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- à l'assemblée générale annuelle – L'assemblée générale se réunit en début d'année, en région parisienne, et s'accompagne toujours d'une réunion scientifique. Elle permet au conseil d'administration de rendre compte de la gestion de la Société devant ses membres et à ceux-ci de l'interpeller directement. Le renouvellement partiel du conseil se fait à cette occasion.

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MESOLITHIC PALETHNOGRAPHY

RESEARCH ON OPEN-AIR SITES
BETWEEN LOIRE AND NECKAR

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ROUND-TABLE MEETING
IN PARIS (NOVEMBER 26–27, 2010)

as part of sessions organised by the Société préhistorique française

Published under the direction of

**Boris VALENTIN, Bénédicte SOUFFI, Thierry DUCROCQ,
Jean-Pierre FAGNART, Frédéric SÉARA, and Christian VERJUX**



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Mesolithic Pale ethnography
Research on open-air sites between Loire and Neckar
Proceedings from the international round-table meeting, Paris, November 26–27, 2010
Boris VALENTIN, Bénédicte SOUFFI, Thierry DUCROCQ, Jean-Pierre FAGNART,
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The Mesolithic of the Centre Region: state of research

Christian VERJUX, Bénédicte SOUFFI, Olivier RONCIN, Laurent LANG, Fiona KILDÉA,
Sandrine DESCHAMPS and Gabriel CHAMAUX

Abstract: Following a period that essentially focused on the analysis of collections from pedestrian surveys, our understanding of the Mesolithic period in the Centre region has recently been updated, most notably in connection with the growing number of rescue excavations. Although the chrono-cultural framework has been refined, the majority of dates still fall within a short period between around 8200 and 7600 cal BC, i.e. the end of the Preboreal and the onset of the Boreal. The preservation conditions of most excavations have nonetheless rendered pale ethnographic information rare.

THE CENTRE region occupies a large part of the western half of the Paris Basin, from the Île-de-France to the borders of the Poitou region up until the northern limits of the Massif Central. It essentially belongs to the Loire watershed and, to a lesser extent, that of the Seine for the north and east of the Loiret, as well as the north of the Eure-et-Loir. More than 200 Mesolithic sites, the majority represented by surface collections, are currently known from this vast territory. However, their distribution is unequal given the nature of certain areas being less propitious for the detection of sites (Sologne, Orléans Forest...), but also due to the fact that surveyors have, for example, been more active in the departments of the Indre-et-Loire, parts of the Indre and in the north of Loiret.

BRIEF HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Initial Mesolithic research in the Centre region represented single notes, artefact inventories and short papers (Giroux, 1912; Cordier, 1955, 1958 and 1965; Nouel, 1963; Rigaud, 1971; Cuffez and Cuffez, 1981; Berthouin, 1986). More in-depth work was carried out in part of the region during the 1970s by J.-G. Rozoy lead-

ing to the recognition of a new culture, the Beaugencian, linked with a small excavation in 1971-1972 at Beaugency (Rozoy, 1976 and 1978, p. 825-890). During the 1990s, A. Thevenin led a series of studies with volunteer surveyors that produced a seriation of industries and an overview of the survey results (Audoux and Thevenin, 1995; Bazin et al., 1995; Dufour and Leconte, 1995 and 2001; Girard, 1995a and b). The development of this initial chrono-cultural framework based on microliths demonstrated all phases of the Mesolithic to be represented in surface site collections.

UPDATING OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

During the last two decades numerous academic works, some still employing traditional approaches essentially based on microlith typology (Girard 1994, Violot 1994, Bornet 1997a), along with more recent studies integrating insights from lithic technology (Robbins 2001, Yvert 2002, Ollivier 2003) have generated new information in several different areas. At the same time, paleo-environmental data has been recovered from rescue excavations such as those at Tours in the Indre-et-Loire (Vivent, 1998) and in the west of the region (Visset et al., 1999;

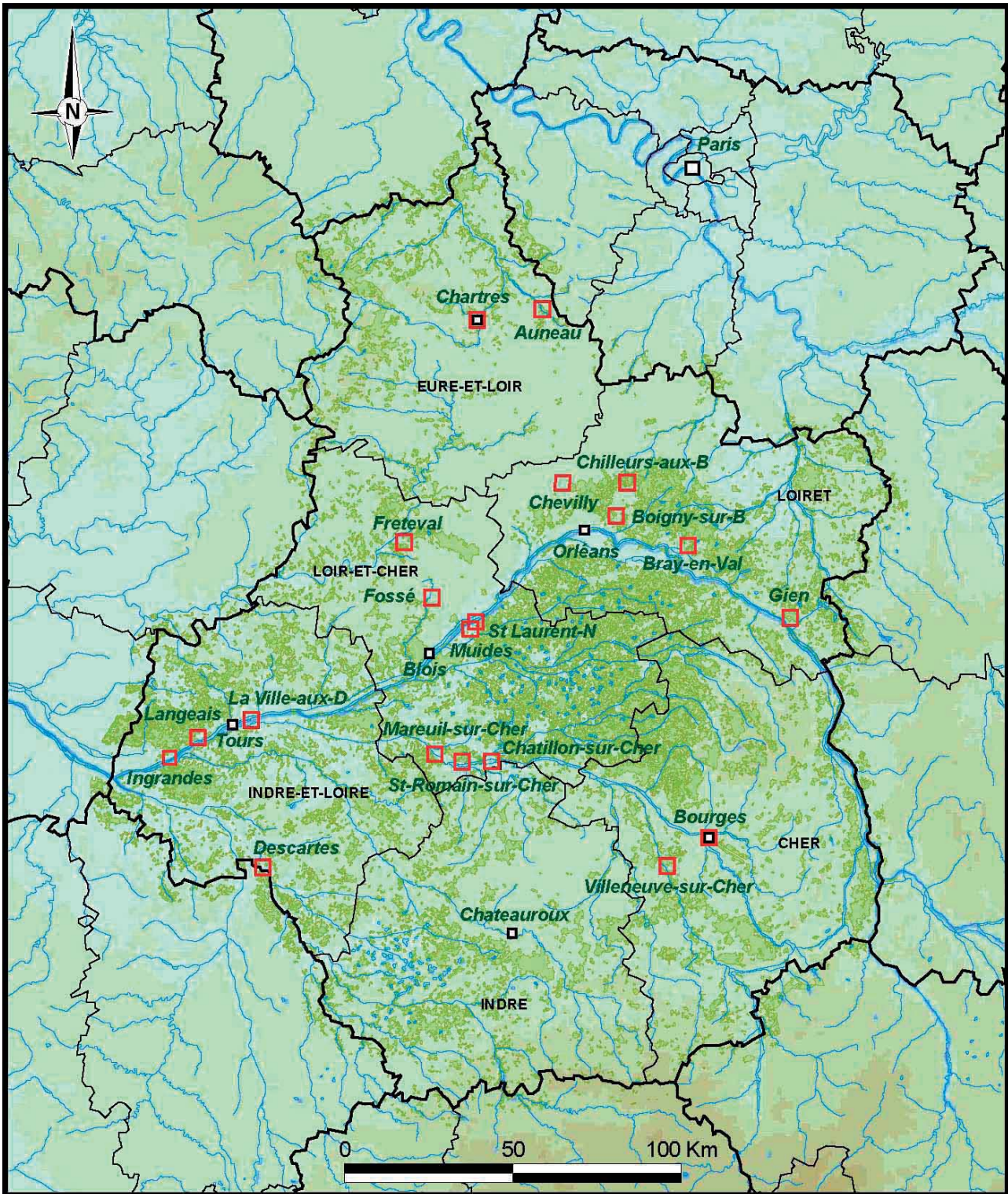


Fig. 1 – Sites and indications of Mesolithic sites discovered in the Centre region during evaluations or diagnostics between 1990 and 2010 (Source SRA Centre – BD Carto). Forest cover is indicated only for the Centre region (map C. Verjux).

Cyprien et al., 2004), as well as in the framework of specific research programs as at Auneau in the Eure-et-Loir (Richard and Limondin *in* Verjux, 2002) and in the Avaray valley in the Loir-et-Cher (Garcin et al., 2001). Several research excavations have also produced Mesolithic

remains, for example at Ligueil (Indre-et-Loire), Villentrois (Indre), and Muides (Loir-et-Cher), however without doubt the most important is the site of Parc du Château at Auneau in the Eure-et-Loir (Villes, 1990; Bornet, 1997b; Irribarria, 1997; Verjux, 2000).

