

NORTH WEST WETLANDS SURVEY 7

THE WETLANDS OF **South West Lancashire**

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Front cover: *The Sluice, constructed in 1692 to drain Martin Mere*
Rear Cover: *The North West Wetlands Survey area*

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Contents

List of Illustrations	v
Abbreviations.....	viii
Contributors	ix
Foreword.....	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Summary.....	xiii
 1 THE NORTH WEST WETLANDS SURVEY	 1
Threats to the archaeological resource.....	3
Aims and objectives	5
Methodology	7
The nature of the archaeological evidence.....	15
The organisation of the volume.....	19
Terminology	20
 2 SOUTH WEST LANCASHIRE	 23
Relief.....	25
Drainage.....	26
Climate.....	27
Plant and animal communities.....	27
Geology and soils	29
Land-use	31
History of research	32
The NWWS in South West Lancashire	37
 3 THE SOUTHERN MOSSLANDS: ALT VALLEY, DOWNHOLLAND MOSS, AND HALSALL MOSS	 39
Land-use	43
Wetland development and landscape change.....	43
Archaeological survey	63
Discussion.....	77
Potential	79
 4 THE NORTHERN MOSSLANDS: MARTIN MERE, CHURCHTOWN MOSS, AND TARLETON MOSS.....	 83
Land-use	87
Geomorphology.....	87
Wetland development and landscape change.....	89
Archaeological survey	104
Discussion.....	131
Potential	132
 5 SMALLER MOSSES	 137
Croston, Mawdesley, and Hoscarr Mosses.....	137
Farington Moss	154
Bickerstaffe Moss.....	165
 6 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION	 173
Relationship of the results to the HERs.....	173
Site visibility	174
Settlement and subsistence	174
Peat wastage and archaeological sites.....	189
The 'character' of South West Lancashire.....	192
Future work.....	194
Conclusions	198

Glossary	201
Appendix 1: Site gazeteer	209
Appendix 2: Gazetteer of SMR site on and around South West Lancashire’s wetlands	235
Appendix 3: Detailed Paleoenvironmental Evidence.....	249
Appendix 4: Radiocarbon date	271
Bibliography	275
Index	295

List of Illustrations

Figures

1	The location of South West Lancashire in the NWS area of study.....	xviii
2	The NWS area of study, with the dates of survey and publication.....	2
3	The South West Lancashire survey area	6
4	The location of areas of aerial reconnaissance in Lancashire, 1990/1.....	13
5	The organisation of the volume by study area	19
6	The wetlands of the Lancashire Coastal Plain and modern topographical features	22
7	The main areas of mossland in South West Lancashire	24
8	South West Lancashire: relief	25
9	South West Lancashire: major watercourses.....	26
10	Crossens Catchment, showing the drainage of Martin Mere.....	27
11	South West Lancashire: solid geology.....	29
12	South West Lancashire: drift geology	30
13	South West Lancashire: history of survey	38
14	Area covered by the Southern Mosslands.....	39
15	The Southern Mosslands: soils.....	40
16	The Southern Mosslands: the modern landscape	42
17	The eastern margin of Altcar Moss, showing the sampling sites	43
18	The stratigraphy of Altcar Moss, west of Hill House Farm.....	44
19	Percentage pollen diagram: Hillhouse-6A	45
20	Part of the River Alt and Downholland Brook catchments	46
21	The stratigraphy along the New Cut	47
22	Percentage pollen diagram: Altcar 1	49
23	The distribution of Soil Survey cores, with peat thickness (in feet)	50
24	Downholland and Altcar Mosses, showing the sampling sites	51
25	The Downholland Moss stratigraphy.....	52
26	Percentage pollen diagram: Downholland Moss-11.....	53
27	Distribution of pollen, diatoms, foraminifera, and particle size in Downholland Moss-15.....	54
28	Percentage pollen diagram: Downholland Moss-15.....	55
29	Percentage pollen diagram: Downholland Moss-16, 7.98-8.13 m.....	57
30	Percentage pollen diagram: Downholland Moss-16, 0.05-1.90 m.....	58
31	Percentage pollen diagram: Downholland Moss-16C, showing strata.....	59
32	Plant macrofossil diagram: Downholland Moss-16C.....	60
33	The Southern Mosslands: archaeological sites, peat depth, and land-use	<i>rear of volume</i>
34	The Southern Mosslands: Mesolithic and early prehistoric sites.....	64
35	The Southern Mosslands: flintwork from Mesolithic and early prehistoric sites	65
36	The location of LA593 at Hill House.....	66
37	Section through peats adjacent to LA593 at Hill House.....	67
38	The Southern Mosslands: late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites.....	70
39	The Southern Mosslands: flintwork from the late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites	71
40	The location of Green Kettle Farm, Halsall Moss.....	79
41	Sections through a coversand ridge at Green Kettle Farm, Halsall Moss	81
42	The location of the section through the disused railway, Halsall Moss.....	81
43	The stratigraphy beneath the railway embankment and peats, Halsall Moss.....	82
44	Area covered by the Northern Mosslands	83
45	The Northern Mosslands: soils	84
46	The Northern Mosslands: the modern landscape	85
47	Location of some of the sampling sites on Martin Mere, Churchtown Moss, and The Gravel.....	90
48	Percentage pollen diagram: Greenings Farm, Martin Mere (MM-1).....	91
49	Stratigraphy across Martin Mere from south-east to north-west	92
50	Martin Mere: its extent in 1691, according to Brodrick (1902), and land height in the early 1960s.....	93
51	Percentage pollen diagram: Langley Brook, trees and shrubs.....	95
52	Percentage pollen diagram: Langley Brook, herbs, spores, and aquatics.....	97
53	Percentage pollen diagram: Tarlsough Moss	99
54	Percentage pollen diagram: Back Moss Lane	101

