

## Mesolithic Project – Farndale 2009

### Introduction

After a long period of difficulty in obtaining statutory permissions to carry out fieldwork on the sites chosen for this year's project, evaluation finally went ahead on a site at Farndale between 20 July and 31 July. Over the two weeks 16 volunteers contributed a total of 86 days, supervised by three staff (R Grahame (Project Officer), A Goode (Field Officer, D Errickson (Site Assistant)). The project was once again plagued by poor weather, and of the 10 working days available a total of 2 were lost to bad weather, the high point being a heavy and sustained hail storm.

Despite the conditions a total of 132 shovel pits (c. 0.30m square) and 10 test pits (generally c. 1m square) were excavated. These were spread across three areas (Figure 1): two of these (eastern and western) were focused on sites where flints had been found in the past on the eroded path surfaces, the other (central) was an area identified by Mags Waughman (NYMNP Archaeological Conservation Officer) during a site visit as suitable for occupation.

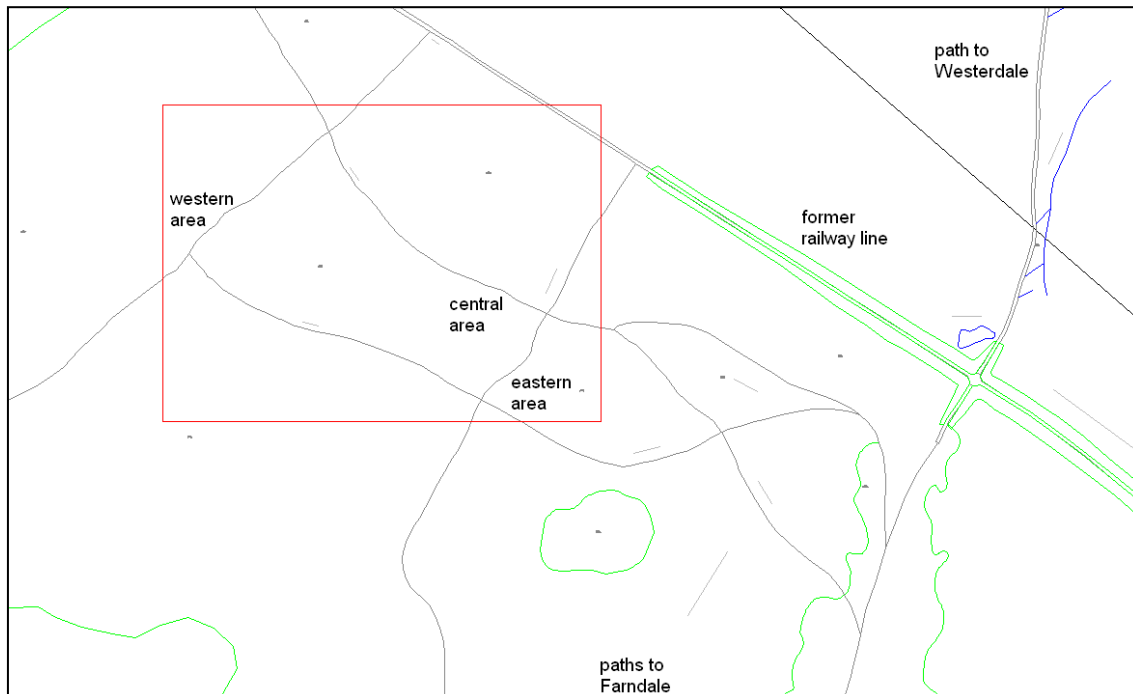


Figure 1 The project area

In the western area, shovel pits were put in at 10m intervals on either side of the path, then at 5m and 2.5m intervals to identify suitable areas for test pits. In the central and eastern areas shovel pits were put in at 5m intervals. The siting of shovel pits was to some extent influenced by the maturity of the vegetation, as it proved difficult to excavate in areas where the heather was very high.

The peat which forms the modern ground surface was generally 0.10m-0.15m deep and was removed as a block to expose the mineral soil below. The base of peat blocks were examined for flint and the mineral soil, generally 0.10-0.20m deep, was then excavated and sieved through a 6mm mesh. Excavation was halted when the natural substratum, either sandstone bedrock or a pale yellow clay, was reached. The mineral soil was found to occasionally have small sandstone fragments within it. Scatters of flint were found in well defined discrete concentrations, with shovel pits containing large numbers of flints flanked 10m or 5m away by shovel pits containing only 1 or 2. The

flint tended to be found primarily in the interface between the peat and the mineral soil, though flints were also found spread throughout the mineral soil in most shovel pits.