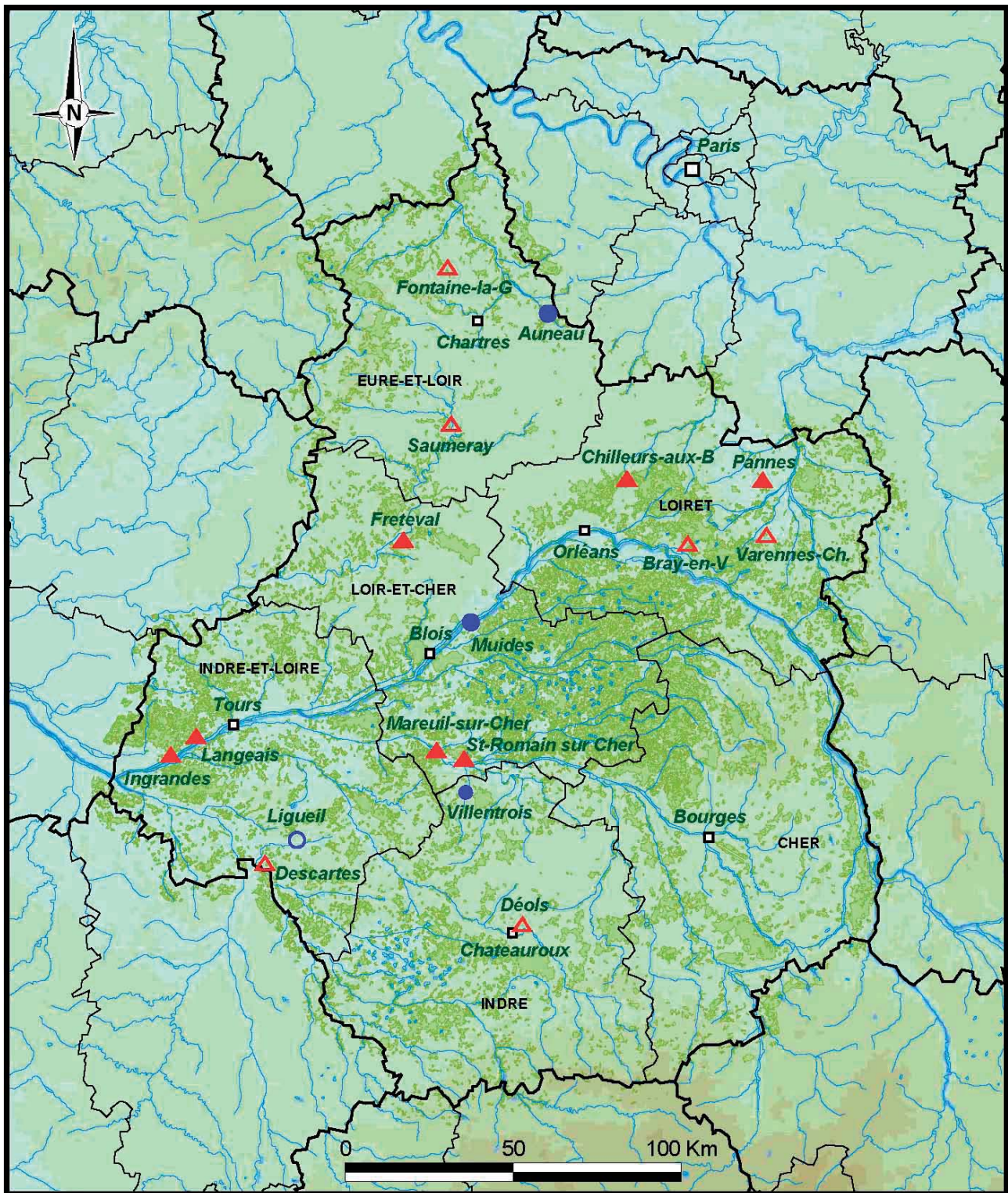


Fig. 2 – Mesolithic research and rescue projects carried out in the Centre region between 1990 and 2010. Blue circles: research excavations; red triangles: rescue excavations. Symbol outlines correspond to the excavation of Mesolithic remains found during projects concerning other periods (map C. Verjux).

Prompted by the Regional Archaeology Service of the Centre Region (Ministry of Culture), particular focus has been placed on the identification and characterisation of Mesolithic sites in rescue contexts (fig. 1 and fig. 2): about twenty Mesolithic sites have been

discovered during evaluations and diagnostics between 1990 and 2010, seven of which were thoroughly excavated. At the same time, Mesolithic remains were also discovered on half a dozen projects concerning other archaeological periods.

SEVERAL IMPORTANT FIELDWORK PROJECTS

Although rescue excavations had been carried during the 1990s at Fréteval (Loir-et-Cher), Descartes (Indre-et-Loire) and at Pannes (Loiret)—see Boguzewski et al., 1994; Boguzewski and Le Grand, 1996; Violot, 1997—, the nine sites presented here (by year of discovery) represent the most significant projects given the considerable quantities of material recovered, their excellent preservation or their location in areas where the Mesolithic is little known.

The majority represent genuine excavations with the exception of the diagnostic at Chevilly and the fortuitous discovery of Mesolithic remains on the proto-historic site of Bray-en-Val (Loiret).

Two sites are found in the department of the Eure-et-Loir, two in the Indre-et-Loire, two in the Loir-et-Cher and three in the Loiret. The south-east of the region (departments of the Cher and Indre) has not seen any recent large-scale excavations. In certain cases, fieldwork or analyses are still ongoing therefore making some data or interpretations subject to revision.

Le Parc du Château at Auneau, Eure-et-Loir (C. Verjux)

This site lies upon a slightly raised confluence zone north of the Beauce plateau, 20 km east of Chartres. During research excavations, nearly 70 features cut into the Fontainebleau sand and often attaining the underlying sandstone bed, were excavated between 1987 and 2001 over a surface of 200 m². Exceptional site conditions, especially the excellent preservation of bone, allowed archaeological analyses to distinguish several functional categories of features (fig. 3, Verjux, 2000 and 2002): burials, intentional deposits of animal remains (aurochs skulls, deer antler), fire pits containing heated stones, postholes sometimes containing large stone wedges, refuse pits, occasional sandstone extraction pits for the manufacture of heavy-duty tools (large scrapers, prismatic tools). The presence of significant numbers of features and the characteristics of certain ones (pits with stratified fills and cylindrical profiles, equivalent diameters and depths between 1 m and 1.5 m), although reused as rubbish dumps, are suggestive of buried storage structures and therefore pose questions as to the nature and duration of the occupations (Verjux, 2004 and 2006). The lithic industry (fig. 4)



Fig. 3 – Parc du Château at Auneau (Eure-et-Loir), different types of features identified at the site. 1: burial; 2: intentional deposit of faunal remains; 3: hearth; 4: sandstone extraction; 5: posthole; 6: refuse pit; 7: storage pit (photos C. Verjux).

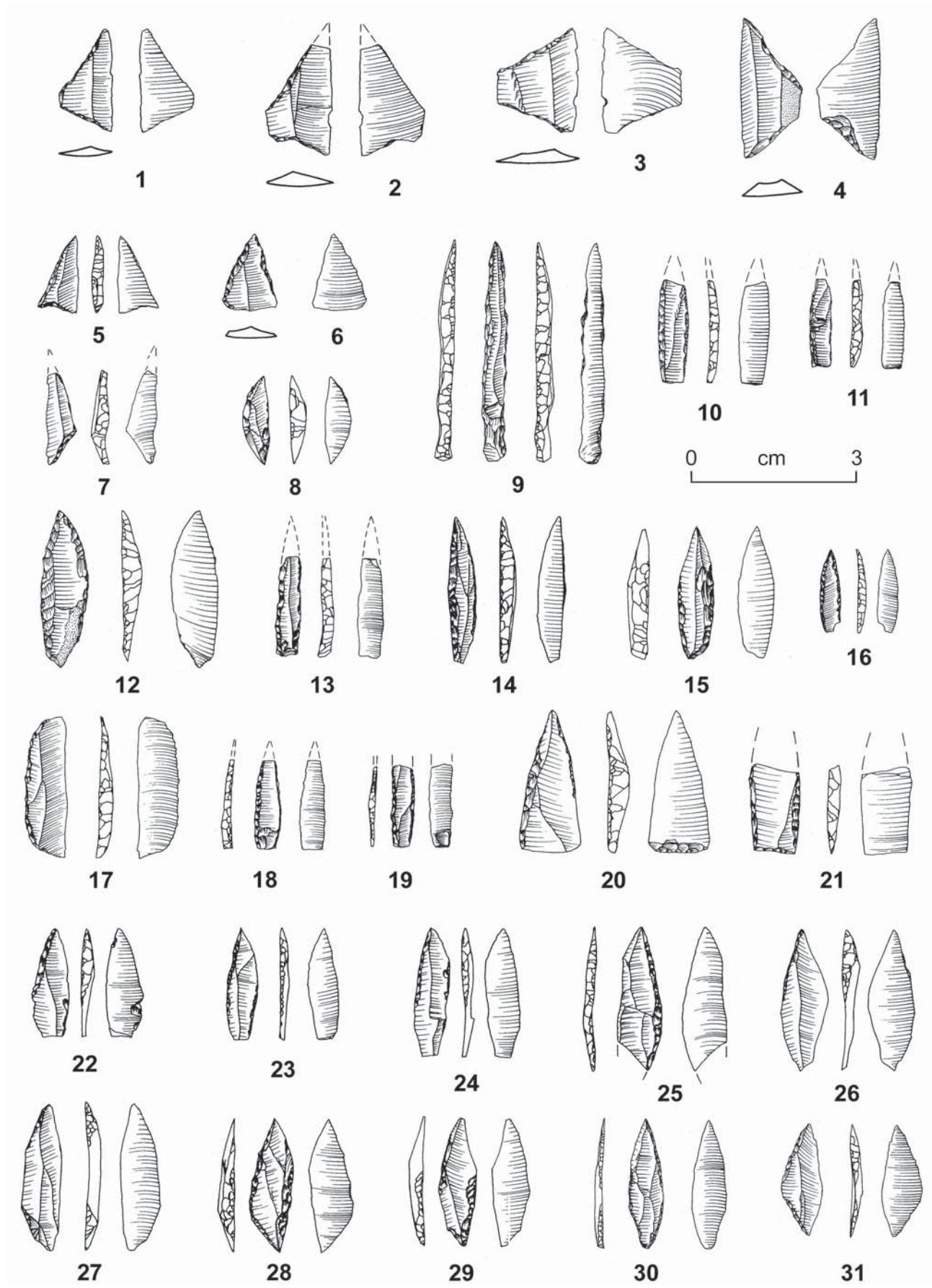


Fig. 4 – Parc du Château at Auneau (Eure-et-Loir), microliths. 1-2: pit 1; 3: pit 39; 4: no context; 5: pit 7; 6: no context; 7: pit 8; 8: pit 32; 9-11: pit 3; 12-13: pit 21; 14: no context; 15: pit 34; 16: no context; 17-19: pit 12; 20-21: pit 36; 22-29: pit 43; 30-31: pit B (drawings C. Verjux).

