

Discover Northern Ireland

Life in early times

Lets Explore Life in Early Times



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DfC

Department
for Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Life in early times



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Introduction

In this booklet you will travel through time to find out how people in Ireland lived long ago. You will begin in a time when there were no people in Ireland and see how our **landscape** has changed over 9000 years. You will meet the first **settlers**, who arrived around 7000 BC and discover how new ideas and inventions changed how people lived and worked. You will also discover places to visit where you can learn more about these ancient peoples.

The meanings of words in bold, **like this**, can be found in the glossary at the back of the booklet.



2. Small picture of another site



1. Giant's Ring aerial photo



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Ireland before People

20,000 years ago Ireland was a very cold place. Most of the country was covered in snow and ice. This was the Ice Age. It was much too cold for people to survive in Ireland. There were no plants to eat or animals to hunt.

Around 17,000 years ago temperatures began to rise. The great ice sheets that had covered Ireland slowly melted and moved north. They left behind a bare **landscape** with no trees or plants. Sea levels were much lower than today, so Ireland was still joined to Britain by land. Plants soon spread across from Britain and they were followed by animals such as brown bears, red deer, wild boar and wolves. However, before people could come to Ireland, the melting ice caused the sea levels to rise. Ireland was cut off from the rest of Europe. It had become an island on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

The sea level was much lower than today



The melting glaciers scraped out valleys and lakes



These maps show how far the ice spread.





Grasses were the first plants to arrive

Trees and bushes began to grow

Animals grazed around the edge of the ice shelf

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People come to Ireland

The first people came to Ireland during the **Mesolithic** era – the Middle Stone Age. As the ice melted, people in Britain began to move north. Families were looking for food, water and shelter. They also needed to find **raw materials** to build homes and make their tools and weapons. Over time the **population** of Britain grew and it became harder for people to survive.

On clear days the north coast of Ulster could be seen from Scotland. The white chalk cliffs of north Antrim shone in the sunlight. The ancient people knew that the chalk would probably contain a rock called **flint**. This is a rock that can be broken into sharp pieces. **Mesolithic** people used it to make tools and weapons. They knew that if they were brave enough to cross the Irish sea they could make the tools that they needed to survive.

The first **mesolithic settlers** arrived in Ireland around 7000 BC. They came across from Scotland in boats made from branches and animal skins called coracles. **Archaeologists** have found **evidence** of these people at Mount Sandel, near Coleraine.

DID YOU KNOW... about Nomads?

Mesolithic people did not settle in one area, they moved from place to place in search of food. People who live in this way are called nomads. They built round houses made from sticks covered with animal skins.

