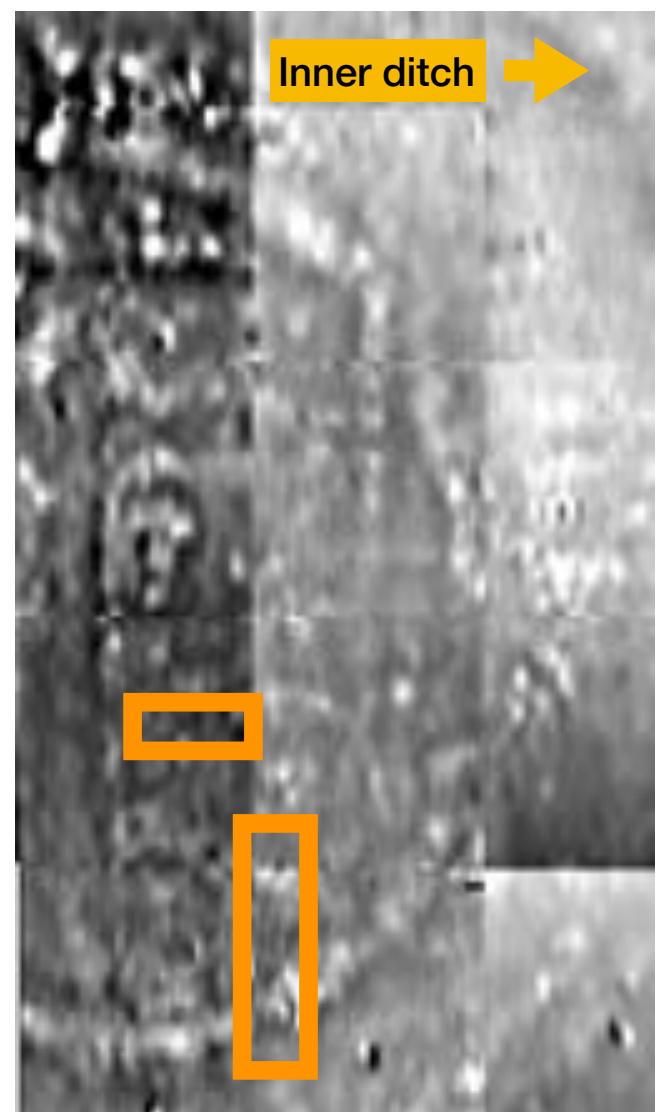




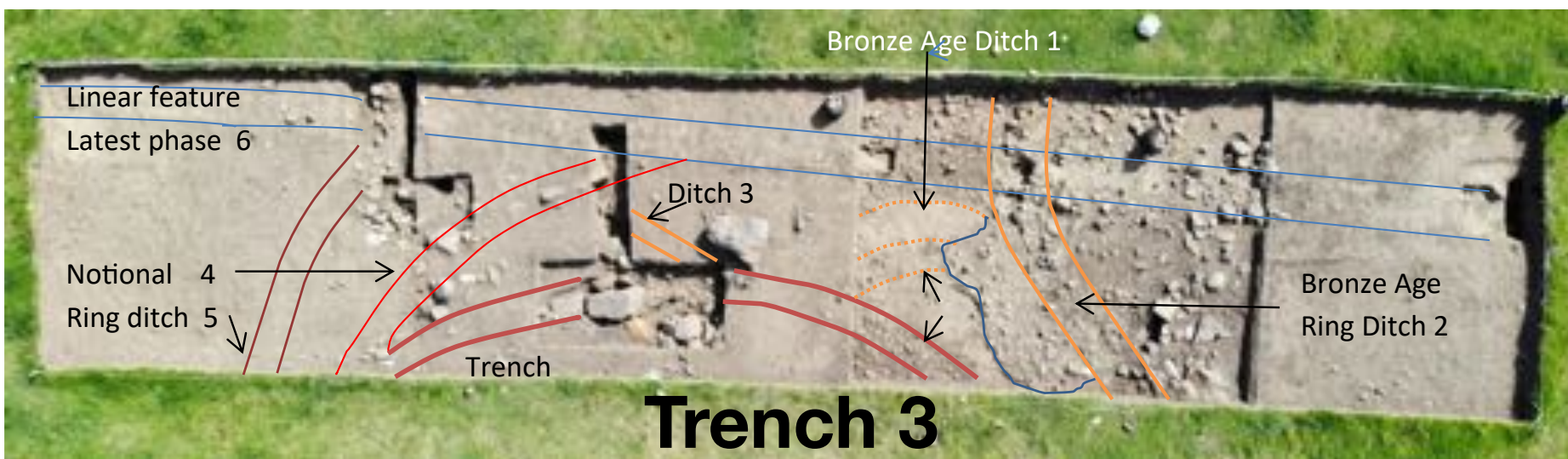
You are standing within a prehistoric settlement. Look behind you at the two ditches and banks that were dug by Iron Age farmers around 2,300 years ago. The strange image on the right is the result of a geophysical survey made in 2018 and shows mysterious structures caused by changes in the soil's magnetism. They represent prehistoric houses, paths, boundaries and possibly burials and are less than a metre below your feet. Two trenches, outlined in orange, were dug in 2019, revealing prehistoric tools, pottery and animal bones. Also found was an Anglo-Saxon brooch. These finds suggest that there's been a working farm here for more than 4000 years.





