

Europe's Cultural Landscape: archaeologists and the management of change

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2002

First published in 2002 by
Europae Archaeologiae Consilium

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EAC Occasional Paper 2

ISBN 90-76975-02-X

Published in Belgium - Royal Library legal
deposit number: D/2001/9242/012

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B-1200 Brussels
Belgium

Page design and composition by Martin Gillard, University of Exeter. Cover adapted by Martin Gillard from an original design by Michael Wagner, Archäologisches Landesmuseum Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Printed in UK by Short Run Press Ltd, Exeter

Cover illustration: An early medieval stronghold at Moraczewo, in the Wielkopolska region of Poland, one of c. 7,000 entries on the Polish official register of scheduled sites and monuments. The stronghold is dated to between the 8th-11th century AD, and is associated with the power base of the Polanie tribe, one of the foundations of the future feudal Christian State. It sits within an agricultural landscape of much later date. Current agriculture activities on or near the site are monitored by the Service for the Protection of Monuments. The modern farm near the stronghold was built before the site was designated in 1972. Photo: W. Stêpień.

16: Raising awareness and managing change: the cultural landscape of the Bjäre peninsula, Sweden

Jenny Nord Paulsson

Abstract: The Bjäre peninsula, situated in the north-west of Skåne, has a rich cultural landscape marked by distinct Bronze Age monuments, enclosed field systems dating from the 19th century and various notable changes and consistencies in settlement pattern. This paper discusses the creation of the landscape and the relationships within it, the significance of the past to the modern landscape, the threats to the cultural landscape and the possible solutions and approaches to these solutions.

The landscape of today

The Bjäre peninsula is situated in the north-west of Skåne, the southernmost county of Sweden (fig. 16.1). In all the area consists of seven parishes and measures about 200km². About 14,000 BC the ice of the last Ice Age began melting and this area was one of the first parts of Scandinavia to be freed from the big ice-sheet. The enormous masses of ice had reshaped the area and these shapes have brought a special appearance to the region. In the north of the peninsula the old rock survived the Ice Age and it is still rising with heights of about 200m above sea level

The prehistoric heritage of Bjäre is very well-preserved and mainly consists of an unusually high density of Bronze Age graves and cupmark sites (fig. 16.2). More than 700 mounds from the Bronze Age are known, and almost as many stone-settings from the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, as well as several hundred cupmarks sites. The larger carving sites also contain footprints and non-figurative carvings. The first figurative carvings have only recently been found on the peninsula illustrating a boat, some fishing hooks and horse hoofs (Broström & Ihrestam, forthcoming).

On the burial mounds we also find another kind of heritage from the past, in the set of vegetation growing on them. An inventory has shown that the vegetation on the mounds of Bjäre is extremely well-preserved and representative of the time before artificial fertilisers were used. It is a flora typical of managed grassland. Analysis has shown that some of the vegetation may actually originate from the time when the mounds were built (Gustafsson 1998).

There are very few visible remains of earlier or later prehistoric date, and the pre-historic layers of visible remains of human activity in the landscape may therefore

be summarised as a well-preserved ritual landscape from the Bronze Age period. Around these, however, many layers of later farming landscapes have evolved.

The landscape of today mainly consists of open arable fields and grazing land with few clearly visible boundaries



Fig. 16.1: Location of the Bjäre peninsula, Sweden.



Fig.16.2: A carving site from where a Bronze Age mound can be seen on the horizon, surrounded by the later farming landscape. Photo: Sven Hernborg.

except for stonewalls mainly constructed in connection with the agricultural reorganisation according to the Land Reform laws of the 19th century (fig. 16.3). The overall picture of today's landscape is much affected by these land *Shifts* since they entailed a comprehensive redistribution of farmland. The principle behind them was that small patches of land should be put together to form larger and more efficient fields. The old common grazing land was also divided between farms and put under the plough. The shifts also implied a change in the settlement pattern. Farms in many of the old villages were scattered and dispersed across the landscape within their own fields. The Shifts caused not only a new landscape character and more rational farming conditions, but were also accompanied by a whole new social situation for people. Among other things, individuality grew stronger, as well as more isolated with the splitting of communities.

