

## **An Archaeological Resource Assessment of the Mesolithic in Lincolnshire (c.9,000-6,000)**

*Steven Membery*

Note: For copyright reasons the figures are currently omitted from the web version of this paper. It is hoped to include them in future versions.

### **Introduction**

The period described within this section encompasses the end of the Devensian and the early Flandrian epoch. For the early phase of this period Britain represented the extreme west of the European landmass. Sea level changes c.9000BC breached the land bridge and peat formation may have occurred within some low lying areas although extensive peat coverage probably took place later in the Bronze Age.

### **Evidence**

Less than one hundred Mesolithic sites are recorded on the SMR within the county, the majority of which represent lithic scatters rather than any true primary *in situ* material. Excavations rarely reveal any features associated with occupation in this period. An example of this is at Mexican Bridge, Midville where the area of a concentration of lithics recorded during fieldwalking was trenched. No features were recorded despite evidence for the presence of an intact early prehistoric landsurface. Therefore, much of the evidence has been recorded by field survey and collection of material from topsoil within excavations. There are exceptions to this with sites such as Willoughton and Sheffield's Hill producing faunal and environmental evidence. West Keal also produced diagnostic implements considered to compare with those at Star Carr (May 1976). However, it is expected that most sites of this period will be transitory surface scatters rather than Star Carr comparable. Further sites are also known from Ancaster and Wroxly. The Limestone and Chalk ridges on which all of the above sites are located seem to have been the focus of activity within the county. Further a preference for sandy sites has been noted such as Sudbrook, Scunthorpe and West Keal. (T. Lane pers. comm.). Grouping of sites is either indicative of concentrated activity or possibly a result of selective survey. Intense fieldwalking on the Fen edge has not changed the overall patterning to any great extent although it has increased the quantity of sites on lower lying areas despite inundation from the Wash burying Mesolithic landscapes in up to 10m of sediments (Hayes and Lane 1992). Sites have been recorded at Morten Fen and Market Deeping in south Lincolnshire and further north the Stickney ridge appears to have been a focus of activity with widespread presence noted along the northern fen-edge (2nd Fenland Survey). Lithic scatters also occur on sand isles at Spilsby, Dogdyke and East and West Keal.

Risby Warren is described as a Mesolithic occupation site that also supported a Neolithic and Beaker period settlement (SMR entry). Artefacts were recovered from blown sand layers rather than features but this site retains its importance because of its multi-period character. The inter-site investigation of the late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic transition is an area lacking throughout the county and does not appear to be confined to upland sites. For example the Mesolithic and Neolithic are both represented at Dogdyke. Indeed French (1992) has inferred that Fen edge sites from this period also exhibit this transitional character and the SMR appears to confirm this on a county scale as it shows similar distribution of Mesolithic and Neolithic find spots. This idea supports May's (1976) suggestion that later Mesolithic picks recovered from Willoughton, Brigg, Scawby and tranche axeheads from Normanby, and South Rauceby were utilised for forest clearance.

### **Conclusion**

Although evidence for Mesolithic exploitation of the county is mainly confined to higher ground the Fenland Survey has shown the potential for preserved sites within areas of later marine or freshwater inundations. The areas particularly high in potential for new information concerning this period are the Fen edge and possibly coastal areas as well as alluviated river valleys. The spread of sites and lack of large assemblages may be describing a transitory population utilising seasonal resources. Despite the lack of excavation of well-preserved sites the material recovered has potential for a greater understanding of hunter-gatherer activity. The mobility of these groups across the landscape means that inter-site analysis is crucial to the study of both the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. Lithic analysis, typological studies and scientific dating are needed to ensure tighter dating into more defined

chronologies. Also supra-county studies must take place in order to recognise movement zones across the east Midland region. The different environments utilised by people need to be understood in terms of seasonality and cultural connections across a wider landscape than this county. One source of data may be focusing on river corridors in order to understand migratory habits in order to answer questions concerning economics and seasonality. Dating of lithics is crucial to the understanding of this period and despite the apparent prevalence for earlier Mesolithic artefacts in the north of the county (Axholme for example) little is known about the true distribution of early and late assemblages. Lithic studies need to understand provenancing of materials in order to understand the utilisation of different geologies. The patterning of sites also requires investigation in conjunction with geological surveys in order to categorise any correlation which have been noted in other counties (G. Philips pers. com.). Kettle-hole data is also available for the Lincolnshire Marsh which offers potential for a greater understanding of long term change within the Holocene and studies such as the Humber Wetlands Project may well add significantly to the understanding of the north of the county. Particular areas within the county have the potential to produce further evidence and specific areas should be highlighted, such as the Bain valley, which can aid interpretation of this period.

#### **Future Work**

Better dating sequences are required.

A greater understanding of geological contexts is required.

SSSI status may be required for sites with high potential palaeoenvironmental data.

Tighter methodologies are required for the recording of sites.

An SMR review is possible for this period which centralises all available data into a tighter chronological, geological and environmental database.

#### **Selected Bibliography**

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