Newport, Pembrokeshire

Introduction (George Nash)

A surface flint assemblage was located on the northern side of the Afon Nyfer Estuary that included five distinct scatters. These sit within a high-density prehistoric area of north Pembrokeshire that includes other surface and sub-surface lithic scatters and several extant Neolithic monuments close by (including Carreg Coetan [NGR 0602 3935]; Cerig y Gof (NGR 0365 3890 and Trellyffaint [PRN 0822 4252]). Associated with these stone chambered monuments are a number of landscape monuments including standing stones, an array of Bronze Age cairns, and several henges, one of which has been recently dated to 3029-2900 cal BC (Casanova 2020).

Commentary on the finds (Andrew David)

The lithic material was collected from the surface at five places along high-water mark on the north side of the Nyfer estuary, opposite Newport town, located as follows:

Site A SN 05408 40123
Site B SN 05480 40103
Site C SN 06025 39738
Site D SN 06112 39715
Site E SN 06214 39637

These find-spots fall into two clusters: Sites A and B close together at the edge of the dune area near to the mouth of the estuary, and Sites C, D and E a further 700m upstream sited to either side of the small inlet onto the estuary at Fynnon Bryncyn. The composition of the lithic collections is summarised in Table 1 (below).

There is sufficient similarity across all five scatters, to consider their raw materials and technology together. The raw material is almost exclusively flint of a variety of conditions and colours. In addition there are four pieces of non-flint material, all from Site A, of different types of fine-grained volcanic rock presumed to be of rhyolite-type. All these materials are typical of those found in surface scatters elsewhere in the region and reflect selection from local secondary and tertiary deposits. The sizes range from very small rounded pebbles through to rather larger battered cobbles (~27mm - ~55mm), all of which could have been collected from local beach accumulations, sediment exposures and river gravels. Whilst some very poor quality material may derive from underlying soils it has proved difficult to distinguish whether or not this has also been exploited; a proportion has been dismissed as non-artefactual 'natural'.

Flint colouration varies from red/brown into greys, of highly variable opacity, with and without mottling and inclusions. Cortical condition is also extremely variable, from smoothed and water-worn to highly chattered and indented. Most of the artefacts (97%) are unpatinated and a modest percentage has been burnt (10%).

The technology associated with all this material, as indicated by the debitage and cores, is mostly by hard-hammer reduction, either to create platform cores or to split pebbles between the hammer and anvil to create bipolar cores. Both methods can produce flakes, blades and bladelets, although bipolar reduction is a response to breaking open smaller pebbles to create flakes, and in west Wales is typical of Neolithic and Bronze Age stone-working. Platform cores are more typical of Mesolithic work where blades and bladelets were in greater demand than flakes.

Sites A and B

These can be considered together as the find-spots lie so close to one another. The 281 items are mostly debitage: flakes, blades and fragments, with 14 platform cores and 10 bipolar cores. There are no firmly diagnostic tools but attention can at least be drawn to two truncated blades with parallels in surface collections attributed elsewhere in Pembrokeshire to the Late Mesolithic (c 8000-4000 cal BC). Also perhaps Mesolithic is the very crudely flaked and roughly pointed core tool, here described loosely as a pick although its status, even as a tool, is uncertain - especially as picks are not generally known in Welsh material of any date. The two convex scrapers are insufficiently distinctive to be attributed to any particular period although scrapers of this general type tend more often to be post-Mesolithic in age.

Sites C, D and E

These three also lie close together and for simplicity's sake can be summarised together. Raw materials and technology are as described above, but it is worth noting that the cores from Sites C and D, both on the seaward side of the little inlet here, are only of bipolar type - although this may partly be due to the small sample size (74 items). All three scatters include a proportion of blades and bladelets, and Site E has platform cores some of which are of convincing Mesolithic appearance. The latter site also includes an end-scraper as well as some limited evidence for soft-hammer blade detachment, both possible indicators of Earlier Mesolithic activity. The 'nosed' piece from this scatter is a thick flake coarsely worked to create a protrusion or nose, and belonging broadly within a family of Later Mesolithic crudely flaked idented scraper-like tools some of which may also have been cores. The other scrapers are imperfect and of indeterminate type.

