

Time Travelling on the Mendip Hills

#mendiparchaeology

Here's your word of the day, palimpsest. Palimpsest originally refers to old parchment handwriting, where new text has been added on top but you can still see the earlier writing. The Mendip Hills is a perfect example of that concept on a landscape scale.

Any visit, anywhere on the Mendip Hills and you'll be travelling back in time, even deep underground, peeling back the layers as you go. Recently cave divers in Wookey Hole found an intact Roman pot and the remains of others deep in the cave system. They are believed to have come from a burial chamber deep in the system that has been flooded by the River Axe over time. Read more [here](#).

Over the other side of the Mendip plateau is Aveline's Hole in Burrington Combe. This is another burial site, in fact it's the earliest scientifically dated cemetery in Britain. Human bone fragments from about 21 different individuals, are thought to be between roughly 10,200 and 10,400 years old.

But the evidence of human settlement on the Mendip Hills goes back even further. Half a million years ago someone was scraping the meat from a deer bone with a flint in a cave. The cave collapsed at some point and was later discovered as part of the quarry above Westbury-sub-Mendip. Some of this 'evidence' is hard to find as it's buried underground but after that early era of the caves being used during the Paleolithic, the evidence starts to become so much more easy to see.



The Priddy Circles are probably the most famous example of Neolithic earthworks dating back to approximately 2500 BC. Each one of these four circles are over 150m across, and they all sit just west of the Castle of Comfort pub. Despite the size and many investigations 'there is little evidence to suggest how the monuments were originally used', according to *The Historic Landscape of the Mendip Hills* by Elaine Jamieson.

Changing agriculture techniques, the Romans, Victorian industry, WWII, post-war forestry and now the modern planning system have all added layers that reveal stories about our beloved Mendip Hills.



There are 172 Scheduled Monuments across the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It's another key reason for the designation in the first place, one of our special qualities. Because there are so many and, like with the Priddy Circles where no-one has the complete picture, investigations continue across the hills. The AONB Partnership will continue to support these and their interpretation so that better understanding leads to better protection and people can read the palimpsest of Mendip.

There are many books on the archaeology of Mendip. A comprehensive guide referenced above is: Jamieson, E. 2015. *The Historic Landscape of the Mendip Hills*. Historic England (ISBN 978 1 84802 042 9). You can also learn more about the archaeology on Mendip by visiting our [Learning Zone](#)