

Defining Landscape use and Activity Strategy in Mesolithic Leicestershire, Central England: Some preliminary observations

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This unique interdisciplinary research project is aimed at defining Mesolithic landscape use and settlement strategies in the county of Leicestershire (and its immediate environs) in the Midlands of England. The conclusions will be tested via a predictive experimental approach, aimed at identifying previously unknown Mesolithic activity within the study area. Some preliminary observations and tentative hypotheses are discussed in relation to the current stage of the research.

The clay lands of central England were historically perceived as largely unoccupied in prehistory, and thus the region has been somewhat neglected archaeologically. However, recent intensive field-walking has identified a plethora of Mesolithic activity in the form of flint tools recovered from the landscape. The archaeological datasets used comprise: a primary source of microliths, microburins and tranchet adzes, and a secondary database of bladelets and associated cores. Most of the data are derived from surface-survey recovery, although excavated and chance-find lithics are included within the research material.

Project methodology entails plotting lithic find-spots and scatters onto digital geographical, geological, topographical and hydrological palimpsests via GIS software. Lithic distribution patterns combined with assemblage characteristics will enable the identification of a model of preferred activity and settlement locations within the study area. Whilst this approach is not new, it has not been undertaken using all available landscape attributes, and never has the validity of such a model been assessed by experimental methodology.

The prototype will be tested by field-walking areas of previously unknown Mesolithic presence identified by landscape attribute compatibility to the model, thus enabling assessment of the predictive robustness of activity and settlement locations within the region. It is envisaged that such an approach will be of considerable use to commercial, developer and research archaeologists alike, in respect of locating or indeed avoiding Mesolithic activity areas in central England, and perhaps the wider landscape.