

# LES QUEYRIAUX (FRANCE) : AN EXCEPTIONAL DISCOVERY FOR INRAP

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I'm Carine Muller-Pelletier. For my "first" 'Day of Archaeology' I would like to present to you a typical day in my life as an archaeologist, on the site of Queyriaux near Clermont-Ferrand in central France, where I have been excavating for more than a year.

5 AM, time to wake up. I have to hand out a scientific update on the site's findings, or at least finish the chapter I have begun last night. At least, the dig is only about 15 minutes away from where I live. 7:30 AM, time to open up the site, to offload the vehicles. Early rising colleagues are here to help. We set up the office. 8 AM the day's work begins, and I start with the ongoing troubleshooting.



*Serious atmosphere in the office – working on documentation, plans and descriptions. © Julia Patouret, Inrap*

A first round of the site: some 28,000 square metres, with everywhere a high density of finds. The race now begins, talking to everyone, on each excavation sector: those where mechanical tools are used to open the grounds, those where ground structures are dug with a mini-scoop, those where level excavations are carried out, using hand-held tools (wow, its great), and those where stratigraphy is being recorded. I need to keep track of what is going on, it's so important that I have a clear overview of everything.



*Base of the mechanical clearing showing the density of the structures: no respite! © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*



*Unearthing a middle Neolithic vase from an opened ditch: the trawl takes over the mechanical tool. © Julia Patouret, Inrap*



*Excavation by square metres of a middle Neolithic occupation floor, with a large heated stone hearth in the foreground. © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*

Fine-tuning is sometimes called for, in function of yesterday's results: new question may arise, and we need to find the appropriate methods to answer them. We consult and debate, and then I need to decide quickly – this is my role.

Specialists follow each others on site to collect the data necessary for the scientific report. It is important to clearly highlight the scientific potential of the site: its state of preservation, the nature of the vestiges, their typological and chronological attribution, aspects of technological behaviour, some preliminary functional interpretations of the occupation zones and their spatial organisation – and that, for each chronological phase. And then, all of that needs to be replaced in relation to what is already known and to the answers we can expect given our outstanding questions.





*Discussion and consultation. (I am on the right !)* © Julie Gerez, Inrap

6 PM, time to endorse my young mother's role .... until 9 PM, when I return to the scientific report and the day's new information.

All in all, this has been an intense 3 months, during which I was asked to produce two scientific reports (a sum of 60 and 90 pages of work usually done as post-excavation work). But the site certainly merited such an investment!



*Clearing fragments of terra cotta with imprints of the clay dome of a collapsed oven from the middle Neolithic.* © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap

Indeed a distinctive characteristic of the site of Queyriaux is the presence of densely structured and remarkably well preserved occupation floors, situated in dwellings dated to the middle Neolithic and the middle Bronze Age periods. The abundance, diversity and good preservation of the finds collected further enhance the value of the site. A rare opportunity thus emerged to connect the organisation of circulation on the occupation floors with the associated material culture, highlighting a broad spectrum of human activities. Together, these strands of information led towards a more faithful 'paleo-ethnological' reconstruction of ancient daily life. The spatial distribution of the finds shows an organised occupation of space, characterised by well delimited and complementary areas, specialised in different activities around a central zone where large scale buildings were present. The data we are gathering can therefore expand our knowledge on villages from that period, and help us address such questions as the hinterland territories of these communities, their interactions with the environment and the landscape, and their networks of exchange.

At a regional level, the site presents a first opportunity to study the middle Bronze Age.



*Excavating an animal deposit (carnivore) in a middle Bronze Age ditch. © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*

Sites of “Chasséen” Neolithic are more numerous, and in most of them occupation floors have been identified. They have not always been studied, however, or exposed on too small surfaces. At Queyriaux, we felt it important to request the scheduling of the site as an exceptional discovery: this would give us at last the necessary means to excavate and study wide stretches of these occupation floors.





*Parts of an occupation layer sector being manually excavated. © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*



*Dismantling and recording a heated stone hearth. © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*

We have thus worked on the site all through the seasons, always with the necessary scientific rigour and dedication. Alongside our own site, was also fully excavated the antique necropolis found alongside the nearby Roman way.



*Wet sieving sediments onsite never stops, even in rough weather! © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*



*The return of nicer weather. © Marcel Brizard, Inrap*

And every day, despite the stress and the weariness, I would reach the site with same emotion. We are so lucky, I was telling myself, that we can study such an exceptional site – a great and possibly unique experience in my life as an archaeologist. Results from the specialist analyses are beginning to arrive, and they confirm, to our great satisfaction, the impressions on the field.



*Holes and heaps on the last day of the dig. © Carine Muller-Pelletier, Inrap*

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