



*Wonderwerk Cave in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa is an extraordinary site preserving two million years of hominin occupation. The cave is the largest of very few caves in this region, measuring more than 140m deep, up to 24m wide and more than 5m high. The first archaeological excavations of the site were conducted in the 1940s. The site had already been partially dug up and disturbed by farmers who collected bat guano to sell as fertiliser. Large-scale excavations between 1978 and 1991, conducted by Peter Beaumont of the McGregor Museum, revealed the long history of occupation of the cave and the exceptional degree of preservation. The hanging grid used to guide these excavations is still intact and visible in this image. Recent investigations by Michael Chazan (University of Toronto) and his colleagues indicate that the earliest use of the cave by hominins occurred two million years ago (see Chazan, M. et al. 2008. Radiometric dating of the Earlier Stone Age sequence in Excavation I at Wonderwerk Cave, South Africa: preliminary results. Journal of Human Evolution 55(1): 1–11). This result makes Wonderwerk Cave the first known utilised cave site in human history. Wonderwerk Cave was included on the 2010 World Monuments Fund Watch List of Endangered Sites. The photograph shows the view from the back of the cave looking towards the entrance, taken on 7 August 2010 by Jayne Wilkins (jayne.wilkins@utoronto.ca).*



*An Iron smelting furnace pictured in situ at Kukumo, Mpu administrative Ward of Sumbawanga District, Rukwa Region, south-west Tanzania. The conical structure measures 3.09m high from the ground surface with an exterior basal diameter of 5.60m. These natural draft furnaces, called ilungu (sing.) and malungu (plural) in Swahili had a peep-hole facing east, measuring 3–4.5cm in diameter, and 10 tuyere ports. The photograph was taken on 19 December 2009 by John Uche Ngonadi (jungonadi@gmail.com) of the National Museum, Benin City, Nigeria, who located it while doing fieldwork for his MA dissertation on twentieth-century iron working. The study compares the methods of two traditional iron smelting technologies, the Fipa and the Nyiha.*

# EDITORIAL

🇬🇧 Britain and the USA are two countries that have semi-privatised the business of archaeology, so that although the state remains nominally in charge of keeping the material assets of the past (aka the ‘heritage’) in trust for the unborn, its research, curation and rescue are devolved to other agencies — universities, associations, firms, developers, individuals. Whether this is part of the democratic philosophy, or a by-product of the Atlantic love-affair with the market place, it is too early to say. One thing is certain — the system won’t go away. No-one is going to wake up one morning and find we have returned to a cosy centrism where the value of archaeology is not in doubt and everyone in it is employed by the state. On the contrary, it seems more likely than not that formerly totalitarian block countries will drift in the same direction, as all governments try and reduce their responsibilities and increase their income by delegation and deregulation.

Of course the big problem in turning archaeology over to the market is deciding who wants to buy it and why. Mitigating the effects of development on the resource — i.e. rescuing archaeological sites from the bulldozer — is a multi-million pound industry, employing thousands in the private sector. But what is it selling? At the IFA<sup>1</sup> conference in Reading this April, Catherine Scanlon from the London School of Economics explained to a large hall of delegates from government and the British commercial sector that the answer was actually ‘nothing at all’. In economic terms, archaeology was graded as having a ‘non-use value’. It happened only because the government said it must: take that away and there was no obvious reason to do it. This was not exactly news to most people, but it certainly needs saying: basically it means that archaeologists are being paid for the wrong reason: not to rescue the archaeology from the developer, but to rescue the developer from the archaeology.

Many archaeologists, including your editor, have never been in the slightest doubt of the true product for which millions of dollars, euros and pounds are dispensed each year: it is research, knowledge, understanding more about the past. What was special about the Reading meeting was the almost universal acceptance of this by a room full of civil servants and (professional) archaeologists hitherto happy to sign up to the concept of preservation by record. The change of mood, and it was a major change, was owed in the first place to the issue of new guide lines for planners drawn up by English Heritage and known as PPS5<sup>2</sup>, but more specifically to the initiative of a small group of senior players led by Taryn Nixon of the Museum of London Archaeological Service. This is known as the Southport Group, since Southport is where they first convened, and it would be difficult to exaggerate their importance. If their message is heard, then a whole new system of procurement will come into being. Sites will be routinely evaluated as before, but only excavated for research purposes. This means that fieldwork will be commissioned on the basis of its design — what it intends to find out — not its price. If anyone is about to claim that is what already happens — dream on: where developers are obliged to do something that has no use-value, they will pay as little as possible, and insist, rightly, on competitive tender. But where the