Figure 2 Volunteers excavating test pits 1 and 2

### Western area

In the western area (shovel pits 100s and 200s) iron pan was often found at the base of the mineral soil, and the natural substratum was generally bedrock. One area with a concentration of flint was identified on the edge of the scarp. This was investigated with two test pits. Test pit 1 contained 2 large sandstone fragments and a high number of flints, and Test pit 2 contained a high number of flints, but neither exposed any cut features. Close by, shovel pit 225 was found to contain a stone feature and was expanded to create test pit 3.



Figure 3 Test pit 3 showing cairn

This exposed a layer of stones lying within the mineral soil and on the weathered natural. These ranged in size from 0.05m to 0.25m and were interpreted as a low cairn. A large amount of flint was

recovered, some of it found amongst and below the stones. Further down the slope, a high number of flints were found in shovel pit 227, but here the generally homogenous mineral soil was replaced by a series of darker brown layers (0.25m deep in total) thought to be material washed down the hillside into a natural hollow. The natural substratum was a very pale cream clay which was augered and found to be 0.37m deep.

## Central area

In the central area (shovel pits 300s), there was occasionally a layer of sandstone fragments between the peat and the mineral soil, and the natural substratum was generally clay. Two areas with concentrations of flint were identified and test pit 4 was targeted at one of these. It



*Figure 4 Test pit 5 showing probable terminus of gully*

exposed a cluster of small sandstone fragments within the mineral soil in the southwest corner but no other features were seen. Shovel pit 308 however was found to contain a cut feature so was expanded to test pit 5. The feature was partially excavated and proved to be an oval pit or the terminus of a gully, deliberately backfilled with redeposited clay and sealed by a possible occupation layer and the mineral soil. The fills contained a large amount of flint, and a column sample was taken of the sequence of fills within the feature. Shovel pit 331 was found to contain a stone feature, so was expanded to test pit 6. The stones were lying on the natural clay in a roughly linear arrangement aligned NE-SW and were interpreted as a possible surface or other feature.

## Eastern area

In the eastern area (shovel pits 400s and 500s), there was generally a lower quantity of flint found than in the other areas. Shovel pit 400 was found to contain a cut feature so was expanded to 0.60m square. The narrow linear feature was aligned approximately north-south and was 0.10m wide and 0.12m deep with a square profile. It cut through the mineral soil into the natural clay and was interpreted as wheel rut, probably quite recent. A larger amount of sandstone fragments was found than in other areas: in shovel pit 402, a layer of flat stones was found on top of the natural clay, and shovel pits 419 and 420 contained large sandstone fragments sitting in or on the clay. Test pit 7, targeted at a flint scatter, also contained a scatter of sandstone fragments in the southwest corner, but these did not seem to form a coherent structure. Test pit 8 was also targeted at a flint scatter, and exposed a narrow linear feature aligned approximately north-south, 0.20m wide and 0.06m deep with a shallow U-shaped profile. This was filled with a mixture of peat, mineral soil and small stones and cut through the mineral soil into the natural clay. It was interpreted as a wheel rut, possibly less recent than that in shovel pit 400, and probably related to a track shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1857 (Yorkshire 044).



*Figure 5 Shovel pit 514 showing shallow pit*

Shovel pits 500, 501 and 502 also contained sandstone fragments within the mineral soil, and shovel pit 510 exposed a large triangular sandstone block 0.45m long, 0.37 wide and 0.13m thick sitting on the natural clay. Shovel pit 514 was found to contain a large amount of flint and a cut feature so was expanded to 0.50m x 0.60m. This was a shallow oval pit

with a mixed fill containing burnt sandstone and sealed by the mineral soil. Test pits 9 and 10 were targeted at flint scatters but did not contain any features.

### **Conclusion**

This years fieldwork at Farndale has confirmed there are well-defined concentrations of flint, provisionally characterised as late Mesolithic, across the area, and in addition a number of features including a cairn and a probable gully lying below or within the mineral soil. The presence of sandstone blocks and fragments overlying the natural clay in several areas, although not forming any identifiable structures, is difficult to explain as a natural phenomenon. Farndale has therefore been confirmed as a site with high potential for finding archaeological evidence of Mesolithic settlement and related structures, and will hopefully be subject to further investigation in the future.

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