

LETTERS AND NOTES

NEW EVIDENCE OF LONG-BLADE TECHNOLOGY FROM LINCOLNSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

There is relatively limited evidence of human occupation in Britain during the Younger Dryas. Evidence towards the end of this stadial is often typified by long-blade technology, which has tended to be recovered from find-spots in south-eastern England. This paper reports on the recent discovery of a characteristic bruised blade indicating for the first time the extension of long-blade technology into Lincolnshire. Furthermore, it indicates the potential for in situ deposits dating from the terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene along margins of the River Bain near Horncastle.

Key words: Late Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Pleistocene/Holocene transition, bruised blade, *lames mâchurées*, Horncastle

INTRODUCTION

A number of recent studies have highlighted the sparse evidence of human occupation in Britain during the Younger Dryas (Barton & Roberts 2004; Jacobi & Higham 2011). The majority of evidence comes from the end of the stadial and is often typified by assemblages dominated by long-blade technology. The lithic industries of this kind are characterised by large, well-made blades (>120 mm) struck from opposed-platform cores (Barton 1989). Often assemblages include heavily edge-damaged artefacts, known as ‘bruised blades’ or *lames mâchurées*, thought to have been utilised for chopping hard organic materials such as antler and bone (Barton 1986), or alternatively curating sandstone hammers (Fagnart & Plisson 1997). Long-blade assemblages with bruised blades have primarily been found at locations concentrated in East Anglia and the south-east (Barton 2009), although find-spots have also been identified as far north as the Vale of Pickering, North Yorkshire (Conneller 2007) (Figure 1).

Based on the limited data available, it has plausibly been suggested that the long-blade assemblages represent a *facies* of the Ahrensburgian (Barton 1998). Ahrensburgian tanged points are rare in Britain, although a couple have been identified alongside long-blade technology at Avington VI, Berkshire (Barton & Froom 1986; Froom 2005). Furthermore, obliquely truncated points with

concavely retouched tips have been recovered from long-blade assemblages at the sites of Three Ways Wharf, Greater London, and Launde, Leicestershire, which show particular affinities with continental Epi-Ahrensburgian sites from Belgium, the Netherlands and western Germany (Cooper 2006). Due to the geographic location of Lincolnshire at the western edge of Doggerland it holds

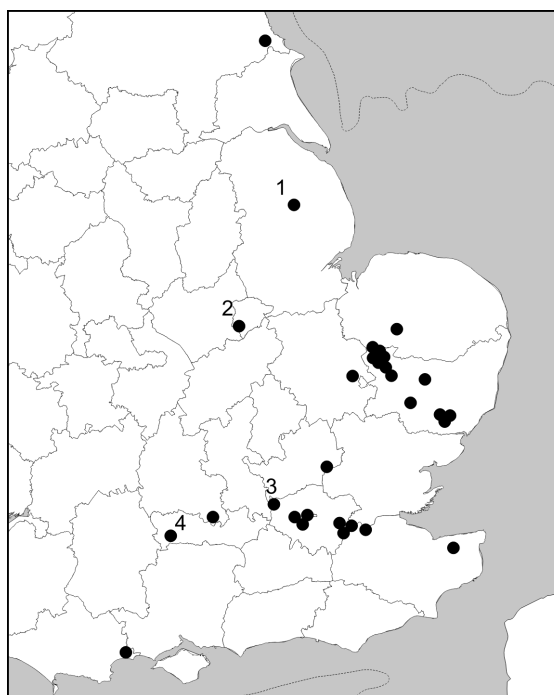


Figure 1. Distribution of long-blade assemblages with bruised blades. 1. Horncastle, 2. Launde, 3. Three Ways Wharf, 4. Avington VI.

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significant potential for understanding hunter-gatherer connections with continental Europe. However, until now evidence of long-blade technology and/or assemblages with similarities to the Ahrensburgian have been notably absent from Lincolnshire.

