

## **Sherracombe Ford 2003 - June Aiken (with additional contributions from Jim Knights)**

(Newsletter No6 2003) See also The Exmoor Iron Project.

After joining Dr. Jill Juleff and first year students from Exeter University at Sherracombe last year and enjoying myself, I readily agreed when I was asked if I would like to join the team again this year. Once I had overcome the problem of transport to the site, i.e. on the back of Jim Knight's quad bike, an experience second to none, I arrived at the site having missed most of the hard work of removing turf and top soil.

There was a lot of speculation by the new group of first year students as to what might be found. Their ideas ranged from pottery to 'Viking hordes'. After a few days of painstaking digging in one of the new trenches they came face to face with reality when a great deal of excitement was produced by the unearthing of a quantity of charcoal. This was about the highlight of this particular trench.

The main focus of interest was around the site of last year's excavation, that is, the working platform at the top of the major slag dump through which a trench was previously dug. The backfilled soil was removed by a small mechanical digger and then the site was trowelled to clean it. It was still as impressive this year as last. The decision was made to break through the smithing floor which had been found last year. This proved easier said than done, as the floor was very thick and very hard. Hammers and bolsters gave way to angle-grinders and drills, and finally pieces of the floor were removed for further investigation in the laboratory. Several sites of possible furnaces were cleared one of them intact to a depth of 0.75m and near to it a quantity of iron. There were further signs of furnace activity around the site; in one case there were indications of a very large furnace, but this remains to be excavated. (There will be a further week of excavation in October.)

Quantities of Romano-British pottery were found, most of it away from the central working area, and of course there was the familiar slag. Soil samples were taken and sent for analysis. At a new site a little way from the main trench, there was evidence of iron being forged into implements. And there is a bit of mystery hanging over the discovery of a slate-lined box containing quartz. More questions were raised and hopefully laboratory investigation will answer them.

Sherracombe Ford is a very large site and it is a shame that, for the moment, this project has completed its brief. Next year's excavation will be in a different location. Perhaps future generations will re-open this site and extract even more information from what we have left untouched.

I look forward to the results of all the laboratory investigations and tests so that I will know what we were looking at and what we found!