

Geoarchaeological investigations of a Mesolithic-Neolithic Sedimentary Sequence from Queens Sedgemoor, Somerset, UK

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A geoarchaeological investigation was undertaken at Queens Sedgemoor in Somerset, southwest England, as part of the English Heritage funded project 'the Mesolithic wetland/dryland edge in Somerset' (EH 6624). This project was designed to address the National Heritage Protection Plan (Topic 4G) associated with the assessment of the character and significance of sedimentary and wetland archaeology. As part of the project, a sediment core extracted from the site and has undergone high resolution radiocarbon dating, with subsequent detailed and directed micropalaeontological analyses (pollen, diatom, foraminifera, ostracoda, mollusca) focussing on the sedimentary sequence associated with the Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods. The presentation summarises the results of this multiproxy analyses and explains how it has assisted in understanding the landscape during a period of substantial prehistoric importance in southwest England. The sedimentary sequence dates back to the Mesolithic period (7.6ky BP) and the microfossil evidence indicates hydrosereal succession has taken place, with the initial establishment of a freshwater lake, prior to undergoing terrestrialisation and the eventual development of a raised bog. Holocene sea-level change also influenced the sedimentary archive. Due to a rise in relative sea level c. 6.7ky BP, subsequent coastal inundation and estuarine sedimentation took also place and is hereby associated with the Lower Wentlooge Formation of the Somerset Levels. Although poor pollen preservation was encountered within the section specifically associated with the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition, a clear picture of landscape change is presented for the sedimentary archive, with evidence indicative of landscape modification by humans since the late Mesolithic.