

# BOILING MOUNDS IN THE NEW FOREST

By A. H. PASMORE and J. PALLISTER

## THE SITES IN GENERAL

A FEATURE of the New Forest's archaeology which has received no attention until the present time, is the frequent occurrence of calcined or burnt flint accumulations. The prevalence of such sites in the vicinity of reliable natural water supplies was noted during field work in the North of the Forest from 1959 onwards, but a definite pattern began to emerge only towards the end of 1966. Attention was then concentrated on the heads of valleys, around springs, and at points where hard tongues of land run up to the edge of the Forest bogs. The results of this work were extremely successful, and at the present time some twenty-two sites have been recorded. For the sake of convenience these will be described as Boiling Mounds, although elsewhere in the British Isles they are known by various names, e.g., 'Deer Roasts'. The characteristics of a fully developed and undamaged mound are as follows. A low crescent or kidney shaped mound about 3 feet in height and perhaps 40 to 50 feet across, rises from water level with the indentation in the mound facing directly towards the water supply. The mound may carry different vegetation (frequently heather) to its immediate surroundings, and calcined flints may be visible on the surface. Where the mound has been destroyed, a profusion of calcined flints covering the surface of the ground or exposed in the banks of a drainage cutting may be in evidence. The majority of New Forest mounds now appear only in this form, and of the sites listed below only two are perfect. Others retain some semblance of a mound. It must be said that these mounds are not deliberately constructed earthworks, and it is probable that most never in fact attained a full kidney or crescent shape. They are the waste material from a process of water heating which will be described below.

Sites of this nature have been most frequently recorded in the Highland Zone, and so far as the writers are aware, they have not been previously noted in the Hampshire Basin. It is debatable whether this indicates that they never existed, or simply that they have been totally destroyed in cultivated and enclosed land. Certainly these slight earthworks would fall easy prey, even to the most shallow ploughing. Despite the protection from cultivation enjoyed by the New Forest, the rate of destruction has been considerable and is still proceeding.

## LIST OF NEW FOREST BOILING MOUNDS (1ST DECEMBER, 1967)

This list is not intended as an exhaustive survey of New Forest Boiling Mounds, but merely as an indication of the distribution and type of known sites. All those described are immediately adjoining a natural water supply. Some of the Grid References are approximate and will be checked when a more detailed examination is possible.

BOILING MOUNDS IN THE NEW FOREST

<i>Grid Ref.</i>	<i>Locality</i>	<i>Description</i>
21841010	East end of Milkham.	Calcined flints exposed in drainage cutting. Mounds destroyed.
21681310	Sloden Inclosure.	Calcined flints in track cutting (1961). Now overgrown. Original water supply drained.
21191241	Sloden Wood.	Calcined flints on edge of bog. No mound.
22350967*	Near Slusters.	Well preserved round mound.
17401787	Densome Wood.	Calcined flints in stream bank. Doubtful.
19321818	Hale Purlieu.	Perfect crescent-shaped mound.
19101745	Hale Purlieu.	Many calcined flints in stream bank.
20701720	Deadman Bottom.	Perfect kidney-shaped mound. Excavated 1967, see below.
23051367*	Near Gorley Bushes.	Round mound surviving, grown with holly.
20221011	Spring Bushes.	Large part of mound survives.
17570769	Waterslade Bottom.	Part of mound survives on stream edge.
20251780*	Turf Hill Inclosure.	Ploughed flat.
20341778*	Turf Hill Inclosure.	Ploughed flat.
20651794*	Mays Firs.	Boundary bank constructed over remains of mound.
26371034	Ringwood Ford Bottom.	Destroyed by track.
21511323	Sloden Inclosure.	Calcined flints exposed in drainage cutting.
23770283	Creek Bottom.	Part of mound remains. Finds of worked flints in association with the remains.
24660318	Markway Holms.	Calcined flints beside track.
24580376	Mill Lawn Brook.	Doubtful. Calcined flints beside stream.
24660192	Near Naked Man.	Large, but very low mound.
25100195*	Above Duck Hole Bog.	Calcined flints exposed by cutting.
253016	Wilverley Plain.	Three sites around valley head.
42330475	Holbury Inclosure.	A good site, but badly damaged by bombing and now ploughed down.
21050790*	Above Buckherd Bottom.	Small accumulation of calcined flints.
20801392	Amberwood Inclosure.	Destroyed by road construction.
19261608*	Stone Quarry Bottom.	Perfect 'U' shaped trough sectioned by stream. Filled with calcined flints, but no surface indication.

\* Indicates approximate Grid Reference.

THE DEADMAN BOTTOM SITE (fig. 2, pl. VIII)

During 1967 it was decided that the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club should undertake an excavation of one of the two well preserved sites mentioned above. That in Deadman Bottom was chosen because of its waterlogged nature, in the hope that perishable materials might have been preserved. Work was commenced in September with the consent of the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest and under the direction of Mr. J. Pallister of Southampton Museums Department.

