

Prehistory Teacher's Kit

Using prehistory to support local studies

Introduction and curriculum links

This teacher's kit looks at ways of using prehistory to support a local study. It includes activities to help pupils understand the timescales involved, how sites are excavated and how we find out more about them. Further ideas can be found by looking at the QCA adapted history unit *How do heritage sites inform us about our local area in prehistoric times?* (see on-line learning links on the back page.)

This kit links with Key Stage 2 history unit 7 and provides a sound introduction to unit 8a, and also to Key Stage 3 unit 7a. The activities in this kit suggest ideas which link across to other areas of the curriculum and particularly support the skills of chronological understanding, historical enquiry and organisation and communication.

Setting the scene

Prehistory means everything that happened before written records began, so all of the evidence comes from material remains left behind. Prehistory in Britain began with the arrival of groups of hunter-gatherers from further south in Europe around 450,000BC and traditionally ended with the Roman invasion of AD43. During this huge swathe of time, humans developed from nomadic hunter-gatherers moving around a sparsely-occupied country to highly-organised groups capable of erecting monuments which survive today. By the time of the Roman invasion Britain was inhabited by people who had a sophisticated culture and created items of beautiful artwork with their jewellery.

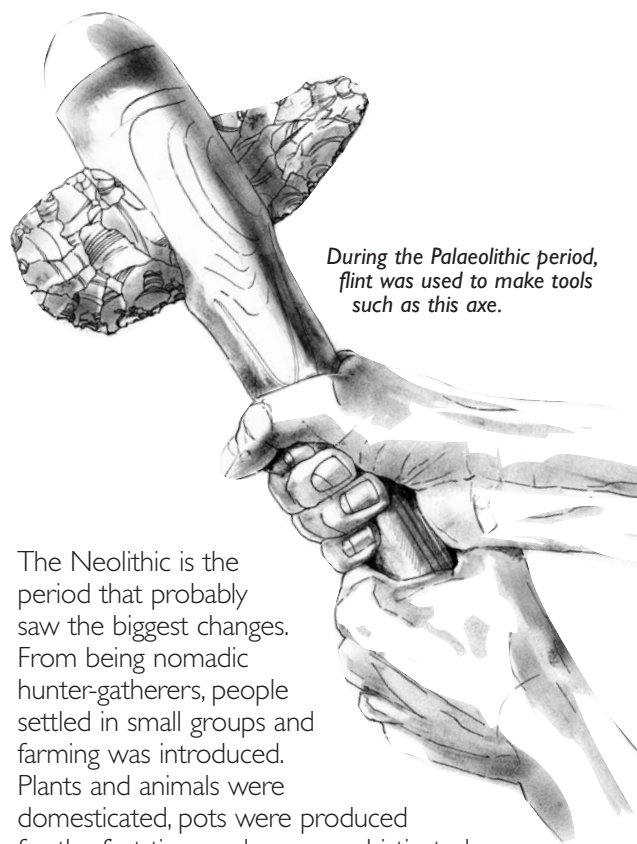
Prehistoric Britain

Prehistory is usually divided into the Stone Age, Bronze Age and the Iron Age reflecting the materials used to make tools and weapons. The Stone Age can be divided into three main periods: the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) and the Neolithic (New Stone Age). During the Palaeolithic humans evolved from Neanderthals into modern humans (*homo sapiens*). Remains from this period are rare and some of the best preserved are from caves such as Cheddar Gorge and Creswell Crags. The Mesolithic starts with the end of the last ice age when Britain became an island.

Tools began to get more complex and were usually composite tools made up of small sharp blades of flint called microliths.



Pottery was first made during the Neolithic period. The pots were simply decorated with a grooved pattern.



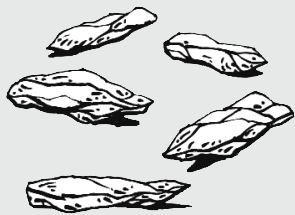


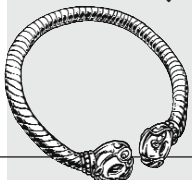
During the Palaeolithic period, flint was used to make tools such as this axe.

