



Mesolithic flint scatter and carved stone

An intensive series of archaeological investigations, culminating in large scale excavations, was carried out before the construction of Great Western Park - to ensure that all of the archaeological evidence in the area was recorded and preserved. This is one of eight information boards which summarise the results of these investigations.

HUNTER-GATHERERS IN DIDCOT

At the height of the Ice Age, Britain was too cold to be inhabited by human populations. As the climate warmed and the ice sheets retreated around 12,000 years ago, however, Britain was recolonised. A 10,000 year old scatter of flint tools found in Great Western Park provides the earliest evidence for the human occupation of Didcot.



Tools of flint

The first inhabitants of Didcot were hunter-gatherers - farming was not introduced to Britain for another 4000 years (see Board 1).

The flint tools include tiny elements known as microliths, which would have been fixed with resin from trees to wooden shafts to make arrowheads. The worked flint also includes tools of other kinds - scrapers, awls and blades - showing that a wide range of tasks were carried out. Most of the flint, however, consists of waste from the production of tools. This waste shows that axes were made on the site - although none were left there.



Mesolithic adze and microliths



Reconstruction of the Mesolithic camp in Great Western Park

Moving around

Obtaining enough to eat from hunting and gathering in this wooded landscape would have required detailed knowledge of when and where resources were likely to be found. Hunter-gatherers are often very mobile - moving around the landscape to exploit resources as they became available. The scatter at Didcot is likely to be only one of many camps that were used by Didcot's first inhabitants. The range of tools suggests that it may have been a base camp, occupied by one or more families, from which smaller groups set out across the landscape to hunt, gather plants, and collect flint and other resources.

Mesolithic incised stone



Fire and woodland

As the climate warmed the countryside became covered in increasingly dense woodland - mostly of pine and hazel, although oak and elm also were beginning to appear. The woodland may have made hunting difficult. Charred hazel nutshells found with the flint show, however, that the woodland also provided food. It is likely that many other plants, which have left no trace, were also eaten. And the hunter-gatherers may well have used fire to make clearances - which made good spots for hunting, and encouraged species such as hazel to grow.



A very rare find

Although it might seem that this mobile lifestyle, dependent upon wild plants and animals, would be arduous and insecure, modern-day hunter-gatherers show that it can provide a secure living, sometimes involving only a few hours work a day.

A very rare find from Didcot might give us a glimpse of some of the activities which went beyond the quest for food. The find is a small stone onto which a roughly rectangular motif - with a diagonal across the middle - has been engraved. Although the engraving is rather crude, any finds from this period other than flint tools and food remains are extremely rare. And engraved motifs of this kind are almost unknown. The significance of the motif is unknown, but it was probably a religious or clan symbol rather than an idle doodle.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

ROMAN
CONQUEST OF
BRITAIN

ANGLO-SAXON
OCCUPATION

NORMAN
CONQUEST

MEDIEVAL
PERIOD

INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION

4000BC

2500BC

900BC

43AD

450AD

1066AD

1800AD