

# DETECTING ON THE WEB

## Internet Site Research

### Part 3.

### Ted Fletcher

Let me recap on what we've discussed so far. The first steps on any successful research project should be in the direction of a map shop to buy relevant Ordnance Survey Explorer sheets for the county on which you have decided to concentrate your web quests. Step two should be an order sent to Archaeology UK for a copy of this year's Archaeological Sites Index. (See their display ads in TH). The name of this amazing CD may mislead newer readers who don't possess a previous year's copy, so let me point out that it contains 6-figure (sometimes 8-figure) references, not only to the sort of "archaeological sites" understood by the narrow definition of Roman villas, but also a vast array of more than 60,000 historical locations from all periods Neolithic to Georgian, with regular updates and additions to the database via the company's web pages. Keep your Explorers up-to-date by transferring all site information obtained from Archaeology UK onto your maps at regular intervals. Use highlighter pens to mark 6 and 8-figure locations, and make pencilled notes alongside where necessary.

Step three should take you to

[www.genuki.co.uk](http://www.genuki.co.uk) on a hunt for the villages closest to the highlighted sites. Lots of useful information will be recorded about the history of each village (or parish), often including mention of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and other finds made in the neighbourhood, as well as background facts about local life in medieval-Victorian times. Readers who have yet to buy a copy of **England - The Photographic Atlas** should try the "clickable" maps and aerial photographs that can be accessed within the Genuki site. But anyone with only limited time for research should take step four and invest £99 in a copy of the Atlas. It's the fastest and, in the long run, cheapest method of checking localities throughout England for those all-important arable acres where finds will lie within detector range. I compared the task of checking half a dozen sites using the Atlas and then the Genuki aerial photographs. Flicking the Atlas pages proved much quicker than navigating north, south, east or west on the monitor screen. When viewed through a small magnifying glass the Atlas' aerial photographs yield a wealth of useful information for anyone planning forays into the coun-

tryside or down to the foreshores of coastal counties.

I've just bought myself one of those wide magnifiers often seen hanging around the necks of embroiderers. It cost under a fiver and has a built-in light that throws bright illumination onto the page. The effect when using it comes breathtakingly close to what pilots taking the original photos must have experienced - mile after mile of straight Roman road.... hedgerow alignments marking Anglo-Saxon parish boundaries.... the effects of coastal erosion on field shapes.... the concentration of arable land along riversides, especially in the north and west.... the survival of so much arable land around the flanks of many historic towns, and so on.

But there are drawbacks to the Atlas. For a start, you'll still need to buy relevant Explorer maps because, apart from brief notes on the peripheries of each sheet, the Atlas' pages carry no text to indicate town and village names as you leaf through the contents. You must keep the appropriate Ordnance Survey map at your elbow to check continuously on where your finger has wandered. And there's

no 8-figure OS grid reference to rattle off when pinpointing a particular field or a feature in that field. So put in some thought before you buy the Atlas about which counties you plan to visit as a detectorist in coming seasons. You'll be spending a fair amount of money on OS maps. Buy them only if you feel confident that you'll win some detecting permissions in counties beyond your home borders.

