

## Preventive Archaeology / Step by Step

### THE EVALUATION

The development of a piece of land for public or private use (e.g. to build a road or a building), entails the disturbance or removal of the subsoil.

Long before building begins, and to avoid its being interrupted, work is undertaken to ascertain if the land concerned contains traces of human occupation: this is the evaluation. Its aim is to detect, characterise, plot and date archaeological deposits. Typically, 5 to 10 percent of the surface threatened is trenched using a hydraulic digger.

#### 1. A field evaluation is required

In the case of important urban and rural development projects (high-speed train lines, motorways, quarries) or when an application for a building permit is made, the Prefect of the region and his archaeological service can demand an archaeological evaluation. Inrap or a registered local authority service submits a detailed project (evaluation strategy, personnel...) indicating how the work will be conducted.

A contract is then signed by Inrap and the developer whether public (D.D.E., municipality, etc.) or private (property developer, private individual, etc.). The contract fixes the conditions of the evaluation, the date by which the report will be handed in and, where relevant, details of any equipment or assistance furnished by the developer.

#### 2. Preparing the field evaluation

The relevant Inrap regional office obtains from the developer essential information about the development project (topographical data, useful technical information). It chooses the members of the archaeological team and organises the necessary technical backup (hydraulic diggers, site huts.)

In addition, the site director of Inrap, designated by the Regional Archaeology Service (DRAC) consults the Sites and Monuments record held by this body so as to have all the available information on the archaeological deposits in the area.

### **3. Field evaluation**

In most cases, the evaluation consists of opening trenches at regular distances to enable the archaeologist to estimate whether there are archaeological structures or not. The number and the size of the trenches opened are dependent on the area to be tested. As a general rule, a trench from 1.30m to 3m wide (corresponding to the width of the bucket of the digger), of variable length is opened. When archaeological deposits appear, it is sometimes useful to widen the trenches so as to better understand how the structures are organised (e.g. post holes forming a building). The depth depends on the level at which the deposits are buried, which can vary from 30cm below the present surface level to more than 4m, in particular for earlier periods.

The trench is dug as follows: an archaeologist stands in front of the bucket of the hydraulic digger at a safe distance and guides the driver. The soil is removed horizontally until the deposits are reached. The different colours or textures which could correspond to wall foundations, rubbish pits, graves, etc. are noted. Partial excavation helps to date the human occupation of the site and verify the state of conservation and nature of the deposits. The archaeologist locates the structures on a plan. Several different periods can be present on the same site.

### **4. The different possible outcomes**

On completion of the evaluation, a report is given to the relevant Regional archaeological service (Ministry of Culture (DRAC)).

Four scenarios are possible:

- The evaluation is “negative” and the Ministry of Culture has no reason to stop or delay the development.
- The evaluation is “positive” but the Ministry of Culture considers that the archaeological deposits are poorly conserved and do not present a real research interest. The developer is free to carry out his project.
- The evaluation is “positive”, i.e. archaeological deposits are present in all or part of the area concerned. If the Ministry of Culture considers that their research interest and their state of conservation are sufficient, it can insist on an archaeological excavation or the modification of the development project.
- In rare cases, exceptional archaeological deposits are discovered during the evaluation. The Ministry of Culture then requires that the developer should integrate the conservation of these structures into his project.

## **THE EXCAVATION**

### **1. The excavation project**

A developer who is planning work can call upon Inrap, a local authority archaeological service authorized by the Ministry of Culture, or any other registered public or private organisation. The contract\* between the developer and the organisation responsible for the excavation fixes the price and the conditions for the conduct of the excavation.

By law, Inrap is the default operator when the developer has failed or been unable to make other arrangements.

The appropriate Inrap regional office, establishes a contract\* with the developer. The Ministry of Culture authorizes the excavation, having checked the conformity of the contract\* with the curator's requirements.

### **2. Inrap on site**

The excavation starts with the installation of the site huts then the removal of the topsoil covering the excavation area.

The topsoil is taken off so as to reach the archaeological layers. Each archaeological layer corresponds to a moment in the history of the site. Its limits are determined by archaeologists, sometimes helped by geologists, who study its colours, textures as well as the structures that it may contain. The layers are an essential guide for the archaeologist.

During the excavation the stratification (the succeeding layers which correspond to a particular moment in the history of the site) is of paramount importance. Usually the oldest layers are covered by the more recent ones. But sometimes the deposits have been damaged or removed and only the bases of deep pits, for example, remain. The finds inside, if there are any, give an indication about the date of the structure.

As the excavation unfolds, the drawing of sections and plans is an essential part of preservation by record. The archaeologist can also call upon the services of a topographer\* who, using a theodolite, takes precise measurements guaranteeing the preparation of an accurate site plan.

Archaeological finds\*, when unearthed, are marked with the details of where they were found (site, zone and layer or structure number) before being transferred to the finds area for treatment. In some cases, they have to be consolidated on site before removal.

In fact, data recorded about archaeological deposits (stratigraphic position, drawings\* and photographs in situ) are very often more important than the objects discovered.

### **3. Study and use of the excavation data**

On completion of the excavation, the information recorded is studied at the archaeological base. Work begins with the preliminary classification of the site documents, as well as the completion of the cleaning and, where relevant, the marking of the finds.

Different tasks are then allocated to the team members. At this stage, the composition of the team changes: those involved in post-excavation work are not the same as those who worked in the field. There are new participants, specialised collaborators chosen because of what was found.

The first priority is the dating of the structures so as to establish the chronology of the whole of the site. The stratification observed in the field is reconstructed and compared with the material discovered to date the successive human occupations. Based on an initial global plan of all the structures, plans by chronological phase are established. Representative plans and sections are selected to be scanned and redrawn by computer.

An overall image of the site is thus obtained showing living quarters, workshops, enclosures, farming areas, cemeteries...

### **4. Description, classification and study**

At the same time the archaeological material is studied and the different types of documents are collated.

Depending on the nature of the archaeological deposits, specialist studies are undertaken and selected objects are analysed by outside specialists or laboratories (e.g.: pottery, study of metal objects, study of bones, etc.)

### **5. Writing of the final excavation report, or the reconstruction of the disappeared site.**

Next, a report must be written up. It contains the description of the evolution of the site supported by photographs and scale drawings of the structures and objects discovered. Specialist studies or analyses, which add to the understanding of the site, are integrated into the text.

Before completing the writing up of the excavation report, the last stage is begun: the preparation of inventories of all the documentation collected prior to their transfer to the local Ministry of Culture archaeology service for safe-keeping. The final excavation report can be the basis for full publication.

### **6. Where do the finds go?**

The material found during preventive archaeology operations is entrusted to the operator (for example, Inrap). Once the report has been written and, at the latest after a period of two years, the material and the site documents are handed over

by the operator to the Ministry of Culture for storage and archiving.

The ownership of the archaeological objects found during the preventive excavation is divided equally between the State and the property owner. If the latter, a year after the reception of the final excavation report, has not staked his claim to his part of the archaeological material, it can be considered that he has no interest in it. Ownership of the objects is then transferred, without cost, to the State which can, in its turn, transfer them to the local authority on whose territory they were discovered, once a formal request has been made and proper conservation of the material is assured. In the case of the owner who has not renounced his property rights, the State can claim its right of property in return for an indemnity agreed out-of-court or after expert opinion.

## **7. Education and outreach**

Inrap also has the task of making archaeology widely known through teaching and cultural activities.

This work is carried out for the research community through publications and teaching and for the general public in different ways: open-days, exhibitions, brochures, teaching workshops, Internet, etc.