

Tim Dook

Third Theoretical Archaeology

Group Conference

THE USE OF ECOLOGICAL MODELS:

HUMAN ADAPTIVE STRATEGY IN THE PLEISTOCENE

Tuesday 15th December 1981, 9.0 a.m. - 1.0 p.m.

University of Reading

University of Reading December 14-16 1981

SESSION PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS

THE USE OF ECOLOGICAL MODELS

HUMAN ADAPTIVE STRATEGY IN THE PLEISTOCENE

Chairperson : Dr. Robert Foley

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| Dr. Robert Foley
(University of Durham) | What did hunters do for a living in the Pleistocene? Problems in hunter-gatherer studies |
| Dr. Nicholas Flemming
(Institute of Oceanographic Science) | Adaptation and the rising sea of the Late Pleistocene |
| Dr. Andrew Hill
(Harvard University) | Hyaenas and hominids : can we identify the earliest hunter-gatherers? |
| Dr. Alan Turner
(University of York) | Hominids and fellow-travellers |
| Miss Katharine Scott
(University of Cambridge) | Hunter-gatherers in big, cold, empty spaces : theoretical issues in the Middle Palaeolithic |
| Dr. Clive Gamble
(University of Southampton) | Ecological resources and alternative hunter-gatherer strategies in Late Pleistocene Central Europe |
| Dr. Andrew Garrard
(University of Cambridge) | Prey selection and group size : a case study for the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic of the Near East |
| Professor David Harris
(Institute of Archaeology) | Discussant |

Session Abstract

HUMAN ADAPTIVE STRATEGY IN THE PLEISTOCENE

Hunter-gatherer studies have been in the forefront of the development of theory in archaeology. Models have been developed relating to a wide range of problems - the origins of hunting, the division of economic activity by sex, the development of institutions above the level of the kin group, and the transition from hunter-gatherers to agriculturalists. Underlying all these have been principles derived from ethnographic observations of hunter-gatherers. The results of work with extant groups has been illuminating, particularly when linked to the specificities of the archaeological record, but there have also been suggestions that these models have applied too rigid a strait-jacket to Pleistocene human behaviour.

This session is devoted to some problems arising from the use of ethnographic data in the interpretation of prehistoric hunter-gatherers, and the alternatives available derived from ecological and environmental principles. What all these papers have in common is an attempt to understand hunter-gatherer spatial and/or temporal variability during the Pleistocene without giving primacy to the ethnographic record. Instead emphasis is placed on the environment and the ecological principles governing the relationship between man and that environment. To achieve this end specific problems relating to hunter-gatherer adaptation will be described and analysed. These problems include the effect of terrestrial and marine environmental changes on hominids during the Pleistocene - group size, prey selection, settlement distribution, mobility; the ways in which resource availability varies through space and time with environmental parameters and the implications of this for selection of strategy; and the articulation of hominids with the large mammal community, in terms of the development of carnivorism and the expansion of the hominid range. It is hoped that these papers will illustrate the fertility of an ecological approach to human evolution and adaptation.

