

The logo for Biggar Archaeology group is a square with a dark brown background and a white border. It features a green brushstroke at the top. The text "Biggar Archaeology group" is written in white, with "Biggar" on the top line, "Archaeology" in the middle, and "group" at the bottom.

Biggar
Archaeology
group

Bringing the past to the present



Two reports on Mesolithic Daer Valley

by Dene Wright. Introduction by Tam Ward 2016.

Introduction

The following two reports on Mesolithic sites in Daer Valley are by Dene Wright MA MLitt PhD FSA Scot, who is a Glasgow University teacher and Research Associate. Dene is also working on Mesolithic assemblages gathered by BAG from Weston Farm, Cornhill Farm and further sites in Daer Valley.

While all of the work of BAG is written and reported to Interim stages and published on BAG web site, the problem for groups such as ours is to get academic or scientific publication of the important findings we make to bring that work to a final conclusion. BAG has secured experts in numerous fields, spanning different time zones of Scottish archaeology, and has succeeded in procuring fifty nine radio carbon dates on pre historic sites. However, the problem always is to get projects finalised.

The expert dealing with the lithics of Daer Sites No's 84 and 85 has done so in a voluntary capacity and BAG are extremely grateful to him for his work and the following contributions.

Apart from occasional finds of microliths and cores recovered during fieldwalking and which were recognisable to the Group, the multiplicity of lithic analyses was not possible and of course it is debitage which forms the bulk of most lithic collections either from ploughed fields or excavations. BAG has amassed large numbers of such material and it is important at this stage to point out that chert in the work of BAG is specifically radiolarian chert and which is derived locally from natural sources along the Southern Uplands Boundary Fault Line. It has been the availability and utilisation of this material throughout all pre historic periods which has ensured that BAG projects have discovered so much lithic evidence.



Daer Valley

It is probably fair to say that BAG have discovered more evidence of the Mesolithic period in Scotland than any other organisation, although all of that data is confined to their area of interest which has been the upper reaches of the rivers Clyde and Tweed.

The largest assemblages have been gathered at the farms of Weston, Cornhill, Brownsbank, Melbourne, Howburn, and Nether Hangingshaw and also in the Daer Valley, in the latter case from both forestry and reservoir excavations, all are reported on BAG web site.

The collections and their locations are allowing a better understanding of the southern Scottish Mesolithic period from its beginnings over 10,000 years ago to its demise around 6000 years ago. While each site has produced some new aspect of the life of the hunter gatherers, perhaps of particular interest are the geographic locations and concentrations of sites in particular vicinities, the latter showing that the wandering people were returning to the same locations time and again.

Daer Sites No's 84 and 85 among several other places, show that previously the 'traditional' locations along river systems, coastlines and estuaries is no longer viable as being the best places to look for such sites, and that inland camp sites are being repeatedly found in places removed from water courses and are found not only on dry land further away, but also high up on the slopes of hills, such as the two sites reported here and on BAG reports, and which are thought to be the highest Mesolithic sites known in southern Scotland. That being said, the river valleys are still clearly seen as the through routes adopted by the hunters while on their journeys.

Upper Clydesdale and Daer Valley in particular can presently claim to the Mesolithic heart of Scotland given the number of sites which are now available for academic and scientific study.



Excavation site Daer Valley

Mesolithic events at Daer 84, Coom Rig: preliminary notes on the character of the lithic assemblage

Introduction

A report on the excavations undertaken by the Biggar Archaeology Group of the Mesolithic site at Daer 84 can be downloaded from their website (cf. Ward 2005b). The lithic assemblage comprises of 1811 pieces of chipped stone. A full typological and technological analysis of the assemblage has been carried out (Wright 2012). This document represents brief preliminary notes pending full publication in due course.

A sample of hazel charcoal from a pit (Feature 6) produced a radiocarbon date of 4338-4071BCE [SUERC-6829 5390±35BP] (Ward 2005a, 179). Known Mesolithic events in Daer Valley covers over four millennia. The earliest date is from Daer Reservoir 1 at 8550-7950BCE [AA-30354 9075±80BP] (Ashmore 2004, 100; Ward 1998, 127) and the latest from Daer 85 at 3779-3647BCE [SUERC-6463 4930±35BP] (Ward 2005a, 179).

Raw Materials

Chert dominates the assemblage at 97.13%; flint 2.65% and others 0.22%. The excavation and survey team from Biggar Archaeology Group note from chert does not occur naturally in the Daer Valley, although it is common nearby in the upper reaches of the River Clyde (cf. Ward 2004).

Character

The character of the assemblage is shown at Table 1. 99.46% of the chert is fresh. The incidence of burnt, patinated, rolled and weathered pieces is exceptionally low. The frequency of burnt pieces is probably understated. Experimental work undertaken on flint (Finlayson 1990, 53) and chert (Ballin and Johnson 2005, 63) indicated that burnt pieces would not have been classified as such due to the absence of burnt attributes.

