



A BRONZE AGE LANDSCAPE (1800 - 1000 BC) - THE VIEW ACROSS THE RIVER

Environmental researches have shown that, prior to its straightening in recent centuries, the lower reaches of the River Great Ouse meandered in great oxbow bends across its floodplain. In effect, it was a delta-like landscape with its backwater channels encircling small islands. This would have been a particularly diverse environment, including marshland, water meadows, woodland stands, and with the potential for pasture lands and arable plots on the higher ground of the gravel terraces.

In the field before you the ring of a great settlement enclosure can be seen. This has recently been restored in the topsoil, with the archaeology lying protected a half metre or more below. Before it and to the left (south), the mounds of five Bronze Age round barrows can just be made out.

Each are encircled with large ditches, the spoil from which would have generated the bulk of their turf and gravel mounds. These would have originally stood 1.50-2.00m high (roughly twice their height today) and each probably sealed a central cremation pyre burial, with later cremations inserted into the flanks of their mounds. Behind you, the higher mound beyond the pond on the other side of the road approximates the restored full profile of another barrow. This is the only such monument that has been excavated in this area

The painting reconstructs the Bronze Age landscape as seen from the western shore of the river, and is based on the results of more than a decade of fieldwork. Notice that the barrow group and the circular enclosure were then actually sited on an island.

As is also shown, fields extend across both banks of the river, around which are dotted small hamlet-like settlements. In the foreground is a double ring-ditch burial monument, which became the site of a major cremation cemetery (inset right). Criss-crossing the low ground before the river are a series of timber-post 'screens' (excavated in 1996; see inset left). These appear to have done little more than frame sight-lines towards the barrows on the opposite shore, and perhaps channel movement. Together with the ring-ditches and barrow cemetery, they contributed to what would have been a ceremonial landscape.

Further information can be found on Hanson Aggregates archaeological web-site, www.unearthingthepast.net