



NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

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Archaeology and heritage



Creek Cottage, Salt Boiling Houses

Archaeological techniques

There has been a long and continuing tradition of research into the archaeology of the New Forest and yet parts of the National Park are under-researched compared to some areas of the country.

A number of techniques have been employed to learn about the past including surveying, excavations and pollen analysis. The pollen analysis is particularly useful as it allows us to understand changes to vegetation and landscape types over time. The pollen is usually extracted from peat sequences found in mires and bogs.

Introduction

Management by people, influenced by geology and soil types, has contributed to the landscape and survival of much of the Park's heritage. This factsheet looks at the cultural heritage and archaeology that is so special to the National Park.

The study of historic landscapes has become increasingly important in recent years at the expense of the focus on isolated monuments. Historic landscape is defined as the result of past interaction between people and the natural environment, reflecting social and economic practices as well as political and ideological beliefs. Historical landscape character describes both visible physical remains such as monuments, buildings and field patterns, along with less visible sub-surface features such as buried sites, crop marks and palaeo-environmental deposits.

The historic landscape can be examined by looking at different themes or taking a chronological approach. This factsheet examines each time period and outlines the archaeological and cultural themes that dominate.

Mesolithic (8,500 – 4,000BC)



Pollen records provides an insight into past vegetation (Coral necklace, Hatchet Pond)

There is evidence to suggest that the New Forest landscape was used in the warm post-glacial periods of the Mesolithic. This evidence is in the form of worked flint found in the Avon valley and from areas of the Open Forest. This points to human uses of the landscape in the form of hunting and gathering of wild local resources. The population would certainly have been nomadic at this time moving to exploit seasonal resources. There is increasing evidence of some landscape management during this period.

Burial and boiling mounds

There are numerous examples of Bronze Age burial mounds and boiling sites within the National Park. In fact some 250 burial mounds exist within the area and much archaeological data has been recorded from these. There are at least 1600 boiling sites.

The burial mounds (or tumuli as marked on Ordnance Survey maps) were originally created during the late Neolithic and early Bronze Ages as a burial ground for single families or tribal groups.

From around 2,500BC they became more selectively used to bury the remains of individuals with high status within communities possibly their chieftains or religious leaders. At this point it was common for the dead to be provided with offerings placed with the body.

There is less known about boiling mounds (mounds of burnt fire cracked flint). Potentially, many thousand may remain scattered across the Park. Like the burial mounds these are thought to date from the Bronze Age. They are small mounds usually close to a stream or water course and excavated examples have evidence of a wooden water trough. It is assumed that water was heated by placing pre-heated flint into the water filled trough. There are many varied suggestions as to what these sites were used for. These theories include the possibility that they were quasi-ritual in origin, possibly associated with imitation rites or were even related to historic evidence for Scandinavian saunas or Irish sweat houses simply for bathing and personal hygiene purposes.

An unusually large quantity of burial and boiling sites has survived within the heathland and areas of common pasture within the National Park. This is probably because these areas have not been ploughed since the sites were created. It is likely that the areas outside the heathland and commons had a similar density of sites but these have largely been obscured by subsequent human activities.



Neolithic (4,000 – 2,000BC)

The Neolithic saw the hunter gatherer way of life gradually replaced by small scale farming and a less nomadic lifestyle. There was some exploitation of the woodland resources and continuing localised clearance. There is a lack of Neolithic physical remains in the New Forest as is the case across Hampshire. Certainly the New Forest does not have the types of monumental structures that are found in other parts of Dorset and Wiltshire, and Sussex.

Table on historical time scales

Geological Era: Quaternary, Geological Epoch: Holocene

Climatic period	Cultural Period	Dates
Sub-Atlantic	Modern	1800AD - present
	Post-medieval	1500AD - 1800AD
	Medieval	1066AD - 1500AD
	Saxon	410AD - 1066AD
	Post-Roman	410AD - 650AD
	Roman	43AD - 410AD
	Iron Age	700BC – 43AD
Sub-Boreal	Bronze Age	2400BC - 700BC
	Neolithic	4000BC - 2400BC
Atlantic Boreal Pre-Boreal	Mesolithic	8500BC - 4000BC
Late Glacial	Palaeolithic	500,000BC - 10,000BC

Bronze Age (2000 – 700BC)

During the Bronze Age there was a massive expansion of arable agricultural activity. This was possibly due to increased population pressure at this time. It was also in part due to the increased herding of domestic animals. The pottery evidence found across the Forest suggests increased settlement activity at this time. This was indeed a period of major environmental change. The poor soils of the Forest became exhausted from this arable use and some areas became incapable of supporting arable agriculture from this time onwards. As the poor soils failed to regenerate, heathland replaced woodland in certain areas. From the middle to late Bronze Age settled valley communities with a mixed pastoral and arable economy were using the Open Forest. Land boundaries in the form of ditches and banks formed divisions at this time.

