



Book Reviews

STONEHENGE FOR THE ANCESTORS. PART 1: LANDSCAPE AND MONUMENTS. THE STONEHENGE RIVERSIDE PROJECT VOLUME 1 BY MIKE PARKER PEARSON, JOSHUA POLLARD, COLIN RICHARDS, JULIAN THOMAS, CHRIS TILLEY AND KATE WELHAM

Sidestone Press, Leiden. 2020. 602pp, 425 col & B&W figures, 106 tables, pb, ISBN 978-90-8890-702-9, €69.95 (also available to read for free via the publisher's website)

In 2003 work began on the Stonehenge Riverside Project (SRP), a programme of work designed to reassess the purpose of Stonehenge and its chronological and topographical place in the landscape, including its link to the internationally important site at Durrington Walls. We are reminded from the outset, in this volume, that the project has previously generated three books and 80 other academic papers; however, the definitive details of the excavated results have been long awaited. Now, in the first of four volumes documenting the work, we can begin to gain access to the results of the fieldwork. Future volumes are planned to focus on analysis of lithics, soil sciences and landscape development from the Mesolithic period to the Early Neolithic, followed by coverage of the important work at Durrington Walls and Woodhenge with a final volume featuring landscape development from the Bronze Age onwards.

For such an ambitious project, which produced so much data, it is no mean feat to know how to structure, this information. The preface and introduction are therefore vitally important in enabling the reader to know what to and what not to expect in the following pages. The impressive list of authors has elected to adopt a chronological approach. This weighty tome covers the Neolithic period and its monuments before Stonehenge was constructed but develops to feature the monument itself and its associated monuments. The volume considers connections to the river and concludes with discussion of the human remains and current radiocarbon results.

The introductory chapter sets the tone by appraising the primary research aims of each excavated site and stressing the flexible nature adopted in the project, allowing alterations to be made in subsequent fieldwork campaigns, as results developed. Reference is made to where the results feature within the volume or forthcoming volumes, where that applies. The section concludes with an appendix which contains a comprehensive review of all the principal

prehistoric monuments in the project area, including not only those which feature in the SRP but also those supplementary Neolithic sites which occur in the surrounding landscape.

Chapter 2 covers the fourth millennium beginnings before the construction of Stonehenge. This very readable section defines the geographical area covered by the SRP placing the study firmly on the River Avon valley and extending the boundaries from Beacon Hill in the east, the Sidbury Hill horizon to the north and the Till valley to the west. This expanded approach, guided by the horizon, marks a welcome divergence from the boundaries of the World Heritage Site (WHS) which are formed primarily by modern road systems. The text, which adopts a topographical approach, placing monuments in the landscape, contains subsections on long barrows, causewayed enclosures and cursus monuments. A short link is made to Stonehenge itself before the content focuses on the results of the excavation fieldwork.

The chapter concludes with results of geophysical survey at the Greater Stonehenge Cursus and Amesbury 42 long barrow. It is not immediately clear why these results were included here and not placed with the results of the excavations of these monuments which form the ensuing chapter.

Chapter 3 sets the tone for most of the following chapters which detail the results of the individual excavations of archaeological phases up to the construction of Stonehenge. The approach follows an established pattern; each excavation is described separately commencing with work at the Greater Stonehenge Cursus which incorporates results from Amesbury 42 long barrow and evidence of Early Neolithic activity at Woodhenge. The text for each site provides a preliminary history of previous fieldwork, followed by stratigraphic descriptions of each trench, with details of artefact assemblages, principally flint, soil micromorphology, where this formed an essential part of the excavation, and concludes with a site specific conclusion. This approach works admirably for sites which, like the Greater Cursus and Amesbury 42 long barrow, can be concluded in a single report; however, where sites span a number of widely separated phases the decision to adopt a chronological approach is not without its limitations. The strategy is especially problematic for those who may approach the project from an artefact-based position. We are informed that the results of the Late Neolithic timber monument at Woodhenge will be presented in volume 3, together with selected stone tools and a Roman bead in volume 4. The approach means that researchers and students of artefact studies are presented with analyses which cover only selected parts of the site with the text reassuring the reader that the remaining detail will be completed in subsequent volumes.

The text then moves to Stonehenge itself, which in one way or another occupies much of the remaining content of the volume. The introduction of Stonehenge 1 at the head of the queue

can be justified by the decision to approach the subject chronologically, although further focus on the monument inevitably leads to a journey from death to life, travelling from Stonehenge to Durrington Walls, a point of arrival for which we have to wait until Volume 4. The following chapters consider the Stonehenge bluestones (Chapter 4), the Neolithic phases of the important Bluestone henge at West Amesbury (Chapter 5) and the sarsens of Stonehenge (Chapter 6), including a detailed study of the sarsen working debris and hammers, and the Avenue, immediately in front of Stonehenge. The text then diverges to consider sarsens in the broader Stonehenge landscape (Chapter 7), featuring work on the Neolithic phases at the Cuckoo Stone and Tor Stone before returning to the Stonehenge Avenue (Chapter 8). The volume finally enters the floodplain of the River Avon in a chapter containing results of a palaeo-environmental study of the floodplain deposits which links Durrington Walls to Stonehenge. In a slightly unusual approach the text departs from most conventional excavation reports by including a guided tour of the landscape corridor from Durrington Walls down the River Avon, as seen from a canoe, before leading the reader along the Stonehenge Avenue to the monument itself. This novel approach does much to place the project and its monuments in the context of the real world and within the world of the 'ancestors'. The volume concludes with the results of re-excavation of Aubrey Hole 7 to recover cremated human bone for analysis and ends with details of the latest radiocarbon determinations from Stonehenge. Perhaps inevitably, for the reporting of such a large body of work with the promise of further volumes pending, there is no concluding summary or discussion of the overall project results.

The text is well composed, considering the multiplicity of authors, and is referenced to photographs, plans and sections, which all use colour, and can be followed clearly; however, in this reviewer's opinion, some graphics, for example Figure 7.34, have reduced impact through over reduction. Inevitably for such a large body of data some minor errors appear in text with some referenced work omitted in the otherwise comprehensive bibliography; a brief survey of references contained in Chapter 1 noted the absence of Vatcher (1969) and Harding (1988)!

This volume will undoubtedly become essential reading to serious students of Stonehenge and its landscape; however, it is sufficiently well written to be readily transferrable to a wider audience, who may wish to have access to current data on the monument. Sadly, this wealth of information, contained in a volume which is published in soft back format, comes at a price of £90, which will make it largely inaccessible to many potential users. Thankfully, the volume is available free to read online which is likely to ensure that, for many, it is accessed online and not on-shelf.

The authors should be congratulated on completing this first phase of a project that has created a massive body of data but still remains very much a work in progress. They have set the bar

high. The results at Durrington Walls, a monument which attracts less impact among many lay readers, but which were of equal importance in fulfilling the project aims of linking these two great monuments through the River Avon will be especially welcome and awaited with enthusiasm. In the meantime, this volume justifiably joins Richards' (1990) Stonehenge Environs Project, and Cleal *et al's* (1995) Stonehenge monograph as an initial reference point for anyone wishing to research fieldwork results at Stonehenge and its landscape. Parker Pearson notes in his introductory comments, that his own copies of these essential volumes are now both extensively worn through use. These are exciting times for studies of the enlarged Stonehenge landscape; renewed interest in the area created not only by this project but also by results from the Army Basing Programme (Wessex Archaeology 2021), which also lie outside the boundaries of the WHS, have reinvigorated knowledge of this fascinating area.

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