

## **Hengistbury Head Survey Project**

(Dr James Cole, Dr Will Davies, Mr Dominic Barker)

The promontory of Hengistbury Head in Dorset is the spectacular location where a multitude of nationally and internationally significant multi-period archaeological sites are located stretching from the Late Upper Palaeolithic through to the Roman settlement of Britain, all located within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Much archaeological work including extensive excavation has been carried out on Hengistbury Head most notably by Mace (1959), Campbell (1977), Cunliffe (1987) and Barton (Barton *et al* 1992), and the primary focus of this research project shall be on the Prehistoric landscapes encapsulated within Hengistbury Head, although, time allowing, later sites shall not be excluded from the survey.

The Prehistoric sites of Hengistbury Head have been well documented in Barton *et al* (1992), and comprise a Late Upper Palaeolithic Site on the south-eastern tip of the headland, a Mesolithic site on the upper slopes of Warren Hill. A further later Prehistoric site in the form of Late Iron Age earthworks (the Double Dykes) are located near the visitors' centre and car park at the base of Warren Hill (Cunliffe 1987) with further Later Prehistoric features located on the Hengistbury Head Plateau in the form of Bronze Age barrows and an Iron Age linear earthwork. However, Hengistbury Head may also contain evidence for a much older and ancient landscape of the British coast evidenced by the presence of a raised beach on the eastern face of the promontory. The context of the Hengistbury Head Prehistoric landscape within the initial colonisations of Britain by ancient hominins has never been fully explored, and the accurate surveying of the raised beach may help to clarify the role of the south coast of Britain in such an exciting and uncertain story.

It is well known that Hengistbury Head is subjected to high levels of erosion with both the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic sites being especially vulnerable to damage, from the retreating cliff edge and the high levels of pedestrian traffic on the headland footpaths. The highly dynamic erosional processes present at Hengistbury Head pose a direct threat to the archaeology of the entire headland, highlighting the need for a method of quantifying the rate of erosion and the threat of that erosion to the archaeological sites present on the promontory

