

CONAN PARSONS: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GEOMATICS PROJECT OFFICER

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7:30am I'm normally at the office by now, with my first cup of coffee, but there's some roadworks on the road around the corner from the office, so we've taken a detour to avoid the hideous congestion. I'm sharing a ride from Faringdon with my partner Charles and Gary the GIS expert – more people are living out of Oxford as it's so expensive, on archaeology wages if you don't want to house share any more then you'll have a hard time staying in the city.

7:45am I load up my unit vehicle, today it's a little Skoda Fabia, my PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) is already in the boot from yesterday, I just needed to get the GPS out of it's locker. I don't put my coffee down while I'm loading, it's a morning ritual I've developed when getting ready to go to site. As I drive out of the estate I'm going away from all the congestion and traffic, so it only takes me 30 minutes to get to site near Dorchester-on-Thames

8:15am I put my work boots on and assemble the GPS, I'm here to finish marking out some trenches that I started on Monday. I couldn't get access to part of the site until today, as there were electric fence issues. I create a new job on the GPS and select which trench I want to mark out and head on over.

Here I bump in to the land owner who's got some concerns about where trenches are going and wants to know how long it'll be until the excavator is in the field where her horses are now. The supervisor is at the dentist so I ring the site technician who's over with the machine, to try and find out for her. He claims ignorance of details above his pay grade, I jovially scold him and between us we come up with an estimate of time scales for the land owner, which she seems happy with.



A friendly foal I find in the field.

8:40am I'm now marking out the trenches with the GPS, putting a yellow flag at each end. A foal comes over to me and starts sniffing me while I'm working, the whiskers tickle quite a lot so I can't help giggling, which attracts the other horses, that are all curious why I'm in their field. Luckily they don't eat my flags.

915am I let the technician know that I've finished, and that I'm off site, checking he doesn't need anything else from me while I'm there. Back to Oxford! It takes me longer than usual, there's still that pesky roadwork problem!

10:am I've unloaded the car and put GPS batteries on charge. I notice one of the batteries hasn't charged properly again (I had previously flagged it up for checking last time it failed). I give it to my boss and ask him to order a replacement. He's getting a growing pile of dead batteries now, as they get worn out after a while! I grab another coffee and tell Charles I'm back in the office after popping myself in on the in/out board

10:20am I need to process my job to get the information in to CAD, one of our supervisors has also done some survey and uploaded his data to our server, so I decide to process that as well while I'm using the same software. When I've processed my stakeout data I send a list of trench altitudes to the site supervisor, so that he can use a dumpy level on his trenches to work out heights. When I've processed

the other job I make a PDF of a plan and send it to the supervisor so he can see what his site looks like, I also put some hard copies in his pigeon hole.

While this is all going on I'm having issues with the IT department: They've just got a new server up and running and I need them to put our specialised photogrammetry PC on to it before I start any jobs later. Also I have to put paper in the printer and tidy up the print area: People sometimes print things and then don't pick them up/forget them. Sometimes this happens when the printer runs out of paper and jobs just queue up until some one actually puts paper in.

11:45am I've got some polecam photos to put through the photogrammetry machine, they're from our site in Somerset which is over a Roman villa. I've previously processed a mosaic from the site, now some of the cobbled surfaces are being done. Polecams give a good vantage point and the photogrammetry software can stitch the photos together to make an orthometric photo (or ortho-photo for short), which we can put to scale on a CAD drawing. One of the parts of site comes out fine and I send this over to the site PO (Project Officer) so that she can put it on her CAD drawing for a birds eye view of the cobbles. The two other parts are awaiting her survey information so that I can locate it spatially and scale it.