The Neolithic is the period that probably saw the biggest changes. From being nomadic hunter-gatherers, people settled in small groups and farming was introduced. Plants and animals were domesticated, pots were produced for the first time and some sophisticated monuments (henges) were built showing that people worked co-operatively. The first elaborate burials in long barrows also took place.

The next big innovation was the introduction of metal with the Bronze Age. Stone tools continued to be used but bronze was also used for the first time. Elaborate burials continued, often in round barrows, and monuments that had been started in the Neolithic period were added to during the Bronze Age – for example Stonehenge.

The use of iron was introduced around 700BC and during the Iron Age, large fortified hillforts, many with elaborate defences were constructed. Iron was used for tools and weapons (initially swords) and other innovations such as wheel-thrown pottery made an appearance.



	TOOLS	SETTLEMENTS	MONUMENTS
Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) 450,000–10,000BC	Stone tools	No settlements as people were nomadic hunter-gatherers	No monuments
Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) 10,000–14,500BC	Stone tools  <i>Microliths</i>	Rare to find settlements as they were temporary campsites for hunter-gatherers	No monuments
Neolithic (New Stone Age) 4,500–2,300BC	Stone tools First evidence of pottery	First small settlements and farms 	First evidence of monuments such as henges
Bronze Age 2,300–700BC	Stone tools still used but bronze weapons and tools, and gold jewellery, introduced	Settlements of roundhouses built 	Elaborate burials often in round barrows
Iron Age 700BC–AD43	Iron used for tools. Gold and other metals used for coins and jewellery  <i>A torc or neck ring</i>	Bigger settlements of roundhouses built	Large hillforts
Romans AD43	Metal tools	Military sites early on, villas later	Temples often dedicated to the soldier's god Mithras

Activity 1: Building a timeline

Purpose: To help pupils understand that humans have lived in the UK for a huge period of time.

Resources: Measuring tapes, lots of scrap A4 paper, photocopies of pictures of different tools, monuments and settlements.

Your pupils have probably seen timelines before but this one will give them some idea of just how long people have lived in this country. You can make a timeline either by sticking lots of pieces of paper together or by using a roll of paper such as wallpaper, friezes or old fax rolls. To give you some idea of how much paper you need – to get back to the Neolithic period sticking A4 pieces of paper together (using one sheet of paper to represent 500 years) you would need 80 sheets!

Mark one sheet or part of your roll by measuring out 500 years for one sheet of A4 (landscape). Make a mark at 1 year = 0.5mm so 10 years is 5mm and 100 is 50mm. Try and squeeze a few dates of birth of your class into the first few millimetres. If you are feeling brave you could add your date of birth. Ask your class about the ages of their grandparents or great grandparents and work out where their dates of birth should be marked. Depending on what periods of history your pupils are familiar with you could add the date of birth of Queen Victoria (1819), the end of the Tudors (1603) or other key events they may recognise. Add three more sheets of paper to include the Vikings,

Make copies of these pictures and add them to your timeline in the right place.

The first farmers:
This Neolithic woman is grinding corn into flour



Iron Age jewellery:
An Iron Age torc



The poster visual timeline

- The first scene shows a simple henge from the Neolithic period. This is the first evidence of large groups of people working together. Only stone tools were used.
- The second scene shows a Bronze Age barrow, or burial mound. Not everyone was buried in a barrow, so they may have been important people and the barrows may mark important places.
- The third scene shows a huge Iron Age hillfort. Even though metals tools were used, this is an impressive example of organisation and building-skills.
- The final scene shows the formal layout of a Roman fort.

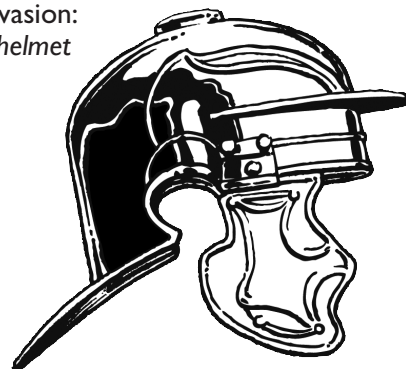
Anglo Saxons and Romans. If you don't want to use 80 sheets of paper you could measure back to prehistory using a metre rule (23 metres to the Neolithic).

