

North York Moors National Park Mesolithic flint recording guidelines

General

North East Yorkshire Mesolithic project

This volunteer project is part of a wider project (the North East Yorkshire Mesolithic) which the National Park are carrying out in partnership with Tees Archaeology and with English Heritage funding. The aim of the project is to increase our understanding of the Mesolithic in the North York Moors and adjacent Tees valley. The volunteer programme will focus on examining moorland locations with a view to identifying both new sites and previously known sites where flints are still to be found. The objective will be to observe areas where the peat has eroded away to look for and record any flint finds.

Getting started

You can choose when you would like to make your visits – there's no hurry and we would like you to enjoy yourselves as well as making an important contribution to the project. Some visits we will ask you to make to specific locations, others you can decide exactly where to go within a given general area. We will supply a map showing these general areas, where large numbers of flint finds have been made in the past and you can select routes to monitor on these moors.

At any time if you are out walking on the moors, whether for Voluntary Ranger duty or just for pleasure, keep your eyes open – additional observations are welcome from any area and you may be successful in discovering new sites in places where none are known already. [NB this doesn't mean you can claim travelling expenses every time you go out for a walk – as a guide, we wouldn't be expecting you to go out as an archaeology volunteer more than an average of once a month, unless we ask you to monitor a specific location]

It is useful to plan a route in advance and make sure that your planned route is not too strenuous for your level of fitness. Use an Ordnance Survey map – these will show the wider area and road access. OS Explorer Series OL 26 and 27 cover the NP at 1:25000 and show field boundaries as well as contours.

If you have one, a hand-held GPS unit may be useful (but not essential). Use a digital camera (if you have one) to record any sections which have flints *in situ*.

For safety reasons when you are recording stream gullies, or other remote locations away from paths which we may ask you to monitor, we would like you to work in teams of at least two people. If you need someone to work with then let us know and we will put you in touch with other people who are looking for a partner or team member.

Where to go

Keep to areas with public access

Please keep to Public Rights of Way or Open Access land (marked on the OS 1:25000 maps). If you are uncertain whether an area is Access land or not then check with an OS map.

Paths and tracks

In the first few months of the project monitoring should take place only along footpaths and unsurfaced estate tracks – if it looks like a track has been ‘upgraded’ (re-surfaced) then it probably isn’t worth spending any time looking for flints. Use the map provided as a guide to which moors have high or medium potential for the discovery of sites.

Stream gullies/moorland drainage grips

Later you may be asked to monitor a stream gully or an area of eroded drainage grips - follow the line looking at sections on both sides of the watercourse (if possible). Do not try to access difficult areas (eg because of unstable/uneven ground or steep slopes) unless you are sure that it is safe to do so.

Nesting season

Please keep to paths and tracks during the ground nesting bird season (April-July).

Shooting season

Please be aware of any shooting taking place (grouse shooting season is between Aug 12 and Dec 30) and do not leave the paths/tracks in areas where this is happening. Observe any signs/instructions given by the estates/gamekeepers regarding shooting activities.

What to look for

Eroding path surfaces

Look out for any loose flints in the path surface. Look particularly at the path edges where the flints may just be becoming exposed. Don’t be fooled by scatters of grouse grit left by the gamekeepers – these are actually very white quartz chips.

Patches of water erosion

Look out for patches of erosion where water run-off has removed or partly removed the peat. Some of these can be quite large, but for the larger ones you are more likely to find flint towards the edges – anything from the centre will have been washed away over time as the erosion patch grew. If you spot any areas of erosion at some distance from the path you may have to return to investigate at a later date, after the nesting season is over when there is no possibility of disturbing nesting birds.

Sections through peat

Where you find exposed sections of peat, either isolated peat hags or alongside streams or drainage grips, focus on the area at the bottom of the

peat and in the top of the mineral soil beneath. Look out for flints sticking out from the section, and if you feel confident enough to identify it, layers of charcoal (showing up as a very black layer) which could be an indication of flints nearby. However, you should note that all peat which has been exposed for any length of time will also have a very dark appearance which should not be confused with charcoal.

What to record

Flints

If the flints are loose they should be collected in one of the sealable plastic bags provided. If you run out of bags let us know and we will give you some more. If you come across any flints which are *in situ* in the peat or mineral soil then leave them undisturbed (unless it looks like they are in imminent danger of being washed away/eroded out).

Locational information

Make a note of where you find flint, both in general terms (eg Glaisdale Moor) and as accurate a grid reference (NGR) as you are able to obtain. If you have a hand-held GPS then you can use this to get a grid reference, otherwise work out the NGR (preferably to 8 figures) from an OS map – the 1:25000 Explorer maps are best for this. If you have located flints *in situ*, have found more than just a few flints in one place or have found what you think is a particularly well-worked artefact, please mark the site in some way – a piece of string or narrow strip of biodegradable plastic from a carrier bag tied on to a clump of heather should be enough. We may ask you to return to these sites with one of our GPS units to work out a more accurate NGR, but if you can make a note of some more locational detail (eg 27 paces north of stone cairn on path, or on path 35 paces from stream crossing) this will help us to find the site again.

We would also like to know the type of location (eg path, erosion patch, stream gully section) and the type of deposit the flint was in (eg in mineral soil, at base of peat, loose on path, loose on mineral soil).

Marking the bags of flint

If you have collected any loose flints, then mark each bag with your name, the date, how many flints are in it, as well as the locational information:

Example Eroding path - Lyke Wake Walk near Shunner Howe
 SE 7385 9967
 4 flints loose on mineral soil
 M Waughman 27/03/08

What to do next

Really exciting finds

Let us know as soon as possible if you find

- flints *in situ* in an exposed section

- more than 10 flints together in the same location (can be collectively on more than one visit if you are sure it is the same spot).

You can do this by emailing the archaeology volunteers address (archaeology-volunteers@northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk) or call the NP offices (01439 770657) and leave a message if Mags is not there. We may want to make arrangements to look at your finds or send you back to make a more detailed record.

Less exciting finds

Every 2-3 months let us know where you've been and what you've found. The key bits of information we need at this stage is who you are, when you went, where you went, what you found and a NGR for the finds.

Look after your finds

Please keep your bags of flint in a safe place. Every 6 months or so we will hold an ID session and will ask you to bring us your flints so that we can see what you have found and gather all the information together.

If you have any questions or need any further information once you have started then send an email to Mags (m.waughman@northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk), or call the NP offices and leave a message if Mags is not there.