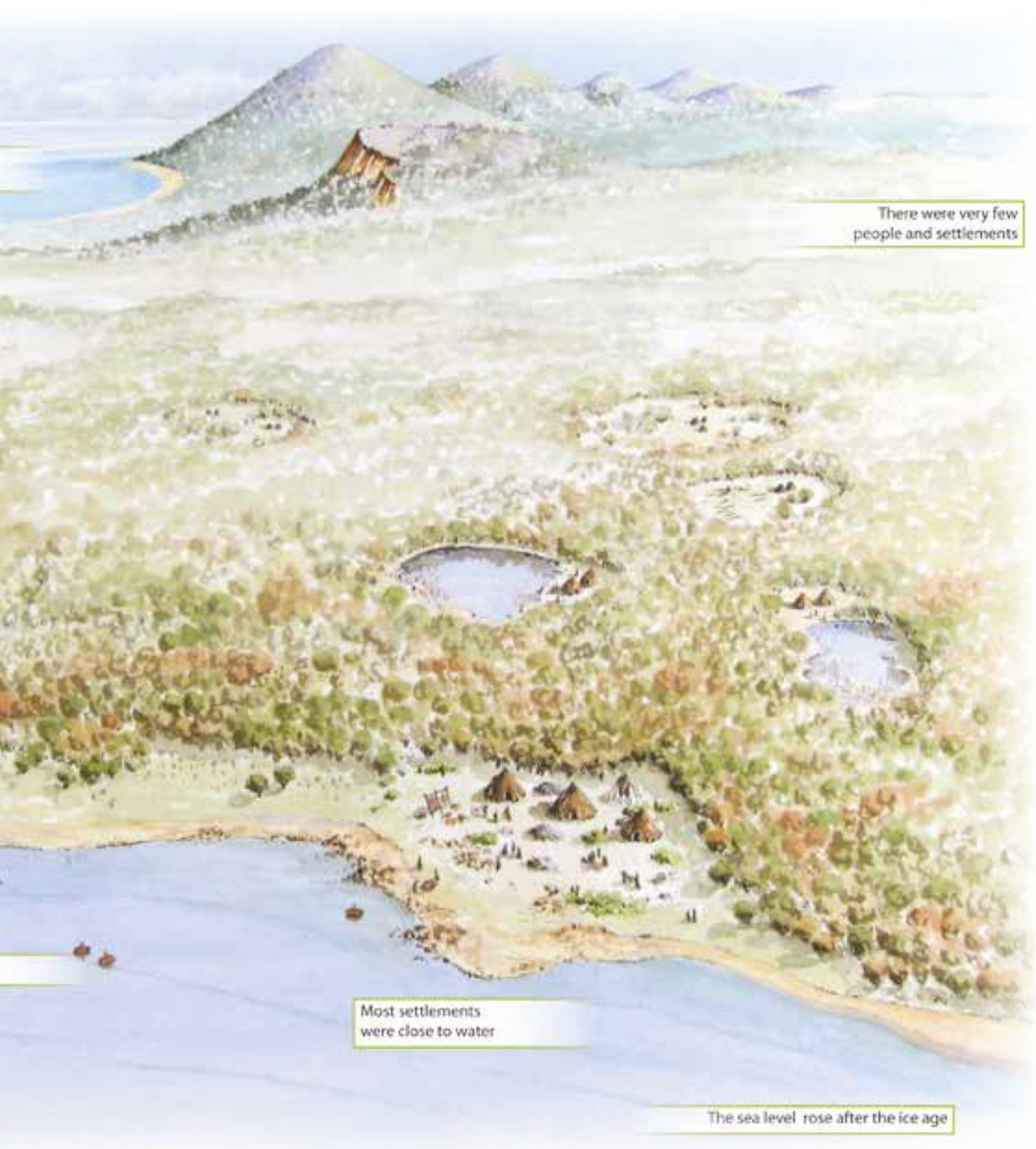


Flint nodule



Most of the landscape is covered in trees

Fishing boats



There were very few people and settlements

Most settlements were close to water

The sea level rose after the ice age

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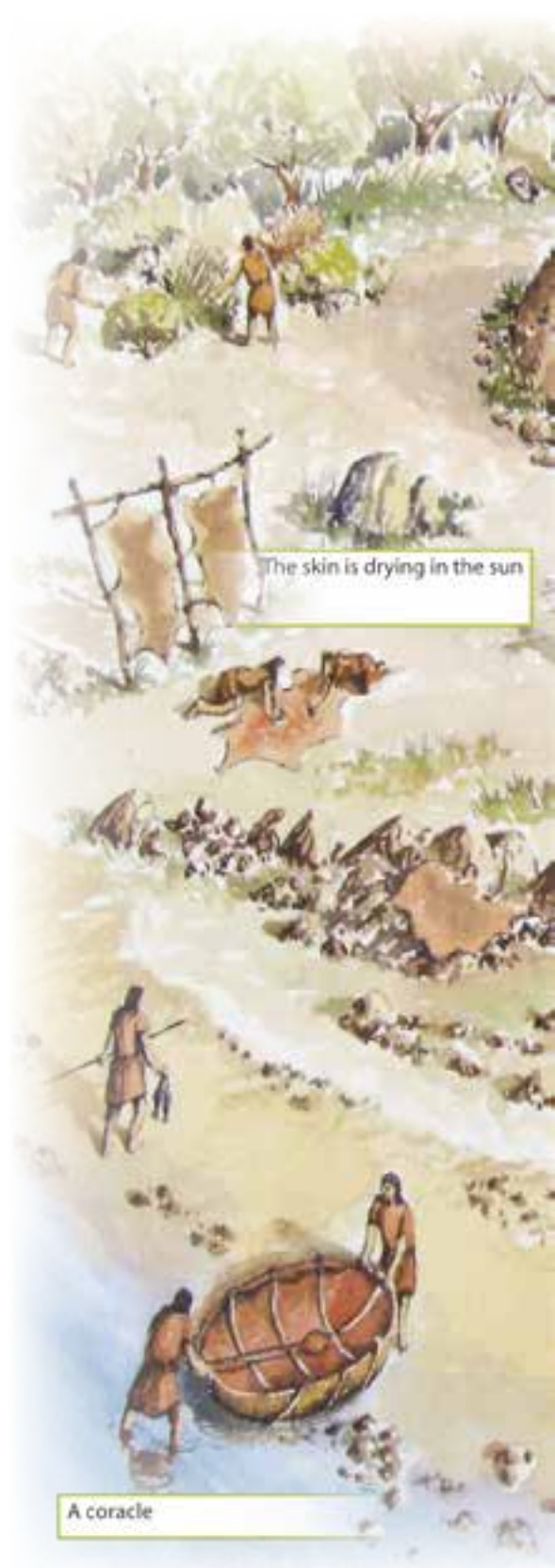
Life in a Mesolithic Settlement

The people of **mesolithic** times were hunters and gatherers. They survived by hunting animals and birds, catching fish and gathering wild berries, nuts and fruit. They had no way of storing food so everything was eaten immediately.

They used **flint**, bones and wood to make their tools and weapons. Sharp pieces of flint were chipped off using another stone or a piece of antler. Working with flint to make tools is called flint knapping. At first they used tiny pieces of **flint** called **microliths** but gradually they learned to make larger, stronger tools.