DESCRIPTION

During excavations by Allen Archaeology Limited, in advance of flood alleviation works on the River Bain near Horncastle in Lincolnshire (National Grid Reference TF 229753), a characteristic bruised blade was found at the interface between alluvial silts and underlying river gravels (Figure 2).

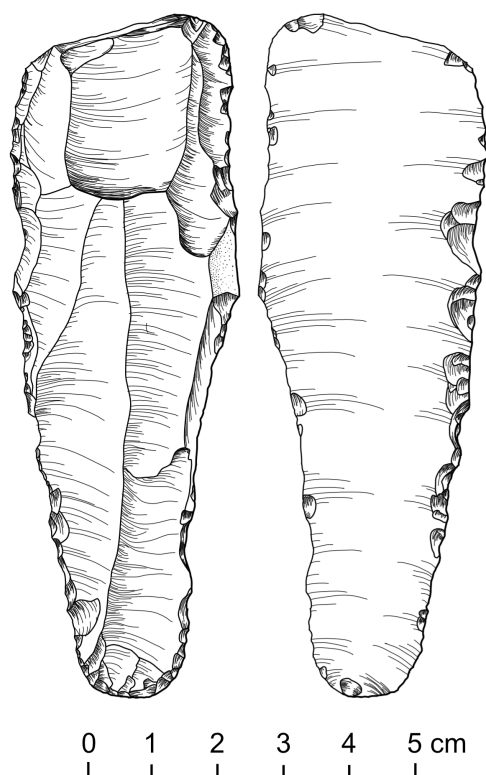


Figure 2. Bruised blade from near the River Bain, Horncastle.

The blade is made on flint that is stained greyish-black obscuring the original colour of the raw material. The striking platform is carefully prepared with small faceted removals and on the ventral surface there is a low diffuse bulb of percussion with small *écaillage* scar. The blade has a large hinged termination indicating that, despite careful preparation of

the striking platform, the removal failed to propagate along the length of the core. A number of the dorsal scars run counter to the direction of the removal of the piece, including the remnants of two large scars with distinct hinged terminations. The size and nature of the scars indicate that the object comes from a much larger opposed platform blade core that would probably have been at least 150 mm long.

The margins of the blade are straight and broadly parallel. The left margin of the blade tapers to form a thin edge that displays extensive damage along its entirety. The damage scars on the ventral surface are focused along the mesial section of the blade. They are characterised by relatively long, scaled removals, some extending over 5 mm from the lateral margin. The morphology of the edge damage differs slightly on the dorsal surface with the edge heavily worn and rounded with shorter, relatively abrupt, removals towards the butt. The right margin has similar damage towards the butt with the remainder of the edge marked by relatively sporadic scarring on both surfaces of the blade.

Most of the edge damage is similarly stained as the body of the object indicating the damage occurred broadly contemporary with the manufacture of the blade. However, a series of intermittent chips towards the distal end of the artefact lack the greyish-black staining and have a distinctive trapezoidal morphology ending in stepped terminations indicative of having occurred post-depositionally.

In addition to the bruised blade, a bladelet was recovered measuring less than 25 mm in length. It is fashioned on partially patinated, speckled, semi-translucent flint with cortex retained on the dorsal surface. The margins are broadly sub-parallel and it has a triangular cross-section. It was probably struck during the early stages of core-reduction for the purpose of shaping the core for subsequent bladelet removals. No edge damage was recorded.

CONCLUSIONS

The discovery of the bruised blade fills an important gap in the distribution of long-blade assemblages in Britain and shows for the first time the extension of assemblages into

Lincolnshire. Long-blade technology has been broadly dated to c. 10,000 BP and the recovery of the bruised blade suggests activity along the River Bain towards the end of the Younger Dryas. It is unlikely that the bruised blade and associated debitage would have been an isolated occurrence and they could be indicative of more extensive human activity in the immediate area. The objects were chanced upon at the base of excavations in sediments just outside the scope of works (Allen Archaeology Limited, in prep.). The remaining sediments will be preserved *in situ* and could potentially provide further avenues of study.

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