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Surveying the Anzac Battlefield

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Between 2009 and 2014 I was fortunate to take part in a tri-nation project at Gallipoli, the Joint Historical and Archaeological Survey (JHAS) of the Ari Burnu (or Anzac) Battlefield. I had the pleasure of becoming intimately familiar with an area of great importance to New Zealand's military history, of associating with experts in various fields and of learning a lot about a place that is an archaeological treasure, with many as yet unexplored ancient sites.

The survey project had its origins in a furore that arose in Australia in 2005 over Turkish attempts to improve roading in the vicinity of Anzac Cove. Ironically, the Turks had been encouraged to make these improvements by the Australian and New Zealand governments because of the numbers of their citizens who were visiting the peninsula. There was an outcry when bones were exposed, not surprisingly because there are bones everywhere in the area, the whole of which is regarded as a cemetery. The upshot of this controversy was agreement by the Turkish and Australian prime ministers, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and John Howard respectively, to a survey of the area to provide a basis for further works. Prime Minister Helen Clark subsequently associated New Zealand with the proposal.

Despite this agreement, there was a long delay before the Turks were willing to act, presumably because of departmental turf battles. It was not till 2009 that action was taken. As General Editor (War History) in the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, I was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to take part; having recently published a guidebook for Gallipoli and been involved in the creation of a New Zealand track on the battlefield, I was already familiar with the area. The New Zealand involvement in the project thereafter was a joint Foreign Affairs and Trade/Culture and Heritage effort. Although roading issues were instrumental in the inter-governmental agreement, from the outset our Turkish colleagues discouraged any association of the project with management issues in the area, such as roading. It was always described as a centenary project, looking to the commemoration in 2015 of the Gallipoli campaign.

The purpose of the survey was to examine in detail one particular part of the Gallipoli battlefield — the so-called Anzac Area, which is today subsumed

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within the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park. At our first planning meeting with our Turkish colleagues it was made very clear that all our activities would be strictly confined to this area, as defined by a map attached to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which formally ended the war between Turkey and the Allies. The creation of the Anzac Area was the result of a seven-year effort on the part of New Zealand and Australia to ensure the special commemorative status of the land on which their troops had fought. New Zealand Prime Minister William Massey set this campaign in motion in 1916.



Figure 1. Ian McGibbon and one of the markers that delineates the Anzac Area as defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

The Anzac Area covers what is best described as ‘old Anzac’, the area held by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) from 25 April to 6 August 1915. After the offensive in August the Anzac enclave, just six square kilometres in extent, was linked up with the much larger area captured by British troops who landed at Suvla Bay. The Anzac Area in fact covers only part of the area in which the ANZAC operated at Gallipoli. From New Zealand’s viewpoint the restriction to this area was significant because the Anzac Area does not encompass the site of most significance to its Gallipoli effort, Chunuk Bair. This caused some problems at our planning meeting in 2009. My efforts to ensure that the survey covered the New Zealand sites at Chunuk Bair and Rhododendron Ridge were met with obdurate refusal by the

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Turks to broaden the scope, a stance that no doubt stemmed from the very bureaucratic approach by the Turkish authorities to heritage matters.

Who did the survey? It is fair to say that the Australian Department of Veterans Affairs was the powerhouse of the project. Australia provided a 7–8 person team led by a retired admiral (Figure 2). It included an archaeological team drawn mainly from the University of Melbourne and headed by Professor Antonio Sagona, an archaeologist with extensive experience in eastern Turkey and Georgia.



Figure 2. Some of the JHAS team above Anzac Cove in 2014. From left: Dr Michelle Negus Cleary, Sarah Mitford, Professor Antonio Sagona, Ersumer Karanfil (in front), Professor Chris Mackie, Dr Ian McGibbon, Dr Jessie Burkett-Ries, Rear-Admiral (rtd) Simon Harrington, Dr Richard Reid, Mehmet Yalcinkaya (Turkish government rep)

Why was there no New Zealand archaeologist input? A New Zealand archaeologist could have been attached to the Sagona team but would not have had a role in practice, other than advice. To be effective New Zealand participation would have required the provision of a team similar to the Melbourne team, with suitable equipment. A New Zealand involvement on this scale would have changed the whole dynamic, requiring New Zealand to provide transportation and accommodation. There was never the funding available for such purposes, and even my own involvement was done on the

cheap because there was no dedicated funding for New Zealand participation in the project. (The two ministries funded my involvement on an alternate basis.) In fact it was always a matter of some bemusement that my participation annually cost less than the business-class air fares of just one of the Australian participants! I was fortunate that the Australians regarded all of us down under participants as an Anzac team, and were generous in allowing me to use their transport and equipment. My presence as an 'outsider' among the Australasians proved amusing to one of the Turkish government representatives, who at one stage likened me to the solitary Bulgarian with a team of Austrians on the previous project she had supervised.

