WELCOME TO THIS ISSUE

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EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to the ACE Newsletter. Many thanks to all those who have submitted articles for this edition, keep 'em coming in!

Please send articles or anything else for the newsletter to me by post or preferably digitally to: God.ron@live.co.uk only (not to Janet because she has to forward it to me anyway). Also could I ask that contributors send any images in a file size of 500kb or less, as this helps to keep the file size of the Newsletter down to sensible levels for Emailing, Thanks. The deadline for the next newsletter is the **19th February 2019**

Please note the views expressed in this Newsletter or any other media may not reflect Club policy.

Don't forget that you can keep up with all thing ACE by following us on Facebook and our website,

[www.acearchaeologyclub.wordpress.com](http://www.acearchaeologyclub.wordpress.com)

*Gordon Fisher*

CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chairman's News.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bone and leather working days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A criticism of Archaeoastronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sharpitor walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Remembering Ross Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Moistown Newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A.C.E Archaeology Diary dates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chairman's News

After a long, beautiful and very colourful autumn, winter is now here with a vengeance, no snow yet (well, just a little on Dartmoor) but I am sure there will be some over the next few months. So I intend snuggle down in the warm and hibernate until spring… I wish! There is a mountain of Moistown related work to be done, so no hibernating for me, or the finds team come to that, there are plenty of tasks to keep our minds off of the weather.

Back in October, the sun shone for the ACE day walk in the area of Sharpitor and Peek Hill, on Dartmoor. We were treated to some fabulous archaeology, from Bronze Age to WWII, followed by some delicious home cooked soup and puddings at John and Rachel’s abode. An ACE day indeed, read more about this on page 7.

Then came our AGM in November, this was very well attended, about 60% of the membership were there, which many an organisation would be proud of. Also, considering quite a few members live a long way from the South West, it makes the number of folk attending even better. The business part of the day was as usual, completed quite quickly, after which we looked at a reference collection of pottery that Lynne had brought in for us to see. After a splendid bring and share lunch, there was an update on Moistown with a discussion period covering all aspect of the dig from how it is run to where we could dig next. As director, I found this ever so useful and it has given me food for thought about next years activities. Then came the planning meeting which was really good, we have sorted out all but a few ACE days for 2019, with plenty of offers from members to arrange events.

The ACE Woodland Wander was kindly postponed for a week as Gordon and I could not make it, because one of our cats was very ill. Also the weather was pretty horrible that day too, so hopefully it will be nice and sunny on the 8th Dec and Thing (the cat) will better by then.

After Christmas, we start off the year with two fabulous ACE days for you, they are both indoors, in the warm at Winkleigh Community Centre. In January, Dr Wendy Howard will be running another of her wonderful bone days; “Animals in Archaeology”. And in February, Mac Howard will do a leather working day for ACE, where you will be able to make something for yourself to amaze your friends with! See page 4, for details of both events.

Of course there are loads more great ACE days to follow, have a look at the diary pages, I think you will agree that, thanks to our members, we have a really interesting mix of activities ahead.

I hope that you all have a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year, or whatever kind of celebrations you chose for the dark days of the year.

Janet Daynes
Animals in Archaeology

This ACE day is a chance to see why zooarchaeology is such a fascinating subject, and why some of us are obsessed with it. It will also give you an idea why I'm always collecting bones! The day will look at why (and how) we recover animal bones in archaeology and what we can learn about the past from them. The plan is to combine a little informal teaching and practical elements, so will include a talk on the subject, plus a chance to get ‘hands on’ and get to grips with some basic identification. I suggest that people bring a pen, pencil, notepad and a bring and share lunch, hot drinks will be provided.

Booking is essential for this day, so could you please let Erica know if you are interested by the 29th of December at the latest, Thank you.

NB. If there are any particular aspects that people may like to see covered please let me know well in advance! I can't promise, but I can try to include it on the day. There will be a chance to handle bones, and you are welcome to bring disposable gloves if you'd prefer (I will also bring some if I remember). All unwanted bones welcome!

This event is on Saturday 5th January at the Winkleigh Community Centre, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm

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Leather thonging day

The aim for this day is for people to make a small leather item, probably a belt pouch of medieval style (but its up to the individuals imagination!) I will buy some beautiful leather for you to use, so I need know how much to get, therefore please book with Erica by Saturday 12th January at the latest.

There will be a charge for the day, this will cover the cost of materials and the hire of the hall, possibly about £20 per head for six people but proportionally less if there are more folk.

You will need to bring a good pair of scissors for cutting the leather, a bradawl, or any of the pointed tools used for basket making and perhaps a stapler. Please bring multiple items if you have them.

There will be a bring and share lunch, hot drinks will be provided.