Most work was done outdoors to use natural light. See if you can spot people :

- Flint Knapping - Fishing -
- Gathering berries - Cleaning Skins -
- Sewing Clothes - Gathering Shellfish -
- Coming back from a hunt -
- Cooking - House building



The skin is drying in the sun

A coracle



a



c



b



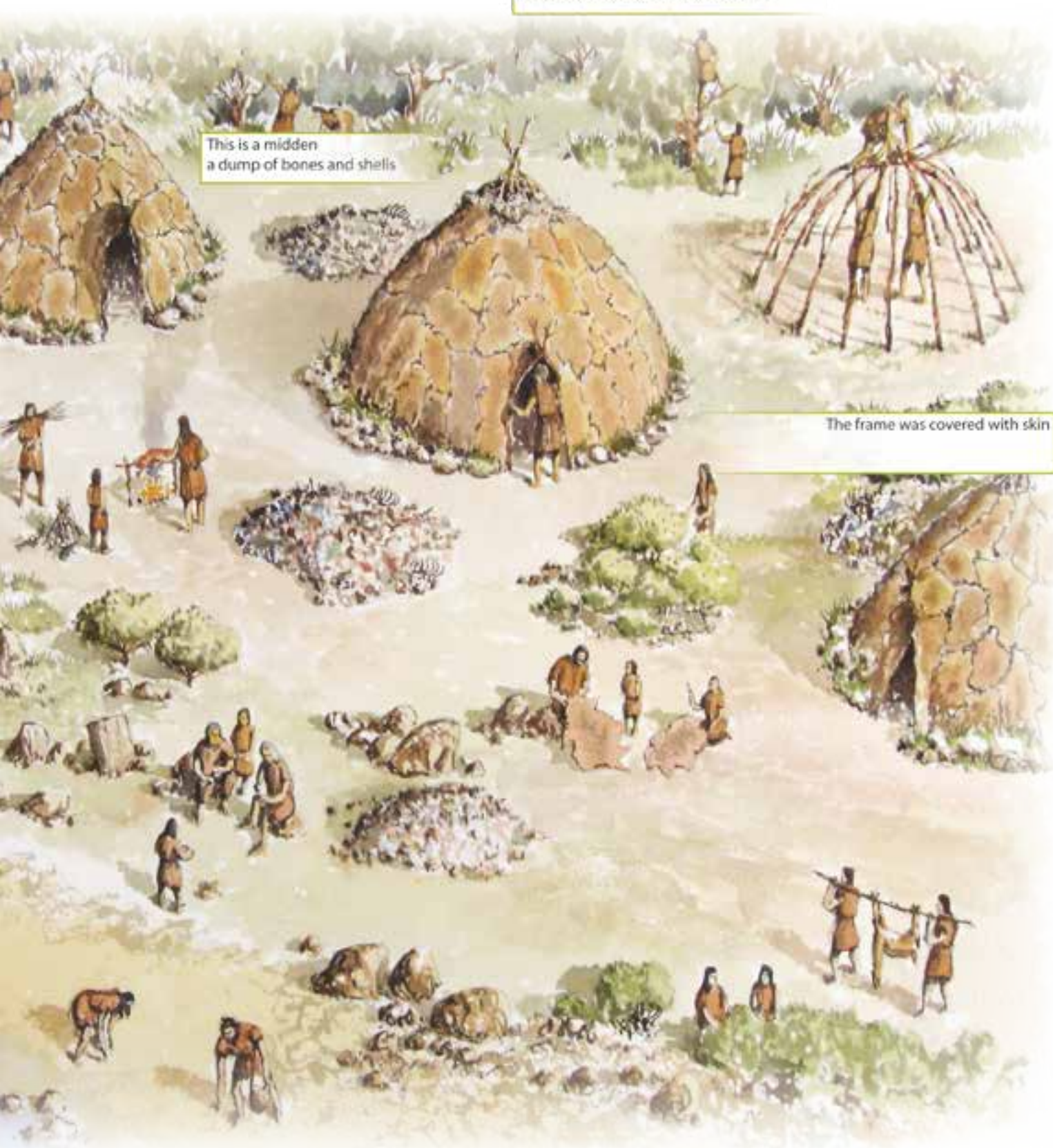
d

a. Stone Axe & Antler hammer - b. Bone Needles
c. Microlith - d. Scraper

Branches were bent to make a frame

This is a midden
a dump of bones and shells

The frame was covered with skin



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The New Stone Age

The **Mesolithic** way of life continued for 4000 years but over time new **technologies** began to arrive in Ireland. This time of change was called the New Stone Age – the **Neolithic** period.

Neolithic people were the first farmers. They cut down trees using axes made from a very hard rock called **porcellanite**. When the land was cleared of trees, walls and fences were built, dividing the **landscape** into fields. Crops like wheat and barley were grown and the grain stored in pots. Instead of hunting for meat, animals were **domesticated**. Sheep, pigs, goats and cattle all grazed in the new fields.