Trench 3

Trench 4



Trench 3



Neolithic Flint Flake

Bronze Age Axehead



Early Medieval Brooch



Animal Bone



Iron Age Pottery



BBC image

In front of you was an Iron Age roundhouse, about 8m in diameter and one of many similar roundhouses close by, lived in by other members of an extended family. Around 10 people are likely to have lived in the house, occasionally sharing with their animals during cold weather. The roof would have been made of grass or thatch and the walls made of a mixture of mud, animal dung and straw. It would have been quite cosy, if a bit smelly, with a fire glowing in the central hearth.



BBC image

The community made all of their own pottery and tools in workshops that were over to your right, close to the river and away from the houses.

Double ditched Iron Age enclosures are relatively common in this area. In this case the enclosure is completed by the banks of the River Low to the east. The purpose of these ditches is uncertain. Perhaps to enclose domesticated animals such as cattle and sheep, perhaps as a means of defence from attack by members of other Iron Age communities who lived nearby. There's evidence of several similar Iron Age enclosures locally at Kentstone Hill, Kylee Ridge, Lowick and Roughting Linn. We don't know if these were all inhabited at the same time but if so then there may have been conflict between the communities, necessitating defensive structures.

In 2017 the archaeology sub group of the Lowick Heritage Group received permission from landowners Tom and Karen, and Natural England to open two trenches at the points where the ditches would have met the river. These were trenches 1 and 2 but after extensive excavation little was found other than evidence of a few post holes. However, within the area enclosed by the ditches there is evidence of the presence of several roundhouses. These are identified by subtle differences in the colour and density of the grasses. Look around and you may see them, usually about 8m in diameter. In 2018 a decision was made to conduct a geophysical survey of the area in order to identify underground structures that are totally invisible at the surface. Equipment was loaned to us by the Bernician Studies Group and after suitable training the survey was conducted in July 2018 using a Fluxgate Gradiometer. This measures tiny differences in the magnetic field of the soil, displaying these differences as shown in the image.



We were surprised by the complexity of the outcome. Linear and circular features together with images of the probable roundhouses. Linear structures were rare during the Iron Age so these raised questions. The perfect circle in the lower left of centre is also a puzzle. At 15m it is too large to be a roundhouse. The dominant semicircular feature, concentric with the ditches, could be a palisade that predated them by several centuries. It became clear that excavation was required and so in June and July 2019 trenches 3 and 4 were opened.

Under the guidance of professional archaeologist Kristian Pedersen, the community dig took place over a three week period and involved 36 volunteers ranging in age from 7 to over 70 providing more than 1500 hours of their time. Despite that effort, the complexity of stone structures and other finds of interest in trench 3 meant that we had insufficient time to excavate trench 4. That will be saved for another year.

Hunting Hall Farm Information for Visitors

Trenches 3 and 4 were opened, roughly at right angles to each other over what we hoped were some of the more important features revealed by the geophysical survey. Something of interest was immediately apparent; a linear surface feature of different soil colour and texture running diagonally along the length of trench 3. Several small sections of the feature were dug in an attempt to find how it had been made and why. It could have been a field drain but this was unlikely because of its direction parallel with the river. The different textures and colours of the soils within the sections cut across the linear feature together with several finds of archaeological interest showed us that it was indeed prehistoric and may have existed for many centuries. Interestingly there were three linear soil features across Trench 4 that ran parallel to that in Trench 3.

As more and more of the soil was removed from Trench 3 it became apparent that the stones were arranged in complex patterns that were consistent with practices of both Bronze Age and Iron Age. Huge stones in one section had possibly been used as standing stones. In the same section, deep beneath the surface, were found large animal bones and charcoal. Could these have ceremonial implications? We won't know until further investigations such as DNA analysis and radiocarbon dating have been completed.

In other sections were found large and small fragments of Iron Age pottery. Dark coloured and very rough textured, these had been made from local clay from the river bed and fired at quite low temperature and so not very resilient. Iron Age pottery made on a site such as this was considered expendable at the time and broken vessels were discarded (a bit like our own 21st century plastic!). These pieces are currently undergoing further expert analysis to determine the types of vessel used.