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Archaeologists, [www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net)

<sup>2</sup> Planning Policy Statement 5, an advisory document for local government planners

product is redefined as research, then they, or a combination of developer and research councils, should pay for the design that best serves the archaeological opportunity.

Of course there is a lot to do. Developers should be given tax sweeteners for contributing to the public good. Project designs should be placed on public view in planning offices to ensure planners and developers are not getting archaeology on the cheap. Archaeology firms should focus on maximum research output rather than maximum income from days on site. Universities should join in and get dirty. Britain has a government determined to create wealth and avoid paying for anything, but not even they are likely to abandon planning controls. Using public and private money to find out more about the country you live in is something every voter can support, be they ere so dank and drear. Let's hope it all happens — meanwhile four cheers for Southport! May it flourish and succeed where 30 years of lobbying have so far failed.

☪ One consequence of the Southport prescription is, or could be, the end of minimum random sampling — the idea that a site can be rescued or exchanged for knowledge by digging test pits over 15% of it. This default practice can be laid at the door of Lewis Binford — unfairly as it happens, since he promoted the concept of design before all else, and the appropriate design emphatically does not always mean test pits, random or otherwise: that's simply a convenience that has grown up with the north American version of the industry (the Europeans never took to sampling). The great man died this April, and like many genuine achievers his enemies were just as numerous and worthy as his friends. My curmudgeonly colleague, Humphrey Harumpher (who is now a professor you'll be glad to hear), thought Binford was 'over-rated' and 'uncultured': he had little appreciation of Roman sculpture or medieval towns, and was always trying to prove something, rather than speculating about it over a good dinner. But others will be ever grateful to him and with good reason. He made archaeology matter, and not just to those who do it.

Binford was literally stellar: he had an asteroid named after him by the International Astronomical Union. *Asteroid 213629 Binford*, discovered in 2004, has a diameter of slightly over 1km and orbits the sun between Mars and Jupiter, every four years.<sup>3</sup> Binford put archaeology into a global orbit that is not going to burn out any time soon. By recruiting the methods of exploratory and experimental science, he inspired researchers of high and low estate with the urge to solve problems, test ideas, be bold, all through the vehicle of design. In the true spirit of the sixties, he disarmed authority and empowered the young. Of course he wasn't the first to do this — Kidder, Willey, Wheeler all embraced design after their fashion. But every generation needs it to be stressed again, if necessary with a serrated edge: archaeology is a structured investigation, not guesswork; it can demonstrate its conclusions, not just assert them, convince its users, not just fantasise and entertain. Archaeology is not just some recreation for the quirky: it has a product worth working for, worth paying for. Binford gave us ambition<sup>4</sup>.

☪ Perhaps fantasy still has its place. *Cave of forgotten dreams* (2010), billed as a documentary film about the Chauvet paintings, was made by Werner Herzog, a director who memorably

<sup>3</sup> (<http://antiquity.ac.uk/tributes/binford>)

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Binford died on 11 April 2011. Tributes will be found on our website at <http://antiquity.ac.uk/bulletin.html#tributes>

filmed Klaus Kinski up the Amazon on a raft in *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, a motion picture pulsating with natural splendour and manic energy. Not so here. It is hard to believe that such a beautiful setting as the Ardèche and a twisting gallery as thrilling as the Chauvet cave could result in such a dismal piece of film-making. What were the French authorities thinking of? The commentary was a creepy sermon punctuated by corny asides. The sound track was a deafening onslaught of squeaks and groans — why does every attempt to represent Paleolithic music have to resemble a dying duck in a thunderstorm? (Unfortunately this is not an isolated trend. The same genre of wailing choirs marred Neil MacGregor's otherwise excellent BBC radio programme, *A History of the World in 100 objects*.) Palaeolithic persons had an ear for nature's noises, a good sense of pitch and rhythm, flutes with pentatonic notes, rattles with pebbles. There is no evidence that they were permanently trapped in the seventh level of hell, gnawed by angry aardvarks. Why is it so improbable that they might express a sense of harmony, excitement and joy — like their paintings in fact?

