

New evidence suggests site near Stonehenge was occupied far earlier than thought

April 22 2013, by Bob Yirka



Stonehenge. Image: Wikipedia.

(Phys.org) —New tests using carbon dating techniques on materials found at a site approximately a mile from Stonehenge suggest that the area was continuously occupied thousands of years earlier than scientists have believed. The new research, led by Open University archaeologist David Jacques, came about as he and his team were investigating the closest known water source to the famous landmark.

Up to now, the consensus among scientists has been that Mesolithic people visited the site now known as Vespasian's Camp as far back as 7,500 B.C., but then abandoned it for unknown reasons. Thousands of years later, the thinking went, [Neolithic people](#) moved in and eventually built the world-renowned stone structures. The new research by Jacques

and his team shows that such thinking has apparently been wrong as the area appears to have been occupied the whole time. It pushes back the date of earliest settlement of the area approximately 5,000 years.

The work being done by Jacques and his group of researchers is being documented as part of a BBC special called *The Flying Archaeologist*, to be broadcast in Britain this week. In it, Jacques reports that he became interested in the site near Stonehenge after viewing [aerial photographs](#) taken many years ago. He and his team surmised that if animals or humans were going to be living in the area far back in history, the most likely place would be near a source of water—Vespasian's Camp has a natural spring. They began studying the site (in Amesbury, Wiltshire) more closely back in 1999, and since then have found many prehistoric monuments.

Carbon dating of [artifacts](#) found at the site shows that people were living in the area right up to the Neolithic time, which means there was a gradual changeover—a slow mixing of cultures rather than an [abandonment](#) of the area. Dr Josh Pollard, of Southampton University, told the BBC that the teams' findings mean the group has found the identity of the people that erected the first monuments (Mesolithic posts made of wood) at the [Stonehenge](#) site. He added that they might also represent just the tip of the iceberg, hinting that more discoveries might be coming.

© 2013 Phys.org

Citation: New evidence suggests site near Stonehenge was occupied far earlier than thought (2013, April 22) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-04-evidence-site-stonehenge-occupied-earlier.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.