Prehistoric Monuments in the A1 Corridor

Information and activities for teachers, group leaders and young archaeologists about the henges, cursus, barrows and other monuments in this area

Between Ferrybridge and Catterick, the modern A1 carries more than 50,000 vehicles a day through West and North Yorkshire. It passes close to a number of significant but often overlooked monuments that are up to 6,000 years old. The earliest of these are the long, narrow enclosures known as cursus. These were followed by massive ditched and banked enclosures called henges and then smaller monuments, including round barrows. The A1 also passes by Iron Age settlements and Roman towns, forts and villas. North of Boroughbridge the A1 follows Dere Street Roman road.
Between Boroughbridge and Catterick the A1 heads north with the Pennines to the west and the low lying vales of York and Mowbray to the east. This area has a rural feel with a few larger settlements (like the cathedral city of Ripon and the market town of Bedale) and lots of smaller villages and hamlets. Many of these have been lived in for over a thousand years and have medieval churches at their core.

In this area there are several grand houses and parks. These have formal gardens, carefully landscaped water gardens, managed vistas and deer parks. Some areas of parkland are now used to grow arable crops.

In the early 20th century seven large airfields were built on the wide, flat areas alongside the A1 and the River Swale. These had an important role in the Second World War. Some of these airfields are still used, others have been abandoned or re-used for other activities such as turkey farming.
The *henges* and other monuments

A simplified map of the monuments lying close to the A1 between Boroughbridge and Catterick, accompanied by images of some of the major monuments.

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<td><img src="image1.png" alt="North Henge" /></td>
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<td>Nunwick henge</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Nunwick henge" /></td>
<td>©Environment Agency copyright 2008</td>
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<td>RAF/106G/UK/1306 Frame 4258; Cam.RS; LN290; 26/3/46. English Heritage (NMR) RAF Photography</td>
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<td>SE3671/12 DNR877/4A 4/7/76. ©English Heritage. NMR (Derrick Riley Collection)</td>
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<td>Part of Scorton cursus</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Burial Cairn at Catterick Racecourse</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Two of the Devil’s Arrows, Boroughbridge</td>
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<td>30/08/2003 © Dave MacLeod 2003</td>
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The Major Monuments along the A1 Road  
(between Boroughbridge and Catterick)

Excavations at Marne Barracks uncovered a Late Neolithic enclosure. The enclosure was formed by two circuits of paired timber posts, some of which had been burnt down. The enclosure lies just 250 metres to the south-west of Castle Hills, a natural mound which was modified in the 12th century to form a motte and bailey castle. Some archaeologists have suggested that in the Neolithic period the mound may have been used as a viewing platform during rituals and ceremonies in and around the timber-post enclosure.

Scorton Cursus was discovered from the air in 1949. The cursus was up to 2km long and was formed by pairs of outer ditches and a central bank. Archaeologists have excavated small sections but still little is known about this monument. Old maps show that gravel quarrying close to the cursus began in the late 19th century but this increased dramatically in the late 20th century and it has now destroyed approximately three-quarters of the monument.

Catterick Henge was built on top of an earlier Neolithic burial cairn. The henge was made of rounded river cobbles and earth that were probably collected in the surrounding area.

This map shows the location of Catterick Henge and its closeness to other Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments. It shows how this area near the River Swale was also favoured in the Iron Age, Roman and Anglian periods.
Nunwick Henge lies between Nunwick Beck and the River Ure and was only discovered in 1951. It is barely visible on the ground, though the farmer was aware of slight bumps and stoniness at the site. This enclosure has been ploughed over for hundreds of years but special height measuring technology called LIDAR can reveal the very low remains of the bank.

You can see a lidar image of Nunwick Henge on page 5.

The three Thornborough Henges are part of a group of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments built on Thornborough Moor, next to the River Ure. Today all three henges are clearly visible as massive circular banks up to four metres high. These henges once stood on a low promontory overlooking wetlands. Most of the wetlands have been drained and large areas north and west of the henges have been quarried. Some quarries have been filled in with household waste. Now some fields are lower than they were before and others are higher so the view to and from the henges has changed.

The Hutton Moor and Cana Henges are located just a few fields to the west of the A1. In 1775 the Hutton Moor Henge was still on “waste” (unploughed ground), whilst the area of the Cana Henge seems to have been ploughed at that time. This may partly explain why the Hutton Moor enclosure is better preserved. The two henges sit on low hills no more than 2km apart.

The old map below was created by Thomas Jefferys in 1775 and it shows the three henges. At that time they were thought to be Roman camps.

An air photo of Thornborough Henges taken in 1946

Hutton Conyers Henge in grassland

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Things to do [simplest first, trickiest last]

**How many different ways of discovering archaeological monuments can you name?** Make a list in the white space below.

*Hint* look out for words coloured blue in this booklet.

**Stratigraphy** is the word archaeologists use for layers of archaeological material. Most of the time the most recent layer is at the top and the oldest is at the bottom. Stratigraphy can be used to explain very detailed sequences of filling within a single ditch or broader sequences of monument building within a wider landscape.

**Can you put** the 5 broad sequences at Catterick Henge into stratigraphic order, with the oldest at the bottom? You can write your answers in the boxes.

*Hint* page 7 might help with this task.

**Do you know** which is the longer, the whole of the Neolithic period or the time from the end of the Romans until now? This timeline can help you work it out.

Circle your answer here Neolithic or End of Romans until now.

**Can you work out the order in which the archaeological monuments shown below were built, starting with 1 for the earliest?** You can write your answers in the boxes.

*Hint* page 7 might help with this task.

**Stratigraphy**

The duck pond is drying up. Can you help the duck and ducklings swim to the nest in the middle of the pond?

**Whitemere Dike**, near Hutton Moor Henge. These rings of banks and water-filled ditches were built as a nesting place for wildfowl more than 200 years ago. At the beginning of the 19th century the water had dried up and few people in the area could remember what it had been for. Some people thought it was a maze.
The Devils Arrows are a row of three standing stones at Boroughbridge. A fourth stone is mentioned in an old document written in 1538 and is said to have been reused for the repair of Peg Bridge over the River Tutt in the early 17th century.

Oral or written histories are names archaeologists and historians give to the stories we tell about places and the things that happened there in the past. Can you draw or write about a story you have been told about a place near where you live? It might be a hill, a tree, an old quarry, a house or even a road. The story might be about what the place was used for, something that happened there once, or something that was found at the place. Does your place have a name?

You could share your stories or drawings with your class or group, perhaps you can link them all to a map of your town or village. Did anyone else write about the same place and did they have the same story to tell?

Find out more. Here are some great online resources to help you find out more about Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments and landscapes in this area.

- The National Mapping Programme pages on English Heritage’s website can tell you more about air photo mapping in this area (http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/national-mapping-programme/)
- You can use English Heritage’s Pastscape website (http://www.pastscape.org.uk/) to find and read the records of archaeological monuments. You can search by parish or grid reference, type or period or create more complex searches
- North Yorkshire County Council’s Online Mapping Service can show you old maps and recent air photos of places in the county. Try looking for your house, or one of the major monuments like the Hutton Moor Henge. (http://maps.northyorks.gov.uk/connect/?mapcfg=historic_maps)
- And visit the Thornborough Project website (http://thornborough.ncl.ac.uk/) for a 3-D tour of the Thornborough Henges

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