crawford's *The Long Barrows of the Cotswolds* (1925), on which Hemp and Berry's excavations were based; and Timothy Darvill's *Megalithic Chambered Tombs of the Cotswold-Severn Region* (1982), which takes a broader view to encompass Neolithic society and landscape as well as the physical sites themselves.

Acoustic Archaeology

As with many other Neolithic sites, Belas Knap displays some unusual acoustic properties. The west chamber sometimes has within it a strange "hum"—a resonant standing-wave—that is generated by the wind blowing across the entrance from the south or north. Prolonged exposure to this hum is disorientating and can produce hallucinations—the sound feels as if it comes from the middle of the mound, and the stones appear to move. This is very similar to the effects reported by Aaron Watson (2007) at Maes Howe, the Dwarfie Stane and Camster Round. Preliminary experiments with a tunable infra-sound (~2Hz) detector seemed promising at first, but were found to be caused by feedback within the instrument itself; further tests are planned with an updated instrument.

Experiments were also undertaken with sound produced in the west and north-east chambers. Low-frequency drumming at around two beats per second (i.e. ~2Hz) appears to distort perception and, from outside the chamber, sounds as if it comes from behind the false-portal or from deep within the mound rather than from the chamber. Higher-frequency sounds were also tried, using a concert flute as a near-sine-wave sound-generator; lower notes on the flute traveled better than higher notes, and in the forecourt again sounded as if they were being played from behind the portal. It was also notable that the sound could be heard more clearly in the forecourt than at the side of the mound, even though the latter was closer to the source. This again resembles Watson's results at the Dwarfie Stane and at Camster Round/Camster Long (Watson 2007).

The retaining drystone wall around the mound is made up of small "slates" of local stone, typically around 10–20cm wide and 1–3cm thick, and projecting horizontally out

Fig 7 Drystone wall in forecourt

from the binding earth of the wall by around 3–7cm. When tapped lightly with another stone, these produce a musical "plink," like a stone xylophone (lithophone), much as described by Devereux (2001). Running a stone lightly up and down the walls of the forecourt (Figure 7) creates a rhythmic tinkling that is noticeably hypnotic—a stone equivalent of a shaman's rattle. When rain falls on the monument, the same tinkling sound occurs naturally, as water drips down the stones—this is particularly noticeable in the quiet of night.

Rock-art and Lighting

Several of the megaliths in the north-east chamber incorporate fossil remains that resemble cup and ring marks (Figure 8), and some stones also have natural holes in them (Figures 8 and 9). It also seems that some of the fossils may have been "enhanced" artificially by subtle pecking against the stones. This enhancement may also have aided recognition of these "symbols" by touch alone, in the dark.

Experiments simulating firelight in this chamber show that the Cotswold stone reflects light well, greatly illuminating the chamber. The flickering light creates the illusion that the circular fossil remains are moving, creating an unusual, somewhat hypnotic visual effect.

The megaliths with holes are located at the entrance to the east chamber. It seems these may perhaps have been chosen to represent the natural aspect of the landscape to the east, where holed stones can be easily found on the surface in the woodland on the steep slope down from the ridge (Figure 10).

The equivalent applies for the west chamber, where there are no holed megaliths: there is an impression that the stones inside the chambers could have been

Fig 8 North-east chamber: holed stone with ammonite (at upper left)

Fig 9 North-east chamber: holed megalith

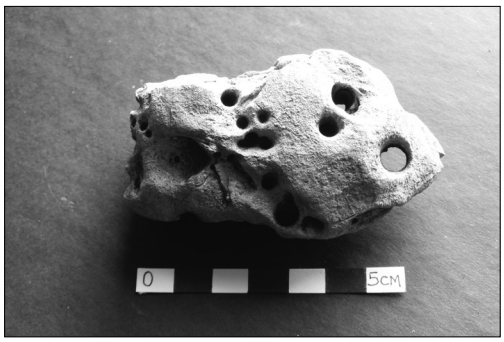

Fig 10 Examples of holed stones from Humblebee Wood

chosen to mimic the landscape they face. It should be noted, though, that restoration may mean that stones may not be in their exact original positions, or in some cases may be later or modern replacements—as is known to be the case for the lintel-stone at the false-portal (Hemp, 1929).