*The Site*

Deadman Bottom forms the head of a valley running from the water-parting ridge of Bramshaw Telegraph to the Avon at Armsley. For the first one and a quarter miles south-west of the Salisbury road, this valley contains no defined watercourse during most of the year. It is not until Cunniger Bottom is reached that a definite and permanent stream materialises. Above this point, storm water has gouged out deep pits in the valley floor which remain dry for much of the year. Further towards the head of the valley, however, patches of permanently boggy ground occur, and it is on the edge of one of these that the site is located. Here the hillside rises steeply from the south edge of the bog, while a natural pond (artificially enlarged in recent years) lies immediately on the eastern side of the mound. The supply of water is permanent, and appears to arise from spring water percolating through the derived gravel of the valley floor. An interesting feature of the site is that the water-level of the pond may be substantially altered with a minimal amount of drain-cutting. This is partly due to the matted

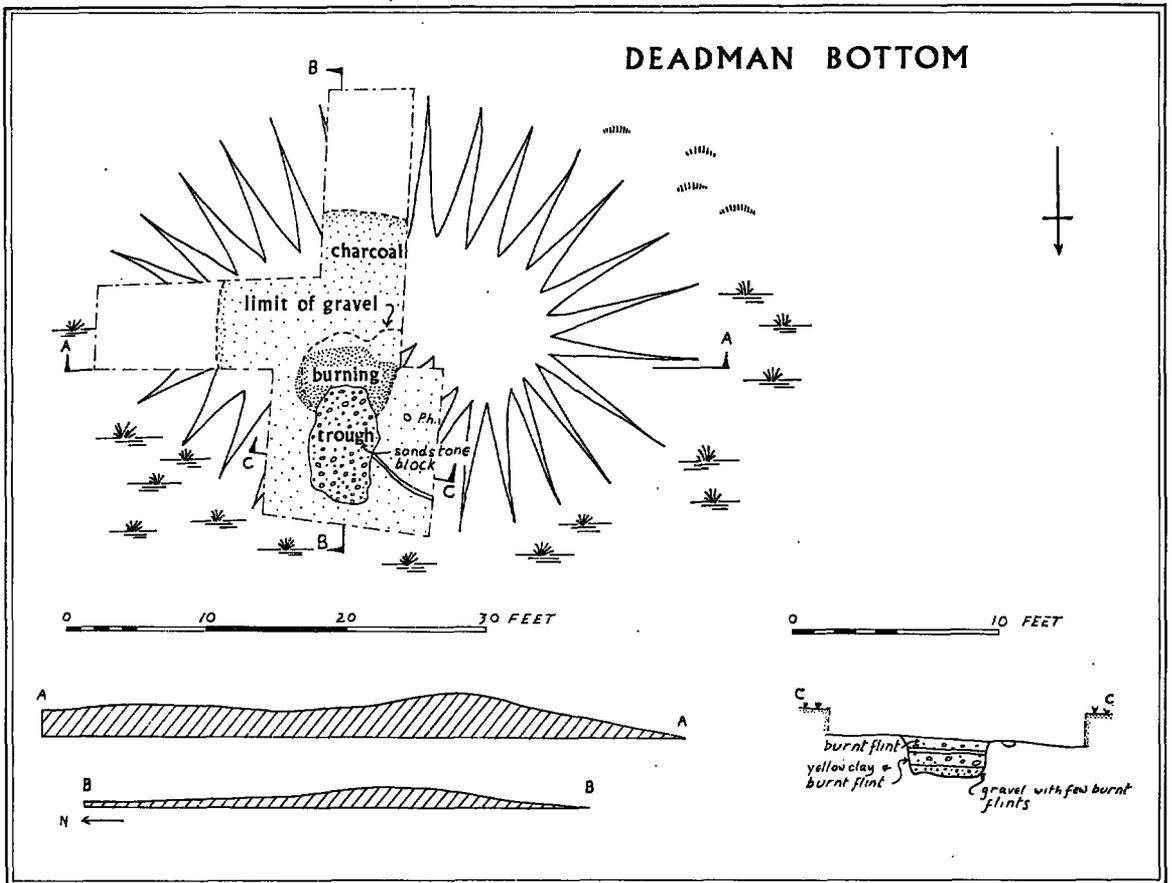


Fig. 2. Plan of excavation

## BOILING MOUNDS IN THE NEW FOREST

vegetation forming a crust over the bog; and, assuming that conditions have not changed materially, might have been a factor in the choice of this site.

The subsoil here belongs to the Bracklesham Beds and comprises a sandy clay. The surrounding hills are capped with Plateau Gravel, and derived material from this source has created a buried layer on the valley floor. The Plateau Gravel comes to within fifty yards of the site and lies about fifty feet above.

The mound itself is built partly in the bog, but because of the peculiarities of the site, water-level on the eastern side is some two feet above that on the west. It is an almost perfect kidney shape, with the western half being higher above the bog than the remainder.

