

Avalon Marshes



Cattle in the fields adjoining Avalon Marshes Centre and our reconstruction director Richard Brunning, who seems to take his role rather too seriously from time to time

Down at the Marshes, the SWHT volunteers have been building a new round house. It was a bit hit and miss at first, but as our maestro observed, if we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be experimental. The first attempt had walls that leaned a bit crazily, then the roof was too low. But gradually a convincing structure emerged.



Starting from the ground with piles of hazel rods

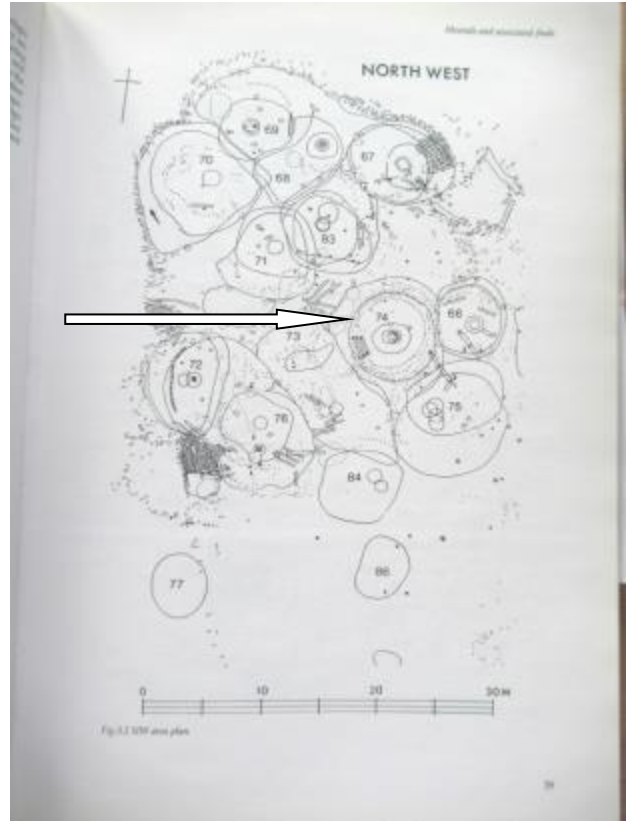


Straightening the walls and adjusting the roof

It is being constructed next to the Saxon long hall (see links below) from hazel coppiced from Ebbor Gorge by the volunteers. The design is based on Mound 74 in the Glastonbury Lake Village. The location is shown below.



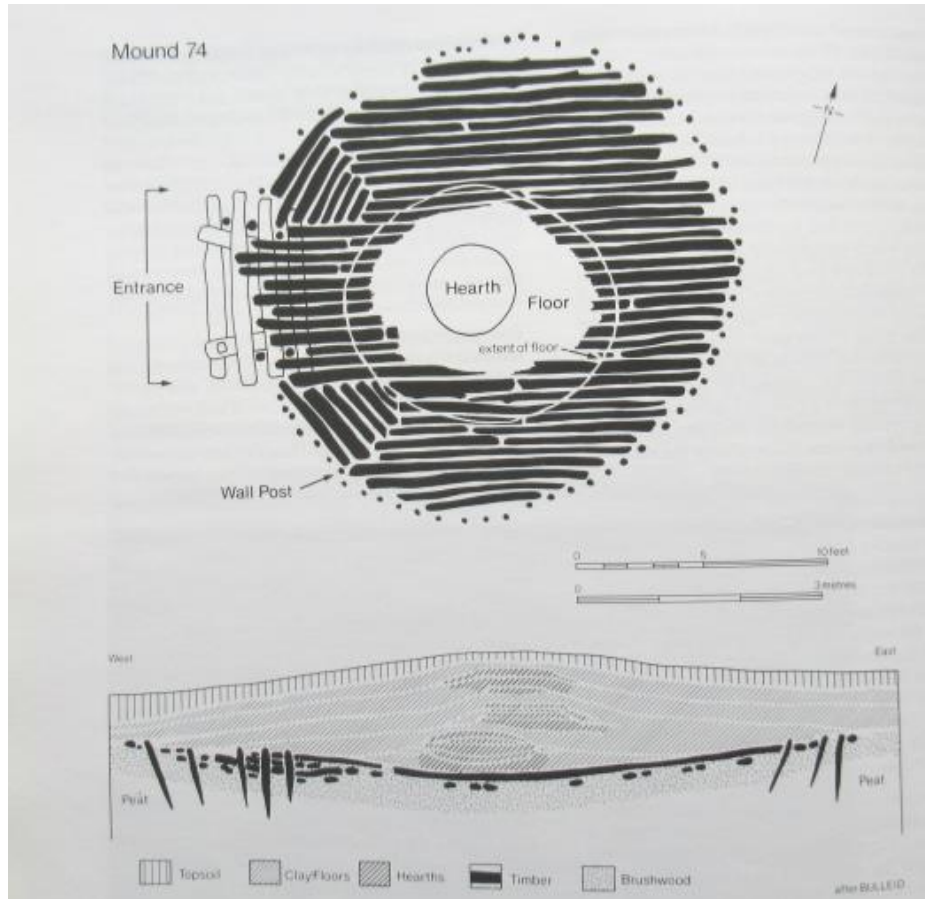
The overall plan of the Lake Village. Coles & Minnitt Fig 8.14