Firelight in the forecourt produces visual distortions, creating a spectacular shadow-show against the false-portal. This again has a noticeable hypnotic effect. When viewed at night by moonlight the barrow is magnified and appears as if it is a model of the whole landscape. It looks like its own horizon when seen from the far side of the valley to the east. This is especially noticeable at winter solstice when the moon sets in the west over the barrow. If Berry's suggestion (1930) that the mound was originally faced all over with stone is correct, it would have strongly enhanced this impression in moonlight.

Natural Context

The barrow has definite sides, light and dark, hot and cold. The west side, facing the open field and the sunset, is warm, sunny, bright; the east side, facing into the woodland, is dark, the "dead side." This "sidedness" is also reflected in a difference in the bird-sounds that form a constant aural backdrop to the site: to the west, the light skittering of skylarks rising into the air; to the east, darker calls of crows echoing through the woodland below.

A frost-line—an area of ground seemingly in permanent frost in winter—occurs in the forecourt, at the northern end of the barrow, about 3m from the false-portal (Figure 11). This starts with the first frosts in November, and usually remains until late March or early April, as a kind of seasonal clock. In principle this is because that part of the forecourt remains in shadow from the low winter sun, but it does not seem to move relative to the portal despite the changing altitude of the sun as winter progresses to spring. When the frosts end, the edge ceases to be visible, but seems to persist through the warmer seasons as a line detectable by dowsing.

It is also notable that the false-portal rarely receives direct sunlight, as it is at the northern end of the barrow, and shielded to east and west by the high retaining-walls of the two "horns" that form the sides of the forecourt. This seems to emphasize the feeling that the portal represents an entry into a dark inner world.

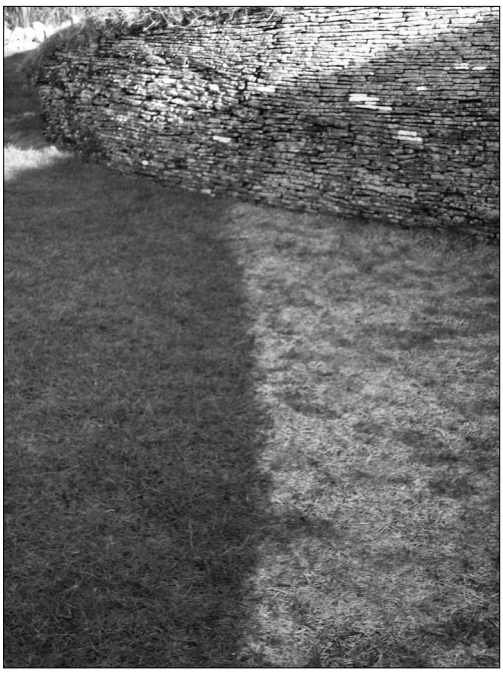

Fig 11 Frost-line in forecourt

Belas Knap has its own micro-climate: the weather seems more extreme, with sudden appearance of cloud formations as they manifest over the barrow after moving up the valley from the north east. A small localized standing cloud—"puffy cloud syndrome"—can often be seen immediately above or close to the barrow. The slope to the south-east seems to attract far more lightning strikes than elsewhere, perhaps because of the topology, perhaps also because of water-sources underground. As a result, many trees there and to the east have been struck by lightning, or stripped bare for other reasons, and seem like totem-poles, linking land to sky (Figure 12).

The field to the west and south is criss-crossed by tracks of large animals, particularly badger and deer, and represent *non*human interaction with a "human" place. The badger-tracks seem to be persistent from year to year, despite the plowing of the field—and also despite the low eye-height of the badger, relative to the end-point of each track. The badger-tracks often include short "passing loops" (Figure 13), for which there seems to be no apparent reason; badger activity such as scrapes and defecation-areas seem also to coincide with small patches of relatively unusual vegetation, which may themselves coincide with subsoil features that could be of archaeological interest—such as the known plowed-out round-barrow.

