Professor Vince Gaffney - Mapping lost worlds transcript

Mapping lost worlds, Professor Vince Gaffney, University of Birmingham

Title: **Professor Vince Gaffney (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMKUmG7tU7c)**
Duration: 3.51 mins

Speaker Names (if given):

S1 Professor Vince Gaffney

S1 I explore lost worlds. At the end of the last ice age when global warming impacted on humans the last time, about 30–40% of the total land mass of Europe was lost to the sea; it remained a completely hidden and mysterious area for archaeologists until, within the last six to seven years when, at Birmingham in the Visual and Spatial Technology Centre here, we managed to crack a way of using oil and gas data to actually map all of the land, the hills, the valleys, the rivers that had been lost at the end of the last ice age. This was an area in which people lived and walked. In fact it was probably one of the most important populated areas within North West Europe at that time but it was lost to memory for the best part of 8,000 years, and we re-discovered it. There are areas which are even larger that remain to be explored. For instance, in South East Asia an area almost the size of India was lost as a result of global warming and rising sea levels, and now that we know how to deal with these areas and how to map them, we can start to explore these vast regions as well – and it's quite likely that some of the most important and key events in early human history may well be linked to these areas, and up till now we simply haven't been able to do anything with them. They've largely been ignored but now we're going to be able to explore them and to let them take their place in history.

What impact does my work have? Well, I think in Birmingham the most important thing is it actually makes us a world centre for this sort of research. Nowhere else in the world has this work been carried out at the scale at which we work. When you do research– even when it's frankly as groundbreaking as this project has been– there's rather the assumption that it's an area in which perhaps only postgrads or staff or postdoctoral researchers are likely to engage. However, that's not really the truth. This information and the technologies rapidly are cascaded down to undergraduate teaching, and today we use the results from research to inform our own undergraduates – and as a consequence, they're better informed and they're more likely to engage with current research more rapidly. Students in the future will be creating vast models in which humans will be interacting with the environment, avatars will be moving across these surfaces, we may start to see how individual Mesolithic tribes operated within this landscape and then to start to use that model data to explore the landscape in reality. At the moment if you try to find traces of human activity, it would just be a needle in a haystack. However, if we've got the landscape – and if we start to model humans themselves in that landscape – we will be able to go to the North Sea and prospect for evidence with some confidence of success – and that's, I think, where we will be in ten years.

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