And what paintings! An epitome of animal beauty, brilliant celebration of vanished creatures we had come to see — not some fearful mystery but a long anticipated first glimpse of the vivid experience of and deep thoughts of the earliest *sapiens* to reach Europe. Unfortunately we were not encouraged to just look (or to know where we were in the cave), but hurried from place to place by the pointing and panning of arty 3D camera work.<sup>5</sup> Light relief was provided by tacked-on film clips: Fred Astaire dancing (bizarre), the master perfumier who smelt out caves (endearing), the spear-throwing demonstration (admirable), a white crocodile swimming (baffling). Moments of vital clarity were provided by real archaeologists — the inestimable Jean Clottes, Nicholas Connard and others, but otherwise this was a film that succeeded in being condescending without being informative. Why wasn't the whole script in French, written and delivered by someone who understood the subject? As usual, prehistory was the loser: the roots of modern humanity, about which we now know a great deal, hijacked by artists well out of their depth peddling the supposedly popular culture of the weird and sentimental.

There was a lot more educational value, as well as entertainment, I seem to remember, in the brazenly fictitious 'Quest for Fire' (*La Guerre du Feu*) made by Jean-Jacques Annaud in 1981. Here shaggy Neanderthals were given to making murderous raids, eating live insects and mating from behind, while *Homo Sapiens*, by contrast, made love face to face, went in for ingenious recipes and natty costumes and was altogether more French. Unfortunately during a racial incident all the fires went out and no-one knew how to get them re-started. So our hero and his pals made the long journey to the edge of the forest, and down a steep drop onto a plain where everyone was already Neolithic. These agriculturalists were governed by an immense woman — a life-sized Willendorf Venus — attended by a vigorous harem of young men. The Neolithic heroine was a fine child of the 60s, naked apart from a pair of go-faster stripes running from armpit to ankle. Rescued from some cannibals, she supplies the fire, but stops short at translocating to the forest upland. The script consisted of a language of Indo-European grunts and chants invented by Anthony Burgess, but the action was easy to follow. Of course we scoffed at the anachronisms and gauche gestures — the

<sup>5</sup> For a less hectic tour, see Jean Clottes *Return to Chauvet Cave: excavating the birthplace of art* (Thames & Hudson, 2003)

sabre-toothed lion was clearly the citizen of an urban zoo which treated its giant plastic fangs with considerable irritation. But at least it was thought-provoking. Cheerful fantasy beats turgid docu-tainment any day of the week. And in the picture of lengthy co-existence between Neanderthals and Sapiens, (and between hunter-gatherers and farmers), fantasy may well have the last laugh.

🐾 We are pleased to announce our prize-winners for 2010, as determined by our panel of judges: the *Antiquity* prize for the best article (£1000) goes to Trevor Watkins for 'New light on the Neolithic revolution in south-west Asia' (September), a précis of his Rhind Lectures; and the Ben Cullen Prize for the runner up (£500) to Jill Goulder for 'Administrators' bread' (June), her identification of the bevel-rimmed bowls from Uruk as containers for government-issue loaves. Although the winner was not in doubt, the five-person panel selected a gratifyingly large number of articles that were deemed worthy of a vote. All credit to our authors for doing and reporting such excellent research, and for showing the world that it matters. Oh yes, — one more prize: the best photo published as a frontispiece went to Alberto Arzoz and Timothy Clack for their picture 'Mursi warriors with prehistoric stone platforms' (March). This was a fine photograph and the winners will be sent a cheque for £500. But I have to speak severely to my readers about this competition. I started it in September 2006 as a way of encouraging archaeologists to take better photographs, of sites, of excavations, of objects. But I would say we still have some way to go. Digital technology has not made us better at composition; but it has made it easier to send your photographs to us. Please do so! All creative efforts carefully considered.

Martin Carver  
York, 1 June 2011