

'Advances in the study of the Middle Palaeolithic of Arabia'

Abstract: "As a bridge between Africa and the rest of Eurasia, the Arabian Peninsula is of fundamental importance in our understanding of Middle and Upper Pleistocene hominin evolution, demography and dispersal. Dramatic environmental change in Arabia also makes it a pertinent place with which to study the relationship between humans and environments through time and the extent to which they could adapt to arid conditions. No pre-Holocene hominin fossils are known in Arabia, so the study of human evolution primarily rests on the analysis of lithic assemblages. In the last five years stratified and dated archaeological sites in Arabia have begun to be published, allowing the first robust comparisons both within Arabia and with surrounding regions. Here we report the results of the recent fieldwork of the Palaeodeserts Project, which has been conducting surveys and excavations in Saudi Arabia. We have conducted the first excavations of Middle Palaeolithic sites in Saudi Arabia, which have demonstrated high levels of technological diversity. Other results include the discovery of the oldest well-dated Palaeolithic site in Arabia (MIS 7). In this paper we present these recent findings and compare the character of lithic reduction at these sites using quantitative techniques to assemblages in surrounding regions of Africa and Asia. We argue that increasing evidence supports the hypothesis of Marine Isotope Stage 5 population dispersals from Africa into Arabia along terrestrial routes. This stands in contrast to some other models, which suggest that the dispersal of modern humans out of Africa occurred around 70-50 ka and followed a coastal route."