

Discovering the Ancient Don Gorge

Final Project Report

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*On behalf of The Don Gorge Strategic Partnership
For English Heiritage*

Summary:

Discovering the Ancient Don Gorge was delivered by Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery, in partnership with InHeritage, South Yorkshire Archaeology Service and Creswell Heritage Trust, on behalf of The Don Gorge Strategic Partnership. It was successfully completed between July 2007 and February 2008, and delivered a number of educational and innovative outreach products, such as the comic and graphic novel, free myfind postcards, science and archaeology sessions for schools, an interactive website called Yourfind, with an online artefact gallery and web-blog and video diary space for schools, and a travelling exhibition designed to go into libraries and schools in the Don Gorge.

SMR/flint/pottery analysis and reporting:

The analyses of artefacts discovered in the Don Gorge from fieldwalking prior to aggregates quarrying and kept in Doncaster Museum was successfully completed and reported on by *inHeritage* finds specialists. The SMR entries held by South Yorkshire Archaeology Service were also successfully researched and reported on by *inHeritage*.

The unexpected discovery of further pot sherds and flints way in excess of the number estimated in the project design did cause some problems at the analysis stage. A total of approximately 3,000 pieces were provided for analysis rather than 500. The flint specialist had no time to analyse the full collection so concentrated on supplying an audit of the collection and an initial analysis of the diagnostic pieces. This leaves all of the flint working debitage unanalysed, which is required to understand the nature of occupation and technology associated with the collection. However, enough material was looked at to input basic period and function information into the project, which was all that was necessary to deliver the outreach elements of the project, and therefore did not effect the planned outputs of the project. The flint specialist has offered, as part of his PhD, to supervise analysis of the total collection by an MA archaeology student at the University of Manchester if a student comes forward to work on the materials. This can be progressed by contacting the flint specialist to request he looks for an MA student.

The report on all of the finds in Doncaster Museum's collection and the records of South Yorkshire Archaeology Service is complete. The report has been converted to a PDF and will be available as a download on the YourFind website.

Cartoon Workshops:

All six cartoon workshops were delivered in July at the three main community libraries in the Don Gorge - Conisbrough, Mexborough and Sprotbrough. An *in*Heritage educational archaeologist and the artists working on the comic and graphic novel delivered the workshops. These had varying success in attracting participants. They achieved good local media publicity in the press and on the radio, and were advertised by posters, which were disseminated amongst community libraries and schools in the Don Gorge and through the museums, Frenchgate centre and Tourist Information. The three workshops for 7-11 year-olds had a total of 46 attendees between 5 to 13 years old. The three workshops for 12-14 year-olds had only 13 attendees, ranging in age from 11 to 13.

The workshops were extremely successful in engaging participants with the drawing aspects of all of the workshops. We achieved a lower level of success with engaging the younger age group with the archaeological content, which I think may have been caused by the educational archaeologist pitching the session at too high and detailed a level.

It became apparent through discussion with the library service and staff after the workshops that we may have had more success if we'd have taken the workshops into schools, or perhaps into shopping centres or leisure centres, as the libraries tended to attract a small repeat audience, but were not overly successful in attracting new audiences for events and activities.

We successfully obtained ideas for comic and graphic novel content from all workshops which were collated by the educational archaeologist and written-up. These ideas, including types of artefacts, characters and elements of storylines, were incorporated in both publications at the story-boarding stage.

Project Launch Event:

We designed a 1 day public launch event, at the start of the project to help promote the project and generate interest in the outreach elements such as the talks, finds handling sessions, website and education sessions. The launch took place at Conisbrough Castle (a historic visitor attraction within the Don Gorge), on Saturday 4th August. The event was advertised locally by the distribution of flyers, and posters which were placed at the following sites: Local Libraries, Museums, The French Gate shopping Centre, The Doncaster Dome, The Blue Room (Tourist Information) and at local community centres within the project catchment area. The event received publicity in the Free Press, Star and Yorkshire Post and on Trax FM and Hallam FM. The day consisted of several hands on activity stalls with contributions from all DGSP partners, The Portable Antiquities Scheme, SYAS, Creswell Heritage Trust and the Museum Service as well as several timed talks and Prehistoric re-enactment and related activities. A total of 435 visitors were counted, though numbers were probably 25% higher (as the method of counting employed required visitors to enter the visitor centre). Feed back from the public was extremely positive, with many visitors commenting on how well organised the event was, and how much there was to see and do, as well as a general surprise at how much there was to the archaeology and history of the Don Gorge. The event ran from 10am – 4pm. Several problems arose from

