

The industrial material from Trevelgue Head, Cornwall

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The interim reports produced at the time of the excavations on Trevelgue Head mention evidence for both ferrous and non-ferrous metalworking. On a visit to the site in September 1983 I collected ironworking slags; they were weathering out of exposed sections of ditch fill on the southern edge of the headland. The samples collected suggest both iron smelting and smithing were carried out on the site. Veins of iron ore were also identified on the landward side of the channel that cuts ~~the channel that cuts~~ the headland off from the mainland. No evidence for non-ferrous metalworking was found.

Chris Salter, who works with Peter Northover in the Metallurgy Dept at Oxford, has analysed a few slag and ore samples from the old excavations. His results suggest that it is indeed the local ore that is being smelted. Iron smelting sites in the pre-Roman period in Britain are few and far between so Trevelgue is important for this reason alone. It has the added advantage that the ore source is also known which adds greatly to the potential of the site for enhancing our knowledge of Iron Age technology. It should be possible to follow the iron from ore through smelting and smithing processes to finished objects.

The technological finds from the site held in Truro Museum certainly warrant fuller investigation than they have had to date. If they include evidence for non-ferrous metalworking then consideration should be given to the likely local sources of raw materials for this industry too. In order to document the industrial activity on site a basic record should be made of all the technological finds preserved from past excavations. This should be supplemented by a few selective analyses along the lines of those already done by Chris Salter. Further information should also be available from consideration of the corresponding archaeological data - distribution of finds on site, related features etc. If smelting furnaces can be located, from the old excavation records or from the recent geophysical survey, then excavation or re-excavation might add considerably to our understanding of Iron Age smelting technology.

Until we know how much information we really have already about the industries practiced on Trevelgue Head no assessment can be made of the potential loss from erosion of the site though as with any site the archaeological finds are a non-renewable resource.