Many of the deer-tracks lead down into the woodland on the steep slope to the east and south-east (Humblebee Wood). These tracks often converge on the small springs scattered throughout the slope, particularly in the south-east, which could well have made it prime hunting-ground in the Neolithic period—though the slope itself is a dangerous steep edge covered in broken branches, fallen trees, and unstable ground. Snow lies in the valley and this wood for many weeks as no sun penetrates the lower slope. Overall, this area has the feeling of "an in-between the worlds" space (project notes).

As is common with Cotswold-Severn long-barrows, the mound itself is profiled against the ridge horizon but is just below the highest point of the ridge itself, which in this case is somewhat to the north. The ridge also rises slightly to the south, such that the barrow sits in a shallow saddle, though still far above the valley to the east. To the west, the ground is an almost level plateau for at least two or three kilometers, though cut in places by shallow gullies that drain to

Fig 12 "Totem-pole" tree and "inverted" tree, Humblebee Wood

the south. One of these begins close to the south-west of the mound: walking up this slope, the mound is not visible until about 100m away, at an acoustic "null-point" at about SP 0206 2515 where background sounds seem both unusually quiet and unusually enhanced, a dominating stillness. In some ways this topology resembles the "Long Mound" at the major Crickley Hill site several kilometers to the south-west, where the mound, in a shallow, level gully formed by a natural geological fault in the high ridge, is all but concealed from the habitation site above, yet visible to anyone on either side. This route would thus seem to fit well as a potential "processional way" to the site (Darvill 2004). Another "null-point" occurs at about SP 0207 2545, close to the stile in the western wall around the barrow.

The soil in the west field seems to be unusually prolific in fossils, especially bivalves and echinoids (Figure 14). It seems likely that this alone could have been sufficient to merit the site being regarded as "special" in the Neolithic period.

Narrative Investigation

In keeping with the principles of Shanks's deep-mapping, the chance for literal conversations with people about place has been taken whenever the opportunity arose. These include interviews with landowners and people who have worked the land within living memory. In addition

Fig 13 Fork in badger-track with "passing loop" to right

Fig 14 Fossils from Belas Knap west field: brachiopod, echinoid, bivalve

to information about land-use and the like, these have brought up legends and folklore of the area, such as a "blue man" seen repeatedly in the area below and within Humblebee Wood, and apparently first recorded in the early eighteenth century. For several centuries at least the folklore of the region also contains many references to hooded figures, often seen as a trio; these may perhaps be linked to a Roman-period cult of "cucullati" or hooded spirits (Figure 15), centered on a spring at Syreford, about five kilometers to the south.

Present-day visitors to Belas Knap will usually have radically different experiences of the site depending on the direction from which they arrive (Figure 16). Most visitors will start from the signposted car park on the Winchcombe-Syreford road at the foot of the ridge to the north-east: the trail from there is about 1.5km up a steep and often muddy slope, eventually arriving almost without warning as the path through the dark woodland suddenly opens out at the barrow. For many, this route is experienced as something of an ordeal.

The other route, via the less-well-known back road, links up with the Cotswold Way long-distance footpath some seven or eight

Fig 15 Romano-British cucullati stone, Cirencester Corinium Museum (photo: Paul Devereux)

Fig 16 First view of Belas from north-east (left) and from west (right)

hundred meters to the west of the barrow. From there, the trail is almost flat, in open country, with the barrow in full view all the way. For those visitors, and especially for walkers on the Cotswold Way, the Belas Knap site is experienced more as a kind of sanctuary, a rest-point before descending down into the dark of Humblebee Wood. The contrast in experiences could hardly be more striking.

