

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Come the Millennium

THE SUDDEN potential availability of large amounts of 'lottery' money for heritage is likely to produce a crop of grandiose projects, on a scale not previously seen in this country. Two early examples are the proposal to re-flood the moat at the Tower of London (£23m, see pp. 387-90), and the English Heritage/National Trust 'vision' of a Stonehenge Millennium Park (£50m). This would set aside 4000 acres of the surrounding landscape for pedestrian access, and grass over the local roads and car park, creating the greatest prehistoric monumental park in the world. An observation post about 1 km east of the stones would "contain a state-of-the-art interpretation of the history and importance of the Stone Circle and the 450 ancient monuments of national importance built between 5000 and 3000 years ago that lie within a 2 km radius." It would also act as a focus for "many grass paths across the revered landscape", and would be linked by light transport to a more remote Visitor Centre, the *Gateway to Wessex*, where there would be parking and other facilities. This could cope with at least 1.5m visitors per year, over twice the present number. The public would also be able to enter the Stonehenge Millennium Park from any direction on foot, and roam freely within the area. The central purpose of the Visitor Centre would be "the promotion of the extraordinary variety of England's heritage that lies within Wessex and to encourage... visitors... also to enjoy the richness of the region's heritage." In other words, to take some of the pressure off Stonehenge by promoting alternative attractions in the region.

What makes Stonehenge different is that government cannot decide to do nothing, for two reasons

First, because its present setting is a squalid mess and a 'national disgrace', and second, because the Highways Agency is champing at the bit to upgrade the A303, which runs past the site and is seen as a traffic bottleneck. This conjunction of circumstances presents Stonehenge with its 'biggest threat and its biggest opportunity'. Several routes of what amounts to a 'Stonehenge by-pass' have been proposed; EH/NT favour the 'Green Tunnel route'—a 4 km-long tunnel beneath the Stonehenge area, which would do the least archaeological and environmental damage, and free the area for their own proposals (see above). It is also the most expensive option, having been costed at about £200m. A northern route, the 'Improved Purple' one, although less preferable, would be acceptable, subject to certain safeguards. Three other routes suggested by the Highways Agency, the Purple, Yellow and Grey routes, would not be acceptable to English Heritage and the National Trust. They appear to have been rejected politically, but such proposals have a nasty habit of bouncing back.

The outcome is important to all of us. Not only is Stonehenge one of only fourteen World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom, and thus of international importance; it is also the flagship project for taking our heritage seriously. If this one sinks, many other projects may go down with it.

Fieldwork Round-up 1995

Contributions to the 1995 Round-up should be sent to the Editor, c/o Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H OPY, and should be modelled on the ones in Vol 7, no. 13. It would be a great help if they could be sent in on floppy disk (ASCII text, PC or MAC disk) as well as on paper.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL Lecture and Meeting of the London Archaeologist will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 14th May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. The speaker will be Peter Rowsome on 'Excavations at No. 1 Poultry—an update'. Before the lecture, the annual reports and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the

election of officers and the election to the Publication Committee of the six local society representatives, whose nomination should be made to the Chairman, c/o 7 Coalecroft Road, SW15 6LW. Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers; subscribers and their friends will also be welcome. Refreshments will be served from 6.30 p.m.