DID YOU KNOW?-

That Pottery was a very important invention?

Neolithic people learned how to make clay pots.

For the first time people were able to store and carry food and water. They could also be used for cooking. **Archaeologists** have found many of these pots buried with the dead in **megalithic tombs**.

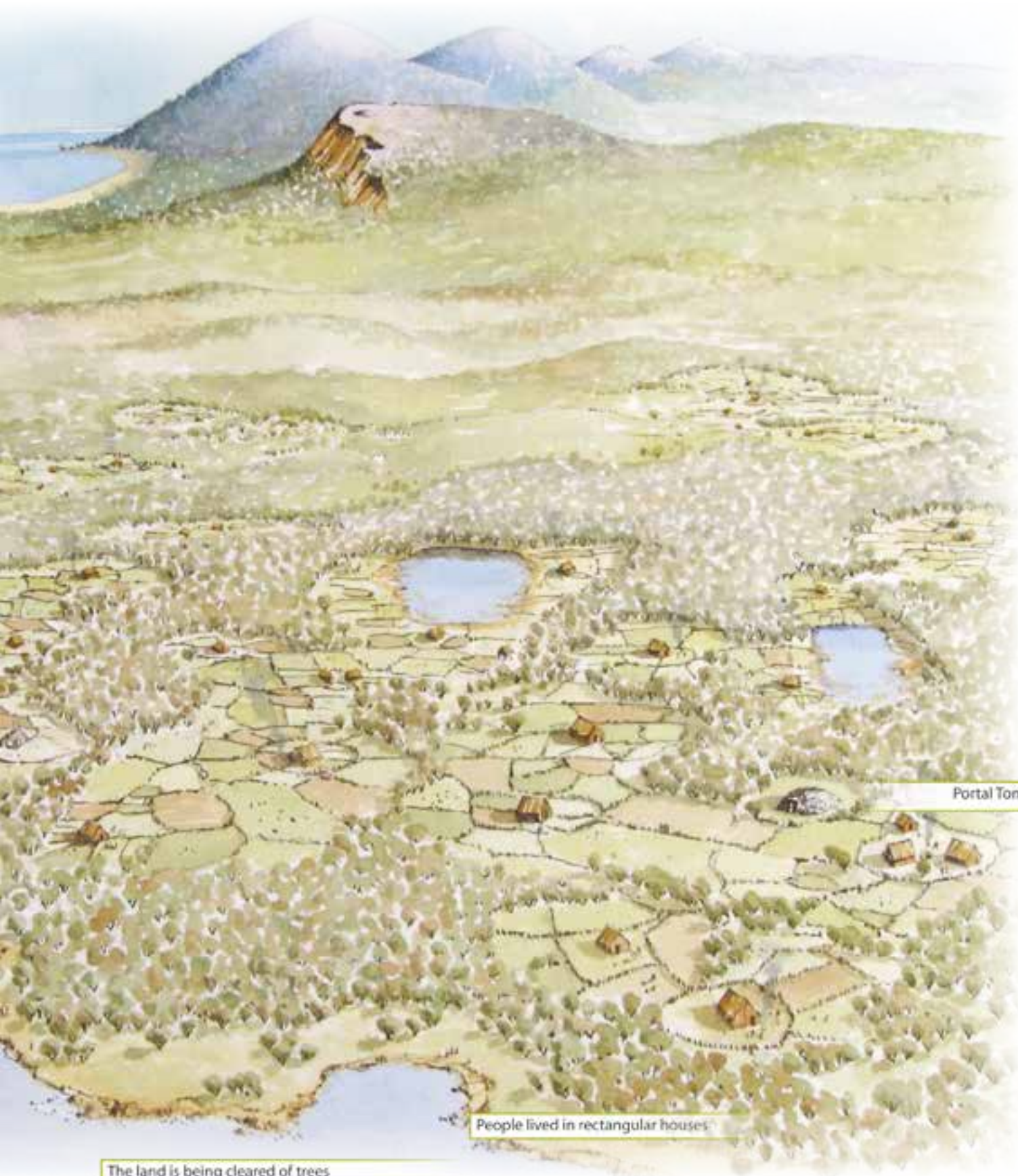


Polished Hand Axes

Court Tombs

There are more settlements now





Portal Tomb

People lived in rectangular houses

The land is being cleared of trees

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The roof was thatched

Life in a Neolithic Settlement

Neolithic farmers lived in family groups. They built their houses on small farms. The walls of their homes were made from wooden planks and **wattle and daub**. The roof was thatched using reeds.

If you could journey back in time and visit a **Neolithic** settlement you would see many different jobs being done. Pots had to be made and baked on a fire to dry out the clay. After the grain was harvested it was stored in pots until it was needed. It could be boiled into porridge or ground into flour on a stone **quern**. The flour could then be baked into bread.

