

PIT-AND-MOUND FEATURES IN THE NEW FOREST: EXCAVATIONS AT ASHURST LODGE, 2013

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ABSTRACT

Three field monuments were investigated at Ashurst Lodge, New Forest, Hampshire (NGR SU 341085) in 2013 as part of the New Forest History and Archaeology Group's Pit-and-Mound Project. Two of c. 70 such monuments in this location were selected for excavation in Trench 1, and proved to be classic pit-and-mound features with flanking pits, while a third, excavated in Trench 2, was simpler and more circular in shape, and was intersected by a poorly-preserved linear feature. Two stages of development were seen in the larger of the two mounds in Trench 1, which led eventually to the creation of a secondary flanking pit. No traces of funerary evidence were found, and an interpretation of this type of monument as having a practical function, for instance in processing of animal or plant products, is hypothesised. The only indicator of dating was a single small piece of probably Bronze Age pottery. The third, smaller mound was different, with a simpler structure and an accompanying lithic assemblage of both Mesolithic and Neolithic/Bronze Age tools and waste, together with burnt flint. Its purpose appears to be linked to different activities from the pit-and-mound features of the Ashurst Lodge group. This mound was stratigraphically earlier than the linear feature, which is likely to be of later prehistoric or early historic date.

INTRODUCTION: THE PIT-AND-MOUND PROJECT

Excavation by the New Forest History and Archaeology Group (hereafter NFHAG) in 2013 is part of a fieldwork project on Pit-and-Mound features (Pasmore 2011). It was the third group of such features to be investigated, following work at Gorley Bushes, NGR SU 2213, in 2008–9 (Pasmore 2010) and Latchmore,

NGR SU 1912, in 2011 (Pasmore 2012). A fourth pit-and-mound was subsequently excavated at Leadenhall, NGR SU 1915 (King 2016), and has been reported on in *Hampshire Studies* separately (King 2017a).

Pit-and-mound features are typically low oval mounds, c. 0.5m high, 4.0m x 2.0m in extent. They often taper at the long ends with a curve. Alongside one (very occasionally both) of the long sides is a shallow pit, c. 0.25m deep, usually shorter and narrower than the mound itself. The features usually occur in groups, typically numbering 5–40, but in some cases many more, e.g. Gorley Bushes 190+, Latchmore 120, Ashurst Lodge c. 70. In excess of 600 pit-and-mound features have been recorded so far by the NFHAG Fieldwork Group and others. The groups of pit-and-mound features appear to form no spatial pattern, and are not consistently orientated, or relatable to any specific topographical characteristics. They are not linked spatially to other types of archaeological monument.

On excavation, the mounds are usually seen to be the partial up-cast and back-fills of the underlying pits, with the highest part of the mounds above the deepest part of the pits. The Latchmore excavations showed this most clearly, but the same sequence was also very evident at Gorley Bushes. The fill suggests that it was effectively the material that had been taken out of the pit, replaced after a relatively short interval. Finds are very sparse. Bronze Age flint assemblages of tools and flakes were found on both sites (Moody 2010; 2012), and at Gorley Bushes there were a small number of Middle to Late Bronze Age pottery sherds, and some Roman pottery (Mephram 2010). It has not been possible to recover enough burnt

material at any of the sites for a C14 date. At Latchmore, an adjacent linear earthwork did, however, yield a C14 date of $1911 \pm 25 \text{ calBP}$ (Wk-36186), placing it in the Roman period (Pasmore 2013). The earthwork is thought to be later than the pit-and-mound feature. Similarly, the overlying 'platform site' at Leadenhall contained charcoal with C14 dates in the Late Iron Age/early Roman period (King 2017a, 52, AM 1–2), stratigraphically above the pit of the pit-and-mound feature. On balance, a prehistoric date, probably Bronze Age, is indicated for this type of monument.

Interpretation of pit-and-mound features has focussed on the possibility that they are funerary in nature. This was Wise's opinion in the 1860s (Wise 1895, 207, 209–10; Pasmore 2011, 22), and still remained the most active hypothesis at the outset of the 2013 season of excavations. Wise discovered charcoal in the mounds, a finding that has not been repeated in the current research project. A potential difficulty with the funerary interpretation, however, is the lack of finds that might be associated with burials, e.g. calcined bone, burnt debris from a pyre, pottery grave goods, etc. This has made it uncertain that a primary burial function can be assigned to pit-and-mound features, unless the acidic soil conditions have totally removed clear evidence of cremation or inhumation remains, and no grave goods have survived.

As discussed by Anthony Pasmore (2011, 22), other interpretations have included gravel-digging pits, features linked to peat cutting, or military (i.e. recent) features. None of these seem likely, but there is another line of interpretation that was actively considered during the 2013 season, namely that pit-and-mound features represent some form of 'industrial' site, perhaps linked to processing fibres (e.g. flax) or skins for tanning, etc.

There is also the possibility of their being a natural phenomenon. They may be tree root hollows, with the mound formed from the eroded remains of the root plate settling into the pit formed by the upheaval of the fallen tree's root system. However, the taphonomy at the Latchmore excavation militates against this hypothesis, i.e. that the very clear and undamaged, near vertical, side to the pit,

covered by the mound, suggests deliberate human cutting of the side of the pit.

An anthropogenic hypothesis, despite the suggestion in the previous paragraph, seems to be preferable to a natural origin for pit-and-mound features. That said, the interpretative uncertainty about these enigmatic features has been the catalyst for the Pit-and-Mound Project, as a continuing attempt to clarify what they actually signified in the prehistoric landscape.

ASHURST LODGE SITE

Location and topography

The Ashurst Lodge group of pit-and-mound features is located on open forest land (NGR SU 3408, Fig. 1) adjacent to the Ashurst to Beaulieu Road railway line (to the east), the enclosed fields of Home Farm (to the north) and the Beaulieu River (to the south). All the group lies on a single topographic unit – a low flat-topped tongue of clayey sand and silt bounded on the west and east by the Beaulieu River and a much smaller gutter-like stream, which meet at the southern end of the block containing the pit-and-mound features. The Beaulieu River is not a significant stream at this point, being fairly close to its source, but its shallow valley is poorly drained, leading to waterlogged and marshy conditions. However, the land containing the pit-and-mound group is slightly elevated above the river level, and is dry under nearly all weather conditions.

The site area is on the Chama Sand Formation (BGS website), consisting of poorly-drained acid to very acid sands, silts and/or clay, locally variable in composition. It is part of the Bracklesham Group and Barton Group of undifferentiated sand, silt and clay. It is of poor to medium agricultural potential (Soilscape website), consistent with its current status as heathland, grazed by cattle and horses, with extensive clumps of bracken growth.