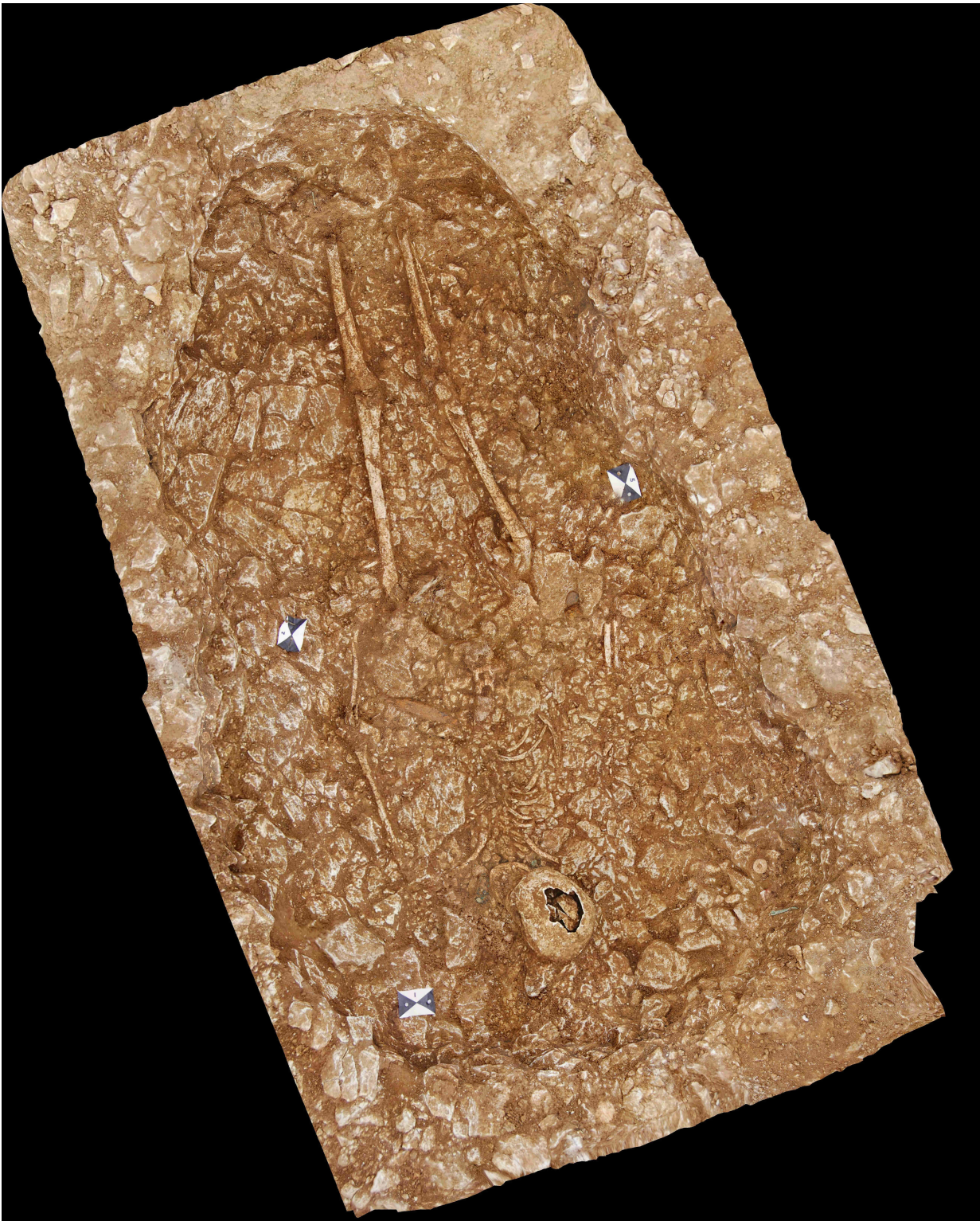
Then I have to help one of the IT guys find the equipment cage for Somerset, as he's just finished processing the site backup disk (so that if anything happens to the site laptop we still have the most current data.)

12:12pm The supervisor from Aylesbury has rang me after receiving his site PDF, and given me some feedback about what needs changing on the plan after a re-inspection of the site. We agree on the changes and then I update and resend the drawing.

12:30pm I grab another coffee and steal a cigarette off of a project manager (who's also given up smoking), we've got some history together and we get on well, so I don't feel bad about asking, and he doesn't mind my company. I've got a good working relationship with most of the managers actually, which is useful when negotiating things on site or on the computer (such as time limits, working practises etc.)

12:40pm I have 3 outstanding skeletons to process from one of our other sites: We're also using photogrammetry to make ortho-photos of burials now. This site has had a lot of grave goods, and some the photos look amazing, showing the context of the finds in great detail. After a half hour lunch break and when I've finished processing the photos I ask Gary if he needs the photogrammetry machine for anything, he says "no" so I shut it down.

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One of the ortho-photos I processed. An ortho-photo is a uniform-scale overhead photograph.

2:15pm I load up the 3 new ortho-photos in to the site CAD drawing, trace around the shape of the grave cuts, draw a stick man in the pose/position of each skullie and digitise any grave goods (like necklaces, swords, seaxes, the usual). I save the drawing – The project manager for the site is on holiday this week, but I know that as soon as he gets back on Monday he will go straight to the drawing and have a look at the progress, he won't be expecting the stick men in the graves but he'll appreciate it. It will be a good drawing to send off to the client and county archaeologist as a progress report. I was a bit engrossed and my coffee went cold, so I get another.

2:30pm Our graphics team have been a bit low on work, so one of the illustrators is digitising Bexhill for me, as I don't have time and the other surveyors are in the field. I've been asked by his manager, Magda, to check on his work and make sure the drawing is all OK thus far. I have a good look through, checking for valid geometry and that data is attached. It's 99% good work, and after discovering he's already gone home when I go to give my feedback, I send him an email, copying in his manager, about what he's done well and what could be better. I'm happy it's going smoothly, as it's a big project he's digitising.

3:15pm I load up a CAD drawing from Didcot that I've been digitising myself in between projects. It's a very quiet afternoon and I'm left to it with no interruptions, I've been lucky this week as a few managers are on holiday and as such I've had few interruptions to my already busy schedule!

4:00pm I go and talk to Stuart, our drone pilot at OA South, we're off out early tomorrow and I'm his flight assistant. I confirm with him what time we're going out tomorrow and then round up the guys ready for the drive home.

I hope those road works are finished.

Conan Parsons is a Geomatics Project Officer at Oxford Archaeology's South office in Oxford. For more information about [Oxford Archaeology](#) and our specialist geomatics services, visit our website: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com/professional-services/specialist-services/16-oxford-archaeologys-services/fieldwork/21-geomatics>