
Lost in sand? - The Upper Lusatian Mesolithic at the open-air site Reichwalde 6/4

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Abstract

In the years from 1997 to 2001 the Saxonian Archaeological Heritage Office conducted multiple field campaigns in the soft coal mine Reichwalde (Saxonian Upper Lusatia, Germany) during which parts of the massive open-air site Reichwalde 6/4 were excavated. The site gained international recognition for its remains of a Late Glacial forest discovered in the bog of the Altliebeler Lake. Apart from this extraordinary setting the excavations also yielded around 250 000 artefacts from the Mesolithic. Additionally, current excavations preceding the ongoing mining activities yield new Mesolithic sites every year. Despite this abundance of Mesolithic sites in the area there are no complete assemblages published or even analyzed so far. Therefore, this project is the first one trying to shed a light on the Mesolithic in Upper Lusatia.

Mesolithic Reichwalde 6/4 can be subdivided into several spatial units thereby also subdividing the whole assemblage. One of these sub-assemblages consisting of roughly 6000 lithic artefacts is currently analysed for a Master thesis. Mesolithic blank production has rarely been studied so far, so this study may contribute to a better understanding of Mesolithic lithic economy. In the light of new research from North-Western Europe the anthropogenic origin of features usually referred to as hearth pits shall also be examined.

The Upper Lusatian Mesolithic seems to be special in various aspects. It seems like there would be no continuity between the Late Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic. This hiatus includes the whole Early Mesolithic until 6800 cal BC, but the microlithic assemblages is still indicating older traditions. A second aspect of speciality is that there hasn't been a real neolithisation – most likely due to very poor soil conditions. The radiocarbon dates are indicating that Mesolithic traditions may have survived until 4000 cal BC and beyond while in neighbouring areas the Neolithic is already fully established. Understanding the Upper Lusatian Mesolithic may therefore lead to a better understanding for exchange mechanisms among hunter-gatherer groups and farming societies.

Keywords: Mesolithic, Lithic Technology, Open air sites, Intra site spatial analysis

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