

Bronze Age – 2,000-600 BC

There may be continuity with the Neolithic period in the Early Bronze Age, with the harbour being used for seasonal grazing, and perhaps butchering and hide preparation. In the Middle to Late Bronze Age, there is extensive evidence of settlement, and farming systems with enclosures, fields, hut platforms and burial grounds on the chalk, outside the AONB. Within the AONB itself (Fig 7), evidence suggests that the landscape was being exploited as one part of a diverse social and economic region by Bronze Age communities.

The local environment is likely to have been one with a stronger maritime feel than in earlier periods. The streams and rivers are likely to have been tidal, with increasing salinity and the development of salt marsh along their margins and fringed with alder carr. Drier land is likely to have been low-lying grassland, with oak, yew, alder and willow.

It is probable that the flint tools in this period were made very quickly as required, and discarded after use. The unfinished flint arrowhead found on Itchenor beach and dating to the Early Bronze Age (Chi SMR 210; 478000 101000) seems to support this interpretation, as do the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age flints (Chi SMR 2371; 483610 104240) found at Fishbourne Creek and a Late Bronze Age collection of flint tools found around Conigar Point and south of Warblington Road (Hants SMR 32,461.00; 473000 105000). However, a 'socketed flint axe' [sic] (Chi SMR 2436; 484300 103700) found in a river bed by the sewage works in Apuldram Lane may be an exception and may have been lost or deliberately deposited rather than discarded. This socketed flint axe may in fact be an artefact made from a naturally-holed flint nodule, since it is impossible to drill flint, and may even be a macehead (Jon Cotton pers comm.). Uses for the flint tools are likely to have included scraping, boring and cutting, perhaps associated with the butchering of animals and the preparation of hides. Flint was used in preference to metal, since bronze tools were less efficient for such tasks.

In the Middle to Late Bronze Age extensive areas of the southern landscape were being utilised as parts of a much larger farming economy. There is evidence for settlement and burial activity of this date. Outside the AONB, roundhouses have been found on the coastal plain at Creek Field, Hayling Island (at 47185 10352; White 1971) and at Gosport (Hall and Ford 1994) and there is evidence from the coastal plain for field systems and barrows at Westhampnett. Within the AONB, an excavation at Knapp Farm, Bosham (Gardiner and Hamilton 1997) found Bronze Age pits into which flints and pottery had been deposited. The flintwork may have been associated with domestic activity, although the assemblage could not be related to areas in which cooking, sleeping and craftwork took place since such areas were not identified in the excavation.

One rare Late Bronze Age structure consisted of number of timbers and an area of wattle (Hants SMR 33,667; 472400 104180) found on the north coast of Hayling Island during the construction of a new sea wall. The structure was interpreted as the remains of a possible wharf support, although an alternative interpretation is that it was part of a causeway. The main feature recorded was a 0.40m diameter oak pile with axe marks that was dated by radiocarbon to 900 BC +/- 100 (Fig 8).

Allen and Gardiner (2000) postulated a Bronze Age urnfield running roughly east-west across the top of Langstone harbour and encompassing the north part of Hayling Island and the south part of Langstone village. This open, flat cemetery would have been overlooked by those living on the Havant-Gosport ridge and higher ground within Hayling Island.

The evidence for this is the location of five buried vessels suggesting funerary rather than domestic practice found by their own survey, as well as the positions of over seven other Bronze Age vessels, some containing cremated human bone (Bradley and Hooper 1973; Williams and Soffe 1987; Soffe 1980).

Finds of Bronze Age urns associated with cremations found in the AONB seem to support this idea of an urnfield, and may push its postulated limits further south and east. The inverted urn (Hants SMR 23,528.00; 472610 104270) containing a cremation burial was found in 1968 during land reclamation at Duckard Point was included in Allen and Gardiner's postulated urnfield. A further cinerary urn (Chi SMR 2353; 480760 104720) surrounded by bones was found in 1888 at Critchfield Cottage in Bosham; if this is part of the postulated urnfield rather than an outlier, then the urnfield would extend much further east and include much of the north part of Chichester Harbour. Similarly, if the cinerary urn containing human remains found at West Thorney (Chi SMR 174; 476810 102540) was also part of the urnfield, then the boundary would extend further south. The location of sherds of flint grit pottery (Hants SMR 32,462.00; 473000 105000) found around Conigar Point and south of Warblington Road also falls within the postulated urnfield.