You could also explore other ways of creating a timeline. For example, you could use children as markers stretched out across a playground or pegs on a washing line marking 10's 100's or 1000's of years. To give an idea of scale to get back to the beginning of human occupation in A4 sheets you would have to use 1000 sheets of paper measuring a total of 290 metres.

Bronze Age monuments:
Round barrows



Roman invasion:
A Roman helmet



Activity 2: Drama and creative writing

Purpose: To understand that Iron Age society was sophisticated and the Romans didn't invade a country of 'barbarians'. Use writing, drawing and role-play to create a short play about the first meeting between a Roman and an Iron Age inhabitant.

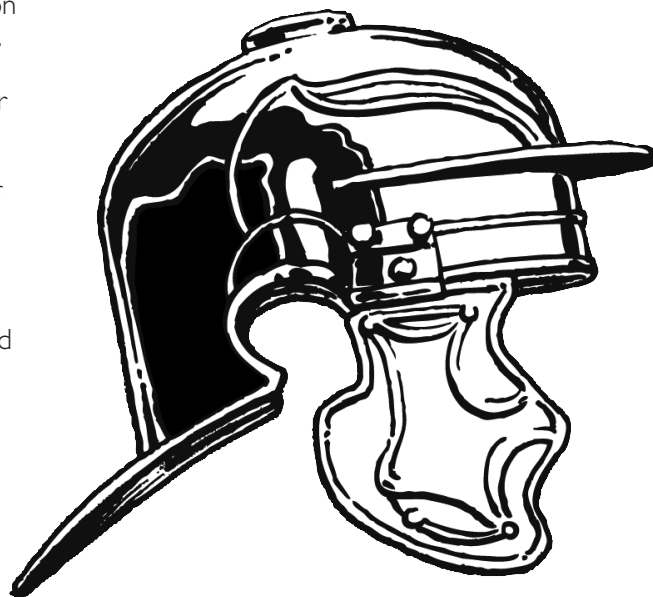
Resources: Photocopiable sheet, colouring pens, comics or graphic novels.

Discuss with your pupils evidence that shows the Iron Age people had a sophisticated culture of their own. Show them pictures of Iron Age hillforts and talk about how groups would have had to work together to create something so large and complicated. Look at examples of Iron Age jewellery such as the beautiful torcs and coins to demonstrate the skills of metalworking and creativity.

The Romans had links with some Iron Age chiefs before the invasion in AD43. Archaeologists have found some sites that show the local people adopted Romans diets and copied Roman pottery.



Iron Age groups produced their own coinage. The coins were often beautifully decorated.



The Roman soldiers that invaded Britain in AD43 would have worn metal helmets like these.

Other sites showed that the Iron Age way of life continued with very little change. It is likely that some inhabitants of Britain would have carried on for years after the invasion without even realising they had been invaded. If this seems unlikely to your class you could talk about how events are communicated today at the click of a mouse and ask them how events would have been communicated before roads had even been invented.

Set the scene for your class. A Roman soldier has been sent out to look for firewood and is on his own in a strange country. At the same time a native Briton is also looking for wood but they don't even know that the Romans are in their country.