The area is designated by Natural England (Natural England website) as a Ramsar site (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance), a SAC (Special Area of Conservation), a SPA (Special Protection Area), and is in SSSI (Site of Special Scientific

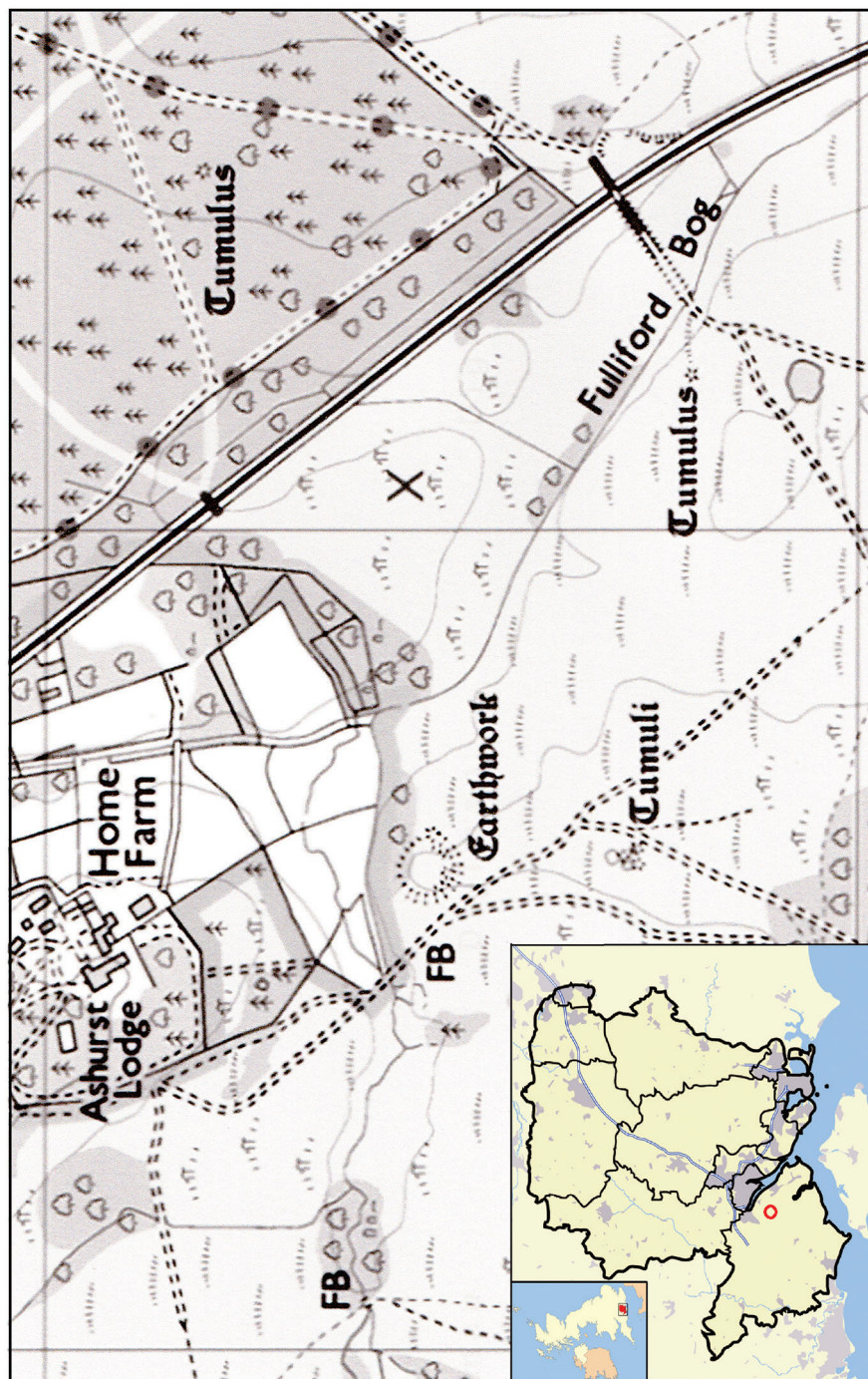


Fig. 1 Ashurst Lodge 2013: location map. The site is marked with an X (NGR SU 341085) on the main map, and with a circle on the small-scale county map. OS map reproduced in accordance with NFHAG OS licence

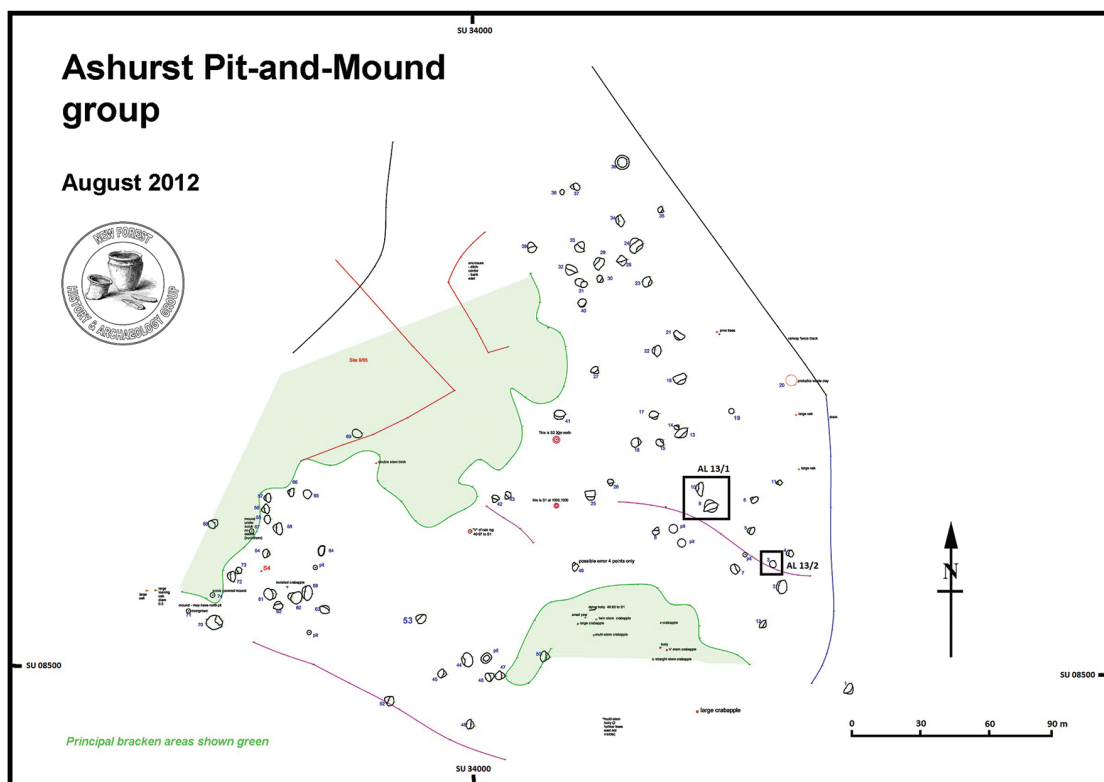


Fig. 2 Ashurst Lodge Pit-and-Mound Group: topographic survey by NFHAG, August 2012. The locations of Trench 1 (AL 13/1) and Trench 2 (AL 13/2) are indicated

Interest) unit 374. It does not have any specific archaeological designation. It is Open Forest within the New Forest National Park, and is managed by the Forestry Commission on behalf of the Crown and the National Park Authority.