the very short lead up time to the event, from the signing off of the project design. As we could not book certain elements such as the re-enactors before we knew the project had been given the go-ahead, this meant that many re-enactment groups were already committed to events, having been booked up at least 6 months in advance. Though we managed to book a group called Historical Promotions, they were significantly more expensive than some of the groups I have worked with, and were not as authentic as I would have liked. However the public did enjoy their performances and living history displays, and the re-enactors themselves were well organised, friendly and ensured that the public were entertained. The venue was a good choice, as it was within the project area, had good public facilities, and since it achieved good weekend visitor figures on a regular basis in its own right, we were assured of a good attendance. The event received overwhelmingly positive and complementary feed back from members of the public, with people commenting on the breadth and depth of informative displays and activities on show, how well organised and staged the event was, and how it would encourage them to find out more about the project after the event. In retrospect it would have been useful to record peoples reactions and comments. It was also noted after the event that the method employed by the staff at Conisbrough Castle was inadequate for accurately recording visitor numbers, since visitors were only recorded if they entered the visitor centre, though it was possible for visitors to enter the castle and completely bypass the visitor centre. We had not unfortunately foreseen this prior to the event, and in retrospect should have monitored visitors at the gate entrance to the castle also.

Comic:

The comic was successfully delivered to Doncaster Museum in time for the public event on the 9th February 2008. A total of 6,000 copies of the comic were printed. They have been delivered as free publications to the community via the public event, Museum-based school activity visits and public libraries. They will continue to be delivered via the Museum, public libraries and online at the YourFind website, as a downloadable PDF.

As agreed in the project design, the comic is a 12-page, full-colour publication. It focuses on the prehistoric periods represented in the Don Gorge. The comic was produced by an *in*Heritage writer/artist team and printed on recycled paper using vegetable dye inks by Northend of Sheffield. It includes the following elements:

A cover showing an Ice Age mammoth hunt

A 2-page Ice Age story about a mammoth hunt featuring a young female lead character

A 1-page Ice Age house makeover story

A 1-page Ice Age superstore showing Ice Age equivalents for modern everyday objects

A 1-page Ice Age what's wrong activity showing modern things in a mammoth hunt

A 2 1/2-page Neolithic story about a boy coming of age by making and using a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead

A 1/2-page Prehistoric tool kit showing Prehistoric equivalents for modern tools

- A 1-page Prehistoric Fun & Facts activity including recipes, a word search and facts
- A 1-page Neolithic board game
- A 1-page jokes and games activity section

Information about the limestone geology and aggregates is provided throughout the comic.

The comic was produced in close collaboration with Doncaster Museum, including input from the Archaeology Curator and the Education Team, as well as input from English Heritage and South Yorkshire Archaeology Service. At the early editing stage the comic was given to Doncaster Young Archaeologists club members, and they were asked to comment on the story, readability and how well the text worked with the imagery to tell the story. This proved a successful focus group, as they represented a broad cross section of the general Doncaster audience that the comic is aimed at. We received some positive feedback, and very useful comments on the readability of the story and clarity of the images, which was then fed into a further editing stage of the comic.

The comic has been converted to a PDF and is now available as a download on the YourFind website.

So far the comic has proved incredibly successful. The comic format and idea was employed for an earlier ALSF project – ‘Romans on the Don’. By using a familiar outreach medium on this project and working with the same artist and InHeritage team, we were able to refine the idea and improve on the interactive elements such as a board game.

Graphic Novel:

The graphic novel was successfully delivered to Doncaster Museum in time for the public event on the 9th February 2008. A total of 5,000 copies of the graphic novel were printed. They have been delivered as free publications to the community via the public event, Museum-based school activity visits and public libraries. They will continue to be delivered via the Museum, public libraries and online at the YourFind website. Due to a mistake made by InHeritage, the incorrect number of graphic novels was printed, leaving us 1000 short of the agreed 6,000 detailed in the project design. Though every effort was made to rectify the mistake, a quote having been requested for a reprint to cover the 1000 shortfall, it was deemed to expensive to cover the cost of a second individual run, and has been agreed with the project monitor that the distribution of the graphic novels will be monitored, and a reprint will be discussed if the demand is significant, and the need for them apparent.

