

CRAFTING STORIES OF THE PAST: STRATHEARN ENVIRONS AND ROYAL FORTEVIOT (SERF) PROJECT 2015

July 24, 2015 Tessa Poller Early Medieval,Excavation, Explore Posts, Finds, Iron Age, Neolithic,Publishing Finds, Iron Age, medieval, Neolithic, pottery,SERF, soil samples

Two weeks today the [Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot](#) (SERF) project was packing up and leaving Perthshire, Scotland. Trenches in various locations around the small village of Dunning had been excavated, recorded and were ready to be back-filled by machine. SERF is both a multi-period research project and an archaeological field school run by the University of Glasgow since 2007. This year we had over 50 participants helping out with fieldwork which revealed evidence from the Early Neolithic, Iron Age, Medieval and Modern periods.

Today the SERF team is sorting through the variety of materials that have come back from the field, piecing them together to create stories about the past. Dr Dene Wright, director of the excavations of the Early Neolithic pit complex at Wellhill, has been making sense of the records (drawings, context sheets, notes and photographs), and completing his data structure report. During this process a final check is done to ensure that all the records correspond to one other, when they don't amendments are made and further notes are taken. Dene can then draw links between features, compare the results from this site to others, and then put into words an initial interpretation for the site, situating it into wider narrative.

But, of course, there is still work to be done which will impact on how the site is interpreted. Post-excavation processing is just beginning. Gert Petersen (Laboratory Technician), pictured here with student Ilia Barbukov, has just started to sort through the residue materials from the flotation of soil samples. The residues are carefully examined for carbonised wood and grains, bone, and any other artefacts. These will then be sent to specialists, such as palaeobotanists, for further identification and analysis.

Now is also the time to sort through our finds and get them ready for specialists. This year we retrieved a record number of pottery sherds (relative to other SERF years). Wellhill produced just under 200 pottery sherds, many of which came from a pit that also yielded our first fragment of a polished stone axe. A variety of pottery sherds also came from our hillfort excavation at Dun Knock. Although all the pottery was first thought to be of Iron Age date, sherds from one of the ditches were unusual for this time period and may be much earlier. This is where our specialist, Dr Ann MacSween, will come in and examine the whole assemblage. Today all the sherds have been cleaned and were laid out in the lab ready for inspection.

For me (Dr Tessa Poller) today was also about interpretation and pulling together the evidence from the hillfort excavations at Dun Knock. Like Dene I have a data structure report to write and much of my time has been collating the records from the site director Cathy MacIver. The SERF hillfort programme, which has investigated ten forts over the past nine years, has also been piloting a digital visualisation project. In collaboration with [Dr Alice Watterson](#) and [Kieran Baxter](#) this project is about exploring how archaeologists

formulate and communicate interpretations, utilising digital media and visualisations as tools in this process. Today I had a meeting with Alice to discuss progress, look over footage recorded in the field, suggest further work and to pull together a structure for a paper we will be presenting at the [EAA conference in Glasgow](#). Exciting ideas flow as this is all new to me and there are lots of creative potential.

Although we may not be in the field for long, there is always work to be done on the SERF project and more fantastic findings to be made.



Aerial view of the Neolithic pits at Wellhill 2015.



Dr Dene Wright collating records for Wellhill.



Gert Petersen and Ilia Barbuikov sorting through soil residues.



Prehistoric pottery from SERF excavations.



Dr Alice Watterson collaborating on a digital visualisation project.



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