



Archaeology at the Al Ghazal Golf Club



Abu Dhabi Islands
Archaeological Survey



المسح الأثري
لجزر أبوظبي

Golfers will have noticed some areas of the Golf Club are off limits – as opposed to out-of-bounds! This is because they are important archaeological sites. Here's some more information about them.

Many of the important archaeological sites in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, apart from those in the Al Ain area, are on islands. A site discovered by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey (ADIAS) on the island of Dalma, for example, has the oldest evidence of human occupation in the UAE. Although the site at Al Ghazal Golf Club is not on an island, when occupied it *was* on the coast (now it's about 6 kilometres inland). Its location would have provided access from the mainland to Umm al-Nar island where a large Bronze Age settlement and complex of tombs were discovered in the 1950s.

Q: What has been found?

Systematic surveys and excavations carried out in 1995 and 2002 at the Al Ghazal Golf Club discovered two ancient wells along with large quantities of pottery and stone tools. The top part of each of these wells was lined with stone blocks to prevent their collapse. These were made of two types of stone, some of which was available nearby, with the second type having been brought from 2-3 km away, from near today's GAMCO. The wells may have been covered to protect them from sandstorms. The larger well was excavated to a depth of 2.5 metres at which point the work ceased for fear of its collapse.

Analysis of the pottery found on the site by Beatrice de Cardi OBE showed that the potsherds date to the Jebel Hafit period (5200–4500 years Before Present, BP), the Umm al-Nar period (4500–4000 BP), the Parthian period (2300-1700 BP), and the Late Islamic period (the last few hundred years or so).

One exciting group of finds was small amounts of pottery similar in shape and decoration to those from tombs in Bahrain. These date to the middle Tylos phase, from 2100–1800 BP, also known as the 'Barbar' period.

The oldest material from the site is from the Late Stone Age or 'Arabian Neolithic Period.' From this period, around 7500–5200 BP an interesting collection of stone (flint) tools have been found, all belonging to what, in terms of technology, is known as the 'Arabian Bifacial tradition'. These are typically worked bifacially, meaning both sides of the edge of the tool have been chipped away.

The stone tools included arrowheads, scrapers, small drills and other items. The drills would have been used to make beads from seashells and stones. Amongst the stone tools were a number of tiny pieces. Several of these may have been fixed to a piece of wood and used as teeth in a sickle or a scythe for cutting plants. They are half-moon shaped and about two millimetres in thickness.



Three microliths from the Al Ghazal Golf Club

Q: How did the people live?

During the Neolithic period (7500 – 5200 BP), there may have been a seasonal settlement here, with an economy based on domestic livestock such as sheep and goat. Game such as gazelle and desert hare may have been hunted. Fishing and the exploitation of other marine resources such as shellfish would have also been important.

During the later periods of occupation, the covered wells would probably have held permanent fresh water and the sheer number of pottery sherds found implies that the site represented an important stopover point perhaps en route to Umm al-Nar, as well as to more distant locations. Trade in pottery and other goods has been extensive throughout the Gulf region since at least 5000 BP, as well as with the site's more immediate hinterland, including Al Ain and the Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter), and possibly even to the Red Sea.



Two imported black flint tools

Q: What did the area look like 7,000 years ago?

At the time of initial occupation, the mid-Holocene era (7500-5200 BP), the landscape was mostly one of fossilised sand dunes covered by drifting sand. Higher rainfall meant there would have been far more vegetation than now. Water would have been easier to find too.

Q: What happened to the site's occupants?

By about 4000 BP, this settlement was abandoned. However, seasonal or infrequent visits may have continued for some time afterwards, although it was probably not used during the Iron Age (2300–1700 BP). Why the site was abandoned remains unknown.

Acknowledgements

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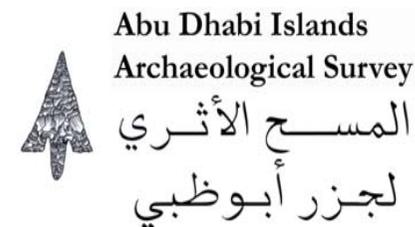
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One of the wells during excavation in 1995



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