The first farmers in Ireland

Over the next 12 weeks we will be bringing you a series of articles from the National Monuments Service. This week, we look at Ireland’s first farmers.

**NEOLITHIC TOOLS**

The creation of the first fields necessitated the felling of trees and, to this day, Neolithic farmers used one of the most characteristic tools of the Neolithic: the polished stone axe. Many axes found throughout Ireland were made from porcellanite, which was sourced primarily from Tievebulliagh Mountain in Co Antrim and Rathlin Island. Some polished stone axes are so impressive and carefully made that they have survived down through the ages.

Other tools and weapons such as arrowheads, blades and scrapers were made of flint or chert and were used for skinning animals, cutting hides, cleaning fish, harvesting crops and for warfare. Pottery made its first appearance in Ireland during the Neolithic period. The earliest pots were mainly non-decorated round-bottomed bowls, although decoration became more common in the later part of the period. Pots were handmade and fired in bonfires or firing pits.

Following its introduction about 6,000 years ago, farming gradually became the dominant way of life in Ireland. Until recent centuries, almost all the structures built in Ireland were directly or indirectly related to farming and were built by farming communities. To this day, most of our archaeological monuments are situated on farmland.

The role of farmers in protecting our national heritage has been recognised in the Common Agricultural Policy, in REPS and in the current move towards recognising the delivery of “public goods” as an important task of the farming community.

**PRESERVING THE PAST**

The preservation of archaeologi- cal monuments might seem less important in a time of recession but there are still many good reasons for looking after them. For example, the work farmers do to protect our monuments is vital to another of the work farmers do to protect our irreplaceable archaeological heritage and for ensuring that it is preserved for the future generations to come.

NEXT WEEK: IRELAND’S EARLIEST FARMHOUSES