

Books

The Making of the English Landscape

W.G. Hoskins, Hodder & Stoughton, £12.99

Historic Landscape Analysis

Stephen Rippon, CBA, £9.50

Unravelling the Landscape: an inquisitive approach to archaeology

Mark Bowden, Tempus, £19.99

Archaeological Surveying and Mapping

Phil Howard, Routledge, £24.99

Air Photo Interpretation for Archaeologists

D.R. Wilson, Tempus, £19.99.

Revealing the Buried Past

Chris Gaffney and John Gater, Tempus, £17.99

'The English landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright, is the richest historical record we possess.' So wrote W G Hoskins in *The Making of the English Landscape*, first published in 1955 and reissued in a variety of formats ever since. A beautifully crafted text, many consider Hoskins' work to be among the best history books ever written. It certainly introduced many of the themes that have continued to underpin the discipline of landscape archaeology up to the present day. Although many of his conclusions have been overturned by 50 years of subsequent research, his central theme - that history can be 'read' from the landscape - remains as valid today as in the 1950s. It is simply a matter of learning the language in which that history has been written.

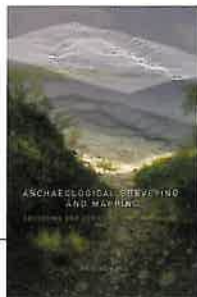
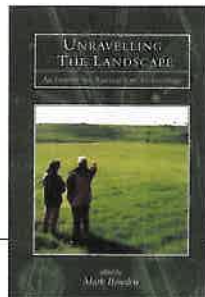
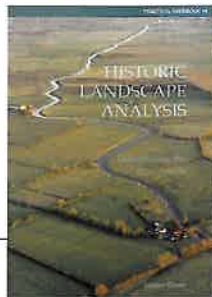
The physical landscape is often equated with a palimpsest, a piece of parchment from which the ink of the original text was scraped and a new text written over the top. With many palimpsests it is still possible to read parts of the original text, and so it is with the archaeological landscape. The landscape is the parchment on which successive generations made their marks, sometimes removing or obliterating earlier features, sometimes respecting them and, on occasion, reusing them.

Broadly speaking, there are three main classes of evidence for understanding the landscape. First, there is the present-day landscape itself; it surrounds us, actively shaping our everyday lives, and is comprised of a number of individual elements of different dates. Secondly, there are the visible remains of the landscapes of the past, taking the form of ruins and earthworks, preserved within but no longer an active part of the working landscape. Finally, there is the buried evidence, those sites and monuments for which all surface evidence has been erased, but which might be excavated or periodically become visible as crop-marks or soil-marks. To explore, record and explain these different classes of evidence a number of techniques are available. Several key books about these have recently been published or reissued.

Steve Rippon's *Historic Landscape Analysis* is one of the latest in the series of invaluable handbooks produced by the Council for British Archaeology. Aimed primarily at students, Rippon's book considers the modern landscape as a whole and explores the ways in

which the landscape can be broken down into a series of constituent parts of different dates and functions. This is achieved via the use of historic maps, documentary evidence, field evidence, and the ability to recognise older patterns preserved in the shape of the modern landscape. Rippon's methods are adapted from the programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation promoted by English Heritage, the usefulness of which has been the subject of much debate, but through the use of a number of illustrative regional case studies Rippon successfully demonstrates that such methods can produce effective results. The approach is not without limitations, not least in areas where post-medieval enclosure eradicated much of the evidence for the earlier fieldscape, but even here there is the potential for other forms of archaeological evidence like earthworks or crop-marks to survive.

Aerial photography has been used by landscape archaeologists since the early 20th century. Numerous collections of both vertical and oblique photographs are held throughout the country, particularly at the National Monuments Record Centre in Swindon and at Cambridge University, but the increasing availability of vertical aerial photographs via online services such as Get Mapping and Google Earth means that a bird's eye view of the landscape is now widely accessible. Indeed, an excellent example of the power and potential of the web can be found in Norfolk's E-map Explorer, a service which allows the user to view aerial photographs and historical mapping side-by-side, and which was a runner-



up in this year's British Archaeological Awards.

Having access to aerial photographs is all very well, but how should one go about interpreting their contents? One of the best introductions to the subject can be found in Wilson's *Air Photo Interpretation for Archaeologists*, originally published in 1982 and resurrected by Tempus in 2000. It remains as important a reference work today as it was 25 years ago, and Wilson's text provides useful overviews of the methods and techniques employed by aerial archaeologists, the processes behind the formation of crop-marks and soil-marks, and, crucially, lengthy discussions of the shapes and patterns that indicate archaeological remains. Most helpfully, Wilson also provides a handy collection of photographic red herrings, such as the patterned ground caused by underlying geological formations, and the henge-like parch marks left by a visit from the circus!

Once the presence of archaeological remains has been established, the next stage in the process is to record them. Surveying is an important skill for anyone engaged in archaeological fieldwork, for without an accurate spatial record archaeological data are largely meaningless. Surveying, particularly the survey of earthworks and ruins, is of particular importance to the study of the historic landscape. An invaluable guide to all aspects of surveying is offered by Mark Bowden's *Unravelling the Landscape*, first published by Tempus in 1999 and recently reprinted. One of the last publications produced by the Royal Commission on the Historic

Monuments of England, this book draws on a wealth of experience and contains a number of insightful chapters detailing the many and varied methods of recording different elements of the archaeological landscape. Most importantly, throughout the book the focus remains firmly on the 'traditional' means of surveying, executed using tape measures and drawing boards, representing by far the most cost-effective and accessible approaches available to those working to a tight budget.

Phil Howard's *Archaeological Surveying and Mapping* takes a different approach. Aimed at field archaeologists, Howard also covers the essentials of surveying (albeit in a manner for which an A-Level in maths would be desirable!). Howard is a staunch advocate of digital surveying methods, the digital rendering of archaeological plans, and the manipulation of digital data with Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Such digital approaches are extremely useful and are increasingly being employed in archaeological work of all kinds (as the review of Henry Chapman's latest book in CA 211 demonstrates). Despite their great potential, the cost of procuring the relevant hardware and software, and the level of training required to operate them effectively, puts these more high-tech techniques beyond the reach of many amateur fieldworkers. Consequently, the techniques described in Bowden's book will be of greater use to many readers of *Current Archaeology*.

A final non-invasive method of landscape investigation familiar to

regular viewers of *Time Team* is geophysical survey, and, once again, Tempus has produced an excellent introduction. *Revealing the Buried Past*, written by *Time Team* regulars Chris Gaffney and John Gater, provides a detailed but accessible overview of the subject, including the scientific principles that underpin the surveys. Their explanations are complemented by many illustrative case-studies drawn from the authors' work on television and elsewhere, and this book gives an excellent account of how to interpret the results of geophysical surveys. Again, the prohibitive cost of much geophysical equipment makes the possibility of amateur fieldworkers using geophysics unlikely. Sadly, the effective and affordable resistance meter produced by TR Systems in association with the Council for Independent Archaeology (discussed in previous issues of *Current Archaeology*) is currently out of production, though hopefully it will not be too long before manufacture can be resumed.

There are many different approaches to the study of the historic landscape, and the books discussed here provide good introductions to several of them. All these books contain new and different ways of looking at the landscape around us, and of recognising the great depth of time behind its creation.

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