Site	Reference	Sample	Material	BP date	Calibrated date
Auneau	Ly 4731	Grave 3	Bone	6 655 ± 90	-5 870 -5 280
	Ly 5606	Grave 6	Bone	8 350 ± 105	-7 528 -7 069
	Ly 7097	Grave 7	Bone	6 825 ± 105	-5 913 -5 501
	Ly 7972	Fireplace 4	Charcoal	6 930 ± 85	-5 939 -5 623
	Oxa 5643	Aurochs skull 1	Bone	9 010 ± 90	-8 237 -7 834
	Oxa 5644	Aurochs skull 2	Bone	8 710 ± 80	-7 923 -7 560
Bray-en-Val	GrA-38073	983/026 m ²	Hazelnut	8 805 ± 40	-8 005 -7 727
Chilleurs-aux-Bois	Poz-27875	F929 M13 A/M12 C P.1	Hazelnut	8 690 ± 50	-7 840 -7 590
	Poz-27876	F929 M13 A/M12 C P.3	Hazelnut	8 790 ± 50	-8 200 -7 650
Ingrandes-de	Lyon-2168 (OxA)	12/85 m ²	Hazelnut	8 730 ± 40	-7 955 -7 604
Touraine	Lyon-2169 (OxA)	13/88 m ²	Hazelnut	8 695 ± 45	-7 937 -7 598
	Lyon-2170 (OxA)	15/87 (Sd 2) m ²	Hazelnut	8 820 ± 40	-8 198 -7 753
Mareuil-sur-Cher	ETH-31853	Sd 288/866 p. 2	Hazelnut	8 980 ± 65	-8 289 à -7 945
	ETH-31854	Sd 288/866 p. 3	Hazelnut	9 015 ± 65	-8 410 à -7 964
	ETH-31855	Sd 288/866 p. 4	Hazelnut	8 850 ± 65	-8 226 à -7 751
Saint-Romain	Lyon-2294 (OxA)	Locus 1	Hazelnut	8 795 ± 45	-8 196 -7 681
sur-Cher	Lyon-2295 (OxA)	Locus 1	Hazelnut	8 785 ± 45	-8 195 -7 654
	Lyon-2311 (OxA)	Locus 3	Hazelnut	8 820 ± 50	-8 201 -7 747
	Lyon-2382 (OxA)	Locus 4	Hazelnut	8 875 ± 50	-8 233 -7 830

Table 1 – ¹⁴C dates for Mesolithic sites in the Centre region.

indicates several occupation phases spanning the end of the Early Mesolithic to the Final Mesolithic which is in accordance with the available dates that range between 8200 and 5500 cal BC (table 1). The majority of the features seem however to belong to the Middle Mesolithic.

La Prairie d'Ingrandes at Ingrandes-de-Touraine, Indre-et-Loire (L. Lang and F. Kildéa)

Located in the Loire valley, 20 km south-west of Tours on the recent alluvia of the river, this site was excavated in 2000 over a surface of 120 m² (Lang and Kildéa, 2007). The archaeological level was preserved within a depression and yielded more than 6,000 pieces (fig. 5), including 111 cores and around 1,300 blades and bladelets. Essentially unipolar reduction was preferentially carried out by soft stone-hammer percussion. One hundred and twenty-five microliths were recovered, half of which are isosceles triangles (fig. 6), as well as obliquely truncated points and points with truncated bases, fusiform crescents and points. The series is completed by 69 tools, for the most part on flakes, and small retouched blades. Finally, a crystalline rock grinder with traces of red ochre over its entire surface was also recovered.

A dozen burnt bone splinters were recovered during sieving, as well as fragments of hazelnut shells that produced three radiocarbon dates between 8200 and 7600 cal BC (table 1), however the techno-typological characteristics of the lithic industry link it to the Early Mesolithic.

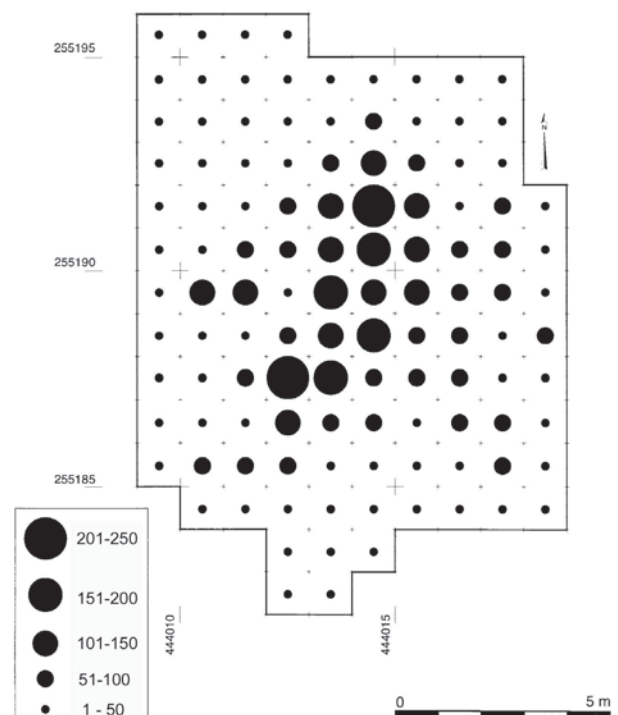


Fig. 5 – La Prairie d'Ingrandes at Ingrandes-de-Touraine (Indre-et-Loire), density of Mesolithic remains (Lang and Kildéa, 2007).

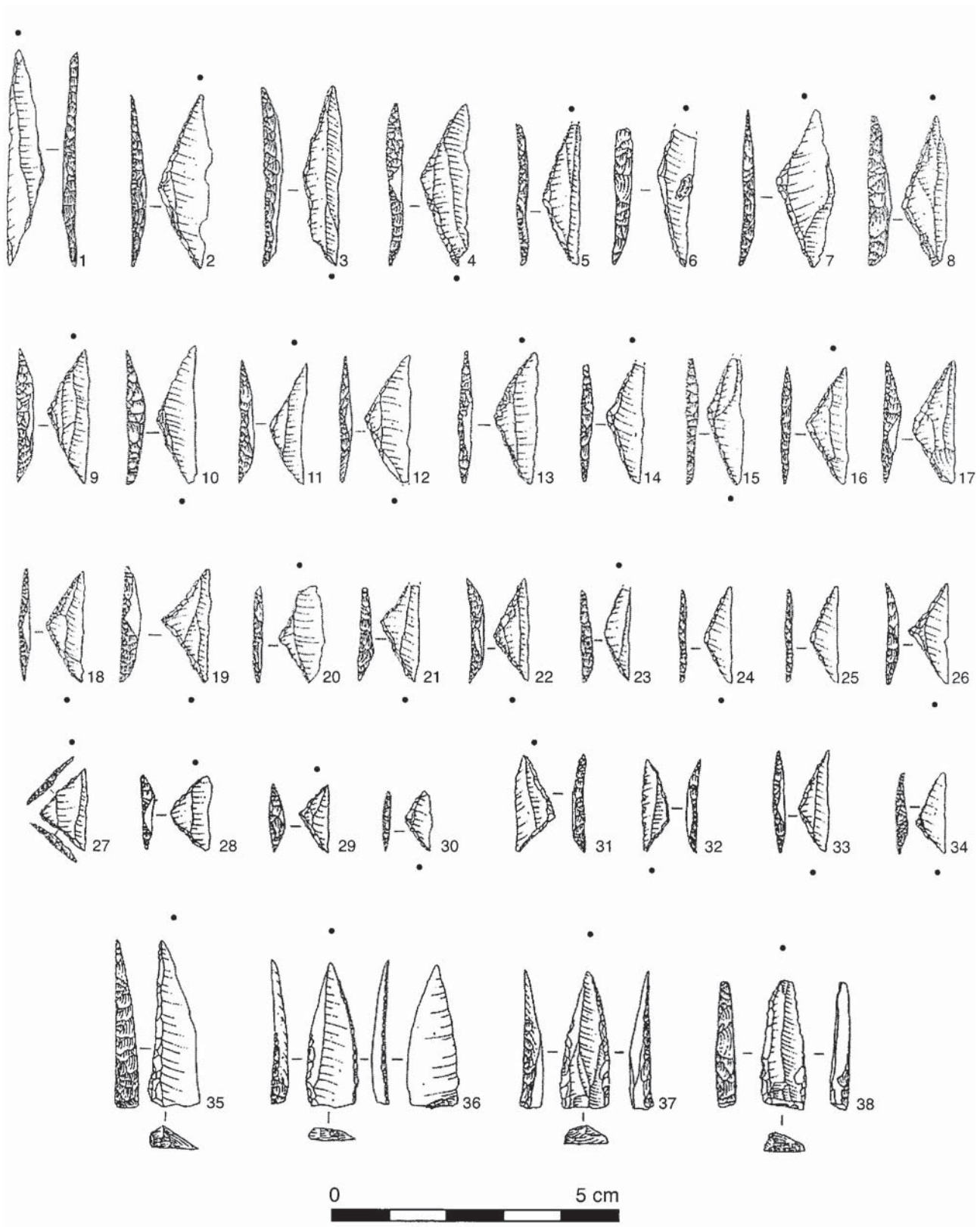


Fig. 6 –La Prairie d’Ingrandes at Ingrandes-de-Touraine (Indre-et-Loire), microliths. 1–34: triangles; 35–38: points with retouched bases (Lang and Kildéa, 2007).



Fig. 7 – Le Chêne des Fouteaux at Saint-Romain-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher), general plan of the loci and density of remains by square metre. The dotted line indicates the artificial limit between loci 1 and 2 (Kildéa, 2008a).

**Le Chêne des Foutaux
at Saint-Romain-sur-Cher, Loir-et-Cher
(F. Kildéa)**

This vast site, found some 30 km south of Blois on the sandy Tertiary formations of the plateau bordering the right bank of the Cher river, was identified and excavated

in 2001 (Kildéa, 2008a). Following the identification of the lithic concentrations, five excavated loci yielded three distinct assemblages (fig. 7).

