

Uncovering the history below the

A8 Dual Carriageway



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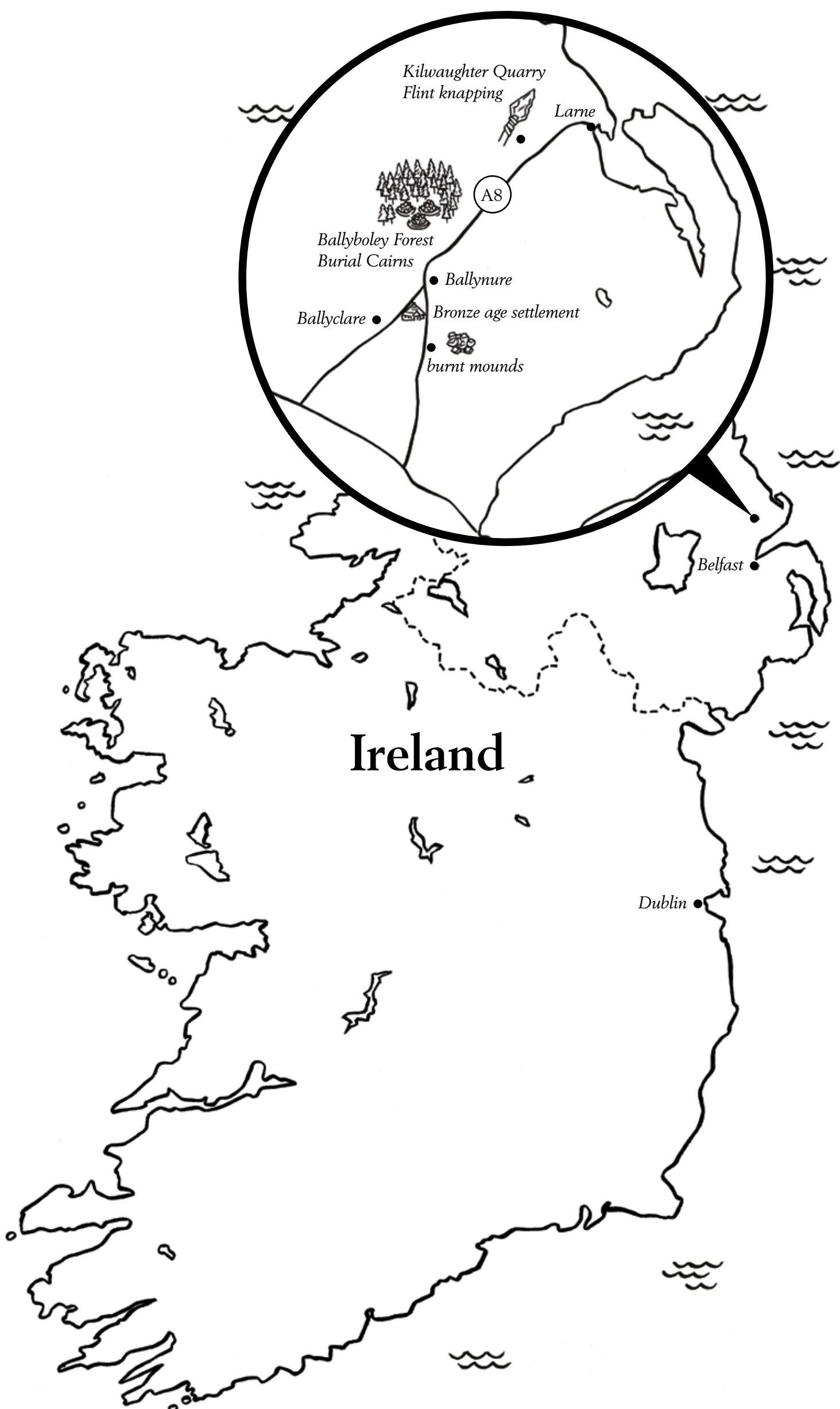
ARUP

