

AN ADVENTUROUS VISIT ON A FORBIDDEN PENINSULA

August 2, 2017 Sonja B. Grimm Buildings, Day of Archaeology 2016, Day of Archaeology 2017, Expeditions, Finds, Germany, Landscape Archaeology, Military, Post Medieval, Prehistory Coastal archaeology, Late Upper Palaeolithic, site exploration

Alas, on this very last **Day of Archaeology** I was on leave (yes, indeed, there are some of us who really can afford such luxury as having several days off from work!). Yet, despite vacation and weekend, I went off to explore a site on Saturday – and it had almost all in it that made me decide for this job: adventure, hidden places, and the great feeling of finding something someone has left behind several years or maybe even decades, centuries, millenia ago.

On my last post I still had been a post-doc in the UP-NORTH project at UCL and writing about another exciting trip – back then the team went to Jersey. Well, summertime is a very likely time to find archaeologists out in the field! Since last year I've been back working in Germany as a post-doc in a collaborative research centre, the CRC 1266 "Scales of transformation – Human-Environmental Interaction in Prehistoric and Archaic Societies" at Kiel University (https://www.sfb1266.uni-kiel.de/en?set_language=en). The project I'm working in is about the "Pioneers of the North: Transitions and Transformations in Northern Europe evidenced by high-resolution data sets" and actually hosted at the Centre of Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology at Schloss Gottorf in Schleswig (http://zbsa.eu/research/projects/projekte-mensch-und-umwelt/pioniere-des-nordens?set_language=en) where I used to work before.

After a presentation about the project at a conference in spring this year, a colleague came up to me stating that he had been informed about a potential Late Upper Palaeolithic site in north-eastern Germany. Thus far, he had only seen photos of artefacts that appeared convincing to him but his time had not allowed him to take up this lead, Now he heard the presentation, he thought he could show us the photos, make a connection to the collector for our team, and maybe something comes out of it. Yay, great! Why not?

To explain why this suggestion was of particular interest for my new team, I have to introduce some details about this bit of archaeology: The first people (pioneers) to enter northern Germany after the last glaciation (c. 26,000-19,500 years ago) are archaeologically associated with the so-called Hamburgian – no, no burgers but reindeer hunters who left a whole lot of wastes near Hamburg that were found and in the 1920s firstly categorised by Hamburg university scholar Gustav Schwantes and termed Hamburgian by him. The Hamburgian is similar to the British Creswellian a Late Upper Palaeolithic entity that clearly arose from a Magdalenian (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalenian>) substratum and also dates to the beginning of the Lateglacial Interstadial (appr. 14,700 – 12,700 years ago – the beginning comprises c. the first 700 years). In that period temperatures rose rapidly, precipitation increased, and vegetation and fauna reoccupied the northern regions that were more or less recently freed from the large inland glaciers. Traditionally two variants of the Hamburgian are distinguished based on their projectile typology: The classic Hamburgian with shouldered points that is considered slightly older and the Havelte Group with large but slender tanged points. Most sites of this archaeological group are found in the northern

Netherlands, north-western Germany, Denmark (though only the Havelte variant), and Poland (here only the classic variant). Surprisingly, there seems to be no site in eastern Germany. Therefore, the idea that there might be a potential site in north-eastern Germany made us quite excited – what might there be between the classic Hamburgian areas in Poland, the Havelte Group material in Denmark and the diverse material in NW-Germany?

Yet, entering the site wasn't as easy and straight forward as one might expect: The findspot is located on a private peninsula that also is in parts a natural conservation area. So the owner and the environmental protection agency had to agree on our coming. The latter is something we also know very well from sites in our part of northern Germany where somehow the relevant archaeological sites are also frequently located in natural protection zones with different degrees of excluding archaeological field works – but that's an entirely different story that partially explains the scarcity of modern excavations of this period in the State of Schleswig-Holstein.