55	Percentage pollen diagram: Mere Sands Wood-1	102
56	The Northern Mosslands: archaeological sites, peat depth, and land-use	<i>rear of volume</i>
57	The Northern Mosslands: Mesolithic and early prehistoric sites	105
58	The distribution of lithic material at LA605/606, Banks.....	106
59	The distribution of flintwork at LA606, Banks	107
60	Flintwork from LA605 and LA606	107
61	Chert ?axe from LA299, Holmeswood.....	108
62	Section through a buried creek, Churchtown Moss.....	110
63	Flat axe from Martin Mere.....	112
64	The Northern Mosslands: late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites	113
65	The Northern Mosslands: flintwork from late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites	114
66	The distribution of possible Romano-British mounds at Mere Brow	115
67	Sherd of fourth-century Huntcliff Ware from LA600, Mere Brow	115
68	Dug-out canoe from Martin Mere, discovered in the 1690s, or from the Ribble Estuary	118
69	Dug-out canoes from Martin Mere.....	120
70	The extent of Martin Mere, 1598-1824, from early cartography.....	123
71	The 'old sea-bank', at Banks	129
72	Embankments enclosing marshland on the Ribble Estuary	130
73	The location of Rhonda's Moss, near Mere Brow.....	133
74	Location of sections recorded through the Mere Sands, Holmeswood	135
75	Section recorded through the Mere Sands and associated deposits at Holmeswood	136
76	Area covered by Croston, Mawdesley, and Hoscar Mosses	137
77	Croston/Mawdesley and Hoscar Mosses: the modern landscape.....	138
78	Croston/Mawdesley and Hoscar Mosses: soils	139
79	Percentage pollen diagram: Hoscar Moss	142
80	Croston/Mawdesley Moss: archaeological sites, peat depth, and land-use	<i>rear of volume</i>
81	Sketch plan of the Mesolithic site at Mawdesley	144
82	Mesolithic flintwork from Mawdesley	145
83	Croston/Mawdesley and Hoscar Mosses: Mesolithic, Neolithic, and early Bronze Age sites	147
84	Croston/Mawdesley and Hoscar Mosses: medieval and post-medieval sites	149
85	Ridge and furrow on the edge of Croston Moss	150
86	Area covered by Farington Moss.....	154
87	Farington Moss: the modern landscape	155
88	Farington Moss: soils.....	156
89	Location of section, Farington Moss	157
90	Percentage pollen diagram: Farington Moss B.....	159
91	Percentage pollen diagram: Farington Moss D	160
92	Spot samples from Farington Moss.....	161
93	Farington Moss: archaeological sites, peat depth, and land-use	162
94	Area covered by Bickerstaffe Moss	165
95	Bickerstaffe Moss: the modern landscape	166
96	Bickerstaffe Moss: soils	166
97	Bickerstaffe Moss: archaeological sites, peat depth, and land-use	169
98	Possible trackways and field system (LA453) at Barrow Nook, Bickerstaffe Moss	170
99	Distribution of Mesolithic and early Neolithic sites in the wetlands of South West Lancashire	175
100	Distribution of late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in the wetlands of South West Lancashire.....	183
101	Surface-level changes in the peats of Halsall Moss, 1962-73	190
102	Peat loss in the Southern Mosslands, between 1955 and 1994/5, with the distribution of Mesolithic sites..	191
103	The stratigraphy of Churchtown Moss.....	260
104	Stratigraphic transects A-B and C-D across Hoscar Moss	266