### *The Excavation*

The indentation in the mound was very moist prior to excavation, although on the removal of a thick turf layer, a hard base of calcined flints was revealed as on other parts of the earthwork. Near the crest of the mound the heather turf was scarcely one inch in thickness. It was decided to uncover a rectangular area lying immediately above the indentation and to cut a linking six-foot trench across the mound to the south and another at right angles towards the east. The exact shape of the excavation was, however, dictated by the necessity of excluding water. In fact, during the period of the excavation there was no rain and the impermeable nature of the soil prevented an invasion of water. As soon as work was completed, the entire system of trenches was flooded to a depth of about one foot.

The main body of the mound was found to be composed almost entirely of calcined flints with little intervening material. As the subsoil was reached a layer of charcoal became apparent, although the limits of this were not clearly defined and the layer tended to die out away from the centre of the mound. Beneath the indentation lay a trough cut into the natural soil to a depth of 22 inches. This was roughly rectangular in shape measuring 8 feet by 4 feet with the long axis at right angles to the bog. Around the head of the trough and beneath the principal band of charcoal was a rough layer of gravel (about 2 inches thick), the extent of which is indicated on the plan. Below this again (about half an inch thick) was further charcoal on the surface of the natural soil. The latter consists of sandy alluvial material and was burned red in a crescent shape around the southern end of the trough.

The trough itself was filled for the first six inches of its depth with material similar in character to that of the mound. Thereafter followed about nine inches of calcined flints in a thick matrix of yellow clay with the top layer stained iron red. Finally a band of calcined flints in blue waterlogged clay merged into the natural material beneath. The bottom of the trough was not clearly defined and a constant seepage of water hampered detailed examination. Although about six to nine inches of water accumulated in the trough overnight, it did not appear to be completely self-filling under dry summer conditions. It would, however, have been a simple matter to flood the trough by running a short cutting into the bog. No form of lining was located and no indication of the former presence of such was found.

The filling contained three blocks of unshaped 'hethstone' (sandstone) which appeared to have fallen in when the trough was filled or abandoned. Although this

material occurs naturally in the surrounding hills, only one other small block was found within the area of the excavation. Some heavily fired fragments were found amongst the calcined flints comprising the mound.

The finds from the excavation comprised flakes and cores. These were distributed throughout the mound itself, although with a greater concentration around the head of the trough. Worked flints are common in the surrounding area, but it is not thought that these finds represent chance fragments brought onto the site with gravel to be heated. Of the pieces found, only one showed any sign of having been fired, despite the fact that almost the entire composition of the mound had been burnt.

Above the level of the trough only one fragment of pottery having a diameter of less than quarter of an inch was found. The trough itself, however, produced several fairly substantial fragments of coarse, black, gritty fabric, so much decayed that it appeared only as a black smear on the clay in most cases. Even in those fragments which survived in part, much of the surfaces had perished for one-sixteenth of an inch in depth.

The only structural feature to be recorded was a doubtful post hole indicated on the plan. This had a depth of only three inches into the natural soil suggesting that it had been sunk through the mound. A narrow gulley might simply mark the passage of some animal, although it was quite clearly defined and at some depth.

#### *Conclusions*

The original date and purpose of the mound must now be considered. There seems little doubt that the process carried out here was simply the heating of flints which were cast red hot into the trough in order to boil water. This appears to have been the purpose of similar sites in other parts of Britain, and in the absence of contrary evidence it is assumed that the boiling water was required for cooking purposes. The total lack of animal remains is not surprising bearing in mind the very acid nature of the soil. The fire was located at the head of the trough immediately adjoining its edge, presumably to avoid unnecessary heat-loss in the transfer of flints from fire to trough. As long as the mound remained in use, the cold flints removed from the trough were thrown up in a wall on three sides leaving the fourth (bog side) open to allow for a fresh flow or seepage of water. Perhaps this continued until the accumulations of waste made so much effort necessary in clearing the trough that the site was abandoned. Certainly the heap must have been very substantial, as the wasting of the mound has spread calcined flints over a wide area below and around the site. The leaving clear of the fourth side and perhaps a platform around the trough accounts for the standard crescent or kidney shape of well preserved mounds. On other sites which may have been in use less extensively, the three sides might not have become built up so that they now appear as a simple mound or merely as a scatter of burnt flints.

#### *The Finds by John Pallister*

Nine sherds of pottery and a number of tiny scraps were found within the trough. All were of a coarse hand-made black fabric with fawn coloured surfaces, and were tempered with finely crushed flint. Every sherd showed signs of deterioration typical of that associated with the acid soils of the New Forest. There is one rim sherd but it

#### BOILING MOUNDS IN THE NEW FOREST

is featureless and too small to assign to any particular type. The fabric however is identical to that of Urn I found at Stoney Cross (five miles south-east of Deadman Bottom) in A.D. 1912<sup>1</sup>, and can be dated to the late Bronze Age.

The flint collected did not produce any assignable artefacts or waste.

<sup>1</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, 'Note on the Discovery of Two Bronze Age Urns at Stoney Cross, in the Parish of Minstead, New Forest', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club*, vol. vi, supp. 33-6, and for illustration, E. Godden, *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, part 3, 35, no. 10.