

## Mesolithic Britain

### Introduction

In Britain, the Mesolithic period, or Middle Stone Age, occurs around 8,800 BC to c.4,500 BC. Mesolithic inhabitants generally lived a nomadic lifestyle hunting and gathering their food. At Star Carr however, there is evidence of phases of a more settled existence. As the climate warmed the flora and fauna of the region began to change, leading to a warmer climate with increased forestation. Their diet consisted of fruits, nuts, berries and wild plants, along with fish caught with bone and antler harpoons and wild animals and birds caught using bows and arrows. Tools, made out of flint, bone and antler, were small and easily portable.

### Mesolithic Red Deer headdress

**Date:** 11,000 years old (8000 BCE)

**Object:** Headdress made from Red Deer frontlet (skull)

**Size:** 32cm

**Museum database:** <https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/objects/440771>

A red deer skull has been transformed into a mask or headdress. Sections of antler have been removed, perhaps to make it lighter to wear. Holes, which form the eyes, have been carved into the skull using a sharp piece of flint. It is thought such headdresses were worn by shaman during rituals connected to hunting. A shaman is a religious leader who can heal the sick. They may have special powers to communicate with human and animal spirits.

Over 20 of these enigmatic objects have been found at the site, many having been placed into the lake. Star Carr is an extremely important Mesolithic site in north Yorkshire where many Mesolithic artefacts such as the skull headdresses, antler, bone, and flint tools have been recovered. It is thought people set up camp on the edge of a large lake full of wild game like deer, fish and other prey.

### **Prompts to Stimulate Enquiry**

- Choose a wild animal that best suits your character. Design and make a mask or headdress based on this animal. Use either paint, collage or fabric to add texture and detail.
- Imagine you are a shaman dancing around a fire with other shaman. Draw a picture of this scene.
- Write a paragraph describing a dance ritual where Mesolithic shaman are wearing animal masks. Include what you can see, hear and smell.

### **Other resources**

<http://www.starcarr.com> An excellent website detailing recent and past excavations at Star Carr along with videos and other useful resources.