Tables

1	NWWS areas and publication dates.....	1
2	Areas of peat in South West Lancashire	24
3	Land-use in South West Lancashire in 1985.....	32
4	Radiocarbon assays from Altcar Moss.....	48
5	Dug-out canoes from Martin Mere.....	119
6	Lithic typology at Mawdesley	146

7	NWWS sites in South West Lancashire: summary results	174
8	Downholland Moss: the stratigraphy between Barton Brook and Fleam Brook.....	250
9	The stratigraphy of Downholland Moss 16, sampled in 1982 and 1988	253
10	Downholland Moss 16: the stratigraphy of the basal layers, resampled in 1995	255
11	The stratigraphy of Greenings Farm, Martin Mere (MM-1)	259
12	The stratigraphy of Langley Brook	262
13	The stratigraphy of Tarlscough Moss.....	263
14	The stratigraphy of Back Moss Lane	264
15	The stratigraphy of Hoscar Moss	267
16	The stratigraphy of Farington Moss B	268
17	The stratigraphy of Farington Moss D.....	268
18	Radiocarbon dates for the Southern Mosslands and Martin Mere	271
19	Additional radiocarbon dates cited in the text	273

Plates

1	Archaeological methodology: fieldwalking an outcrop of coversands, Halsall Moss	8
2	Archaeological methodology: plotting artefacts at LA605, Banks, using a GPS	8
3	Archaeological methodology: recording a cleaned dyke section, Alt Valley	9
4	Map of Downholland Moss and surrounding district, compiled 1557-9 by William Hamilton	18
5	The superficial geology of the country adjoining the coasts of South West Lancashire, Sheet 90SE.....	34
6	Sections through the deposits in South West Lancashire.....	36
7	The landscape of the Alt Valley	41
8	Halsall Moss	41
9	Halsall Moss: Mesolithic sites LA651 and LA654	65
10	Halsall Moss: Mesolithic site LA668, adjacent to the former channel of Chisnall Brook	68
11	The southern part of Downholland Moss, showing coversand ridges projecting from wasting peats	78
12	Halsall Moss: section through a coversand ridge at Green Kettle Farm (Dyke 1)	80
13	Halsall Moss: section through the railway embankment, and the underlying peats	82
14	The seventeenth-century drainage channel, known as The Sluice, and the area of Martin Mere	86
15	Palaeo-tidal creeks (roddons), Churchtown Moss, north-west of Martin Mere	88
16	Mesolithic site LA299 at Holmeswood, during fieldwork.....	109
17	Palaeo-tidal creek (roddon), Churchtown Moss	110
18	Fragments of the skeleton of an aurochs, found at Clay Brow c 1968.....	111
19	Field system, LA463.....	116
20	Field system, LA468.....	117
21	Dug-out canoe recovered in 1899 from near Banks	121
22	The Sluice, constructed in 1692 (and remodelled since) to drain Martin Mere	125
23	The northern edge of Tarleton Moss at Banks, showing sea-dykes in the distance.....	129
24	Rhonda's Moss, Mere Brow, with the peat section surviving under the woodland	134
25	Rhonda's Moss, showing the peat section	134
26	Intercalated peats and Mere Sands at Holmeswood, on the northern edge of Martin Mere	136
27	The floodplain of the River Douglas, south of Rufford, showing Croston Moss, looking north.....	137
28	Land-use on Croston Moss.....	140
29	Stable on Croston Moss, showing wasting peats	154
30	Leyland Moss, showing intensive horticulture on cultivated peats.....	156
31	Section through an abandoned trackway, Farington Moss, showing exposed deep peat section.....	160
32	An uncut remnant of the original Little Hoole Moss	164
33	Bickerstaffe Moss	165
34	The remains of peat cutting under modern woodland, in the centre of Bickerstaffe Moss.....	167
35	<i>Carting the turf from Farington Moss</i> , by Thomas Wade (1828-91).....	187
36	Peat being blown away on Simonswood Moss in 1992.....	189

