

## **WQL Woolhampton Quarry Landscape**

### **Historic Character**

This is a small zone of gravel pits and restored land on the Kennet floodplain south of Woolhampton. There is some ongoing gravel extraction in the north-east corner, but most of the zone was quarried in the 1980s and 1990s. The disused quarries have since been restored to arable fields or allowed to flood and form lakes. The largest lake, between the Kennet and the canal, is managed as an angling lake. Parts of some disused quarries have been restored to land and have developed coverage of scrubby woodland. The pre-quarry landscape was composed of meadow land and early enclosure fields, but little trace of this landscape remains. Warren Farm, which dated back at least to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, was the only settlement within the zone, but this was demolished in the process of gravel extraction and its site has become wooded over.

### **Historic Environment**

Activity of all periods has been documented in this zone and much archaeological work has been carried out. The zone was covered by the Lower Kennet Valley Survey, and several parts saw evaluation and excavation prior to gravel extraction. Excavations in the quarried areas south of the Kennet have located deposits relating to later-prehistoric and Romano-British settlement and agriculture, and the Ermin Street Roman road which crosses the zone. Evidence from this part of the quarries for later periods is relatively scarce, and confined to finds and isolated features including marl pits. The zone between the Kennet and the canal has no HER records despite being quarried. This is particularly surprising as it lies adjacent to a significant Mesolithic concentration around Quaking Bridge and within a generally archaeologically busy zone. It is possible that there were no archaeological deposits in this zone but, given the scale of surrounding features, it is more likely that they were not recorded during quarrying.

Remains of structures related to river exploitation, such as wharves and fish-weirs, may survive within the present channel and its banks. Such deposits could range in date from prehistoric to post-medieval and could be well-preserved through waterlogging. Remains of these features are likely to be significant as exploitation of riverine resources is poorly understood.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

Gravel extraction has provided valuable opportunities for the discovery of archaeological remains in this zone, but has now removed the majority of the buried archaeological resource. The archaeological potential of the remaining unquarried areas, including pit baulks, is likely to be high. Such areas are most likely to contain Mesolithic, later prehistoric and Romano-British features. Elements of features such as wharves and fish-weirs are likely to be preserved within the present river channel.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- Management of Kennet and Avon canal and possible impacts on surviving early fabric of locks, bridges, etc.

#### Research Priorities

- Can the palaeo-environmental potential of the area be characterised and exploited?

### *Historic Environment Character Zone*

- Do the areas left by previous gravel extraction contain undisturbed archaeological features/deposits?
- Can further Mesolithic sites be identified?
- What was the nature of later prehistoric land-use in the zone?
- Where are the Romano-British settlements? What was their character and function?
- What does the paucity of medieval evidence in the area tell us about land use and socio-economic activity in the zone at this time?
- Does archaeological evidence for the historic management of the river survive, especially in relation to mills and water management?
- Does archaeological evidence for the early development of the Kennet navigation survive in locks and other canal infrastructure?