

Possible use of logboats in the area between Ince Blundell and Formby in the early Bronze Age (circa 1600 BC)

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Introduction

The following article is the result of reflection on a dissertation done by the author as part of an MSc in Applied Archaeology at Oxford University in 2006 (James, 2006). It could be argued that British archaeologists have placed great weight on the use of ridgeways (long distance routes extending across the high ground) as a main pattern of communication in prehistoric times, and have given little emphasis to the possible use of inland waterways (Bradley, 2006:16-21, Davies, 1946). This article intends to suggest that there may be a connection between the archaeological finds at Ince Blundell and the human footprints on the beach at Formby dated to the early Bronze Age (circa 1,600 BC), and that the means of communication could have been logboats used on the inland waterways.

As recently as 1982 Kelly (1982:6-7) wrote that the marshy state of the land around Formby must have made this part of the country unattractive to prehistoric settlers. The emergence of the prehistoric footprints on the beach at Formby and the artefacts found around Ince Blundell as part of the North West Wetlands Survey of Merseyside (Cowell and Innes, 1994) have meant that this view should be re-examined. It must be noted that

the evidence for an actual prehistoric settlement in this coastal region has so far eluded archaeologists.

The Formby footprints

The Formby footprints were first mentioned by Tooley (1970), and were photographed by Smith (in Hale, 1985). Various articles have appeared about the footprints (Cowell et al, 1993; Huddart et al, 1999a; Huddart et al, 1999b; Gonzalez and Huddart, 2002). Roberts has extensively studied the footprints over a 10-year period (Roberts et al, 1996). Gonzalez et al (1996) present a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the sediments in which the prints are found, which includes palaeoenvironmental analysis using foraminifera, ostracods, diatoms, shells, grain size and the dating of the stratigraphical succession.

Dating the footprints

The literature shows that the dating of the prehistoric prints was established by two different methods, and the dates established by these methods are in approximate agreement. A reasonably secure date for the footprints has therefore been established.

¹⁴C dating of alder roots in sediment

The first method relies on dating alder roots that are seen to be growing through the sediments. Gonzalez and Huddart (2002:574) state that a set of sediments was located on the beach at Lifeboat Road, and these sediments contained alder roots that were subsequently dated to 1615- 1427 Cal BC (Pye and Neal 1993b:209). Cowell et al (1993:46)



Figure 1. Alder stems growing within desiccation polygons in Holocene silt dated to 1615-1427 Cal. BC. In Pye and Neal (1993a:44).

