

BENEATH THE WAVES: INVESTIGATING SUBMERGED LANDSCAPES OF THE SOUTHERN NORTH SEA

Dr Louise Tizzard, Geoservices: Wessex Archaeology

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Report by David Parr

It has long been recognised that in the past Britain has been at times joined to the Continent. The broad outline of this was clear 100 years ago with, for example, the Thames flowing past the site of Happisburgh into the Wash to join the North Sea near the Dogger Bank. Since then, much more detail and the timing of this have emerged, showing a cycle of falling temperature leading to establishment of the land bridge, followed by warming and inundation, roughly every 100,000 years for the last million years.

There have been many sources of information about the submerged landscapes, ranging from the traditional maritime (both wrecks and debris) and aviation, to more recent and sophisticated surveys for cable-laying, port and foreshore construction, wind farms and oil/gas exploration. Scanning, echo sounding, drilling samples, diving and photography have all played their part. Evidence of woolly rhinoceros, woolly mammoth and giant red deer, together with butchered bones has been discovered, but no sign of archaeological hot spots.

Two voluntary initiatives continue to be valuable – one, a collection of flakes, tools and faunal remains donated by amateurs on both sides of the English Channel; the other, of items recovered from the grading processes of aggregate dredged from the seabed, with the winning find publicised in the trade magazine. An indication of the magnitude of the challenge is the number of finds in Autumn 2011 in a specially selected area off Great Yarmouth – 20 flakes and 3 hand axes from 40,000 tons of sediment. This highlights the challenge for the future of this work – to identify high potential areas to justify the very high cost of this exploration.