The archaeology of Alderley edge

This book presents the archaeology of an area rich in copper mining of various periods from the early Bronze Age to the early Industrial in Yorkshire, England.

Hywel KEEN (UK)

This BAR report covers the landscape study of Alderley edge which aside from surveys and excavations of selected sites which is normal for such landscape studies included a short programme of experimental demonstrations held on open days in order explain to the public.

Two elements of the actual mining techniques were explored. The first was the use of fire setting, held over a period of two days. This was a widely known but often misunderstood technique especially as it fell out of use with the introduction of steel mining tools and more importantly the introduction of explosives. The basic source used in fire setting experiments is Argnicol’s ‘De Rea Metallica’. In the case of the Alderley edge experiments this source was supplemented by experience gained by one of the participants (S. Timberlake) in similar experiments on other sites. In general the experimenters concluded that the effects of fire setting occur in the first few hours of the burn with rock shattering caused by to the expansion of water held within the rock and that the only reason for dousing the area with extra water is to cool the area quickly and remove a lot of the waste.

The second mining technology looked at was the construction of stone hammers as they are thought to have been used during the Bronze age. This consists of two elements, the hammer stone itself and the binding or handle. Alderley edge has produced many examples of hammer stones and it was these that were reconstructed, particularly those with a distinctive groove which, it is presumed, was used to help secure the handle. The handles’ form though is more problematic, in general the model used is that of the Chuquicamata hammer, held in the British Museum, from South America. Although an alternative style was used that had been developed during experiments at other sites, but which lacked either ethnographical or archaeological parallels. The hammers were then used in conjunction with antler picks to break up an remove rock in and around the areas that had been fire set.

The third area of experimentation in this study was the smelting of ore obtained from the locale in kilns modeled on those used in the early Bronze age. The aim of these experiments was to explore the temperatures possible with this technology and the likely achievable yield from the local ore. In addition...
Hallstatt Textiles: Technical Analysis, Scientific Investigation and Experiment on Iron Age Textiles

The book publishes proceedings from the first Symposium on Hallstatt textiles.

Toon REURINK
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A nice piece of red printed matter is lying on my desk, a new one which promises to tell much about the textiles from the Hallstatt finds, “Hallstatt Textiles. I hope it will give many new insights and will help to deepen my knowledge of archaeological textiles. It brings the proceedings from the first Symposium on Hallstatt textiles hosted by the Austrian village of Hallstatt in 2004. Divided into three sections, the detailed and well-illustrated seventeen papers focus on material recovered from sites in Hallstatt itself, discuss the results of experimental archaeology and consider textile evidence from neighbouring Iron Age and La Tène sites in, for example, Italy, Slovakia and Moravia. The papers are all presented in both English and German and are followed by colour photographs of some of these remarkable and complex pieces of cloth. At first sight, the publication seems well-groomed and has – thankfully – many good pictures. Exactly because this publication holds many independent reports, it invites being read at random, I personally find that very comfortable. But I think this treasure of information would be more accessible to a broader public by editing it to one large consistent book. It is disturbing, but understandable, that more languages are used in this volume, translations cost a lot of time and are therefore precious. The reports are clearly and most surely usable for an insider and those who dare to make reconstructions of textiles from this period. I do see, however, there was too little experimental knowledge because of which in some cases people have come to the right conclusions or not the right solutions are to not shown. More knowledge of sources would certainly help here. What would also contribute to a better understanding is to gain knowledge in countries where different textile techniques are still in use.

Can I, as textile producer, start working with the information from this publication and for example make replicas of the fabrics mentioned? Yes, that would be possible, although you need to be a trained weaver or spinner. Somebody who works only every now and then with textiles will certainly need more explanation. What is missing in my eyes is information on the twist per centimetre of the yarns and the thickness of the fabrics. What also is a pity is that of the few garments, no patterns are given. It is nice that by reading all these articles you get a better insight into the particular type of textiles in a certain period and especially in the abilities gained over time.

All in all a good publication – hopefully sooner or later there will a detailed consistent book to published (in a single language).