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### Recent Discoveries off The Coast at Tynemouth

The last few months have proved an exciting time for our research group, [SALT](#). Having stumbled upon the first submerged prehistoric site in the British North Sea, we have extended this to be the earliest submerged prehistoric site in the UK (see Fig. 1).

At the end of the last Ice Age, sea levels were lower than today, large volumes of water still contained in ice sheets. The Early Mesolithic coastline now lies almost 10m below mean tide level (MTL) (Shennan *et al*, 1999) (see Fig. 2). In Norway, where the coastline has risen through isostatic rebound (relative sea level has dropped) the importance of the coastal zone to postglacial pioneers is beyond doubt. Yet in Britain we have been slow to address this issue, assuming any sites to have been lost to the sea. However as the thousands of Danish submerged sites demonstrate, the potential for organic preservation so lacking in terrestrial sites of this age, is tremendous.

Prior to our discovery the only other comparable site was Bouldnor Cliff, a Late Mesolithic site in the Solent (Momber, 2000). However this was an estuarine site, not coastal as ours is. As yet we have only surface finds. But comparable Danish sites have produced fantastic organic material including fishing equipment, canoes and even human remains. Prehistoric human remains were once found off Hartlepool. So environmental conditions do permit such preservation in the North Sea, as well as the Baltic where the waters are brackish. Precisely what may be preserved at our site will be very much dependant on site formation processes and depositional context.

So this site has the potential to open up new areas of research: we can begin to see the entire Mesolithic landscape in the North East of England. Clearly an extensive programme of research, excavation and analysis is demanded. As the weather closes the site for the season, we leave it having made a final, thrilling find: a 165mm blade, probably of Late Upper Palaeolithic origin, making ours the latest site (submerged or terrestrial) north of Scarborough. Watch this space!



Figure 1: the site at low tide viewed from the south. The visible extent of rock forms the southern extent of the site which runs east-west on the sea bed below.

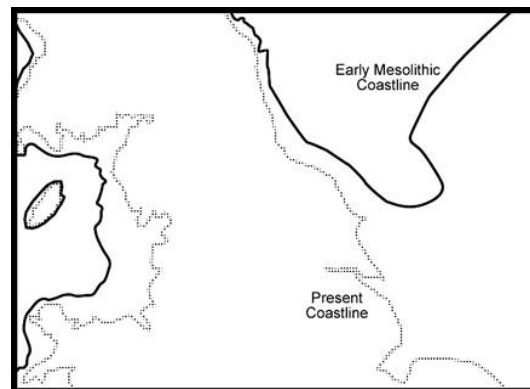


Figure 2: approximate coastlines of the Early Mesolithic (after Spikins, P.A. 1999)



Figure 3: Morten Engen preparing to enter the water for a reconnaissance dive



Figure 4: the site is full of flint, a lot of it worked.



Figure 5: one of many finds, an Early Mesolithic scraper



Figure 6: one of several cores found at the site



Figure 7: one of the team investigating surface sediments at the site.

### Links

SALT home page

<http://historical-studies.ncl.ac.uk/SALT/>

Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology pages on Bouldnor Cliff

[http://www.soc.soton.ac.uk/HWTMA/projects/bouldnor\\_cliff.html](http://www.soc.soton.ac.uk/HWTMA/projects/bouldnor_cliff.html)

The Nautical Archaeology Society

<http://www.nasportsmouth.org.uk/>

### References

Momber, G. (2000) *Drowned and Deserted: a submerged prehistoric landscape in the Solent, England*, in The International Journal for Nautical Archaeology Volume 29:1

Shennan et al, (1999) *Modelling western North Sea palaeogeographies and tidal changes during the Holocene*, in Holocene Land-Ocean Interaction and Environmental Change around the Western North Sea. Special Publication 166: Geological Society of London: Bath

Spikins, P.A. (1999) *Mesolithic Northern England: environment, population and settlement*, Archaeopress: Oxford