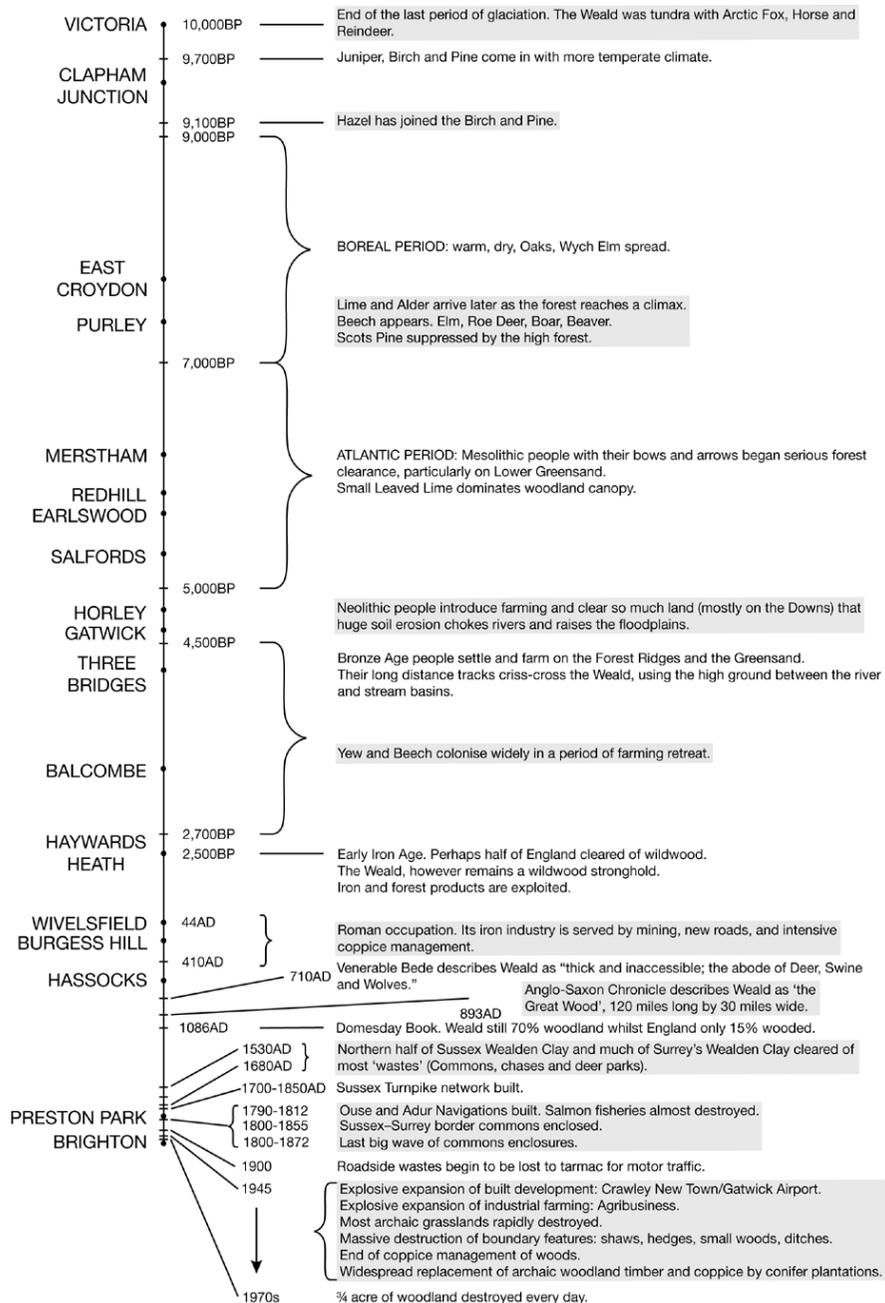


TIMELINE



CHAPTER 1 The Wealden landscape's history

Jane and I know a bit about the earliest humans in our part of the Weald. It might only be a tiny bit, but it's large and personal to us, for she found an item of their lost property one February day whilst we were walking across a ploughed field near Barcombe. I think it is the most precious artefact that either of us have ever found on all our walkings, for it was likely made by another extinct species of ancient humans, the Heidelberg People 1[i], *Homo heidelbergensis*, who lived in this countryside some half a million years ago.

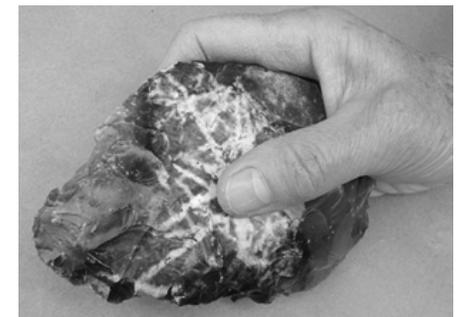
We'd automatically gone into 'search mode' when we got to the field edge. She walked forward on one line, whilst I walked another, both scanning to our left and right. We didn't find much...but then Jane stooped and picked up a large flint object. By the time she brushed the earth off it was obvious it was very special. It was a bi-faced Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) hand axe, convex, heavy, fitting neatly into the palm of her hand, and worked all over both surfaces. It was also peculiarly polished, even for flint, because of the effect of aeons of burial, with the actions around it of permafrost, water, tree and plant roots, worms and moles, and shifting soil and gravel. (That polish contrasted with the rough patina on the broken edge on one side, where a bit had been knocked off, maybe by a tractor).

Matthew Pope2[ii], the archaeologist, told us that our flint tool could be anything from 600,000 to 60,000 years old, for those folk's technology was relatively unchanging over a huge period. In any case, when she made this tool our ancestral cousin likely lived in

a world with several other species and subspecies of humans, and before the full development of the species we belong to.

At least three other bi-faced Palaeolithic hand axes have been found on the Ouse river terraces north of Lewes, and there is a scatter from all along the Downs and the river valleys through them and to the north. By far the biggest cluster of hand axes – 450 – was found at Boxgrove3[iii], near Chichester, where the peopled land surface has been perfectly preserved on the buried seashore under the old cliff line, exposed in modern times by quarrying. Sussex back then, 500,000 years ago, was likely open grassland, heavily grazed, with Horse, Boar, Roe and Red Deer, alongside Elephant, Rhinoceros, Lion and Hyena4[iv].

After the Ice Age interglacial Boxgrove episode, three more phases of glaciation and two more interglacials passed, before the **latest episode of glaciation finished in our area, a bit over 10,000 years ago**. At that time, when a milder climate returned, the Weald was a tundra of tall herbs and dwarf shrub heath, with beasts



Multi-purpose butchery tool. Jane's palaeolithic handaxe. Made by an earlier species of human.

Timeline

The left side depicts the Brighton-London Railway with its stations shown at their relative distances from each other. The right side depicts key episodes since the end of the Ice Age shown at their relative time intervals from each other.