Abbreviations

ΣAP	Sum of the Arboreal (tree) Pollen
BP	Before Present. In terms of radiocarbon dates, present is defined as AD 1950
EDM	Electronic Distance Meter; survey equipment measuring distances between it and a reflecting prism by computing phase differences between the outgoing and returning signal of a beam of infra-red radiation
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HER	Historic Environment Record
INQUA	International Union for Quaternary Research
LUAU	Lancaster University Archaeological Unit
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food
OD	Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
PAZ	Pollen Assemblage Zone
RCHM(E)	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
RDBMS	Relational Database Management System
RIGS	Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites
RPAZ	Regional Pollen Assemblage Zone
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SM	Scheduled Monument
SMR	Sites and Monument Record, now HER
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest (Nature Conservancy, now Natural England)
SUERC	Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
TLP	Total Land Pollen
TLPS	Total Land Pollen and Spores

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Foreword

The publication of this volume sees the forging of the final link in the chain of lowland wetland sites from the Solway to Shropshire. That it has been so long in gestation was not planned, but despite the storms that came its way, it is to the credit of both English Heritage and Oxford Archaeology North (and particularly to Rachel Newman) that it has been safely piloted through the shoals and brought to shore.

The multi-disciplinary approach, developed in North Lancashire and refined in Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, and Cumbria, has proved its worth in the improved management of the wetland resource through the planning system. Recent changes to that system introduced by the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 (including the loss of the 2010 Planning Policy Statement on heritage) have made the careful research set out here and in the companion volumes even more important than it was in 1994 when the first volume in the series - *The Wetlands of Merseyside* - was produced.

The fieldwork for the volume was completed in 1996 and, as is only to be expected, time has marched on and there have been changes large and small across South West Lancashire. These have included developer-funded archaeological works on wetlands sites as diverse as a gas pipeline through Lathom, a wind-power development at Mawdesley, and a canal marina at Bickerstaffe. However, access to the data gathered by the NWWS, even in its unpublished form, and the general heightened interest in, and understanding of, wetlands archaeology, has meant that these developments could be designed in a manner sensitive to the fragile archaeology contained in this unique landscape.

Peter Iles

Specialist Advisor (Archaeology), Lancashire County Council

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The volume has greatly benefited from discussions with Audrey Coney, Ann Hallam, and the late John Hallam, whose assistance in its production is gratefully acknowledged. Access to the Mawdesley Archive at Liverpool Museum was facilitated by Ron Cowell, who has also provided essential advice about all of the matters addressed in this volume, and thanks are also due to his colleague, Rob Philpott, for checking information on the Merseyside Historic Environment Record.

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The North West Wetlands Survey has been generously funded by English Heritage. The project has published seven volumes, presenting the results of the Survey in Shropshire / Staffordshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, North Lancashire, Cumbria, and now South West Lancashire, the production of all of which were funded by English Heritage.

