

9. CONCLUSION

The early prehistoric communities of the Dee Valley occupied a rich territory throughout at least 10,000 years from around the time of the initial warming of the Late Glacial Interstadial. The work of Mesolithic Deeside reveals an extensive archaeological record that comprises multiple traces of diverse activity throughout this landscape. This record is not and can never be complete, but in comparison with many other areas it is abundant. The prehistoric population of Mesolithic Deeside was not scattered, nor isolated – this part of the country was well able to support a thriving population over long periods of time.

The area has a strong role to play in pushing back evidence for the human settlement of Scotland into the Late Glacial period. The presence of a possible Hamburgian shouldered point among the finds adds to the, admittedly sparse, potential evidence

for a Late Upper Palaeolithic presence at Nethermills Farm (Ballin & Wickham-Jones 2017) and there is supporting material from East Park and Wester Durris. While isolated finds are always problematic, this does add significance to the area when considered in light of the Late Upper Palaeolithic material recently excavated at other sites along the River Dee. Mesolithic finds are more common, but no less interesting. In addition to the diversity of sites recorded, the overall archaeological scatter at Nethermills Farm stretches for over 2km, making it among the most significant locations for Mesolithic activity in Britain. Neolithic material shifts focus very slightly, with a large spread between Balbridie and Nether Balfour on the south side of the river. The lithic scatter sites provide important evidence to supplement that of the excavations at Balbridie and Warren Field, Crathes. While excavation can reveal the details of a settlement, the diversity of the scatter sites offers an important reminder of the



Illus 9.1 A classic Mesolithic conical core found during fieldwalking. The sites recorded through archaeological fieldwalking, such as that of Mesolithic Deeside, provide a valuable source of information for our interpretation of prehistory

activities that supplemented farming and sustained local communities. Within the context of other archaeological work in the region, it is now possible to build a strong picture of life along the Dee for the families who chose to make it their home through time. While their immediate surroundings provided for the necessities of life, these people were not isolated. Connections to the east and west are recorded from the start, as well as the drawing in of resources from both north and south.

Several years of fieldwork along the middle reaches of the River Dee in Aberdeenshire have yielded a wealth of information that falls into two archaeological categories: that related to interpretation and improved management; and that related to the methodology of information gathering and site analysis. Other areas have similar potential, for example the Tweed Valley, and the

work described here should be seen as a model which could be adapted and applied elsewhere. Further benefits have accrued in terms of the role of community archaeology as a significant driver of archaeological understanding. This has several facets: the acquisition of archaeological data; the social benefits of participation; improved interest in archaeology across the region; and the construction of a resilient future for the remains of the past along the river. Funding for Mesolithic Deeside has come from many sources, and the work has involved a wide variety of people, both children and adults, including some professional archaeologists. In this way, the excitement of unearthing the ancient past has come to many (Illus 9.1). The project has undoubted academic and archaeological benefits, but it has also resulted in much wider impact and this will, it is hoped, continue into the future.