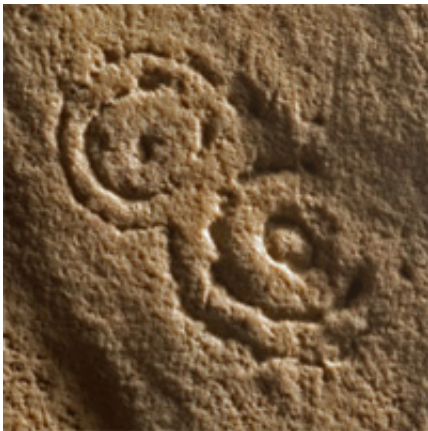


Cambridgeshire Quarry throws up 4,500-year-old find

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A remarkable piece of Neolithic rock art, unlike anything previously found in Eastern England, has been unearthed in the Cambridgeshire village of Over.

The hand-sized [artefact](#), which could date back to 2,500 BC, was found by a participant in a geological weekend course which was being run by the University of Cambridge's Institute for Continuing Education.

It consists of a hand-sized slab of weathered [sandstone](#) with two pairs of concentric circles etched into the surface - a motif which, according to [archaeologists](#), is typical of "Grooved Ware" art from the later Neolithic era.

While examples of similar Grooved Ware art have been discovered at sites elsewhere in the UK, this is the first time that any such find has been encountered in Eastern England, which may provide more information about the connections of the communities who inhabited the area 4,500 years ago.

The motives of whoever created the design are unclear. Researchers say that it could represent the ornamental efforts of a Prehistoric Picasso, but may just as easily have been an aimless inscription.

"It really is a fantastic find; certainly we have had nothing like it from any of our sites before," Dr. Chris Evans, Director of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit, which operates out of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge, said.

"In fact, it's unique in Eastern England, with the nearest comparable example being the similar scratch patterns on a sandstone plaque from a Grooved Ware site in Leicestershire. Otherwise you would have to look to Wessex or Northern Britain and the much more formal Megalithic Art of the period."

"The big question in the case of the Over stone is whether we should actually be calling it meaningful art, or if it amounted to no more than Neolithic doodling. Either way it's a great find."

The stone will make its first public appearance since the discovery was made this Saturday (July 17th), when it will go on display at Over Village Carnival.

It was found by Susie Sinclair, who was taking part in the weekend course led by Dr Peter Sheldon (from the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The Open University) at Hanson Aggregates' Needingworth Quarry. The quarry lies north and west of Over alongside

the River Great Ouse.

The Cambridge Archaeological Unit has been excavating sites within the quarry for 15 years, partly in an effort to better understand the shape and nature of the landscape in prehistoric times. The remains of several settlement clusters from the late Neolithic period have already been found.

The Over stone, however, was hidden in the quarry's spoil, one of the heaps of waste geological materials discarded by quarry workers. Researchers believe it had been deposited within one of the river's ancient palaeochannels crossing the area and that, with the existing information they have about the geographical layout of the region, the point where it was found can be reconstructed with relative ease.

The area around Over and the River Great Ouse would have looked dramatically different 4,500 years ago. Huge, "S" shaped bends from the river originally meandered across the fens and efforts to tame them only really began in earnest in the late medieval period.

According to the latest research, at the time the Over stone was being carved, the countryside would have been dominated by the snaking course of the river, its tributary channels and flooding. This would essentially have broken the area up into a delta-like landscape of small islands, channels and marshlands.

More information: Further information about the Cambridge Archaeological Unit and its work in the area can be found at: www-cau.arch.cam.ac.uk/

Provided by University of Cambridge

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