

THE EVERTON FLINT COLLECTION IN WELLS MUSEUM

by

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ABSTRACT

In the stores of Wells Museum is a large assemblage of prehistoric worked flint, recovered from fields at the head of Ebbor Gorge. This was collected by Ann Everton in the 1970's but details were never published. This paper describes the collection, which contains 1460 catalogued items and 11 kg of waste. Several activity phases are represented, ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. It is suggested, however, that most of the flints may relate to a Beaker settlement of the late third millennium BC.

INTRODUCTION

Wells Museum holds a large assemblage of flints, collected by Ann Everton and volunteers during the early 1970's. These were discovered during investigations into the area around the top of Ebbor Gorge, which included work at the deserted settlements of Ramspits and Dursdon Hope. This collection has never been published and in the light of the current resurgence of interest and research into the prehistory of Somerset it seems appropriate to make the data more widely available. This article will provide an inventory of the finds and offer some tentative conclusions as to what they may represent. It should be noted that the classification offered here has been compiled by three individuals: Ann Everton, Mary Irwin (a volunteer at Wells Museum and a one-time secretary of the Cornwall Archaeological Society) and the author. The author has analysed the part of the collection that had not previously been studied and retained the categories of Everton for the sake of uniformity. It is important to stress that the flints previously analysed have not been rechecked as both Everton and Irwin were extremely competent at identification. This article thus presents not only the first analysis of some of the collection but the unpublished classifications of Everton and Irwin. The conclusions reached, however, are the authors own.

THE FIELDS AT EBBOR GORGE

Everton collected from three fields at the head of Ebbor Gorge in the parish of St Cuthbert Out, Somerset (see Figures 1 and 2). She labelled these fields A, B and C, though C was further subdivided as it contained an enclosure, called D. Field A is centred on ST 52704930, Field B ST 52904940 and Field C ST 52704910. Enclosure D is centred upon ST 52604900. Field B contains a cairn, Grinsell's St Cuthbert Out 3. It is uncertain whether the cairn is prehistoric in origin (Grinsell, 1971). Everton also documented upstanding Post-Roman archaeology in all three of the fields, including old field boundaries, a hollow way and building platforms. To make the data more manageable, the finds from each field will be listed separately. The flints are stored according to field so this approach seemed appropriate.