A team from the Onsekiz Mart (18 March) University in Canakkale provided the Turkish component of the survey. Led by Professor Mithat Atabay, an historian, it comprised historians, archaeologists and classicists. The composition changed markedly between the first field session and the next. The archaeologists originally involved, Professors Nurettin Arslan and Turan Takaoglu, were unable to take part in practice, the former because of his heavy workload in a project at Assos (though he did give us a wonderful tour of that site on one of our days off). Another archaeologist, Dr Reyhan Körpe, took their place from the second session. The fact that he spoke very good English was a bonus, but he too was distracted by his involvement in another archaeological project. So no Turkish archaeological team was involved. The first field session also seemed to change Turkish perceptions of the project, perhaps because we went out of our way to make it clear that Ottoman trenches were of as much interest to us as Anzac trenches. Several persons with knowledge of the Ottoman campaign joined us for the second session, including an employee of the Historical Park who, though speaking no English, made a huge contribution to the survey, whether through his extensive knowledge of the battlefield, his ability with a machete in clearing trenches or his general bonhomie.

All archaeological work in Turkey is very closely controlled and this project was no exception. Much form filling preceded every field session. A permit had to be obtained each year, and in the early stages of the project this caused some problems because of the Turkish penchant for approving them very late in the piece, which made planning our travel difficult. Each of us down under participants was issued with a research visa. A government representative was provided and no work on the survey could be conducted until he or she was on site. This generally caused no problems. Officials of the Turkish Ministry for Culture and Tourism, the government representatives came from various places in Turkey. Some were laissez faire, letting us get on with our

work virtually as we liked; one at least was enthusiastic and became very much involved in the field work; and one, the last, from head office in Ankara, was officious and overbearing (though personally courteous) in his interpretation of his role. This latter individual somewhat spoilt the tone of the final field session.

The survey involved five annual field sessions. The first was in October 2010. Because this was well into autumn we had some problems with the weather, with several days of drenching rain. However, the archaeologists, used to maximizing time on site, did not let such conditions deter them (to the historians' surprise!). We spent several days conducting the survey in pouring rain, which certainly caused problems in recording data. To avoid this problem we moved the timing of the second session forward a month, and instead endured much greater heat. Temperatures in September are often in the mid-30s centigrade and down among the valleys in the bush it was often much warmer than that. Each field session was a month long. We Australasians based ourselves at a small motel complex, The Gallipoli Houses, at Kocadere village, which lies just 3 kilometres from Chunuk Bair as the crow flies (but about 15 kilometres by road). This proved admirable for our purposes, with the Australian Department of Veterans Affairs booking out all the rooms for the duration of the session. So we had good facilities for our work, which in the case of the archaeological team went on late into each evening as they cleaned and recorded relics we had brought back from the battlefield.

Our planning session in 2009 provided for the survey to take place initially along the so-called second ridge between Lone Pine and The Nek, an area in which all three countries' troops were engaged in 1915. It is also the area that is perhaps the most vulnerable to any changes to the road system or other development work in the Anzac part of the Gallipoli battlefield. For more than half of this area the road running up to Conkbayiri (Chunuk Bair) passes through what was no man's land with the opposing trenches very close to it on both sides. This somewhat inadequate road is heavily used, as was apparent during our visits. One local inhabitant told us that 2 million people go to the summit of Conkbayiri every year; even if this is an exaggeration, the number of buses trundling up to the summit indicated that the figure might be at least a million.

The permit application specified the objectives as:

- (a) Identify all sites significant to Turkish, Australian, and New Zealand forces during the campaign.