People also bring their own personal responses to place. Flowers or other small "offerings" can often be found in the chambers or elsewhere on the site. The flowers are usually non-native—in other words, not plucked from the path on the way up—and hence would have been brought intentionally to the place, as if to a shrine. Fires are quite often made, in rough fireplaces around the site, in the forecourt or even inside the chambers, echoing the tradition of the place as a beacon-site. Other "interactions" include occasional vandalism, such as an incident in 2007 in which the north-east chamber was entirely blocked with rubble pulled from the adjacent field-wall.

Conversations with Place

Direct subjective interaction with "spirit of place" is probably the most challenging activity of the archaeography work—not least because the discipline requires the researcher to be rigorously honest about what is sensed and felt, and to record the results exactly, without censoring, no matter how uncomfortable or professionally embarrassing they may seem to be. Much of it may at first appear "irrational," but it is a logical outcome of taking literally Beveridge's warning to the scientist that "the origin of discoveries is beyond the reach of reason." Once again, though, this needs to be understood as an adjunct to the formal science, never a substitute for it.

During the earlier stages of the project, the "conversation" with place was essentially one-sided, a personal record of subjective experience:

> Dank misty night fog obscuring the horizon as I walk up the steep slope to the east of the barrow, fog deadening the sound, distorting distance … the walk is about 25 minutes but somehow the fog

> makes it feel like hours. As I reach the top of the field every outline has a domed soft-edged barrow shape to it … On reaching the mound moonlight is showing through the cloud, magnifying the barrow … Even with the moon barely visible there is enough light to see fairly well, approaching from the east with the moon from the west, the east side is in darkness and the outline of the barrow appears like a vast mountain landscape. The dank atmosphere also magnifies the sounds of moisture trickling through the stones in the forecourt. (project notes)

The project notes for the period include references to the experiments with firelight and acoustics as described above. This continued for some months until, as also described above, there was a kind of breakthrough into what was experienced as something much more akin to a true two-way "conversation," and also a sense of being "guided" by the place itself:

> I went to BK early Saturday morning and had another intense session—ended up with a collection of flint and water-worn pebbles and lots more, plus I need to continue my explorations into the gully but only with [team-member] apparently! Was stopped from moving in to gully, need [team-member] to make it safe? (project notes)

This sense of being guided, or "prevented" from entering certain places at certain times, has also been noted by other team members. Although undoubtedly subjective, it *feels* distinct, explicit and "real," with imperatives—especially any "'No entry' injunctions"—seeming particularly clear, almost as if spoken by the place. This also closely matches one team-member's previous experience of place in the Australian aboriginal context, much as described by Chatwin (1987). Again, Paul Devereux describes this sense of a two-way interaction during a period in which he made several fresh and significant archaeological observations about the Avebury complex in Wiltshire:

> So I began to walk around the landscape, simply looking at Silbury Hill from various angles. I had the strangest sensation that

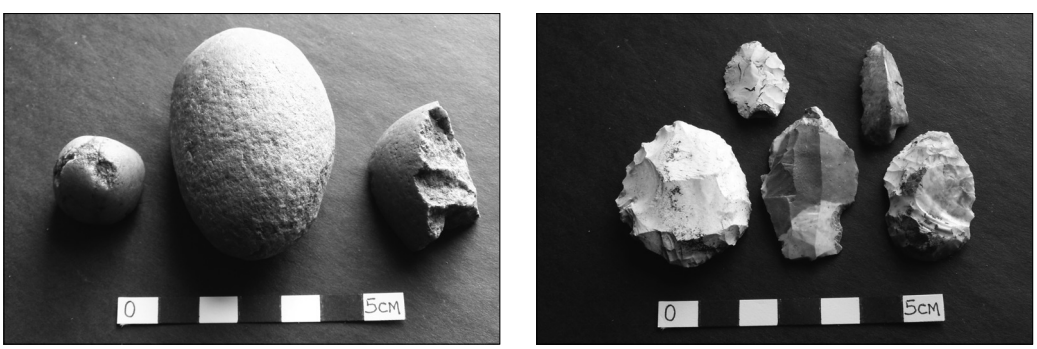

Fig 17 Water-worn pebbles (left) and flint implements (right)

> it was somehow communicating with me … I began to feel that Silbury was some kind of teacher, and I was a student. That remains an accurate description of how the process that was beginning to take place felt. (Devereux 1992: 138)

This feeling of connection and conversation is experienced only while maintaining the perceptual-mapping mode of "Artist/Mystic;" it is possible to override injunctions by deliberately switching to the "Scientist" mode, for example, but the sense of connection is also immediately lost, and may take some time to reconstruct.

