7 Easton Bavents

Grid reference [TM 514 777]

Easton Bavents cliff is a short walk north along the coast from Southwold. As in the nearby parish of Covehithe, the cliffs are rapidly eroding, and buildings on the cliff top may have only a few years before they become rubble on the beach.

Easton Bavents is one of the most important sites in Britain for studying the environmental history of the early Pleistocene period, about 1.8 million years ago; it is part of the Pakefield to Easton Bavents SSSI. The key strata here belong to the Norwich Crag Formation. Marine sands containing fossil shells and mammal bones are found at beach level or just beneath it, and are occasionally exposed by winter storms. Blue-grey clays can be seen in the foot of the cliff; these were laid down on intertidal mudflats during a period named the Baventian. Research has shown that the landscape of the time was open grassy heathland with a few hardy trees; the climate was cold, but not glacial. As at Covehithe, these clays are overlain by sands and gravels of the Westleton Beds and Wroxham Crag, representing offshore sand and pebble banks similar to those forming along the coast today. Brown glacial till deposits of the Lowestoft Formation cap the cliff.

Easton Broad [TM 51639 79344]lies a short distance up the coast.

It is composed of brackish water floored by peat deposits and separated from the sea by a shingle bar which the Environment Agency artificially maintains using bulldozers, so preserving the lagoon. The beach near Easton Wood is the best place to see the fossiliferous marine sands at the base of the Norwich Crag. These date from a temperate climatic period known as the Antian–Bramertonian — perhaps two million years ago — and contain a wealth of fossil molluscan shells and the remains of animals washed out to sea, including falconer’s deer, giant beaver, mastodon, robust horse and southern elephant, all now extinct.

Figure

(Figure 19) Easton Broad, showing the beach bar reinforced with bulldozed shingle, 2006. The eroding cliff at Easton Wood is in the background.

(Figure 20) The Norwich Crag, showing a darker horizon of Baventian clay at the foot of the cliff, overlain by sands and gravels of the Westleton Beds. A mass of dumped clay spoil can be seen on the left.

(Figure 21) Sand-martins nesting in easily-excavated sandy horizons in Easton Bavents cliff. A mass of dumped clay spoil can be seen in the foreground. © A. & A. Kennis, www.kenniskennis.com

(Figure 22) *Alachtherium cretsii*, an extinct species of walrus. A fossil example of its jawbone has been found at Easton Bavents cliff Credit: Andy Robins, UKGE Ltd

(Figure 23) An antler of a large, extinct species of deer *Eucladoceros falconeri*.

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Sand-martins nesting in easily-excavated sandy horizons in Easton Bavents cliff. A mass of dumped clay spoil can be seen in the foreground. © A. & A. Kennis, www.kenniskennis.com

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An antler of a large, extinct species of deer Eucladoceros falconeri.