### **Broader Research Aims**

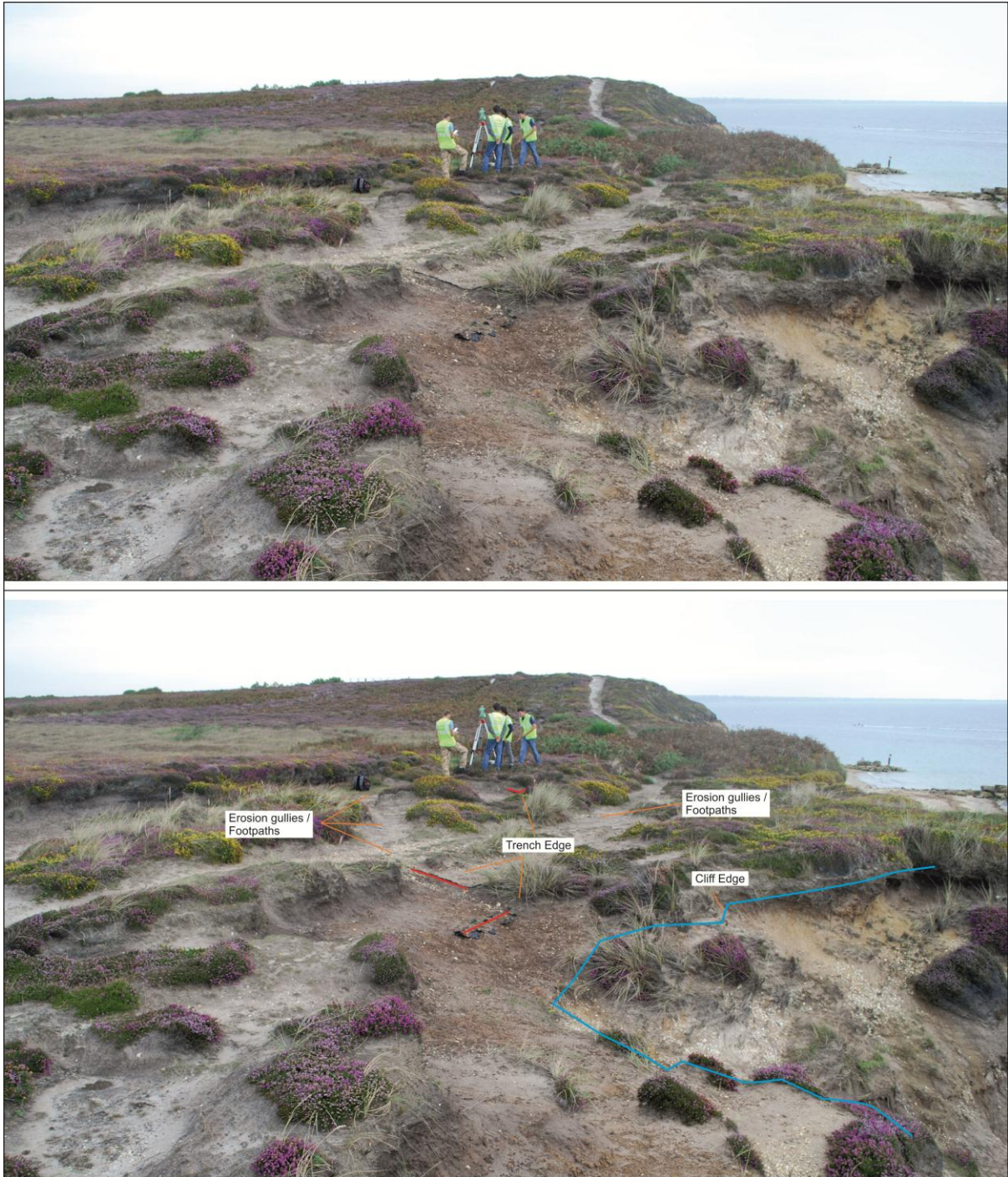
The broader long term regional research aims stated here are driven by current interdisciplinary research frameworks, these themes feed directly into on-going international and national (Wessex Archaeology 2004) research agendas and are design to set a long running research agenda.

- To characterise the Pleistocene/early Holocene prehistory of occupation for Hengistbury Head in relation to a broader pattern of ancient settlement in Britain in order to contribute to establishing a firm regional chronology tied into a national framework (Wessex Archaeology 2004).
- To determine key phases of occupation and extinction, in relation to similar patterns in Britain, the Channel Islands and continental Europe.
- To determine patterns of changing climate and ecology, human landscape use, and subsistence strategies on both a terrestrial and marine front.

- Develop effective prospection and assessment techniques for Palaeolithic deposits (Wessex Archaeology 2004) through detailed topographic survey and geophysics techniques such as Electrical Resistance Tomography.
- Correlate terrestrial and offshore Late Pleistocene and Quaternary deposits in order to define the relationship between Dorset river systems to the Palaeo-Solent and English Channel in order to contextualise the prehistoric occupations of the British South Coast and Channel Islands (Wessex Archaeology 2004).

### **The 2012 Field Season**

During the 2011 field season it was noticed that the Late Upper Palaeolithic site (last investigated by Barton *et al* 1992) was under severe threat from the eroding cliff edge (Figure 1). Therefore one vital aspect of the 2012 season will be to investigate the possibility of intact / *in situ* deposits remaining at the site and, in conjunction with English Heritage, deciding on an appropriate course of action. The 2012 season will also be looking to conduct a field survey of surrounding headlands (Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight coasts), in order to contextualise Lateglacial occupation of this part of southern Britain. In addition the 2012 season will continue with the detailed topographic survey of Hengistbury Head (Figure 2) in an attempt to complete the survey and provide a detailed dataset that can be used in the Heritage Management of this hugely important coast line.



**Figure 1:** Photograph showing the exposed / eroding Barton *et al* (1992) trench edges and erosion gullies / footpaths in relation to the retreating cliff edge.

