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Howburn Farm - Biggar, South Lanarkshire





Stone tools

You would be forgiven for driving along the A702 in South Lanarkshire on your way home to Biggar without knowing you were in a landscape containing some of Scotland's earliest archaeological evidence. Although the surrounding countryside is now rich agricultural farmland, archaeologists have discovered that people were living here as early as 12,000 years ago during the last ice age. That's around 360 generations ago. Archaeologists call this period the Late Upper Palaeolithic.

Four and a half miles north-east of Biggar, just off the A702, there is a place known as Howburn Farm. Between 2003 and 2005 members of the Biggar Archaeology Group discovered significant numbers of stone tools and flakes during field-walking and excavation here and at Brownsbank Farm. These tools were made out of flint and chert; where most were grey in colour, a handful were dark-brown, orange, red, yellow and even purple. A detailed specialist examination of the stone finds was funded by Historic Scotland. After analysing the technological details of the manufacturing process, the specialists concluded that Howburn Farm was in fact the first known open-air Upper Palaeolithic site in Scotland. This was confirmed when two pieces, originally thought to be two separate tools, fitted together to make the tip of a tanged point measuring just over 5 cm in length and up to 20mm in width. Tanged points are typically triangular or leaf-shaped in form and are designed to attach to a wooden shaft. This artefact, and other pieces in the group, showed both technological and typological parallels to Late Glacial sites from Denmark and Germany which date to around 12,000 years ago.



Food and hunting

Other archaeological sites across Britain suggest that Late Glacial people could have been living a nomadic hunting lifestyle. Evidence from cave deposits in the Inchnadamph area of Sutherland in the far north-west of Scotland indicates that both reindeer and wild horse were hunted. Similar evidence from south-west England suggests that red deer and cattle type animals also contributed to the human diet.

So, the next time you travel along the A702 past Howburn Farm, imagine seeing a group of hunters pausing here to process some raw flint and chert into useable tools before following a herd of migrating reindeer into the distance.

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<https://canmore.org.uk/site/216532/brownsbank-farm>
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/4615/allt-nan-uamh>
http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk/news03_109_howburn.shtml





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