

Notes

A Creswellian campsite, Newtown Linford

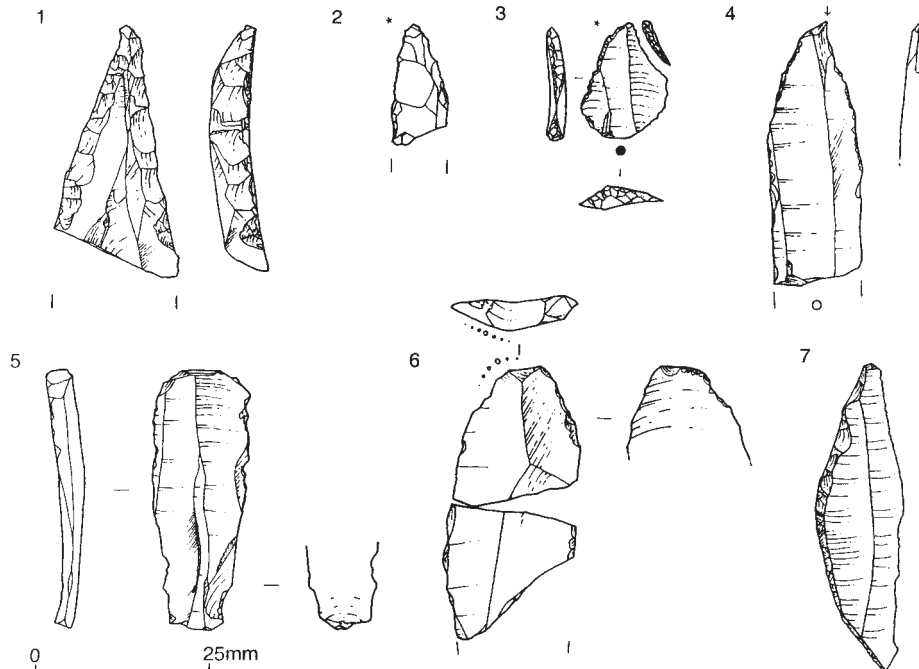
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The British Upper Palaeolithic is divided into Early and Late periods, punctuated by a glacial episode, the Late Devensian, from *c.* 23,000 radiocarbon years ago (BP). For the next 10,000 years or so, human groups were absent from much of north-west Europe, until a relative warming during the Bølling chronozone saw their return (Barton 1990). In Britain, then the north-western peninsula of mainland Europe or Doggerland (Coles 1998), these pioneering Late Glacial hunter-gatherers have been termed 'Creswellian', after Creswell Crags on the Nottinghamshire – Derbyshire border, where many of the caves have produced Late Upper Palaeolithic remains (Garrod 1926). The Creswellian type fossil is the 'Cheddar point', a trapezoidal backed blade with oblique truncations at each end and additional blunting retouch along the shorter side (illus. 1.7; Jacobi 1991; Cooper and Jacobi 2001). A distinctive method of platform preparation for blade production, the *en éperon* technique, also appears to be a British Creswellian trait (Barton 1990, Jacobi 1991, 137). However, as the technique is also known from the continental Magdalenian it may be that the 'Creswellian' is too strict a cultural and typological definition; the British material may just be one facet of a wider techno-complex (Jacobi 1991, 137-8).

A recent chance find at Newtown Linford is an important addition to the small number of Creswellian sites, and possibly unique evidence for an *in situ* open-air campsite. In September 2001, Graham and Christine Coombs and their niece, Faye discovered a flint scatter eroding from a public footpath. The finds were promptly reported to Richard Knox, Leicestershire SMR officer, who identified a Cheddar point amongst the assemblage. Repeated visits over the next few weeks by the Coombs' and the author resulted in a few more pieces, and the recognition that the cluster was from a very limited area, some 5m across. The cluster may represent a specific task locale within a larger site. The site is currently being monitored for further erosion, pending proposed limited fieldwork to further characterise the site and inform on management issues.

The assemblage of *c.* 450 worked flints includes several formal tools, a core, blades, bladelets, flakes and numerous small chips. Six of the blades have *talons en éperon* (illus. 1.5), supporting evidence for its Creswellian character. The tools include a Cheddar point, four burins, a micro-piercer, six broken piercers, and a truncated blade with a heavily-worn end (illus. 1). Similar pieces to the latter have been interpreted as strike-a-lights, used with iron pyrites as fire-starters (Stapert and Johansen, 1999). However, it has been noted that a feature of Creswellian tools with worn tips is that they have marginal retouch or damage extending from the worn tip (Jacobi *et al.*, 2001, 19). Such damage suggests that the pieces were subject to clockwise torsion from use as a reamer. If the retouch was deliberate this might be seen as a technique to provide extra bite and marginal strengthening to the tool. The illustrated example shows marginal retouch, but it is uncertain if it was intended or resulted from use (illus. 1.6).

The raw material used is a high-quality, translucent brown flint which has been imported to the site, though the original source is as yet unknown. Creswellian sites typically comprise flint work exploiting raw material of good quality, often imported from some distance (Jacobi 1997). A high proportion of chips and a core tablet indicates primary knapping of flint, whilst the production and/or maintenance of tools is evident from two Krukowski microburins. These artefacts are generally regarded as the result of



1: Selection of tools and example of blade en eperon from the site: Piercers (1 and 2), micro-piercer (3), obliquely truncated blade with a burin scar (4), retouched blade with *en éperon* preparation (5), blade with worn end (6), Cheddar point (7).

knapping accidents whilst backing blades (Barton 1992, 269), comprising the end segment of a blade with abrupt retouch and an oblique fracture scar where the piece was detached from the backed blade. However, it is plausible that these pieces were deliberately snapped during tool maintenance to present a fresh edge (Barton, pers. comm.). Many of the pieces are burnt, possibly reflecting activities around a hearth. The presence of many small chips suggests that the site was rapidly buried, possibly by windblown loess.

The recent finds have excellent potential to inform about tool function during the Late Upper Palaeolithic. Whereas most Creswellian flint assemblages have varying degrees of patina, precluding use-wear analysis, the present finds show little or no post-depositional surface alteration due to their burial in acidic soils. This fresh condition will allow study of the function of tools such as the Cheddar point – were they projectile points, knives or did they have some other function? A pilot use-wear study is to be undertaken in the near future.

Further fieldwork should elucidate the extent of the site, and whether there are any structural remains such as the tent ring found at the Creswellian site at Zeijen, Netherlands (Stapert and Johansen 2001). The true nature and character of the site awaits further work but it is entertaining to speculate on the activities performed there. Perhaps the biggest clue is the apparent strategic location. Lying at the narrow mouth of a gorge the site would offer great advantage as a hunting station, perhaps with prey

corralled down the gorge to an ambush site at the gorge mouth. The site echoes in small part the topography of Cheddar Gorge where similar hunting strategies are envisaged (Jacobi 1997, 501).

Acknowledgements

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