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# A new open-air Early Mesolithic site in central Italy: Contrada Pace

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## Abstract

Preliminary survey activities carried out during construction works at the site of Contrada Pace in the Municipality of Tolentino (Macerata, Central Italy), led to the discovery of one of the most complete Early Mesolithic open-air sites in Italy. On a terrace of the Chienti river, an Early Holocene paleosoil with significant traces of human activity was discovered under a 1.5 meter thick fine sedimentary cover. The extensive micro-stratigraphic excavation that took place since September 2019, allowed exploring an area of more than 500 square meters and recovering several thousand lithic artefacts and organic remains. These findings appear to be clustered in different functional areas that yielded multiple structured features. Such results have been attained thanks to the fruitful collaboration between the Italian Cultural Heritage Office (Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio Marche) that is in charge of the discovery and the University of Ferrara that led the excavation on practical grounds. Given the extraordinary preservation of organic remains at the site, an extensive activity of manual flotation has started, in collaboration with HIDDEN FOODS – StG-ERC project based at Sapienza University of Rome. In this paper, excavation data concerning the recovered evidence and a preliminary assessment on the lithic and organic assemblages are presented.

**Keywords:** Early Mesolithic, Central Italy, open air site, settlement patterns, functional areas, structured features

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