

EVALUATION OF A FLINT-SCATTER BY SLIPPER LOW FARM, BRASSINGTON, DERBYSHIRE, 1994

By DARYL GARTON AND ALISON KENNETT

(Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD)

INTRODUCTION

A proposal to build a bungalow at Slipper Low Farm (SK 22035670) led the Peak Park Joint Planning Board Archaeologist, Ken Smith, to request the Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust (T&PAT) to conduct an evaluation of the archaeological potential of the site. The proposed bungalow and associated works would destroy some 900 square metres of pasture field from which flintwork had been recovered in the early 1960s. T&PAT agreed to test-pit on a 10m grid to see if flintwork or other artefacts were present, and attempt to establish the context of any artefacts. This project was directed by Daryl Garton and supervised in the field by Alison Kennett. To keep the costs low volunteers were asked to help with the fieldwork. The archive and artefacts from this evaluation will be donated to the Museum at Buxton.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The farm lies adjacent to Slipper Low barrow, which was excavated in 1844 by Thomas Bateman, who uncovered a rock-cut grave with a Beaker, disturbed inhumations and cremations. Flintwork accompanied the cremations, and a number of pieces, disturbed by ploughing, were found with the inhumations (Barnatt 1989, 10:15). The area has several other barrows close by, including the chambered cairn at Minning Low (Marsden 1982).

The Sites and Monuments Record includes at least three find-spots within the field in which the bungalow was to be built. In 1961 a 'petit tranchet derivative' came from the southern part, 'artefacts' from the south-western corner, and a 'concentration of flint waste flakes over an area 15-20 yards across' in the north-eastern part of the field (SMR 2413). A similar, but less precise grid-location to the last record was given for an area producing 'Mesolithic cores, a graver and three scrapers', also reported in 1961, but by a different individual (SMR 2412). Where such concentrations of limited size have been found elsewhere in the Peak District, they are usually Mesolithic, and it is possible that these two reports actually refer to the same site. The bungalow was to be built in the western corner of the field, perhaps coinciding with the area where the material described as the 'artefacts' was found.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Slipper Low Farm sits in the base of a broad valley on the limestone plateau at 335 metres above Ordnance Datum, with the head of the valley just to the south of the farm (Fig. 1:1). Immediately west of the proposed bungalow site, and along the western side of the field, are a number of hollows some 30m across and up to 2m deep (Fig. 1:2). At the proposed building site, the ground level sloped down to the south-west. The area around the hollow was noticeably lower, so this area had probably been disturbed in the past and was avoided by the test-pits (Fig. 1:4). In the test-pitted area, the field surface was undulating with low ridges trending down the valley (Fig. 1:4).