Locus 2, excavated over some 100 m², produced 8,000 pieces, including 21 cores, 70 tools, 214 microburins and 220 microliths. The densest concentration extended over some 30 m². More than half of the identifiable microliths

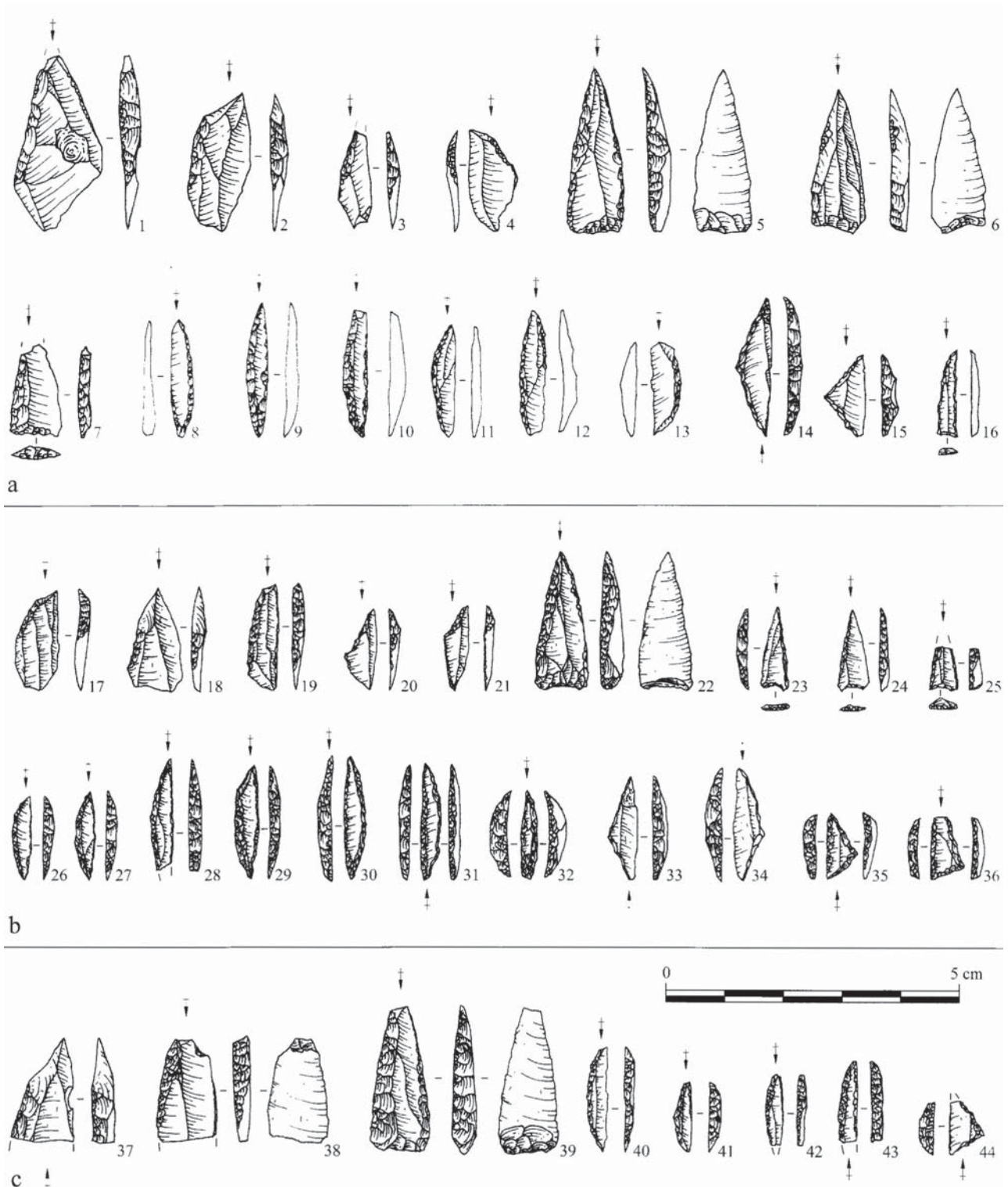


Fig. 8 – Le Chêne des Foutaux at Saint-Romain-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher), crescents and points from the lithic assemblages. a: locus 1; b: locus 3; c: locus 4 (Kildéa, 2008a).

are isosceles triangles, however the assemblage also includes points with transversely or obliquely truncated bases, crescents, scalene triangles and several Montclus triangles. The debitage is of the Coincy style and on typological grounds the assemblage can be attributed to Early Mesolithic, probably the second half of the Preboreal.

Around 15,000 pieces of worked flint were recovered from loci 1, 3 and 4 excavated over surfaces ranging between 40 to 100 m². These loci yielded very similar assemblages that differ significantly however from the one discussed above (fig. 8). The assemblage is composed of 72 cores, 173 tools, 410 microburins and 287 microliths. Although the morphology of the cores and their modes of exploitation vary, they remain within the Coincy style. Fairly fusiform crescents dominate an assemblage that also includes obliquely truncated points, points with retouched bases, scalene triangles, as well as several Sauveterre points or isosceles triangles. These three loci are all attributable to the Middle Mesolithic with dates produced from hazelnut shells placing them to between 8200 and 7600 cal BC (table 1).

Finally, locus 5, excavated over a surface of just 42 m², has produced the smallest assemblage with only 2,300 pieces including 9 cores, 19 tools, 25 microburins and 47 microliths which are mainly scalene bladelets and Montclus triangles. This collection can also be assigned to the Coincy style, however it is made on lesser quality raw materials (gelifracted blocks) in comparison with the other loci and blade production was less important.

La Guériverie at Langeais, Indre-et-Loire (L. Lang)

This site is found on the plateau dominating the Loire valley, a dozen kilometres south-west of Tours (Leroy, 2003). Excavations in 2002 over approximately 250 m² yielded 160,000 pieces, including 1,500 microliths recovered during the hand-sorting of sieved sediments. Artefact distributions indicate several different occupation units. The lithic industry, dominated by isosceles triangles, can be attributed to the Early Mesolithic which is consistent with the radiocarbon dates produced on hazelnut shells.



Fig. 9 – La Croix de Bagnoux at Mareuil-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher). Plan of the site and the Mesolithic test pits (graphic design INRAP).

**La Croix de Bagneux at Mareuil-sur-Cher,
Loir-et-Cher (F. Kildéa and B. Souffi)**

Excavations of this site found upon the recent alluvia of the left bank of the Cher river, 30 km south of Blois,

took place during the winter of 2004 (Kildéa, 2008b). One square metre test pits, distributed every 5 m, were dug over an area of approximately 100 m². A total of 33 test-pits returned 6,940 artefacts greater than 1 cm, together with 37,659 smaller pieces. The Mesolithic

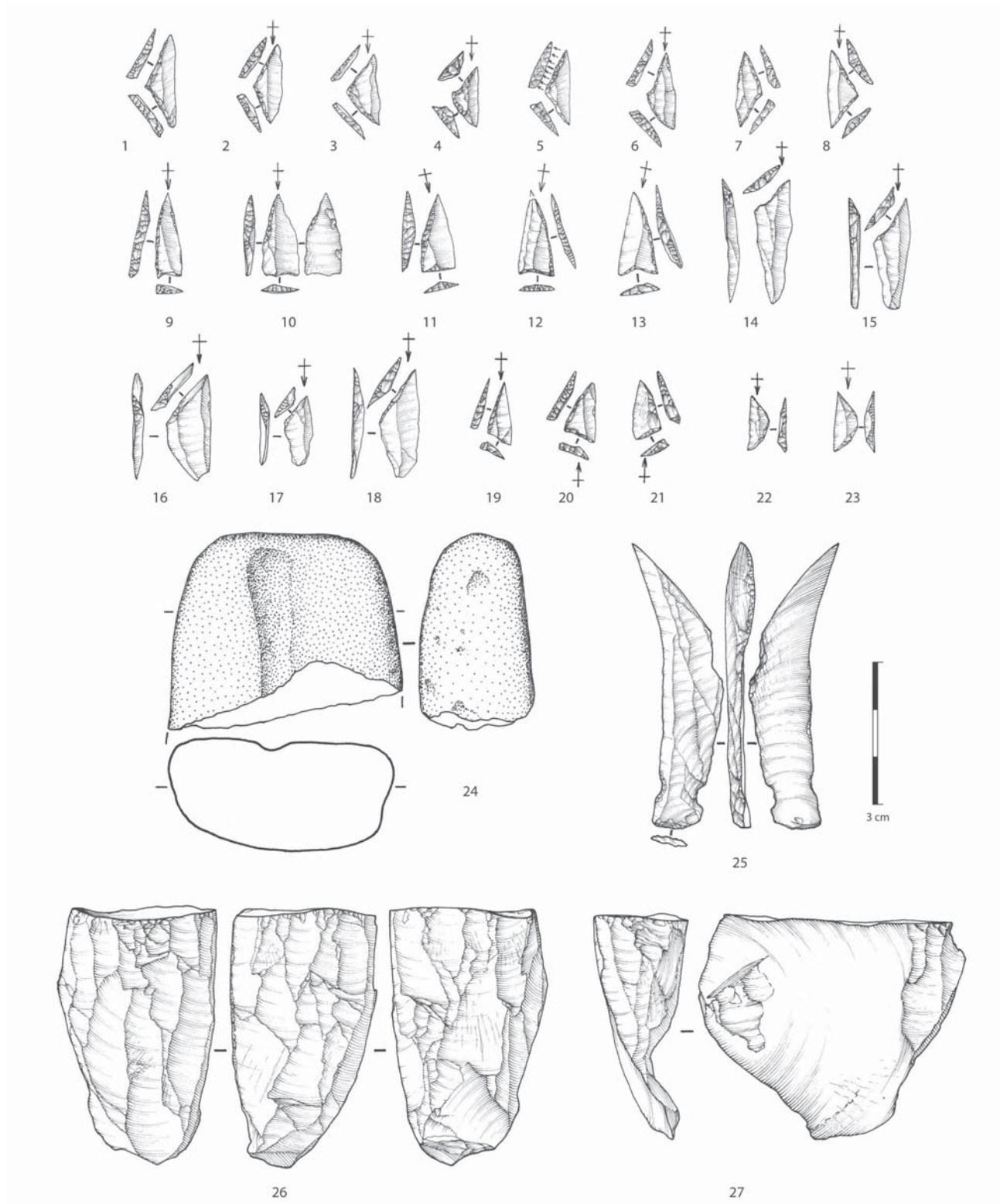


Fig. 10 – La Croix de Bagneux at Mareuil-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher), microliths and domestic tools. 1–8: isosceles triangles; 9–13: points with retouched bases; 14–18: obliquely truncated points; 19–21: scalene triangles; 22–23: crescents; 24: fragment of a grooved abradar; 25: blade with basal notches; 26–27: cores (drawings E. Boitard-Bidaut, INRAP).

industry is dispersed vertically (up to 90 cm) with a clear unimodal distribution within a level of localised banded sands derived from the east of the exposed area. In the absence of bone, three samples of burnt hazelnut shells from spits 2, 3 and 4 of the densest test-pit (290/866) were dated to between 8400 and 7750 cal BC (table 1).