Connection, and especially any "conversation," requires that there be an "Other" with whom to have the conversation—hence the practical value of the metaphor of "spirit of place," as a means to personify place as that "Other." It also implies that, for the apparent "conversation" to take place, there needs to be a sense of being "in the presence of the Other." But if so, where does that sense of connection start and end? Is "presence" purely a visual matter? While visual connection may well help, perceptual-mapping records from walking along the western footpath *away* from the site suggest that this is not the only factor:

> As usual, there's a clear sense, several times on the half-mile walk, of the barrow requiring our further attention, like a child wanting yet another "last" goodbye wave. (project notes, quoted in Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008: 133)

With care and practice, the "conversation" can be taken further, to guide actions and searches. This leads to a kind of directed version of fieldwalking which may at first look random, yet yields finds and other information at a rate which seems far higher than in conventional "brute force" techniques:

> Walk into field from the west, head over to the right and [dowsing-]rods take me to a large stone with fossil remains, rounded, feminine feeling, like many of the smaller stones here, this feels significant so pace over to gas marker [on high-pressure gas-line that crosses beneath the field] 115 paces east of marker to stone. I am aware that I'm near the track I followed on Saturday so ask to pick that up … it's about 10 paces to the south … start to follow, this takes me to the edge of the field to the point in the wall same as last time, I don't follow over [the wall]. It's starting to rain, ask to be taken to the most important place for ritual in the field, takes me to the edge of the quiet place [the null-point at the head of the gully at about SP 0206 2515, as described earlier] and several flints. Take photo to pinpoint flint scatter [in the same immediate area]. Check with barrow as this place feels male … yes … follow rods until we reach that spot where they open out indicating a barrier? Ask to be taken around … Again left and right in a kind of castle-zigzag pattern and we end up and over the rise, I suddenly look up to find that the barrow is out of view … The rods cross over a figure of eight pattern … ask if this is a burial: yes … human: no … animal: no, etc. It feels like a future burial place, a site chosen but never used? Some "heat haze" as I look towards barrow and some blurring of the edges; it feels [as if] it's raining invisible iron filings, it's crackly

> and spacy. Move out of this place following a twisty path to the south—a water-line?—and end up at the south of barrow near the blind spring [at SP 0202 2528]. (project notes)

Some of the content in the note above does resemble the kind of terms used in New Age literature about "energies" and the like: "heat haze," "raining invisible iron filings," "crackly and spacy." The difference here is that this is acknowledged as a personal shorthand for subjective perceptions, or perceptual distortions, that do occur quite frequently at Belas Knap and other sites while working in the Artist/Mystic mode, for reasons which are not known but are felt as somehow "meaningful" in that sense. Such subjective impressions are included in the record as part of the outcomes of that operating mode, but further interpretation is expressly disallowed *because* it arises in that mode. Interpretation toward objective meaning requires the Scientist mode, and concrete facts—neither of which applies to those perceptions, but *does* apply to some results such as the location of the flint-scatter.