DID YOU KNOW... about **Neolithic** clothes?

Neolithic people were able to use the wool from their sheep to make clothes. First the wool was spun to make thread.

Then it was woven into cloth.

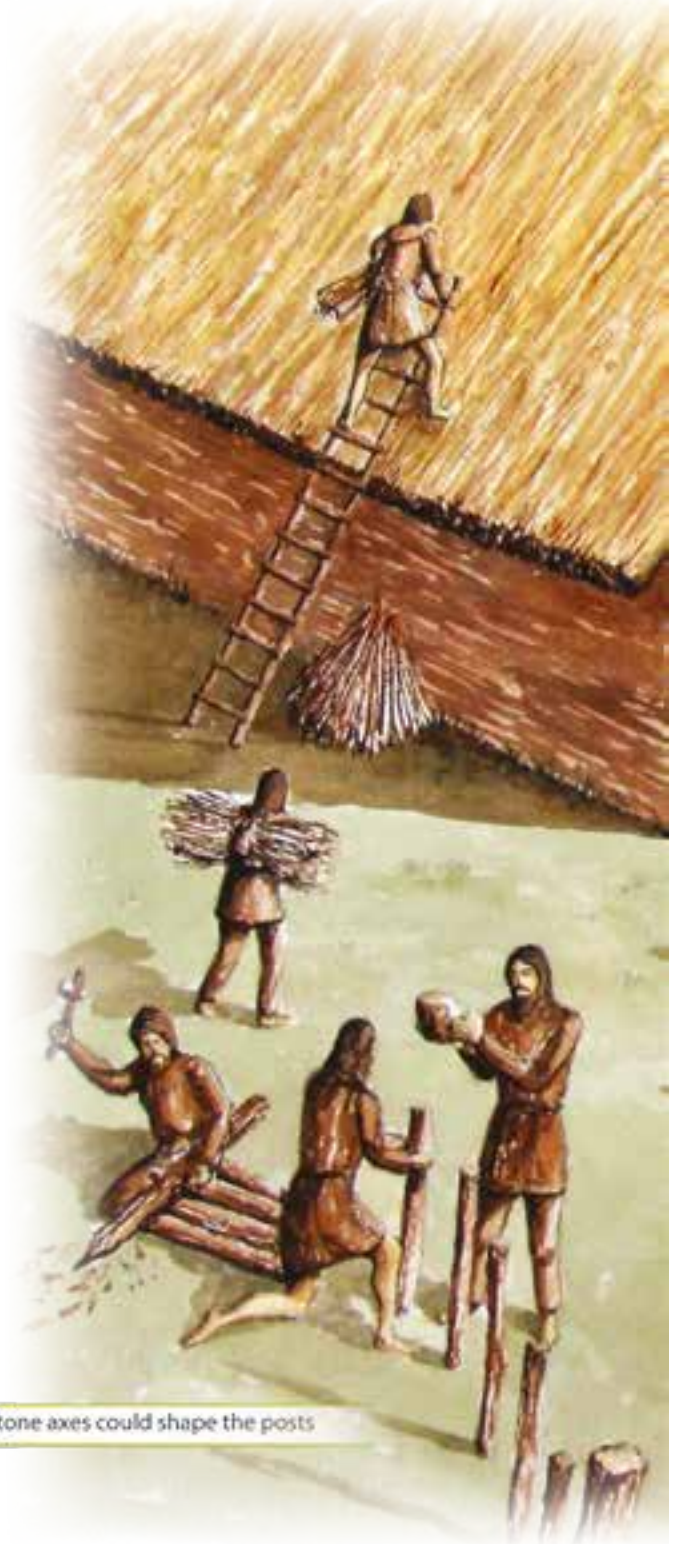
Sometimes it was dyed with bright colours using natural plant dyes.