This event is on Saturday 2nd February at the Winkleigh Community Centre, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm
"A criticism of archaeoastronomy"

Bill Radcliff

The definition of archaeoastronomy is:-
Archaeoastronomy (also spelled archeoastronomy) is the study of how people in the past “have understood the phenomena in the sky, how they used these phenomena and what role the sky played in their cultures”.

I have been asked by the Chair of ACE to write an article on this topic, probably because I go on about it too much. My background is in physics, which I got into from an interest in astronomy, and when I first went to Stonehenge, having heard that it was ‘just a pile of stones’ I was amazed by how wrong that description is. I thought ‘this structure has been carefully designed’ and then ‘why did they want that?’ The guidebook referred to an astronomical orientation on midsummer sunrise. The following pictures are taken from the centre, looking SW to the midwinter sunset, and NE towards where the sunrises in midsummer.

Moreover I was intrigued to read that, only at the latitude of Stonehenge, the azimuths (angles from due north along the horizon) of sunrise and sunset are at right angles to the extreme rise and set azimuths of the moon.

I became one of the many people who wondered whether there were astronomers in Britain 5000 years ago, perhaps from Babylon or Egypt where I knew astronomy was studied. I formed the idea that the early astronomers may have worked out the heliocentric system well before Aristarchus, and travelled north to demonstrate it. This was my ‘insight’, which sent me off around the country to look at other stone circles. Dartmoor has about 15 true stone circles and 5 similar monuments (henges, multiple circles etc), so I ended up here.

Many others have had ‘insights’ into the minds of prehistoric people. It is undeniable that there are monuments all over the world (see the definition above and references at the end of this article) which seem to be related to the appearances of the sky, and the night sky would have been much more impressive than it is today, as the atmospheric and light pollution makes observation (without telescopes) more difficult for us to see what they could see. But many of the ‘insights’ that I have read about involve attributing knowledge to the prehistoric peoples that they could not have had. The builders of Stonehenge may have known in great detail how the rising and setting of the sun and moon appeared to vary with the year (and some longer intervals) whereas most people today do not, but crucially they did not know why these variations occur, and much that is published implies that they did. Aristarchus put forward the heliocentric theory quite late in antiquity, as a guess, not a serious theory, and far from being accepted, he was accused of impiety. And his guess possibly had nothing to do with sun rises and settings anyway.

There are other objections to ‘insights’. When different people have insights, they tend to come to different conclusions, and of course, different ancient societies took different views on the same astronomical events (see references again), which indicates that not all of them could have had true knowledge of astronomy (they usually attributed the events to the gods). I am here going to use, as an example, some things that have been written about the remains at Merrivale, but there are similar disagreements about many other

Ace newsletter December 2018 5
prehistoric observatories’. A paper printed in the scientific journal Nature, claiming the rows to be a “Megalithic Lunar Observatory” specifically says “The rows themselves are not aligned with astronomical significance”, whereas a recent article in the Transactions of the Devonshire Association sees a clear alignment with the rising of the Pleiades. The writer of the TDA article objects to the insights of another archaeo-astronomer because they do not agree on what a particular stone aligns on. To yet another recent writer, it is the shadows cast by the stones that is important, rather than their orientation.

None of these writers take much notice of the design of the rows themselves. Occasionally, they comment on the directions the rows point in, but more often what can be seen from various points along them, ie looking away from the row, as that allows more possibilities. But they do not address the question of why some rows are single, others double, yet others triple or more, while a few apparently are single in places, double at other points along their length? RH Worth showed in his articles in TDA that the orientations of Dartmoor rows are largely random, apart from a slight clustering around north to south.

Why is it that, on Dartmoor at least, there are several rows that are in pairs of differing orientations, sometimes with one of the pair being single and the other double? An answer to the question why there was more than one row at Merrivale was suggested in the TDA article:- A new row was required when the precession of the equinoxes resulted in the first row no longer pointing at the original rise of the Pleiades. This seems unlikely to me, and does not apply to the other pairs etc of rows.

Surely these factors were of as much importance to the builders as any risings and settings of astronomical objects, and would have been part and parcel of the significance the rows had for them. But these questions are not so amenable to ‘insights’, it seems.

One of the writers referred to above, when asked how his theories related to other sites on Dartmoor, replied ‘I can’t visit them all’. Another example of how archaeoastronomy is selective and ignores the wider (more confusing) picture, is that there are several places that would have been prime sites for marking alignments to risings and settings. Brent Tor is an obvious candidate for observing the setting of the sun at the solstice from the south western moor. And there is one, small, cairn from which it could have been observed if the prehistoric astronomers had been interested. But it is small, there is no indicator at the site, and no archaeoastronomer has noted it, to my knowledge. There are no other cairns, rows or circles along the viewing line.

One item I came across while researching this article amused me. There were a few mentions of the ‘sophisticated astronomy’ of the Arawak Indians of Central and South America. Columbus escaped disaster on one occasion by being able to predict an eclipse and threatening the Arawak with punishment by the gods if they did not help him.