> Walk over to barrow, it feels unhappy, unsettled … I feel unsettled … barrow not in a good mood … Walk round to west chamber to find the remains of lots of litter and a large fire just inside the chamber. Go back to forecourt and explain that we are not all idiots, and the mood lightens … Managed to frighten some visitors who said … they didn't think I was human? … as I was sat in the forecourt talking to the barrow. I apologized for surprising them but they were rather spooked and left me to it. Head toward home, find a Victorian coin right on top of the soil next to the path at the start of the ploughed area [at SP 01953 25428], pick up more flints near the car [flint-scatter at SP 0158 2526], barrow looks happy now, looks like a cat that's sat on a mouse it's just caught, about to have some sport. (project notes)

Much of the above might well sound bizarre, but in fact follows precisely the methodology's rules for operating in the subjective Artist mode, acknowledging *and acting on* whatever is sensed or felt. It's essential to remember that the two modes of Artist and Scientist are fundamentally different in scope and function, and it makes no sense to attempt to judge one mode in terms of the other. In any case, note again that this perhaps seemingly "crazy" modus operandi also leads here to concrete, objective artifacts such as the flints and 'coin'.

Note, too, that the strange notion of "didn't think I was human?" was made by the visitors—in other words was *about* the team-member doing the work, not *by* her. It would have been a misperception triggered by mindset or by preconceptions about the place, or possibly even a hallucination arising from their own "conversation" with place. The latter may sound improbable, but similar "overlay-hallucinations" have been noted at some other similar sites, such as a "horned man" overlay recorded several times at Stoney Littleton long barrow in Somerset (Graves and Poraj-Wilczynska 2008: 84–5).

The "Victorian coin" (Figure 18) shows an image of Queen Victoria ("Victoria Regina"), dated 1856, and a "George and Dragon" under the script "Hanover," dated 1834, with a hole punched through close to the edge. Rather than a true coin, it appears to be

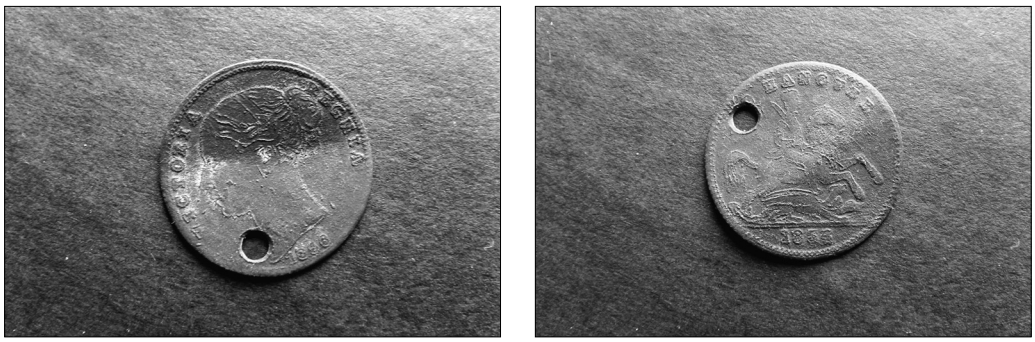

Fig 18 Victorian token: obverse (left), reverse (right)

some kind of ornament or commemorative token:

> Sorting through some old things yesterday, I came across my grandfather's and great-grandfather's fob-watch chains, which had tokens much like the one I found hanging from them. (project notes)

The date and the context suggest that the token could have fallen off a man's fob-chain during the 1860s excavations: one of the contemporary engravings in the Cheltenham Museum shows just such a gentleman and lady—complete with parasol—inspecting the site with evident interest. If so, it would be a tangible link to a key event in the history of Belas Knap.

Artwork

A key intended aim for the project is an exhibition, hence there has been considerable emphasis on creating artworks for that purpose.

The first image here (Figure 19) is from a small six-by-four card (15cm x 10cm) which one team-member keeps in her car and has reworked in the Artist mode after each of many visits to the Belas Knap site.

East is at the top; the barrow is shown at upper-center, with the horns of the forecourt at the northern end facing left. Each line represents something sensed within the landscape—badger-trail, water-line, possible round-barrow, or whatever. Some lines and features also extend into the field at the north and into the woodland sloping steeply down to the east, as well as the Belas Knap field to the west. Working in this way over an extended period builds layers of depth and richness to the picture that would not be available from the results of a single session.