- (b) Locate and record the condition of all visible material of the campaign, including trenches, tunnels, paths, cemeteries and markers.
- (c) Locate and record the condition of all sites of significance where there is no external, visible evidence remaining.
- (d) Identify the position of memorials and war cemeteries in relation to battle sites.
- (e) Correlate the position of sites of historical significance with built structures such as roads and memorials.
- (f) Produce reports and associated material that will identify the historical context, location and condition of all sites of significance.

How did we conduct the survey? I should emphasise the word survey. This was not a dig. Our task was to examine and record what was left on the surface of the battlefield after 100 years. This involved not just the remnants of the trench and tunnel systems - and Anzac is one of the best examples left of these from the First World War - but relics that might be lying on the surface. The process, as it evolved, provided for the Australian historian, the Turkish historians and myself to search the battlefield to find the features or relics that might be recorded. Dubbed the 'scouts' by the archaeologists, we crisscrossed the battlefield as far as possible in the rugged terrain, which prevented a grid being established. Analysis of our movements, recorded digitally, indicated that we had covered the area very intensively. Small flags or ribbons were used to mark anything we found that related to the campaign. Professor Sagona's team followed us painstakingly recording each item, in the same detail as they would a 3000-year-old relic from a dig. The archaeological team used a GPS receiver to record the location of the trenches or relics (Figure 3).

Although we had a general outline of the battlefield from contemporary maps, including a detailed one prepared by a Turkish officer in 1916 following the evacuation - the so-called 'Shevki map' - our procedure was to record what we found, not to use the map to find it, though we historians knew, of course, generally where the trench systems had lain and inevitably focused on areas where we expected to find remnants of the campaign.

During two of the field sessions our team was augmented by two people from Melbourne University who used ground penetrating radar in an attempt to explore underground conditions. The ruggedness of the terrain militated against successful use of this technology, however, and the results were not very good. But several areas, including Lone Pine Cemetery, The Nek and Quinn's Post, were explored. Some evidence of the tunnels that undoubtedly exist in these areas was found by this means.