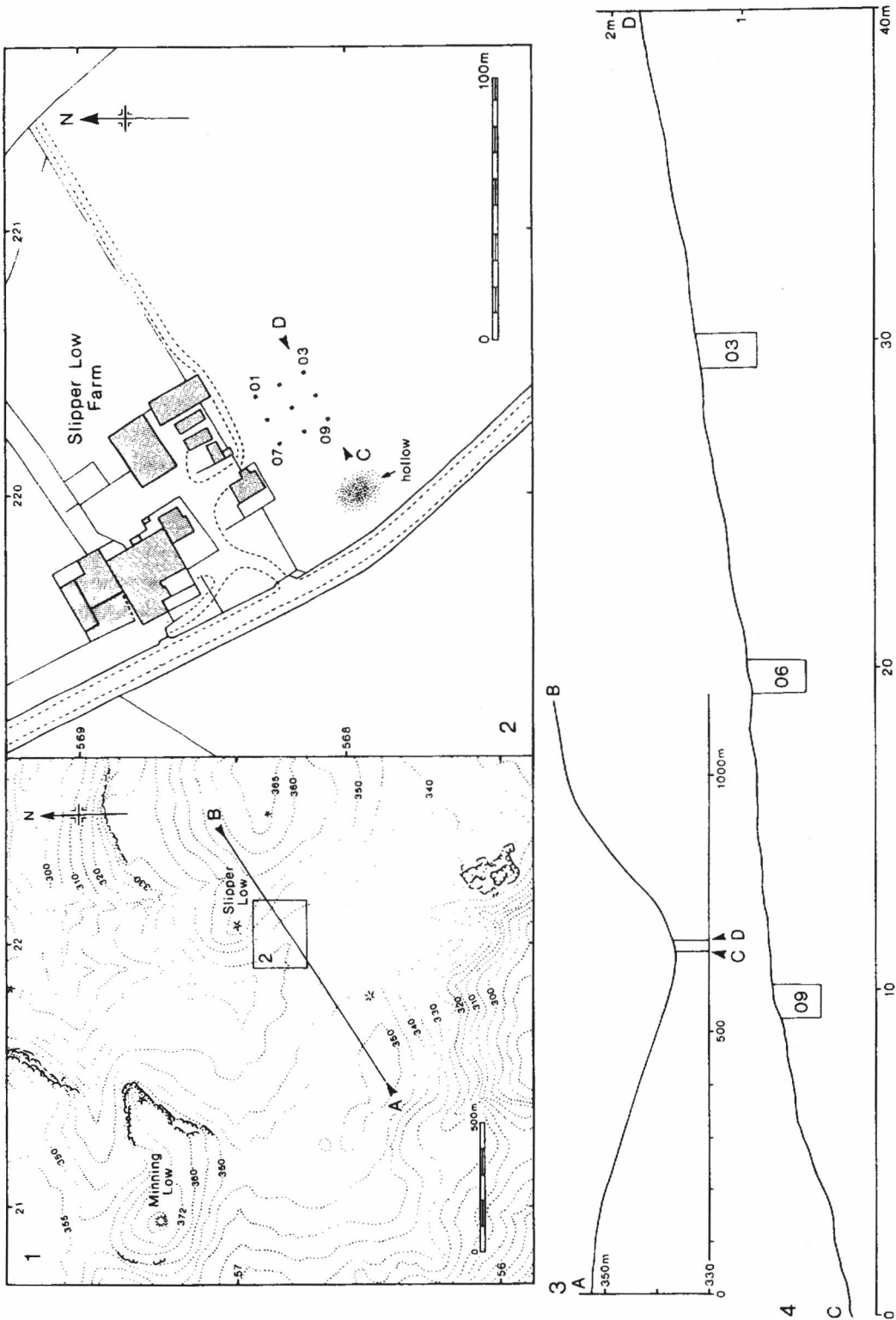


Fig. 1 Slipper Low Farm. 1: location of Slipper Low Farm, scale 1:2500. 2: position of the test-pits in relation to the farm complex and the National Grid, scale 1:250. © Crown copyright. 3: profile across the valley, vertical exaggeration x10. 4: profile across the area test-pitted, vertical exaggeration x4.

