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F 51 FAMPOUX NEAR ARRAS

A flint mine recently discovered at Fampoux near Arras (Northern France)

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GEOGRAPHICAL PRESENTATION

The site is located on a slight south-facing slope of the river Scarpe, at about 5 kilometres east from Arras (Pas-de-Calais, France). The river Scarpe runs across the Artois, a chalky plateau which is generally covered by Pleistocene loess, but the northern slopes are often eroded, as at Fampoux, and the bed-rock is bare. The Scarpe valley is 50 m deep, the highest point of the plateau above the site is 105 m; the bottom of the valley is flat, wide and boggy. Bronze Age metal artefacts have been discovered at Fampoux, but the exact location is unknown.

The site spreads over the middle of the slope, at a height of 80 metres. The gradient here is of 5%. Artois is an agricultural country and most of the fields are ploughed.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

It was an amateur archaeologist, Pascal Lefebvre, who discovered the site by fieldwalking several years ago. In 1992, a survey showed flint scatters in the ploughed land, with many picks and fragments of axes. Then the Service Régional de l'Archéologie decided to lead, in September 1992, a small-scale excavation for corroborating the hypothesis of a flint-mining site, delimiting its extent and characterizing the type of exploitation.

GEOLOGY OF DEPOSITS

The bed-rock is Cretaceous chalk, with beds of flint nodules. The chalk outcrops in the upper part of the slope; its top is frost-broken by periglacial processes into little blocks. In the lower part of the slope, the chalk is covered by slightly loamy clay-with-flints.

The nodules of flint are black, with chalky white cortex; their size is about 20–25 centimetres but many of them are frost-broken. The quality is good for knapping.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION OF SEPTEMBER 1992

The excavation was carried-out in only two weeks, because the field is cultivated, and the farmer allowed us to work between the harvesting and the sowing. Two perpendicular trenches were opened by mechanical means, one 79 metres long, and the second 61 metres long: a total of 235 m² was scraped and 15 circular structures were excavated. The surface of these structures showed typical plugs of flint shafts, with a crown of flint artefacts surrounding a core of chalky fragments. One structure has been excavated stratigraphically with a half-section; all the spoil was sieved, and the natural flints were weighed.

PATTERN OF EXPLOITATION

The small-scale excavation can only give preliminary results, but several characteristics are already known.

The extent is at least 2400 m², on a strip perpendicular to the slope and 40 metres wide. The extracting was from circular pits, less than 1 metre deep, the diameter of which varies from 1.6 to 3.0 m; the bottom is concave and little cavities are left on the wall by extracting of flint blocks. It is still difficult to recognize the density of exploitation: the pits are clustered in little groups, about 10 metres apart. Some of them cut each other, showing that the exploitation was probably discontinuous. The excavated pit was filled with layers of chalky gravels, chalky loam, and dark humic loam on the top, in which most of the lithic artefacts were discovered.

Two “picks” of red deer antler were discovered at the bottom of the excavated pit (type h and b1 in the typology of Boguszewski, *cf.* Bostyn and Lanchon eds 1992:102–20).

It seems that the only goal of the exploitation was the production of flint axes, because no further lithic tools have been discovered, except flint picks; there were no blade-cores and no blades. On the other hand, fragments of axes are rather numerous. The knappers worked by the pits, as is shown by the large quantity of knapping waste in the filling.

DATING

The only artefacts discovered by fieldwalking and by the excavation were the lithic implements and the red deer antler picks. No sherd has been found; pottery is rarely preserved in the soil of this country. The context does not give any help: the only prehistoric settlements in the neighbourhood are funerary ring-ditches from the Early Bronze Age at Fresnes-lés-Montauban, 6 kilometres away, and the Middle Bronze Age dwelling at Roeux, 3.5 kilometres away, both in the Scarpe valley

(Desfossés, Masson and Vallin 1990). Many polished flint axes, without context, have been discovered by fieldwalking in the area but the flint is always atypical, spread all over the country without significant characteristics.

The red deer antlers will be submitted to radiocarbon dating.

We must remember that only two probable flint “mines” were previously known in the Nord — Pas-de-Calais area: Lumbres (Middle Neolithic II), where flint-pits (dug in chalk) were excavated forty years ago (Prévost 1962) and Etaples — les Sablins (Middle Neolithic I), where a shaft in a gravel-terrace has been explained as a flint-extraction structure (Piningre, Bostyn and Couppé 1991). Both sites were however probably settlements. Fampoux seems to be only a working-area.

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F 52 SERBONNES “LE REVERS DE BROSSARD”, YONNE DISTRICT

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The site at Serbonnes lies on the western edge of the Sénonais area about 80 km south-east of Paris, between Montereau (Seine-et-Marne) and Sens (Yonne), on the right bank of the Yonne valley (Fig. 1). This mine was discovered and excavated in the course of rescue work carried out before the construction of the A5 motorway.

The site extends on both sides of a small dry valley, orientated NE-SW, leading down to the alluvial plain of the Yonne less than 2 km away.