



PRESS RELEASE

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AT RISK FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

Latest climate change predictions for the UK look like bad news for internationally-important wetland archaeology on the Somerset Levels and Moors. Sites such as the Iron Age Glastonbury Lake Village have survived in a miraculous state of preservation for thousands of years because of the waterlogged peat that surrounds them.

Scientific studies now predict that hot dry summers, such as the one we experienced in 2018, will become more frequent. In the recent past, the chance of such a summer was less than 10% but by mid-century this could rise to 50%. That spells trouble for archaeology because hotter drier summers cause a lowering of the water table on the peat moors. If the peat is no longer waterlogged, the fragile wooden remains will shrink, crack and begin to decay.

Water monitoring by Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium on the site of Glastonbury Lake Village has revealed that the dry summer of 2018 probably caused this very problem. The recorded water levels fell below the top of the buried wooden remains of the settlement for several months during the summer. If such summers become more frequent and extreme they will pose a significant threat to the Lake Village and other sites such as the many prehistoric wooden trackways that cross the area.

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The gradual loss of surface peat is also a threat. Peat preserves unique information on the changing wetland landscape and climate stretching back thousands of years. Its erosion is a big worry for archaeologists but also threatens distinctive flora and fauna and leaves the moors more susceptible to flooding. At the same time sea levels are predicted to rise and winter rainfall to increase.

In the face of such threats a more sustainable form of land management needs to be developed if the archaeology and natural heritage of the Somerset moors are to be preserved. In some cases, it may be possible to protect an individual site, but a more resilient management regime for the whole landscape needs to be considered.

Assessment and monitoring work on the Levels and Moors has been carried out by a partnership of organisations including the South West Heritage Trust, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, Historic England, Natural England and Glastonbury Antiquarian Society, which owns the Lake Village field. The Glastonbury Antiquarian Society remains committed to working with other organisations to try and achieve the best possible future for this wonderful site.

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For further information please contact Beth Jerrett, PR & Communications Lead Officer, beth.jerrett@swheritage.org.uk or 01823 347418.

Image/s: *Photographs are granted for one time use in conjunction with this press release only, and photographers must be credited.*

Photo Captions:

Archaeologists excavating Glastonbury Lake Village to assess the condition and depth of the wooden remains.

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Notes to editors

Glastonbury Lake Village is owned by Glastonbury Antiquarian Society.

Funding for the assessment and monitoring projects at Glastonbury Lake Village and elsewhere came from Defra, the Heritage Lottery Fund Avalon Marshes Landscape Partnership Project, the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, Historic England and the South West Heritage Trust.

The latest climate change predictions for the UK (UKCP18) are available online from the Meteorological Office <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/collaboration/ukcp/key-results>

Glastonbury Antiquarian Society

An exhibition on the settlement and the unique artefacts found within it in the Tribunal Museum in Glastonbury High Street. The Museum is currently closed for refurbishment and will be opening as the Glastonbury Town Museum in partnership with Glastonbury Tribunal Ltd in early 2019. For more details see <http://glastonburyantiquarians.org/site/>

For contact email Dr Tim Hopkinson-Ball at tfhball@icloud.com

The South West Heritage Trust

The South West Heritage Trust is an independent charity committed to protecting and celebrating Somerset and Devon's rich heritage. As well as the widely-praised Museum of Somerset and the redeveloped Somerset Rural Life Museum, in Glastonbury, the Trust manages state-of-the-art facilities in Taunton and Exeter to care for the extraordinary archive collections of the two counties. The Trust also provides essential advice about the historic environment and manages historic sites. Individuals and businesses are invited to support the charity through its Supporters' scheme. Visit swheritage.org.uk #SWHTdiscovery

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