Discovering fire, and churches, around ancient Hereford

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Anne Jenkins, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: “These two projects will give local people excellent opportunities to get involved in hands-on historical research that, in their different ways, connects them with their local environment and with those who lived, worked and worshipped there many centuries ago.”

The Ewyas Harold Archaeology and History Group (EHAHG) will investigate the site of the former priory that was said to have been founded around 1100 within the site of the now ruined Ewyas Harold castle. This community-led project, which has received a grant of £49,900, will set out to discover the precise location of the priory using medieval documentary evidence backed up by modern survey methods and archaeological digs.

There are suggestions that the site of the priory might actually be in one of two locations outside the castle boundary or even further away along the Dulas Valley. The volunteers will also try to establish the date when St Michael’s Church, Ewyas Harold, was founded. Local people will work with experts to undertake surveys and small-scale excavations to unravel the mystery. The 18-month project will report its findings online, in a book and through local displays. Copies of the report will also be deposited at Hereford Museum and Reference Library, and the National Monuments Record.

Commenting for the EHAHG, Huw Sherlock, the project archaeologist said: “This is an exciting and innovative project that will seek to involve local people in investigating and interpreting their heritage. It should be a real challenge.”

The second project, Fire & Food, will examine how Iron Age people lit fires, foraged, stored and prepared food. The hands-on project will be run by outdoor education charity BODS* with the help of a £38,000 HLF grant.

Working with up to 1200 participants and volunteers, the project will take place at Werndee Woods, near Hereford, where the participants will learn the lost skills upon which their ancestors relied. Supported by Hereford Museum and the local Council for Voluntary Youth Services, those taking part will gain a greater understanding of their environment and how the various ancient skills provided the basis for civilization to develop.

They will learn the use of flints and iron pyrites in fire starting, foraging and identifying edible plants and those used for medicinal purposes, preparing food for storage, making snares and fishing techniques, and different methods of cooking.

Results of the 18-month project will be spread to a wider audience through a website and by video.

Commenting for BODS, manager David Davoll said: “This is an exciting opportunity to engage people in discovering new skills and gain hands on experience in the way our ancient ancestors lived. It respects and uses the eternal elements of food and fire to help people make connections with today’s ways of life.”

Both projects are due to end by June 2011.

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Further information:
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Notes to Editors:

• Heritage Lottery Fund - Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, with over £317million going to projects in the West Midlands.

*BODS was founded in south London as a Christian-based outdoor charity called Bermondsey Open Door. In 2001 it established its Hereford youth centre.