Much of the removed soil was passed through a course sieve. This allowed us to filter out some of the artefacts that we might have otherwise missed. In among finds made like this was a flint flake. This is of special interest to us as the nature of the way the flint was napped suggests that it was worked during the late Neolithic period (around 4,500 years ago). Another find made by sieving was a Civil War stone musket ball.

Perhaps the most important find was a bronze brooch, once again situated close to the linear feature and not very deep. This design was used from the early Bronze Age until the Medieval period. It was found relatively close to the surface near the linear feature and examination by experts at Edinburgh University suggests that it is from the Anglo Saxon period. This is exciting because the name Lowick derives from Anglo Saxon and means 'Farm on the Low'. There may have been several farms along the length of this short river but could this farm, immediately adjacent to what may have been the original Pilgrim's Way be the original Lowick? Much more investigation is required and we'll probably never be certain.

The beautiful bronze axe head has been dated by experts to the mid Bronze Age so is around 3000 years old. Although not found in this particular part of the site it was discovered by the group's expert metal detectorist very close by. Once again, analytical techniques of the metal and alloys could establish a more accurate date for when the axe was forged. These finds, when considered collectively, suggest that this site has been occupied either continuously or intermittently for around 4,500 years. Work now continues to microscopically examine some of the soil samples to establish what kind of crops were grown here.

Hunting Hall Farm

Information for Visitors

Family and farming life between the Bronze Age and Iron Age did not differ greatly. There were changes in ritual practices, pottery and of course the composition of metal tools and weapons that were used. The image on the panel represents how this site may have looked around 3000 years ago.

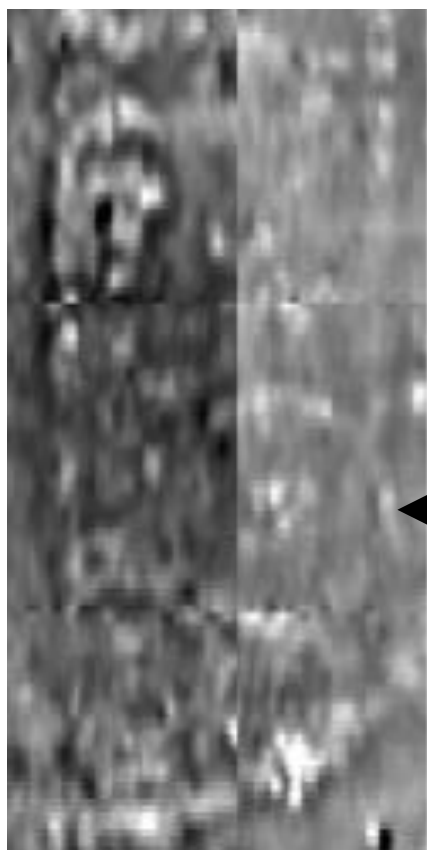
We sometimes consider our prehistoric ancestors to be primitive. In fact they were very much like us, similar in size and intelligence and very able to make best use of their surroundings. They made quite fine garments using looms and wool from their sheep.

Their animals were very important to them and it's quite possible that conflict existed between rival communities. The need to protect themselves and their animals from others may be the reason behind the ditch and bank structures though we can't be certain.

Earlier features of the site would have included palisades, probably a wicker structure supported by upright fenceposts and kept in place using stones. On this site there appears to be a palisade that is concentric and within the ditches.

The roundhouses were built using wood for the main structure and covered in wattle and daub, a lattice of flexible wood such as hazel filled with wet soil, clay, sand, animal dung and straw. Each was around 8 metres in diameter. Sometimes these were built double skinned to allow the packing of straw between the walls to provide extra insulation. The roofs were thatched with grass or straw and angled in such a way to allow rain to run off and maximise the living space.

Both people and, on occasion, animals slept in the roundhouses. With a central hearth fire the temperature would have been comfortable. Smoke from the hearth drifted up through the roof (there wasn't a chimney) and was sometimes used to smoke meat and fish hanging from the roof in order to preserve the food to sustain the family through winter.



The geophysical survey suggests that the workshops were on the south east of the site. The thatched roofs of the roundhouses were vulnerable to fire and so it made sense to keep the heat of the blacksmith as far away as possible.

Of special interest is the circular structure identified in the geophysical survey. This structure is around 15 metres in diameter and so is a little too big to represent a traditional roundhouse. Look out for the intense magnetic activity at the centre of the circle. Current opinion is that this may be a Bronze Age burial, perhaps with a cist, a stone coffin, at its centre. Deceased ancestors were revered by prehistoric people and their transition to the 'afterlife' was very important to them. We have yet to investigate this structure but the plan is to excavate during May and June 2020.

More information about the 2019 dig is available in the Dig Diary.