The industry is made on locally available Lower Turonian flint cobbles collected from secondary contexts. It is characterised by a prevalence of microliths over the domestic tool component (4% versus 1.2% of the products greater than 1 cm) dominated by retouched flakes, blades and bladelets. We can also note the presence of a blade with a basal notch, otherwise known as a ‘Rouffignac knife’, and a fragment of a grooved sandstone abrader (fig. 10, no. 24). The microlith assemblage is typologically homogeneous (fig. 10, nos. 1–23) which is coherent with the radiometric dates. The association of isosceles triangles and points with or without retouched bases is generally attributable to a phase of the regional Early Mesolithic, as at the slightly earlier site of Ingrandes-de-Touraine whose lithic assemblage differs in the larger size of certain microliths. The most similar assemblage is that of Saint-Romain-sur-Cher (locus 2), especially the squat morphology of the isosceles triangles and the points with retouched bases.

Vallée du Nant at Chevilly, Loiret (O. Roncin)

Discovered in the small discrete Nant valley in 2006 during a diagnostic phase preceding the construction of the A19 autoroute, the site is located in the eastern area of the Beauce plateau, 15 km north of Orléans. A concentration of lithic and faunal remains was discovered at a depth of 90 cm and fully excavated over 5 m². However, the extent of this concentration may have surpassed the limits of the autoroute. The site’s depositional conditions resulted in the rapid burial of the remains which is responsible for their excellent preservation (presence of bone remains and lithic refits). The assemblage is very coherent in terms of the general freshness of the pieces, as well as their techno-typological homogeneity.

The concentration yielded 966 flint pieces and 7 poorly preserved bones, mainly horse teeth. The lithic assemblage is composed of 925 debitage products, 7 cores, 20 tools and 14 microliths (fig. 11 and fig. 12). Debitage is geared towards the unipolar production of fairly regular and rectilinear bladelets associated with rectilinear blades obtained from very carefully prepared and exploited opposed platform cores. All of these elements indicate direct soft stone-hammer percussion. The microlith component is comprised of backed bladelets and obliquely truncated points. The latter are significantly homogeneous both in their morphology and method of manufacture, despite varying degrees of obliqueness in the truncation. Tools are dominated by retouched or truncated blades and bladelets associated with the occasional flake tools.

The presence of horse and the characteristics of the lithic industry renders the site of Chevilly more comparable with the last industries of the Northwestern European Final Palaeolithic, dated to the Younger Dryas-Preboreal transition (epi-Ahrensbourgian), than with the initial Mesolithic industries (Early Mesolithic derived from the Ahrensbourgian). However, points of comparison still remain rare for Northern France (Fagnart, 2009; Valentin, 2008).

Bois au Cœur at Bray-en-Val, Loiret (B. Souffi)

This site was discovered in 2007 during excavations of a proto-historic site in a quarry exploiting the lower alluvia of the Loire, 30 km east of Orléans (Lardé, 2008). The Mesolithic material is concentrated at the top of an elongated fluvial bar parallel to the present course of the river. The majority of the pieces were found in the first 20 cm below the surface as the Mesolithic level had been significantly disturbed by the proto-historic occupation. Nine test pits produced 137 pieces, mostly flakes, and a further 1,014 were recovered during sieving. The assemblage includes 8 microliths, 8 microburins, two endscrapers and two cores. The raw material is in the form of cobbles with rolled cortex collected from the alluvial deposits. Although generally fragmented and small in size, the microlith component appears homogeneous (fig. 13) and is dominated by un-characteristic points with retouched bases and points with transverse bases. A Sauveterre point and a fragment of point with flat inverse retouch were also recovered.

One of the two dates produced on burned hazelnut shell fragments falls between 8000 and 7700 cal BC (table 1) or the first half of the Boreal and may correspond to the Mesolithic occupation. This small collection once again underlines the potential of the Loire valley for future Mesolithic discoveries.

La Rouche at Chilleurs aux-Bois, Loiret (S. Deschamps)

This site is located on the south side of the small Laye du Sud valley, 20 km north of Orléans. A 70 m² area excavated in 2008 (Fournier, 2010) yielded a lithic assemblage composed of 48 blades, 193 bladelets, 350 flakes, 213 chips, 25 cores and 7 microliths. Debitage was geared towards the production of small, relatively regular blades and bladelets (with 2 or 3 faces) by direct stone percussion using a somewhat simple Coincy style reduction strategy. The few domestic tools (n = 18) are made on flakes, blades and bladelets. Use-wear analysis was not possible due to the significant patina of the pieces. The 7 microliths can be separated into three types: one fusiform point, three points with retouched bases and two crescents.

The presence of bovids and suidae among the 25 bone remains, together with the coexistence of two environments identified by the malacofauna, one forested and the

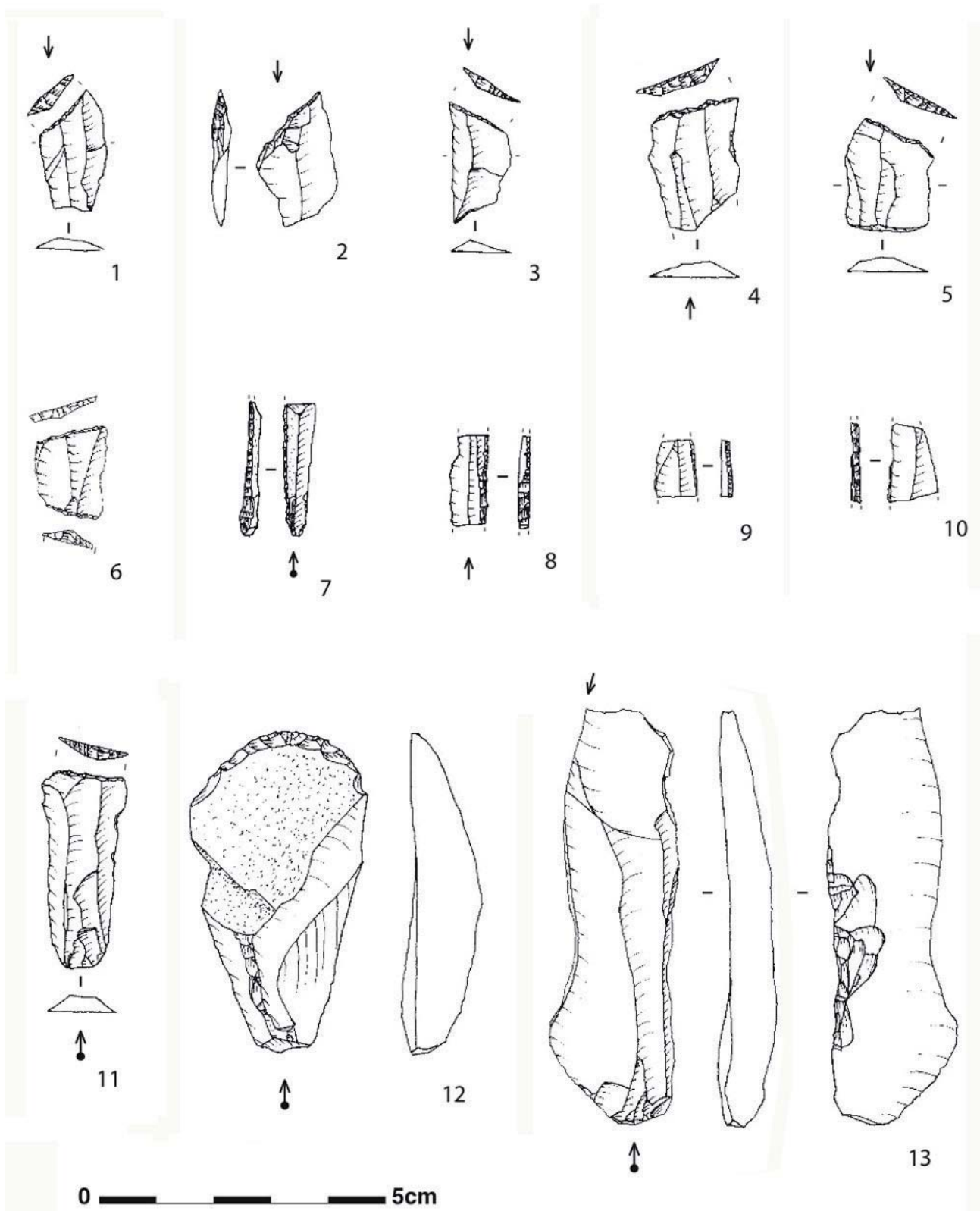


Fig. 11 – Vallée du Nant at Chevilly (Loiret), microliths and tools. 1–5: obliquely truncated points; 6: trapeze; 7–10: backed bladelets ; 11: truncated bladelet; 12: endscraper; 13: composite blade tool (drawings O. Roncin).