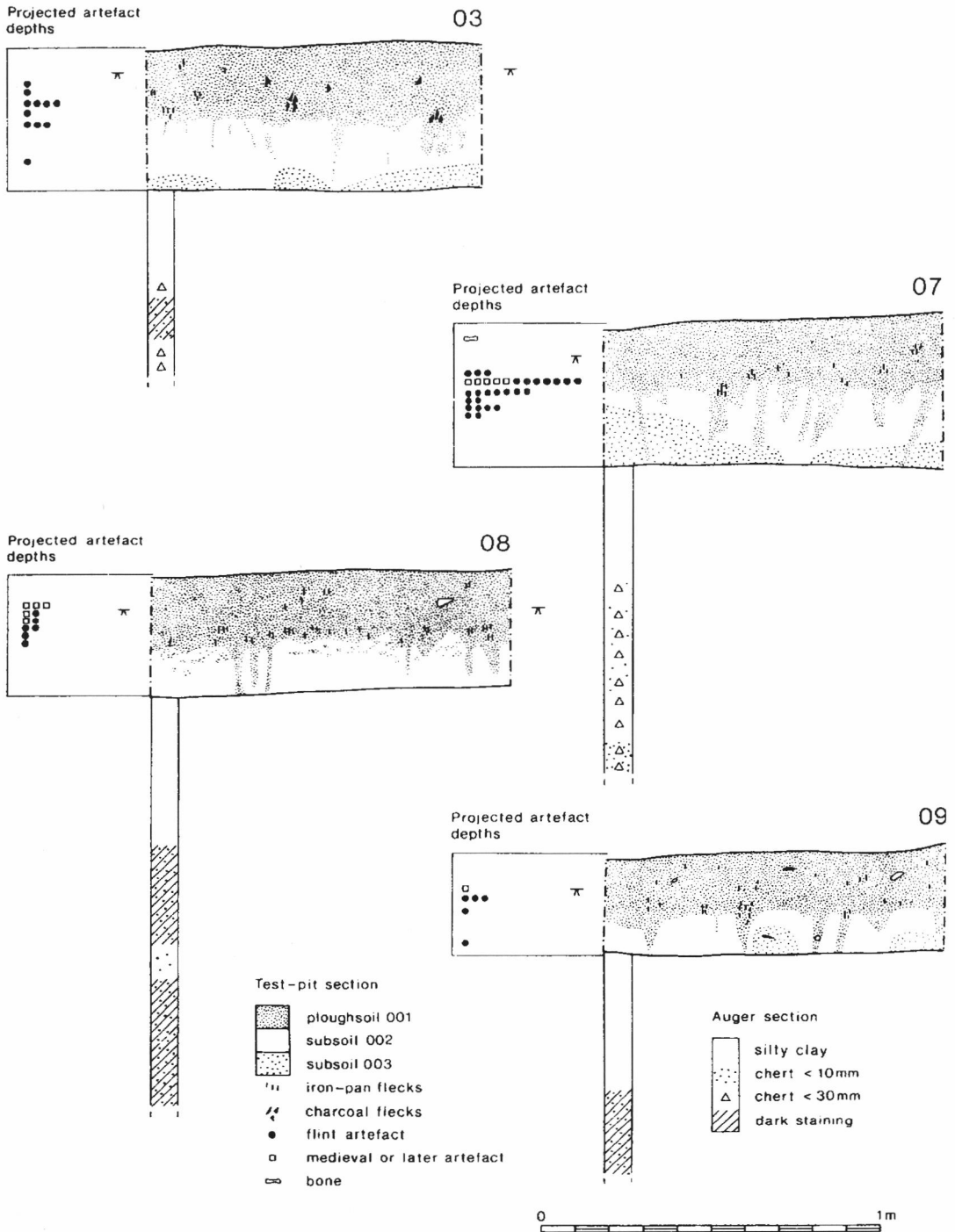


Fig. 2 Slipper Low Farm. South-facing sections of test-pits 03, 07, 08 and 09, with augered information plotted below, and projected positions of all artefacts plotted to the left of each section. Scale 1:20.

METHODOLOGY

Nine 1x1m test-pits were laid out at 10m intervals within the proposed development area. A 10m test-pit interval was chosen as it was considered that this should broadly characterise the spatial patterning of any artefact assemblages, while at 1x1m, each test-pit should be large enough to recover some artefacts even if overall densities are low. Each test-pit was excavated in the same manner: the turf was removed in a *c.* 0.05m thick piece; then the underlying soil was trowelled in spits, sieving all the material through a 7mm mesh, to a depth of at least 0.2m below the base of the ploughsoil. The last four pits to be dug (02, 04, 06, 08) had only a 50% sample of the subsoil sieved. The underlying subsoil, to 1m depth, was recorded by augering from the base of the excavated test-pits. The depth of all artefacts was recorded. One section of each test-pit was photographed and drawn at 1:20. The position of each test-pit was located by an Electronic Distance Measurer with reference to the OS 1:2500 map. Finally, a profile was recorded across the valley (Fig. 1:3).

STRATIGRAPHIC SEQUENCE

The uppermost horizon (001) was a dark, reddish-grey, silty loam with a distinct and reasonably level base (*c.* 0.2m deep), with tongues filling small burrows projecting down into the subsoil (002: Fig. 2). This distinct boundary and its homogeneous nature led to its being interpreted as a ploughsoil. However, in its lower part, particularly immediately above the interface with the subsoil, the abundance of small stoney inclusions increased. Both ploughsoil and subsoil horizons were a silty loam with occasional small chert and ironstone fragments. During excavation, numerous small burrows (less than 30mm across) were observed to have moved ploughsoil down and subsoil upwards. At about 0.4m below the turf the subsoil became slightly redder (003). The augering showed that this lower subsoil was up to 0.4m deep, and was progressively clayier with depth. It overlay horizons which contained abundant chert fragments of at least two different size classes (less than 10mm, and up to 30mm); at least three such horizons were recorded to a maximum depth of 1.25m. The depth of the subsoil suggests that the hollows along the western edge of the field were dug as marl pits.

Of the 61 pieces of flint recovered, all but three came from the ploughsoil, and even these three may have come from the burrows penetrating the subsoil, especially since two were found by sieving. There is no evidence for flintwork coming from undisturbed horizons beneath the ploughsoil, and the close spacing of the test-pits makes it seem unlikely that any unploughed pockets survive between them.

Flintwork and other artefacts were found only below 0.1m deep, and only pieces of bone came from immediately below the turf (e.g. Fig. 2:07). Most of the artefacts were from the lowest 0.12m of ploughsoil. Vertical transportation of flintwork is common on prehistoric sites, but such a clear demonstration of movement in recently ploughed soils is unusual, and suggests that this field has probably been pasture since the original discoveries were made in the early 1960s. The mechanisms of such transportation are debated (Garton forthcoming), but the clear evidence for burrowing suggests that, in this instance, worm-sorting has played its part.

