

LETTERS AND NOTES

THE LITHIC STUDIES SOCIETY VISIT TO BOXGROVE AND BEEDINGS, WEST SUSSEX, 20TH JUNE 2008

On Friday 20th June 2008 about 20 Lithic Studies Society members went on the Society's field trip to Boxgrove and Beedings.

We met at a car park at Trundle Hillfort and were subsequently shepherded to the correct car park by Mark Roberts! From the stunning vantage point at the top of the hillfort Mark gave a talk outlining the findings of the recently completed mapping project of the raised beaches of the area. This recorded the Slindon and Earham Formations over a distance of 26km.

Next we visited Boxgrove, which is probably the most important Lower Palaeolithic site in Britain. The excavations here during the 1980s and 1990s uncovered remains of *Homo heidelbergensis* (a tibia and two teeth), a massive assemblage of finely worked handaxes, *in situ* flint knapping scatters, a horse butchery site, and many mammal bones featuring cutmarks. The site was dated to c. 500,000 BP.

Here we were able to see the location of part of the excavations while Mark explained what was involved in his role of managing and maintaining the site (and defending it from attack by persistent rabbits!), and outlined future plans for its protection and development. This included the aim that the site could sustain itself financially by offering training excavations on the areas of the site still to be investigated.

Here we were also shown the third longest biface found in Britain (over 30cm), which was collected by a Society member in the vicinity of Hillhead in Hampshire.

After lunch in the pub at Beedings we were given a talk by Matt Pope on this fascinating Middle and Early Upper Palaeolithic site. Beedings House had been built by John Harley at the turn of the 20th century on a scarp crest near Pulborough. The house had to be built on railway sleepers because of the presence of natural fissures (guls) in the bedrock. However, these fissures turned out to be filled with stone artefacts (including 36 early Upper Palaeolithic leaf points), of which he collected around 2,300. The tools also included Middle Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic pieces, plus a gunflint. Unfortunately many of these tools were discarded after his death and only 180 remain (held at the Museum of Sussex Archaeology at Barbican House in Lewes).

Matt had been directing the excavation of a series of test trenches across some guls adjacent to the house in May and June of this year. In addition, some samples had been taken for dating. We were able to see one of the guls in section, in a trench which had not yet been backfilled (Figure 1), plus some of the lithic pieces found in this year's excavations (Figures 2 & 3), including a Mesolithic bladelet core.

The working of discoidal cores at the site was similar to that at the Mousterian site of Oldbury, which was located on an adjacent hill just across the valley. Matt believed that both sites may have been used by the same groups of hominins.

In spite of some transportation confusion, we all enjoyed a very interesting day!



Figure 1: Excavation trench at Beedings (© Dave Underhill)



Figure 2: Leaf point from Beedings (© Dave Underhill)



Figure 3: Mesolithic artefact from Beedings (© Dave Underhill)

The following two sources are recommended for further information on the two sites:

Jacobi, R. 2007. A Collection of Early Upper Palaeolithic Artefacts from Beedings, near Pulborough, West Sussex, and the Context of Similar Finds from the British Isles. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 73: 229–325.

Roberts, M.B. & Parfitt, S.A. 1999. *Boxgrove: A Middle Pleistocene hominid site at Eartham Quarry, Boxgrove, West Sussex*. English Heritage Archaeological Report No. 17. English Heritage, London.

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