

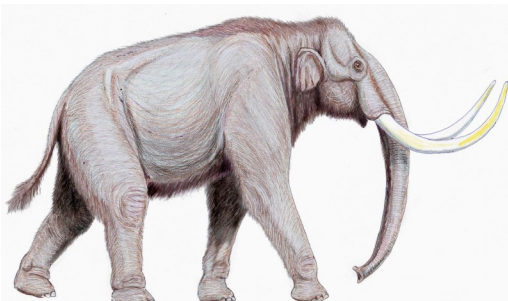
Major Finds

Along North Norfolk's Deep History Coast



The West Runton Mammoth

Found 1990-1995



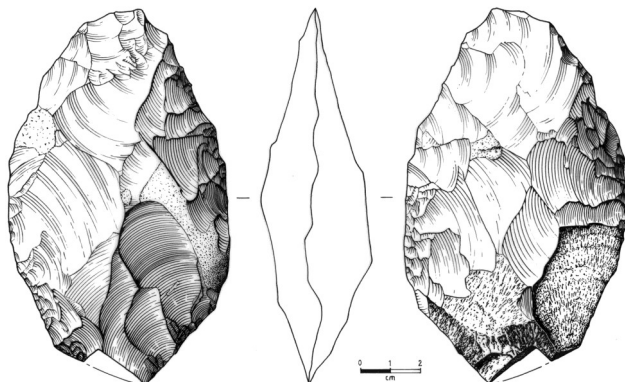
Dmitry Bogdanov (CC BY 3.0)

On 13 December 1990, following a stormy night, local residents Harold and Margaret Hems took a walk on the beach. They found a large bone partly exposed at the bottom of the cliffs, and contacted Norfolk Museums Service. It was identified as a pelvic bone of a large elephant.

Just over a year later, after another storm, several more huge bones were uncovered. This was obviously a find of major significance, and in January 1992 the first exploratory excavation took place. Once the results of this had been evaluated, a second major 3 month excavation followed in 1995. Standing four metres high at its shoulder, the mammoth would have weighed about ten tons – twice the weight of any male African elephant you would find today. It is the oldest mammoth skeleton to have been found in the UK (some individual bones or teeth from elsewhere are older, but none make even a partial skeleton). The West Runton Mammoth skeleton is also the best example of its species—the Steppe Mammoth—ever to have been found. All the bones are stored in a climate-controlled environment at Gressenhall. If the temperature or humidity levels varied greatly the specimens would react by expanding and contracting slightly. If this occurred more than a few times the material would begin to break down physically, and the specimen would be irreversibly damaged. Pieces of the skeleton are on display in Cromer Museum and Norwich Castle Museum.

Happisburgh Hand Axe

Found 2000

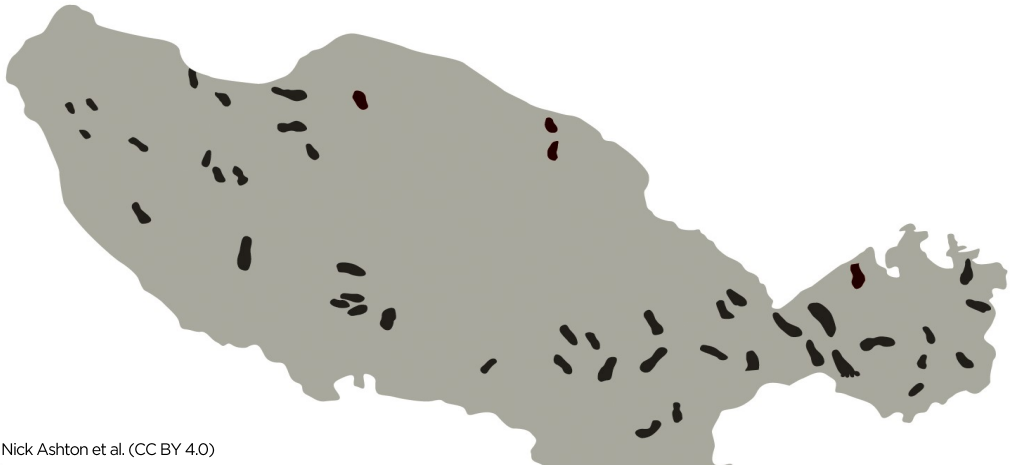


The Portable Antiquities Scheme/ The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Europe.