HORIZONTAL PATTERNING

There is clear spatial patterning in the density of flint per test-pit, varying from none to 24 pieces over a mere 20m (Fig. 3). Indeed, the variation between adjacent test-pits suggests that at least two clusters were encountered, one in the north-west and the other in the south-east of the sampled area (Fig. 3). Given that such clustering is common in both excavated and fieldwalked

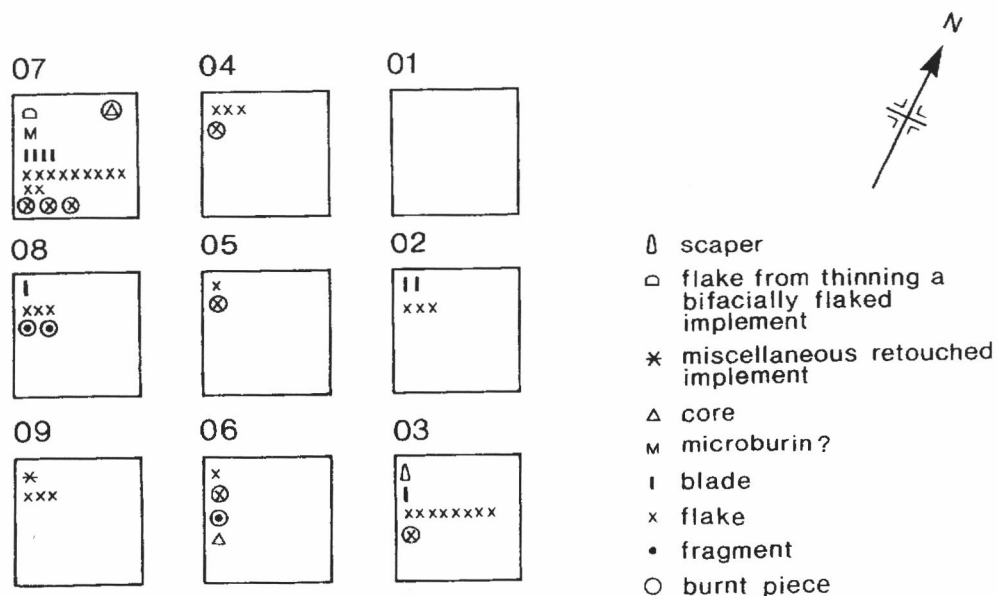


Fig. 3 Slipper Low Farm. Schematic plan of the test-pits showing density and composition of the flintwork.

assemblages, it would appear that here ploughing has not altered the overall pattern of flint deposition beyond recognition.

FLINTWORK

The test-pits contained a range of raw materials, including translucent and mottled flint, with some Wolds grey and white flint. No struck chert was recovered.

The small number of pieces must make any comments about their date or context tentative. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least two broad periods of activity are represented. Test-pit 02 produced a small number of pieces, including a blade-like flake and a corticated small blade with a faceted butt, which could belong with a Mesolithic assemblage. Test-pit 07 contained several small blades and a possible microburin, suggesting a Later Mesolithic context and the number of pieces would suggest that 07 lies close to a focus of knapping (Fig. 3). At least one flake, from thinning a bifacially-flaked implement, might be more likely from a Neolithic assemblage. Test-pit 03 may also have contained material from a mixture of periods, but flakes with plain platforms and a fragment of a large scrapper suggest that it was predominantly Neolithic. A multi-platform core with flake removals from test-pit 06 may also be attributed to a Neolithic, or later, date.

POTTERY

A single bodysherd of hand-made pottery was recovered from test-pit 05. It was recorded as coming from 0.3m deep in the subsoil (002), but as it was recovered by sieving, it is unknown whether it was actually from a burrow or from subsoil. The sherd is small, but retains a distinctive angle, which has been identified as a fragment of the carinated girth of a prehistoric vessel by

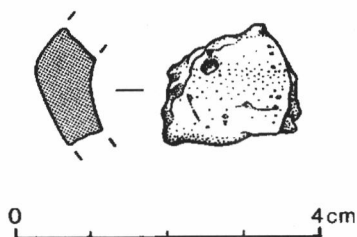


Fig. 4 Slipper Low Farm. The Grimston Ware sherd from test-pit 05. Scale 1:1.

both Pauline Beswick and David Knight (Fig. 4). The exterior is slightly burnished, and a charred residue adheres to the interior. The fabric is sandy with vesicles caused by leaching of former inclusions. The fabric, form and burnishing closely resembles the Neolithic Grimston Ware found at Lismore Fields, Buxton, Derbyshire (P. Beswick *pers. comm.*), where pottery was found only in features, though at Mount Pleasant, Kenslow, abraded sherds survived in an old ploughsoil (Garton and Beswick 1983, 12). The depth from which this sherd was recovered at Slipper Low Farm, and the fact that it is only slightly abraded, may suggest that it actually came from a feature which was not recognised.