Back to the NE-German peninsula. Finally, this Saturday everything was arranged by our colleague and we had the permission to enter the peninsula. The trip began at 7.30am in Schleswig to arrive at the appointed time 10.45am at the gates to the private property. Well, at least that was the plan – not considering motorway closures due to accidents... the arrival time was finally at 11.30am but – thanks to modern communication media – the colleague was contacted early enough about the late arrival. So after a 4hrs ride, everybody already waited at the gates that were closed behind my car again displaying a large sign about danger of unadjusted ammunition... I learned then that prior to German unity and the decampment of the Russian troops in 1990, the area had been a military base since the 1930s with still some material of the Nazi tank shooting training remaining in the grounds. Eh, nice!? I was asked to leave my car with all that is dear to me and not waterproof at the gates and join the others in the car of the ranger. Luckily, the first swarm of mosquitos attacked me there already so that quickly I sprayed the parts without clothes – so hands and face (in the end it's northern Germany – we had about 15°C all day) but also all my clothes with anti-mosquito spray because these nasty creatures were already trying to get through my trousers... Our ride then took us past the former airfield and the barracks village that were left to nature since 1990 but also past the former estate of those who owned the peninsula for some 650 years before the Nazis overtook it. To see nature at work on those buildings was also quite an amazing modern lesson in archaeology!

When the cars came to a stop at the coast, I found out why I had to leave everything behind – the next part of the way was taken by boat (kayak) to the other side of a little bight filled with reeds. At this point even the smartphones that were brought along – just in case and to have at least a chance to take some photos were left behind (alas – no photos to the text!). Well, it was still stormy but we gave it a try to reach the shore close to the site but having passed half the way and the main deep, our guide decided that it was too dangerous to go on and we landed on a sandy ground from where we could also reach the site by foot. Alas, through the reeds that were growing about half a meter taller than me and that were the home of the mosquitos... and the waves of the Baltic Sea splashing into the kayak had made me not just wet to the bones but had also washed away all mosquito protection... I have to admit it gave me a bit of a jungle feeling trying to keep pace with my guides through this thick and high reed forest attacked by nasty

clouds of blood thirsty creatures – I guess if I had been a bit more claustrophobic and / or akarophobic that would have been a moment of pure panic! Finally, after several minutes we reached a little oak forest and after some metres that was cut by the coast exposing only a little beach and giving space to a cool wind from the sea that blew away the mosquitos.

And there we were: Several hundred metres of land cut by the coast revealing archaeological finds of several thousands of years. Once I started looking, the beach and the littoral water was filled with flint artefacts – mostly flakes but also some nice scrapers. You could see how the coast worked on the land and even see artefacts in the exposed sections of different thicknesses. In these, you could also see how the land had developed on top of the glacial moraines and tills from the last Ice Age to a fairly enriched peaty soil over millennia. Well, but the material we found that day did not resembled the potential Hamburgian artefacts that had brought us here. Yet, we were only granted a small time window to visit the site and have a look around – certainly not enough time to start a proper survey. The finds that we had made were packed up and given to the collector who will report them to the State authorities. So after a good look around, we had to return through the reed and to the boat that took us only over the main depth this time and dropped us off in another reed jungle but not as tall as the first one with some grass islands in between and not that many mosquitos. We followed a way cut into these reeds by the large wild boar population on the island until we came back to the car.

On our way back to the gates, we still made a little detour to climb up the former airfield tower to enjoy a grand view over the peninsula – and find out that after only 27 years and admittedly little knowledge about Russian army architecture, we could no longer tell what several of the rooms in the basement were used for... making us think what we do with remains that are several thousand years old and processed far more intensively by natural forces...

Finally, we arrived back at the gates and were released to our own cars and back to modern day civilisation and at this point it really felt like we had just been on a trip through time.

Though this sounds like a good end to an adventure story, a good archaeological excursion does not end at the gates. We looked for a nice café where we could sit together and talk about what we've seen, how we interpret what we've seen and how to proceed further. We remained undecided whether we come back here – we first plan to examine the original artefacts that brought us here in more detail. However, if we do come back we will hopefully have more time and then we will certainly have a more systematic survey plan. Only after another two hours there discussing and warming up with soup, coffee, tea, and cake we finally started our several hours long trips back home.

Though not as long a day as in last year's report, I still collapsed into bed after the 13 hours day that was physically far more demanding than last year's trip with a terrible headache, really itchy mosquito bites, still a bit wet, and dirty but still happy that my job allows me to have such adventurous, almost Indiana Jones like days.

I still cannot believe it's the last Day of Archaeology... this is too sad.

However, as many others did before me, I want to thank the volunteering team so much for giving us all the opportunity to describe our very diverse daily lives as archaeologists. It's been a real pleasure taking part in it and reading all the many interesting insights into other colleague's worklife and reminding me how blessed I am with such job offering this magnitude of possibilities. Thank you, Day of Archaeology!