A hoard of six Middle Bronze Age palstaves (Hants SMR 41,037; 474700 097900) was found on the east coast of Hayling Island in 1985, and is now in the British Museum. Palstaves predominate in metal hoards of this period in Hampshire (Lawson 1999), and the majority of hoards occur on the coastal plain. In the Bronze Age, there is a connection of hoard deposition with 'watery places.' At around the same time that this deposition of personal wealth starts, the custom of burial in urnfields begins to displace burial in large upstanding monuments. As we have seen above, part of the AONB may well be an urnfield. The changes in settlement, economy and material culture in the later Bronze Age may be reflected in changes in burial practice and deposition of hoards in watery places (Bradley 1990). The Hayling Island hoard from the AONB seems to fit well with this picture, as do the portions of two socketed axes and pieces of waste bronze (Hants SMR 23,562; 472700 104300) found on the north coast of Hayling Island in 1966 on a spoil heap derived from the creation of a yacht basin nearby. The palstave (Chi SMR 2329; 484000 104000) with a mid rib but no loop, found near Apuldram, fits less well.

Research questions

As is the case with other periods, there is a substantial gap in knowledge about the prevailing environmental conditions during the Bronze Age. Systematic coring would address this question.

Research questions should also concentrate on increasing understanding of how the AONB was used in the Bronze Age and its relationship to inland sites, particularly settlement sites. There is evidence for settlement just outside the AONB and the hint of settlement within the Area. There is also important evidence for well preserved timber sites relating to causeways or wharfs.

There is evidence that an urnfield located to the west continued into part of the AONB. Future research could focus on whether this urnfield continues further into the AONB. Research could also address how wider changes in settlement, economy and material culture in the later Bronze Age was reflected in changes in burial practice and deposition of hoards in watery places such as the AONB.