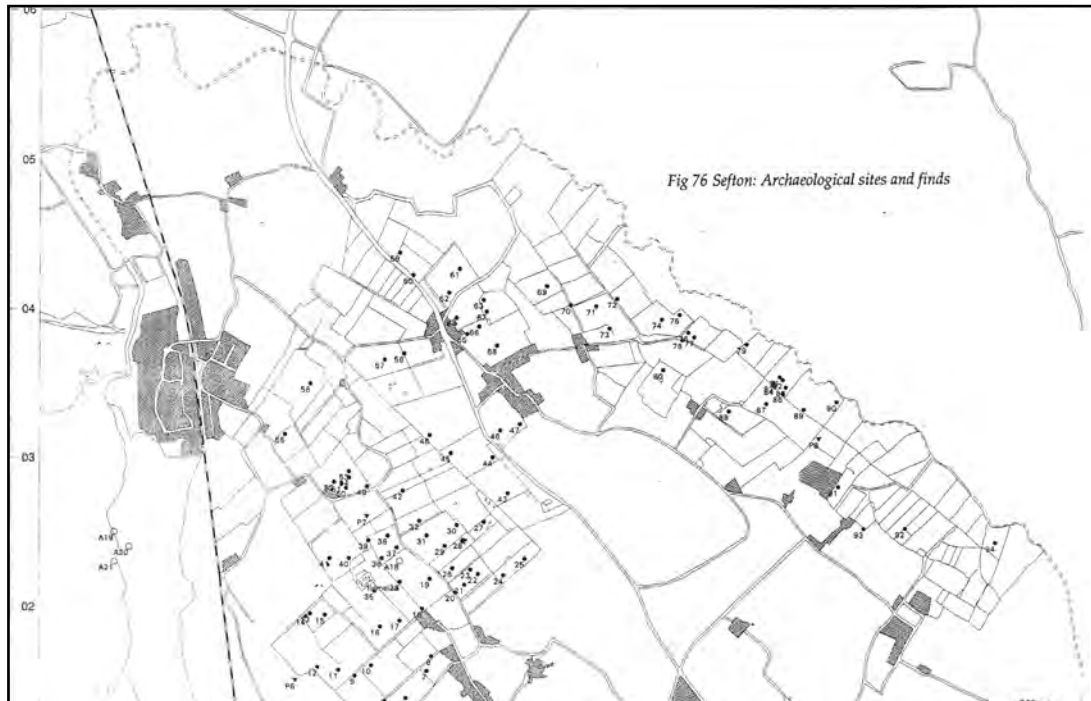


Figure 2. Sefton; Archaeological sites and finds. In Cowell and Innes (1994:figure 76).

also state that one of the alder roots of this group actually grew directly into a deer print, and figure 1 below illustrates alder that has grown through the sediment.

Another method of dating the sediments relies on indirect evidence from sea-level changes.

Huddart *et al* (1999a:565) note that the sediments on the beach, which contain the imprints, were probably formed as intertidal flat deposits between 3,650-3,250 years BP. After 3,250 years BP the character of the coastline changed and intertidal muds appear to have been buried relatively rapidly by dunes, and between 2,500-2,250 years BP the dunes were stabilised and capped by a peat/humic horizon. Thus, the temporal window in which the imprints in the sediments around Lifeboat Road could have been made was between *circa* 4,000-3,600 years BP.

Roberts *et al* (1996:650) also state that a second set of prints at a stratigraphically lower level has been recorded. The age of these at present is unresolved, because no organic material is available for ¹⁴C dating, but Gonzalez and Huddart (2002:577) think that it is possible that they may be dated to the Later Mesolithic (*circa* 8,800-6,000 years BP).

Finds at Ince Blundell

Extensive field walking carried out by Ron Cowell, (see Cowell, 1991) in relation to the Wetlands Survey in Merseyside during the period November to April 1990-1991, produced a sample of flint artefacts from the Little Crosby and Ince Blundell areas. The areas covered in the field walking are illustrated in figure 2.

In the Sefton area there is a lack of secure dated excavations to provide chronological controls for assessing the date of artefacts. Cowell (1991:17) thinks that although the assemblage is rather small, the artefact types and a trend towards broad flakes and implements suggest a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date for the material. There is some doubt as to the more exact attribution of this material, since it shares characteristics with published sites of both Neolithic and the early Bronze Age date from the Fens near Peterborough (Pryor 1976). Pryor favours a late Neolithic date on technological grounds, before or at the mid third millennium Cal BC, on the other hand, other views have suggested an early or even middle Bronze Age date (R.Middleton personal communication with R. Cowell). Until more evidence is forthcoming the precise date must remain uncertain.

Above it was argued that the footprints on Formby beach could be dated to the early Bronze Age *circa* 1600 BC, and the archaeological finds at Ince Blundell/Little Crosby, could be dated to a similar period. The evidence will be considered to see whether it can be hypothesised that the people at Formby and the people at Ince Blundell/Little Crosby could have been related and thus travelled between the two sites.

Travelling between Formby and Ince Blundell/Little Crosby

A connection between the two groups would have necessitated travel between Ince Blundell and the Formby coast. There were two ways this could have been accomplished; these are illustrated in figure 3.