Pieces with attributes highlighting the use of a bipolar reduction strategy as opposed to platform reduction account 14.19% of the assemblage. However, not all bipolar products present with attributes which permit them to be classified as bipolar. It is, therefore, probable that bipolar debitage products are understated (after Kuijt *et al.* 1995, 117).

The ratio of blades to blades and flakes (1:4.19) suggests the presence of a blade industry at Daer 84 (after Bordes and Gausson 1970).

		%
Tested Split Pebbles	3	0.17%
Chunks	78	4.31%
Cores	59	3.26%
Flakes	725	40.03%
Primary	20	
Secondary	234	
Tertiary	471	
Primary regular	3	
Primary irregular	17	
Secondary regular	24	
Secondary irregular	210	
Tertiary regular	39	
Tertiary irregular	432	
Blades	258	14.25%
Primary	5	
Secondary	50	
Tertiary	203	
Primary regular	1	
Primary irregular	4	
Secondary regular	25	
Secondary irregular	25	
Tertiary regular	100	
Tertiary irregular	103	
Small Fraction	577	31.85%
Modified	111	6.13%
Total	1811	100.00%

Table 1: Character of the assemblage from Daer 84.

Secondary technology

There are 111 pieces with secondary modification (Table 2). The typological analysis of the type of microliths present is shown at Table 3.

The presence of a microburin suggests that microliths were manufactured at Daer 84. Experimental work indicated that in the process of manufacturing microliths using a microburin technique 20% of microburins did not produce attributes to identify the piece as a microburin (Finlay 2003, 174).

Microliths	42
Microlith fragments	14
Microburin	1
Scraper	28
Thin backed	1
Point	1
Denticulate	4
Notch	5
Awl	1
Miscellaneous retouch	14
	111

Table 2: Numerical analysis by type of pieces with secondary modification.

Backed bladelet	25
Double backed bladelet	3
Scalene triangle	11
Needle point	3
	42

Table 3: Numerical analysis by type of microliths.

Summary

The Mesolithic assemblage from Daer 84 may be a single occupation phase in the sense of a number of visit events over a relatively short period of time.

Dene Wright MA MLitt PhD FSA Scot
December 2014

- Ashmore, P. 2004. A Date List (to October 2002) for Early foragers in Scotland. In A. Saville (ed.), *Mesolithic Scotland and its Neighbours: The Early Holocene Prehistory of Scotland, its British and Irish Context and some Northern European Perspectives*: 95-157. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
- Ballin, T. B. and M. Johnson. 2005. Glentaggart, South Lanarkshire: Discussion of a Scottish Chert Assemblage and its Associated Technology. *Lithics: The Journal of the Lithic Studies Society*, 26: 57-86.
- Bordes, F. and J. Gaussen. 1970. *Une fonde du tente magdalénien près de Mussidan (Dordogne)*. Koln: Frühe Menschheit Und Umwelt 1.
- Finlay, N. 2003. Microliths and multiple authorship. In L. Larsson, H. Kindgren, K. Knutsson, and A. Åkerlund (eds), *Mesolithic on the Move*: 169-178. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Finlayson, B. 1990. The examination of surface alteration. In C. R. Wickham-Jones (ed.), *Rhum, Mesolithic and later sites at Kinloch: Excavations 198-86*: 53-54. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kuijt, I., W. C. Prentiss and D. L. Pokotylo. 1995. Bipolar Reduction: An Experimental Study of Debitage Variability. *Lithic Technology*, 20(2): 116-127.
- Ward, T. 1998. Cornhill; Weston Farm; Daer Reservoir (Sites 1 and 2). *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*: 90, 128.
- Ward, T. 2004. The discovery and excavation of a Mesolithic site in Daer Valley (Site 85). Unpublished report (<http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk/pdfarchive.shtml>): Biggar Archaeology Group.
- Ward, T. 2005a. Brownsbank Farm; Coomb Rig: Sites 84 and 85 (Daer Valley Project); Weston Farm. *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*: 132, 134-135, 179-180.
- Ward, T. 2005b. The discovery and excavation of a Mesolithic site in Daer Valley (Site 84). Unpublished report (<http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk/pdfarchive.shtml>): Biggar Archaeology Group.
- Wright, A. D. 2012. The Archaeology of Variation: a case study of repetition, difference and becoming in the Mesolithic of West Central Scotland. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Glasgow (Available to download from '<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3310/>').

Mesolithic events at Daer 85, Coom Rig: preliminary notes on the character of the lithic assemblage

Introduction

A report on the excavations undertaken by the Biggar Archaeology Group of the Mesolithic site at Daer 85 can be downloaded from their website (cf. Ward 2004). The lithic assemblage comprises of 1764 pieces of chipped stone. A full typological and technological analysis of the assemblage has been carried out (Wright 2012). This document represents brief preliminary notes pending full publication in due course.

A sample of hazel charcoal from a pit (Feature 2) produced a radiocarbon date of 3779-3647BCE [SUERC-6463 4930±35BP] (Ward 2005, 179). This date determines that known Mesolithic events in Daer Valley covers over four millennia. The earliest date is from Daer Reservoir 1 at 8550-7950BCE [AA-30354 9075±80BP] (Ashmore 2004, 100; Ward 1998, 127).

