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# Time depth in changing environments – From Early Mesolithic coastal sites to strategic observation points in the hinterland in later Mesolithic times

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## Abstract

Throughout all of the Mesolithic, glacial retreat, isostatic rebound and sea-level changes have continuously changed the coastal areas of Southeast Norway. Constantly retreating coastlines led to the replacement of human activity connected to marine exploitation, manifested in an overall relocation of coastal sites following the shoreline. The significance of coastal resources for hunter-gatherer economy has been an important research topic in recent years. Little attention has however been paid to the marked growth of landmasses that took place at the same time, and to Mesolithic people's experience of the growing areas of dried out land. The use of these coastal hinterland areas and people's adaptation to them has hardly been studied. This talk deals with the emergence of the coastal hinterland and its archaeological significance. Starting point are a number Early Mesolithic settlements/occupational sites, which today are located inland, but which in Early Mesolithic times were placed directly at the coast and very close to deep sea beds. Radiocarbon dates from hearths on these sites exhibit often later Mesolithic dates – despite the typical Early Mesolithic artefacts. These late dates have hitherto been considered as outliers, interpreted as signs of later forest-fires. GIS-modelling of the topographic character of the placement of these sites against the backdrop of land-upheaval processes that transformed these coastal areas through time indicates that they were placed at potentially excellent view-points overlooking marked valleys (former sea beds, now placed several kilometres from the coast) at the times of these later Mesolithic dates. Thus, these later radiocarbon dates might indicate a pattern of Late Mesolithic hinterland sites with excellent views, which might have served as places in a communication system, such as observation spots of human and animal movement. As places with a deep human and natural history, they might also have served as places of memory. Setting the coastal hinterland on the agenda adds a new dimension to our understanding of the diversity of adaptive strategies of coastal groups, and opens up new paths for a better understanding of the use of and movement in Mesolithic environments in general.

**Keywords:** Environmental change, coastal landscapes, hinterland use, re, use of sites, time depth, communication system

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