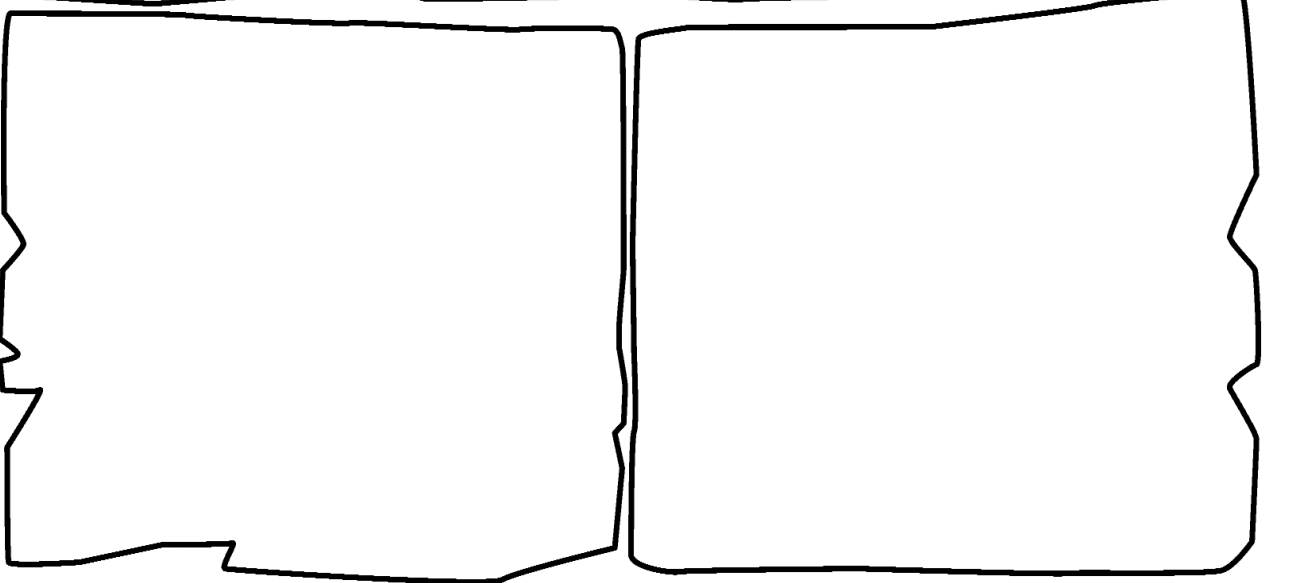
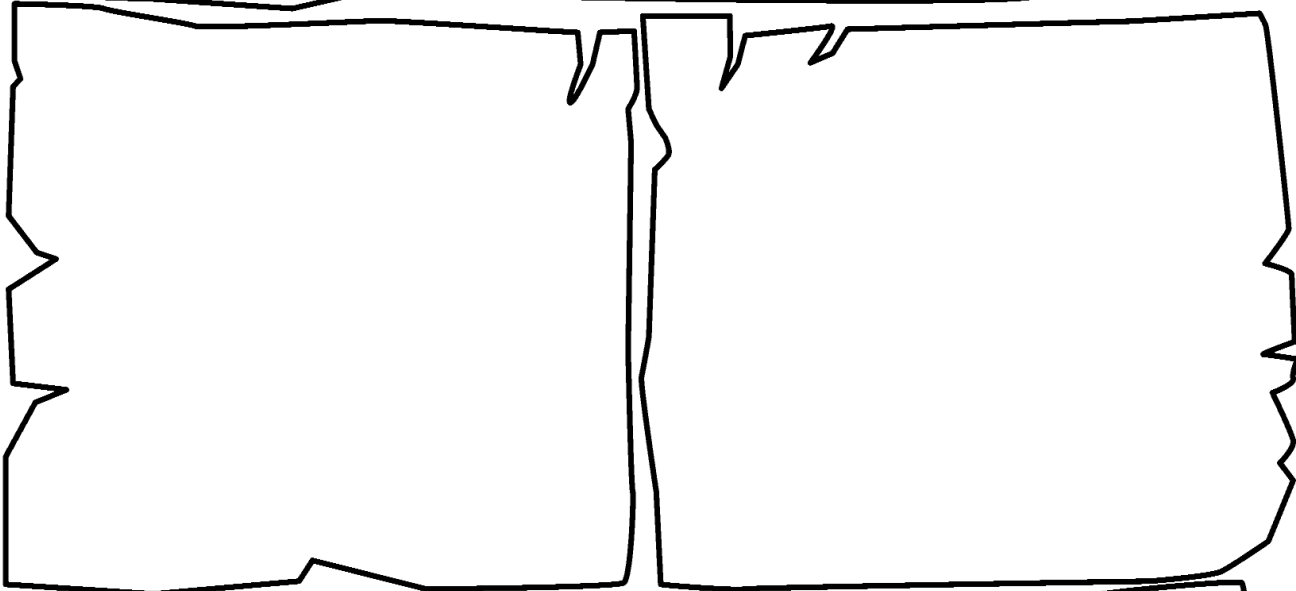
Get your class to work in pairs to discuss how a Roman soldier might feel in a different country. He has been told that all of the people who live there are savages – how might he feel being sent out to look for wood?

