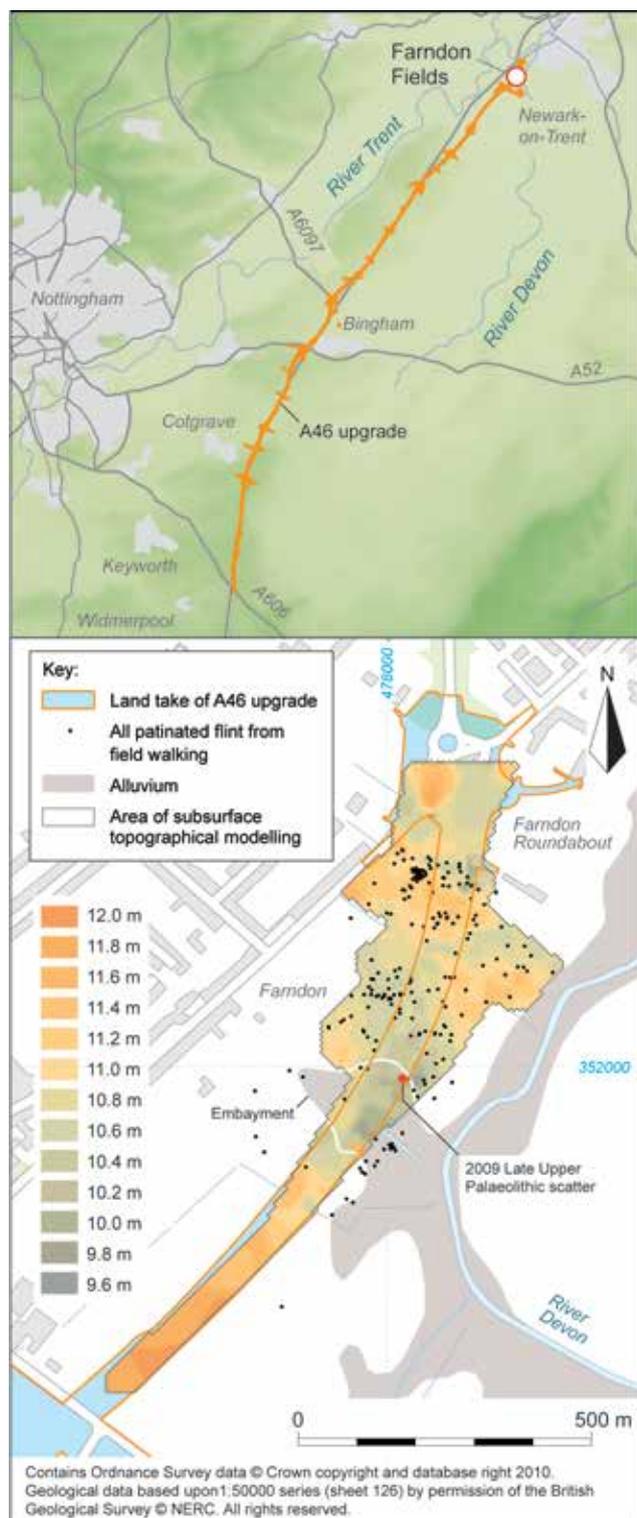


## Farndon Fields, Nottinghamshire: *in situ* multi-phased Late Upper Palaeolithic activity on the floodplain



Location of LUP flint scatters at Farndon Fields, with wider distribution of LUP flints derived from fieldwalking, in relation to the underlying topography (metres aOD) and mapped alluvium (reproduced by permission of the British Geological Survey, © NERC. All rights reserved: CP13/104).

In 2009, a Cotswold Wessex Archaeology joint venture undertook the archaeological works along the 28km upgrade of the A46 trunk road between Newark-on-Trent and Widmerpool, Nottinghamshire. Part of this work impacted upon the important Late Upper Palaeolithic (LUP) site of Farndon Fields which lies just south of Newark near the confluence of the river Devon with the Trent.

