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# Fire, fuel and food: perceptions of the environment in early Mesolithic Arctic Norway

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## Abstract

Starting from the evidence for Early Mesolithic fireplaces (9500-ca 8000 cal BC) along the Norwegian coast, this paper will discuss the extent and purpose of the fires, the implication for interpretations of food preparation and the wider relevance of the conclusions for how these early foragers perceived the environment, in particular the emerging boreal vegetation. The charcoal from fires indicates extensive use of brushwood and some driftwood. There is little evidence of substantial use of bone or blubber as fuel. The fires appear to have been small, which suggest that food preparation only to a limited extent depended on open fire. Instead raw, fermented, dried or possibly smoked fish, blubber, fat and meat must have dominate food preparations. These food habits dominated northern Fennoscandia well into historical time.

If food preparation required limited actual cooking, and wooden fires for also heating and light were limited, then this had impact on the perception of the surrounding vegetation, which was not predominantly interacted with for fuel, but rather for wayfinding, shelter and tools.

**Keywords:** fireplace, fuel, food preparation, perception, coastal, Arctic

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