How would the native Briton feel when encountering a Roman soldier for the first time?

Using a storyboard, plan the main parts of a short drama showing this. You may want to split this up into:

- Setting the scene – the two people set off on their search for wood – how do they feel and how will they show that?
- The meeting – how are the two characters going to meet? What will their first reaction be?
- Interaction – once they have met what will the character do? How will they communicate? Will they be frightened, curious, angry?
- Resolution – how will they part company? Will they run away or do they part in a friendly manner?





Activity 3: Find out about prehistoric sites near you

Purpose: To use a variety of sources of evidence to find out about prehistory in the area around your school.

Resources: An OS map, internet access and a town map with street names.

There are hundreds of prehistoric sites around us but many are no longer visible. Some are under roads and houses and others are buried under years of accumulated soil. There are lots of ways of discovering whether there is evidence of prehistoric activity nearby.

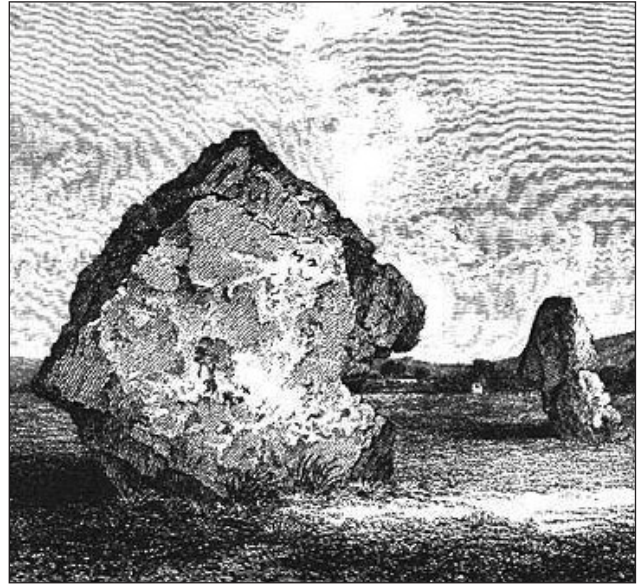
Before starting an archaeological excavation a 'desktop' study will be done. This means that maps, reports, books and photographs are all looked at and a report written about how many archaeological sites there may be in the area. Your pupils could collaborate to write a desktop study of the area around their school.

OS maps of your area will have sites marked on it although these may not be obvious at first glance. Your pupils will need to look for things labelled *tumuli* (these may be Bronze Age barrows) or *earthworks* (these could be the banks of Iron Age hillforts).

The National Monuments Record can supply a pack of 5 aerial photographs showing your school or area of study (each pack costs £15. You can find out more at: www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1562).

The Heritage Explorer website has a tutorial on looking at aerial photographs which will help you to interpret these. Visit: www.heritageexplorer.org.uk and follow the Tutorial links.

Site and monument records are held for each county and they list every individual find that is made or site excavated. These are increasingly being made available online and if you type 'Sites and Monuments record and your county name' into a search engine you should be able to find how to look at the relevant one. Many SMRs are becoming much more accessible and some have sections particularly for teachers and pupils. You



An illustration of Avebury by Richard Colt Hoare.

