



Why carry out a Fieldwalking Survey?

Fieldwalking, also known as surface artefact collection, is a non-invasive process of collecting surface finds in a methodical manner to survey landscapes in order to build up a picture of human activity.

Fieldwalking is a particularly cost effective way of surveying a large site to gain a feel for the past settlements which have been active in the area. There is no need for expensive specialised equipment to carry out fieldwalking, unlike geophysical or aerial survey. It can become a great community effort as the more people you have involved the quicker and more detailed the process can be!

The likely field, possibly spotted from aerial photographs, is marked off with parallel lines (like a running track) which walkers follow to systematically scan the surface for signs of disturbance or bits of pottery, flints, bones or metal objects. Participants collect their 'finds' in plastic bags which are later plotted on a master plan and eventually scatter graph, marking the density of surface finds, either manually or on computer.

Most fieldwalking is carried out during October to March when arable fields have been ploughed, harrowed and allowed to weather for a period of time. Freshly ploughed fields are not suitable due to the rough surface created by the furrows and clods of earth. These furrows cast dark shadows and make for poor visibility, especially in sunny conditions and with clay soils. Fieldwalking is unsuitable for use on permanent grass pasture and wooded areas or in urban locations.

Some modern ploughing techniques dig deep into the soil and tends to obliterate a great deal of archaeological evidence in the form of features. (A feature is anything that cannot be taken away from a site without destroying it, e.g. a grave, a pit, a posthole, a man-made mound.) Secondly, ploughing can disturb and bring to the surface artefacts which have lain under the soil for hundreds or thousands of years.



Equipment required:

- Appropriate clothing and footwear
- Clear, sealable plastic bags
- Tape measure.
- Bamboo canes
- Marker pens

Method:

Google Maps is a great starting point! If you have noticed any lumps and bumps in a field you can use the tool, in its satellite mode, to look for any sign of earthworks from above. Then aim to find the nearest ploughed field to fieldwalk. A look on the County's Historic Environment Record will also show you the nearest earthworks to your village. (Try the map search on http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/advanced_search.aspx)

Always ensure you have full permission from the landowner before you begin. Make sure you follow the Countryside Code when out and about.





For fieldwalking beginners we recommend using the transect method of survey.

The transect method divides an area up into a series of parallel lines, usually with 10 metre intervals between transects. Walkers normally start from a field edge that is used as a baseline.

These transects may be marked by ranging rods or bamboo canes but sometimes the plough furrow or emerging crop lines are used as markers. Each walker carries some plastic bags and a number of bamboo canes and is assigned a particular transect to walk.

Walking along the transect, a band of approximately 1 metre either side of the transect is scanned for artefacts. This means that a 20% sample (2 metres of every 10 metres) of the area under investigation is taken.

Use one bag to collect artefacts per 10 metre stint along the transect. The walker then carries on with a new bag, collecting material in this manner until the complete transect has been covered.

Each bag needs to be marked with a unique number placed in it and its position recorded accordingly. E.g Transect A, stint 1.

What is collected?



Artefacts recovered from the plough soil may be representative of archaeology lying beneath the surface and can provide quantitative data useful in assessing the date and type of occupation of a particular site.

Before modern rubbish collection such material was spread out onto the fields as manure. The organic elements of the waste will decay but broken pottery will still remain in the soil for centuries. There is likely therefore to be a scatter of potsherds (historic fragments of pottery) from a variety of dates over most cultivated fields in the country.



In general, it is better to bag an artefact, which can be discarded later, rather than reject it in the field and regret it later. Remember, you are only looking for objects which people made and used. As a rule the following groups of material may be collected:

Ceramics

Building materials (such as bricks, tiles and tesserae) and pottery of all types, including clay smoking pipe fragments.



Lithics

Flint, as worked tools, cores or debitage (waste), and burnt flint.



Building stone

As worked/shaped/decorated pieces.



Glass

Both window glass and vessel glass.



Metals

Iron, lead or copper mostly, but also slag from industrial activity.



Bone and shell

Only bone tools or worked material, but we do not collect butchered animal bone currently. Shells out of their context (i.e. sea oysters, mussels etc found miles from the sea) are collected.



Analysing Results

All the artefacts must be carefully washed (with the exception of metal finds or material too fragile to keep handling) and some items can be rejected at this stage.

For help and support with analysing items the following organisations can be contacted.

Heritage Lincolnshire – 01529 461 499

Lincolnshire County Council Historic Environment Department - 01522 552222

Portable Antiquities Scheme - 01522 552361

Once you have sorted through and identified your collected artefacts they must be recorded onto a map. The information recorded will then begin to build up a picture of previous settlement activity. Areas of the field with a large concentration of similar artefacts can give a big clue to the locations used by any past inhabitants and may indicate areas where further research, such as excavation or geophysics can be carried out.

Where to find out more:

Heritage Lincolnshire can support you with community archaeology, contact them through www.heritagelincolnshire.org.uk

Finds can be recorded using the Portable Antiquities Scheme at www.finds.org.uk. Any gold or silver object, or a group of coins found during fieldwalking that is believed to be over 300 years old must be reported, under the Treasure Act 1996. The same obligation also applies to groups of prehistoric base metal objects found together.

Your survey should be given to the county's Historic Environment Record to be recorded on the Lincolnshire Heritage Gateway. This website may also include further information on other pieces of archaeological interest in your area www.heritagegateway.org.uk

