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# Short-term occupations at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic in Mongolia: new evidence from the site of Tolbor 34

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## Résumé

The Initial Upper Paleolithic (IUP) has been one the main focus of recent investigations in the Tolbor Valley (North MOngholia). Perhaps because it is recognized by the associations of multiple technological and typological attributes, the IUP is mostly known by large blade-assemblages from sites such as Tolbor-4, Tolbor-16 and Tolbor-21. Meanwhile, clear evidence for IUP short-term occupations is lacking raising questions regarding the visibility of such assemblages in the archeological record. Here, we present data collected at the newly excavated site of Tolbor-34. The site is located along a canyon on the eastern flank of the Sharkhad Mountain between two major sites, Tolbor-16 and Tolbor-17. It was first tested in 2015 with two 2x1m units excavated in arbitrary spits and then excavated in 2016 over two extra 2x1m units. A combustion feature has been uncovered surrounded by a low density of expedient lithic artifacts. Although it lacks diagnostic features, the lowermost assemblage dated to around 45 ka uncal BP chronologically overlaps with the IUP occupation of the Tolbor-16 neighboring site. The data hand suggests two main observations. First, the number of short term occupations in the IUP might be underestimated due to a lack of visibility, preservation bias and the difficulty to assign small – and apparently undiagnostic – short-term occupation to IUP. Implications are that a bias toward large accumulations of

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archaeological material would lead to a distorted reconstruction of settlement patterns by underestimating of logistic mobility. Second, the example of Tolbor-34 suggests that based a lithic assemblage alone, Upper Paleolithic occupation can be unnoticed (or even look older) as typology becomes misleading when variables such as sample size and site function are not factored in. In the present case, the Upper Paleolithic character is confirmed by a single piece of ornament that confirms the concomitant appearance of IUP and symbolic objects in the region.

**Mots-Clés:** Initial Upper Paleolithic, Settlement patterns, Short, tem occupation, Ornament, Mongolia, Central Asia