Summary (Sites A-E):

The lithic material from these scatters is difficult to interpret, for lack of irrefutable typological clues. What pointers there are (bladelet cores, a very few tools), suggest a Mesolithic flavour, especially in sites A, B and E. However, there are no microliths, and all five scatters also include good evidence (bipolar technology) for activity also in the Neolithic and/or Bronze Age. As rhyolite-type raw material is widely used throughout the Mesolithic and later periods, its appearance on Site A is uninformative. The true extent of the scatters northwards from the edge of the estuary is unknown but, judging by examples elsewhere, they could very well extend over a much wider area.

The relative intensity or character of the two separate and generalised periods of activity cannot be established. Activity in both periods here is not surprising. Both Early and Late Mesolithic activity is already known of, or presumed, in the immediate locality: an early Mesolithic microlith and a tranchet axe/adzehead have been found just a few hundred metres away from Sites C-E on the opposite side of the estuary at SN 0579 3938, whilst a second early microlith was recovered from the Carreg Coitan site at SN 0603 3934 a little further off. Evidence for Later Mesolithic activity is less clear but flints potentially of this age, although unconfirmed, have been found below peat only 200m upstream of Site E (Thomas 1923; Rees 1973; Lewis 1992). The tendency of Late Mesolithic sites to focus around the coast close to springs and small valleys with access to the shore is exactly the topography at Sites C-E.

Neolithic-Bronze Age activity, as evidenced by the use of bipolar technology, is widespread in Pembrokeshire and is argued to be a response to the exigencies of locally obtained small-sized raw materials at this time (David 2017-18). Immediately local finds of this type have been made at Carreg Coitan, and near the mouth of the Nyfer river at SN 0445 3975; and recent fieldwork by the Dyfed

Archaeological Trust in 2020 has located a concentration 1 km further west at Cwm Rhigian (SN 0365 3913) near the Cerrig-y-Gof chambered cairns.

The finds on the north side of the estuary reported here therefore fit well within the larger local and regional picture. The attraction of the Nyfer valley as an access route to a more distant coast in the early Holocene with its many resources, including flint, can be imagined. Later in the Mesolithic, with the estuary much closer to its present position, one might expect to find just those types of site the earlier versions of which have since become submerged off-shore. It is surely possible that the area around the estuary might well conceal evidence of considerable activity at this time, contemporary also with that for which evidence may now be emerging from nearby inland and upland landscapes on the Preselis (Darvill and Wainwright 2014; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2015, 2019). The continued attraction of the area, perhaps occasioned by traditions associated with this long preceding history of exploitation, is evidenced by the later focus of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the area. The growing evidence for widespread use of bipolar technology is beginning to reveal a more finely textured distribution map of activity at this time.

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Newport: north side of the estuary, sites found by George Nash							
Summary composition of lithic material							
Site			**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
Debitage	Flakes		77	80	16	19	41
	Blades		17	14	1	8	8
	Bladelets		2	7	1	2	2
	Spalls		5	-	-	-	-
	Cobbles		-	-	-	-	6
	Flaked cobbles		-	-	-	1	-
	Fragments		16	14	11	8	17
	Platform cores		10	4	-	-	9
	Bipolar cores		4	6	3	1	3
	Other core		-	1	-	-	-
	Scaled pieces		1	1	-	-	-
Tools	Utilised	Flakes	5	1	-	-	1
		Blades	6	1	-	1	3
	Retouched	Flakes	1	1	-	-	1
		Blade fragment	-	1	-	-	-
		Fragments	1	-	-	1	-
	Scrapers	Convex	-	2	1	-	4
		End	-	-	-	-	1
	'Nosed' piece		-	-	-	-	1
	End tool/truncation		1	1	-	-	-
	Other tool (?pick of rhyolite)		1	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	Chipped flint and stone		**147**	**134**	**33**	**41**	**97**
Material, Condition	Flaked rhyolite or similar		4	0	0	0	0
	Non-artefactual 'natural'		22	26	4	16	29
	Burnt		5	19	10	1	9
	Patinated		3	7	1	1	2