

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

**Symonds Yat Rapids
Symonds Yat East
Herefordshire**

NGR SO 5610 1560

SMR No: 48815

BORDER ARCHAEOLOGY

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1. Non Technical Summary

Archaeological observation of groundworks carried out in the river channel at Symonds Yat Rapids was undertaken between September 18th and September 22nd 2008.

Large quantities of unweathered stone rubble were revealed probably associated with demolition of the New Weir in 1826. Considerable amounts of iron ore and smelting by-products were also observed, these presumably originating from the ironworks located on the west bank, adjacent to the area of development.

A number of iron artefacts were recovered from the channel, including 11 'quant pole' prongs associated with the movement of barges and other waterborne traffic through fast-flowing sections of the river. An in situ hardwood post was observed close to the east bank, immediately to the south of the rapids, which may have formed part of a mooring, possibly associated with use of a flash lock on the weir to the north.

2. Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Mr A. Laird of Epduk, Consulting Engineers to the British Canoe Union, to undertake archaeological observation of groundworks to improve the stability of the island situated 100m SW of Symonds Yat Rock (NGR SO 5610 1560) and to construct groynes on the E side of the island and the riverbank immediately opposite to improve the rapids for canoeing (**Fig. 1**).

Copies of this report will be sent to Mr A. Laird, Herefordshire Council and the Herefordshire Archaeology Sites and Monuments Record.