Summary

This volume presents the results of archaeological survey in South West Lancashire, the fieldwork being undertaken between 1993 and 1996. It was carried out as a part of the North West Wetlands Survey, a comprehensive, seven-year survey of the lowland wetlands of North West England, which encompassed the counties and unitary authorities of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire, and Cumbria.

The survey used non-invasive approaches to identify archaeological sites of all periods across large areas of agricultural landscape, most of which had seen no previous work. The results of this survey are presented, along with the detailed results of several years of palaeoecological survey undertaken in the area since the 1970s, including pollen and stratigraphic analysis. In addition, the historical background to medieval and later landscape change is outlined. Prior to this, only a few finds and sites were known, mainly from antiquarian records and casual, more recent exploration. The description of more modern finds has been hindered by the inconsistent presentation of the evidence, however. The record was actually dominated by finds made during the drainage of Martin Mere in the seventeenth century. The survey has revealed a wide range of previously unknown archaeological and palaeoecological signatures, showing that the landscape was intensively occupied at key periods in the past. In addition, it has allowed assessment of the archaeological potential of the wetlands and observations on the nature of the archaeological record.

The first traces of Early Mesolithic activity have been found representing, it is argued, a meaningful pattern, with concentrations on the wetland edge, which would have offered significant environmental opportunities for early hunter-gatherers. The pattern is similar to that for the uplands, suggesting the traditional view of the upland/lowland seasonal movement of people can be questioned.

The archaeological survey has shown a real expansion of settlement along the wetland edge in the late Mesolithic period, coincident with rapid changes in sea level, a key feature of this dynamic landscape. The sites tend to be revealed on the edge of the wetland as peat erodes. In specific areas of the landscape, the intensity of the finds shows their continued importance as 'persistent places'. Rivers and coasts were important and there are suggestions of real variability in the intensity of landscape use across the survey area. These sites are complemented by a wider, less intensive use of the landscape. Contemporary pollen signatures show extensive contemporary use of the wetlands through reductions in tree-pollen values and management through burning of the wetland edge, indicated by frequent charcoal spreads.

The evidence for activity in the early Neolithic period declines, although there are suggestions of continuity in landscape use from the late Mesolithic period. In the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, the evidence is more diffuse, comprising scatters of flint across the landscape. The lack of monumental aspects within the archaeological record is significant, although it may relate to the early enclosure of the landscape. There may be real differences in the use of this landscape, with a genuine lack of material from the Shirdley Hill Sand. The presence of only small numbers of old records of stray bronze finds may mark an actual difference from other wetlands in the region.

There is some evidence for the more intensive use of the landscape, through cropmarks, although the surface evidence may not reflect the underlying archaeology. In this, the survey area is very similar to other parts of lowland Lancashire. The Roman record follows this pattern, although there are tantalising records of deliberately buried stray finds from the mosses, which will repay further study.

The key feature of these later periods, supported by the historical evidence, is the clear differentiation between different types of wetland. Martin Mere and associated freshwater habitats were used widely as fisheries and for their other abundant natural resources. The raised mires to the north and south were, however, more lightly used. Their chief role was as the provider of peat for fuel, a process that must have been very important to local communities until the availability of local coal from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Whilst the evidence for such exploitation is evident across the landscape, it is a tradition that was not well documented, perhaps owing to its uncontested nature and the domestic cycle in which it was undertaken.

The volume discusses the potential of the area and notes the degradation of the current landscape, both wetland and dryland. The authors also note however, the great potential of the undisturbed deposits, especially in remnant peats, and the palaeoecological potential of the small stands of peat surviving in the denuded landscape.

Résumé

Ce volume rassemble les résultats d'une investigation archéologique menée dans le sud-ouest du Lancashire, et dont la partie terrain fut exécutée entre 1993 et 1996. Elle s'inscrit dans le cadre de l'étude des zones humides nord-occidentales (North West Wetlands), une étude exhaustive des zones humides des plaines du Nord-Ouest de l'Angleterre qui a duré 7 ans et concernaient les comtés de Shropshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Grand Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire et du comté de Cumbrie.