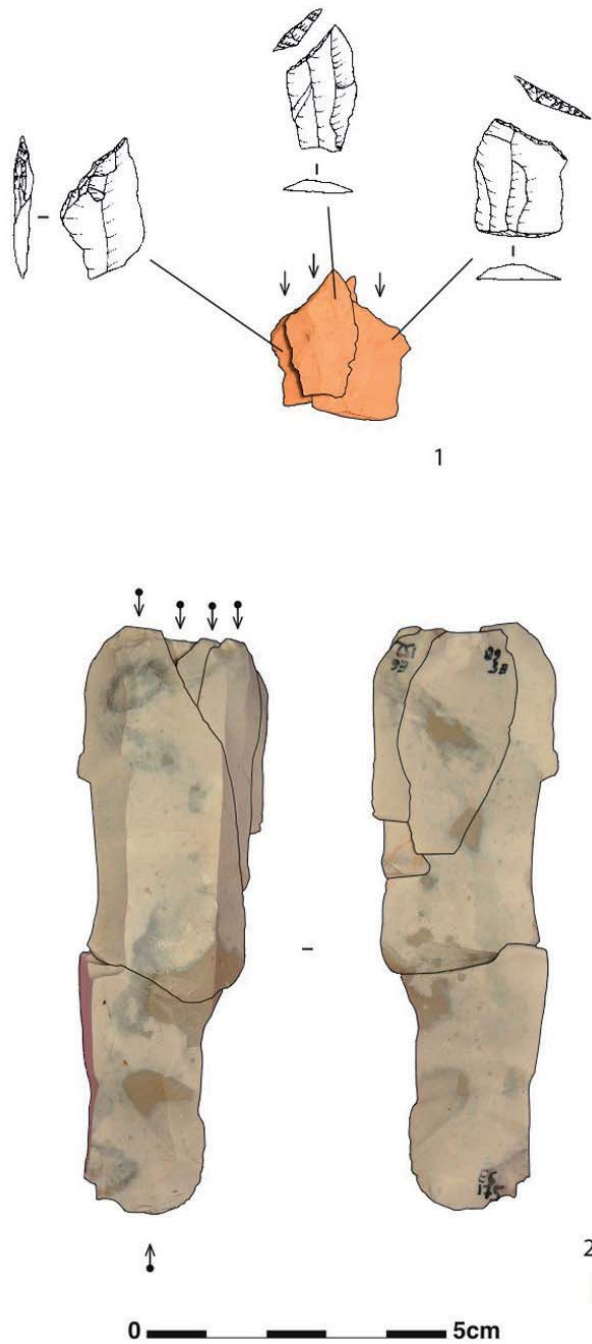


Fig. 12 – Vallée du Nant at Chevilly (Loiret), refits. 1: refits of three obliquely truncated points; 2: refits of blade and bladelet products (drawings O. Roncin).

other humid and open (clearings and woodland edges), is coherent with the Boreal chronozone, while the two dates produced on hazelnut shells fall between 8200 and 7600 cal BC (table 1).

The lithic industry, fauna (mammal and malacofauna) and vegetal remains (shelled fruits) recovered from this site highlights the informative potential of a small plateau watershed often considered as unfavourable to the preservation of Mesolithic remains.

The Hermitage at Auneau, Eure-et-Loir (G. Chamaux)

In 2009 and 2010 several Mesolithic occupations located within a meander of the Aunay river were identified during an archaeological evaluation carried out along the Auneau bypass road (Chamaux, 2009). These different occupations are found in contrasting topographic positions between an abrupt northern bank thinly overlain by silts and a gentler southern bank composed of alluvial and colluvial deposits which cover an ancient terrace. The valley bottom was infilled by fine alluvial formations and peat deposits (fig. 15 and 16).

The diagnostic revealed three Mesolithic levels on the valley floor. The first two were found 48 cm below the surface to depths of between 1.5 and 1.8 m. The upper level spread over 27 m² is contained within a 30 cm deep silty alluvial horizon with a colluvial component. Therefore, the primary position of this level cannot be guaranteed. Thirty-eight pieces, a majority of which are flakes, were recovered along with three bladelets and a unipolar bladelet core. The second level, found within a fluvatile silty-clay deposit sealed by a highly organic clay level, yielded 49 lithic elements over a 15 m² surface. A test-pit 4 m from the banks of the Aunay identified a third extremely well-preserved archaeological level within a fluvatile grey clayey silt horizon 1.9 m below the surface. This level, excavated over only 3 m², produced 111 pieces of worked flint: 57 flakes, 24 blades and bladelets, two cores and some technologically characteristic pieces (half-core tablets, microburins). Two pieces could be refit. Debitage was oriented towards the production of fairly regular blades and bladelets by soft stone-hammer percussion. Burnt animal bones were also recovered during sieving. At the base of the slope, 75 m south of the Aunay, an extensively exposed area connected to the excavation of proto-historic and historic structures revealed a scatter of lithic remains and a combustion feature on a surface of approximately 900 m². One hundred and sixty-three worked flints were recovered, including 7 unipolar bladelet cores, 22 blade or bladelet elements, 2 large tools, 2 points with retouched bases and a crescent. The debitage style and the microliths place this assemblage to the Middle Mesolithic.

These new discoveries in the village of Auneau, 3 km downstream and northwest of the site of Parc du Château, indicates a high-density of Mesolithic occupations in the small Aunay Valley.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Both plateau and valley floor sites are equally well-represented in this series of nine sites. However, some of these plateau sites are themselves located in small valleys. Specific excavations methods adapted to the preservation conditions of the Mesolithic levels were employed on most sites. In fact, the frequency of sandy

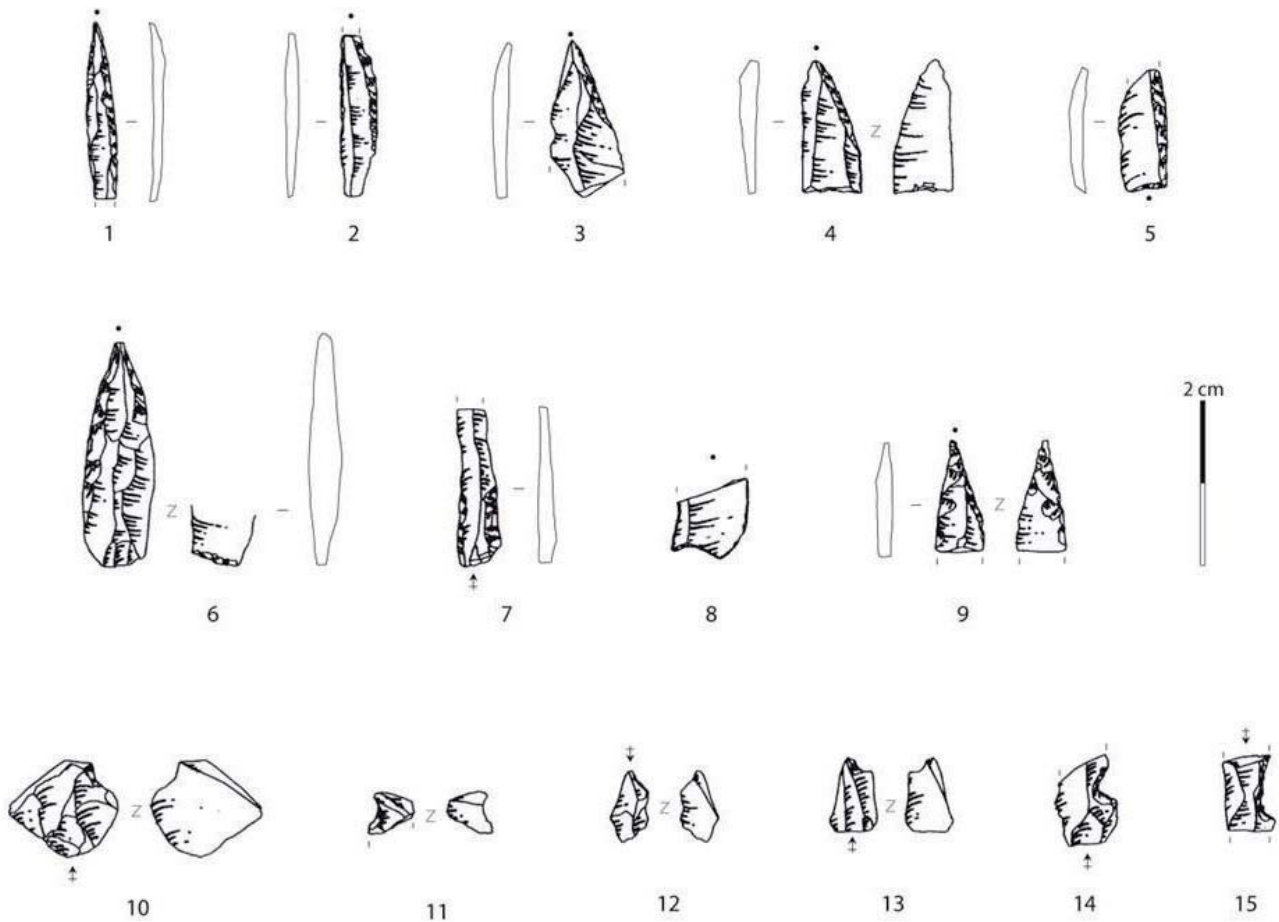


Fig. 13 – Bois au Cœur at Bray-en-Val (Loiret), microliths and microburins (drawings B. Souffi).

