



BAMBURGH
Research Project

BRADFORD KAIMS ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

BURNT MOUNDS



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The term burnt mound is applied to a type of prehistoric monument seen all over the British Isles and parts of Western Europe. They are mounds of fire-affected stones, often fractured due to being exposed to heat. It is not uncommon for quite a lot of charcoal to be mixed in with the stones that form the mound, and it is assumed that they are formed by the discarding of stone and fire-waste from a process that is being undertaken, repeatedly, nearby. On the banks of Embleton Bog we have identified at least 12 of these features, the highest concentration in Northumberland.

The photograph to the right shows two mounds under excavation, the first in the foreground, and the second just visible beyond the hedge to the left of the tent. You can see how they lie on the dry ground just above the low lying wetland areas that flood.



Radiocarbon dating of burnt mounds tells us that they were formed from the Neolithic period (4000 BC to 2500 BC) to the Iron Age (800 BC to 100 AD), with the majority dating from the early Bronze Age (around 2500 to 1500 BC). One of the two excavated mounds at Hoppenwood Bank appears to be very early dating back to the early Neolithic period, around 6000 year ago. The second mound dates to the Bronze Age, around 4000 years ago. This suggest that mounds were being formed here for thousands of years.

Burnt mounds are found near to water, almost always streams, which makes those found at the Bradford Kaims unusual, as here we have identified them near to slow moving or still water. The mounds may also be unusual in there being so many of them, and for their formation over a very long time period, perhaps thousands of years.



The photo to the left shows our first burnt mound under excavation. The dark charcoal and stone of the mound is clearly visible.

What were the heated stones used for? Well archaeologists sometimes disagree over how to interpret features, and in the case of burnt mounds there are very many competing ideas. Two of the most popular are that the heated stones were used to provide steam for a sweat lodge, a little like a sauna, or for brewing beer.

Sweat lodges can be formed from simple structures. Little more than a skin covering on a frame of branches.

