

Mongewell: preliminary archaeological assessment of proposed Wallingford by-pass route on east bank of the river (SU 609 881; Field No. 0005).

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Two trenches were excavated, one close to the eastern edge of the field (I), the other (II) on the top of a pronounced scarp above the narrow strip of low-lying floodplain next to the river.

The eastern trench (I) revealed a build-up of ploughsoils up to 75cm deep (L2) overlying the very thin remnants of original soil cover in places. No archeological features were detected.

The western trench (II) on the slope above the scarp running parallel to the river similarly revealed a build-up of ploughwash (L2) which became thicker towards the river (up to 0.85m thick). Part of the pronounced scarp may thus be attributable to ploughwash.

Beneath L2 at the west end of the trench was a silty loam layer, greyish in colour and containing burnt flint, animal bones and a fairly sparse amount of flint tempered late Bronze Age pottery similar to that from the opposite bank of the river. A neolithic leaf shaped arrowhead and two flint blades are evidence of an earlier presence.

Layer 3 was more or less indistinguishable from the fill of a ditch (F5) which terminated within the trench and ran at a very oblique angle to its line. Beneath its fill to the east was a sandy loam (L8) over more orange sandy subsoil (L9) overlying the gravel. To the west the ditch cut a layer of yellow clay (L4) which became thicker towards the river. It was devoid of finds and may represent alluvium (which seems surprising at this height which is well above the level of the floodplain of the present river) or dumped fluvial clay. It is not derived from the natural subsoil since it overlay a very dark brown loamy natural soil horizon (L6) on the surface of the gravel.

The evidence of prehistoric occupation including man-made features (represented by Ditch 5) indicates the existence of a definite site. The pottery suggests that it is contemporary with the important late Bronze Age settlement on the opposite bank of the river. The presence of occupation material in a layer surviving beneath later ploughwash and not obviously truncated severely by cultivation, suggests relatively good preservation. The present assessment which was entirely exploratory (there being no prior evidence of archaeological features) was designed only to establish the presence or absence of archaeological features. It was not possible to establish in more detail the full extent of the site, nor its relationship to the deposits on the floodplain immediately adjacent. The narrow band of floodplain on this side of the river is lower lying than the west bank, and may represent a buried river channel, which could be directly related to this site. The potential importance of the site is greatly enhanced by its probable contemporaneity with the late Bronze Age settlement on the island now buried in the opposite bank of the river here. Together the two could represent an important crossing-point of the river and/or a settlement connected with the control of river navigation and the exchange of prestige goods. The present work has thus identified a prehistoric site with clear potential whose extent, nature and quality of preservation needs further evaluation in order that the archaeological impact of this part of the proposed road can be assessed.