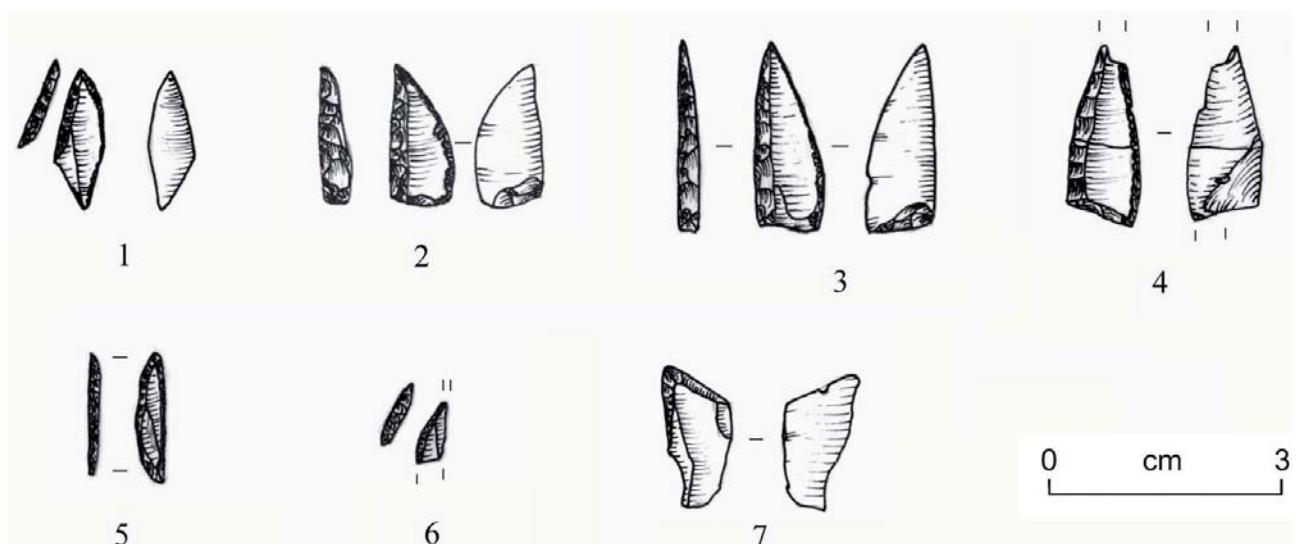


Fig. 14 – La Rouche at Chilleurs aux-Bois (Loiret), microliths (drawings S. Deschamps).

substrates and the near absence of bone led to the systematic sampling of sediments by $\frac{1}{4}$ m² collected from spits of 5 or 10 cm, followed by wet sieving. The three-dimensional recording of the archaeological material was

however done only in certain cases. The planning of the remains was carried out in parallel with the excavation in order to detect any artefact concentrations and adapt the excavation accordingly.

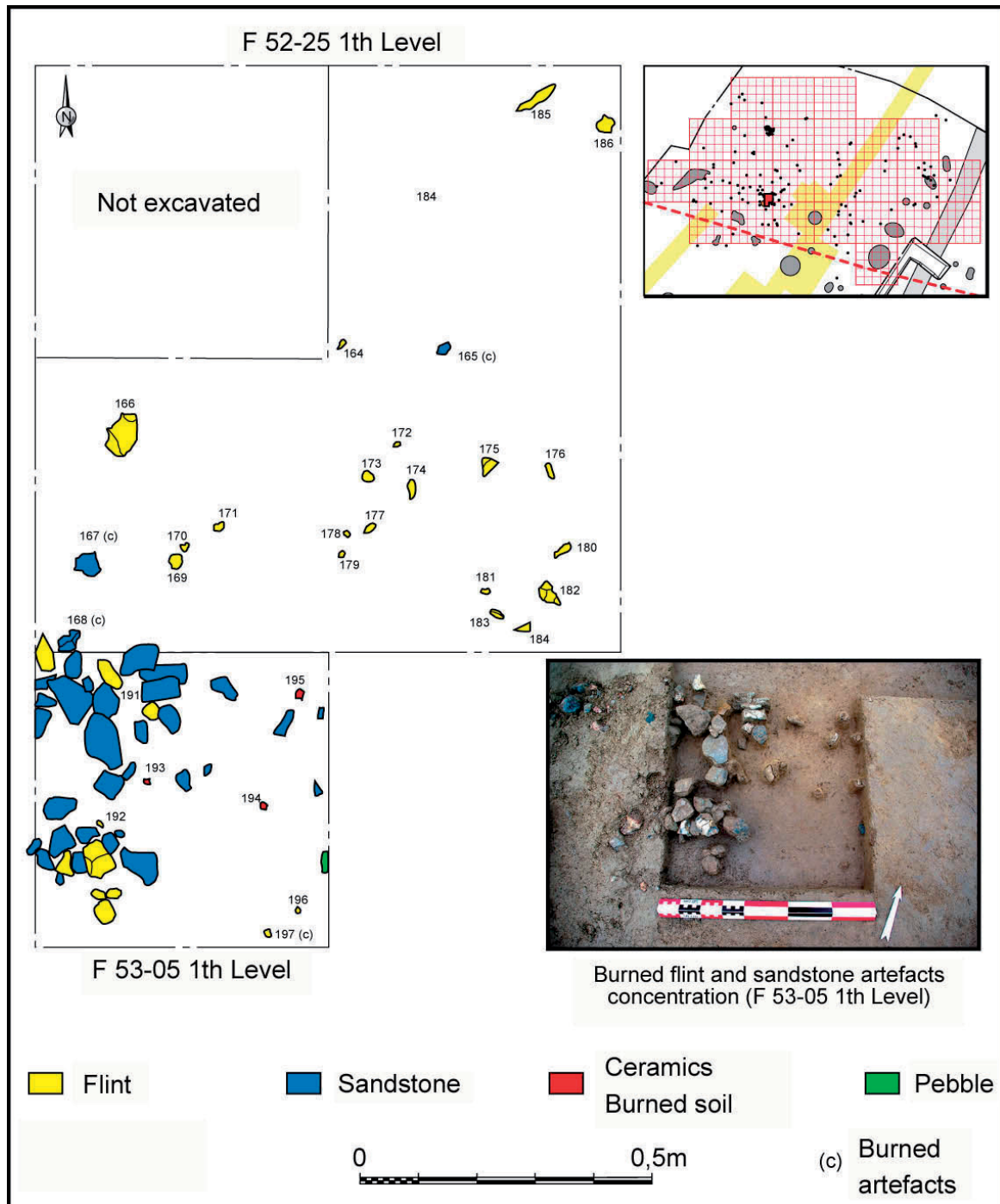


Fig. 15 – L'Hermitage at Auneau (Eure-et-Loir), mesolithic material discovered at the base of the hillside (after G. Chamaux).

In chrono-cultural terms, the information provided by these discoveries permits a re-evaluation of the region's Early and Middle Mesolithic phases. New data concerning the Early Mesolithic (end of the Preboreal/onset of the Boreal) was also collected and complements already available information derived from surface surveys (fig. 17), most notably in the Loiret (Attray, Autry-le-Chatel, Beauchamps-sur-Huillard, Quiers-sur-Bezone...). While the small collection from Chevilly is more appropriately attributed to the Final Palaeolithic, the industry from locus 2 of Saint-Romain-sur-Cher is comparable with the Early Mesolithic of Northeastern France given

the high proportion of isosceles triangles. The sites of Ingrandes, Langeais, and Mareuil-sur-Cher also belong to the Early Mesolithic, as does the material recovered from several pits at Parc du Château in Auneau. The most well-represented period is however the Middle Mesolithic from the first half of the Boreal (fig. 18). Three assemblages from Saint-Romain-sur-Cher (loci 1, 3 and 4) containing crescents and points are also attributable to this period, while the industry from locus 5 belongs to the southern facies of the Middle Sauveterrian with Montclus triangles (Kildéa, 2008a). The majority of features identified at Parc du Château at Auneau also date to the Middle Mesolithic,



Fig. 16 – L'Hermitage at Auneau (Eure-et-Loir), lithic industry. 1–3: microliths; 4–5: cores; 6–7: macro-tools; 8–10: blades and a bladelet. (after G. Chamaux).

as do the small assemblages from Bray-en-Val, Chilleurs-aux-Bois and the Hermitage at Auneau.

Dates produced on hazelnut shells (table 1) fall for the most part between 9000 and 8600 BP (8200 and 7600 cal BC) during a period that covers the end of the Preboreal and the beginning of the Boreal. Given the plateau in the calibration curve (Blanchet et al., 2006), these dates preclude establishing a more precise chronology of these occupations within the 'First Mesolithic' (Costa and Marchand, 2006) despite the microlith assemblages presenting marked differences. Late and Final Mesolithic sites, while well-represented in surface surveys, were only rarely encountered during diagnostics or excavations, as at Ligueil, Muides and Auneau for example.

PERSPECTIVES

Recent archaeological projects in the Centre region have confirmed its rich potential for recovering Early Holocene archaeological material from various contexts such as the bottom and lower slopes of valleys or even plateaus. Paleoenvironmental data remains rare and should become a research priority in the coming years.

Information concerning the spatial organisation of sites and, by extension, the nature and function of the occupations is still limited. In fact, a majority of sites were excavated only over small surfaces and the methods



Fig. 17 – Main Early Mesolithic sites in the Centre region. Grey circles: surface surveys; blue circles: research projects; red squares: diagnostics; red triangles: rescue excavations (map C. Verjux).

