

# Before Farming Editorial: An end to foraging?

---

**Larry Barham**

Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol, 43 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UU  
larry.barham@bristol.ac.uk

## **An end to foraging?**

"*Another* new journal? There's too much to read already!" I can imagine this might be some people's reaction to the news that a journal devoted to the archaeology of hunter-gatherers has been launched. I hope they will be in the minority. Before Farming was born of frustration: prehistorians working in Africa, Europe and Asia have to scan a vast array of journals to keep on top of developments, not to mention taking pot-luck with publishing in journals for which our subject is just one of many. Few of us have the time, mental energy (and even the subscriptions in these days of library cut-backs) to sustain the needed diligence. Before Farming is the only journal devoted to the archaeology and anthropology of hunter-gatherers. It will, we hope, become your first port of call for research results, news and ideas.

## **Online benefits with old-fashioned features**

We aim to publish promptly with a turn around time from submission to publication of three months. Your analysis will still be fresh when it appears online. This will be possible through a network of committed reviewers and associate editors who are keen to trim the time it takes for information and ideas to reach the academic community. The online format also gives us the freedom to include more colour images than found in traditional printed journals.

But there are limitations to the appeal of technology: few people actually enjoy reading online and the papers are designed to be printed out as Adobe Acrobat PDF files. A year-end print edition of Before Farming will be available for those of us who still find comfort in a creaking bookshelf, although the edited print version cannot, of course, contain all the information or imagery found online.

## **Research and overviews**

Our geographical scope is broad - the Old World - with a single unifying theme: the behaviour of hunter-gatherers, past and present. The emphasis on behaviour rather than biology acknowledges the existing coverage of biological anthropology (eg, *Journal of Human Evolution*, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, *Evolutionary Anthropology*). The need is rather for an accessible outlet for hunter-gatherer researchers, in the widest sense. Before Farming should promote communication between archaeologists and anthropologists rather than fragment the field further into regional and chronological specialisms.

The early issues of the journal will contain a mix of topics including commissioned overviews of particular regions, periods and behavioural phenomena. I would like to ask all potential contributors to ensure their submissions are of interest to a broad audience by giving generous amounts of background information and basing them on archaeological, methodological or theoretical issues. We aim to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Our review articles are intended for the non-specialist and aim to provide a context for viewing current

research topics. I hope these will be developed further in subsequent issues. In this inaugural issue, Peter Mitchell reviews the past ten years of Middle and Later Stone Age research in southern Africa. He pays particular attention to the use of ethnographic analogy based on the Bushmen and the development of models of social change among Holocene hunter-gatherers. The end of apartheid and the painful forging of a new national identity have echoes in the current interest in the interaction of foragers, farmers and herders.

Research-led articles will be the norm in *Before Farming* and Paul Pettitt sets the tone with a challenging interpretation of Neanderthal mortuary practices. He rebuffs the minimalist charge that there is no evidence for intentional burial and argues for a variety of practices over time and space, from full inhumation to the placing of body parts in pits. Neanderthals were clearly aware of death and marked its passing with socially constructed rites. This conclusion should provoke a range of reactions and we will consider a *Current Anthropology* style forum for discussion, but with your comments and a response by the author appearing in issue 2.

There was going to be a third major contribution - part analysis and part news item - which we have decided to hold over to issue 2 because more new material is still emerging. Simon Kaner will be outlining the evidence for an archaeological fraud on the scale of Piltdown. Reports have emerged from Japan over several years of pits containing bifaces and other tools dated to between 500,000 and 700,000 BP. The Japanese Lower Palaeolithic appeared to be not only of comparable antiquity to that of mainland Asia, but far more sophisticated. Evidence for the deliberate salting of the pits has recently come to light and confessions have apparently been made. This story has legs and will continue to run. Look out for it in May, along with a report on bone tools from the Middle Pleistocene site of Kabwe (Broken Hill), Zambia.

## Reviews

A feature of *Before Farming* will be its extended book reviews. We have not set a word limit so that reviewers have the freedom to analyse a subject in depth, should they so wish. The reader should learn something about a topic and be in the position to make an informed decision about purchasing the book. The three reviews in this issue represent the geographical scope of the journal with contributions about Africa, Europe and Asia. We will also be reviewing web-based databases and educational sites.

## News

*Before Farming* as an online journal has the capacity to inform its readers of fast-breaking stories and to carry live reports from the field in digital format. Sadly our first opportunity to do this is reporting the death of Desmond Clark this February. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the archaeology of Africa and Asia and skills of analysis and synthesis will be much missed. Ray Inskeep knew Desmond better than most and his personal tribute reflects this long friendship.

We intend the news section to be continuously updated so that you can refer to it between issues. Contact any of the editors with your news.

You will also find the equivalent of classified advertisements accessible from the news page with items of interest to this specialist audience.

## Award

To encourage young researchers to take part in the journal, an end-of-year competition will be held for best contribution to the field by a PhD student. We ask them to send a synopsis of their theses/dissertations of up to 2500 words and a letter of support from their supervisors. Our panel of associate editors will judge the submissions: the winner's synopsis will be published and receive a prize of £100 (\$/Euro140).

We hope you will find the concept and contents of this journal stimulating and of value, particularly as time passes and we publish a wider array of material. Please let us know what you would like to see covered and what features you want in an online journal. It is early days yet and we are open to suggestions. You can help make this journal exactly what you want by becoming a contributor and ensure its survival by becoming a subscriber. The need to forage from a broad spectrum of archaeological sources may soon be over.

#### THE EDITOR

---