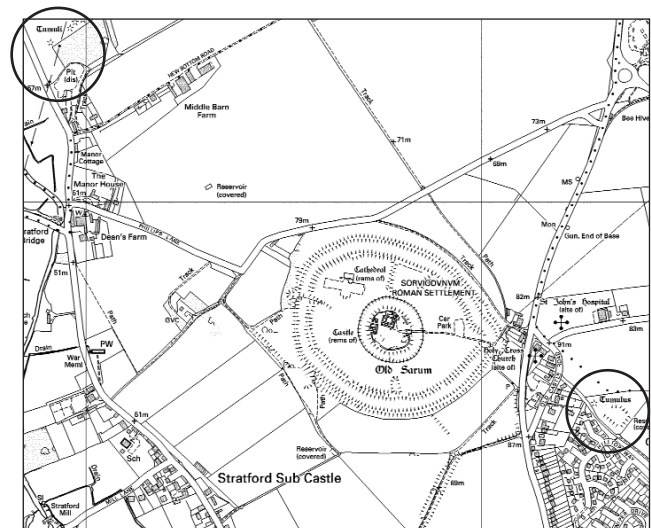
should be able to get a list of prehistoric sites and finds with grid references so that your pupils can add this information to a map or report.

Antiquarian reports are a lovely way to find out about sites which may now have disappeared. Gentlemen archaeologists and historians such as Richard Colt Hoare produced beautifully illustrated reports on, for example, the *Ancient History of North and South Wiltshire*. Facsimile copies can be found in Local Studies libraries.

Discuss with your pupils the best way to present the information they find. They could add it to a large map or write their own 'desktop' report to give a summary of prehistoric evidence close to the school.



This photograph shows an aerial view of the ancient site of Old Sarum. Look at how it is shown on the map.



This map shows the area around Old Sarum. Look at how the tumuli and earthworks are marked.

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Activity 4: Make your own archaeological site

Purpose: To explore how archaeologists work and communicate their results in a fun and hands-on way.

Resources: Seed trays, plasticine, play sand, paintbrushes, the poster image of a roundhouse.