Historical monuments in the immediate area of Ashurst Lodge

The main prehistoric monuments in the area surrounding the excavation site are Bronze Age barrows (King 2017b, Appendix 1). They lie mainly to the west and south, on the west side of the Beaulieu River in the Matley Holms and Matley Heath area (Grinsell 1938–40, 360). The river forms a possible division between a funerary zone on its west and the block of land with the pit-and-mound features on its east. There is one exception, a barrow lying to the

east of the modern railway line and north of the excavation site, in Church Place Inclosure.

Several find-spots of Mesolithic lithics are indicated in the HER database, in most of the surrounding area. Later lithic assemblages and burnt flint deposits are also widespread. Mesolithic and later prehistoric resource exploitation or occupation is a common feature in this area.

Evidence from after the Bronze Age is more limited. A small circular, probably Iron Age, defended enclosure is a well-known monument in NGR SU 3308 just to the south of Home Farm, Ashurst Lodge (Read 2018, 30–2; Smith 1999, 14; Sumner 1917, 60–1), and there are other much more ephemeral sub-circular and linear enclosures, and a relict field system listed in the HER (King 2017b, Appendix 1).

After the Iron Age, few indications of

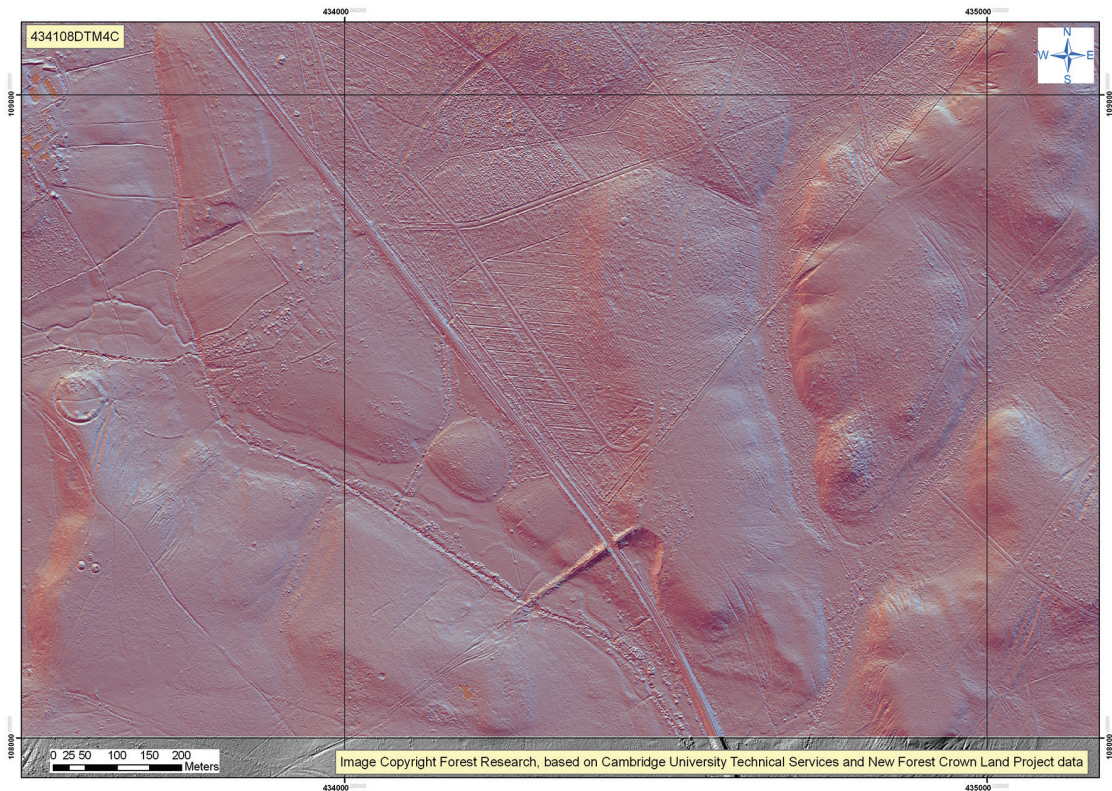


Fig. 3 LiDAR image of the pit-and-mound group and surrounding area. Extract from New Forest NPA website, with kind permission

occupation survive, until medieval enclosures, the Church Place hunting lodge, and later wood banks. Traces of 20th-century military events are also present (but not on the site itself), in the form of bomb craters, slit trenches and a bombing decoy site.

Survey work

An essential preliminary to the excavation was an accurate and detailed topographic survey of the surviving features in the Ashurst Lodge pit-and-mound group. This was undertaken by the NFHAG survey group in August 2012, using a Total Station and GPS equipment (Fig. 2). The inventory of pit-and-mound features ran to 74 entries (King 2017b, Appendix 2), and they occurred in two main groups, to the east and west of a low north-south ridge, but not along the top of it. The group as a

whole was close to the bed of the Beaulieu River and its feeder streams, with a few of the individual pit-and-mound features in quite low-lying positions.

New Forest National Park LiDAR imagery

The publicly-available LiDAR images (New Forest NPA website) proved to be a useful supplement to the topographic survey, although it should be noted that this remote sensing technique is better at discerning linear features than small mounds, and therefore many of the pit-and-mound features found in the NFHAG survey cannot be seen on the LiDAR image (Fig. 3).

Following the detailed survey work, a site visit in December 2012 enabled the excavation director to examine potential pit-and-mound features for the summer excavation. Mounds 9



Fig. 4 Mound 9, with water-filled pits on its north and south sides. Mound 10 is visible to the right (north), and the adjacent linear feature as a dark vegetation alignment, beyond the mounds in the upper left (west) of the photograph. Photo: A. C. King, 30/12/2012

and 10 (Figs 4 & 5) were selected as the focus, with a subsidiary trench to investigate Mound 3 and its relationship with an intersecting linear feature.