There is also a pre-Shift historic layer to the landscape. On Bjäre, it can be argued that because they have pagan names many of the villages and settlement places originate in the late Iron Age, which in this case will mean from about 400-1050 AD. This is probably a result of a more comprehensive change in the settlement pattern at that time. Quite a few of the villages are well preserved from pre-Shift times since some farms actually stayed in the aggregated village centres during the Shifts. Other pre-Shift

features are still visible in the landscape of Bjäre including many old cattle roads leading from the villages towards the seashore where the large common grazing land were situated. These are still visible as tiny roads leading to areas with summer cottages or to nature preservation areas (Erikson forthcoming). In some coastal areas you might still find the old borders in the form of walls and ditches between the villages' grazing lands. In the northern and north-eastern part of the peninsula there are small areas with woodland within which old fields, used in the medieval period and probably even of prehistoric origin, have been preserved.

The great beauty and individual character of the Bjäre peninsula and its closeness to the sea has made Bjäre a popular recreation-area. This means that a lot of summer cottages, golf courses and also nature preservation areas have developed during the last decades.

The circumstances that have shaped today's landscape

In 1666 the first Swedish law protecting ancient monuments was created. In comparison with the early origins of protection, the practice of archaeological research is of a much later date, only emerging in the early 19th century. The protection law has of course been under revision several times, and in 1988 a new law was presented in

which the sense of caring became more important and the protection of larger areas, not only of solitary remains, was included. The early start to legal protection of heritage in Sweden might be one reason for the well-preserved Bronze Age remains at Bjäre.

Another reason for the preservation of the Bronze Age remains might be the strong awareness of their importance among the people of the area. This can be seen in the great interest many farmers and other inhabitants take in caring about the cultural landscape. During recent years some non-profit organisations have emerged and are now taking responsibility when it comes to caring and sharing knowledge about the prehistoric dimension within the cultural landscape. Many of the older inhabitants tell about their grandparents instructing them to respect old graves that are situated on their fields, among which many have kept their special historic names.

The peninsula has a long history of farmers owning their own land, with very little impact from the aristocracy. We might assume that this was one of the important reasons why few villages were fully dispersed during the agricultural Shifts and why the land dividing was actually quite carefully planned. Another reason why the land division was made rather cautiously is probably to be found in the importance of the sea. The villages were usually situated some kilometres from the sea but their land reached

to the coast where good grazing could be found. The sea also provided fish, communication and contacts, shipwrecks and seaweed, which still is commonly used as fertiliser.

During the laying down of the Shifts system, the surveyors had the assistance of the monumental heritage from the Bronze Age in the area. Since the burial mounds occupy many prominent places they can naturally also be seen from a distance and are therefore good places to take aim at while working in the landscape. This has resulted in some boundaries from the Shifts actually crossing mounds, or heading straight towards them (fig. 16.4). In this way the heritage from the Bronze Age has had an influence on how people used the land in later periods. Bronze Age features have therefore been kept 'alive' by being incorporated with new features and given different meanings and significance into later landscapes, and they still therefore form a vibrant part of the modern landscape for a large number of people, local or tourist. The stone-walls from the time of the Shifts are very beautiful and significant features in today's landscape in their own right; they also, however, sometimes incorporated or even stole building materials from a number of cairns and stone settings (both graves and those gathered from cultivated fields) and therefore help to carry a more distant past into the present day landscape.



Fig. 16.3: The landscape mainly consists of open arable fields and grazing land with few clearly visible boundaries, except for stonewalls mainly constructed in association with the agricultural settlement Shifts according to the Land Reform laws of the 19th century. Photo: Marja Erikson.

The many places with cupmarks in this area also still have meaning in the cultural landscape of Bjäre today. They are well known and well cared for by the inhabitants. It has been argued lately among landscape archaeologists that carvings - and maybe especially cupmarks - mark ancient trails in the landscape and also show places of significance as well as borders between territories (Bradley 1997; 2000; Nord Paulsson forthcoming). In the cultural landscape of today the cupmarks of Bjäre still seem to contain some of this relevance since they are found along roads and some of the large carving places are located in very central places, for example *Drotninghall* at the centre of the peninsula, where two main roads meet in the village of Västra Karup (Nord & Paulsson 1993; Nord Paulsson forthcoming).