One sliver from a green-glazed Medieval sherd was recovered from test-pit 07, along with four sherds of Post-Medieval pot from test-pits 07, 08 and 09.

WATCHING BRIEF

Since test-pits are not ideal for recovering any features associated with flint-scatters, and the recovery of Neolithic Grimston Ware deep in the subsoil suggested the possibility of features, a watching brief was conducted whilst the footprint of the building (18x8m) was stripped of topsoil, using a toothless ditching bucket on the back-actor of a JCB. The subsoil surface was watched intently as the ploughsoil was removed, but no certain archaeological features were recovered. The area stripped did not include that of test-pit 05 where the Grimston Ware sherd was found. A plan of the area watched, and notes on the deposits, are in the archive.

DISCUSSION

The spatial patterning and its variable typology over the area sampled suggest that the pattern of the flintwork recovered represents its original distribution. This suggests that ploughing has not destroyed the broad patterning of deposits, and implies that there has been relatively little movement, not only of artefacts, but also of soils. Had the deposits been brought downslope, we should expect the ploughsoil to be thicker and the artefacts would surely not have retained such distinctive patterning. This suggests there has been no significant colluviation in this part of the valley since at least the Later Mesolithic period. The nature and genesis of sediments are poorly known in the Peak District, but the evidence from Slipper Low Farm would suggest that human activities around this valley have had little impact on soil movement.

The cluster of Mesolithic material revealed by the test-pits, and that recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record, suggests that this valley may have been used extensively at that time. This pattern, of a number of foci in a valley, is similar to that excavated at Lismore Fields (Garton forthcoming), and is one type of location identified in an analysis of systematic fieldwalking data from the White Peak (Barnatt, Garton and Myers in prep.). The Slipper Low Farm evidence

contributes to a widespread pattern of Mesolithic activity in the Peak which has been recognised only recently.

Recovery of lower densities of Neolithic material is also typical of Peak District assemblages (Garton forthcoming; Barnatt, Garton and Myers in prep.). The recovery of a single, small fragment of probable Grimston Ware suggests the presence of Earlier Neolithic activity which is not specifically identifiable in the flintwork. The petit tranchet derivative arrowhead recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record, and the flintwork from the 1994 evaluation, suggest an intensity of activity that is characteristic of the White Peak in the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (Hawke-Smith 1979; Bradley and Hart 1983).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to Ken Smith, who asked T&PAT to conduct this work and made available a grant from the Peak Park Joint Planning Board; to Mr. D. Hardy, the land-owner, for his co-operation and the use of his facilities during the fieldwork; to the volunteers who did the fieldwork — Pauline Beswick, Paul Caldwell, Paul Capewell, Keith Challis, Jen Eccles, Val Disney, Graeme Guilbert, Tikshna Mandal, Alan Miller, Alan Morris, Rhoda Mincher, Melvin Pegg; to Pauline Beswick and David Knight who both commented on the pottery fragment; to Graeme Guilbert for helpful suggestions on a draft of the text; and to Jane Goddard who drew the illustrations.

REFERENCES

- Barnatt, J. (1989) *The Peak District Barrow Survey*. Peak Park Joint Planning Board. Bakewell.
- Barnatt, J., Garton, D., and Myers, A. (in prep.) A study of systematically collected lithics from the Peak District.
- Bradley, R. and Hart, C. (1983) Prehistoric settlement in the Peak District during the third and second millennia bc: a preliminary analysis in the light of recent fieldwork. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 49: 177-93.
- Garton, D. and Beswick, P. (1983) The survey and excavation of a Neolithic settlement area at Mount Pleasant, Kenslow. *DAJ* 103: 7-40.
- Garton, D. (forthcoming) The excavation of a Mesolithic and Neolithic settlement area at Lismore Fields, Buxton, Derbyshire.
- Hawke-Smith, C.F. (1979) *Man-land Relations in Prehistoric Britain: the Dove-Derwent Interfluvium, Derbyshire* (British Archaeological Reports, British Series 64). Oxford.
- Marsden, B.M. (1982) Excavations at the Minning Low Chambered Cairn (Ballidon 1), Ballidon, Derbyshire. *DAJ* 102: 8-21.

The Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Peak Park Joint Planning Board in the publication of this paper.