Pre-excavation resistivity survey

A resistivity survey of the area of Mounds 9 and 10 was undertaken by David Ashby, University of Winchester, a week in advance of the excavation itself. An area of c. 40 x 20 m was surveyed, over Mounds 9 and 10 of the surface survey. Dry conditions meant that a 'coarse' survey had to be produced (Fig. 6). As can be seen, the mounds show as lighter shapes in the plot, and pits are visible as darker shapes. The resistivity survey was carried out using a Geoscan RM 15 with a twin electrode configuration. Each grid was surveyed using a series of zigzag traverses spaced at 1m intervals. Mobile probes spaced at 0.5 m gave an effective sub-surface penetration

of between 0.5 m and 1.0 m, with larger features showing at a greater depth. The readings were automatically logged at 1m intervals giving a resolution of 400 readings per 20 m x 20 m square. Upon the completion of the survey, the geophysical data were processed using Geoplot 3.0, and the data were passed through despiking, low pass filter and a high pass filter.

THE EXCAVATION

The excavation took place over ten days in late August 2013. As stated above, the intended objective was to investigate Mounds 9 and 10 and the land surface between them (Trench 1), and the smaller, more circular Mound 3 and its relationship to the linear feature visible in the surface survey and on the LiDAR imagery (Trench 2).



Fig. 5 Mound 10, with water-filled pit on its north-west side. Photo A. C. King, 30/12/2012

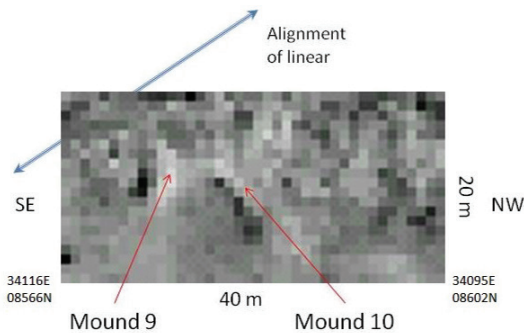


Fig. 6 Resistivity survey of Mounds 9 and 10, August 2013. Plot and drawing: D. Ashby & A. C. King

Trench 1 (AL 13/1)

This trench was initially laid out to cover Mound 9 only, but was subsequently extended over Mound 10 (Fig. 7). Most of the digging

effort by the excavation team was focussed on Mound 9 and its pits, with a substantial section taken through the feature as a whole (Figs 8–9). Mound 10 was cleaned down to archaeological levels, and a small-scale section made across the mound and SE pit (Figs 8 & 10).

Mound 9

The base of the mound was positioned directly on natural sub-soil, within a shallow flat-bottomed hollow. The hollow initially encompassed the northern pit area and the mound itself, but was later enlarged by a new, more steep-sided pit on the south side of the mound, as demonstrated by the stratigraphy of the mound itself (Fig. 11). (For a list of stratigraphic contexts, see King 2017b, Appendix 3).

The base layer (126) was very similar to the yellow/grey clay of the sub-soil, and was

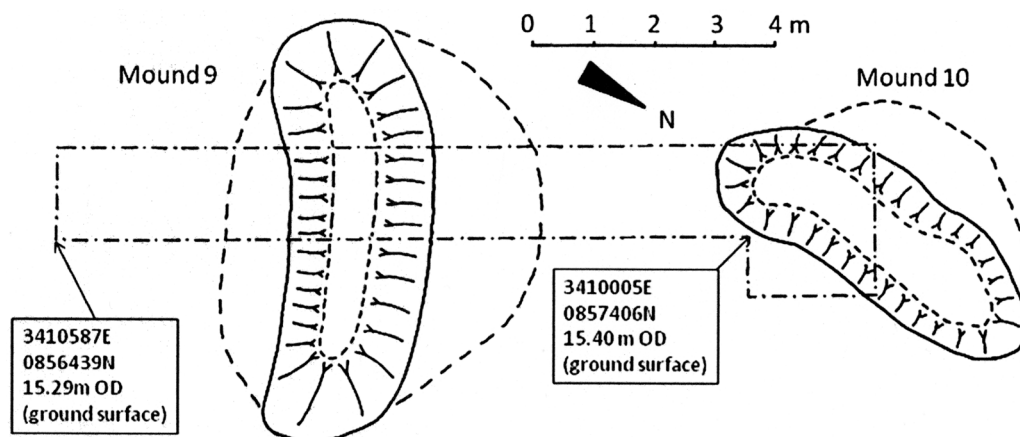


Fig. 7 Trench 1, outline plan, showing position of trench and the pit-and-mound features. The solid line represents the extent of the base of each mound, and the hashed line represents the outline of the flanking pits visible on the surface (two in the case of Mound 9 and one in the case of Mound 10). Drawing: A. C. King

