Rescued from the Sea

02/07/2013

The ‘Rescued from the Sea’ Community Archaeology Project, which will run from today until the end of August at Low Hauxley on Druridge Bay, is being made possible by a grant of £285,900 from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and additional funding from UK Coal and the Coast and Lowlands LEADER programme.

The excavation project will investigate the fascinating but eroding prehistoric remains beneath the sand dunes on land owned and managed for wildlife by Northumberland County Council at the northern end of Druridge Bay (just south of Amble) and close to Northumberland Wildlife Trust’s Hauxley Nature Reserve. It is being led by Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Archaeological Research Services Ltd.

Sea levels along the north-east cost are rising due to global warming and other factors, and coastal erosion is accelerating and threatening coast archaeological sites to the point where many archaeological remains have disappeared and been lost forever with only a photograph as a permanent record.

The eight-week excavation project will investigate the fragile and endangered archaeological gems at Low Hauxley including the remains of a hunter-gatherer settlement dating back at least 8,000 years and a prehistoric cemetery dating back 4,000 years ago. The site is on what was once an upstanding piece of ground surrounded by marsh and wetland. This ‘isle of the dead’ evidently had huge spiritual significance for the people who returned to the site for many years to lay their dead to rest in stone lined graves or ‘cists’.

Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) remains, from when Low Hauxley was home to many families who lived off the natural resources from the seashore and land, have also been unearthed below the cemetery.

An ancient Mesolithic peat has also been discovered on the foreshore near to the site which contains hundreds of animal and human footprints together with wooden tools, shed deer antler, hazelnuts and tree remains and more heritage wonders which the teams hope to excavate.

The findings from the dig will be analysed, interpreted and eventually published as both a scientific paper and a book about the site to better understand the history of sea level change and human occupation along the Bay. The site will be restored once the dig ends.

Mike Pratt, Chief Executive of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, said: “We are all really excited about this project. Without the HLF funding, the site would have been lost to the sea, and a part of our heritage gone before it was completely understood. Nowhere is the historically intimate association between people, place and wildlife more obvious than along Druridge Bay - our heritage is a cultural and natural landscape - we are all part of history and I am sure ‘Rescued from the Sea’ will show us just how big a part history plays in our lives and the findings may help us plan our work in the area which will, in turn, affect future generations.”

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “Rescued from the Sea will give people a fantastic insight into life in Northumberland through the ages. These exceptional finds will be carefully conserved and made accessible for everyone. The volunteers taking part will help us to shed light on the artefacts and piece together parts of our heritage that no one has seen before. We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are delighted to be a part of this special

project and can't wait to see the results."

Commenting from the Low Hauxley dig site, Dr Clive Waddington, Managing Director of Archaeological Research Services Ltd, said: "The exceptional circumstances of preservation at Low Hauxley mean that we are in a race against time to investigate and record one of the best-preserved sites of its kind in the country before more of the site is lost to the sea. Unearthing the past is exciting and fun and we're looking forward to visitors coming to the site so that we can tell them all about it."

Councillor Deidre Campbell, Northumberland County Council's Board Member for the Environment, said: "We are delighted to be working in partnership with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Archaeological Services Ltd on this important and exciting project, and look forward to viewing the finds when they go on display locally."

All finds and recordings will eventually be archived at the Great North Museum.

Notes to editors

Northumberland Wildlife Trust is the largest environmental charity in the region working to safeguard native wildlife. One of 47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK, Northumberland Wildlife Trust has campaigned for nature conservation for over 40 years. It aims to inform, educate and involve people of all ages and backgrounds in protecting their environment in favour of wildlife and conservation. Northumberland Wildlife Trust website.

Supported by over 13,000 individual and 100 corporate members in the region, Northumberland Wildlife Trust manages and protects critical species and habitats at over 60 nature reserves throughout Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

Archaeological Research Services Ltd is a company, originally founded in Newcastle, with offices throughout the country which provides commercial and community archaeology services to the construction, public and voluntary sectors. Archaeological Research Services website.

Northumberland County Council is the landowner and partner in the project and is the organisation responsible for running the Druridge Bay Country Park where a visitor centre, parking, refreshments, walks, information and a series of events is available. Northumberland County Council website.

Further information

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