Ballynure in the Bronze Age

Welcome to the Bronze Age

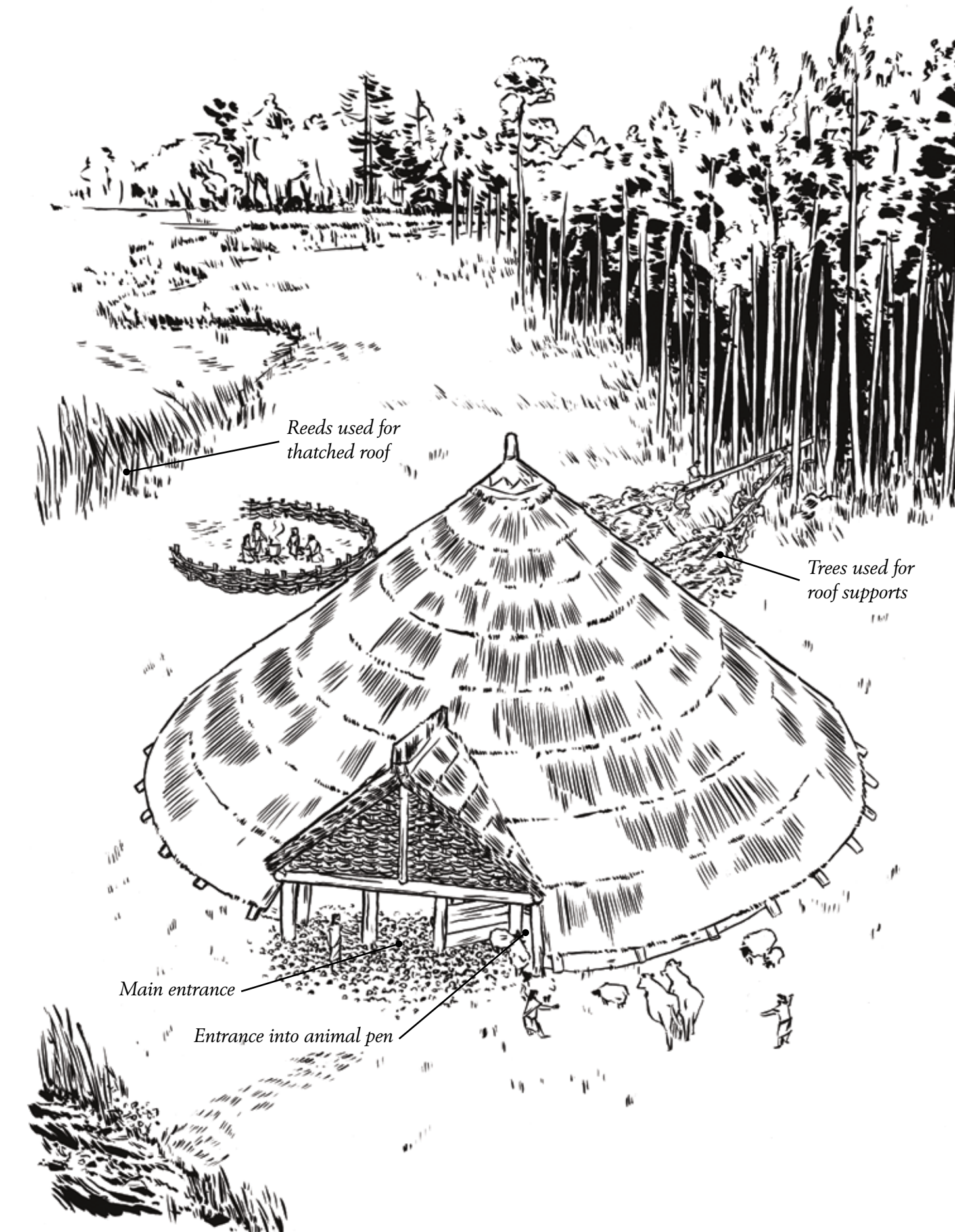
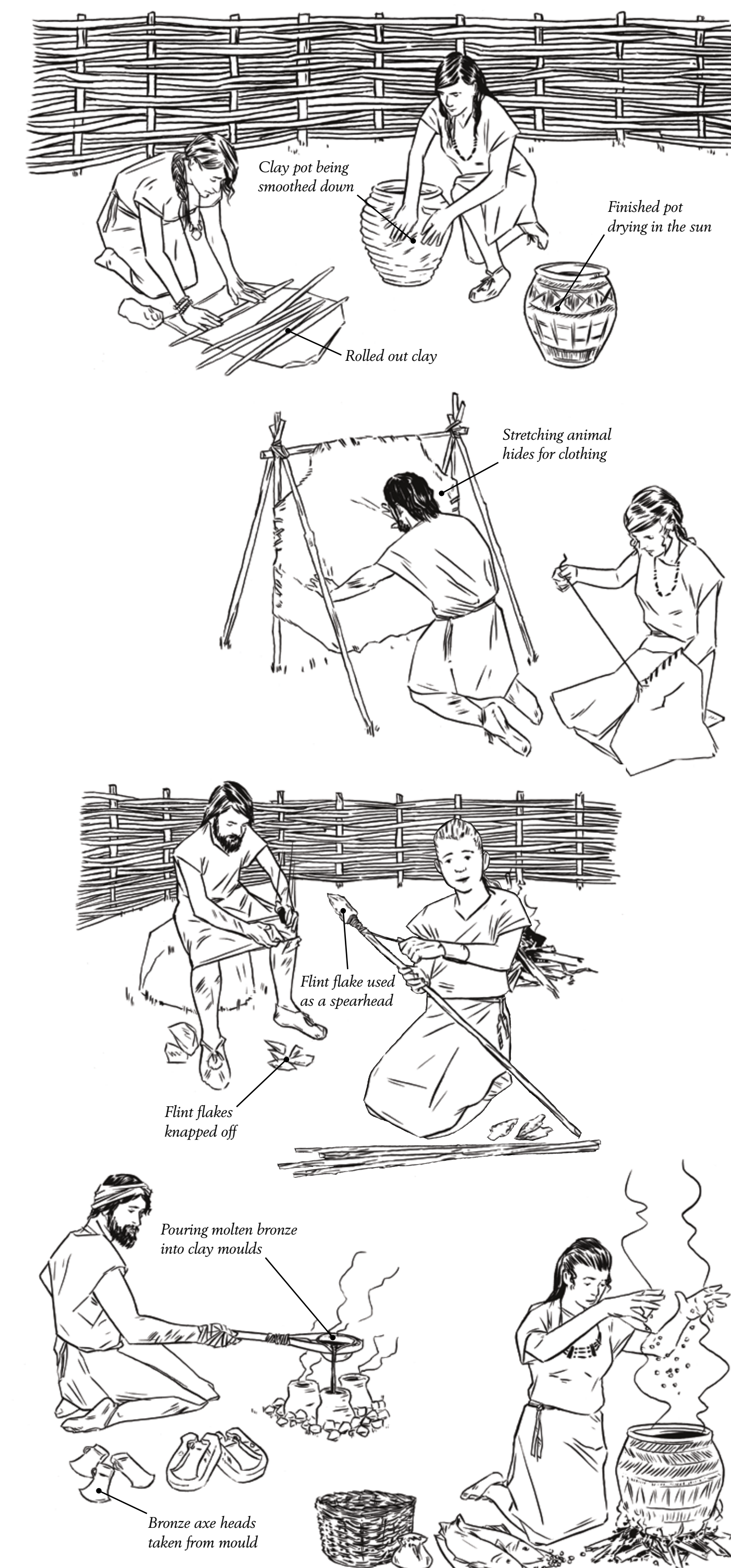
In 2012, archaeologists made some amazing discoveries in Ballynure, County Antrim. A new dual carriageway road was being built, the A8 road between Ballynure and Larne, when the ground was cleared for the new road, archaeologists discovered a series of holes in the ground which turned out to belong to a set of three houses from the Bronze Age period – they were over 3,500 years old.

