

Partnership aims to protect one of the world's most significant archaeological areas

An ambitious wetland restoration project led by Scarborough Borough Council may help preserve world-renowned archaeology in the Borough. Likened in importance to Stonehenge, the Mesolithic site of Star Carr is one of a number of prehistoric sites hidden beneath peaty farmland north of Flixton.

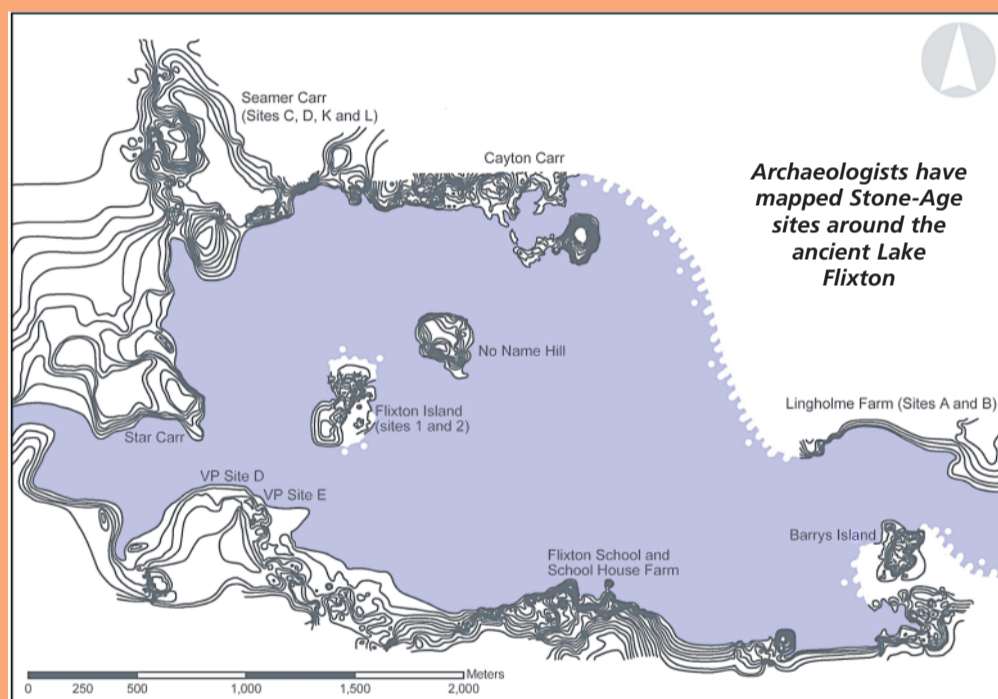
The fragile archaeology, which has lasted for thousands of years due to waterlogged ground, is now under threat due to land drainage schemes and abstraction of water.

Wetland project offers a safer future for prehistoric sites

More information about the Cayton and Flixton Carrs Wetland Project can be found on www.caytonflixtoncarrs.org.uk or by emailing Tim Burkinshaw on tim.burkinshaw@scarborough.gov.uk



Stewardship agreements on the peaty farmland of Cayton and Flixton Carrs could benefit both its hidden archaeology and declining wildlife.



Archaeologists have mapped Stone-Age sites around the ancient Lake Flixton

Secrets of Star Carr by Dr Nicky Milner, University of York

STAR Carr is a very important archaeological site and is taught about in universities around the world, yet many people who live on its doorstep do not know it even exists.

It is a Mesolithic site (Middle Stone Age) occupied after the last ice age, about 10,500 years ago by hunter-gatherers.

It was first excavated in the 1940s and became famous for the incredible artifacts it turned up, including head-dresses made out of red deer skulls, beads, harpoons and a timber platform that extended out onto the margins of what was once a large lake. These kinds of finds are very rare and the timber platform presents evidence of the earliest carpentry in Europe.

Although the site was located on a lake-edge in Mesolithic times, there is nothing but a peaty field to see

today, but it is possible to reconstruct what the landscape would have looked like then. Over the last 30 years further investigations have been carried out in the surrounding area in order to map the ancient lake, coined 'Lake Flixton'.

Many other Early Mesolithic sites have been found around the former lake's margins.

These sites have produced large quantities of worked flint, used as tools for butchering animals and processing plants.

Some have also produced animal bones, though none of them have produced the rare artifacts found at Star Carr.

One of the most important findings of recent excavations is how much the preservation of organic materials has deteriorated in the last 50 years. Bone and antler finds are extremely poorly preserved

and need expert conservation to survive.

Environmental specialists who have visited the site have estimated there may only be five or 10 years before the organic material, which has made the site so justly famous, is gone for ever.

The work that is being carried out at Star Carr and the surrounding carr land is very important to European archaeology because it can provide a detailed landscape perspective of how our Mesolithic ancestors lived and what the environment was like at this time.

• Further information about the ongoing archaeological work can be found at www.starcarr.com. Some of the material from the excavations is housed in Scarborough Museum. There is also a display in the British Museum.

The Cayton and Flixton Carrs Wetland Project

THE Cayton and Flixton Carrs Wetland Project, led by Tim Burkinshaw of Scarborough Borough Council's Parks and Countryside Service, is believed to be the biggest wetland restoration project of its kind led by a local authority.

As lead organisation in a partnership of statutory and voluntary bodies the Borough Council is working with local farmers to restore wetland habitats on the Carrs.

The word 'wetland' may conjure up images of lakes or marshes but in fact the term extends to any land habitat where the soils are wet for a significant part of the year. The vision for the Carrs is to restore the lowest parts of the River Hertford floodplain to grazed grassland which is splashy in winter and damp in spring and early summer.

The project is helping landowners secure funding from Natural England called Higher Level Stewardship agreements. Through the project, farmers can restore less productive fields to wet grassland habitat where the water table is controlled by a system of sluices in adjacent ditches.

The damp soils, benefit declining wetland wildlife as well as buried archaeology. Slowing the rate at which these fields dry out in spring and grazing the grass to the right height will attract species of wading birds such as lapwing and snipe to nest on the fields. Meanwhile



Investigators uncovering wood and red deer antler at Star Carr
Photo courtesy of Nicky Milner

the wet ground limits the decay of organic artefacts such as bone and wood by excluding oxygen. This will benefit archaeological sites such as Star Carr and others as yet undiscovered around the edge of the ancient Lake Flixton.

At the moment none of the sites so far identified, including Star Carr itself, are protected under historic environment or nature conservation legislation.

Sites such as Star Carr fall into a grey area and do not qualify for statutory protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, because they do not have any buildings or structures associated with the finds.

This may change in the next few years as a draft Heritage Protection Bill is in preparation for 2008 which will see a greater value placed on palaeo-environmental sites such as those on The Carrs.

It could mean a whole new importance for the Borough of Scarborough on the archaeological stage. Besides the Borough Council, the project also has financial support from the Environment Agency, Natural England, the RSPB and North Yorkshire County Council.

• The Cayton and Flixton Carrs area