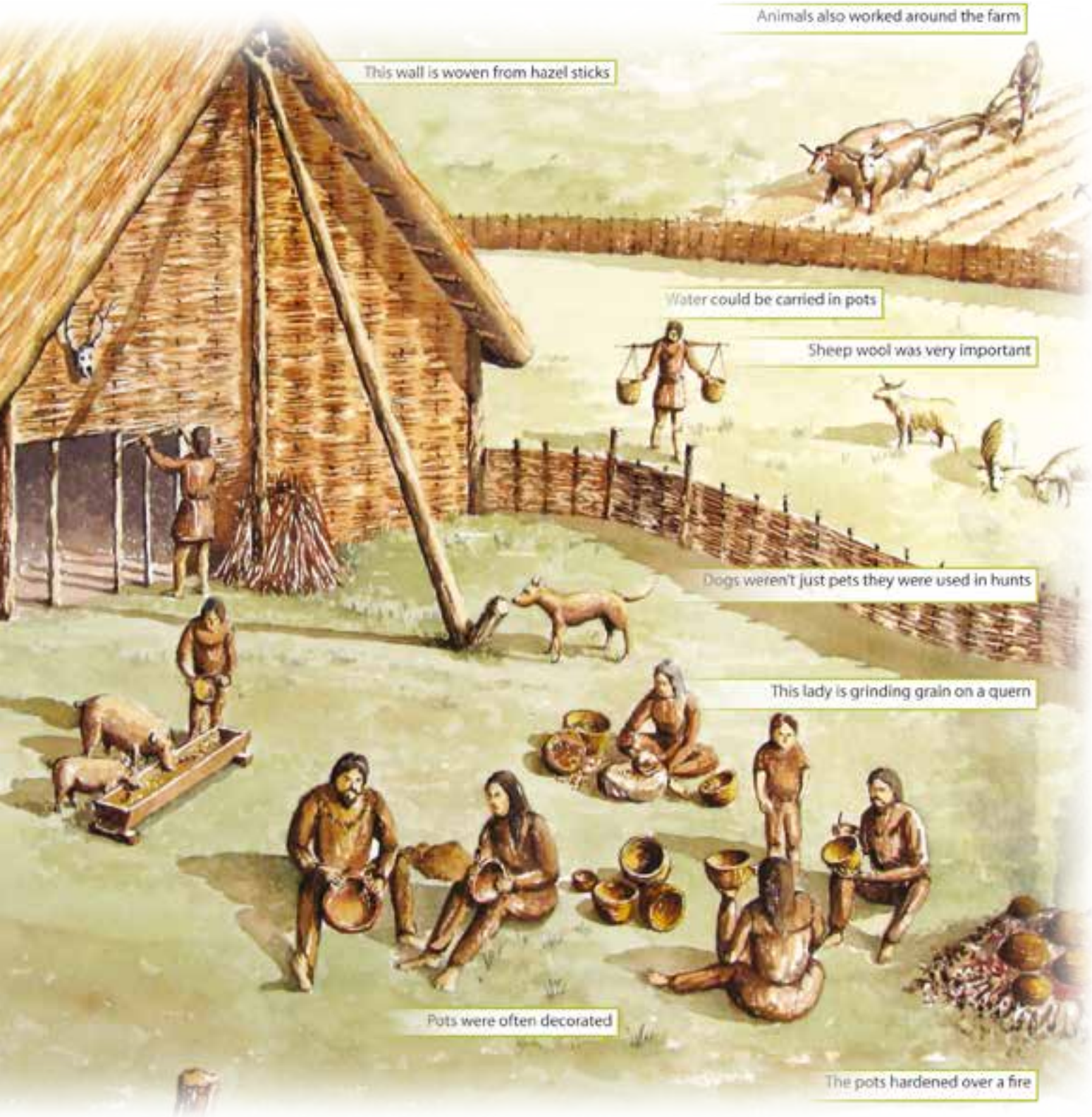
Grain is ground into flour on a Quern.



The flour could be made into porridge or baked.



Stone axes could shape the posts



Animals also worked around the farm

This wall is woven from hazel sticks

Water could be carried in pots

Sheep wool was very important

Dogs weren't just pets they were used in hunts

This lady is grinding grain on a quern

Pots were often decorated

The pots hardened over a fire

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Neolithic Farming

Neolithic farmers worked very hard all year round. In spring ploughs and spades were used to work the land and the seeds were sown. Then the growing crops were tended throughout the summer. In autumn they used **flint** tools like scythes to harvest the crop. All the family would work together to bring in the crop. The grain they harvested could be stored in pots until it was needed.

Archaeologists have found the bones of sheep, goats, pigs and cattle at **Neolithic** sites. As in **Mesolithic** times, **flint** knives and scrapers were used to cut up the meat and clean the skins. As well as farming **Neolithic** people hunted, fished and gathered food from the **landscape** around them.

DID YOU KNOW... about **Megalithic Tombs**?

The people of **Neolithic** times were the first to leave a lasting mark on Ireland's **landscape**. They built huge **megalithic tombs** to bury the remains of their dead. There are 4 main types: court, portal, passage and wedge **tombs**. Their remains can still be seen around our countryside today (see pages 18 and 19) In our picture the people are building a court **tomb**. It is called this because of the open area or 'court' at one end. When it was finished it would have looked like the picture below.



A Finished Court tomb

Families lived together on a farm



People worked together to bring stones for the tomb

Some fields were ploughed for arable crops

Fences divided up the land

wooden posts made the frame of the house

The court was the open area at the front of the tomb

These people are building a court tomb

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The Bronze Age

Between 2500 and 2000 BC people in Ireland began to learn how to work with metal. At first copper and gold were used to make valuable items like jewellery but neither were hard enough to use to make tools or weapons. This changed when new **settlers** brought bronze into Ireland around 2000 BC. Bronze is an **alloy** of copper and tin and is much stronger than the metals that had been used in Ireland before.

Although stone was still used for many hundreds of years, the **Neolithic** had come to an end as Ireland entered the Bronze Age.