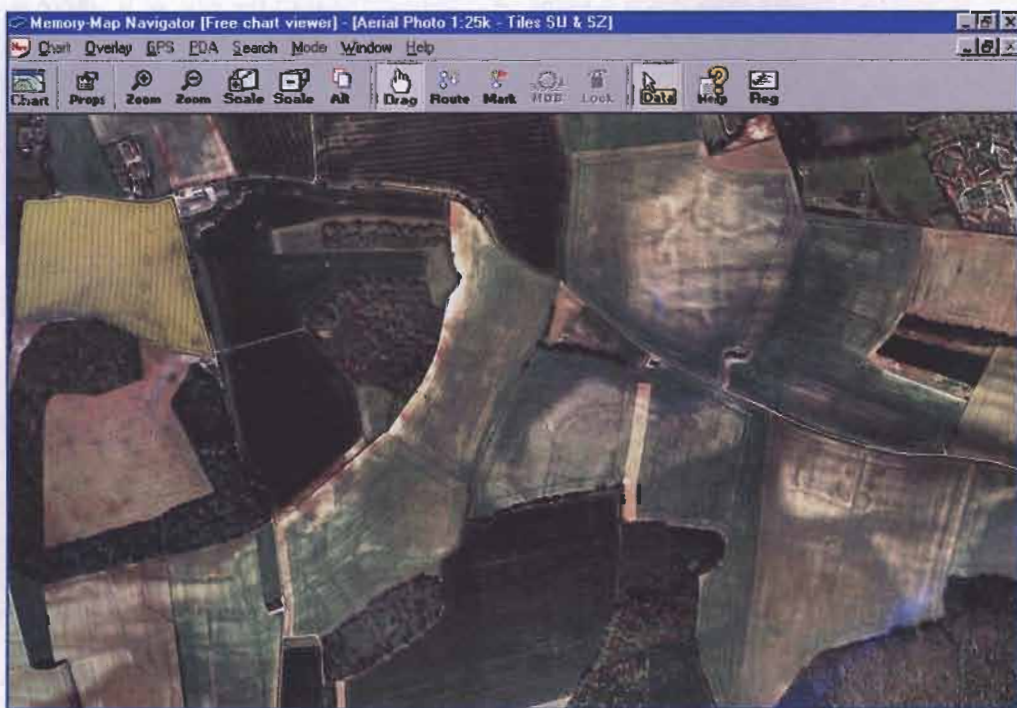


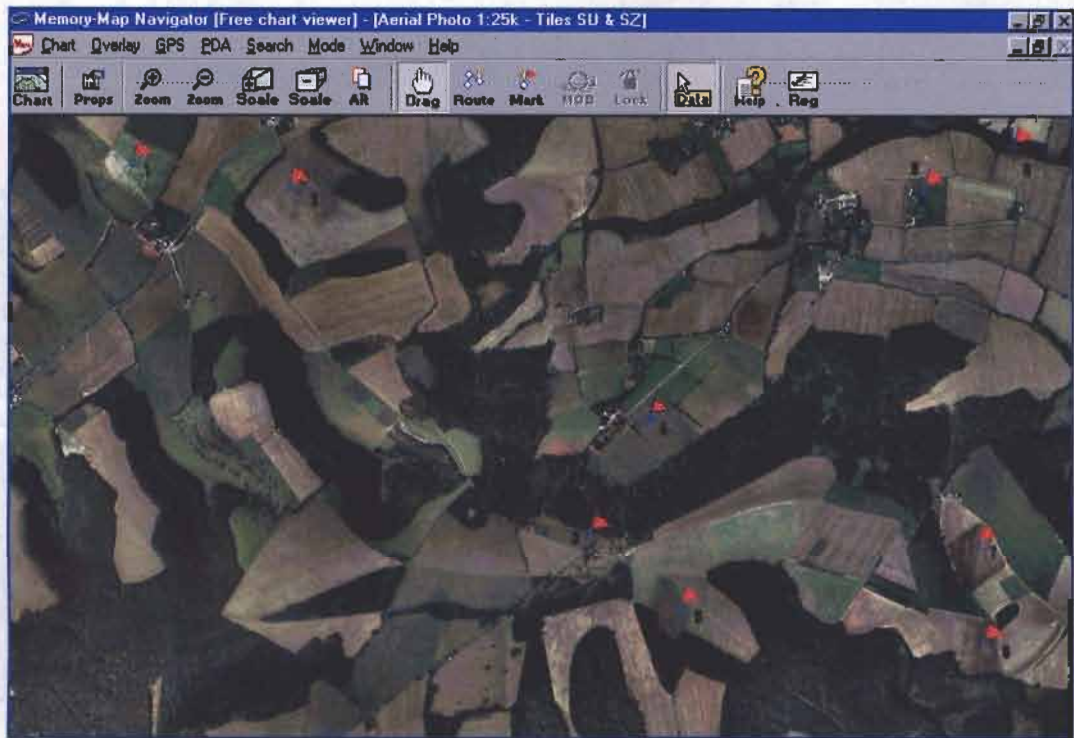
Fig.1. A bird's eye view of a few square miles of land as seen on a County CD from Archaeology UK. It reveals an array of cropmarks resulting from human activities on the ground during the past 3,000 years. Show farmers photographs like this and you'll soon have them begging you to carry out detector searches to discover what lies in their plough soil. And don't forget that with the aid of the CD's eastings and northings you will be able to read the co-ordinates of all your finds with pinpoint accuracy.