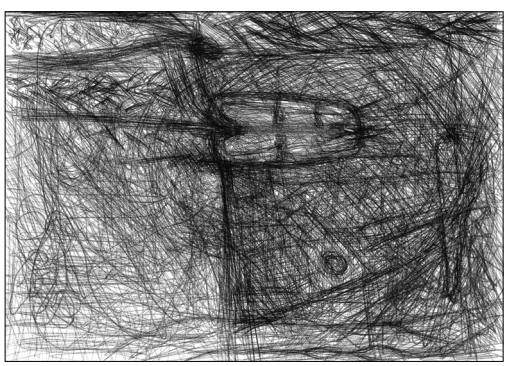

Fig 19 Composite diagram from multiple visits to Belas Knap

Often, as Fowler (2008) also implies, there is a sense of a kind of three-way "conversation" between artist, landscape, and artwork. In the case of the painting of the barrow (Figure 20), the artist had intended it to show the trees behind, but the painting "insisted" otherwise—metaphorically speaking—and instead demanded the presence of the wind and the resultant "standing cloud" that often occurs over the mound.

> Although the painting of the barrow is not the kind of thing I usually do, I know I'm on track because the energy's speaking to me and even though the results are rather basic it moves me, I'm in awe of it. This is what I find so exciting, the emerging space, the unknown and the connection with it before it materializes, you feel it but it's not what you imagine. In the end it's so much more profound, more than just a link to some other time, it's like a message for our undiscovered reality, the unknown within each of us. I'm almost scared of the form on the canvas, as if it's alive and has claimed a space for itself in the now. It lives and becomes touchable as we connect with it, the more different ways we connect the more versatile it becomes, so it doesn't need to be understood to work. (project notes)

Another painting, of the false-portal (Figure 21), is as much about exploring the texture of the dark as of the shapes of color or light. In this sense, the centerpiece of the barrow's forecourt seems less its physical nature of a gateway to nowhere than a subtle, layered portal to a darker world within.

For archaeography and archaeology alike, there are opportunities anew to be found in that inner world. The only catch is that, as the following quote from the project notes explains, the disciplines of subjective investigation may require us to move out of our familiar paths in order to reach them:

> We still don't know anything about the way barrows and stones connect with the landscape around them. Archaeology can only give us two-dimensional maps and plans, it cannot convey texture, shape, spontaneity, confusion or disorientation … These are things the landscape tells us but only if we spend time within it … sensory

Fig 20 Barrow (oil on canvas, 110cm × 150cm)

Fig 21 Portal (oil on canvas, 110cm × 150cm)

investigations without the borders of a map or plan.

Conclusion

The concept of "spirit of place" can provide a framework and discipline for subjective exploration and observation at many types of archaeological sites. The method provides direct, personal familiarity with an experience akin to that traditionally described as *genius loci*, and thus provides insights into possible ritual and practice at those sites. The perceptual-mapping modes of Artist, Mystic, Scientist, and Magician also provide a structured discipline for development of "fieldwalker's eyes" and other archaeological survey skills, and are also relevant to acoustic archaeology, sensory archaeology, and similar disciplines.

Although its primary purpose is archaeography rather than archaeology, the process is usable as a survey technique in its own right. The flint implements, flint waste-flakes, water-smoothed pebbles, and even the Victorian token are all potentially significant as archaeological finds, and the locations of the flint-scatters—both some distance from the barrow itself—suggest a much broader pattern of habitation and use for the site.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Paul Devereux for inviting us to contribute to *Time & Mind*, and, for the Belas Knap archaeography project, would like to acknowledge Professor Timothy Darvill and Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum for assistance on the archaeology of Belas Knap; George Nash for assistance on rock-art; Paul Devereux and Aaron Watson on archaeoacoustics and other project themes; Tony Roberts for assistance on geophysics; Adam Stanford for aerial-cam images; Colin Clark for review of subjective methodology; Richard Michael for assistance with digital image-processing; and English Heritage and Edwin Bailey for access to the extended site.

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