In 2013-15 I made *Inland*, a photographic project, in response to the experience of living in a Mendip valley over twenty-six years. A catalyst for the project was the discovery that Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age remains had been excavated from a cave in a limestone escarpment behind my home in the valley. These excavations took place in 1905 and again in 1947-50. The larger collection of finds from the later excavations are held at The Museum of Somerset in Taunton, but the finds from the earlier excavation are held in the archive of Wells Museum. It was this smaller collection, consisting of some human remains and pottery, that made a deep impression and had a significant impact on my experience and perception of where I live.

Two particular items in the collection drew my attention; a lower jawbone containing teeth that had been worn to a flat surface, and a potsherd, decorated with what are thought to be fingernail impressions. I was struck by these evident traces of early dwelling in the valley and remembered once hearing an archaeologist say, that when handling an artefact such as a flint tool, he experienced an echo or trace of the person who made it. After handling these Neolithic remains I found myself reflecting on the significance of that echo. There are now no visible signs of their occupation in the valley, even the cave where their remains were found has collapsed. However, human history can take a mental form as well as a physical or material one. When I sit near the cave, or pass the spring at the base of the slope below, I think of the effort and ingenuity of those people who chose to settle, as I have, in this location. Their inhabitation is almost tangible. The sensory encounters of my daily walking provided a direct bodily connection with the past and became the subject of my photographs.

The archaeologist Richard Morris suggests in *Time’s Anvil* that due to the division of time through periodization, we have underestimated connections between periods, things and ideas that are normally studied apart. An ambition of this project was to evoke a sense of these connections through the overlain and woven histories of nature and culture. To this end, I was interested in exploring photography’s potential as a form of archaeology, to capture and collect traces, memories and moments, that would contribute to a narrative of a local, but also wider sense of place.

Since 2015, this project has been further extended through the collecting and photographing of ‘finds’ from the surface of the ground, in a one-mile radius of my home. These objects vary in age from a few days old to around three hundred million years old and evidence moments in the continuum of geological, human and animal activity.

Further details and photographs from this project can be found at: http://helen-harris.com/

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