Dans le cadre de cette mission, des approches non invasives ont été privilégiées pour identifier des sites archéologiques de toutes les périodes sur de grandes étendues du paysage agricole, dont la majeure partie n'avait pas fait l'objet de recherches antérieures. Dans cet ouvrage sont présentés les résultats de cette enquête, puis ceux, détaillés, de plusieurs années d'étude paléoécologique entreprise dans ce secteur depuis les années 1970s, et qui comprenait des analyses du pollen et de la stratigraphie. En outre, ce rapport expose les grandes lignes du contexte historique des changements du paysage à la période médiévale et plus tardive. Avant cette campagne de recherche, seule une petite quantité de mobilier et de sites était connue, principalement grâce aux archives anciennes et à la reconnaissance ponctuelle plus récente. Toutefois, la présentation inégale des vestiges a fait obstacle à la description du mobilier plus moderne. En fait, le relevé était dominé par du mobilier recueilli au moment du drainage du petit lac de Martin Mere au XVII^e siècle. Les travaux effectués ont mis au jour une vaste gamme de signatures archéologiques et paléoécologiques auparavant inconnues, témoignant d'une occupation intensive du paysage à des périodes clés du passé. Enfin, ils ont permis d'évaluer le potentiel archéologique des zones humides et de faire des observations sur la nature du relevé archéologique.

La découverte des premières traces d'une activité au Mésolithique ancien représente, sans doute, un schéma parlant, dont témoignent les concentrations d'activité en bordure de zone humide, ce qui aurait procuré des possibilités importantes, d'un point de vue environnemental, aux premiers chasseurs-cueilleurs. Ce schéma est similaire à celui des massifs montagneux, suggérant que la vision traditionnelle du déplacement saisonnier des habitants des zones humides/montagneuses est discutable.

L'investigation archéologique a montré une réelle expansion de l'habitat en bordure des zones humides au Mésolithique final, ce qui coïncide avec les changements rapides du niveau de la mer, une caractéristique clé de la dynamique de ce paysage. Les sites se révèlent généralement en bordure des zones humides où se produit l'érosion de la tourbe. Dans des zones spécifiques du paysage, la densité du mobilier traduit leur importance continue comme des « lieux pérennes ». Les rivières et les côtes avaient une place importante et une véritable variabilité est suggérée par l'usage intensif du paysage sur l'ensemble de l'aire étudiée. Ces sites sont complétés par un usage plus large, moins intensif du paysage. La présence de signatures de pollens contemporains montre une utilisation contemporaine plus étendue des zones humides que démontrent des quantités réduites de pollens d'arbres et la gestion par la combustion en bordure des zones humides indiquée par des épandages de charbon.

Les témoignages d'une activité au Néolithique ancien diminuent, bien que soit suggérée une certaine continuité de l'utilisation du paysage à partir du Mésolithique final. Au Néolithique final/Âge du Bronze ancien, les témoins sont plus diffus et comprennent des débris de silex dispersés sur l'ensemble du paysage. L'absence d'aspects monumentaux dans le relevé archéologique est significatif, néanmoins elle est peut-être liée à la partition initiale du paysage. Il semble y avoir de réelles différences dans l'emploi de ce paysage, et un manque flagrant de matériel en provenance de Shirdley Hill Sands. La présence d'un nombre seulement réduit d'anciens relevés de mobilier isolé de l'Âge du Bronze pourrait marquer une véritable disparité en comparaison avec les autres zones humides de la région.

La présence de quelque indice phytologique témoigne de l'utilisation plus intensive du paysage, bien que les vestiges en surface ne reflètent pas forcément l'archéologie enfouie. Ainsi, la surface investiguée est très similaire aux autres zones humides du Lancashire. Le relevé romain suit ce schéma, quoique des relevés intéressants du mobilier isolé, enterré délibérément dans la mousse, pourraient bénéficier d'un examen complémentaire.