As an alternative to the all-England Photo Atlas you might consider a single county photo CD, also available from Archaeology UK for £22.45. I've tried the Essex CD and compared it with the Atlas. I'm convinced it's a better bet than buying the Atlas, provided you have no plans to hunt beyond Essex. Here's why it's better. Every image you scroll onto your PC's monitor can be manipulated via zoom-in/zoom-out controls that allow you to concentrate on the group of fields (even a single field) where you expect to obtain search permission. Right-click the image (or do whatever your PC requires) and you can save it to the "My Pictures" folder. Make a couple of

copies on a good printer, and make sure you have a copy to offer the farmer when you seek permission. He'll be very impressed; even more impressed if you have the facility to manipulate the image in Photo Express, or some other programme. I've tried all sorts of experiments with the colour, contrast, lighting and focus controls. I'm convinced that I can induce crop and soil marks to stand out on some fields. Asking the farmer what he makes of such marks almost guarantees that you will arouse his interest to the point where he'll grant detecting permission in order to find out what lies beneath the soil surface.

The one-county CDs provide you with easting and northing figures at bottom right of each image though, like the Atlas, they don't have town and village names on the photographs. Nevertheless, you won't get lost while browsing any CD. Just keep half an eye on the bottom right of any photograph and you soon get your bearings.

But wait, here's the latest development from Archaeology UK - a Place Name Finder that can provide OS grid references for more than 30,000 towns and villages throughout Britain. To use it in conjunction with the photo CD, first examine your marked-up Explorer to find a location for which you possess interesting archaeological information. Next slip the Place Name Finder CD into your D-drive and enter the 4-figure grid reference for the site in the appropriate place. From this the Finder will generate easting, northing and other useful information. Make a note of the easting and northing, then put the



aerial photo CD into the D-drive. With the image on screen, check the figure at bottom right until it matches the figure you obtained via the Explorer. You will know instantly whether or not there is potentially accessible arable land on or near the spot. If it looks especially interesting, use the zoom-in facility to get a closer look at the field/fields in question. You'll spot all manner of useful information, but concentrate on crop or soil markings. If you decide to add this site to your "must visit" list, copy the photograph into My Pictures and play with it to bring out those crop/soil marks. And if you become so absorbed in cropmark quests that you forget where you are on the aerial image, just fall back on your Place Name Finder, type in the co-ordinates of the crop mark in question, and the finder will tell you the names, directions and distances to all villages/towns in the neighbourhood. You'll regain your bearings in an instant!

If I have to find fault with this photo CD and Finder CD combination, the only one I can think of is that you might spend far too much time zooming across the countryside in your virtual helicopter, chasing road alignments, puzzling over crop marks, checking out field boundaries etc, etc, that you might become no more than an armchair historian.... but you'll possess a veritable goldmine of site information.

Writing articles for TH always results in my discovering new things about readers, and this short series has certainly opened my eyes so far as com-

Fig. 2. How good are you at interpreting crop marks? You can test your skills here by jotting down what you think is indicated by each of the red arrows. Answers at bottom of this page.

puter literacy goes. Feedback via Email (to [fletchnews@aol.com](mailto:fletchnews@aol.com)) and via old fashioned letter-post (c/o The Editor) leads me to conclude that many who buy the magazine already know a lot about Internet research. If you fall into that group and you feel you can add more to what I hope I've set in motion with this short series, why not try writing an article of your own and submitting it to the editor? If you're at a recent beginner's stage, try searching with Google (UK), with Lycos, and with other search engines. Simply enter the name of your county followed by the word "history". The results will amaze you. Good Web hunting!

#### Answers:

1. Old field boundaries.
2. Possible burials.
3. Point where Roman road enters forest.
4. Possible enclosure (Roman?).
5. Neolithic causewayed enclosure and Iron Age settlement.
6. Substantial network of ditches (Roman?).
7. Substantial network of ditches (Roman?).
8. Courtyard type Roman villa.
9. Beginning of linear alignment along field boundaries for approximately 1.46km from the top of the image.