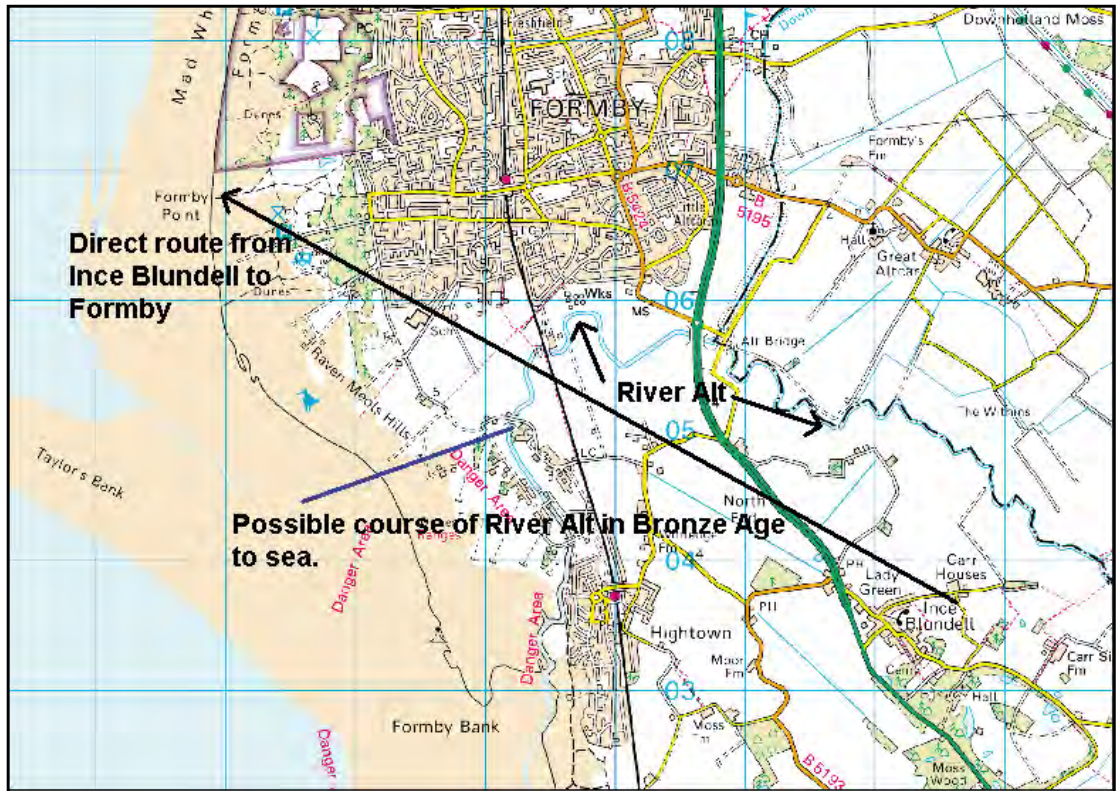


Figure 3. Map downloaded from Digimap to illustrate 2 possible ways people at Ince Blundell could have reached the beach at Formby Point, that is by walking some 5km over waterlogged ground or by logboat using the River Alt. The use of logboat would seem a preferable method.