All together there are seven churches (and seven parishes) in the Bjäre area and all except the town church of Båstad originate from the 12th century. The farmhouses from the area share their distinctiveness with houses in surrounding regions and it can be said that Bjäre is a meeting point of two different building cultures. To the north and east on the highlands and in the forested area the houses are mainly made of wood, while on the lower ground on the south-south-west the houses are mainly made with clay and are often L- or U-shaped (or even O-shaped) as in the south of Skåne. In these houses you can quite often find wooden features that originate from shipwrecks. Today a lot of new houses are being built and old farmsteads are being modernised, which gives a new

character to the architecture of the cultural landscape. But not only are new houses being built, in an outdoor museum at the centre of the peninsula a Bronze Age house has been reconstructed which is meant to make highlight the Bronze Age context of this area, making the past even more vivid (pl. 16.1).

Thus what seems at a first glance to be a post-medieval landscape in fact has great depth and much diversity: carvings and barrows, surviving and re-used, successive layers of landuse, early settlement locations and later farm sites. It can also be argued that the important changes that are visible in this landscape also represent-changing attitudes towards it. The large number of burial mounds with their monumentality highlight the domination of the land at a time when agriculture first became important in this region, while the more recent division of the land during the Shifts represents a modern attitude, where efficiency is highly ranked.

The threats

The peninsula is very much affected by developments associated with recreation, mainly by constructing summer cottages and golf courses. The golf courses can be seen as threats to the cultural landscape in several aspects, for example by the way they redesign and reshape the historical landscape with artificial mounds, which can be rather destructive and confusing to the historical depth in this kind of landscape.



Fig.16.4: A stonewall from the Shift crossing a burial mound. Photo: Jonas Paulsson.

Traditional small-scale agriculture is having difficulty surviving, which might lead to either abandonment or overuse, or even both at different levels. Abandonment or neglect will destroy them by making them overgrown and forgotten, while overuse will most probably lead to the physical destruction of the cultural landscape and its historic and prehistoric remains. Overuse with modern technical resources will also in all probability lead to a degree of abandonment as well, because it will demand larger areas to be farmed with less people in them. People abandoning the region will lead to a loss of information and erosion of the human context in the cultural landscape. These developments are increasing and may in the near future represent a considerable threat to the cultural landscape. These changes are also of importance not only in terms of abandonment or overuse, but perhaps even more so when it comes to the fragmentation of the cultural landscape. Farms are being sold as summer cottages or permanent residences, but without the farming land which is being amalgamated with other land to create new large farms that are then more and more intensively farmed, equally changing the landscape by putting fields together and destroying their old boundaries. New houses are being built in the countryside in a way that suppresses the cultural landscape and loses its character.

Until recently the monuments of prehistory have been allowed to stay vivid in peoples minds and lives as well as in the character of the landscape. This might be an effect of the small-scale traditional way of life where people rarely have been forced by superior ownership or by national regulations to make unwanted decisions. The agricultural Shifts might have been the first time this occurred. Today several new regulations are, unfortunately, making it very difficult for farmers and other landowners to continue in a traditional way.

The visions of the future

The remains of the past are also memories for the future, two aspects of our environment that are somehow inseparable and are the two main ingredients that we need to consider in the present-day planning of the cultural landscape. How can we achieve a sustainable management of the cultural landscape where the prehistoric and historic dimensions will be able to exist together with modern developments, and where a vivid small-scale farming can survive that can keep this cultural landscape alive? At the moment, it looks quite possible that the area will be turned into a sophisticated recreation area, a sort of monoculture with golf and summer holidays as its crops, even if many visitors actually come to Bjäre only for enjoying the beautiful cultural landscapes. Already it is considered a problem that the peninsula loses so many of its inhabitants during wintertime and that the local people cannot afford to buy houses in the area.

