

Palaeoenvironmental flotation samples – Sand.

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Introduction

Two hundred and ninety five flotation samples were sorted for palaeoenvironmental and archaeological contents.

The aim was to separate the different types of remains in order for specialist identification to be facilitated.

Methodology

Sampling (see Hardy, K & Wickham-Jones, C.R. 2000, 48 – 57): Two conjoining L-shaped trenches (A and B) were excavated, with a total coverage of 90m². Each trench was divided into metre grid squares (A1A – A21A, A1B – A20B; B1A – B25A, B1B – B25B). During excavation, squares were subdivided into quadrants (NE, SE, SW, NW) and all finds and samples were recorded by grid square, quadrant and spit or context. A 100% sampling strategy was adopted for all deposits of archaeological interest.

Processing: Deposits were processed on-site using a flotation tank. A sample register was compiled in order to identify which grid squares had been processed and to catalogue samples as they were sorted. Due to the nature of the deposits some residues had to be re-processed in the laboratory; these were washed and 1mm flotation fractions were taken and sorted.

Sorting: 4mm and 1mm flotation fractions were combined and then sieved into 4mm (4F), 2mm (2F) and 1mm (1F) fractions. Each of these was sorted separately. Samples were scanned using a stereo microscope. For samples with a large quantity of shell remains, a riffle box was used to subdivide the 1F fraction and 25% was sorted fully. The remaining 75% was sorted for all remains other than shell. Very large 1F or 2F fractions were passed through the riffle box and 25% sorted.

Results

Description: Considerable quantities of shell (undifferentiated into marine or terrestrial organisms), charcoal, animal bone, bird bone and fish bone (burnt and unburnt) were recovered. Also recovered were hazelnut shell fragments, lithics and smaller quantities of crustacean, coarse stone, otoliths and later intrusive material (glass). Carbonised seeds and some cereal caryopses were also recovered.

Contamination: In order to assess the degree of contamination by later intrusive material, the number of cereal caryopses present in each quadrant of each spit in two grid squares (B1B and B24A) were counted and recorded. The results are displayed below in table 1. It is concluded that spits 1, 2 and 3 are considerably contaminated by later, intrusive, material. Spit 4 and possibly lower are also contaminated, though to a much lesser degree.

Table 1: Quantities of cereal caryopses in grid squares B1B and B24A, arranged by quadrant and spit.

B24A						
SPIT	GENERAL	NE	SE	SW	NW	
2	10	X	X	X	X	
3	3	O	7	4	1	
4	X	O	2	1	O	
5	X	O	O	O	O	
6	X	O	O	O	O	
7	X	O	O	O	O	
8	X	O	O	O	O	
9	X	O	O	X	X	

B1B						
SPIT	GENERAL	NE	SE	SW	NW	
2	O	X	X	X	X	
3	X	O	O	X	O	
4	X	O	O	O	O	

References:

Hardy, K. & Wickham-Jones, C.R. 2000. *Scotland's First Settlers 2000*. Unpublished Data Structure Report, CFA, Edinburgh.