

## **Hengistbury Head**

Hengistbury Head is one of the most important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in England. It boasts walking routes that lead to spectacular views of the nature reserve and surrounding area.

As part of their current programme of activities 17 members of HADS made their way there to visit in early June because it is also known for its internationally important archaeology and geology.

Our first stop of the day (apart from the café!) was the Visitor Centre where we learnt a lot about this fascinating site. People have been visiting Hengistbury Head for over 12,000 years and numerous archaeological excavations have revealed what people were doing there in the past.

Helpful information boards along the path added to our interest. The history of the area spans from the Palaeolithic period (about 12,000 years ago) to modern times. Stone tools and other artifacts suggest that the area was visited seasonally for hunting and fishing by early hunter-gatherers.

In the Mesolithic period it was warmer and wetter so people started to settle along the coast. The Neolithic period saw a rise in farming lifestyles and cremated remains from the Bronze Age suggest the presence of important individuals. In the Iron Age it became a major trading centre and the Romans used it as a major port. Ships from the Roman Empire arrived with exotic goods such as wine and glass. In Medieval times interest in the site declined, but the Victorians found it to be a useful source of ironstone and gravel.

Now it is a public open space, and hundreds of people were enjoying it on the day we visited.

We learnt that use of the headland changed towards the end of the Neolithic period and the beginning of the Bronze Age – around 4,000 years ago – when it became a place for the dead. 13 round barrows are located there, 2 to the west of the Double Dykes, 3 near the Visitors Centre and 8 on Warren Hill.

Walking on we encountered strong energy which Don demonstrated with his rods. We stayed by the information board which gave details of the late Iron Age. At this time the Roman Empire was expanding and the area became a busy port. Our next stop was by Quarry Pond. As its name suggests this was the site of 19<sup>th</sup> century mining. A lot of mining was carried on here which left the headland considerably weakened. The Pond was formed in 1976 and has developed since into a valuable freshwater habitat.

The wind was very strong as we reached the top of the headland. It certainly blew any cobwebs away! As we walked down towards the café we could admire the geology of the area and the views over towards Christchurch Priory and the sea were spectacular.

It was here that we learnt about the Early Iron Age and how the settlement continued to grow. Around 2,400 years ago in the Middle Iron Age a huge earth ditch and bank called the Double Dykes was built. We could see them clearly and marvel at the amount of effort it would have taken to construct them. What we see today, however, is much eroded and originally the banks would have been higher and the ditches deeper.

We then found the café again and enjoyed much needed refreshment. All agreed that we had enjoyed a wonderful day, learning a lot thanks to Don, and enjoying each other's company.

Ed Cole

June 2025