

Geophysics continued

**BACAS
Geophys team
survey land
north-east of
Blacklands**

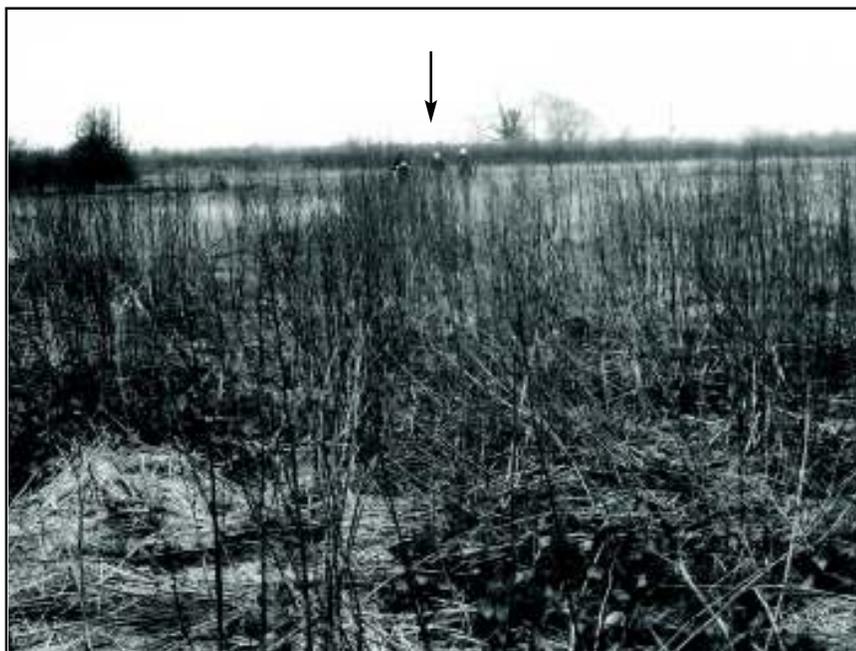
John Oswin

Over the course of the winter, we continued our geophysics campaign over Sands, Crow Oak, Broadmead and Little Mackley. There were only a few ancient ditch lines in Little Mackley, but it is an interesting place. A little distance north-east of Blacklands, nearly to Norton St. Philip is a group of fields with Mackley names running along a ridge. The name is possibly a corruption of Oak-Leigh, but the main interest is that the group spreads over three parishes, Norton, Laverton and Hemington, and these parishes are all in separate Hundreds, Norton and Hinton Liberty, Frome Hundred and Kilmersdon Hundred. These are all ancient parishes, and the boundaries probably go back over a thousand years, but already by then, Mackley has ceased to exist and was only remembered as a name.

Is there a missing Saxon settlement at Mackley? There is certainly evidence of Roman building debris in a field at the eastern end of the group, and metal detectorists recently found a fourth century silver coin in one of these fields, so there was certainly Roman settlement there. There are plenty more fields there still in need of geophysical survey to tease out the story of Mackley.

As spring approached, I had no option but to get on with the field I had been dreading, Normeads. This would be quite accessible with an off-road vehicle, but it is some hundred yards up a lane too deeply rutted for a road car, and the nearest place to park is a quarter mile away. My compromise was to drive up the lane as far as I dare, drop off the equipment, mud, lunch and any archaeologists before reversing back and heading for the parking spot, and then to do the reverse of this at the end of the day. I was hoping to get the eastern part of the field done and ignore the western part, but luck did not go that way. On about Day 2, the magnetometer started to respond...

As spring progressed and the unkempt vegetation grew higher and higher, we pressed on through both parts of the field, jumping over crotch-thistles and tripping over hidden briars until we were forced to give up at the end of May as the grass and weeds grew over the top of our gridding poles and left us unable to see where our grids were. And still the magnetometer kept finding more enclosures. The neighbouring field, Strawbridge, had yielded Roman debris but had been disappointing for its geophysics, so there is possibly a Roman villa in the remaining portion of Normeads which lies beyond our reach, too overgrown and too distant from civilisation to yield to our technology.



**Figure 1
Spot the
archaeologists.
Yes, there are
three geophysicists
at work here, hidden
by the vegetation,
and this is before
the spring growth
really sprung!**