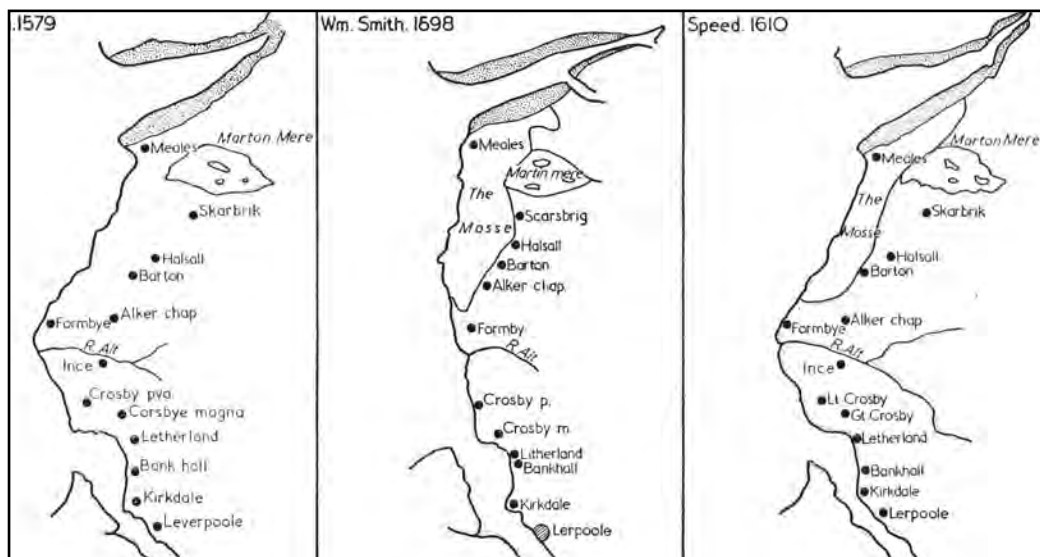


Figure 4. Sefton coastlines by Saxton 1579, Smith 1598 and Speed 1610, showing the westward flow of the Alt to the beach, compare its present course in fig. 3 above. In Gresswell (1953:100).



Figure 5. Logboat from Martin Mere on display in the Botanic Gardens museum, Churchtown, Southport, made from an oak log, dated AD 535.



Figure 6. Logboat from Martin Mere in Botanic Gardens Museum, Churchtown, Southport, dated AD 535.

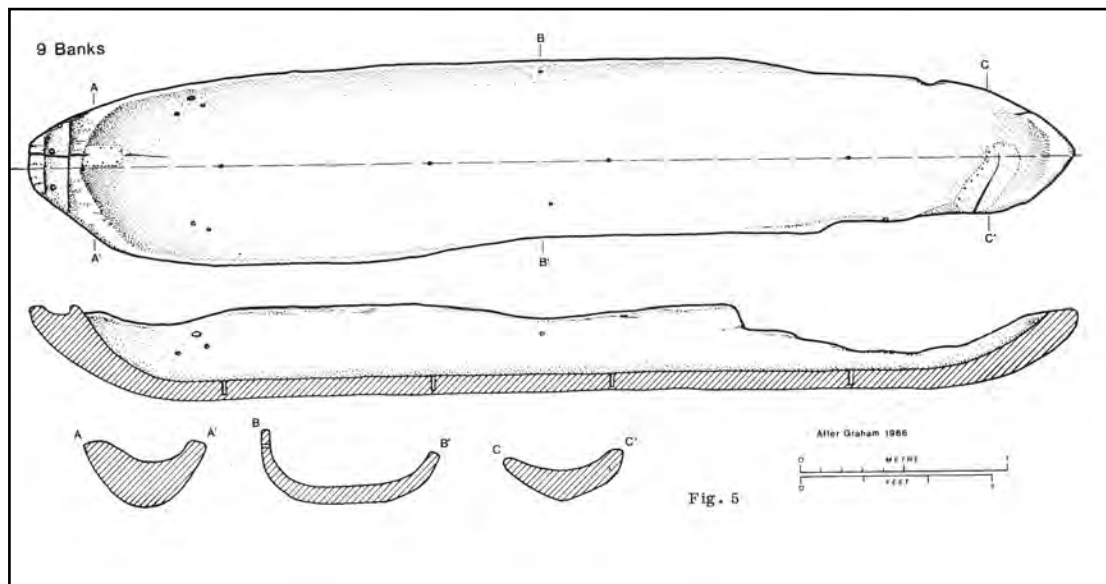


Figure 7. Drawing of logboat now in Botanic Gardens Museum, Churchtown, dated AD 535, made from half an oak log. In McGrail (1978, part 2, figure 9).

One way would have been to walk from Ince Blundell to the Formby coast. This would have involved crossing the River Alt at some point along the way. The direct travel distance is approximately 5km, which is now over dry flat land. At the time of the Bronze Age, the land would have been waterlogged, thus making travel over the direct route difficult, although the dune belt along the coast would have provided a drier path.

The outlet of the River Alt into the Mersey has changed since the Bronze Age, and Gresswell (1953:98-114) examines the evidence of coastal changes around Formby from old maps. Maps dated 1579, 1598 and 1610 clearly illustrate that the outlet of the River Alt was originally at a position further north than it is today, and it is shown as flowing westward on to the beach. Gresswell (1953:103) records that there is no reliable map evidence of the course of the River Alt across the beach until 1689, when the low-water mark was drawn. In fact the west coast of the British Isles north of the Bristol Channel only became recorded with some semblance of accuracy from about 1530, and maps of the area prior to this date are valueless geomorphologically. Fig. 4 shows the outlet of the Alt *circa* AD 1600.