It is important to create a wider understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage, which would also

contribute to a sense of community value and a wider respect towards the historical dimensions in the environment. As I have mentioned before there is a strong awareness in this region about the historical layers of the landscape, but still this is quite limited to certain groups in the society and not to the community as a whole. We have to strengthen the awareness of the landscape's history among all people living there and using and affecting the landscape in different ways, even if they only do it during part of the year. In this way we might be able to create a climate where for example cultural tourism and the continuation of the traditional farming could be developed in a sustainable way. Today a dawning discussion of alternative solutions to keep small-scale farming alive and thus also the ancient qualities of the landscape has emerged. Ideas about ecological production, quality brand, small-scale slaughter, local processing of farm products, co-operation between producers and consumers, farm shops and 'farm holiday' enterprises were discussed.

Through making paths in the landscape both virtually and physically we could pass on the understanding of the monuments together with the development of the cultural landscape to a broader public. This is probably of fundamental importance if we want to protect those values into the future. I believe that we as archaeologists have a great responsibility in this work. Recently the first year of a very successful European co-operation, European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes (EPCL), which deals with these questions has been finished, as a follow-up to an earlier three year project, European Cultural Paths (ECP). Bjäre was one of the five projects involved in ECP and is one of the twelve EPCL (see Kraut, and Ermischer this volume). For more information on EPCL see www.pcl-eu.de. If the prehistoric and historic values in the landscape were to be acknowledged by regional decision makers and other interest groups, then it could be developed by the means of both eco-tourism and cultural tourism which would be a far better alternative in managing the area in a sustainable way in the long run. Lately we have started to call the cultural landscape of Bjäre a *living antiquity* in order to give connotations to something that has an economical value and also a value that is likely to grow in time, which I believe it will.

An important obstacle for the future is to decide *what* is worth passing on to the future generations and *who* will make those decisions? Should it be the people living in the area, archaeologists or market forces together with politicians? The best would of course be if the decisions were made in togetherness and the communication between different opinions and interests were working well.

The cultural landscape is like a living organism that is constantly changing. The uniqueness of Bjäre consists, above all, of two things. First the richness of Bronze Age ritual monuments which seem to give an extremely good

total picture of what once used to exist. This prehistoric heritage also seems to have had an influence upon later developments in the area by first dominating and exposing the land. Secondly we have the many visible layers of agricultural development and especially the well-preserved picture of the Shifts. But, it will only remain this way as long as all the monuments and the cultural landscape of today are there to be seen. Therefore one could argue that every single one of the monuments should be well protected, as well as the agricultural landscape. But will we really be able to pass on all that to the future?

We need to find a local solution for every local situation even if support is needed from regional and national or even international institutions. For some years the regional museums in Sweden have offered skilled staff to local authorities in the guidance of heritage issues. So far these services have only applied to the conservation of buildings, but it might be useful for other issues as well. In the Bjäre peninsula for example it would have been very useful to have a municipal keeper concentrating mainly on landscape issues. One problem connected with the management of the cultural landscape today is the existing confusion in the relationship between the organisations that manage nature issues and cultural heritage. One of the goals in the above mentioned EPCL project is to produce a historic landscape characterisation which will help local as well as regional decision makers to achieve better information about the historic values in this landscape before making decisions. This information concerns both biotopes and physical (as well as non-physical) features.

Local pride and sense of belonging are fundamental values for the future management of the cultural landscape

and the historical environment as a whole. If people feel connected with the places in which they live, they will also feel more responsible for maintaining the landscape for future generations. We need - as professionals - to communicate the necessity of understanding the past as well as its legacy in present. Today several non-profit organisations in the area are conducting guided walks in the cultural landscape which are very popular among the inhabitants as well as tourists. These walks are not only informative but also a very good way to reach a dialogue about the cultural landscape with the people actually living and working there.

At Bjäre the non-profit organisation *Bronstid* has devoted an enormous amount of work in communicating the heritage to inhabitants and tourists. Through the former EU-project *European Cultural Paths* several paths have been created in the landscape, which give substance to some of remains in the region which are still for many people anonymous. The signs with the EU stars also give a certain dignity with the hidden message that 'even the EU have noticed the uniqueness of the cultural heritage in this area'. *Bronstid* is also developing a Bronze Age centre with the above mentioned reconstructed Bronze Age house at the peninsula, in which information and education are provided for schools and the public about the prehistoric remains. Already the young generation is being provided with education in a very vivid way at this centre, which is one way of strengthening the awareness into the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Graham Fairclough and Annila Sterner for giving useful comments on this paper.

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European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes