The Raunds Area Project
A Neolithic and Bronze Age Landscape in Northamptonshire
The Raunds Area Project
A Neolithic and Bronze Age Landscape in Northamptonshire
Volume 2 Supplementary Studies

Edited by Jan Harding and Frances Healy


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Edited by Frances Healy
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Further illustrations by: Lesley Collett, Judith Dobie,
  Mick Gibbons, David Goodger, Eddie Lyons,
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Frontispiece A reconstruction by Judith Dobie of the primary features of the
Long Barrow. The opium poppies in the foreground were represented by
seeds preserved in the waterlogged fills of the ditches that flanked the mound
subsequently built over these features.
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List of contributors

Aidan Allen: Formerly of English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Paul Backhouse BA: Graphics Manager, Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

Tony Baker: Formerly of the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit

Polydora Baker, BA, PhD: English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Torben Bjarke Ballin, CandPhil, PhD, FSA Scot, MIFA: Lithic Research, Banknock Cottage, Denny, Stirlingshire FK6 5NA

Alistair Barclay, BSc, PhD: Wessex Archaeology, Portmay House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury SP4 6EB

Alex Bayliss, BA: Scientific Dating Co-ordinator, English Heritage, 1 Waterhouse Square, 138–42 Holborn, London EC1N 2ST

Anthony Beck, BA, PhD: Faculty of Engineering, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT

Frances Blore, BTech Hons: 12 Blende Road, Llandeilo SA19 6NE

Angela Boyle, MA(Hons), MA: Burial Archaeologist, 27 Inverkip Drive, Shotts, North Lanarkshire ML7 4DF

Philippa Bradley, BA, Dip Post-ex, MPhil, AIFA: Wessex Archaeology, Portmay House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury SP4 6EB

Gill Campbell BSc, MSc: English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Andy Chapman, BSc: Northamptonshire Archaeology, Northamptonshire County Council, 2 Bolton House, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton NN4 9BE

Lesley Collett: Formerly of Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

Gordon T Cook, BSc, PhD: Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, Rankine Avenue, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 OQF

Mark Copley, BSc, MSc, PhD: Formerly of the Organic Geochemistry Unit, Biogeochemistry Research Centre, School of Chemistry, University of Bristol, Cantock’s Close, Bristol BS8 1TS

Anna Cselik, BSc: Formerly of the Archaeological Conservation Section, Ancient Monuments LaboratoryVicky Crosby BA, PhD: English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Mary Davis, BA, Dip Arch Con: Department of Archaeology and Numismatics, National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP

Simon J M Davis, BSc, Ph D: Instituto Português de Arqueologia, Avenida da Índia 136, P-1300–300 Lisboa, Portugal

Judith Dobie: Graphic Artist, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Stephanie N Dudd, BSc, PhD: Formerly of the Organic Geochemistry Unit, Biogeochemistry Research Centre, School of Chemistry, University of Bristol, Cantock’s Close, Bristol BS8 1TS

xix
The late Glynis Edwards, BA, Dip Cons

Chris Evans BA: Graphic Artist, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Richard P Evershed, BSc, PhD: Professor in Biogeochemistry, Organic Geochemistry Unit, Biogeochemistry Research Centre, School of Chemistry, University of Bristol, Cantock’s Close, Bristol, BS8 ITS

Andrew Foxon MA, AMA, PhD, FSA Scot: 39 Droghadfaule Road, Port Erin, Isle of Man IM9 6EN

Mick Gibbons: Graphic Artist, formerly of English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB

David Goodger: Graphic Artist, formerly of English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB

Roger Grace, BA, PhD: Computer Officer, Department of Psychology, University of Essex

Jan Harding BA, PhD: Senior Lecturer, School of Historical Studies, Armstrong Building, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU

Frances Healy, BSc(Econ), Dip Archaeol, PhD, FSA, FSA Scot, MIFA: 20 The Green, Charlbury, Oxon OX7 3QA

Janet Henderson: Formerly of English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB

Carl Heron, BTech, PhD: Professor of Archaeological Sciences, Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD7 1DP

Jon Humble BA, MA: Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage, 44 Derngate, Northampton NN1 1UH

Claire E Jones, BA: Archaeological Archives Curator, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Ian Kinnes, BA, PhD, FSA: Formerly of the Department of Prehistory and Early Europe, British Museum

Eddie Lyons: Graphic Artist, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Richard I Macphail, BSc, MSc, PhD: Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

Simon Mays: English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Professor F Gerald McCormac, BSc, PhD: Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA

Liz Muldowney, BA, MA, formerly of English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Stuart Needham BA, PhD, FSA, formerly of the Department of Prehistory and Europe, British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG

Karen Nichols: Senior Graphic Artist, Wessex Archaeology, Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury SP4 6EB

Andrew Payne, BSc: Archaeometry Branch, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Dominic Powlesland, BA: The Landscape Research Centre, Bridge Barn, Yedingham, Malton, North Yorkshire YO17 8SL

Christopher Bronk Ramsey, BSc, PhD: Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, University of Oxford, 6 Keble Road, Oxford OX1 3QJ

Stéphane Rault, BA: Formerly of the Department of Archaeology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU

Mark Robinson, MA, Ph D, FSA: Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW

The late Ian A G Shepherd, MA

Maisie Taylor, BA, Cert Ed, FSA, MIFA: Flag Fen Bronze Age Centre, The Droveway, Northey Road, Peterborough PE6 7QF

David Tomalin, AMA, PhD, FSA: Department of Archaeology, Avenue Campus, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 2BF

John Vallender: Graphics Manager, English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD

Angela Wardle, BA, PhD: Museum of London Specialist Services, Mortimer Wheeler House, Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED

Robert Whiteman: Formerly of Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

Patricia Wiltshire: Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

David F Williams, PhD, FSA: Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Dave Windell: Formerly of Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit

Jo Woodiwiss: Formerly of Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit

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Preface

The Raunds Area Project was one of the major fieldwork initiatives of the 1980s. Although prompted by the need for large-scale rescue excavations, it broke new ground by linking these to an integrated investigation of local landscape history, which incorporated fieldwalking, earthwork and geophysical survey, environmental investigations and documentary research. Partnership between English Heritage and the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit brought the benefits of complementary expertise and resources. The initial emphasis of the project was on landscape development from the late Iron Age onwards, in keeping with what was then known of the archaeology. But the progressive discovery of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments concealed and preserved beneath a blanket of alluvium covering the floor of the Nene valley transformed perceptions of the area’s prehistory. It is this pre-Iron Age evidence that is presented here.

Human presence at Raunds spans the transition from the hunter gatherer lifeways of the 5th millennium BC to the livestock-rearing and monument-building of the early 4th millennium. Importantly, the earliest monuments were, with one exception, not the long barrows and causewayed enclosures already well known from the same period. Rather, they were of diverse form, unimposing, and almost devoid of human remains, deliberately placed artefacts, or animal remains. This emphasises the extent to which valley-floor locations can expand our understanding of the period, and the extent to which contemporary use of different topographies may have been complementary rather than uniform. Much later, at the turn of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, the evidence highlights the complexity of funerary practice and associated activities. Raunds also makes a unique contribution to the understanding of early Bronze Age society and its funerary rites, in the form of a barrow mound piled high with the skulls of almost two hundred cattle.

This publication brings these and many other threads of evidence together. It also explores one of the directions that archaeological publication can now take, as it both synthesises a large body of evidence and makes it accessible in digital form, putting the reader in a position to analyse and reinterpret the data.
Acknowledgements

Fieldwork by the Central Excavation Unit was funded entirely by English Heritage; fieldwork by the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit was jointly funded by Northamptonshire County Council (Planning and Transportation Department), English Heritage, the Manpower Services Commission and the Training Commission. Fieldwork by the Oxford Archaeological Unit was funded by ARC, as were the initial site narrative and assessment. With this exception, post-excavation has been entirely funded by English Heritage, whose long-term support for the project is gratefully acknowledged.

The principal excavators were Andy Chapman, Tony Baker, Phil Voice, Dave Windell and Jo Woodiwiss (West Cotton); Claire Halpin (Irthlingborough); David Neal (Stanwick); John Moore, Mark R Roberts and Graham Keevill (Redlands Farm); and Frances Blore (Stanwick 1991–2). They and their teams worked hard and long, often in difficult circumstances, to extract and record the information that has proved such a rich resource. A particular mention must be made of Dave Windell, who was the director of the West Cotton excavations throughout the fieldwork stage and was therefore responsible for keeping the excavations and the team on track, and for dealing with the complexities of the funding and politics inevitably associated with such a complex operation. Assistance with machinery and co-operation was provided by ARC Ltd (now Hanson), and many local organisations, including Raunds Town Council and Wellington Tannery, also provided assistance. Thanks are also due to the residents of Raunds and Stanwick, who showed interest and good will towards both the work and the excavators.

In post-excavation, Jon Humble, who led the project from 1991 to 1997, pushed the analysis of the Irthlingborough archive forward, infusing enthusiasm and direction into what must at times have seemed endless tasks. He has subsequently been unfailingly helpful and supportive. His assistants were initially Aidan Allan and subsequently Stéphane Rault, who accomplished the project’s move to Newcastle, providing much-needed knowledge and continuity. In Newcastle, Denise Wilson, Glyn Goodrick and the entire staff of the Department of Archaeology (now part of the School of Historical Studies) have provided practical support.

The form and content of this publication owe much to Tim Williams. Alex Gibson, who monitored the publication project, has provided positive and practical support. His capacity for cutting confidently and unsentimentally through problems has been an invaluable asset.

Assembling the results of parts of a larger project, itself undertaken by three separate organisations, had inherent problems, which could not have been overcome without a generous and unflagging flow of help and information from Andy Chapman and Steve Parry of Northamptonshire Archaeology; Vicky Crosby, Liz Muldowney, Brian Attewell and Ed McSloy of English Heritage; Angela Boyle, Philippa Bradley and Alistair Barclay of Oxford Archaeology; and Claire Halpin of Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust.

The data became manageable thanks to its integration into a single GIS-ready digital archive by Dominic Powlesland and Anthony Beck, who have given unstintingly of their time and patience in overcoming problems and making it possible to examine the area and its landscape in ways that would otherwise have been impossible.

Alex Bayliss has provided the chronological framework that underpins and shapes the whole work.

All the specialist contributors have added depth and perspective to the narrative. We appreciate the endurance of those who have stayed with the project for many years: Mark Robinson from the first, David Tomalin from 1986, and Gill Campbell from 1988. The labour of recording a lithic assemblage of over 20,000 pieces fell largely to Peter Makey. Torben Bjarke Ballin rose to the challenge of writing it up.

The staff of English Heritage’s Graphics Office have also been involved throughout, John Vallender having produced some of the first and last illustrations to be completed. In his role as Graphics Manager he has grappled successfully with the integration of graphics of varying vintage and in varying media and with source material and briefs of varying quality, as well as managing to programme a large body of work in the face of many conflicting demands on the Office’s time. The skill, good humour, patience and forbearance of the entire Graphics Office are wholeheartedly acknowledged.

The project could not have been placed in its surrounding landscape had not Glenn Foard, Christine Addison and Susan Freebrey of Northamptonshire Heritage and Ben Robinson of Peterborough City Council provided SMR data and support and given generously of their time in problem-solving and question-answering. It was particularly welcome that Bob Bewley of English Heritage agreed to reschedule the National Mapping Programme for Northamptonshire to prioritise the Raunds study area. Alison Deegan of the NMP has since been generous with advice and information, and Jacqueline Minchinton, Records and Resources Management Officer of Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, has kindly provided information about excavations by Dr Robb at Redlands Farm.

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The Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum have generously provided the photographs of bracers attributed to petrological group VI used in Panel 4.2 and in SS3.7.1 and the University of Cambridge Collection of Air Photographs has provided the photograph reproduced as Figure 3.63.

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In the course of the Raunds Area Project and subsequent excavations some 3.5km of the floor of the Nene valley were investigated, including more than 20 Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments, most of them previously obscured by later archaeology and by Saxon and early medieval alluvium. The record begins with a slight human presence in the early Holocene, which became progressively more marked. By around 5000 Cal BC, one spot at the confluence of the Nene and a tributary had long been a regular stopping-place, where flint was knapped and tools suitable for a whole range of domestic tasks were discarded once they were blunted and finished with. Beyond this site, there was intermittent activity all along the well-wooded valley.

Soon after 4000 Cal BC Neolithic artefacts began to be discarded at the same confluence and, within a couple of hundred years, a landmark had been built there – the Long Mound, about 135 metres long, 18 metres wide and perhaps 1.5 metres high. Its scale means that its construction could have been a communal event, bringing together perhaps 50 or a 100 people. Indeed, the pattern of stakeholes beneath it suggests that it was divided into hurdle-defined compartments, each of which could have been built by a different group. It was built of turf, cut from an area of something like 100m by 100m, which can only have been the product of grazing. In other words, livestock were being kept by about 3800 Cal BC, and had already begun to alter the vegetation. Three other monuments, the Long Barrow, the north part of the Turf Mound, and the Avenue, were also built in the first half of the 4th millennium.

The plants, insects and pollen from waterlogged bottoms of the Long Barrow ditches indicated that it stood in a lightly grazed clearing in recent cleared woodland. Opium poppy seeds expand the range of ultimately near eastern plant species introduced to Britain in the 4th millennium. Also in the ditch were clusters of woodchips and offcuts from the construction of the revetment. The flint axehead used to do the job had been left at the barrow, its battered and damaged cutting edge precisely fitting some of the cutmarks on the wood. In the narrower, lower end of the barrow was a burial chamber, built of small limestone slabs, in which were weathered fragments of a single human long bone.

By 3000 Cal BC a chain of five or six diverse monuments stretched along the river bank (the Long Mound, the Long Enclosure, the Turf Mound, the Causewayed Ring Ditch, the Avenue, perhaps the Southern Enclosure, and the Long Barrow). There is little sign that people lived here, rather that they lived nearby, possibly on the valley sides, pasturing their herds among the monuments and visiting them more formally when occasion demanded. For the next 500 years or more, both people and their animals seem to have come to the valley bottom less often. Trees grew on and around some of the monuments; late Neolithic artefacts were scarce; and the only site definitely dated to this period was the Riverside Structure, a timber platform at the edge of a channel of the Nene, into an upper layer of which cattle bones and a couple of human long bones were either washed by the river or deliberately deposited. The focus of ceremonial activity may have shifted to a little-understood monument, the Cotton ‘Henge’, which survives as two concentric ditches on the occupied valley side.

By about 2200 Cal BC the valley was more heavily grazed and less wooded than ever before. At this stage, monumentbuilding accelerated. Except for the Segmented Ditch Circle, the new monuments were round barrows – at least 20 in all, nine of which were excavated. Two of them covered post- and stake settings. Unlike the earlier monuments, almost all contained burials, some of them richly furnished. The most outstanding is a male inhumation in Barrow 1, accompanied by numerous artefacts, some of them exotic, covered first by a limestone cairn, and then by a heap of about 200 cattle skulls, which were already defleshed when brought to the grave. The barrows were progressively enlarged, as cremation gradually became the normal burial rite. The valley bottom remained uninhabited, while settlement on the valley sides became more marked and activity began to extend onto the surrounding Boulder Clay plateau. Cremations continued to be buried in and around the mounds down to about 1000 Cal BC, by which time two overlapping systems of paddocks and droveways had been laid out. The terrace began to be settled when these had gone out of use, in the early 1st millennium Cal BC.
Au cours du projet d’étude de la région de Raunds, et des excavations qui ont suivi, on a examiné quelques 3,5 km du fond de la vallée de la Nene, y compris plus de vingt monuments, datant du néolithique et de l’âge du bronze, dont la plupart était demeurée jusque là dissimulée par une archéologie postérieure et des alluvions datant de la période saxonne et du début du Moyen-Âge. Les premiers indices consistent en une légère présence humaine au début de l’Holocène, qui s’est progressivement accentuée. Dès environ 5000 ans cal av. J.-C., on avait construit un site remarquable, le ‘Long Mound’ (Long Tertre), d’environ 135 mètres de long sur 18 mètres de large et peut-être 1,5 mètres de haut. Ses dimensions signifient qu’il se pourrait qu’il soit le résultat d’un travail collectif, rassemblant peut-être cinquante ou cent personnes. En fait, la disposition des trous de pieux que l’on a trouvés en-dessous, donne à penser qu’il était divisé en compartiments, délimités par des claires, il se pourrait que chacun de ceux-ci ait été construit par un groupe différent. L’ouvrage était construit de mottes de gazon, levées pour un endroit, à la confluence de la Nene et d’un de ses affluents, constituait depuis longtemps une halte régulière, où on débitait le silex et où on rejetait des outils, propres à toute une variété de tâches domestiques, une fois qu’ils étaient émoussés et qu’on en avait fini avec eux.

A l’extérieur de ce site, il y avait des signes d’activité interminable, tout au long de cette vallée bien boisée. Peu après 4000 ans cal av. J.-C. des objets manufacturés néolithiques commencèrent à être rejetés à cette même confluence et, en l’espace de quelques centaines d’années, on y avait construit un site remarquable, le ‘Long Mound’ (Long Tertre), d’environ 135 mètres de long sur 18 mètres de large et peut-être 1,5 mètres de haut. Ses dimensions signifient qu’il se pourrait qu’il soit le résultat d’un travail collectif, rassemblant peut-être cinquante ou cent personnes. En fait, la disposition des trous de pieux que l’on a trouvés en-dessous, donne à penser qu’il était divisé en compartiments, délimités par des claires, il se pourrait que chacun de ceux-ci ait été construit par un groupe différent. L’ouvrage était construit de mottes de gazon, levées sur une aire d’environ 100 m. sur 100 m. qui ne pouvait être autre chose que le résultat de pâturage. En d’autres termes, on élevait du bétail vers environ 3800 ans cal av. J.-C., et les animaux avaient déjà commencé à modifier la végétation.

Contrairement aux monuments plus anciens, presque tous ces tumulus couvraient des emplacements à poteaux et pieux. Les plus remarquables étaient ‘Long Barrow’ (Long Tumulus), la partie nord du ‘Turf Mound’ (Tête à Mottes de Gazon) et l’‘Avenue’, furent également construits dans la première moitié du 4ème millénaire.

Les plantes, les insectes et le pollen provenant des fonds imbibis d’eau des fossés du ‘Long Mound’ indiquaient qu’il se dressait dans une clairière légèrement pâturée dans un bois récemment dégagé. Des graines de pavots à opium viennent augmenter la gamme d’espèces de plantes, originaires du Proche-Orient, introduites en Grande-Bretagne au 4ème millénaire. On trouvait également dans le fossé des amas de copeaux et de morceaux de bois rejetés, provenant de la construction du revêtement. La tête de hache en silex utilisée pour accomplir cette tâche avait été laissée sur place, son côté tranchant, bossé et endommagé, correspondant exactement à certaines des traces de coupure sur le bois. À l’extrémité plus étroite et plus basse du tertre se trouvait une chambre funéraire, construite en petites dalles de calcaire, dans laquelle on a découvert des fragments, qui avaient été exposés aux éléments, d’un seul os long humain.

Dès 3000 ans cal av. J.-C. une chaîne de cinq ou six monuments différents s’étendait le long de la rive (le ‘Long Mound’, le ‘Long Enclosure’, le ‘Turf Mound’, le ‘Causewayed Ring Ditch’, l’‘Avenue’, et peut-être le ‘Southern Enclosure’ et le ‘Long Barrow’). Il n’existe que très peu de témoignages de la présence de populations à cet endroit, il est plus probable qu’elles habitaient à proximité, peut-être sur les versants de la vallée, faisant paître leurs troupeaux parmi les monuments et s’y rendant plus cérémonieusement quand les circonstances l’exigeaient. Pendant les cinq cents années qui ont suivi, voire plus, il semble que populations et animaux soient tous deux venus moins souvent au fond de la vallée. Des arbres pousèrent sur et autour de certains des monuments; les objets manufacturés de la fin du néolithique étaient rares, et le seul site qui date, sans aucun doute, de cette période était la Riverside Structure (Structure de Bord de Rivière), une plateforme en bois, au bord d’un chenal de la Nene, dans une couche supérieure de laquelle furent apportés par la rivière, ou déposés délibérément, des ossements de bétail et une paire d’os longs humains. Il se peut que le foyer des activités cérémonielles se soit déplacé vers un monument mal compris, le Cotton ‘Henge’, qui a survécu sous la forme de deux fossés concentriques sur le versant occupé de la vallée.

Dès environ 2200 ans cal av. J.-C. la vallée était plus intensément pâturée et moins boisée qu’à aucune autre période de son histoire. À ce stade, la construction de monuments s’accéléra. Mis à part le ‘Segmented Ditch Circle’ (Cercle à Fossé Interrompu), les nouveaux monuments consistaient en tumulus ronds, – au moins vingt – dont neuf furent excavés. Deux d’entre ces tumulus couvraient des emplacements à poteaux et pieux. Contrairement aux monuments plus anciens, presque tous contenaient des sépultures, dont certaines étaient accompagnées d’un riche mobilier. La plus remarquable était une sépulture mâle dans le ‘Barrow 1’, accompagnée de nombreux objets, certains exotiques, recouverte d’abord d’un cairn calcaire, puis d’un tas d’environ deux cents crânes de bétail, qui avaient été décharnés avant d’être apportés sur la tombe. Les tumulus furent progressivement agrandis, au fur et à mesure que l’incinération devenait le rite funéraire normal. Le fond de la vallée resta inhabité, tandis que l’occupation des flancs de la vallée devenait plus marquée et que l’activité commençait à déborder sur le plateau de Boulder Clay. On continua à enterrer les incinérations dans et autour des terres jusqu’à environ 1000 ans cal av. J.-C., date à laquelle deux systèmes concomitants d’enclos à animaux et de chemins de passage de bétail avaient éte mis en place. La terrasse commença à être occupée quand ceux-ci furent devenus caducs, au début du 1er millénaire av. J.-C..<br><br>Traduction: Annie Pritchard
Zusammnfassung

Im Zuge des Raunds Area Projekts und der damit verbundenen Ausgrabungsarbeiten wurden an die 3,5 km der Bodenfläche des Nene-Tales untersucht. Dazu gehörten auch mehr als 20 Grabmäler aus Neolithikum und Bronzezeit, von denen die meisten in der Zwischenzeit durch spätere archäologische Arbeiten und durch sächsische und mittelalterliche Ablagerungen verdeckt worden waren. Die Aufzeichnungen beginnen mit einer spärlichen menschlichen Präsenz im frühen Holozän, die allmählich zunahm. Um etwa 5.000 v. Chr. hatte sich eine Stelle am Zusammenlauf von Nene und einem Nebenfluss zu einer regelmäßigen Lagerstätte entwickelt, wo Feuerstein gebrochen und Werkzeuge für die verschiedensten häuslichen Zwecke weggeworfen wurden, nachdem sie stumpf und unbrauchbar geworden waren. Auch über diese Stelle hinaus sind über die gesamte Länge des bewaldeten Tales hin immer wieder Nachweise menschlicher Aktivität zu finden.

Bald nach 4.000 v. Chr. wurden am selben Zusammenfluss neolithische Artefakte entsorgt und es entstand im Lauf einiger Jahrhunderte eine Wall-Grab-Anlage, Long Mound genannt, mit einer Länge von ca. 135 Metern, einer Breite von 18 Metern und einer Höhe von etwa 1,5 Metern. Aufgrund ihrer Größe ist anzunehmen, dass es sich dabei um ein Gemeinschaftsprojekt gehandelt hat, an dem an die fünfhundert bis hundert Menschen beteiligt waren. Die tiefliegenden Pfahlöcher lassen darauf schließen, dass der Wall-Grab in durch Flechtwerk getrennte Abteilungen unterteilt war, von denen eine jede möglicherweise von einer anderen Gruppe gebaut worden war. Errichtet wurde der Wall-Grab auf einer Rasenfläche, die aus einem etwa 100m x 100m großen Areal geschnitten wurde, bei dem es sich zweifelsohne um Weideland gehandelt haben muss. Das bedeutet in anderen Worten, dass die Menschen um 3.800 v. Chr. bereits Vieh gehalten haben, das zu diesem Zeitpunkt begonnen hatte, die Vegetation zu verändern. Drei weitere Grabmäler, Long Barrow, der nördliche Teil von Turf Mound und Avenue, wurden ebenfalls in der ersten Hälfte des vierten Jahrtausends errichtet.


Übersetzung: Ingrid Price-Gschlössl
für First Edition Translations Ltd, Cambridge
SS1.1 Irthlingborough Island. Key to trench plans
SS1.2 Irthlingborough Island. Trenches in north-west
SS1.3 Irthlingborough Island. Trenches in north-east
A NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE LANDSCAPE IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

SS1.4 Irthlingborough Island. Trenches in south-west
SS1.5 Irthlingborough Island. Trenches in south-east
A note on radiocarbon dates

Simple calibrations, which relate the radiocarbon measurements directly to the calendrical time scale, have been calculated using the dataset published by Stuiver et al (1998) and the computer program Oxcal version 3.5 (Bronk Ramsey 1995; 1998; forthcoming). The calibrated date ranges cited in normal type have been calculated according to maximum intercept method of Stuiver and Reimer (1986). They are quoted at 95% confidence in the form recommended by Mook (1986), with end points rounded outwards to ten years. The estimated date ranges quoted in italics are derived from the mathematical modelling of the archaeological chronology and are posterior density estimates (SS6). Laboratory numbers are quoted in italics where they refer to posterior density estimates, and in normal type where they refer to samples or to simple calibrated date ranges. Weighted means have been taken from replicate measurements before calibration (Ward and Wilson 1978).

Note sur la datation a radiocarbone


Anmerkungen zur Radiocarbondatierung