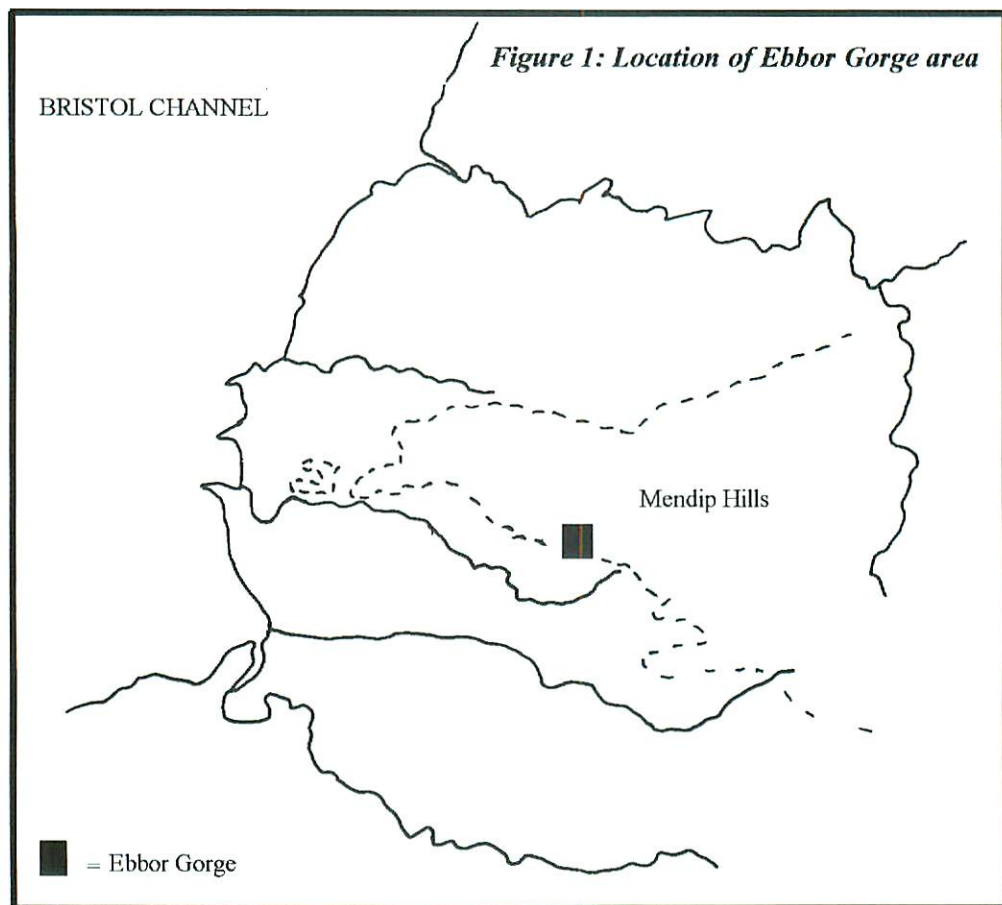


Figure 1. Location map

THE FLINTS

Field A (ST 52704930)

RETOUCHED: 76 retouched flakes, 25 end scrapers, 7 end & side scrapers, 4 side scrapers, 1 disc scraper, 38 'miscellaneous' scrapers, 16 broken scrapers, 10 notched pieces, 2 knives, 13 broken knives, 8 borers/piercers, 2 petit-tranchet derivative arrowheads, 2 axe fragments, 6 Mesolithic scrapers.

OTHER: 169 flakes, blades and chips, 141 edge damaged/possibly utilised pieces, 28 cores/core related pieces, 3 nodules, 2 hammerstones, 8 burnt pieces.

Retouched	210
Other	351
Total number of catalogued flints	561

Field A also contained 0.5 kg of burnt waste flint.

