Ice Patch Hunters in the Mesolithic? An exploratory review of the current evidence

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Abstract

In recent decades, many spectacular archaeological discoveries have been recovered from melting ice patches in the high alpine, in both Scandinavia and in the Alps. The frozen conditions mean that prehistoric organic objects are sometimes well-preserved. These glacial finds have provided us with new insights into the different way people utilized the high alpine in the past; whether it be hunting and trapping on ice patches, or following transport corridors

Until now, the oldest finds recovered from high-alpine glacial sites in Europe date to the Neolithic. The purpose of this paper is to examine the evidence from different disciplines as to whether Mesolithic populations might have hunted on alpine ice patches or not. The analysis focuses mostly on Norway and Sweden, but draws from and is also relevant too the European Alps and other alpine regions.

This form of logical modeling is not only useful for thinking about future ice patch surveys and analyses. It is a fin heuristic for synthesizing some of the archaeological, glaciological and paleoclimatic factors we have learnt in recent years about glacial archaeological sites and past adaptations. These include the role of paleoclimate in past-use of the high alpine, post-depositional processes and prognosis for future melts and discoveries.

Keywords: Mesolithic adaptation, mountain archaeology, glacial archaeology

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