

GEOCHEMISTRY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND REINTERPRETING IRISH PROMONTORY FORTS

Johanna Ullrich, Ph.D.
UCD School of Archaeology
Archaeological Review from Cambridge 27.1

Phosphate analysis is a geochemical soil spatial examination technique commonly used in archaeology to locate previously unknown sites and features and to pinpoint areas for excavation. However, phosphate analysis can contribute more to reconstructions of site and social dynamics when use-of-space models are generated from the results. This paper draws on work from Irish promontory forts to demonstrate how geochemistry and archaeology can be better integrated, to interpret use of space on sites with little upstanding architecture, to illustrate how phosphate analysis can be used to assign function to sites that are not well understood and to create more accessible and complete interpretations of archaeological sites. The ability of phosphate analysis techniques to accurately identify archaeological features, as well as less tangible components such as pathways, activity areas and archaeologically 'empty' space, makes phosphate testing applicable to a large variety of archaeological sites. The utilization of this information to create use-of-space models helps determine land-use patterns over sites, allows for greater trends between sites to be identified and aids in the archaeological interpretation of large- and small-scale site and social dynamics. Reconstructions of the site and social dynamics present on archaeological sites based on phosphate patterning allow for a greater depth of interpretation. Intensities and/or durations of use can be determined with greater accuracy, and many functions and features not visible in the archaeological record with other analytical techniques can be identified and add greatly to archaeologists' understandings of continuing site and community construction in the past.