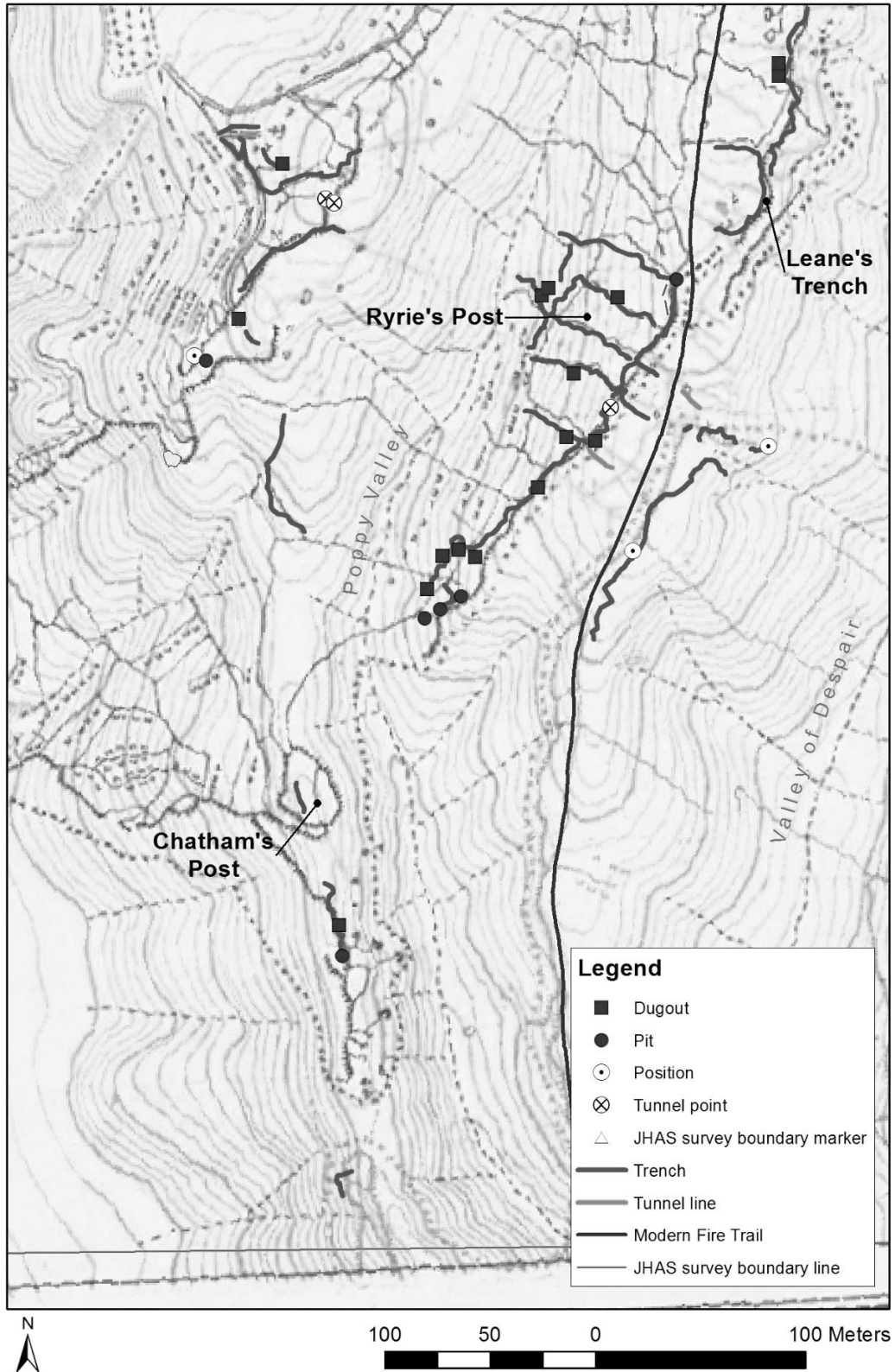
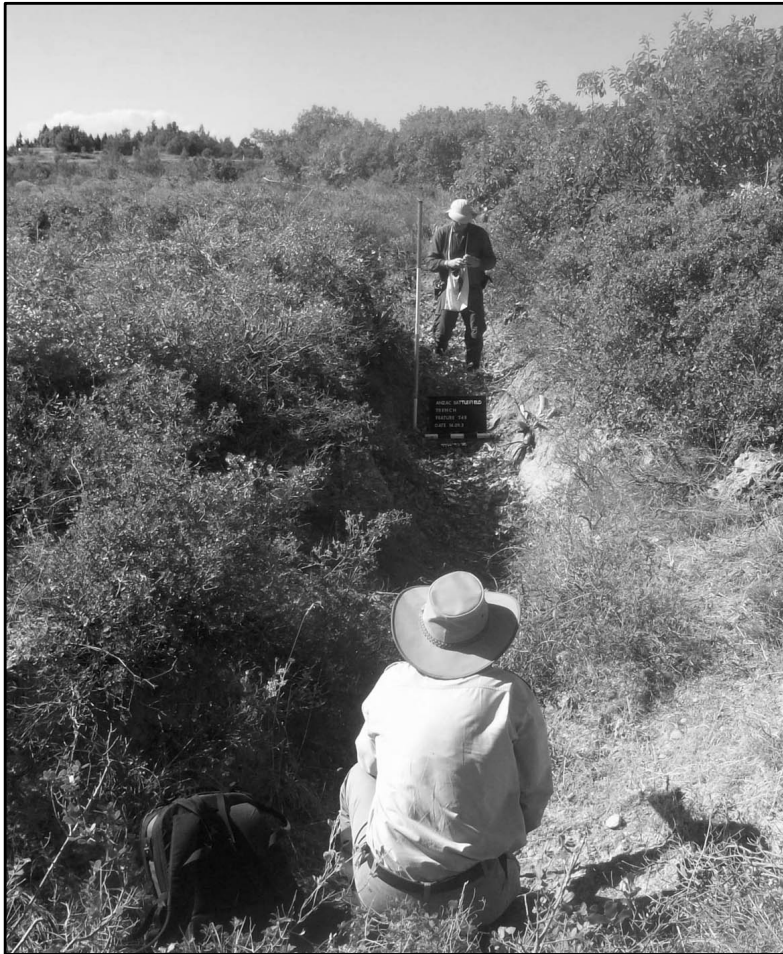


Figure 3. An example of one of the maps produced by the JHAS of the Anzac battlefield. The locations of archaeological features as recorded using GPS are overlain on part of the 1916 'Shevki map.'