The outlet of the River Alt has moved in a southerly direction over the years. It was finally diverted to its present course in 1935 by the erection of a training wall midway between Hightown and Blundellsands.

The other means by which the two sites could have been connected would have been by using some form of water borne transport, such as logboats. Hale and Coney (2005:70) state that 15 logboats have been recorded as being found in the area of Martin Mere, although the true total of logboats found may be rather more. Martin Mere

is 8km to the east of Southport. The reasons for the non-recording of such logboats in the past could simply be that they were not recognised for what they were; others may not have been reported because farmers were loath to disclose the fact of their discovery. Logboats were made from hollowed out tree trunks and were probably used on the waterways of the British Isles over a large span of time. In Ireland they have been found in association with crannogs (lake dwellings) and were still in use in that country in the late 17th century and perhaps into the 18th century as well (McGrail 1978a:12).

Martin Mere's logboats are often described in the literature as canoes. Of the 15 for which records exist, almost all have rotted away and the whereabouts of only one example is known for certainty. That example is in the Botanic Gardens Museum in Churchtown in Southport (see figures 5, 6, 7).

¹⁴C dating of this logboat gave a conventional carbon age of 560 ± 70 AD. When calibrated, this result indicates a 95 per cent probability that the parent log was felled within the date range AD 360-645 and a 68 per cent probability that the event occurred between AD 425 and AD 600. A leaflet in the Botanic Gardens Museum states that the dugout canoe is radiocarbon dated to AD 535, this radiocarbon dating had been carried out by the School of Biological and Earth Sciences at Liverpool John Moores University and Beta Analytic Incorporation Radiocarbon Dating Services in Miami.

Brodrick (1902:5-18) states that the logboat in the Botanic Gardens Museum was discovered in 1899 in the North Meols part of Martin Mere during ploughing. It lay about one metre deep in peaty earth above a deposit of beech or hazel leaves and branches. McGrail (1978a)

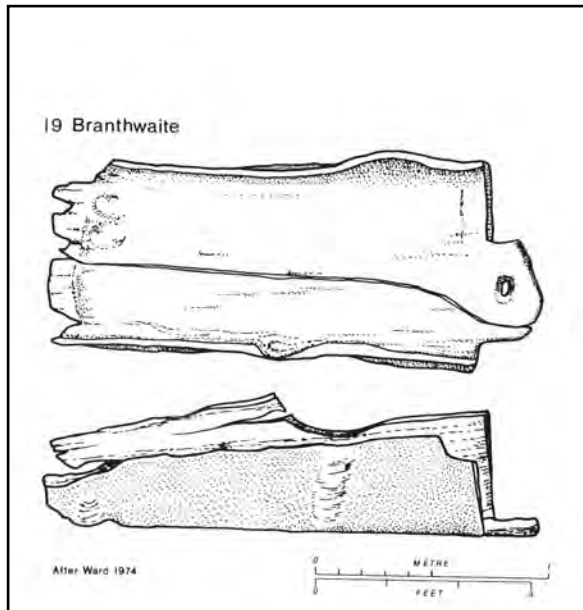


Figure 8. Logboat found at Branthwaite, Cumberland, dated 1520 BC. In McGrail, Part 2, figure 7, 1978.

re-examined the boat in 1974, and classified it as a first-rate all-round logboat of canoe form. It weighed 500 kg and had been fashioned from half an oak log split longitudinally, with 78.8 per cent of the parent log worked away. Adze marks, ribs, pins and patches noted by Brodrick had disappeared. Its length was 5.03m and the greatest width was 1.22m. A flat board, which Brodrick suggested was part of a seat, and which lay near the centre of the vessel is no longer with the vessel. McGrail (1978a:153-156) assessed the boat's manoeuvrability as moderate, but reckoned that the vessel could have been propelled by oars at good speeds. It would carry a crew of one person standing and seven kneeling and, at standard freeboard, transport one person standing and up to 920 kg of turf.