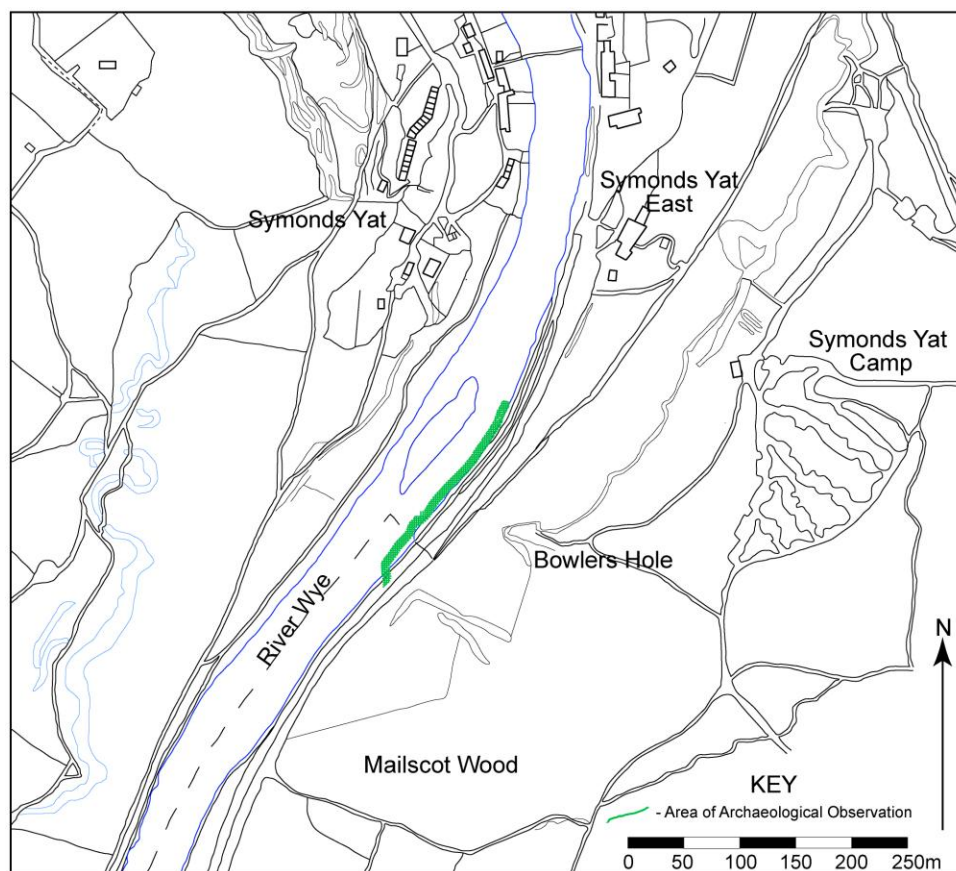


Fig 1: Plan showing location of area of archaeological observation

2.1 Soils & Geology

In the immediate vicinity of the site at Symonds Yat Rapids, the predominant soil type comprises typical brown earths of the EARDISTON 1 series (541c), consisting of well-drained reddish coarse loamy soils over sandstone, shallow in places, especially on brows, with some reddish fine silty soils over shale and siltstone. The underlying geology is Devonian and Permo-Triassic reddish sandstone, silty shale and siltstone (SSEW, 1983).

3. Brief Historical and Archaeological Background

The site is located within the Lower Wye Valley, which has been classified as a landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest. Evidence for Middle to Late Palaeolithic occupation has been identified in a cave near Bowlers Hole in the limestone cliffs overlying the site to the east. Later prehistoric occupation is represented by the large Iron Age multivallate hillfort constructed on a promontory close to the NE. Bronze Age tools also found in this location may suggest that there was earlier occupation of the site.

A weir is referred to at or near the location of the current structure in a document from 1282, as belonging to William De Valence, lord of Goodrich Castle, although evidence for medieval settlement at this location is limited, the land lying within the royal demesne of the Forest of Dean and therefore heavily wooded.

A weir is documented as having been built in its current location, presumably to supply water for a forge owned by Gilbert Talbot, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury (and lord of Goodrich Castle), by the late 16th century. This was subsequently demolished in 1589 as part of a scheme to improve navigation along the Wye, although it was later rebuilt.

By 1684, the weir, then known as 'New Weir', is recorded as being the property of the Earl of Kent, who rebuilt it and raised it to provide an increased supply of water for the New Weir Ironworks constructed on the site of the earlier forge. The Wye and Lugg Navigation Act of 1695 required the weir to be lowered for a lock to be installed and a house to be built for the lock-keeper.

The weir remained in use until the early the 19th century, when the ironworks closed. The weir was demolished by 1826 and the lock filled in. The island at this location appears to have been formed from the remains of the weir where it ran adjacent to the ironworks, the obstruction causing a build-up of material in the river channel. Large quantities of iron slag and ore stone were also apparently dumped in the river at this location.

By the end of the 1860s, work had begun on a railway line along the E bank of the river, appearing on the O.S 1st edition map in 1889. It appears that strengthening work was carried out to the riverbank in order to support the track, the bank side immediately adjacent to the site being heavily impacted upon by this work.

4. Methodology

The archaeological observation was undertaken between September 18th 2008 and September 22nd 2008, groundworks being continuous over this period, in accordance with *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001) and *Standards for Archaeological Projects in Herefordshire (Issue 1)* (Herefordshire Council 2004). Border Archaeology adhered throughout to the IFA *Code of conduct* (2002) and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology* (2002).

The development comprised the removal and replacement of a series of groynes, comprising artificial banks designed to disrupt the flow of water through the rapids downstream of the weir creating white-water conditions for canoeing. The excavated material was used to build a temporary platform along the E side of the river for machine access. The replacement groynes, which were constructed using large stones, were then placed in predetermined locations.

The removal of material from the channel was carried out under archaeological supervision, with all spoil scanned for artefacts and other material of archaeological significance, such as industrial residues and by-products. Extant remains of features or structures associated with the historic use of the river were also recorded.

All finds and features were photographed using a 10.3mpx digital camera and a site plan at a scale of 1:500 was produced.

5. Archaeological Observation

The excavation of material from the main river channel E of the island was undertaken over an area of approximately 120m, from an access ramp on the E bank, approximately 30m S of the southernmost tip of the island, to a point opposite the northernmost extent of the island, 10m S of the weir.



