

PUPIL'S BOOKLET

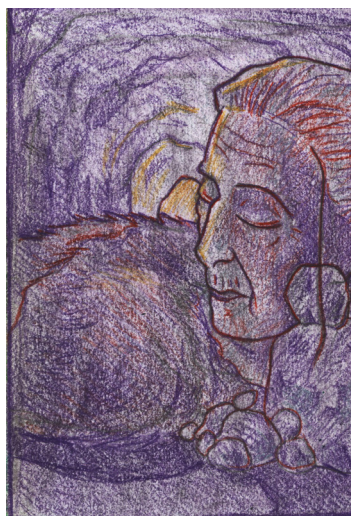
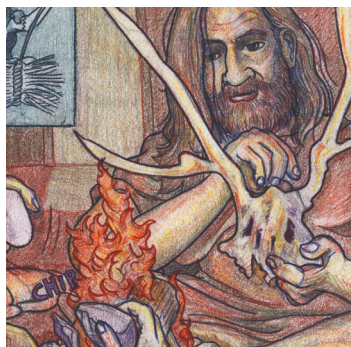
MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

FROM PREHISTORY TO
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

THE MESOLITHIC

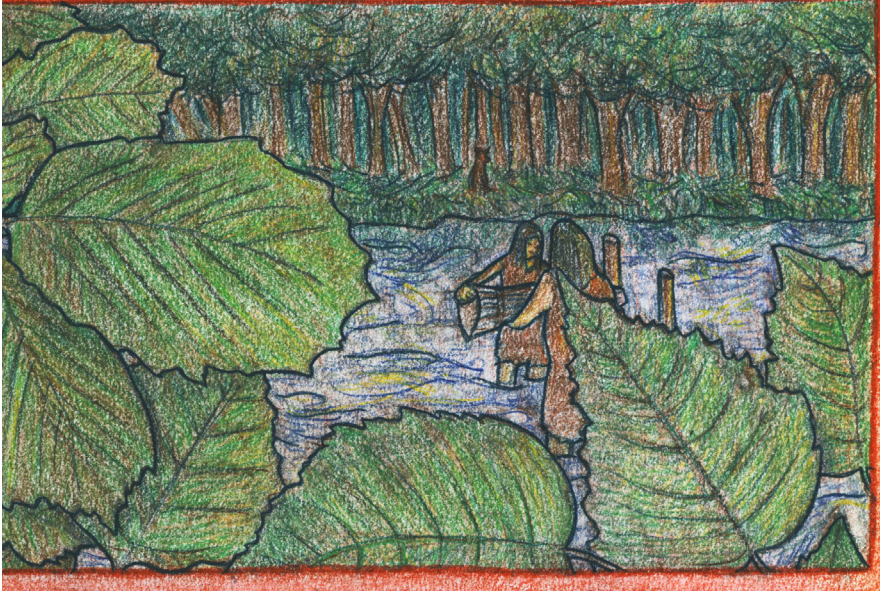
LIFE IN BRITAIN AFTER THE ICE AGE



9600 - 4000 CAL BC

These last **hunter gatherers** moved around the British landscape **seasonally**, acquired a range of animal and plant resources, and used tools made from **antler, wood and flint**.

WHERE PEOPLE LIVED



The Mesolithic started at the end of the last ice age. This means that during the Mesolithic the environment changed lots as the climate got warmer. At the start of the Mesolithic, lots of the planet's water was still frozen at the North and South poles. This meant that the sea was much lower than it is today: Britain was connected to the rest of Europe, and people lived on the land now under the North Sea and English Channel! But, as the climate warmed up, some of the ice at the poles melted and the sea levels rose; by the end of the Mesolithic Britain had become the island we know today.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

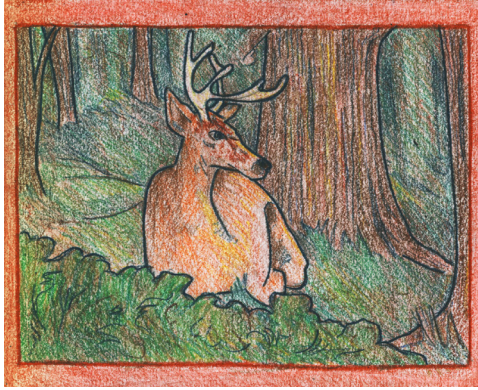


The Mesolithic environment was made up of rich woodlands with birch and pine trees. As the climate got warmer, species of trees like hazel and oak started growing in Britain too. Mesolithic people, or hunter gatherers, are sometimes wrongly called 'cave-men' - but in fact they hardly ever lived in caves! Instead they lived in the woodlands, regularly close to rivers and lakes, in small wooden framed structures, covered with skins, bark or turf. People would live at a certain site for part of the year, using it to hunt, fish or gather plant materials, before moving to another site, to do other tasks. At Star Carr in Yorkshire, archaeologists have found multiple structures and a number of wooden platforms on the lake edge, where people might have fished, taken boats out into the lake, or hunted in the reedbeds. Some sites, like Star Carr, suggest Mesolithic people came back to the site again and again, but other sites may have only been used once.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

HOW PEOPLE LIVED



People in the Mesolithic were 'hunter gatherers'. This means they did not keep animals or grow plants; all of their food came from wild plants, animals and fish. They hunted lots of different animals, including red deer, elk (which you might recognise as American moose), roe deer, aurochs (massive wild cows), wild boar (a type of wild pig), beaver, fox, bear, wild cat and pine martin. They would hunt animals for their meat, but also they could use their bones, antler and tusks for tools, and use their skins and fur to make clothes, tents, bags and boats. But Mesolithic people were not carnivorous cavemen - plants were also really important in their diet, including seeds, nuts, fruits and roots. By the end of the Mesolithic, people had also trained wild wolves to help with hunting and these became domesticated dogs - the first ever pets!