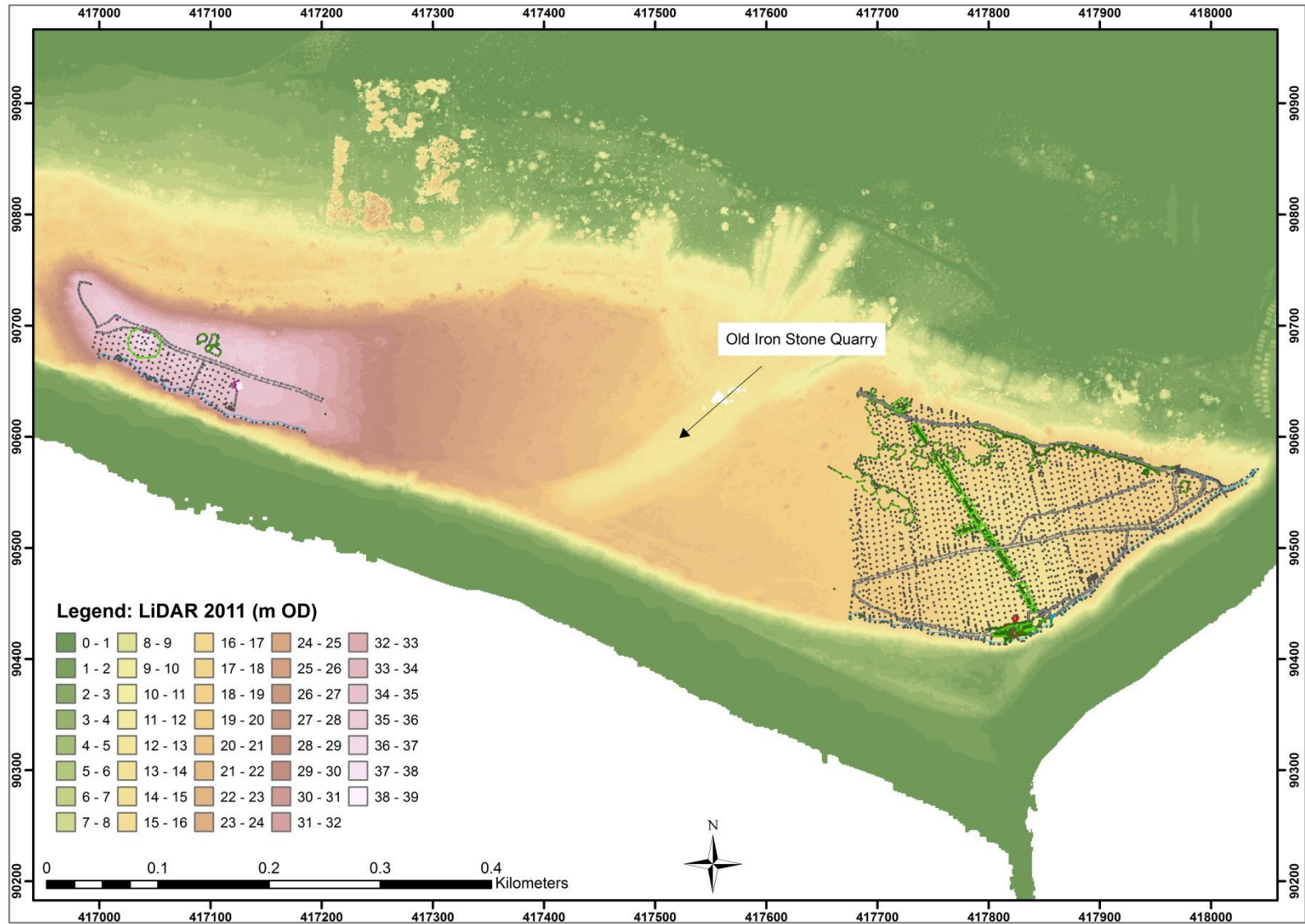


Figure 2: Showing the results of the HH11 survey project against the LiDAR data from 2011.