

Ancient wheat DNA found in Britain provides clues to history of agriculture

Some of us spend so much time thinking about *not* eating wheat, particularly its key protein, gluten, that it can be difficult to remember how important wheat is to human history.

That's a lot of history to hang on the remains of some grain kernels. Now, a major archaeological find appears to have reset that understanding of history, and it hangs, not even on kernels, but on preserved DNA. In sediments taken from under the English Channel, scientists have identified the genetic material of ancient wheat varieties—and the layer where they reside is 2,000 years older than the earliest known evidence of farming in Britain.

A team of scientists from several British universities [reported in *Science*](#) last week that they have identified wheat DNA in cores from the seabed at a site known as Bouldnor Cliff.

A reasonable conclusion, Allaby said, is that the wheat arrived as a trade good, possibly in the form of flour—and possibly by sea, not only because the site was a shipyard, but because one Neolithic cultural group is known to have moved up the western coast of France by boat.

Many questions of course remain, including why the transition from buying wheat to growing it took so long in Britain, and whether there are other submerged sites—on the French coast for instance—with contents that could further explain the timing of farming's start.

Read full, original article: Ancient Wheat DNA Find Shifts Early UK Farming Theories