Raw Materials

Chert dominates the assemblage at 91.04%; flint 7.88% and others 1.08%. The excavation and survey team from Biggar Archaeology Group note from chert does not occur naturally in the Daer Valley, although it is common nearby in the upper reaches of the River Clyde (cf. Ward 2004).

Character

The character of the assemblage is shown at Table 1. 98.45% of the chert is fresh. The incidence of burnt, patinated, rolled and weathered pieces is exceptionally low. The frequency of burnt pieces is probably understated. Experimental work undertaken on flint (Finlayson 1990, 53) and chert (Ballin and Johnson 2005, 63) indicated that burnt pieces would not have been classified as such due to the absence of burnt attributes.

Pieces with attributes highlighting the use of a bipolar reduction strategy as opposed to platform reduction account 11.96% of the assemblage. However, not all bipolar products present with attributes which permit them to be classified as bipolar. It is, therefore, probable that bipolar debitage products are understated (after Kuijt *et al.* 1995, 117).

The ratio of blades to blades and flakes (1:3.06) suggests the presence of a blade industry at Daer 84 (after Bordes and Gausson 1970).

		%
Tested Split Pebbles	6	0.34%
Chunks	83	4.71%
Cores	58	3.29%
Flakes	773	43.82%
Primary	16	
Secondary	234	
Tertiary	523	
Primary regular	0	
Primary irregular	16	
Secondary regular	23	
Secondary irregular	211	
Tertiary regular	54	
Tertiary irregular	469	
Blades	340	19.27%
Primary	2	
Secondary	86	
Tertiary	252	
Primary regular	0	
Primary irregular	2	
Secondary regular	42	
Secondary irregular	44	
Tertiary regular	139	
Tertiary irregular	113	
Small Fraction	392	22.22%
Modified	112	6.35%
Total	1764	100.00%

Table 1: Character of the assemblage from Daer 85.

Secondary technology

There are 112 pieces with secondary modification (Table 2). The typological analysis of the type of microliths present is shown at Table 3.

The presence of three microburin suggests that microliths were manufactured at Daer 85. Experimental work indicated that in the process of manufacturing microliths using a microburin technique 20% of microburins did not produce attributes to identify the piece as a microburin (Finlay 2003, 174).

Microliths	54
Microlith fragments	11
Microburin	3
Scraper	33
Thin backed	2
Denticulate	1
Notch	3
Miscellaneous retouch	5
	112

Table 2: Numerical analysis by type of pieces with secondary modification.

Backed bladelet	23
Double backed bladelet	9
Crescent	1
Scalene triangle	17
Needle point	4
	54

Table 3: Numerical analysis by type of microliths.

Summary

The Mesolithic assemblage from Daer 85 may be a single occupation phase in the sense of a number of visit events over a relatively short period of time.

Dene Wright MA MLitt PhD FSA Scot
December 2014

- Ashmore, P. 2004. A Date List (to October 2002) for Early foragers in Scotland. In A. Saville (ed.), *Mesolithic Scotland and its Neighbours: The Early Holocene Prehistory of Scotland, its British and Irish Context and some Northern European Perspectives*: 95-157. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
- Ballin, T. B. and M. Johnson. 2005. Glentaggart, South Lanarkshire: Discussion of a Scottish Chert Assemblage and its Associated Technology. *Lithics: The Journal of the Lithic Studies Society*, 26: 57-86.
- Bordes, F. and J. Gaussen. 1970. *Une fonde du tente magdalénien près de Mussidan (Dordogne)*. Koln: Frühe Menschheit Und Umwelt 1.
- Finlay, N. 2003. Microliths and multiple authorship. In L. Larsson, H. Kindgren, K. Knutsson, and A. Åkerlund (eds), *Mesolithic on the Move*: 169-178. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Finlayson, B. 1990. The examination of surface alteration. In C. R. Wickham-Jones (ed.), *Rhum, Mesolithic and later sites at Kinloch: Excavations 198-86*: 53-54. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kuijt, I., W. C. Prentiss and D. L. Pokotylo. 1995. Bipolar Reduction: An Experimental Study of Debitage Variability. *Lithic Technology*, 20(2): 116-127.
- Ward, T. 1998. Cornhill; Weston Farm; Daer Reservoir (Sites 1 and 2). *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*: 90, 128.
- Ward, T. 2004. The discovery and excavation of a Mesolithic site in Daer Valley (Site 85). Unpublished report (<http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk/pdfarchive.shtml>): Biggar Archaeology Group.
- Ward, T. 2005. Brownsbank Farm; Coomb Rig: Sites 84 and 85 (Daer Valley Project); Weston Farm. *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*: 132, 134-135, 179-180.
- Wright, A. D. 2012. The Archaeology of Variation: a case study of repetition, difference and becoming in the Mesolithic of West Central Scotland. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Glasgow (Available to download from <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3310/>).