As agreed in the project design, the comic is 20 pages, full-colour, and focuses on the Roman and early Medieval periods represented in the Don Gorge. The comic was produced by an *in*Heritage writer/artist team and printed on recycled paper using vegetable dye inks by Northend of Sheffield. It includes the following elements:

A cover showing the main characters with sketches of the Don Gorge landscape in the background.

A 1-page introduction to the Don Gorge, the two stories and the discovery of finds because of aggregates quarrying incorporating an aerial view of the project area

An 8-page story set in the Roman period called Roman Eagles on the Don. It is based on the fictional impact of the revolt of 196 AD on a family living in a settlement in the Don Gorge

An 8-page story set in the early Medieval period called Saxons in the Gorge. It is based on the fictional impact of the Norse sack of Conisbrough in 866 AD on settlement in the Don Gorge with a multi-cultural theme

A 1-page explanation of how the artefacts came to be displayed in Doncaster Museum, including the role of aggregates quarrying in this process and information on how to find out more

The graphic novel was produced in close collaboration with Doncaster Museum, including input from the Archaeology Curator and the Education Team, as well as input from English Heritage and South Yorkshire Archaeology Service. At the early editing stage the graphic novel was given to Doncaster Young Archaeologists club members, and they were asked to comment on the story, readability and how well the text worked with the imagery to tell the story. This proved a successful focus group, as they represented a broad cross section of the general Doncaster audience that the graphic novel is aimed at. We received some positive feed-back, and very useful comments on the readability of the story and clarity of the images, which was then fed into a further editing stage of the graphic novel.

The graphic novel has been converted to a PDF and will be available as a download on the YourFind website.

A new idea, and one which was spurred by feedback from the Romans on the Don comic, it enabled us to reach an older audience through a familiar and popular comic medium (Manga art). The Novel has proved to be a massive success, with positive feedback from members of the public. The novel provides some incredible reconstructive images of the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods in the Don Gorge, based on the archaeology, and has proven popular with adults as well as the 11-16 age group that it was intended to engage.

Finds photography:

Julia Reid, an *in*Heritage photographer digitally photographed a selection of objects from the Project area held in the Doncaster Museum archaeology collections selected and supervised by Peter Robinson. Julia spent a day and a half with me photographing a selection of the most aesthetically complete and archaeologically interesting items from all of the periods represented in the project study area.

The Photographs now form the online object catalogue on the YourFind website. Three feature on the MyFind postcards and others appear as part of the travelling exhibition. They are therefore helping to publicise the archaeology of the Don

Gorge to a wider audience. The photographs have been provided to the Don Gorge Strategic Partnership and Doncaster Museum as publication quality TIFF files and so can be used for future publications, as well as forming a photographic database of the collection for researchers. One unexpected problem with the images being provided as high quality tiff files has been that they are too large to be easily opened and used on a standard computer, and this has caused problems with their secondary use, which is something that we will seek to rectify, by requesting smaller sized images. Whilst bar far the majority of photographic images are excellent, it was noted that some of the images do not capture the objects as well as they might. This is probably due to the photographer not having had any prior experience in working with archaeological artefacts (small objects). Whilst it has not detracted from the success of the web-museum, or reflects on the quality of the images in general, in future I would seek to use a photographer familiar with photographing archaeological artefacts, as I feel it would produce more accurate images, which better show specific details of objects.

Website:

A web designer was employed through InHeritage to design and maintain the website, which has it's own registered domain name and IP address: www.yourfind.org.uk and a years hosting, after which it will be maintained by DMBC as part of either the Museums web-space or that of DGSP, so ensuring that it has a life beyond the end of the project. The website was developed between July and September and Launched in early October. There was a three week slippage on the delivery date, due to development issues with the website. Interactive elements – in particular the schools blogging section, caused problems, as it was necessary to have this section as a secure log-in section due to child protection issues with having images of children as part of the recording of the school sessions. Unexpected problems were also encountered with the interactive voting facility on the web-gallery, for which a new piece of free-ware had to be found to allow the voting to work. However we were able to deliver a far more robust and dynamic website than had been agreed in the project design, and the quality of the interactive web-gallery, and schools blogging section has surpassed what had originally been planned. The website in its finished state comprises of a homepage, detailing the project, a section on the history of the Don Gorge, based on the archaeological finds, an interactive web-gallery show casing the best archaeological artefacts from the project area, with a voting facility, a news section for updated news on project events, activities and outputs, a secure schools section for uploading blogs and video diaries from school sessions, and a resource section where PDF's of the comic, graphic novel, post cards and archaeological report can be downloaded. I feel confident that we produced a clean well structured and very accessible website, however several lessons have been learnt from the creation of the website, and from monitoring its use over the past 5 months from October to the end of February. The take-up from schools of the web blog element of the website has been incredibly poor. Even though we made the log in process and usability of the site simple, there has been a lack of interest from the schools to use this facility. This seems to be due to the reluctance of teachers to want use the facility, and a lack of time to use

it after school visits had been undertaken. Though we supplied information and instructions to teachers prior to their visit explaining how to use the facility and what information we required to set them up with their own space, we have not had any take up. The voting element of the web-gallery was also disappointingly underused. Less than 300 votes were logged. Whilst this did not effect the result of the public voting to determine the 3 Myfind choices for the postcards, it cannot be counted as a success, due to the poor uptake. The website was installed with a counter and has had over 2000 individual hits since its launch, so it is not from the lack of visits that votes were not logged. It must be assumed that whilst people have visited the site and viewed the web-gallery, few visitors have expressed an interest in voting on the objects.

MyFind Postcards:

Three artefacts from the Don Gorge were voted for by the public in an open invitation to choose three objects to feature on a series of three postcards. *inHeritage* designed and arranged for the printing of the postcards. Each features a photograph of an object against a modern, single-colour background on the front, and information about the artefact, the project and where to find out more on the back.

The three artefacts chosen by the public for the postcards were a Neolithic polished axe head, a Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead and an Iron Age sword scabbard mounts.

5,000 copies of each design were delivered to Doncaster Museum in time for the event on the 9th February 2008. They were delivered free to the public at the event and will continue to be delivered via the Museum and online via the YourFind website.

The postcards have been converted to a PDF and are now available as downloads on the YourFind website.

It is too early to comment on the success of the postcards, though they are being picked up by the public where they are on display.

Community Talks:

A total of 12 community talks have been booked by groups and given at the two public events organised by the project.

The powerpoint presentation was created and the talks delivered by an *inHeritage* archaeological public speaker. Five have been delivered to date, with another seven confirmed between the end of February and November 2008.

Talks delivered:

1. Conisbrough Castle (project launch event) 04.08.07
2. Friends of Doncaster Museum 25.10.07
3. South Yorkshire Archaeology Day 03.11.07
4. Don Gorge Volunteers 18.12.07

5. Doncaster Museum (project public event) 09.02.08

Talks confirmed:

6. Doncaster Naturalist Society 05.03.08

7. Don Gorge Community Group 27.03.08 (afternoon)

8. Don Gorge Community Group and open public invite 27.03.08 (evening)

9. Doncaster and District Heritage Association 09.04.08

10. Wheatley Hills Senior Citizens 15.06.08

11. Harrogate Archaeology Society 08.11.08

12. Hunter Archaeological Society (Sheffield) As yet unknown date in winter 2008.

Verbal feedback from the talks has been encouraging, and a number of talks have been booked on the basis of people attending a talk in the early stages of the project. The talks covered a mix of the history and archaeology of the Don Gorge, as well as a run through of the project, its aims and achievements.

Travelling Exhibition:

Mike Cox, of Mike Cox associates was employed to help design and create the travelling exhibition. Mike had worked with the museum on several large Heritage Lottery projects, and we had established a good working relationship with him, and could be sure of the quality of the end product that he would produce, and that it would be delivered on budget and on time. We chose to work with local firms FOGA (who built the travelling exhibition case) and Merit (who built the graphic display), as they provided competitive quotes and good quality products. It proved a good choice to work with local firms, since travelling to the workshops was necessary on several occasions, to iron out minor problems. The travelling exhibition consists of a curved graphic display approximately 1500mm tall by 3500mm long, and a standing square pillar display case approximately 1000mm x 1000mm x 1750mm (tall). Both elements have been designed to allow a single person to construct them, and they are designed to fit within relatively small exhibition spaces, such as are available within local libraries, schools, sports centres and community centres. The graphic display covers an introduction to the project, how to find out more, and the Iron Age to Anglo-Saxon periods, the objects for which are on permanent display in the Museum and Art Gallery at Chequer Road. The Exhibition case displays material from the Prehistoric periods (objects which are non environmentally sensitive, and of low value (to avoid problems of conservation and security), and is accompanied by two interior graphics covering that the prehistory of the Don Gorge. The exhibition was launched at Doncaster Museum on the 9th February, where it has remained for a month, until the end of March, after which it is due to tour around the libraries in the project catchment area, before being offered to community centres and schools (those involved with the school sessions initially). As the travelling Exhibition has been a major element in advertising the project to the public, in retrospect, and if the lead in time had been longer, it would have been better to have produced this as one of the first project outputs, as it may have significantly increased public knowledge of and interest in the other project outputs.

School Education Sessions:

The education sessions for schools were planned and advertised to schools to run from 1st October through to February 2008. However due to the requirements of visiting schools sessions will also continue past the February deadline throughout 2008 and from 2009 in a slightly altered format as science in archaeology sessions. The format of the sessions is a 2hr hands on educational session, catering for school groups of up to 35 pupils, covering a general theme of Science in Archaeology, which is based on the archaeology of the Don Gorge. The programme of the session includes looking at Aggregates extraction and putting it into historical context, looking at Objects from the project study area and providing a video diary and blogging element for uploading onto the website. A full and detailed session plan was developed and sent to schools upon booking, and before they arrived for the session. This gives the teachers a brief outline of what the session will consist of, how it will be structured, which subjects and topics will be learnt, and information about the creation of a web blog. Teachers are also sent a form requesting the information required to create a blog space for their group, which is then brought along to the session. So far 6 schools have booked museum based sessions:

School sessions delivered:

Edlington 4 classes November 2007

Hatfield Woodhouse 2 classes December 2007

School sessions booked:

Waverley 2 classes March 2008

Further sessions have been built into the museum education programme for 2008-9 and bookings will be taken in due course.

The sessions have been popular with the schools who have undertaken visits, as they cover key subject areas such as Maths, English, Science, History and Geography at Key Stage 2 and 3. However all the bookings so far have been from Key Stage 2 schools. The failure to attract Key Stage 3 (Secondary schools) seems largely to do with the problem within secondary schools of being able to undertake trips out of the school. In future to reach this age group, it would be necessary to look at the possibility of taking sessions into the schools, although this would require considerably more funding, as it is beyond the current scope and potential of the museum service.

Finds Handling Sessions for the general public and special interest groups:

A total of 11 Finds Handling sessions have been booked by groups and given at the two public events organised by the project.

The session was created and delivered by the Museum's Archaeology Officer. Five have been delivered to date, with another seven confirmed between the end of February and November 2008.

Sessions delivered:

1. Conisbrough Castle (project launch event) 04.08.07
2. Friends of Doncaster Museum 25.10.07
3. South Yorkshire Archaeology Day 03.11.07
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Sessions confirmed:

6. Doncaster Naturalist Society 05.03.08
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9. Doncaster and District Heritage Association 09.04.08

These sessions have proved incredibly popular, giving members of the public an opportunity to handle and engage with the real archaeological finds from the project area, and to understand the nature of the site, and how to extract a historical narrative from objects.

Travelling Exhibition Launch Event:

The launch event took place on Saturday 9th February, and was held at Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery, Chequer Road. The event consisted of information and activity stalls provided by DGSP partners and project partners, living history displays by The Vicus (Roman re-enactment group) and Regia Anglorum (Anglo-Saxon re-enactment group), as well as flint knapping by Karl Lee – Prehistoric Flint Knapper, and the Museums education team, who provided a finds handling and science in archaeology activity stall. The purpose of the event was to launch and advertise/promote the travelling exhibition, and the completed comic, graphic novel and my find postcards. The one day event attracted 580 visitors, and was a resounding success.

Article for South Yorkshire Archaeology Review:

The article has been agreed by South Yorkshire Archaeology Service for inclusion in the South Yorkshire Archaeology Review covering 2007/08. This will be published in two or three years time as part of the Review's standard publication schedule.

The article will be based on the archaeology report and will include a review of the project. It will be written in March and April 2008, following completion of the project, by *inHeritage*.