As for the deliberate placing of Stonehenge at a significant latitude, it would seem likely by the same line of thinking that the latitude where the midsummer sunrise/set azimuth was at right angles to the midwinter sunrise/set would be marked in some way. And lo! There is such a monument – quite a significant one, in fact, called Castle Rigg in the Lake District.

I do not see much of a north-east/south-west orientation there. The blobs outside the circle in the bottom right (and elsewhere) do not appear on plans of the site, or other Google Earth pages, and may be people visiting the site. Well, what about the latitude where The moon’s extreme risings and settings are at right angles? That is about at the latitude of Paris. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to find somewhere at that latitude. There must be many, as at all other latitudes, so it will be easier than finding out why Stonehenge was built. It would be foolish to give up on an interesting insight.

Wouldn’t it?

References
General
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeoastronomy
http://www.bajr.org/BAJRGuides/43_Archaeo-Astronomy/43_ArchaeAstronomy.pdf

Specific areas of the world
Australian Aborigines http://www.emudreaming.com/whatis.htm


China http://idp.bl.uk/4DCGI/education/astronomy/history.html

On Sunday 7 October (postponed from the previous day due to the weather) nine members of ACE walked the Sharpitor area, led by John Watson. This small area, sandwiched between the Yelverton/Princetown road and the steep slopes around Burrator reservoir, is rich in archaeology, both ancient and modern.

Only 20 metres from the car park we found two small bronze age cairns, with a short double row of nine or ten stones between them. Also, across the E end of the row runs the Walkhampton Common reave, a substantial rubble wall which can be seen running down from Sharpitor and across the flank of Leeden Hill. Like many of the other monuments in this area, this is kept clear of encroaching vegetation by the volunteers of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, who own Sharpitor itself.

Walking south west alongside the road we passed two PCWW boundary stones, relics of the 1917 land purchase by Plymouth Corporation Water Works of the catchment area around Burrator Dam.

Immediately east of these stones is a cairn and cist, the cairn still showing the remains of a retaining circle, and the cist three sides still in place. This cairn marks the end of a long, but rather intermittent single, then double row of small stones which stretch over 150 metres uphill, past Goatstone pond on the summit, to a very small cairn 50 metres further on, near the road. Although many of the stones are small and difficult to find, it must have been an impressive monument which it was built.

After lunch in a small quarry on the hillside, we found a grassy track leading up to the summit of Peek Hill, marked by large stones. This is the road up to what was once RAF Sharpitor, originally a collection of temporary huts and a 200ft transmitter aerial, used as a location beacon for bombers in the second world war, and known as the GEE system. Little now remains except for a few flat areas of grass, the odd piece of concrete with an anchor ring for the mast, and a sealed Royal Observer Corps bunker under a mound in the top of the hill. This bunker was used as part of the early warning system for missiles etc. during the cold war, and was only closed in the1980s.
On the top of Peek Hill there are also two neolithic cairns, and a fine view over Burrator reservoir to Plymouth Sound and the Eddystone lighthouse. With the sun shining on us it was a magnificent sight.

Returning across the saddle between Peek Hill and Sharpitor, we passed through a bronze age pound, and by a boundary marker for the DPA land. Skirting Sharpitor to the east, we passed by another DPA marker and another bronze age reave which crossed from Leather Tor to Sharpitor.

Dropping down the hillside to the north we found a number of bronze age roundhouses and two pounds. These houses varied in size and were scattered across the hillside to the east of the Walkhampton Common Reave.
On the other side of the road, on either side of the reave. We also inspected two very contrasting settlements. On the west side of the reave are two large bronze age pounds, with some imposing round houses, several being built into the pound walls, and having remaining walls up to a metre high or more, with recognisable doorways.

On the east side of the reave is a jumble of small very round huts often joined by or attached to lengths of ruined walls, making no obvious pattern. Perhaps, with the road so close, this area was plundered for stone for road building, as there are several small quarries in the neighbourhood.

With the walk completed, still with sun shining, all agreed it had been a very pleasant and undemanding walk, with lots to see. We then adjourned to John's house in Tavistock for drinks and some food, to finish off the day properly.

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**Remembering Ross Dean**

I expect that most of you have heard of the sudden death of Ross Dean on October 27th this year, he was only 61. He was well admired in the archaeological world in Devon and beyond, for his excellent geophysical work and also that he was a good all round bloke.

One of his first surveys in Devon was for ACE, back in September 2000, this was at Handsford Farm, near Chawleigh, where a large Mesolithic flint scatter had been found. Since then he has carried out geophysical surveys for organisations all over the west country.