Le trait clé pour ces périodes récentes, renforcé par les témoins historiques, réside dans la différenciation nette entre les divers types de zones humides. Martin Mere et les habitats en eau douce qui y sont apparentés étaient largement utilisés pour la pêche et pour leur potentiel en ressources naturelles abondantes. Les bourbiers surélevés au nord et au sud étaient toutefois moins employés. Leur rôle principal consistait à fournir de la tourbe comme combustible, procédé qui a dû tenir une place importante au sein des communautés locales jusqu'à ce que le

charbon local soit disponible à partir du XVIII^e et du début du XIX^e siècle. Même si les témoignages d'une telle exploitation sont évidents sur l'ensemble du paysage, cette tradition était mal documentée, possible résultat de sa nature incontestée et du cycle domestique dans lequel elle avait lieu.

Ce volume examine le potentiel de cette région et constate la dégradation qu'a subi le paysage actuel, celui des zones humides comme celui des zones sèches. Toutefois, les auteurs remarquent aussi le potentiel considérable offert par les couches non perturbées, spécifiquement dans les tourbes subsistantes, ainsi que par le potentiel paléoécologique des petites étendues de tourbe conservées dans ce paysage dénudé.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Band stellt die Ergebnisse einer archäologischen Untersuchung vor, die von 1993 bis 1996 im südwestlichen Lancashire stattfand. Diese Untersuchungen waren ein Teil des "North West Wetlands Survey", eines 7 Jahre andauernden Surveys der feuchten Tiefebene Nordwest Englands, welche die Grafschaften und Behörden Shropshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire, sowie Cumbria umfasste.

Für diesen Survey wurden nicht-invasive Methoden für die Identifikation archäologischer Stätten aller Epochen über große Teile der Agrarlandschaft hinweg, verwendet, von denen der Großteil nie zuvor archäologisch untersucht worden war. Die Ergebnisse dieses Surveys werden hier, zusammen mit den ausführlichen Ergebnissen mehrerer Jahre an paläoökologischen Untersuchungen, einschließlich Pollen- und stratigraphischer Analyse, welche seit den 1970er Jahren im gleichen Gebiet durchgeführt wurde, vorgestellt. Darüber hinaus wird der historische Hintergrund für den mittelalterlichen und neuzeitlichen Landschaftswandel skizziert. Zuvor war nur eine kleine Anzahl von Funden und Fundstellen, hauptsächlich durch antiquarische Aufzeichnungen und unregelmäßige, moderne Forschungen bekannt. Eine Beschreibung der moderneren Funde war bisher jedoch aufgrund der inkonsistenten Publikation dergleichen behindert worden. Diese Aufzeichnungen waren ferner von Funden dominiert, die während der Entwässerung des Martin Mere im siebzehnten Jahrhundert gemacht wurden. Die Untersuchungen bezeugen eine breite Palette bisher unbekannter archäologischer und paläoökologischer Eigenschaften, welche die Besiedlung dieser Landschaft während der wichtigsten Perioden in der Vergangenheit bezeugen. Darüber hinaus erlaubt die Arbeit eine Einsicht in das archäologische Potential der Feuchtgebiete sowie Beobachtungen zur Beschaffenheit der archäologischen Funde.

Es wird argumentiert, dass die ersten Spuren früh-mesolithischer Aktivität ein bedeutungsvolles Muster von Konzentrationen an den Rändern der Feuchtgebiete aufweisen, welche erhebliche umweltliche Möglichkeiten für frühe Jäger und Sammler dargestellt haben müssen. Dieses Muster ähnelt dem in der Hochebene, was nun eine Infragestellung der herkömmlichen Interpretationen der jahreszeitbedingten Migrationen von Menschen zwischen Hochebene und Tiefland zulässt.