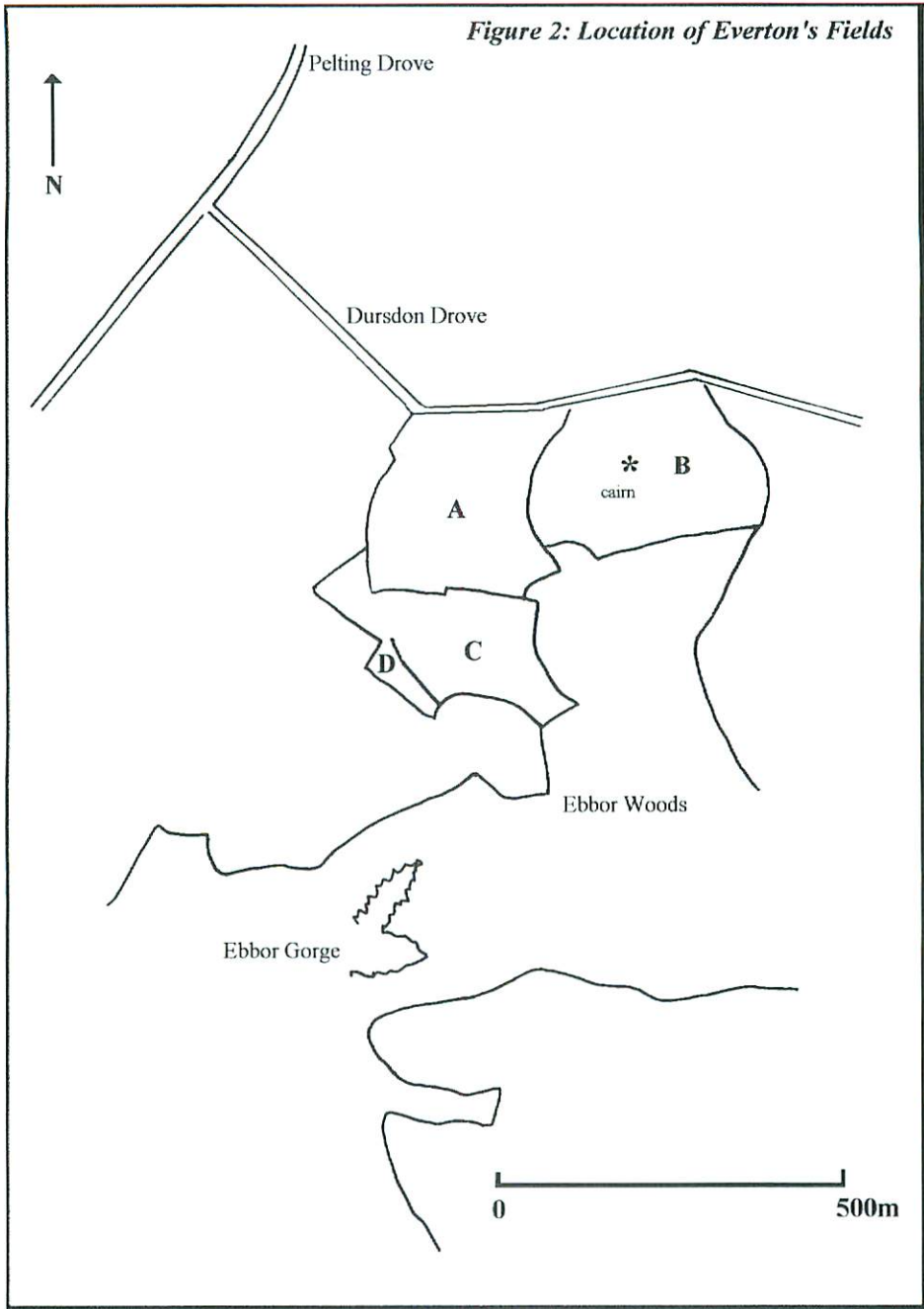


Figure 2. Sketch map showing the location of the three fields referred to in the study.

Field B (ST 52904940)

RETOUCHED: 182 retouched flakes, 9 end scrapers, 4 end & side scrapers, 19 side scrapers, 3 disc scrapers, 17 thumbnail scrapers, 23 'miscellaneous' scrapers, 31 broken scrapers, 11 notched pieces, 9 broken knives, 11 borers/piercers, 1 axe fragment, 26 retouched Mesolithic pieces (including scrapers).

OTHER: 193 flakes, blades and chips, 11 edge-damaged/possibly utilised pieces, 22 core/core-related pieces, 5 hammerstones, 11 burnt pieces.

Retouched	346
Other	242
Total number of catalogued flints	588

Field B also contained a further 3.2 kg of unburnt small 'waste' and 0.5 kg of burnt flint.

Field C (ST 52704910)

It is not certain that the following flints are from Field C as the box in the museum is not marked with a number. However, the absence of any other flints marked Field C, together with the knowledge that this field was fieldwalked, makes it likely.

RETOUCHED: 5 double-ended scrapers, 8 end scrapers, 8 'miscellaneous' scrapers, 1 tanged point, 1 awl and 6 Mesolithic scrapers.

OTHER: 140 flakes and blades, 29 cores.

Retouched	29
Other	169
Total	198

This box also contained 4.5 kg of uncatalogued flint 'waste'.

Enclosure D (ST 52604900)

113 pieces of edge-damaged/possibly utilised pieces.

1.8 kg of 'waste' flints.

Total Numbers for all Fields

Total Number of Retouched Pieces:	585
Other:	875
Total Number of Catalogued Flints:	1460