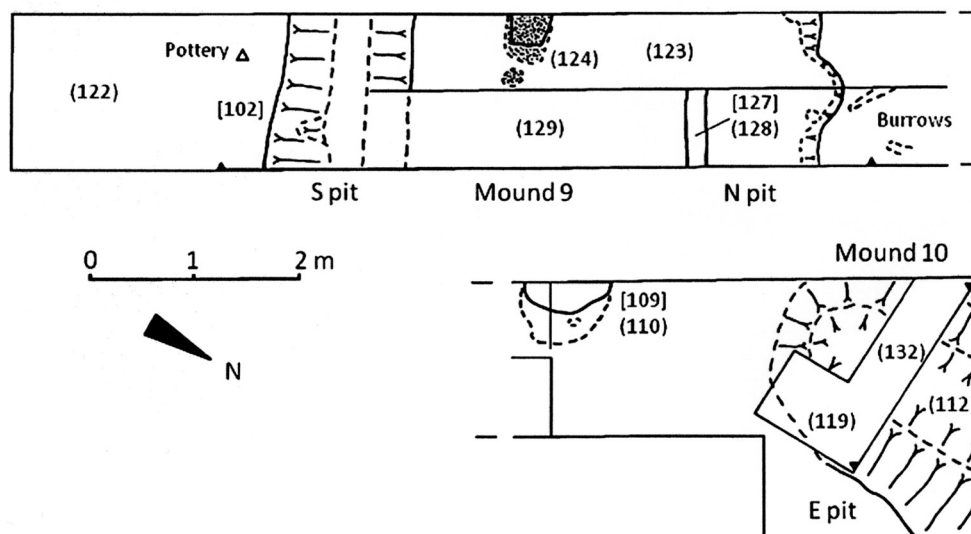


Fig. 8 Trench 1, plan of features within the trench. Drawing: A. C. King

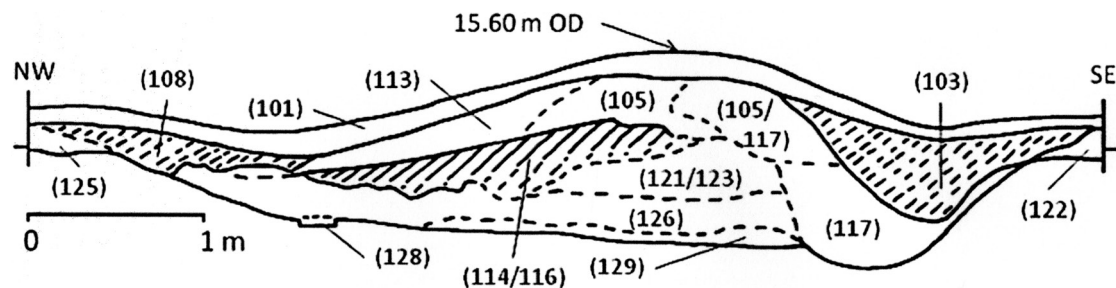


Fig. 9 Trench 1, east side (west-facing) section across Mound 9. Drawing: A. C. King

only distinguished from it by a thin grey gritty horizontal layer (129) that may have been a treading layer in the base of the hollow. The natural underneath was augured for another 30 cm, and can be characterised as a pure yellow/grey clay with some sand.

The north end of (126) covered a distinct east-west slot (127), parallel to the general alignment of the long side of the overlying mound, c. 20 cm wide and c. 5 cm deep, with

a flat bottom and straight, vertical sides. It had the appearance of a beam-slot, and was filled by a gritty layer (128), virtually identical to (129). The sequence therefore suggest that the hollow was dug, including a wooden beam in its base, then the beam was removed or rotted, and a treading layer formed in the hollow. This was then overlain by material that had been dug out of the hollow, so as to form the lower part of Mound 9, with the shallow pit/hollow on its northern side.

The horizontal top surface of (126) graded into a dirty version of itself (123), with decayed roots and turf, including a clearly-defined patch of decayed turf and root holes (124), c. 40 cm x 40 cm, running into the west section of the trench (Fig. 12). This was probably an ancient turf line, covered and possibly truncated by a dump of fairly pure clayey sand (121) that formed the inner core of the mound.

At this stage, layers (121), (126) and (129) have together the overall appearance of the

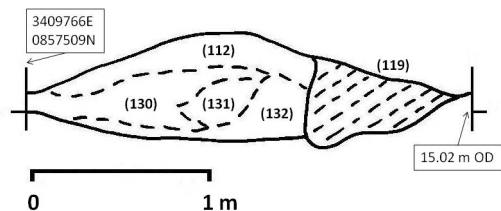


Fig. 10 Trench 1, south-facing section through Mound 10. Drawing: A. C. King



Fig. 11 Mound 9, east section, at the end of the excavation. View from the west; scale 10 cm. Photo: A. C. King



Fig. 12 Mound 9, east section, partially excavated, showing the primary mound and intermediate dark layer (123 & 124) in the foreground. The upper dark layer (114/116) covering the primary mound, is visible in the section. View from the west. Photo: A. C. King

mound, but c. 50 cm lower than its eventual height. Formation of this primary mound seems to have come from material scooped out to form the hollow under the mound and its northern pit, and may have been marked by a hiatus, when the decayed turf line (123/124) formed. The character of the mound on the south side at this stage is unknown, due to its subsequent truncation by the digging of the southern pit.

A well-defined dark silty/sandy layer (114/116) overlay (121) and filled much of the northern pit. It ran in a gentle slope up the north side of the primary mound, but was truncated at the highest point of the mound by later activity associated with the formation of the southern pit. It was very dark grey and well-defined on its upper margin, but faded to a pale grey c. 5/10 cm below this. In places this change was sufficiently different to be regarded as a separate layer (115) during the excavation,

but was eventually abandoned as such and incorporated into (114). The interpretation of this layer is best seen as an ancient ground surface over the mound and in the northern pit, with turf formation and subsequent decay when overlaid by later material.

The next event in the sequence is the cutting of the pit (102) on the southern side of the mound. The cut line is steep-sided, and has removed the south part of (121) and destroyed its relationship with the southern margin of the original hollow. The fill (117) is grey-stained silt and clay, particularly immediately under the peaty upper fill (103), where there may have been leaching down of material into (117). The sides of the layer were less stained, and relatively hard and dry, similar to layer (105) over the mound itself. The material dug out of the southern pit was used to heighten the mound (105). It was a hard, dry yellow/



Fig. 13 Mound 9, after initial cleaning, showing the top of the mound (105) and the darker fills of the pits to either side. View from the west; scale 10 cm. Photo: A. C. King

brown sand, drier and paler, with more clay on the south side (Fig. 13). On the north side it grades into an overlying patchy orange/yellow silty sand (113), which probably represents a spread or movement of the mound material northwards into the northern pit. Overall, the stratigraphy discussed in this paragraph fairly clearly represents a cut, or re-cut to form the southern pit, resulting in the enlarging and steepening of the mound. It may have been higher than currently surviving, with a spread of material down into the northern pit. By contrast, the southern pit seems to have been kept clear, or perhaps re-cut again, since it had a distinct peaty dark fill of even consistency (103) across the excavated section.

Overlying all the layers of Mound 9 and its pits was (101), the modern turf/heather with its roots and humic layer. The dry conditions of the mound itself had resulted in a vegetation difference with the pits on either side, more heather, with attached lichens, being present,

rather than the predominant grassy cover on the peaty topmost horizon in the pits. In places, animal disturbance was apparent, either by grazing animals, or by burrowing. A burrow had damaged the west side section of Mound 9, limiting the stratigraphic clarity on this side of the trench. The northern margin of the north pit, too, had an uneven shape, probably due to ancient hoof damage to the side of the hollow.

In sum, Mound 9 has all the appearance of being an artificial (i.e. anthropogenic) creation, rather than a natural event such as a tree-throw. It has features within it, of which the most clearly-defined was the probable beam-slot in the base of the northern pit. It also has phasing; a primary mound, perhaps formed in two episodes, with a dirty horizon (turf-line?) between; then a cut or re-cut for the southern pit, linked with an enlargement of the mound to its present height or higher. Between the two phases is a distinct turf-line,



Fig. 14 Mound 10, view of the south-facing section through the mound, and the fill of the eastern pit. View from the south-west; scale 10 cm. Photo: A. C. King

indicating a gap long enough for turf and vegetation to grow on the mound. In its second phase, the mound must have gained its current curved shape (Fig. 7), and this is probably due to the formation of the southern pit in the curve of the mound's south side. Prior to this, it may have been more oval in shape. Mound 9 is unusual in having two obvious pits visible in the surface survey, and it is likely that the re-cutting event in the second phase was the underlying cause of this.