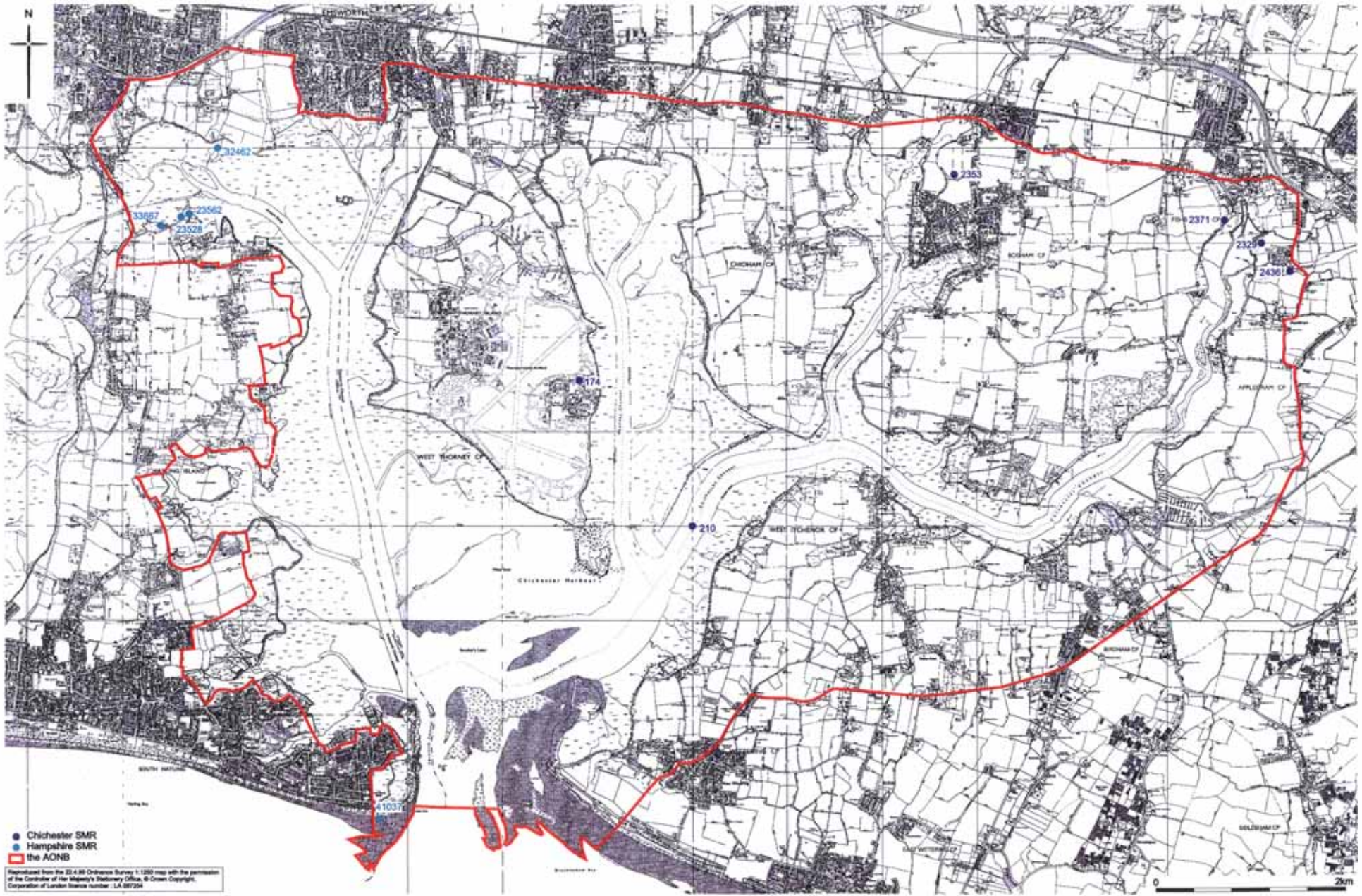


Fig 7 Bronze Age period map

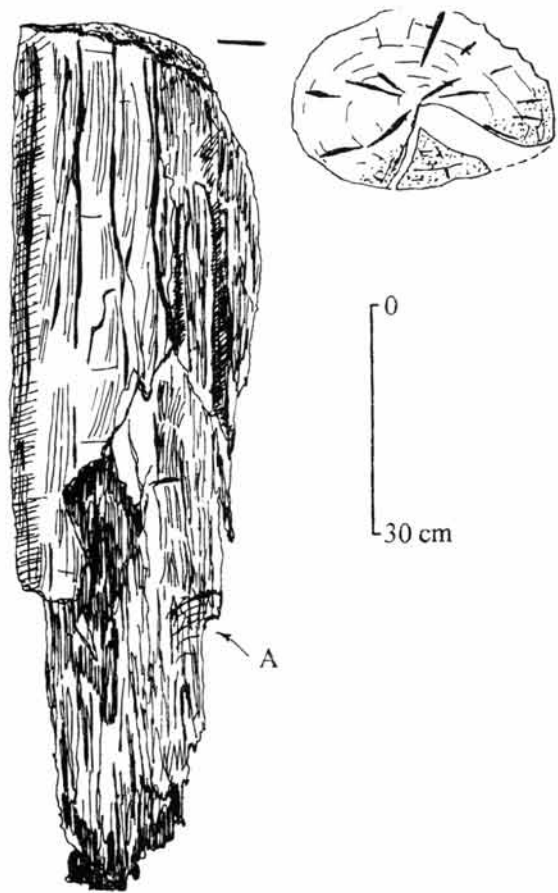


Fig 8 Bronze Age timber stake found on the north coast of Hayling Island (drawn by G. Soffe (from Williams and Soffe 1987))



Fig 9 NMR aerial photo of an undated timber feature (possibly a causeway or a wharf) north of Northney Holiday Village (Aerial photo (e))