Detail of the north west end of the site. Coles & Minnitt Fig 3.2



Section through Mound 74 clearly showing floors and hearths. See Coles & Minnitt p25



Plan and section of Mound 74, one of the classic Lake Village house Mounds. Few of the other Mounds had such clear flooring, wall lines and porch. Drawn by S. Rouillard. See Coles & Minnitt p106

This was the first roundhouse on that mound: Bulleid identified 5 floors on this site, the earliest (Floor 5) having a diameter of 5.8m, which is also the size of the reconstruction. Excavation showed that this house site had a complex development with a variety of floor materials including alder logs, brushwood as well as clay, all built up around a hearth which was renewed 4 times. The two images above show the density of the construction at the Mound. Finds were numerous with many stratified objects: *The abundance of hearths, crucibles, bronze drips and hammerstones suggest some sort of metal working operation during Floors 4 and 3 activity.*¹ This was not extensive, it would seem. The chronological modelling provides an estimate for the establishment of Glastonbury Lake Village of 210–150 cal BC (95% probability) according to a recent appraisal.²

Back to today:



Round house creeping higher and it even has its own windows and a little porch, which like the original, is built of timbers and posts.

In the reconstruction, about 54 wall stakes in total, each upright averaging 38mm in diameter and placed approximately 25cm apart. This design is to match the footprint of the original site. You can see from the progress illustrated above, the roundhouse roof creeps higher, but as the diameter lessened, it becomes harder to weave. The open weave walls will be daubed in due course. Several hundred bundles of reed from Ham Wall Nature Reserve were delivered for the thatch, for which many thanks to the RSPB and the Somerset Wildlife Trust. Progress was halted in mid-March before work on the thatch could start.

Butser Ancient Farm has also reconstructed the house on Mound 74. The house was chosen as it had the best preserved floor and is unusual as it doesn't have a door pointing towards the morning sun. The colour of the paint on the outside is yellow ochre, a natural mineral which is found in the Mendips. The thatching at Avalon Marshes will look rather different.



The reconstruction of Mound 74 at Butser Ancient Farm



However, as you can see, the construction at Butser, whilst following the archaeological footprint, uses a rather different method for the roof. This is a more conventional roundhouse design and not one being followed by Richard.

The weaving being carried out at Avalon Marshes will ensure that the roof weighs less and the daub, which will be added to the wattling of the walls, will add to the soundness of the overall construction. What could possibly go wrong?

MC

Reference

1 [Industrious and Fairly Civilized: the Glastonbury Lake Village](#). John Coles & Stephen Minnitt. Somerset Levels Project and Somerset County Museums Service 2002.

2 [Glastonbury Lake Village Revisited: A Multi-proxy Palaeoenvironmental Investigation of an Iron Age Wetland Settlement](#)

T. C. B. Hill ORCID Icon, G. E. Hill, R. Brunning et al. Accessed at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14732971.2018.1560064 31/3/2020.