
Landscape and Creativity in the Mesolithic: An Example from Kokořínsko, Czech Republic

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Abstract

In this paper, we consider how Mesolithic communities in Central Europe used local nuances of landscape as tools to creatively manage relationships a changing environment. We approach this from the vantage of Kokořínsko – a unique area of sandstone formations that comprises a network of incised valleys that converge and drain into the Elbe River. Often perceived as a sort of hinterland to Mesolithic movement along the Elbe corridor (as exemplified by the nearby site of Hořín), the position of Kokořínsko in regional subsistence patterns and landscape management is under-studied. In 2017, we began a systematic survey of this complex area, and our preliminary results demonstrate high selectivity in site locations. In particular, rock shelters positioned at the intersection of deep gorges attracted multiple Mesolithic occupations through time. Such locations continue to offer a high frequency of encounters with wildlife whose movements are channelled along these narrow passages. We interpret the meaning and importance of such sites as rooted in opportunities for both subsistence and environmental monitoring, and consider implications for understanding the wider lifeways of Mesolithic Bohemia. Indeed, Kokořínsko has become a protected landscape, critical to monitoring and understanding ecological change in the present. At Kokořínsko, we perceive creative dimensions of Mesolithic adaptation and sustainability that are inadequately captured if framed as economic strategy alone. Drawing on Gregory Bateson's perspectives on creativity and ecology, we consider the efficacy of landscape in how Mesolithic communities renewed stability between their community and a dynamic environment.

Keywords: Mesolithic, Central Europe, Landscape, Hunter, Gatherer Theory, Creativity, Ecological Management

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