The handaxe is knapped from black flint and is in mint condition, apart from an ancient break at the butt end. The handaxe measures 128mm x 79mm x 37mm and would have been used for a wide range of cutting, chopping and butchery tasks. This handaxe was not the first example of the type to be discovered, but, crucially, it was the first to be discovered still embedded its original archaeological context. On the basis of its location and the circumstances of its discovery, a date of 700,000 years old was suggested for the handaxe, making it one of the oldest human artefacts to have been discovered in Great Britain. This date also makes the handaxe contemporary with the West Runton Elephant.

Word of the discovery spread quickly, and a flurry of archaeological activity ensued in and around Happisburgh as the hunt for further evidence of early human occupation began in earnest. Subsequent excavations undertaken on Happisburgh beach by the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain project between 2005 and 2010 have recovered further flint tools and butchered animal bones potentially as much as 950,000 years old, making them the earliest evidence for human occupation so far discovered in northern Europe. In 2012, experts chose this prehistoric handaxe as Britain's top archaeological treasure of recent years.



Nick Ashton et al. (CC BY 4.0)

The oldest human footprints found outside Africa, dated at between 850,000 and 950,000 years old, were discovered on the storm-lashed beach at Happisburgh in Norfolk, one of the fastest-eroding stretches of the British coast.

Within a fortnight, the sea tides that had exposed the prints had destroyed them, leaving only casts and 3D images made through photogrammetry (stitching together hundreds of photographs) as evidence that a little group from a long-extinct early human species, *Homo Antecessor*, had passed that way.

The best preserved prints, clearly showing heel, arch and four toes, is of a man with a foot equivalent to a modern size 8 shoe, suggesting a height of about 1.7 metres. They walked through a startlingly different landscape from today's, along the estuary of what may have been the original course of the Thames, through a river valley grazed by mammoths, hippos and rhinoceroses. The pattern of the prints suggests at least five individuals heading southward, pausing and pottering about to gather plants or shellfish along the bank. They included children.

Although far older footprints have been found in Africa, these prints are more than twice the age of the previous oldest in Europe, from southern Italy and dated to around 345,000 years ago.

Mammoth Tibia

Found April 2017

Flint expert Russell Yeomans and his friend Dan Chamberlain were on the beach in West Runton when they made the discovery of what is believed to be the lower leg of a mammoth.



They also found what they believe to be a 'fire site', with two other mammoth bones found nearby, as well as flint tools, an iron-age grindstone and an axe. Russell claims to have found evidence of hyena, rhino, deer, and hippo, as well as mammoth, along the Deep History Coast.

Sponge Reef

Found 2017

Amateur archaeologist Russell Yeomans believes he has discovered a Cretaceous sponge reef off the coast of West Runton, the first of its kind to be found. The reef is about a kilometer long, with barrel-like chunks of flint running across it. The research was picked up by professors at the University of Cambridge, who were keen to take aerial images of the reef to gain better insight into its structure. The sponge reef came into being towards the



end of the Jurassic period, meaning it could be anywhere between 145 and 65 million years old. Yeomans thinks this bed once sat on the coast of the ancient Tethys ocean, and that it helps account for the evidence of human settlement in the area, since having an

abundant source of flint would have made it an excellent source of material for weaponry and tools.

Mammoth Tooth

Found May 2019

Brad Damms was scanning the coastline for a project for London studio ScanLAB when he found a fossilised Mammoth tooth lying on top of the sand at Sidestrand. Experts confirmed it was from a Southern mammoth of the Pliocene era, which would have lived between 2½ million and 700,000 years ago.



'Dragon Scale'

Found January 2020

After taking up walking to recover from injury and depression, Michelle Smith found a starfish fossil in flint on a concrete walkway above the beach at Sidestrand. It is affectionately called Dracarys as it is dragon like in appearance, but is believed to be a long armed goniasterid, coulonia or nymphaster.



Mammoth Pelvis

Found January 2020

While out on a walk with her 10-year-old son, not long after her remarkable starfish find, Michelle Smith discovered half a mammoth pelvis buried in a crag on West Runton beach. Excited by the find, she enlisted the help of the Seaview cafe,



who brought Professor Anthony J. Stuart of the University of Durham, and his son Dough, to lead a team to excavate the bone. Local geologist Martin Warren also helped record the find and took soil samples. The bone is believed to belong to a Southern mammoth.