Total weight of uncatalogued 'waste': 9.5 kg

Total weight of uncatalogued burnt flint: 1.25 kg

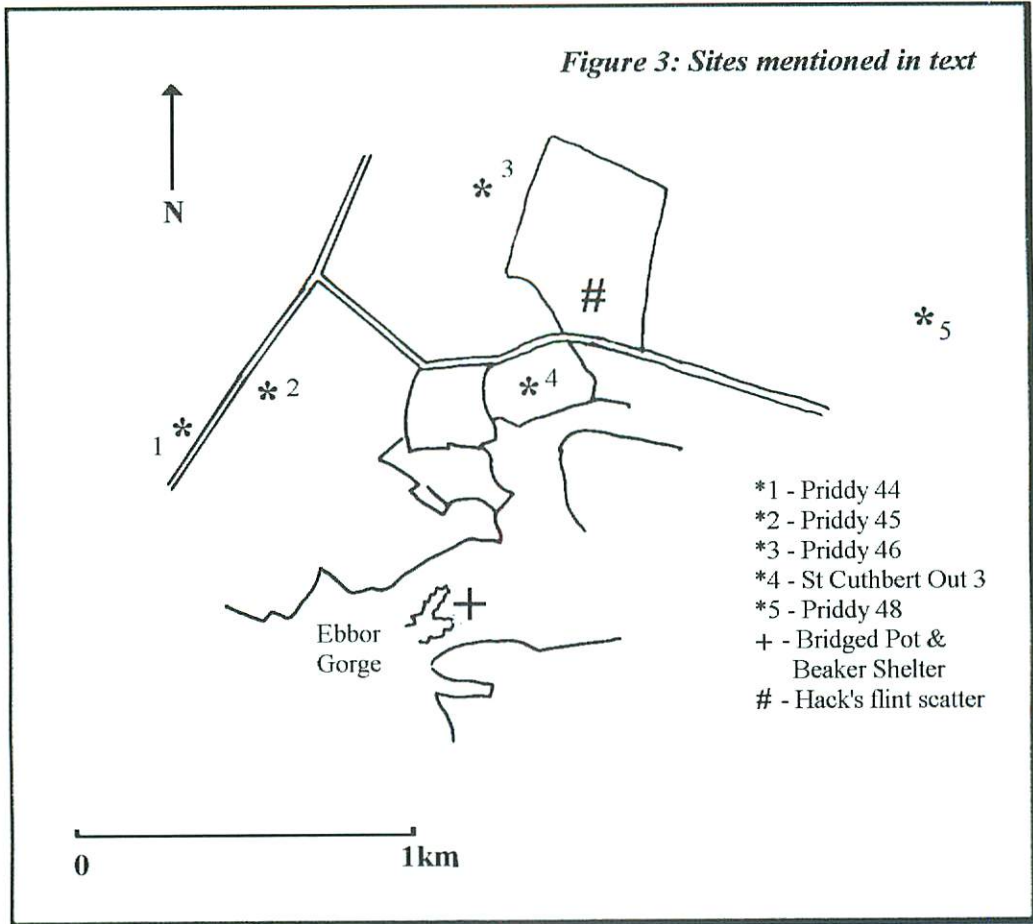


Figure 3. Sketch map showing sites mentioned in text.

INTERPRETATION

1460 individually catalogued flints and nearly 11 kg of uncatalogued waste were recovered from an area measuring approximately 700m east-west by 400m north-south, to the north of Ebbor Gorge in the parish of St Cuthbert Out. A small amount of chert is present but the assemblage is dominated by flint. The flint ranges in colour from grey to brown to black, suggesting that the raw material was obtained from more than one source. The assemblage represents an extremely significant concentration of material and appears to be of more than one period. The following phases can be identified:

Mesolithic

The earliest phase found is Mesolithic in age. It is represented by 38 retouched items. The majority of these (68%) were found in Field B. It was not necessary for the author to

reanalyse the Mesolithic material as Everton and Irwin had already classified it. They identified many of the flints as scrapers. Scrapers were an essential part of the hunter-gatherer tool-kit and were thus produced throughout the Mesolithic. The other main Mesolithic tool type represented here are retouched and utilised blades. Although the scrapers are not particularly indicative of a date, the retouched narrow blades may suggest a Later Mesolithic date for the assemblage. Everton did not distinguish between Mesolithic and later flint 'waste' so it is possible that more Mesolithic material is present in the uncatalogued waste.

Neolithic/Early Bronze Age

The remainder of the material falls into the general category of Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, as is common with the majority of the flint scatters on the Mendips. The most common tool type is the scraper, representing 40% of the total of retouched items (excluding the Mesolithic material). The scrapers are dominated by miscellaneous (32% of scrapers) and broken (22%) forms that can not be analysed any further here. It is more useful to analyse the scrapers that do conform to the standard typologies as these are more helpful in dating the assemblage. They can be broken down as follows:

End scrapers	19%
Side scrapers	11%
Thumbnail scrapers	7.7%
End & Side Scrapers	5%
Double-ended scrapers	2%
Disc scrapers	1.3%

End scrapers are the most common scraper type found on sites of Neolithic date and so their dominance here is no surprise. Little more can be said about them at this level of analysis. The number of side scrapers and thumbnail scrapers is interesting, as these are more closely datable. Side scrapers are usually assigned a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date. At Briar Hill causewayed enclosure in Northamptonshire (Bamford, 1985) they were confined to the Later Neolithic features and at the Grimes Graves flint mines (Saville, 1981) they were more common in the Bronze Age. At the Late Neolithic henge enclosures of Durrington Walls and Mount Pleasant (Wainwright and Longworth, 1971) they constituted about 20% of all scrapers. Thumbnail scrapers are generally associated with Beaker assemblages, also suggestive of the same period. Indeed, taken together, the presence of these scraper types at Ebbor suggests a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date for at least part of the assemblage. Disc scrapers are also attributable to this general period.