Dieser archäologische Survey belegt ferner eine graduelle Ausdehnung der Besiedlung entlang des Randes der Feuchtgebiete während des späten Mesolithikums, welche mit dem rapiden Wandel des Meeresspiegels übereinstimmt, und stellt somit ein wesentliches Merkmal dieser dynamischen Landschaft dar. Die archäologischen Stätten neigen dazu, an den Rändern der Feuchtgebiete aufzutauchen, an denen Torf erodiert. In bestimmten Bereichen der Landschaft belegt die Intensität der Funde die andauernde Bedeutung und Besiedlung dieser Stätten. Flüsse und Küste waren wichtige Merkmale, und es existieren ferner echte Intensitätsschwankungen in der Landschaftsnutzung über das Untersuchungsgebiet hinweg. Diese Stätten werden von einer breiteren, jedoch weniger intensiven Nutzung der Landschaft ergänzt. Zeitgenössische Ergebnisse von Pollenanalysen belegen eine gleichzeitige umfangreiche Nutzung der Feuchtgebiete durch reduzierte Baum-Pollenwerte sowie die Verwaltung der Ränder der Feuchtgebiete durch Verbrennen, was durch häufige Vorkommen von Holzkohlemassen belegt wird.

Die Hinweise auf Aktivität in der frühen Jungsteinzeit gehen zurück und werden weniger, es gibt jedoch Hinweise auf eine Kontinuität in der Nutzung der Landschaften des späten Mesolithikums. Im späten Neolithikum / der frühen Bronzezeit, sind diese Beweise diffuser, und beinhalten Feuersteinstreuungen, die über die Landschaft hinweg auftreten. Der Mangel an monumentalen Aspekten im archäologischen Befund ist bedeutungsvoll, obwohl sich dieser auf die frühe Abgrenzung der Landschaft beziehen könnte. Es kann echte Unterschiede in der Nutzung dieser Landschaft geben, sowie einen wahren Mangel an Material aus dem Shirdley Hill Sands. Die wenigen alten Aufzeichnungen von verstreuten Bronzefunden könnten einen echten Unterschied zu anderen Feuchtgebieten in der Region belegen.

Die Existenz von cropmarks könnte auf eine intensivere Nutzung der Landschaft hinweisen, obwohl die Oberflächenfunde nicht immer die darunterliegenden archäologischen Befunde widerspiegeln. Somit ähnelt das Untersuchungsgebiet sehr den anderen Gebieten im Tiefland von Lancashire. Die römischen Dokumentationen weisen das gleiche Muster auf, obwohl es spannende Aufzeichnungen von absichtlich vergraben Streufunden in den Moosgebieten gibt, die weitere Untersuchungen wert sind.

Das Hauptmerkmal dieser späteren Epochen, welches durch die historischen Quellen belegt wird, ist die klare Trennung der verschiedenen Arten an Feuchtgebieten. Martin Mere, sowie dazugehörige Süßwasserlebensräume wurden weitläufig für die Fischerei und die Verwertung seiner anderen reichlich vorhandenen natürlichen

Ressourcen verwendet. Die Hochmoore im Norden und Süden wurden jedoch weniger benutzt. Die Hauptrolle derselben war die Versorgung mit Torf als Brennstoff. Dieser Prozess muss, bis zum achtzehnten sowie dem frühen neunzehnten Jahrhundert, als lokale Holzkohle verfügbar wurde, für die Bevölkerung sehr wichtig gewesen sein. Während die Belege für eine solche Ausbeutung über die gesamte Landschaft offensichtlich sind, wurde diese Tradition nicht besonders gut dokumentiert, was vielleicht auf seine unumstrittene Natur, sowie auf den häuslichen heimischen Zyklus, in dem sie durchgeführt wurde, zurückzuführen ist.

Dieser Band bespricht das Potenzial der Region und stellt die Verschlechterung der derzeitigen Landschaft, sowohl von Feucht- als auch von Trockengebieten, dar. Die Autoren nehmen jedoch Rücksicht sowohl auf das hohe archäologische Potenzial der ungestörten Ablagerungen, vor allem der Torfüberreste, als auch auf das paläoökologische Potenzial der kleinen Torfstände, welche in der kargen Landschaft überleben.



Fig 1: The location of South West Lancashire in the NWS area of study