

## Going to extremes

Not for the first time in the short history of *Before Farming* we have a north-south split in the coverage of our articles. The first two come from the southern extremity of Africa and the following two from the circum-Arctic region of northern Europe. Regular readers will appreciate this diversity of coverage as the bread and butter of the journal; those new to *Before Farming* will soon discover that we actively eschew regional, temporal and subject boundaries. Our odd mix is purposeful, to encourage archaeologists and anthropologists to broaden their methodological and topical horizons, exposing us to subjects that might be unfamiliar because of disciplinary specialisation, or simply competing pressures on our time. The gradual increase in subscribers to *Before Farming* suggests that this generalist philosophy has some appeal. That said we are still not reaching the anthropologists among you. If you are an archaeologist with colleagues who work with contemporary or historic hunter-gatherers, please encourage them to submit a paper. All of us will benefit from the increased breadth of the journal.

The articles by Stewart and Smith follow the African Neolithic theme that has been featured in the last two issues. Stewart takes an explicitly functional look at one aspect of the material culture of the Khoekhoe of southern Africa – conical based pots. His replication experiment is combined with ethnohistorical and ethnographic observations of the uses of these unusually shaped vessels. The conclusion that they were used for cooking is not startling, but he does make the point that the pots were also well designed as containers to suit a highly mobile forager or herder lifestyle. I recall a lecture a few years ago at the Museum of Mankind, London, given by an archaeologist who saw clear evidence for a Roman influence along the Cape coast – the Khoekhoe had amphorae didn't they? Equifinality is an often neglected concept.

Smith deals directly with the appropriateness of the term Neolithic in an African context, and especially in southern Africa where all domesticated plants and animals were introduced. This paper should ideally be read in conjunction with the discussion in issues 3 & 4 of *Before Farming* 2004, and the point made here about the minimum numbers of sheep needed to maintain a herding economy undermines the argument made previously that some hunter-gatherers kept just a few animals for feasting or display. This debate is likely to continue for some time especially given the limited available archaeological evidence and clearly opposed interpretive frameworks.

Looking north, Grøn applies his considerable ethnographic experience among Evenk reindeer herders to the interpretation of late Upper Palaeolithic archaeological sites in northern Europe. As archaeologists we need more than occasionally to be reminded of the complex interplay between cosmology, religion, ideology and material culture. Grøn argues that the apparently insurmountable gap between observed behaviours based on beliefs and the archaeological record can be bridged by looking at repeated patterns in both sets of observations. He applies this argument to a well developed case study which shows clear parallels to Evenk uses of the landscape, spiritual as well as economic. This paper also brings to our attention early work by Russian scholars of the Evenk who might be little known to most readers.

The rock-art of Finland lacks such a body of ethnographic data to interpret its patterning, and in our final paper Seitsonen addresses a basic issue for researchers in the area – the age of the imagery. She integrates geological evidence for isostatic uplift in the landscape coupled with changes in lake level to develop a relative chronology. The resulting sequence shows a change in the content of the imagery from themes associated with hunter-gatherer populations to those with farming groups for which a link is made to the independently dated archaeological record. The terminology of the Finnish record may be unfamiliar, but what is clear is the cultural continuity across the foraging/farming transition.

The departmental review in this issue features a project rather than an institution. The 'Lucy to Language' project

transcends disciplines and departments and is the largest investigation of the social brain hypothesis to be undertaken. Gowlett gives an informal overview of the many interlinked themes among the twenty projects that will unfold over the next six years. A case study by Hallos uses the refitting of flint artefacts from the Middle Pleistocene site of Beeches Pit, Suffolk (UK) to reveal evidence of forward planning by hominins in northern Europe.

The long and remarkably productive collaboration between Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild is the double act that will feature in our 'Benefit of Foresight' later this month. I look forward to reading about their longstanding partnership, the article is currently in its final stages and we will be publishing it as soon as we can – one of the benefits of our online format.

We had hoped to begin this issue with a report on the state of the Onge of the Andaman Islands following last December's tsunami, but an unavoidable delay means we will now have to bring you up to date in the next issue.

The reaction to the open forum debate in our last issue on the status of *Homo floresiensis* was as polarised as the discussants' views. Some of you felt space should not have been given to the Henneberg & Thorne analysis and others that Brown and Morwood took an unnecessarily *ad hominem* stance. I think I can speak for both 'sides', however, when I say that we all look forward eagerly to the publication of further data.

Finally, returning north, I would like to welcome a new associate editor to the journal, Lars Larsson. Lars brings his international experience of archaeological research in Africa, Portugal as well as his native Sweden, neatly bridging north and south.

The Editor

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