An Archaeological Evaluation at Hagg Farm, Swaledale, Yorkshire

Site Code: HFS 17

Lithic Assessment

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Introduction

Archaeological investigations at the above site resulted in the recovery of 26 pieces of struck flint and chert. The assemblage has been comprehensively catalogued and this includes details of raw materials, condition and a suggested spot-date range (Appendix L01). This report follows the methodology and recommendations encapsulated in both MAP2 and MoRPHE (English Heritage 1991; 2006). It summarises the information contained in the catalogue, describing the general characteristics of the assemblage and assessing its wider archaeological significance and potential to contribute to the further understanding of the nature and chronology of activity at the site. Metrical information follows the methodology established by Saville (1980).

Quantification and Distribution

	Flake	Non-prismatic blade	Prismatic blade	Core - flake	Core - blade	Conchoidal chunk	Arrowhead	Burin	Scraper	Retouched fragment
No.	8	2	3	1	1	6	1	1	1	2

Table L01: Quantification of the struck flint from Hagg Farm

The struck pieces were all recovered from unstratified deposits during the 2017 investigations. This suggests that the bulk of the material was originally discarded onto the surface and became incorporated into the soil horizons. Overall, the assemblage is in a good condition. Most pieces are either sharp or only slightly abraded, indicating that they had received only minimal post-depositional disturbance and were recovered from close to where originally discarded.

Description

Raw Materials

The raw materials used include chert and a variety of types of flint. Ten of the pieces are made from chert, all of which are inclusion-free, dull or 'stony', dark grey to black, fine-grained and slightly laminated. It appears to have a rough outer surface but no true cortex. The pieces used here are all small, none measures in excess of 40mm, and comprise thin <20mm thick tabular fragments that were used as 'front' or 'front and back' types cores. The chert is clearly very brittle with six pieces consisting of conchoidal fragments that most probably represent cores that shattered during reduction. The chert is typical of the 'Pennine Black Chert' (cf Hind 1998; Evans *et al.* 2007; 2010) and, although petrological analysis would have to be conducted to verify its origin, it is perhaps most likely to have been gathered either from the chert-bearing Four Fathoms Limestone Member, which outcrops a few hundred metres to the east of the site or one of the other chert sources present along the Swale valley (e.g. Eastmead 2014).

The remainder of the material is made from a 'glassy' flint of variable knapping-quality. It ranges from black, brown to grey in colour and contains a variety of inclusions. Such flint is present in the glacial tills or as redeposited material within alluvial deposits found across much of the region, and other potential sources include beach or marine deposits present along the coast (e.g. Young 1984; Henson 1985). Interestingly, no Lincolnshire or Yorkshire Wolds flint is present. Whilst the chert at least could have been obtained locally, given the highly mobile nature of Mesolithic and Neolithic populations it is quite possible and perhaps likely that some of the raw materials could have been brought from further afield by the communities themselves (e.g. Donahue and Lovis 2006).

Technology, Typology and Dating

Whilst much of the assemblage comprises knapping waste, technologically diagnostic pieces indicate that most, if not all, was generated using a blade-based, systematic approach to producing standardised narrow thin flakes. Such techniques are typical of those of Mesolithic and Early Neolithic industries. These include all of the blades, the blade core and most of the conchoidal chunks, which also show evidence for blade production. One of the retouched pieces has been identified as a leaf-shaped arrowhead, which if correct would belong to the latter period. However, a dihedral burin is also present. These are more commonly encountered in Mesolithic collections, although are not entirely absent in Early Neolithic assemblages. Young's examination of numerous assemblages from County Durham has also raised the possibility of the existence of transitional assemblages containing elements from both Mesolithic and Early Neolithic industries (Young 1987). The other retouched pieces include a scraper and fragments from two others, none of which are closely dateable.

Discussion

The assemblage is small but indicates activity at the site during the Mesolithic / Early Neolithic. It comprises core working waste and a high proportion of retouched implements, the latter contributing

nearly a fifth of an admittedly small sample. The composition of the assemblage suggests that the raw materials had been brought here and converted into a range of tools that would be typical of settlement-type activities. The assemblage is too small, however, to indicate whether this represents broad-based occupation or a more task-specific encampment, and it is also possible that it was generated during repeated visiting to the site. There is only limited evidence for activity in this part of the Swale valley during these periods although a number of stray stone tools from these periods have been found (Fleming 1998, 118-119). Nevertheless, the resources provided by of the river and the opportunities the valley would have provided in terms of movement through the Pennines must have made this a favourable location for early mobile communities.

Recommendations

Due to the size of the assemblage, no further analytical or descriptive work is warranted but a brief description of the worked stone, which can largely be gleaned from this report, should be included in any published account of the investigations. The assemblage does indicate that further fieldwork in the vicinity could have the potential of adding to understandings of later prehistoric lithic technology and depositional practices in the region as well as addressing specific questions concerning the nature of the occupation at the site. Should further work be considered, the assemblage reported here should be re-documented in conjunction with any additional material found following the completion of the archaeological programmes.

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