More Footprints

Found July 2019

Local photographer, Paul Macro, found five footprints while scanning and photographing the coast for ScanLAB Projects. He managed to take 3D photographs before the site was eroded after only two days of



being visible. The footprints are thought to be the same age as those discovered in Happisburgh in 2013, and to also belong to *Homo Antecessor*. Other finds Mr Macro has made while working on the project include a 500,000-year-old hand axe and a mammoth tooth.

Cromer Shoals Chalk Bed

Found early 21st Century

Found just off the north Norfolk coast and around 20m below the waves, the Cromer shoal chalk beds, created when dinosaurs ruled the earth, has been found to be



the longest in the world. In 2016, the area was officially designated as a Marine Conservation Zone. The status is intended to protect the chalk reef and its habitats, and give added protection from future developments. Known about for years by local fishermen, but discovered in the 21st Century by scientists, the reef, with dramatic features such as towering arches and deep chasms made during the Ice Age, has one of the most diverse and spectacular arrays of sea life around Britain – the composition of the reef meaning the water is actually quite warm.

Try your hand at fossil hunting!

Tips and tricks for a day out looking for fossils:

1. Watch the weather

Wandering out on the beaches looking for fossils can take you far from shelter. Make sure to check the weather forecast ahead of time, especially on the day you're planning to head out, and dress appropriately for conditions. If it has rained recently, be extra careful around cliffs, and stay clear of them in all conditions.

2. Track the tides

An even bigger hazard than the weather is the tides—make sure you know what the tide times are, and keep away from areas where you could get stranded by a high tide, such as between Mundesley and Walcott. Take a mobile phone in case you get into trouble.

3. Bring the right tools

To look for fossils on the beach, it helps to have something to dig them out with, especially if they're embedded in sand or mud. (But **don't dig for fossils in cliffs!**) They might also be encased in a layer of rock, but don't break this open straight away. Fossils are fragile, so bring newspaper to wrap them in and plastic bags to keep them from drying out.

4. Know what to look for

You can get a free fossil guide from the North Norfolk Visitor Centre, or Cromer Museum, and the Deep History Coast Explorer smartphone app also includes a helpful guide to the types of fossils you might find. Write down where and when you found your fossils—the what3words app is helpful for recording the precise location. Leave large fossils where they are and report them to Norfolk Museums Service (Tel: 01603 493625/Email: museums@norfolk.gov.uk)

5. Show off your discoveries!

Make sure to take clear, well-lit photographs of anything interesting you find. The Facebook group **Norfolk fossil finds (uk)** is full of knowledgeable people always interested in local finds, so the perfect place to find out if you've got a dazzler or a dud, and will probably tell you if you've got something interesting even if it isn't a fossil! Don't forget to tell the Museums Service if it looks significant!

**EXPLORE THE
DEEP HISTORY COAST...**



The Deep History Coast Discovery Trail

Ready to go exploring? You can learn more about the Deep History Coast on the Discovery Trail, which consists of 11 Discovery Points along the coast. Here you'll find fascinating facts about the past of this beautiful coastline, and more!

	Postcode	what3words
Weybourne	NR25 7SR	///things.ivory.seating
Sheringham	NR26 8BJ	///fillers.jumbo.sector
West Runton	NR27 9QP	///cornering.vintages.online
East Runton	NR27 9PA	///tidal.searching.repeats
Cromer	NR27 9AU	///drum.shelters.butlers
Overstrand	NR27 0PE	///slopes.tadpole.dandelions
Trimingham	NR11 8EG	///stuff.crust.brisk
Mundesley	NR11 8BG	///enough.insurance.ourselves
Walcott	NR12 0AP	///importing.muddle.rebounded
Happisburgh	NR12 0PR	///headliner.stocky.comply
Cart Gap	NR12 0QL	///deaf.butterfly.slowness

Download the DHC Explorer App

Get more out of the Discovery Trail with the Explorer Augmented Reality app. Use the GPS map to guide you along the Norfolk Coastal Path and unlock and collect clues to the past (and the present) as you go. See how the landscape looked over 750,000 years ago, collect virtual mammoth bones and build your own Steppe mammoth in the Mammoth Task game, and identify anything interesting you collect with the fossil and flint finder!



North Norfolk Information Centre,
Louden Road, Cromer, NR27 9EF
Tel: +441263512497
nnic@north-norfolk.gov.uk

Information correct at time of printing. This guide is not exhaustive and inclusion should not be taken as a recommendation. Please contact us to contribute updates and additions.

Printed Apr-21