Plates 1 & 2: Removal of material from the river channel for access platform

Considerable quantities of ironstone and slag were identified in the excavated spoil, which was, presumably, waste material associated with the ironworks located on the W bank. Unworked, unabraded stone rubble was also observed, which may have originally formed part of the weir.

A number of iron artefacts were found, including pronged 'quant pole' ends associated with commercial river traffic. A barge pole fixture was also recovered and several items associated with the railway immediately to the E of the site.



Plate 3: Quant pole pronged end



Plate 4: Possible barge hook

An in situ timber post measuring 0.38m x 0.30m (102) was found close to the east bank opposite the southernmost extent of the island. This could represent the remains of a mooring point.



Plate 5: Timber post (102)

6. Conclusion

The observation of groundworks at Symonds Yat Rapids identified considerable evidence for use of the river and the immediate environment. The eastern riverside appears to have been built up in the 1870s with the construction of a revetted embankment associated with the railway. This may have significantly impacted upon the river channel in the vicinity of the flash lock which was located at the E end of the weir.



Plate 6: Revetted embankment on the E side of the river

A large number of double pronged 'quant pole' heads, of varying size and form, and part of a large boat hook were removed from the navigable channel. These implements were attached to wooden poles and used to propel and steer vessels through fast flowing sections of river or upstream; evidently, these examples had broken off during use. The largest were probably used for barges, with smaller versions used for correspondingly smaller craft. Such implements remained in use well into the 20th century, although the use of heavier deeper draft barges, carrying coal and other bulk cargos, would probably have declined sharply with the expansion of the rail network in the mid 19th century.



Plate 7: Quant pole ends showing comparative size

The remains of a hardwood post, which was located approximately 3m from the E bank and slightly to the S of the rapids, may represent a mooring point for river traffic waiting to move upstream. Barges and other larger vessels probably worked close to the E bank, which was formerly the channel for the flash lock (prior to 1826) and adjacent to the towing path (established after 1809). It seems probable that some kind of mooring to the S of the rapids would have been necessary, especially if two or more boats were attempting to pass through the rapids simultaneously or if a vessel required towing or winching from the bank side in order to make headway upstream.

The large quantities of ironstone and iron slag observed in the river channel were presumably waste material from the ironworks, heavily concentrated in the former weir pool, this possibly being the nearest suitable location to the works where a build-up of material would not form a hazard to river traffic. Stone rubble was also identified in this deposit, which was probably reused building material from the weir incorporated into the existing groyne structures.

7. Copyright

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8. Bibliography

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9. Site Summary

Report Name & Title	Archaeological Observation: Symonds Yat Rapids, Symonds Yat East Herefordshire	
Contractor's Name and Address	Border Archaeology Chapel Walk Burgess Street Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8DE	
Site Name	Symonds Yat Rapids	
Grid Reference (8 fig)	NGR SO 5610 1560	
Planning Application Number	DCSE2008/0207/F	
SMR Number/s of Site	48815	
Date of Fieldwork	18/09/2008 to 22/09/2008	
Date of Report	29/10/2008	
Findings:	11 'quant pole' prongs Part of a large boat hook	Samples collected: None
<p>Summary of the report:</p> <p><i>Archaeological observation of groundworks in the river channel was undertaken between September 18th and September 22nd 2008.</i></p> <p><i>Large quantities of unweathered stone rubble were revealed probably associated with demolition of the New Weir in 1826. Considerable amounts of iron ore and smelting by-products were also observed, these presumably originating from the ironworks located on the W bank, adjacent to the area of development.</i></p> <p><i>A number of iron artefacts were recovered from the channel, including 11 'quant pole' prongs associated with the movement of barges and other waterborne traffic through fast-flowing sections of the river. An in situ hardwood post was observed close to the east bank, immediately to the S of the rapids, which may have formed part of a mooring, possibly associated with use of a flash lock on the weir to the N.</i></p>		

Document control

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Report edited by	<i>George Children MA AIFA</i>		
Issue No	Status	Date	Approved issue
2	Final	October 2008	<i>Neil Shurety</i>