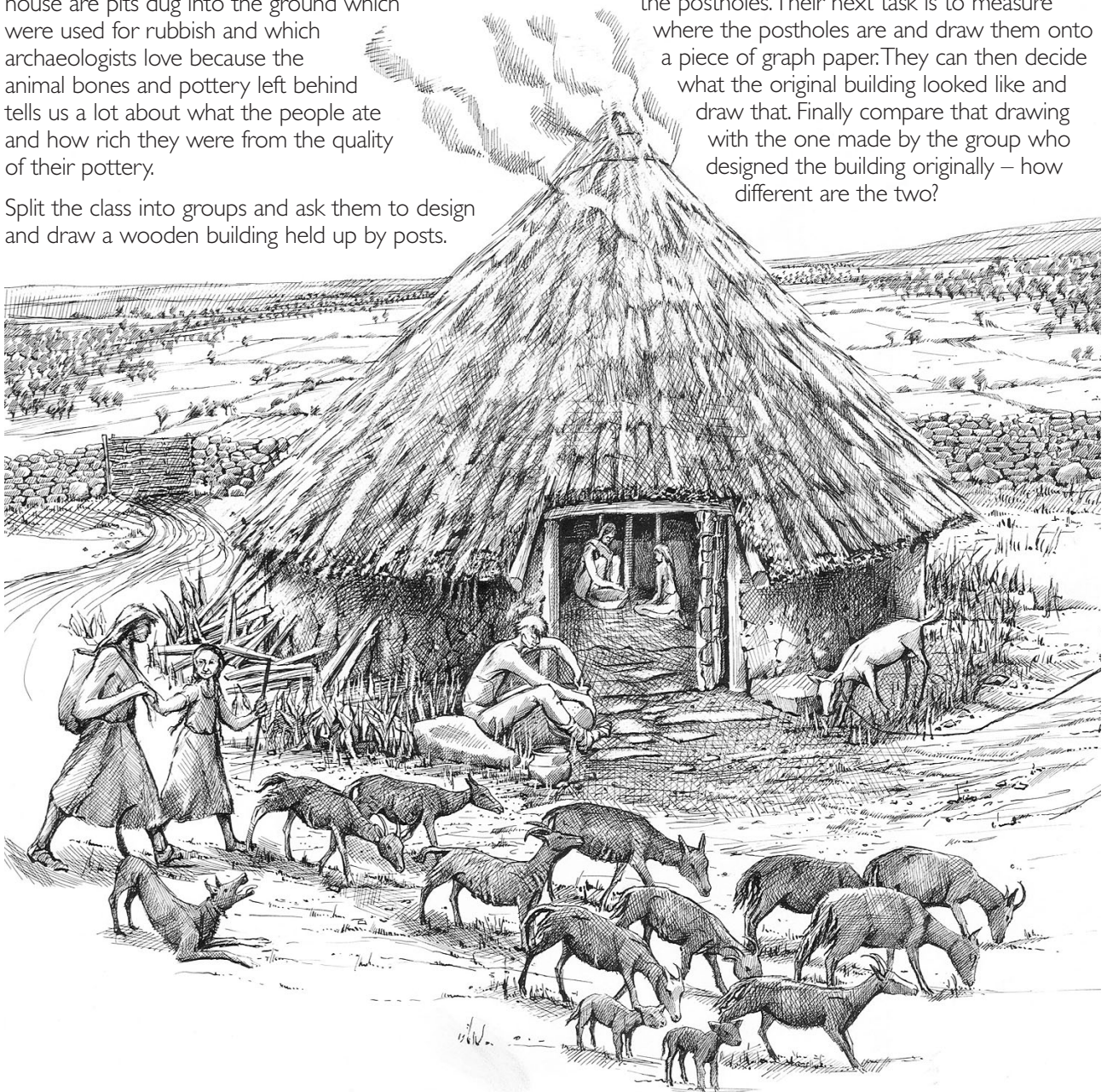
Show your class the poster of a roundhouse. Ask them about the material used to make the walls (wood, wattle and daub). Now ask them what will have happened to these materials after thousands of years and hopefully they will understand that the structure will have rotted away. Using a piece of plasticine push a pencil in so that it stands up. Explain to the class that the posts holding up the walls of the roundhouse would have been pushed into the ground in the same way. Now take the pencil out and show them the hole left behind. This is often all that is left of a roundhouse – a series of post holes and a shallow ditch where the eaves met the ground. Other things found near a roundhouse are pits dug into the ground which were used for rubbish and which archaeologists love because the animal bones and pottery left behind tells us a lot about what the people ate and how rich they were from the quality of their pottery.