Dating of the mound is, at present, uncertain. A small amount of Neolithic/Bronze Age lithic material was recovered, together with a single very small fragment of Bronze Age pottery from the ancient ground surface (122) immediately to the south of the mound and southern pit. Samples for C14 dating were taken from contexts within Mound 9, and submitted to SUERC, but did not have enough carbon for a date, due to humification.

Mound 10

This mound had a different orientation to Mound 9, being north-south along its long axis (Fig. 6). In the surface survey, and site visit in December 2012, a pit was apparent on the west side, but not on the east. The resistivity survey, however, indicated low resistance, and a possible pit, on the east side (Fig. 6). This was confirmed in the excavation of a section across the mound and east side, which was all that was possible within the area of the excavation overall.

The stratigraphy of this mound was simpler than Mound 9, consisting of a base layer (132) of dirty sandy clay with a loose granular texture, overlying gritty yellow/grey clay sub-soil (Figs 10 & 14). Above this was a mixed grey sandy clay with yellow patches within it (130/131). Overlying this was a hard, dry clayey sand, ochre/yellow and grey in colour. There was no sign of a buried turf layer, and the mound has

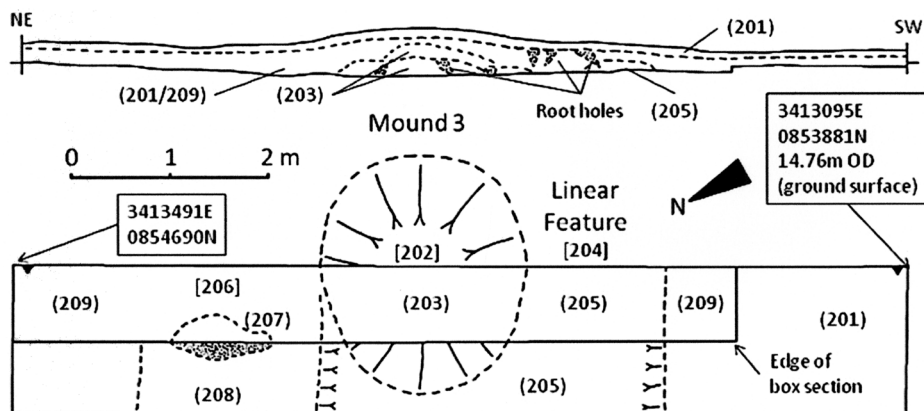


Fig. 15 Trench 2, plan and south edge section through Mound 3 and the linear feature. Drawing: A. C. King

the appearance of coming into existence as a series of dumps of material, probably in one episode. The original hollow for this mound extended beyond the trench to the west.

On the east side of the mound, there was evidence of steep re-cutting to form the eastern pit (118). Its fill was dark soft silt (119), with indications of decayed peaty material, and also burrow disturbance within it. The pit, therefore, was a secondary feature, like the south pit of Mound 9, but in this case, the material dug out does not seem to have been used to enlarge the mound itself.

Mound 10 is slightly smaller, and definitely less prominent than Mound 9. It is also more irregular in shape. It appears to have been formed in a single episode, but with a secondary pit on the eastern side cutting into it.

Dating for this mound is similar to Mound 9, with a sparse assemblage of lithic material, and no other finds.

The ground surface between the mounds

One of the aims of the excavation was to investigate the possibility of features such as slots or post-holes near the mounds. The trench was carefully examined between the two mounds (Fig. 7), and also on the south-east side of Mound 9, but with no features becoming visible. A pit-like feature (109) was uncovered c. 1.70 m to the south of Mound 10, but its fill (110) was up-cast natural yellow/grey silty clay,

becoming much softer and dark grey/black on the east side. This was almost certainly an animal burrow, of indeterminate, possible quite modern, date.

Trench 2 (AL 13/2)

A second trench was laid out to explore a small circular mound, and its relationship with the slight and poorly preserved remains of a linear bank (Fig. 15). Mound 3 is morphologically different from Mounds 9 and 10, and most of the other pit-and-mound features in the Ashurst Lodge cluster. It has no clear sign of a pit, and is a low circular feature nestling in the north side of the linear alignment. The linear feature itself is visible mainly because of the alignment of vegetation (heather and similar low shrubby growth) that runs along the very slight change in level that is apparent to an observer on the ground, as a slope change on the down-slope side of the feature. The LiDAR imagery shows the linear feature much more clearly, as well as, more faintly, Mound 3 itself. This imagery suggests that the linear is part of a rectilinear enclosure that ran round the ridge to the west of Mound 3, also running past Mounds 9 and 10, but not touching them. Inside the enclosure there are few signs of pit-and-mound features, which may suggest that it is a field, within which earlier features had been cleared or filled in.



Fig. 16 Trench 2 after rain following initial cleaning, showing Mound 3, and the linear feature as a light grey trace in front of it. View from the south-west; scale 2 m. Photo: A. C. King

The working hypothesis for Trench 2, therefore, was that the linear feature overlay Mound 3. If the mound was of the same date as previous pit-and-mound investigations, it could be Neolithic or Bronze Age, whilst the linear feature should be later, perhaps late prehistoric, Roman or early medieval. Any dating evidence from this trench would thus be very helpful in clarifying the dating of these features.

Mound 3 and the linear feature

The trench was laid out to cut a half-section across Mound 3 and also a section perpendicular to the alignment of the linear feature (Fig. 16). After turf removal and cleaning, it was apparent that the linear feature was effectively indistinguishable from the surrounding grey sandy silt of the sub-soil, except for a lighter grey trace showing after rain, and the slight topographical difference visible in the section

(Fig. 14, 205). This layer did, however, run up to the mound and overlay it in stratigraphical terms, thus confirming the hypothesis that it should be later than the mound.

The mound had a yellow/grey sandy silt make-up (203), with an increase in the extent of yellow clayey fill at the base of the dump that formed the feature. The mound was small, c. 1 m in diameter, and its circular shape and lack of any pit renders its purpose as not that of the pit-and-mound features in Trench 1. No clue to its use could be gleaned from morphology alone, but the artefacts from the mound and the trench in general include Neolithic/Bronze Age lithics in greater quantity than Trench 1, and also more than 2.8 kg of burnt/fire-crazed flint. The only piece of non-local stone from the excavation was recovered from the cleaning levels in this trench.