Over the six years of the project we traced and recorded more than 16 kilometres of trenches. A lot of sweat was expended because these trenches were often very overgrown. Our Turkish colleagues provided the Australian historian and me with machetes, which greatly increased our ability to clear trenches for the archaeologists. Doing this in 34-degree heat certainly gave us an appreciation of how difficult it must have been on the peninsula in the summer of 1915 — but of course we were well fed and had ample water! We were surprised by how well preserved some parts of the trench system still



are, especially south of Lone Pine and off the tourist tracks. In some places they are still four to five feet deep (Figures 4 & 5).

Figure 4. Professor Sagona looks down a trench just north of the Lone Pine Memorial. The dense vegetation in this area had recently been cleared by the park authorities.

As a tri-nation project we focused as much on the Turkish trenches as on the Anzac ones. Because of weathering on the eastern slopes of hills,

however, we generally found that Turkish trenches were not as well preserved. Erosion had virtually erased them in places. In others manmade developments have also obliterated trenches. This is the case in particular at the position known to the Anzacs in 1915 as the Chessboard on Baby 700. A car park for the Turkish 57th Regiment Memorial now covers most of this area. Nonetheless clearly defined Turkish trenches remain at The Nek and facing Johnston's Jolly and Lone Pine.



Figure 5. A well-preserved section of the Big Sap, a deep communication trench that linked the northern outposts to the main position at Ari Burnu (Antonio Sagona).

Much of the battle was underground after May. Extensive tunnel systems were created in many places. These are revealed today by slumps. The Gallipoli soil is very stable (even if it erodes easily if a water channel is formed). On Rhododendron Ridge (outside our survey area) there are intact tunnel systems, which can be accessed, but we found nothing similar in the survey area. The remnants of 82 tunnels were recorded.



Figure 6. New Zealand Forces button found near Outpost No. 1 in 2014 (Antonio Sagona).

During the five field sessions more than 1200 relics were recorded. These were relatively small objects. Anything larger had long since been removed from the battlefield. Among the material we found was a bayonet, much barbed wire, water bottles with bullet holes in

them, buttons (Figure 6) and ample bullets and cartridge cases and sometimes unfired bullets (Figure 7), belt buckles and many pieces of broken rum jar. The location of each was carefully noted. As the archaeologists told us, patterns are important.



Figure 7. An unfired bullet lying in Monash Valley near Courtney's Post.

All of this information was compiled in archaeological field books. Our task was to provide a report to the three governments, and it was submitted late last year. But we also set about producing a book that makes available not only findings of the survey but also the expertise of people on the survey in a treatment that places the Gallipoli campaign within an historical context. Thus we had an Australian professor of classics as part of the team and he has written about the ancient history of the area, and the wider Gallipoli peninsula. This book, *Anzac Battlefield* (Sagona et al 2016), which was launched in Melbourne on 8 April, includes contributions by people from all three countries, and this tri-nation aspect is perhaps the most important aspect of the survey. Published by Cambridge University Press, it is very different to most Gallipoli literature as it focuses on the landscape: how the battlefield was created, how it was recorded and what is left of it. This study is complemented by a complete digital dataset - the Anzac Gallipoli Archaeological Database (AGAD) - which includes the photographs, maps, and documented features and artefacts from the five field seasons.

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The survey has provided a snapshot of the state of the battlefield as it neared its centenary. Although the project's significance in park management was ruled out, the information provided by the survey now exists, and it is reasonable to assume that it will be taken into account in any changes to the Anzac environment, for example in any proposals to widen the road up to Conkbayiri. The construction of this road in the 1920s certainly affected trenches in this area, but any further work will have much greater impact. In particular the GPS maps will have long-term usefulness. The trenches are steadily eroding and will have disappeared altogether in another 100 years. The GPS traces we have done will be increasingly valuable in these circumstances.

References

Sagona, A., Atabay, M., Mackie, C.J., McGibbon, I., Reid, R. (2016) *ANZAC Battlefield. A Gallipoli Landscape of War and Memory*. Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne.

Dr Ian McGibbon ONZM was formerly General Editor (War History) at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. He was involved in the creation of the New Zealand track at Gallipoli in 2004 and published a guidebook to the New Zealand sites on the battlefield in 2005 (with a revised edition appearing in 2015). His other publications include the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History* (2000) and official histories of New Zealand's involvement in Korea and Vietnam and on the Western Front.

Editor's Note: Cambridge University Press has kindly supplied a copy of *ANZAC Battlefield* for review, and this should appear in the next issue of AINZ

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