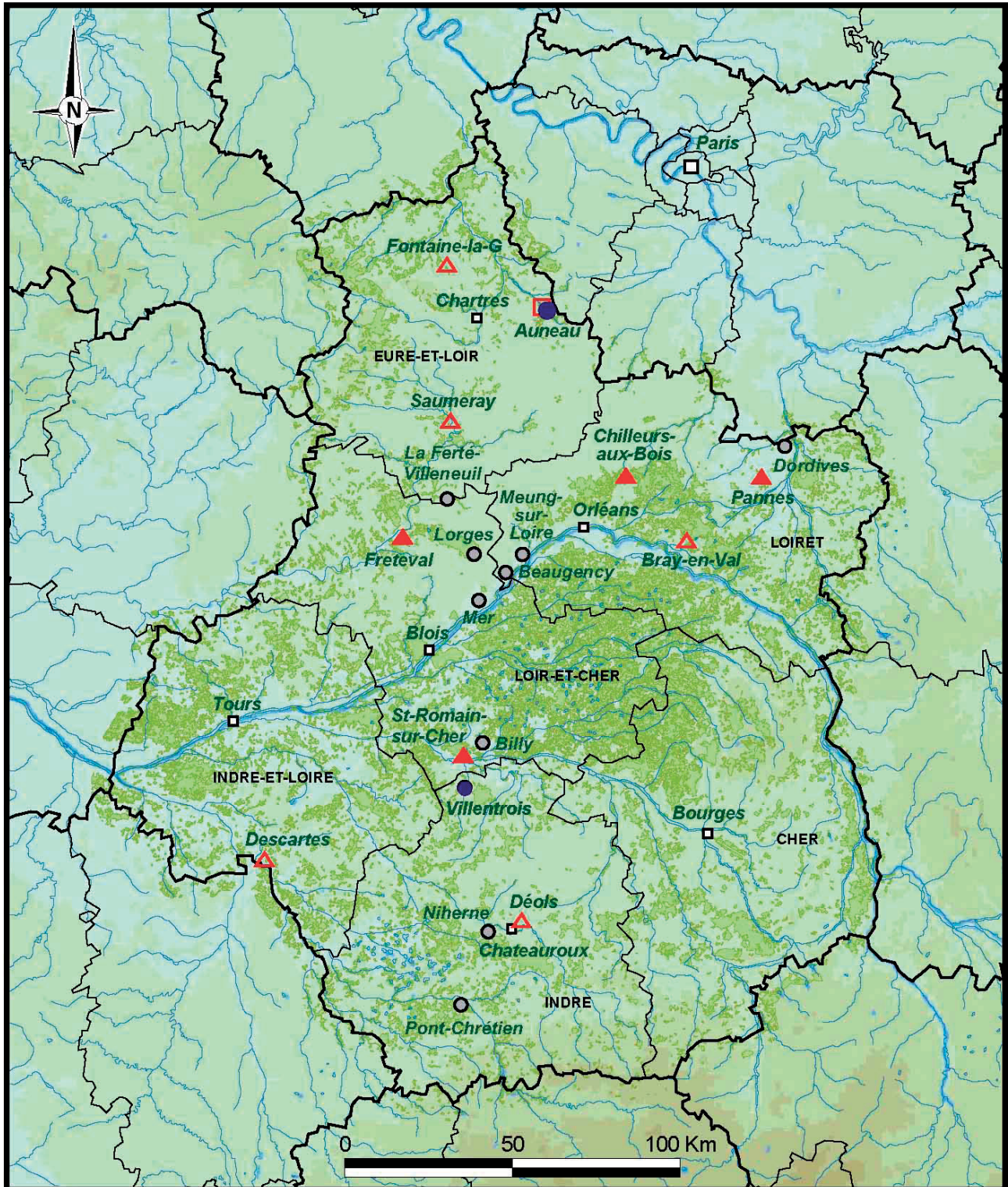


Fig. 18 – Main Middle Mesolithic sites in the Centre region. Grey circles: surface surveys; blue circles: research projects; red squares: diagnostics; red triangles: rescue excavations. Symbol outlines correspond to the excavation of Mesolithic remains found during projects concerning other periods (map C. Verjux).

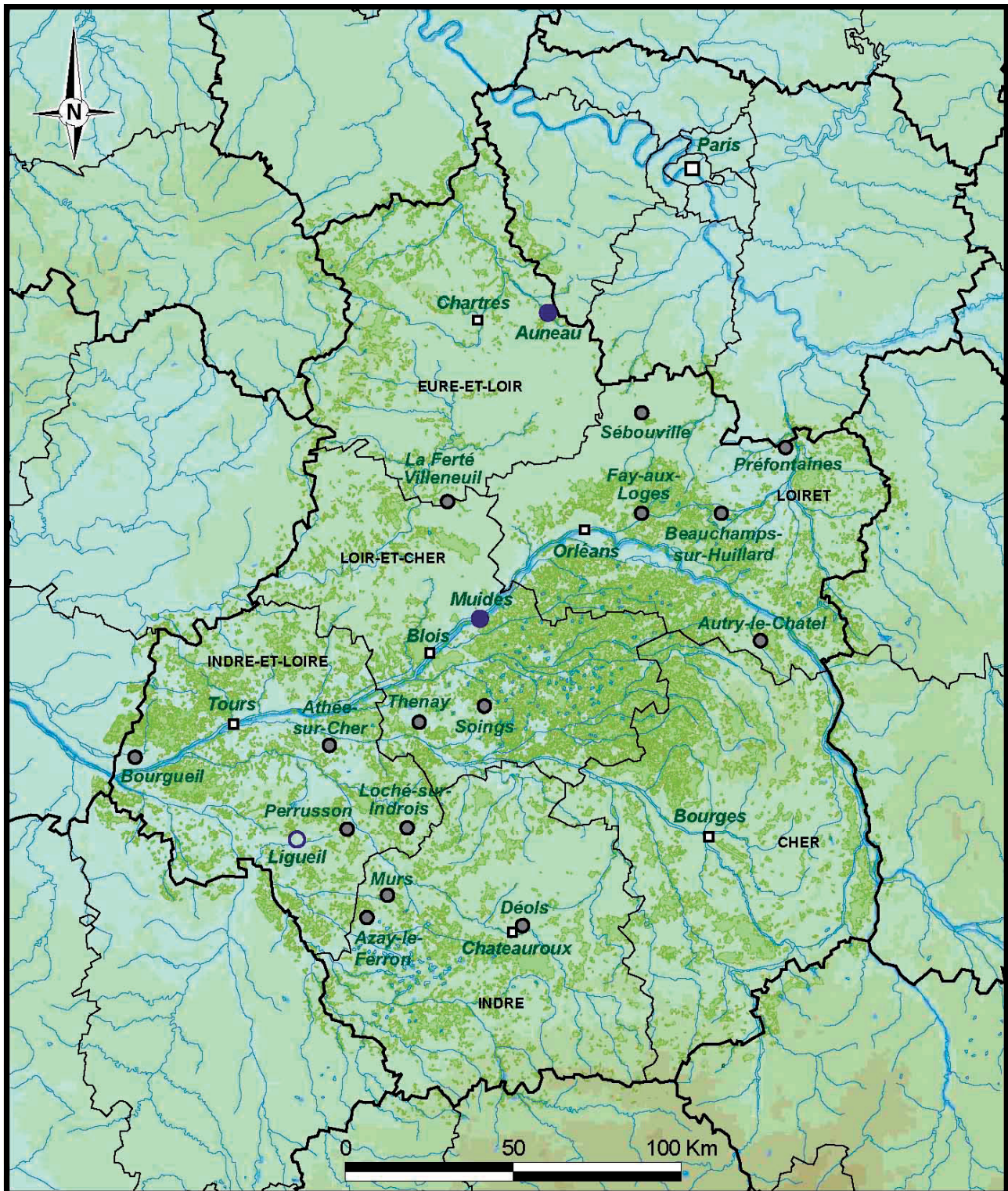


Fig. 19 – Main Late and Final Mesolithic sites in the Centre region. Grey circles: surface surveys; blue circles: research projects. Symbol outlines correspond to the excavation of Mesolithic remains found during projects concerning other periods (map C. Verjux).

employed, although well-adapted to the nature of the remains and their state of preservation (sediment sampling and sieving), permitted only the production of density maps, but not detailed plans of artefact distributions. Furthermore, the near absence of faunal material and the extreme rarity of features are a regular aspect of these sites. Not surprisingly, occupations seem most often related to hunting activities as is evinced by the production and maintenance of hunting weaponry. No new funerary information is available and the burials at Auneau still remain the only known examples for the whole Centre region.

It is also difficult to be more precise concerning occupation durations. Certain sites identified during pedestrian surveys, as well as the results of certain excavations, raise the possibility of successive or recurrent occupations either during the same chronological phase (Langeais, Mareuil-sur-Cher) or spread out over time (Saint-Romain-sur-Cher, Auneau).

Particular attention paid to the detection of this type of site by implementing appropriate means and methods, especially for finding favourable preservation contexts, will enable this potential to be fully exploited in the future.

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MESOLITHIC PALETHNOGRAPHY

RESEARCH ON OPEN-AIR SITES BETWEEN LOIRE AND NECKAR

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Published under the direction of

**Boris VALENTIN, Bénédicte SOUFFI, Thierry DUCROCQ,
Jean-Pierre FAGNART, Frédéric SÉARA, Christian VERJUX**

‘Mesolithic Pale ethnography...’: part of this volume’s title represents a sort of methodological and theoretical mission statement designed to convey the idea that research concerning the last hunter-collectors is today in desperate need of this type of insight. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a spectacular crop of occasionally vast open-air sites has emerged, one of the notable contributions of preventive archaeology. Several long-term excavations have also added to this exponentially increasing body of information that has now come to include a growing number of well-preserved sites that have allowed us to address pale ethnographic questions. This volume represents a first step towards revitalising Mesolithic research. Here we have focused on occupations from the 8th millennium cal BC, currently the best documented periods, and limited the scope to Northern France and certain neighbouring regions. The first part contains several preludes to monographs highlighting potential future studies as well as various patterns in the structuring of space and the location of camps. These, as well as other complementary discoveries, provide material for the second part of the volume dedicated to new data concerning the functional dynamics of Mesolithic camps.



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