
Emerging evidence relating to the late Pleistocene and early Holocene settlement of Scotland

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Abstract

Increasing evidence is pushing the earliest settlement of Scotland backwards. In the 1980s the suggestion that settlement in the island of Rum, West Highlands, occurred in the seventh millennium cal BC was received with scepticism. Today, though precise radiocarbon determinations are lacking, several sites have yielded assemblages likely to date as far back as the twelfth millennium cal BC. Not surprisingly, this evidence is complex in nature. Recent work reveals increasing numbers of broad blade flaked stone artefacts as well as a variety of tanged and other points, all likely to indicate early activity. Previously, the Scottish Mesolithic has been dominated by narrow blade flaked stone industries of a type that would have been considered later Mesolithic further south, though in Scotland the dates were often surprisingly early. Although the evidence is still very fragmentary, it is worthwhile asking how this enhances understanding of the earliest settlement of Scotland. This paper will focus on information related to the possible access routes into mainland Scotland from the lowlands of Doggerland. It will also consider a wider palaeoenvironmental approach in order to research a more nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of the Late Upper Palaeolithic in Scotland. Finally, it will recognise the processes of change inherent in both the environmental and human records through time in order to suggest possible relationships with the existing data on Mesolithic Scotland.

Keywords: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Tanged Points, Broad Blades, Narrow Blades, Microliths, Scotland, Pleistocene Holocene Transition

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