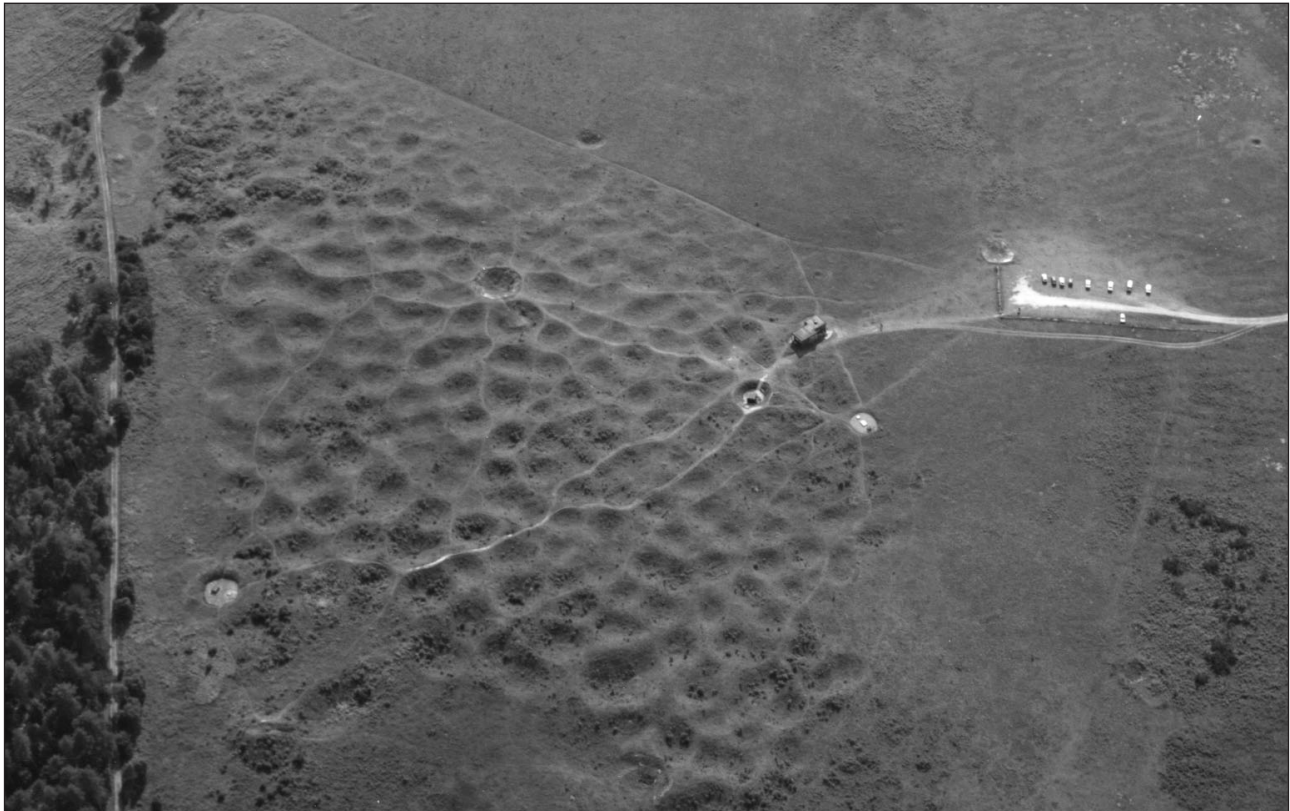
Split the class into groups and ask them to design and draw a wooden building held up by posts.

It can be any shape – a triangle, a star a square or irregular. They must keep their design and drawing top secret from other groups. Now they need to work out what would be left in the ground after the building had rotted away.

Give each group a seed tray and get them to line the bottom with plasticine. Then ask them to use a pencil to make post holes showing the outline of their building. Now cover the plasticine base with a layer of play sand and swap the sites over with another group.

Using paintbrushes and teaspoons pupils should carefully brush away the sand and remove it to reveal the postholes. Their next task is to measure where the postholes are and draw them onto a piece of graph paper. They can then decide what the original building looked like and draw that. Finally compare that drawing with the one made by the group who designed the building originally – how different are the two?





This is an aerial view of a site called Grimes Graves in Norfolk. Over 400 flint mines were dug here during the Neolithic period. From the air the site looks like a lunar landscape.

What next?

Looking at prehistory is a great way of introducing the discipline of archaeology and object-based learning. Your local museum or archaeological unit may have loan boxes containing artefacts and support notes which you can borrow. The Council for British Archaeology has resources and fact sheets which are useful.

Visiting a prehistoric site

Visit www.english-heritage.org.uk to find out about prehistoric sites which you can visit free of charge.

At some sites we offer Discovery Visits. To find out more visit:
www.english-heritage.org.uk/discoveryvisits

We have resources available to support a visit to Stonehenge:
www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.10599

New Teacher's Kit

The Avebury Monuments Teacher's Kit has been produced by Wessex Archaeology on behalf of English Heritage, and with the support of the World Heritage Organisation. It is available online at: www.english-heritage.org.uk/learning

On-line learning links

These links contain further ideas and resources on archaeology and heritage sites in prehistoric times.

www.creswell-crags.org.uk/virtuallytheiceage/
Creswell Crags website has some great information on life in the Palaeolithic period.

www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating/pdf/adapted_prehistory_nov06.pdf
Adapted history unit: How do heritage sites inform us about our local area in prehistoric times?

www.wessexarch.co.uk/
Has reports about excavations, resources for children and photographs

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