Although the logboat in the Botanic Gardens Museum has been reliably dated to *circa* AD 535, it is reasonable to hypothesise that the use of similar logboats extended to much earlier periods in this damplandscape. McGrail (1978a:110-111) records the earliest recorded logboat in England as radiocarbon dated to 1520 BC \pm 100 = *circa* 1570 BC. This boat was found in 1956 during stream clearance near the River Marron at Branthwaite, Cumberland. Apparently it was sampled and re-interred. In 1971 it was re-excavated, lifted and reburied nearby. It is illustrated in figure 8.

Other examples of logboats have been found in the area around Martin Mere and vicinity, these are listed in Table 1. (McGrail, 1978, adapted). A logboat at

Preston Museum is illustrated in figure 9.

The limiting factor in the construction of logboats is the technical knowledge required to fashion suitable tools for their construction, and the logboat in the Botanic Gardens Museum showed evidence that adzes had been used. Alternatively, controlled burning may have been used to form the logboat. The dating of the logboat from Branthwaite illustrates that the required technical expertise was in existence at the time of the Formby footprints. Thus it could be hypothesised that logboats could have been used to navigate the River Alt in the early Bronze Age.

In Table 1 oak (*Quercus*) has been used as the material for the logboats. Cowell and Innes (1994:104) show in a pollen diagram from the Sniggery Wood area that oak (*Quercus*) was present as far back as at least 3770 BC. Thus it is reasonable to suppose that oak could have been used in the construction of a logboat. On the other hand, the fabrication of a logboat would entail a large number of people-hours, and would probably require a large settled community, but no evidence of settled communities exist in the Bronze Age around Formby.

It is unlikely that these logboats could be used at sea, or in the outer reaches of estuaries, because the trees from which they were built would limit the size of the freeboard, and the size of the freeboard is a critical factor in the degree of seaworthiness of the boat. It is impossible to speculate whether these logboats were also used in warfare (McGrail (2001:172), but they could have been important economically, socially and as a possible status symbol.

Cunliffe (2001:65) agrees with McGrail (2001) and thinks that logboats because of their inherent instability



Figure 9. Logboat in Harris Museum, Preston.

Where logboat found	Possible date of logboat	Type of timber	Date found	Length	Crew space	Present location
Banks, Martin Mere. 16km North East of Formby. NGR SD 4027, 1897	AD 535 (¹⁴ C)	Oak (Quercus)	1899	5.03m	1 standing and 7 kneeling	Botanic Gardens, Museum, Southport, see figures 5, 6, 7 above.
Brickfield Farm, near Rufford. 18km North East of Formby NGR c SD 4396, 1536	Unknown	Oak (Quercus)	1869	N.A.	N.A.	Remains at Rufford Old Hall in 1974, possibly the Brickfield Farm boat.
Two Logboats Churchtown Gardens NGR c. SD 367, 187	Unknown	?	1902?	N.A.	N.A.	Lost
Eight logboats found in Martin Mere when it was drained. NGR c. SD 40, 16	Unknown	?	End of 17th century	N.A.	N.A.	Lost
Meols Hall, Martin Mere. NGR c SD 3655, 1853	Unknown	?	1890	N.A.	N.A.	Lost
Mere Sands Wood, near Rufford. NGR c SD 44, 15	Unknown	?	1861	N.A.	N.A.	Exhibited at Great Exhibition, London, 1861. Now lost.
Docks at Preston, NGR SD 525, 292	Unable to date, preserved in benzoline and paraffin in 1888.	Oak (Quercus)	7 TH October 1887	2.67m	1 standing and 2 kneeling	Harris Museum, Preston, in the reserve collection.
Docks at Preston NGR SD 527, 290	Unable to date, preserved in benzoline and paraffin in 1888	Oak (Quercus)	6 TH March 1888	2.35m	1 standing and 2 kneeling	Harris Museum, Preston on display, see figure 9 above.

