8 Southwold

Grid reference [TM 539 860]

The seaside resort of Southwold has a grandstand view of the North Sea, resting on an upstanding knoll of gravelly Norwich Crag of the Westleton Beds. These marine gravels were laid down about 1.9 million years ago, and can be seen in old pits near the water tower on Southwold Common.

The town is surrounded by the marshes of the Blyth estuary to the south and Buss Creek to the north, and was probably an island in Roman times when sea levels were higher. Further back in time, someone looking east 10,000 years ago would have seen a broad plain stretching into the hazy distance, with no sea in sight. Southwold then had a view over Doggerland.

At the height of the last glacial period, the Devensian, an ice sheet reached north Norfolk, sea levels were over 100 m (330 ft) lower than present, and the North Sea basin was a wind- swept tundra landscape larger than the modern UK. Over the years, fishermen up and down the Suffolk coast have trawled up animal bones and teeth in their nets. Some of these have been identified as cold-adapted Devensian species, including woolly mammoth and rhinoceros, wild horse, steppe bison and musk ox.

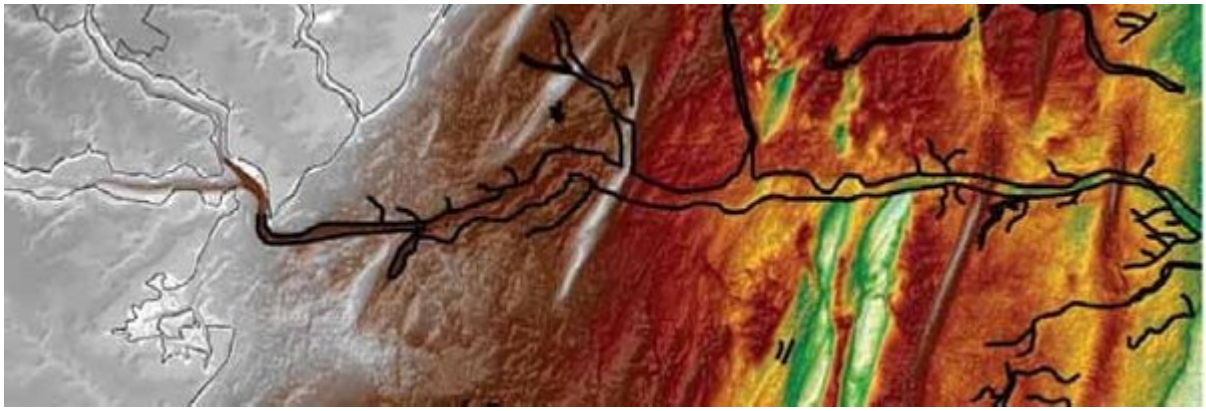
As climate warmed up after the Ice Age, sea levels rose through the Holocene period, gradually inundating Doggerland. The forested landscape at the heart of Mesolithic Europe gave way to tidal flats similar to The Wash today, and later to open sea. The Mesolithic population of hunters and gatherers progressively retreated to drier ground. Suffolk’s rivers flowing into Doggerland became shorter as the shoreline retreated; their courses can be tracked offshore using geological remote sensing techniques. Investigations have revealed evidence for an early Holocene land surface about 5 km (3 miles) off Southwold. Buried tidal flat deposits here mark an offshore extension of the estuary of the early River Blyth, some 6,500 years ago. Onshore, borehole samples have shown that the bed of this river once flowed 14 m (46 ft) below present day Southwold Harbour.

Figure

(Figure 24) Trawled finds from the bed of the North Sea, including a mammoth tooth (below, centre). Photo courtesy Rachel Bynoe, University of Southampton

(Figure 25) The offshore submerged course of the early Holocene river Stour / Orwell, compiled using bathymetric and seismic data. Image courtesy Relict Palaeo-landscapes of the Thames Estuary Project, University of Southampton.

Trawled finds from the bed of the North Sea, including a mammoth tooth (below, centre). Photo courtesy Rachel Bynoe, University of Southampton



The offshore submerged course of the early Holocene river Stour / Orwell, compiled using bathymetric and seismic data. Image courtesy Relict Palaeo-landscapes of the Thames Estuary Project, University of Southampton.