

Where can I discover more?

Unlike much of later prehistory onwards – whether represented by the Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age hillforts, Roman roads, Saxon barrows, medieval castles and churches, and numerous historical structures – there is almost nothing surviving in the landscape today to give a sense of what Palaeolithic Surrey may have been like. Artefacts such as flints which have been pushed to the surface through activity such as ploughing may occasionally be found upon the ground, but otherwise it is the rare excavated site which contains evidence for the period.



Handaxe uncovered from field-walking in East Surrey
(© Surrey County Council)



“Promoting the study of archaeology and antiquities...and any other matters or things relating to the pre-history and history of the County.”

*- Articles of Association
Surrey Archaeological Society*

Surrey Archaeological Society, Hackhurst Lane, Abinger Hammer, Surrey RH5 6SE

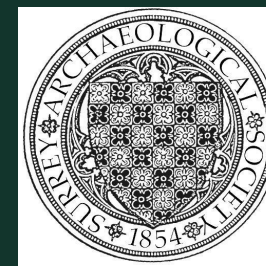
Tel: 01306 731275

Email: info@surreyarchaeology.org.uk
outreach@surreyarchaeology.org.uk

www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk

Follow us on   

Registered Charity 272098



Palaeolithic Surrey



Explore your local heritage and discover more about the origins of Surrey's earliest settlements

850,000 BC

~850,000BC Earliest evidence of humans in Britain discovered at Happisburgh, Norfolk, from which the oldest hand axe found in North West Europe also comes; the first humans in Britain at this time were likely *Homo antecessor*

~700,000BC Previously assumed earliest stone tools in Britain uncovered in Pakefield, Suffolk

~500,000BC 'Boxgrove Man' remains from West Sussex, an approximately 40-year old *Homo Heidelbergensis*, are the oldest human remains in Britain; the site also has evidence for Europe's oldest bone tools, which came from a horse butchered at the site

~420,000BC Sharpened wooden spears from Clacton, Essex are oldest known worked wooden artefacts

~400,000BC Female skull from Swanscombe, Kent represents one of earliest fossils of *Homo Neanderthalensis*

300,000 BC

~250,000BC Best known Levalloisian site and tools from Baker's Hole, Kent

~40,000BC Emergence of *Homo sapiens*, dated by evidence from Kent Caverns, Devon

35,000 BC

~10,000BC Portable art appears, including decorated horse jaw from Kendrick's Cave, Llandudno and engraved figure on mammoth bone from Pin Hole Crave, Creswell Crags

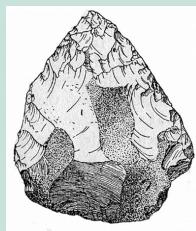
9000 BC

The Palaeolithic period c. 850,000 - 9000 BC

The vast timespan of the 'Stone Age' – over half a million years – is often difficult to conceptualise, not least because it is represented by a wide diversity of artefacts and complexity of themes. The Palaeolithic (or 'Old Stone Age') is the era which begins with the earliest humans and ends with the retreat of the glaciers in the last Ice Age. Although much of our evidence is in the form of the flint tools left behind in the archaeological record, other sites from around Britain can give some insight into other aspects of material culture, including art.

As more and more scientific techniques are developed over the years, new advances are able to be applied towards research, allowing for more detailed results. One of the most significant methods which has developed in the last century is radiocarbon (or carbon-14) dating, which can provide age estimates for carbon-based materials derived from living organisms, based on residual radioactivity. Though this is given as a date range, rather than a specific age, the method can be very useful when applied to Palaeolithic material, whether charcoal from hearths or even mammoth tusks. One such tusk from Farnham – uncovered in a gravel pit in the 1980s – was dated to 36,600 years ago, +/- about 2000 years.

Non-carbon material can also be analysed through advanced techniques, including lithics. A study to characterise local flint sources was undertaken in 2010, assessing Palaeolithic flints from two Surrey sites – Wey Manor Farm and Church Lammas – through Laser Ablation-Inductively Coupled Plasma-Mass Spectrometric (LA-ICP-MS) trace element analysis, which showed correlations with a Salisbury Plain and East Anglian source respectively. Other times, the focus is on older collections, which are reassessed as information and records can be lost over the years, such as the on-going study of axes and flakes collected around Farnham by Henry Bury.



Palaeolithic flake from Farnham
(Drawing by Chris Taylor)



Mammoth tusk from Badshot Lea found in 2005

Church Lammas, Staines
c. 9000 BC

The site was identified from the recovery of characteristic flintwork in a gravel quarry and the evidence indicates that it is likely to have been a temporary camp associated with the hunting of reindeer. The viewpoint looks approximately north across the tundra-like landscape of the floodplain associated with the Thames and Colne rivers. (Drawing by Giles Pattison © Surrey County Archaeological Unit)