Table 1 Logboats found around Martin Mere and vicinity. Adapted from McGrail 1978.

and low freeboard would have made the basic type unsafe in the open sea. The stability of logboats can be improved by attaching outriggers, and the ethnographic record does indicate that this did occur elsewhere in the world, but no such evidence has been found around the British Isles.

The use of rafts would seem to be a reasonable alternative for the shallow marshy areas, and their method of construction was relatively simple. Rafts are lightweight and could have been easily transported and used on waterlogged stretches. Hide boats are another alternative, but McGrail (2001:182-83) states that no prehistoric example has been found. The above discussion has shown that it would have been quite possible to reach the Formby coastline from the Ince Blundell area, either by walking or with the help of some form of waterborne transport.

Possible reasons for travel between the two locations

The large number of human prints suggests that the

humans were there for a definite purpose, and not chance visits, although the prints could represent people who used the beach areas as a travel route north and south. Any travel north and south along the coast would entail river crossings at the outlets of the Alt and the Mersey. Hunting would seem to be a logical occupation on the beach, perhaps on a seasonal basis, with the abundance of deer and wildfowl making such visits worthwhile. The dune slacks could have been used for cattle grazing, perhaps again on a seasonal basis, the fresh water in the slacks being available for watering the herds.

It is reasonable to speculate that the people who made the prints were mobile pastoralists, and although Cowell and Innes (1994:94) argue that pastoralism is difficult to define archaeologically, there is a general trend to identify it as a common component of Bronze Age landuse. The evidence for this statement comes from ethnographic parallels and studies of sites such as burials (see Fleming 1971; Green 1974).

Although Cowell and Innes (1994:94) state that

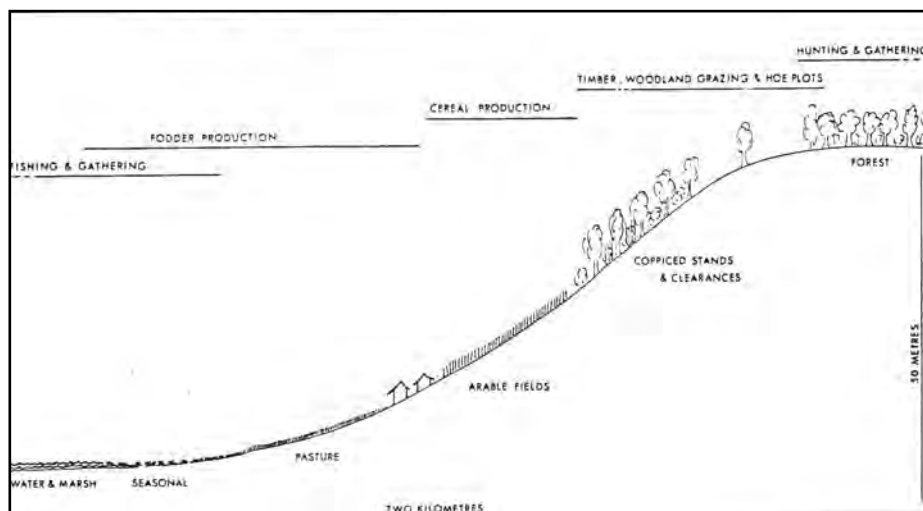


Figure 10. An explanatory profile with exaggerated vertical scale down into the Somerset Levels to illustrate a variety of land-uses in relation to topography. In Coles (1978:147).

in the vicinity of Flea Moss Wood, Little Crosby there is evidence for a large-scale clearance associated with cereal farming in the late Neolithic, after 3622-3340 Cal BC, this palaeoecological evidence does not extend into the Bronze Age. In addition, the flintwork found at this site is difficult to date with any accuracy, and it is not clear if it should be associated with this clearance phase or with a later period for which there is no palaeoecological evidence.

Roberts *et al* (1996:648-650) note that at Formby Point, in the late Holocene mudflats, the footprints of children are predominant: less common are adult women, and even fewer adult men are represented. In addition, where male footprint trails are recorded, they are often associated with red deer tracks and they indicate an above average speed and cadence. The much slower movement of the women and children would suggest a different economic activity that could be gathering shell food.