On the east side of the mound, a patch of dark, burnt organic material (207) was

uncovered in the initial cleaning. This was within a very ephemeral linear feature (206) parallel to the linear alignment, which was initially interpreted as a ditch on the east side of the linear. (It is also likely to have been the 'Pit on E' recorded in the surface survey of August 2012; see King 2017b, Appendix 2.) Its fill was a soft grey/white silt (208), its pale colour probably due to leaching-out of minerals. On further investigation, (207) proved to be only 2–3 cm deep, whilst the ditch disappeared as a coherent feature and graded into the indistinguishable grey/white silt of the sub-soil. The most likely interpretation of this feature is that it is a slight, possibly naturally formed hollow running alongside the linear feature. The burnt patch is of unknown date and origin.

Trench 2 was c. 1 m lower in elevation than Trench 1, and c. 20 m from a small water course leading into the nearby Beaulieu River. Prehistoric activity was certainly taking place, to judge from the artefacts, and presumably can be linked to Mound 3, but its nature cannot be pinned down with any certainty. It seems that the stream-side location may have been favourable for this activity, whilst the pit-and-mound features were constructed for other purposes (see Conclusions). The linear feature is demonstrably later, but very slight, and therefore probably the base for a hedge, rather than a full-sized bank. The lack of stratified dating material does not allow us to give an absolute chronology for the establishment and use of the enclosure, for which the linear was the eastern side.

FINDS FROM THE EXCAVATION

Pottery by Anthony King

A single sherd of pottery was found, just to the south of the pit on the south side of Mound 9 (position shown on Fig. 8). It was an eroded handmade body fragment, with one surface smoothed, dark grey/black, and the other surface irregular, possibly not the original surface, in a light grey/buff colour. The fabric contained abundant grog in small pellets, c. 1–3 mm in size. Dimensions 22 mm x 16 mm,

8 mm maximum surviving thickness, weight 3 gm. (122), small find 1.

Consultation with pottery specialists reached a consensus that this piece of pottery was later prehistoric, probably Early Bronze Age (pers. comm. J. Timby, R. Seager-Smith). This would accord with the broad dating of the lithic assemblage from Trench 1, and contributes indirectly, by virtue of proximity to Mound 9, to the dating parameters for pit-and-mound features.

Lithic assemblage by Steve Moody

Trench 1 (Mounds 9 and 10) AL 13/1

The lithic assemblage from mounds 9 and 10, Trench 1, had very few flint artefacts; all four being waste flakes. No definitive identification can be drawn from such a small assemblage of waste other than to say it is prehistoric and not of any sophisticated type of industry. There are three flakes and one spall. One of the flakes is a thermal flake with two flake scars. There is one primary flake and one secondary. The primary flake from a thermal core appears to have had the proximal along with the bulb removed but for a purpose that is not clear.

Trench 2 (Mound 3 and Linear) AL 13/2

This assemblage was also very small, consisting of only eighteen artefacts, but unlike Trench 1, there are recognisable tool types. Of the eighteen flints, six can be categorised as tools and two stand out from the rest as being of a different typology from the majority of flint artefacts. This suggests that they come from an earlier industry and from an entirely different period in pre-history.

The waste does not contain reduced cores or core rejuvenation flakes and the flakes are generally corticated. The majority are primary and secondary flakes and only one tertiary flake with a possible second one that may have been a flake, but this cannot be confirmed because the proximal has been snapped and lost. This could mean that the small sample indicates a casual approach to knapping procedures in the production of the artefacts and a lack of technical requirement needed for their use. The fact that thermal flakes and cores have

been utilised seems to support this view. The waste flint material does not fit with the earlier period flint artefacts described below.

A thermal flake shows signs of utilisation and a thermal core and a secondary flake have slight retouch on them, the core forming a small notch. A further utilised flake is a tertiary flint. This has utilisation along the left edge, distal point and distal right edge.

The two tool types are a burin and a failed microlith, a mishit. The burin is made on a blade like flake and has had the proximal, bulb end, deliberately removed. Two short, hinged flake scars are present on the proximal left edge presumably removed from the butt prior to its removal. Further trimming flakes have been executed around the removed proximal scar to form a burin edge. Typically, this is a tool found in the context of Mesolithic assemblages. The mishit, also from a Mesolithic context is an almost completed microlith that has had the proximal successfully removed. The microburin, the waste product of microlith production, has been snapped off correctly. The distal end however has been snapped in error leaving the pressure flaked notch intact. A typical mishit occurrence.

Summary

The lithic assemblage from Ashurst Lodge is split into two distinct groups: that of the earlier industry of the Mesolithic and the other of a probable later or indeterminate date. None of the waste can be shown to have been associated specifically with the Mesolithic though some might be contemporary.

The mishit, microliths, microburins and burin are typologically Mesolithic industry artefacts. A mishit is an accidental mistake in the production of microliths. A microlith, formed on a blade carefully fashioned for this purpose is produced by pressure-flaking a notch on one edge of the blade. The blade is then snapped in such a way that it leaves a sharp point from the notch, removing the end of the blade (these snapped blade ends, some distal some proximal and very distinct in their appearance are called microburins, once thought erroneously to be very small carving tools). If the blade has a point

at the distal end, as in an A1 microlith, then the microlith after a small amount of slight retouch, is complete. If not, then both the proximal and distal ends have to be removed.

The Ashurst Lodge mishit is of the second type. The first end of the blade to be removed was the proximal. This was completed successfully and then the notch near the distal end was pressure flaked into the blade's left edge. The blade was then snapped, but the distal end of the blade failed to break off in the right place, rendering the operation a failure, the mishit being discarded.

The Mesolithic period is well represented in the New Forest with many find sites and assemblages. The remaining material, having no particular tool types present could be easily placed in any later prehistoric period from the Mesolithic onwards.

Catalogue of the lithic assemblage

AL 13/1 Trench 1 (Mounds 9 and 10)

No tool types recovered.

1. Flint spall, light brown (101 North).
2. Corticated thermal flake with two struck, removed flakes. Butt corticated light brown (117).
3. Corticated secondary flake, cortex to the right edge and distal. Platform butt, dark brown (122).
4. Primary flake, removed proximal, small hinge on distal, light brown (122).

AL 13/2 Trench 2 (Mound 3 and Linear)

Of the 18 artefacts in this small assemblage, six are recognisable tool types (nos 5–10). Two stand out as different from the majority of flint artefacts as coming from an earlier date. The burin (no. 6) and mishit (no. 5) are from an earlier industry, most likely the Mesolithic period.

1. Microlith production mishit. Proximal removed in microlith formation fashion with scar to ventral. Mesial retouch to dorsal on left edge. Snapped distal in failed removal of waste, a mishit with retouch remaining on left edge. Dark grey (203) Fig. 17.