Stone circles were built for rituals, perhaps for seasonal festivals

Standing stone

People lived in round houses



a



c



b



d

- a. Bronze spearhead
- b. Flint Arrowheads used in Bronze age
- c. A bronze age period pot
- d. The remains of a dagger



More of the land has been cleared for farms

Ring barrows and cairns were burial sites

A henge was a religious site

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Sites to visit

There are many **prehistoric** sites in Northern Ireland. Many of these are in the care of the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities and are free to visit. These are just some of the most famous sites. Most areas have **prehistoric** sites nearby. Can you find out if there are any in your area?

1. Beaghmore Stone Circles
2. The Giant's Ring
3. Leganany Dolmen
4. Drumskinney Stone Circle
5. Dooley's Cairn
6. Creggandeviskey



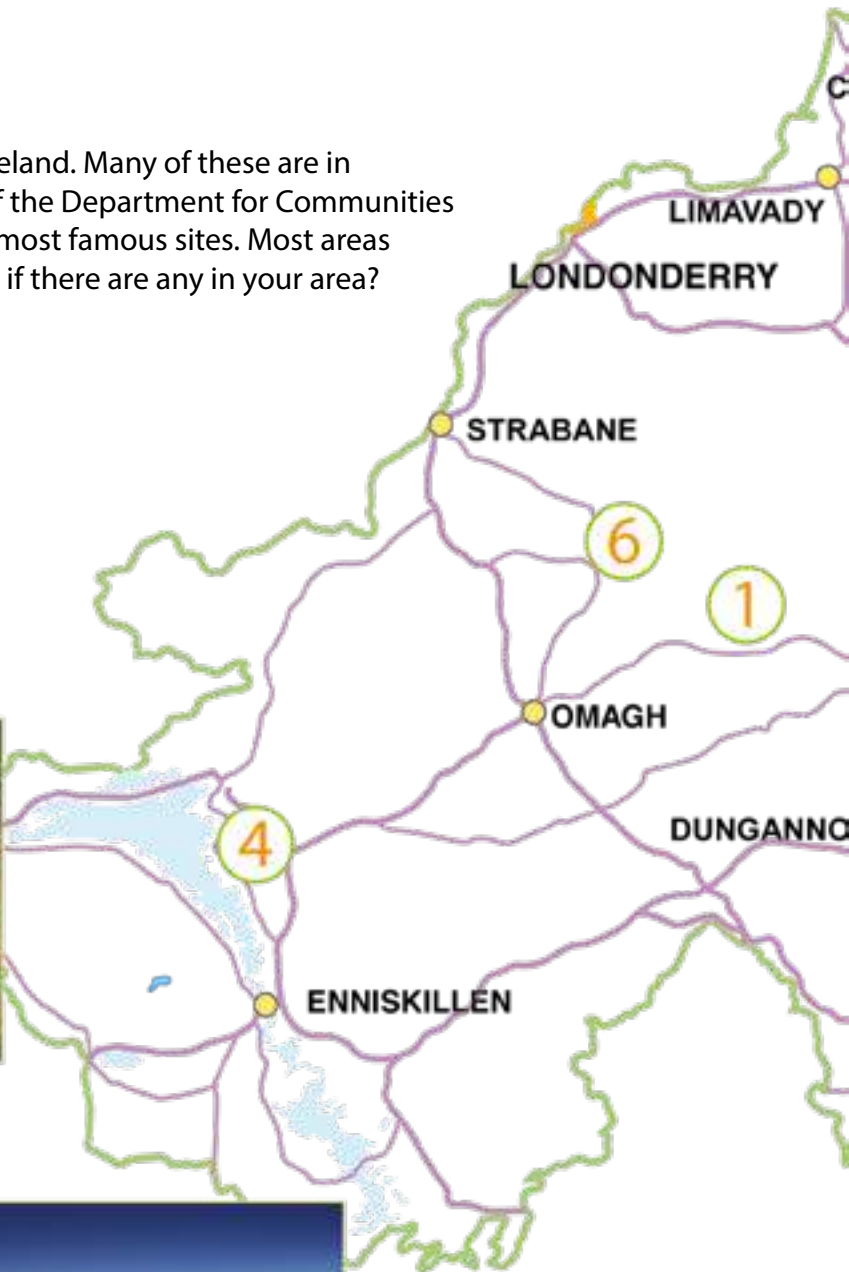
1.



2.



3.



6.



5.



4.



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Glossary

Alloy – a mixture of metals.

Archaeologist – person who studies the past.

Bronze - mixture of copper and tin.

Domesticated – animals that have been tamed and live with people.

Evidence – clues which tell us about how people lived.

Flint – a stone which breaks into sharp pieces.

Landscape –the countryside around us.

Megalithic – built with very large stones.

Mesolithic – the Middle Stone Age

Microlith – a very small piece of stone.

Neolithic – the New Stone Age

Population – the people who live in a country.

Porcellenite – a very hard black stone used to make axes.

Prehistoric – the time before writing.

Quern – a stone used for grinding grain.

