
”Ain’t no mountain high enough”. Mesolithic colonisation processes and landscape usage of the inner alpine region Kleinwalsertal (Prov. Vorarlberg, Western Austria)

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Abstract

At the end of the last ice age and with the melting of the glaciers the Alps, a landscape of 200.000 km², formerly covered almost entirely by ice became again inhabitable for plants, animals and humans alike. One of those new ice-free regions was the Kleinwalsertal (province of Vorarlberg, Austria), which represents one of the numerous little-known archaeological areas of the Austrian Alps. Here, over 90 mainly Mesolithic sites of various sizes and functions were found over the last thirty years. Within this talk, the results of the project ”The Kleinwalsertal. A Mesolithic landscape with far reaching contacts” will be presented. The project itself aimed to understand the archaeological landscape Kleinwalsertal, as well as its ”colonisation” and the subsequent usage of this habitat during the Mesolithic. To obtain a most complete picture, the sites and their artefacts were studied by an integrated methodological approach. This approach included an examination of the topographic and landscape morphological position of the sites within the landscape via a field survey and subsequent GIS-analysis. Hereby, the sites within the regions were not simply considered as dots on a map, but rather as an integral part of the landscape, intertwined with its possibilities, resources and limitations. Furthermore, the three excavated Mesolithic sites Schneiderküren, Egg-Schwarzwasser and Bärämähder were studied in more detail, including an intra-site analysis and an examination of morpho-technological and typological characteristics as well as raw material provenance of their lithic artefacts. The synthesis of the obtained data will address questions regarding the function of the sites in the landscape and mobility patterns throughout the Mesolithic in the study area and to adjacent regions farther abroad. Furthermore, we provide solid basic data for further investigations regarding the studies of the Stone Ages in the Eastern Austrian Alps. Hereby we come to realize that the alpine regions were not an unsurmountable barrier, but rather areas of transition and maybe also interaction.

Keywords: Austrian Alps, Kleinwalsertal, Boreal and early Atlantic, mobility patterns, technology and typology, raw material procurement

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