Coles (1978:147-148) suggests a model for the land-use in the Somerset Levels, which may well be similar to the pattern around Ince Blundell. Fig.10 illustrates this model, which has marsh at the base where fishing and gathering occur perhaps on a seasonal basis. The cereal production is on the higher slopes. Although the model may have some relevance for the Ince Blundell area, the highest point in the model is 50m, which is considerably more than the 15m in the Ince Blundell area.

Conclusion

This article has discussed critically whether there were links between the people who made the prints on Formby beach and the humans associated with the Ince Blundell finds. An interpretive viewpoint, in the post-processional critique style was used to argue that logboats were the

possible mode of travel between Ince Blundell and Formby along the River Alt. It is hoped that it may stimulate debate.

Further archaeological work

Evidence could be sought for inland settlement sites to the east with a view to trying to establish links with the coastal dwellers, whilst confirming coastal habitation. This leads to consideration of the possible use of river transport as a means of communication.

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Appendix 1⁹

Descriptions of the Lost Later Prehistoric Monuments of Allerton, Liverpool

The Pikeloo Hill monument (also known as Pykeloo, Pykelaw, Pikelow and Pykloohill)

HER ref. Number: 4087-018 Location: SJ 48NW (NGR 402 876)

Location description: Located approximately 60m south of entrance to Hart Hill from Harthill Road.

Description:

Possible Barrow, maybe Bronze Age in date, the precise location unknown. Maps of the 18th-century showing field name evidence reveal several field names: Pikeley Hill Closes, Further and Little Pikeley Hill Closes and Pikeley Hill. Further, the early medieval place name derivation reveals that the first element 'Pike' means hill or summit with the second element 'Hlaw' meaning burial mound. The 'ley' has also an early medieval derivation, meaning wood clearing.

The site is clearly marked as a large circular mound on the Wavertree - Allerton boundary dispute map of 1568, referred to this map as *pykeloohill*. The mound is flanked by two upright stones, 30m apart. These outlying standing stones, used as part of the boundary appear to have been associated with the nearby Calderstones monument and the Rodger Stone. The inscription on the map states:

... From that stone est by north to another stone called Rodger stone sixtene roods. From that stone Est norhest to three stones called Calldway stones fortye fyve roodes and a halfe...

Based on these measurements, Mike Royden plots the Pikeloo monument within the current boundary of Calderstones Park, possibly close to Allerton Beeches.

The whereabouts of the site came under the scrutiny of Ronald Stewart-Brown (1911). He stated: '...the Hart Hill Estate has been searched for traces of the mound and stones but nothing could be found. On the north side of the drive, in the field, and not far from the lodge, the ground has a curious uneven appearance over an area of about 20 yards wide, within which no daisies were growing, though the rest of the field was then white with them. This might be the spot but doubtless the mound was levelled very long ago.'

⁹ Local historian Mike Royden provides an excellent overview of the later prehistoric monuments of Liverpool: see <http://www.btinternet.com/~m.royden/mrlhp/local/calders/calders.htm>

The Rodgerstone

HER ref. Number: 4087-019 Location: SJ 48NW (NGR 403 876)

Location description – Possibly between Harthill Lodge and the Calderstones

Description:

The precise position of this monument is unknown but probably stood between the Calderstones and the now lost Pikeloo monument. According to early documentary evidence the name Rodger, Dawger and Dojer has been directly linked to the Calderstones but both are clearly separate monuments.

As part of a boundary dispute between the residents of Allerton and Wavertree, the Rodger Stone, along with the Calderstones and Pikeloo is mentioned. The claim mentions: '.....standing 45 roods from the 'Rodger Stone' and of the witnesses called to make depositions, all referred to three mere stones called 'caldway stones', 'the great stone called Rodger Stone' and the 'Roger stones otherwise called Dawger stones or Caldway stones....' Based on the description, the Rodger Stone must have been a large menhir. Furthermore, regarding its location, this menhir probably stood west of the Calderstones monument as an outlier, acting a similar role as the Robin Hood's Stone.