



## Rob interviewing Rob Guiner

Rob: Well I'm here, in the middle of a field just outside Carhaix. I'm at the site of the cairn of Guouzec with Rob Guiner.

RobG: Hello, Very good to meet you

Rob: I think we need to define our terms a little bit here. I've said we're at a cairn. What exactly is a cairn?

Rob G: Well I'm not an expert on Neolithic architecture but what I've learnt in the past 3 years is that it is a large burial ground. This one is about 200 metres, 220 metres long. It was built to house burial chambers. So imagine a very large pile of stones. I hate to say a pyramid.. it's not quite a pyramid but it is a big pile of stones in the middle of a field,in which there would have been a number of burial chambers housing the bodies of important people.

Rob: How far back are we going?

Rob G: We're going back to Neolithic times so as far as I'm aware, this site is actually older than the pyramids. So it's several millenia old.

Rob: Five or six thousand years

Rob G: Yes, yes.

Rob: Originally what do the experts estimate this place to look like? A large stone mound?

Rob G: Yes exactly. If you look at the front of the cairn here.. obviously it's radio so I can't show you but you can see the remains of what we call the facade, which is a large wall and then you had a big mound of earth on top of it. Obviously what you see here is only a few feet high because most of it has collapsed and this area here to the left has actually been destroyed and these people are currently investigating how that was destroyed.

Rob: It's a big place and there's a lot of you working on here.. What have you discovered so far as it were, with your excavations?

Rob G: Everybody visiting the site must remember it is Neolithic. We do get visitors here who expect something akin to Indiana Jones and to see archeologists pulling various golden artefacts out of the ground. As I say Neolithic is stone age, so what we tend to discover is a number of stone age tools, what the french call equoultour which are effectively Lumps of quartz, which we use to shape tools, used to shape the stones that you can see in front of you, out of which the cairn was built.



So we've discovered a lot of those, we've also discovered some quite large pieces of ceramic which are being dated at the moment, which are probably Roman, because we know that Romans occupied this site after it was built, probably to steal the stones..... or use them, sorry... to use them.

Rob: They've left a trace though.

Rob G: Oh absolutely, yes, back in 2019 when the dig started in the second or third week we found part of a Roman amphora near the oak tree which is right in the middle of the site, for those of you who have seen it, and as I say lots of bits of Roman ceramic and also a grain oven as well, which I believe was Roman near where the amphora was found.

Rob: Oh right ok, so we're not going to find any skeletons for example? You're not going to find any skeletons ...

Rob G: Well human remains were found at a similar site at Saint Thois, which is over near Chateauneuf-du-Faou. But I have been told.. again I'm not an expert, that it is quite unusual to find human remains in the soil in Brittany because it's very acidic and it burns away bone very quickly.

Rob: Why do you think they chose this particular site, I mean, it's a large field but it's not the highest point in the field and why is it aligned this way do you think?

Rob G: Its alignment is exactly the same as the alignment at Barnenez, which is another cairn that has been partially reconstructed, just to the north of Morlaix. For me one of the reasons I love coming here is there is a certain kind of magic about this site and I think that probably also attracted Neolithic people. It's a very, very beautiful site, there's also a number of water sources near here as well, which of course were vital and if you look across the site we have evidence of at least 3 large quarries, one of which is being excavated as we speak, so there was a very, very good supply of large pieces of stone here as well.

Rob: And how significant is this cairn in Central Brittany?

Rob G: It is becoming more and more significant all the time, obviously it is a big hump in a field , as you've said. The surface was quite literally scratched I think in the 20's and 30's but not significantly excavated until 2019 when Dr Florian Cousseau came and started this dig that you see today and I think it will be very, very significant. It's at least 220metres long. We know that there were 3or 4 burial chambers and there are probably more.

Rob: It's a rare occurrence.



Rob G: Oh absolutely, yes... definitely.

Rob: And how was it discovered in the first place? Because this was a field full of cows, wasn't it?

Rob. G: When I first came here it was a field full of cows and it was knee deep in mud in places. Obviously it's a very clear feature here, you can see the hump, so people have always had suspicions that it was some kind of burial ground. As I say, a French archeologist had quite literally a bit of a scratch around with his trowel, I think in the 20's and 30's, and then Florian from the University of Geneva came along and now it's turned into a pretty major dig really.

Rob: Ok and I imagine that aerial photography probably came into it perhaps?

Rob G: Arial photography came into it. For those who visit Vorgium, they can actually see an exhibition of aerial photography which includes drone pictures of this site, so aerial photography was used. Florian now has a drone which he flies which we have used this year as well, so yes aerial photography is very very significant and drone archaeology is becoming more significant every year as technology improves.

Rob: What can we learn about our Neolithic ancestors from this site?

Rob G: We can learn a lot about their burial rituals, we can learn about how they manufactured tools, we can learn about their day to day life, we can learn, hopefully, depending on what we can discover about their pottery, ... So everything really about just their day to day life. It's several thousand years old so there's a lot to be discovered, lots of information gaps to be filled.

Rob: And the future for the site? I mean, how many years ahead are we looking?

Rob G: I'm been given to believe that probably 10 years, as you can see this is a huge area. In 2019 we started with two trenches. You can see how big it is now. It is, it is very, very big

Rob: So the end aim is to rebuild it perhaps? Like Barnenez?

Rob G: At the moment the aim is to have the whole cairn excavated and fully understood. There is an area where the cairn has been destroyed so at the moment, it's still very much a case of understanding the dynamics of this cairn and how many chambers it's got and its structure. I'm not even sure if Florian knows that.

Rob: Rob Guiner, are you an archaeologist?



Rob G: No I'm not...I'm an English teacher in Brest..(laughs). When I went to university in the late '80's, early '90's I very much wanted to read archaeology but was told not to because archaeologists didn't earn any money and so I read English and didn't see earn any money...anyway, in a round about way I've ended up in France and in April 2019 I just happened to see, in passing, an advertisement asking for volunteers to come and dig here..and the rest is history... I've been here every year since.

Rob: And you're a happy digger..

Rob G: I am a happy digger, I am a happy digger in spite of the Breton weather, it's not always easy. It gets very muddy which makes excavating difficult, but yes, yes I am a happy digger.

Rob: Rob Guiner thank you very much for explaining this place to us and best of luck with your excavations.

Rob G: Thank you very much, it was very good to meet you.