A Late Neolithic date is also implied by the presence of notched flakes (4% of the total retouched assemblage) and the two petit-tranchet derivative arrowheads. The rest of the retouched assemblage (knives, borers etc.) are not particularly diagnostic in date beyond being of the general Neolithic/Bronze Age period. Two blade ends of polished flint axes and one butt end of a stone axe are also represented in the assemblage but little more can be said about these other than that they fit into the general period outlined.

The large amount of uncatalogued waste includes primary, secondary and tertiary flakes, suggesting that knapping may have taken place in-situ. No attempt has been made to catalogue the waste due to the sheer volume of material and the enormous amount of time this would take. A detailed study of this material would certainly provide more information on the

treatment of the flint. Length: breadth analysis of the complete waste flakes, as advocated by Pitts (1978) may also help assign a broad date to the assemblage.

CONCLUSIONS

The flint assemblage from the top of Ebbor Gorge is predominantly Neolithic/Bronze Age in date with a minor Mesolithic element. The Mesolithic flints may be Later Mesolithic in date, with scrapers dominating the retouched tools. The small amount of Mesolithic material would suggest temporary occupation, a short stay camp perhaps, involved in a specialist activity such as the processing of animal hides. A number of late Mesolithic assemblages are known on the Mendip ridge, often in situations commanding good visibility of the surrounding landscape (Darvill, 1987, p41), so the evidence fits the general pattern well. It is thought that during the Mesolithic the Mendip uplands would have consisted of open woodland and scrub, providing rich grazing for large game (Cunliffe, 1993, p23). The proximity to the gorge would also allow easy access to the wide gravel flood valleys to the south, which are abundant in wildfowl and fish. The site would therefore be an ideal location from which to exploit two diverse, rich environments.

Most of the flint assemblage is however Neolithic/Bronze Age in date. The problems of dating surface scatters are manifold, especially when the scatters contain only flint. It is difficult to do more than make broad classifications, such as 'Early Neolithic', 'Later Neolithic' and 'Bronze Age', each of which lasted hundreds of years. Indeed, it is only possible to make these classifications when there are diagnostic pieces present, otherwise an assemblage may just be said to be of 'Neolithic' type, a time-span stretching over several millennia. With this in mind, it is impossible to be certain whether the evidence from the top of Ebbor Gorge represents a single episode of activity or successive activity phases over a longer period at a favoured site. The presence of primary waste, cores, tiny chips and even a flint nodule, would indicate that flint was being imported and knapped on site. The evidence would appear to be in favour of a site involved in the manufacture and use of flint tools, with the burnt flint suggesting domestic activity. A Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date is implied by some of the more diagnostic pieces of the retouched assemblage. It is possible therefore that many of the flints may relate to a single phase of domestic occupation, dating to the *approximate* period 2300-1800BC, in part contemporary with the 'Beaker' period. If the cairn in Field B is prehistoric, the settlement may be of roughly the same date.

Many sites of a similar date are known in the general area (see figure 3). At Bridged Pot cave in Ebbor Gorge, a beaker vessel, flints and a greenstone axe were recovered. Beaker Shelter, also in the gorge, contained a beaker and the remains of four individuals whilst other caves and shelters in the Gorge contain general 'Neolithic' activity. Within a one kilometre radius of the site are three round barrows and one questionable round barrow: Grinsell's Priddy 44, Priddy 45, Priddy 48 and Priddy 46 respectively. Perhaps most importantly, a large flint assemblage was collected by Brian Hack at NGR ST 532494, which he described as 'typically Beaker'. This included 24 plano-convex knives, a polished discoidal knife, convex scrapers, a petit-tranchet derivative arrowhead and a partially polished barbed and tanged arrowhead (Hack, 1984, p11). The field from which these were recovered lies to the north of Everton's Field B, on the other side of Dursdon Drove. It therefore seems possible that these two scatters, lying adjacent to each other, are contemporary and represent the rather dispersed remains of a Beaker age settlement.

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