He will be very much missed by us all.
Moistown news

The ACE finds team have plenty to do to while away the dark months, there are the 2018 finds to be cleaned and several years worth to be numbered, the environmental to be catalogued and last but very much not least, preparing the spreadsheets for cataloguing the finds.

While the finds team are getting on with all of that, I will be drawing up the sections and plans, and writing the interim report for 2018.

It’s not all indoors work though, we are back at Moistown for the March ACE day, when we will be clearing the brambles and scrub from the area of the potential trenches for the 2019 season. This should not be too onerous a task because we cleared a lot last year, so maybe we may get time to bake some potatoes on the bonfire again, they were so delicious.

At the planning meeting, after the AGM, it was suggested that it would be useful for members and diggers to have an event about Moistown before the dig. This would include a Moistown update and also let people know what we will be doing during the dig and why we are doing it. This is such a good idea, I don’t know why we didn’t think of it before! And it would save a lot of time on the first morning of the dig too.

There is nothing planned for the July ACE day (6th July), so this might just be the time to hold the event, where this will be has yet to be arranged, but the details will be in the next newsletter.

The following Saturday, (13th July), is the set up day and hopefully, if we can get all of the tents up fairly quickly, we may be able to carry out the contour surveys of the new trenches and possibly even get some turf off. I think that we would need a lot of hands on the day to get all of that done though, but it would be nice just to be able to start digging the following Saturday (20th July).

Before the dig dates were set, there was a great deal of discussion about last year’s three week dig, rather than on previous years, when there were three separate sessions, in May, July and August/ September. Although everyone thought that having just one block of time was a good idea, some found it too much, well, digging through demolished cob is very hard work for anyone no matter how fit they are. This, of course was made much harder by the hot, hot weather, so in 2019, we are going to try out something new. The dig will be in one block but with a week off during it. I didn’t like the idea too much at first but now I have come round to it greatly, as it will allow for much more flexibility for the workforce and the vagaries of the weather.

So the dig dates for 2019 are; 20th to 28th July, have five days off then back again from 3rd to 18th August.

This is of course dependent on the weather, if we lose the first week to rain we can rearrange days to suit all.

Even before writing the interim, I am getting really excited at the prospect of getting back to Moistown to reveal more of the story. So fingers crossed for good weather, but not too good!

Janet Daynes
A.C.E ARCHAEOLOGY  DIARY DATES

Some ACE events will be subject to a small charge to cover hire, material and insurance costs. Non-ACE members attending ACE events will have to pay £5.00 per day, this will be in addition to any other cost of an event.

Where booking is essential contact Erica at: surica47@gmail.com

2019 HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

JANUARY

Saturday 5th: A Bone Day indoors!!! Animals in Archaeology with Dr Wendy Howard (see page 4 for details).
At the Winkleigh Community Centre, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. Booking essential.

FEBRUARY

Saturday 2nd: Leather working day, also indoors!! A practical day making beautiful things with leather, lead by Mac Howard (see page 4 for details).
At the Winkleigh Community Centre, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. Booking essential.

March

Saturday 2nd: Scrub clearance at Moistown, meet there at 10.00am. Wear old clothes and sensible footwear, bring all you need to eat and drink and maybe potatoes for baking in the bonfire if we have one. Also please bring any useful tools, such as slashers/strimmers, grass rakes, loppers, secateurs etc. Please let Erica know if you are coming.

April

Saturday 6th: A proposed trip to the Taw Valley brewery in North Tawton, this is sited in a historic building possibly looking like Moistown did before its demise. To be confirmed, but please let Erica know if you are interested.

May

Saturday 4th: An experimental archaeology day, details of what we will be doing in the next newsletter.
Saturday 18th: A guided walk in the Stanlake area of Dartmoor with Dr Sandy Gerrard, details in the next newsletter.

June

Saturday 1st: A walk on Belstone Common, with Michael Jones, details in the next newsletter.
July
Saturday 5th: Moistown update and dig news day, details in the next newsletter.
Saturday 13th: Moistown dig set up day, meet on site at 10.00 am, wear old clothes and suitable footwear and bring food and drink for the day. Please let Erica know if you are coming.
Saturday 20th to Sunday the 28th: Moistown excavation. Please book your dig days with Erica.

August
Saturday 3rd to Sunday the 18th: Continuation of the Moistown excavation. Please book your dig days with Erica.

September
Saturday 7th: Nothing yet arranged, if you have any ideas and want to organise this ACE day please let Erica know.

October
Saturday 5th: Nothing yet arranged, if you have any ideas and want to organise this ACE day please let Erica know.

November
Saturday 2nd: ACE Archaeology Club AGM. At the Winkleigh Community Centre, 10.00 am for coffee for a 10.30 am start. Bring and share lunch followed by a planning meeting for ACE activities for 2020. Be there, it's your archaeology club, so come and have your say!!

How's this for an ACE Yule log?!