

Collecting at Happisburgh

The coast near Happisburgh is one of the most important places in Europe for understanding early humans. Over the past 20 years, the area has produced:

- Stone tools dated to approx. 900,000 years ago, which provide the earliest evidence of human occupation of northern Europe
- The oldest human footprints outside of Africa
- A rich fossil record that enables the reconstruction of past environments
- Evidence of later populations with more complex technology including handaxes

The significant erosion affecting the coastline around Happisburgh is revealing new information all the time. But through the same process this information can also be lost as important sediments are eroded and artefacts and fossils are dispersed. The work of collectors is therefore vitally important for capturing as much information about this vulnerable record as possible.

The material recovered by collectors combing the beach is adding a huge amount of data to the Happisburgh record and has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of early human occupation of northern Europe. However, there are a number of steps that can be taken to ensure that collecting activities contribute fully to the emerging picture of life in Britain almost one million years ago.



The coastline near Happisburgh can be dangerous. Dangers include cliff collapse and tides. Please take a copy of the safety leaflet.

1. When you find an interesting object

Record the location

- Ideally obtain national grid coordinates using a handheld GPS or smart phone app.
- Otherwise record location on map as accurately as possible or make detailed notes of location

Record the context

Was the object found on clay?



Was the object found on sand or shingle?

Was the object lying on the surface?



Was the object embedded in sediment?



Take a photograph

Photograph the object on the beach as you found it

2. After you have brought your discoveries home

Please take your finds to Norfolk Museums Service so they can be added to the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER). They will keep the objects for a period of time until they have been recorded and then return them to you. There are three places you could take them:

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery , Castle Hill, Norwich, NR1 3JU
Cromer Museum, East Cottages, Tucker Street, Cromer, NR27 9HB
Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, Gressenhall, Dereham, NR20 4DR



It is a good idea to photograph your find next to a scale.

We are always interested in hearing about any new finds. To contact us, email Dr Rob Davis (rdavis@britishmuseum.org)
For more information about PAB, visit our website www.pabproject.org