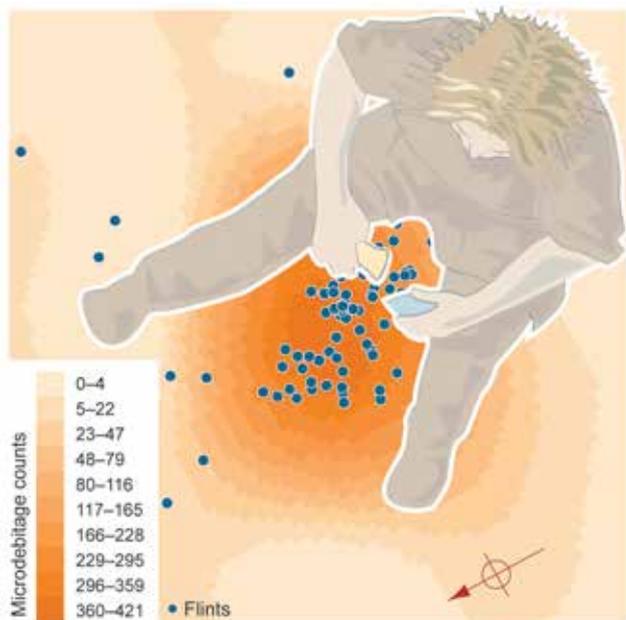
The site's importance was first recognised in 1991 when fieldwalking by Trent and Peak Archaeological Unit recovered a small quantity of diagnostic LUP worked flints belonging to a British derivative (Creswellian) of the European Final Magdalenian culture (c. 12,600–12,250 BC). Additional material was collected in subsequent fieldwalking campaigns, including a number of discrete clusters of relatively undamaged artefacts in the ploughzone. These pieces, which were all distinguished by a white surface patina, provided the prospect that *in situ* sub-ploughsoil scatters might exist, though preliminary small-scale test pits failed to locate evidence of this. A series of auger and borehole surveys across the study area yielded important information about its sub-surface topography, enabling potential areas for *in situ* LUP material to be identified, including the margins of an alluvial embayment in the centre of the site.

The new road was constructed without removing the ploughsoil, thereby preserving the archaeology beneath it *in situ*; archaeological test pits and trenches were located within the flanking drainage ditches. The most significant discoveries were made in a trench situated on the eastern edge of the alluvial embayment, where four possible LUP flints were recorded in alluvium below the ploughsoil in opposing sections of the trench. Expansion of this trench to the east and west revealed two distinct LUP flint scatters.

The earlier of these industries, on the east side, comprised 167 patinated artefacts, in mint condition, from a blade industry employing extensive use of platform faceting and soft hammers, and exploiting non-local flint. These were identical to the LUP Creswellian artefacts found during the earlier fieldwalking campaigns. The largest component, comprising 138 pieces, supplemented by quantities of microdebitage to 1mm, lay in an undisturbed nucleated scatter (c. 0.5m long by 0.25m wide), surrounded by a diffuse spread of 21 outlying artefacts, some of which could be refitted to those in the nucleated cluster. This suggested that the scatter was *in situ* with very limited post-depositional horizontal movement. The vertical distribution of flint artefacts displayed clear evidence of bioturbation through c. 0.15m of the underlying alluvial deposits. The Creswellian scatter was similar to scatters produced experimentally (detailed in the forthcoming publication) suggesting that it represents the rare survival of an ephemeral *in situ* knapping episode, worked by one highly skilled person seated on or



Excavation of the flint scatters.



Interpretation of the knapping event showing the distribution of flint artefacts and microdebitage; the distribution suggests a right-handed knapper.

close to the ground, and so documents a single, relatively uninterrupted, moment in time.

A stratigraphically later, more diffuse, scatter of unpatinated artefacts from a blade industry was found in the small

area opened on the west side of the original trench. This assemblage contrasts with the Creswellian material, both in its hard-hammer mode and relatively unsophisticated core technology, and in its use of poor-quality nodules from the local river gravel. Retouched material included backed pieces and scrapers. These attributes suggest that this industry was also of LUP date but of Federmesser type (c. 12,000–11,000 BC). The scatter was also found both in the upper parts of the alluvium and the overlying ‘sub-soil’; however, the assemblage had suffered some horizontal dispersion of artefacts, both by human activity during the use of the site and from being located immediately below the ploughzone. Despite this, sufficient structure remained within the relationship of artefacts and microdebitage to suggest that elements of specific site activities survived. Discrete areas of flaking activity appear to have co-existed within a general spread of occupation activity located around what appear to have been hearths. Specific activity areas were defined by microdebitage, notably chips of distinctive raw material indicative of a single flaking event location, and distinct distributions of scrapers.

The excavated scatters indicate human activity at the site throughout the Late Pleistocene Windermere Interstadial (c. 12,700–10,700 BC). The large LUP dataset now available, coupled with that from fieldwalking, indicates that activity across the study area during this period occurred along low-lying wetland margins and areas of elevated gravel adjacent to river channels. Soil micromorphology undertaken within the Creswellian scatter suggests that knapping would probably have taken place at this location during the summer months. Clear differences in material sourcing are also apparent, with good quality flint used by the Creswellian groups to produce blade blanks as supports for retouched tools, while fluviially battered, thermally flawed nodules were exploited by the later Federmesser groups. It is clear that, in a region where flint does not occur naturally, raw material was obtained from two contrasting sources, of which only the later industry is likely to have been sourced within the local catchment, if not the site itself.

With continuing research being undertaken at Farndon Fields (*Ice Age Journeys* project: <http://www.iceagejourneys.org.uk/>), it is almost certain that the site will continue to yield important information relating to LUP activity in the River Trent catchment. The report is currently being prepared for publication: N. Cooke and A. Mudd, *A46 Nottinghamshire: The Archaeology of the Newark to Widmerpool Improvement Scheme, 2009*, Cotswold Wessex Archaeology Monograph.

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