
Marking a Landscape – thoughts on how early Danish Maglemosian hunters marked their routes and sites in the boreal forests

Anne G. Rosenberg*¹

¹Øhavsmuseet (ØHM) – Denmark

Abstract

In 2011-14 two large hunting stations were excavated on the southern part of the Danish island of Fyn. These excavations showed that each site stretches across an area of hectare, and not the expected 5-8 sqm! Burnt hazelnuts date the sites to the period around 8200 – 8000 BC CAL. The finds indicate several stays at the two sites and thus a repeated use. This led to thoughts on how the early Maglemosian hunters found their way back to these specific locations – places they intended to return to with prepared cores for the manufacture of microliths. Explanations were sought using ethnographic parallels and theories, focusing on the concept of wayfinding. This proved difficult, as most existing parallels are drawn from areas of either dense jungles or arid steppes, and therefore with very different kinds of visual environments. Also, the parallels in existing literature often dealt with rocky terrain, where rock art and petroglyphs could readily be inscribed everywhere. The questions for the excavated sites on Fyn are: How did the users of these sites find their way back to specific hunting sites? Did they produce markings in this landscape without rocks and how? But what about trees? Ethnographic parallels from North America and Fennoscandia show that trees could be altered into shapes or embellished with markings, so-called arbo- or dendroglyphs, which helped with the marking of trails and sites in the boreal landscape. Could there have been a whole world parallel to rock art where the basis were trees not rocks? What would the implications be?

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*Speaker