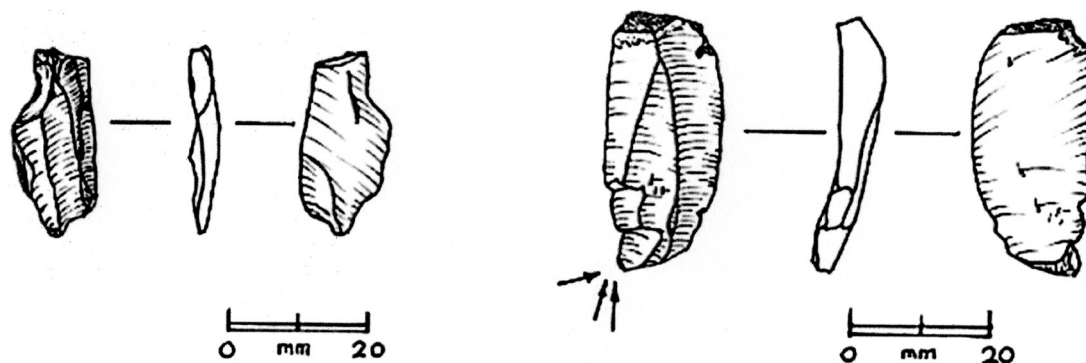


Fig. 17 Flint tools. Catalogue, Trench 2, no. 1 (left); no. 2 (right). Drawing: S. J. Moody

2. Burin on blade-like flake. Removed proximal, cortex on distal. Two flakes removed in succession from proximal on left edge. Further flakes removed from proximal end scar to ventral to form burin edge (203 East) Fig. 17.
3. Utilised tertiary flake. Faceted butt. Utilised left edge, distal point and distal right edge. Light brown (209).
4. Thermal, corticated core with opposing flake scars on one edge. Small amount of retouch on formed edge between scars creating a notch. Light brown (201 West).
5. Thermal flake with two struck surfaces. Slight utilisation on one edge. Light brown (201 West).
6. Corticated secondary flake, platform butt. Cortex on right edge, slight retouch to distal. Light brown (201).
7. Primary flake, corticated. Corticated butt, light brown (201).
8. Corticated secondary flake, removed proximal with flake scar to ventral. Light brown (201).
9. Secondary flake, platform butt, cortex on left edge, light brown (201).
10. Primary flake corticated. Corticated butt. Snapped distal. Light brown (201 West).
11. Corticated secondary flake, lightly burnt. Platform butt. Mostly corticated, damage to ventral right edge. Light brown (201 East).
12. Corticated primary flake. Corticated butt, snapped distal. Light brown (201 East).
13. Corticated secondary flake, corticated distal, snapped proximal. Light brown (201 Linear).
14. ?Tertiary flake. Distal tip of flake/blade, proximal snapped. Grey (207).
15. Corticated primary flake. Corticated dorsal, faceted butt. Light brown (209 East).
16. Corticated secondary flake. Dihedral butt, corticated distal edge. Light brown (209 East).
17. Corticated secondary flake. Corticated left edge, platform butt. Light brown (209 East).
18. Flake chip. Light brown (209 East).

Burnt Flint by Anthony King

Burnt and crazed flint was found in both AL 13/1 (542 gm) and 13/2 (2822 gm), but the quantities were markedly skewed towards Trench 2 (Table 1). The association of burnt flint with the pit-and-mounds in Trench 1 is therefore weak, and does not seem to be a contributory element to their interpretation. By contrast, the amount of both struck lithics and burnt flint from Trench 2 indicates utilisation of flint for various purposes in or near the circular mound in this trench. It emphasises the differences between the two trenches.

Table 1 Catalogue of burnt flint

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Weight (gm)</i>
13/1	101 North	112
	101 South	98
	101 Extension	51
	105	14
	110	11
	114	14
	122	227
	125	15
13/2	201 West	424
	201 Mid	225
	201 East	701
	201 Linear	38
	203	44
	207	62
	209 West	256
	209 East	900
	209 Mound (mid)	123

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Mesolithic tools in Trench 2 demonstrates activity of that period locally, and reinforces the impression gained from the HER (King 2017b, Appendix 1) of noteworthy numbers of Mesolithic finds in the Ashurst Lodge area, as seen elsewhere in the New Forest (e.g. Beaulieu and Rowbarrow: Rankine 1939).

The mound in Trench 2 is later, to be associated in all probability with the later prehistoric lithic assemblage and the burnt flint. The purpose of this small circular mound is unknown, but it is morphologically different from the pit-and-mound features in Trench 1, and may have been a simple dump of material. However, the lithics and burnt flint, together with its proximity to the minor stream to its east, may indicate a loose association with a processing function linked to water and the burning/heating of flint.

Turning to the main focus of the excavation, Trench 1, the Pit-and-Mound Project as a whole, and the range of interpretations set out in the introduction to this report, it is possible fairly quickly to dispose of the hypothesis that pit-and-mound features are natural. The stratigraphic sequence for Mound 9 in particular argues for an anthropogenic origin, and for re-cutting and alteration over time. The favoured working hypothesis prior to the Ashurst Lodge excavation was that pit-and-mound features may be funerary in purpose. The excavation does not support this idea, given the extreme paucity of artefacts, lack of calcined bone, and absence of any traces of deposition that could be linked to burial ritual. It is, of course, difficult to argue from negative evidence in this way, since it could equally be argued that the acidic soil conditions have destroyed any trace of bone, and if the burials were very poor, no accompanying artefacts need be expected. However, they do not appear to be 'poor men's barrows' morphologically, and the evidence of re-cutting in Mounds 9 and 10 suggest a type of feature that was revisited, rather than left as a single-use monument. It is also worth noting that, topographically, the Ashurst Lodge pit-and-mound group occupies a land unit on one side of the Beaulieu River, whilst on the other, several Bronze Age barrows can be seen on Matley Heath and Matley Holms. This may imply a funerary zone in the Matley area, and a different purpose (occupation and/or processing) for the Ashurst Lodge land unit, with the river as a separator.

There remains the hypothesis that pit-and-mound features were for some type of processing, e.g. soaking hides in the pits and drying them on the mounds, or retting flax (cf. Hall 1989). The poor drainage and standing water in the pits for much of the winter may favour this line of interpretation. The excavation found no direct evidence for these possibilities, although it is to be hoped that on-going analysis of environmental samples for pollen, etc., may provide pointers. For the moment, pit-and-mound features remain an enigma, but the 2013 results have helped us to reduce the extent of uncertainty that surrounds these intriguing monuments.

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