The Bronze Age period was a time beginning about 4,500 years ago. It's named the Bronze Age because this is when people discovered and started to use metal called bronze, a mixture of copper and tin, which was used to make tools, weapons and jewellery. This period of time lasted about 1,500 years. Before then people only used stone and animal bones as tools and weapons. They still used these even when they had discovered how to make metal, as it was easier to make everyday item from stone and bone. Metal was used for special items.



Tools and technology

Everything these people had or used, they had to make or catch themselves, as there were no shops to buy food, clothes or plates. They made their own bowls and pots out of clay, they had to grow their own crops if they wanted bread and keep their own animals if they wanted meat, milk or clothing, catch their fish and pick their own fruit and berries. They also had to build their own houses.



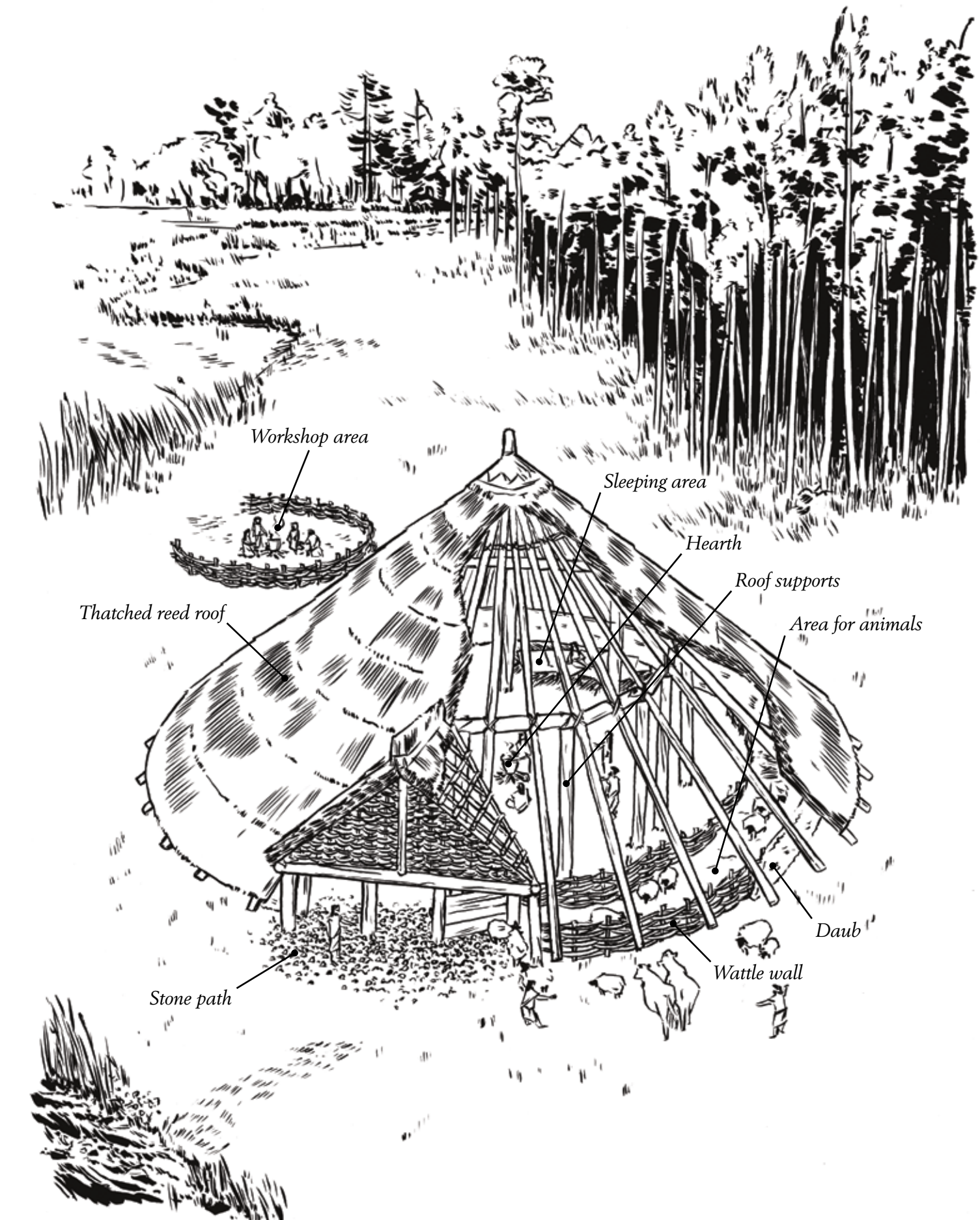
A Bronze Age House

A house like the ones discovered by the archaeologists would have used a lot of different material; wood for the building, bundles of reeds for thatch for the roof and clay to cover the walls.

When people were building their houses during the Bronze Age they did not have the same machines that we have today. All of the digging would have been done by hand using tools like wooden spades and deer antlers used as picks and hammers, and trees would have been cut down using bronze or stone axes. It would have taken a lot of effort and people to help build a single house.

Firstly the supports for the roof were put up. A ring of holes were dug and large wooden posts were put in them, stones and soil were packed around to keep the posts steady. Next the wall. About 2m away from the roof supports a ring of smaller posts, or stakes, were pushed into the ground. Then longer, thinner pieces of wood were woven between them to create a wall. This is known as wattle. A gap was left on the southeast side of the house and larger posts were put up to form a doorway. Then the roof had to go on. Longer pieces of wood were used to create a conical roof. The roof was then thatched using bundles of reeds from the shores of the nearby lake. These houses didn't have a chimney and would have been very smoky inside. Finally a mixture of clay, animal poo and straw, known as daub, was put on the wattle walls to keep out the wind and the rain. Small stones were pushed into the ground outside the door to create a path.

At Ballynure there were at least three houses so a lot of wood and reeds would need to have been cut and gathered to build all the homes.



Hundreds of stakeholes were found inside the large house at Ballynure. These stakeholes mark where walls would have been and show how the house was divided up into different areas. These areas would have had different purposes. Some, were for sleeping and others for working. Although they served the same purpose as the rooms in modern houses they would have been quite different from what we know today, with everybody sleeping and working together in the one area. People wouldn't have had their own bedroom and there were certainly no bathrooms inside the house.

A house of this size would have housed an extended family as well as their animals. Mums, dads, children, aunties, uncles, cousins and grandparents would all have lived in the one house. The animals, including the cows and sheep, would have been brought into the house at night to keep them safe. Archaeologists believe that at Ballynure they were kept in the area between the outer wall and the posts that supported the roof.

We can't say exactly what people would have done inside the house, but we do know that there must have been separate areas for sleeping and working. A hearth was found in the centre of the building and people would have gathered around the fire at night for light and heat. As there was no chimney it would have been quite smoky inside the house, though this smoke would have helped to keep away insects.