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

Photograph: Alison Burns

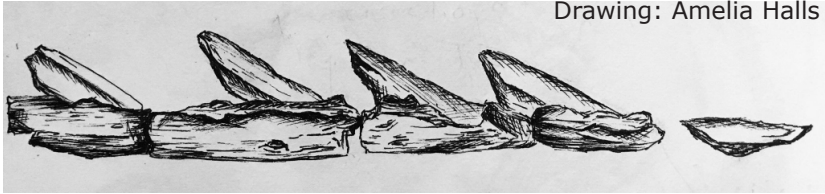


In order to hunt, gather and fish, Mesolithic people moved through the landscape, stopping and camping in lots of different places in different seasons, from river valleys, forests and hills to the coast. At Formby beach (which is North of Liverpool), we can still see the footprints of Mesolithic people and the animals they were hunting over 6000 years ago! These are in ancient muds, and have been protected by layers of sand, giving archaeologists an exciting picture of people moving across their landscapes, perhaps hunting, gathering plants or going to catch some fish. Perhaps the Mesolithic children were even playing on the beach!

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

MESOLITHIC TECHNOLOGY



In Mesolithic Britain, there was no metal or pottery, so people made tools and everything they needed from stone, bone, antler, animal skins, wood and other plant material. Their stone tools were particularly important. They would take a type of stone known as flint, and they would shape large pieces of this into the tools they needed by knocking it with other stones. This sounds quite rough, but it was actually very precise. In fact, Mesolithic people were skilled at making tiny, delicate stone tools, known as microliths, which could be used as anything from the sharp barbs in an arrow or spear, to stone knives for scraping and cutting the skin and bones of animals, to graters for grating roots and other plants.

Barbed antler point made by Nick Overton



MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC



Not all artefacts found at Mesolithic sites were tools; excavations have found beads made from stone and amber, including a unique engraved pendant from Star Carr, 'amulets' made from animal bones and other exciting objects, such as the Star Carr red deer 'frontlets'. These were made from the top of a red deer skull with the antlers attached, and some had holes cut into them. Some archaeologists think they may have been worn by people on their heads, perhaps for hunting or for use in important ceremonies.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

MESOLITHIC BELIEFS



Mesolithic people treated their dead in a number of different ways. Some were buried in caves, and some were cremated, but other Mesolithic bodies were deliberately broken up and separated into different parts, once people had died. These parts were carried around, and then deliberately dropped or buried in different places, including caves and watery places. Archaeologists think Mesolithic people believed the remains of their dead continued to be alive, or had a kind of spirit in them. It may be that they believed in a spirit-world or after-life, and that certain places, like caves and water, were places where spirits could move from their bones to the after-life.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC



Archaeologists find it useful to learn about the beliefs of more recent hunter gatherer groups, like Native Americans, to help them understand the evidence from the Mesolithic. This has led archaeologists to think that Mesolithic people may have believed that plants, animals and special places were “alive” and had powerful spirits. This may have meant Mesolithic people took part in ceremonies to keep the spirits happy, or to ask them for things. The red deer frontlets at Star Carr might have been worn in these kinds of ceremonies, perhaps asking the spirits of the red deer, or the forest, to help the Mesolithic people catch the animals they were hunting.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

MESOLITHIC SITES



FORMBY BEACH

The beach at Formby is an amazing Mesolithic site that is within easy reach of Manchester. The National Trust run tours showing members of the public Mesolithic human, animal and bird prints that have been preserved for millenia, and are now being exposed by tidal erosion.

"These traces of our prehistoric ancestors are a fascinating, fragile and finite evocation of our distant past." Jamie Lund, Archaeologist.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

FORMBY FOOTPRINTS

During the later Mesolithic the area we now call Formby would have been a coastal wetland used by humans, animals and birds. During hot summers some tracks were baked hard in the sun, only to be then covered in sand. This is how the footprints have been preserved for us to discover.

When you go to see the tracks you will be able to identify the creatures that produced them. However, you can also see which direction they were travelling, and if they are associated with other prints. Each tide reveals a new episode before it is washed away for ever. What will you discover when you visit?

Formby Beach, Victoria Rd, Formby, Liverpool, L37 1LJ. formby@nationaltrust.org.uk, 01704 878591

Photograph: Red Deer print, Alison Burns



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

MESOLITHIC

3D PRINTED BARBED ANTLER POINTS



These barbed antler points are characteristic Mesolithic artefacts. The examples above were produced by archaeologists at the University of Manchester. These experimental objects have then been scanned and 3D printed so that your school can have one in the teaching collection.