Iron Age (700BC – 43AD)

The Open Forest has many inclosures that probably date back to this period. These possibly related to stock control or the separation of land for personal holdings. During the Iron Age there was a substantial increase in the local clearance of woodland. This was also a time for defensive settlements such as the Iron Age hill forts.



Buckland Rings Iron Age Hill Fort

A hill fort is a defended settlement which usually follows the contours of a hill. One such example within the National Park is Buckland Rings (a Scheduled Ancient Monument) which is located on the south edge of the Park close to Lymington. It consists of extensive earthworks in the form of three banks and two ditches enclosing an area of around 4.5 hectares. It is thought that the Buckland Rings could have been constructed as early as 400BC and would probably have been rebuilt several times before its eventual abandonment sometime prior to the Roman Invasion in 43AD.

Roman (43 – 410AD) and Anglo-Saxon (410 – 1066AD)

The Roman Period possibly saw the beginning of the present day settlement pattern using the better soil types for settlement sites and the earliest form of industry in the area. The Romans started a thriving pottery industry in the New Forest using the abundant natural resources of clay, fuel wood and water. There are many sites across the Forest which have a distinctive circular earth kiln with pottery fragments found nearby. The Romans traded the pottery to central southern England as far north as Chester. In fact all the Roman sites in the south of Britain have evidence of New Forest pottery. Coins found near to the kiln sites suggest that the pottery industry survived until the Romans left at around 410AD.

The Romans also left a lasting legacy in terms of clearer communication routes. In particular the A35 and A326 follow the course of Roman roads. The A326 follows the line of the Roman road that leads from Lepe to Dibden. Tradition suggests that Lepe provided a landing point for the Saxons when they came to the mainland from the Isle of Wight.

The Anglo-Saxon period was a time for the development of principle settlements within the valleys. The enclosed lands were mostly productive and used for arable farming and were not located on the Open Forest which was probably used largely for grazing. There is little

physical evidence remaining from the Anglo-Saxon period; however evidence survives and lives on through the local place names, nearly all of which are Saxon in origin as well as the location of our oldest historic churches.



Part of a Roman painted bowl made in the New Forest, picture kindly provided by Wessex Archaeology

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Medieval (1066 – 1500AD) and post-Medieval (1500 – 1800AD)

During the medieval period the rights awarded to holdings within the Forest with regard to grazing and other uses were formalised. These became the Rights of Common which still exist today and they were recorded in the Domesday Record. At this time the patterns of the larger estates were established associated with better soil types.

In the post-Medieval period the present day field pattern emerged in part reflecting the earlier landholdings.

Modern (1800AD – present)

The 20th Century archaeological record within the New Forest is dominated by both military and industrial relicts. There is evidence of a substantial gunpowder factory at Eyeworth Lodge near Fritham which has left evidence in the landscape. The two World Wars also left a lasting legacy with airfields, mulberry harbour construction sites and various army camps providing a lasting reminder of the New Forest at war.

Within the forested areas of the National Park evidence of inclosures, banks and ditches, relating to woodland management are common place.

Significant changes were imposed on the landscape by the increasing levels of transport and communication during recent times, in particular in the 19th Century with the growth of the railways across the Park and with the development of leisure facilities.



Stone marker post at Burley

Further reading/ useful information

Other New Forest National Park Authority fact files

The New Forest: Colin R. Tubbs, 2001

New Forest Centre library: www.newforestcentre.org.uk/library

www.new-forest-uk.co.uk/history.htm

Wessex Archaeology : www.wessexarch.co.uk

Hants Field Club & Archaeological Society: www.nfshfc.hampshire.org.uk

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk Factsheet available on CD, in large-print, or Braille on request

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