Raw materials – the basic things that are needed to make items. For example, wood, flint and bone.

Settlers – people who travel to live in a new country

Technologies – inventions that change how people live

Tomb – a grave.

Wattle and Daub – a wall of woven sticks covered in mud to fill in the gaps.

Timeline

2007 AD – Today

1939 – 1945 – World War Two

900 AD – Vikings attack Ireland

0 AD – The Birth of Christ

2000 BC – Bronze Age begins in Ireland

2500 BC – The Great Pyramid at Giza is built in Egypt.

3500 BC – First farmers in Ireland – the Neolithic.

5000 BC – First farmers in Egypt

7000 BC – The first settlers arrive in Ireland in the Mesolithic.

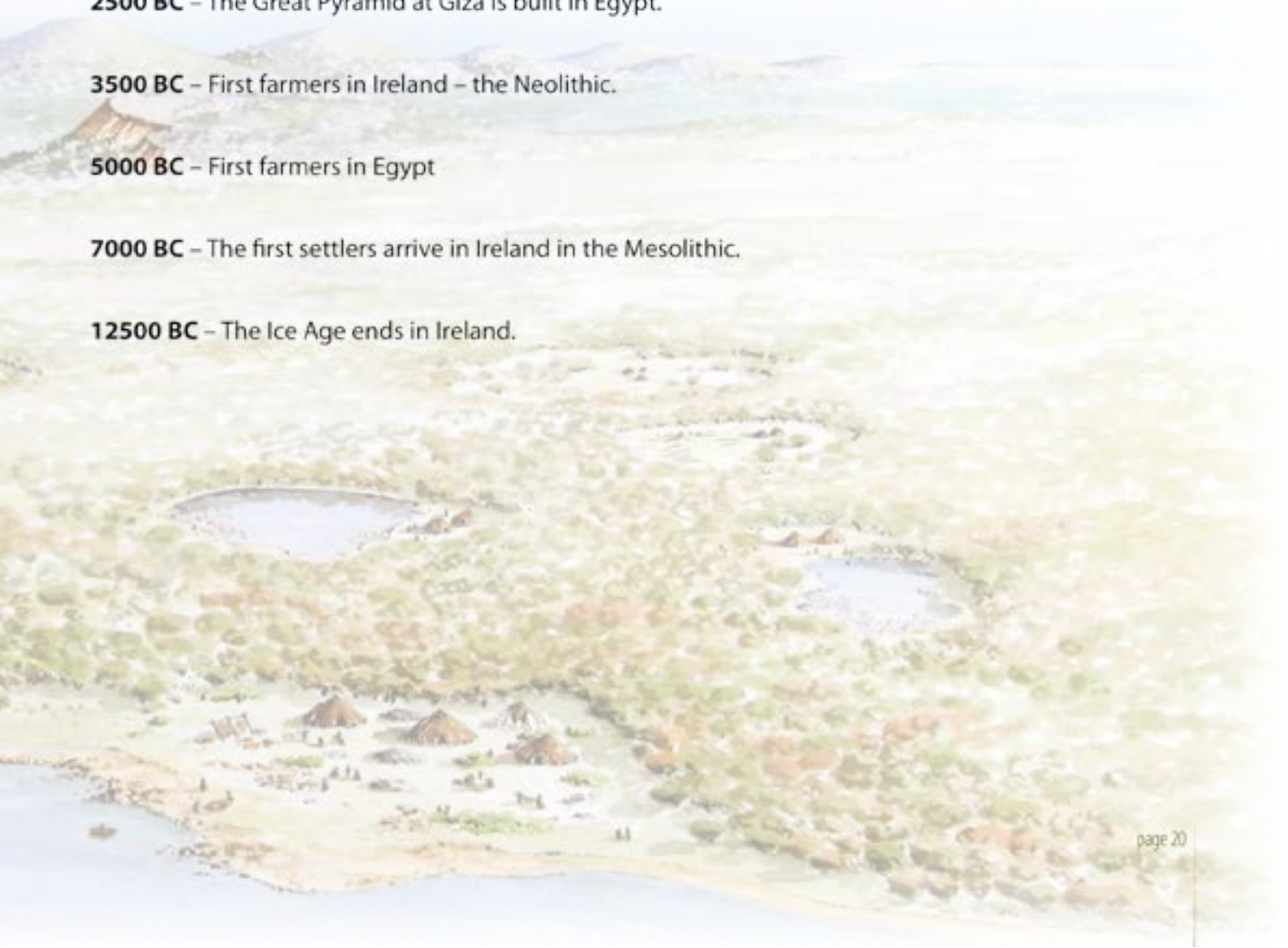
12500 BC – The Ice Age ends in Ireland.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the words we use about the stone age come from a language called Ancient Greek?

Lith means stone.
Meso means middle
Micro means small.
Mega means big.
Neo means new.

Can you see how the Ancient Greek words fit together to make the words we use about the stone age?





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**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**