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## Reviews

*The British Palaeolithic: Human Societies at the Edge of the Pleistocene World*, by Paul Pettitt & Mark White, 2012. (Routledge Archaeology of Northern Europe.) London: Routledge; ISBN 978-0-415-67455-3 paperback £26.99 & US\$42.95; xix + 592 pp., 134 figs., 99 figs. in text boxes, 38 tables

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This new textbook volume covering the Palaeolithic of Britain represents a timely and landmark contribution to the field of Palaeolithic studies that will be of interest both to students making their first approach to this topic, and also to more experienced practitioners looking for a ready summary of the presently-available evidence. In *The British Palaeolithic*, the authors have condensed a vast amount of detail into organized, well-chosen sub-headings and themed Text Boxes, serving to break up nearly 600 pages of information into digestible chunks that allows the reader to jump quickly from one subject to the next. The book also contains a series of summary tables and site lists for each chronological period that serve as handy reference guides to the sometimes rather limited archaeological evidence, supported by a series of excellent maps and illustrations. It is the first academic synthesis to cover the whole of the British Palaeolithic in one volume, and one of only very few books considering these materials to be published in recent years; Pettitt and White's contribution is thus now the key textbook available on this topic and it should be anticipated that, for the foreseeable future at least, so it will remain.

Chapter 1 provides a short introduction to the book which begins with an evocative description of London 12,000 years ago, setting the tone for the writing style used throughout Chapters 1–5: relaxed but business-like, conveying information using an easy-reading style of language peppered with informal comments and occasional clichés (e.g. 'Britain, therefore, was an island of the living dead', p. 133). Chapters 2 through 8 then deal chronologically with the history of occupation in Britain. This begins in Chapter 2 with the evidence for hominin presence in Britain prior to 700,000 years ago (700 kya), providing an outline of the basic glacial–interglacial climatic oscillations that dominated patterns of environmental change through the period, before focusing on the recent finds from coastal East Anglia at Pakefield and Happisburgh 3. The authors discuss the implications of the first expansion of hominins into northern Europe demonstrated at these sites, detailing the importance of colder winter temperatures for the debate around hominin ability to control fire, and manufacture clothing and shelter. They also note that

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the northward expansion from southern population centres likely relates to population pressures in the south pushing groups outward, rather than environmental factors 'pulling' groups north, and that regular access to meat and fat would have been essential not only on nutritional grounds but also for fuelling a growing brain.

The remainder of the Lower Palaeolithic up to c. 300 kya is covered across the following two chapters, dealing first in Chapter 3 with climate, environment and site-specific evidence for hominin activity. This includes an extended section on palaeogeography that describes the breaching of the land bridge that once connected Britain to the continent, and a discussion of the changing geographic settlement patterns throughout the Lower Palaeolithic, highlighting the boom–bust nature of occupation in Britain. Chapter 3 also introduces a series of 14 Text Box summaries of major Lower Palaeolithic archaeological sites, separated from the main text in grey-highlighted panels. These Text Boxes include an excavation history, summary of major finds, stratigraphic diagrams and key references for each site, a format that occurs again repeatedly in later chapters whenever a major archaeological or palaeoenvironmental site is mentioned in the main text. Separating out the site information in this way means the site summaries are easy to find, and this is one of the many attractive features of this book, enabling it to function both as a quick reference guide as well as offering more substantial syntheses of the available data.

The sites reviewed in Chapter 3 are discussed again in Chapter 4 which synthesizes the data from individual sites into broader discussions of the Acheulian and non-Acheulian techno-groupings in Britain, including a large section on the debated Clactonian lithic industry. Here, Pettitt and White have faithfully outlined the range of opinions expressed in the literature about the validity and nature of this cultural industry before offering their own thoughts on the matter. Their account clearly separates the underlying archaeological evidence from the overlying interpretations ascribed to it, and their perspectives are well-balanced and contextualized with all sides represented. The chapter concludes with sections considering habitat preferences, use of fire, mobility and evidence for hunting in the Lower Palaeolithic, contextualizing the British evidence with that from the continent and further afield.

Chapter 5 covers the Early Middle Palaeolithic Neanderthal occupation in Britain up until 180 kya, dissecting in detail the first appearance of Levallois technology and placing the British evidence in context with evidence from the European continent and Africa. As with earlier chapters, the discussion begins with a summary of the climatic context to the period, giving details of the major glacial–interglacial oscillations while key information about the main sites is

again given in a Text Box format. The chapter is rounded off with an in-depth discussion of the potential reasons for the apparent hiatus in hominin occupation of Britain between c. 180–60 kya.

Chapter 6 then deals with occupation evidence of the Late Middle Palaeolithic dating from after this hiatus period, between 60–35 kya, followed in Chapter 7 with coverage of the so-called transitional LRJ industry and evidence of the first *Homo sapiens* in Britain marked by finds of the Aurignacian and Gravettian techno-complexes. Chapters 6 and 7 thus deal with a phase that lasts until Britain was abandoned again prior to the re-advance of the Fennoscandian ice sheets, during which only extremely low-density occupation occurred and the number of finds is correspondingly very small; indeed, the authors note that the evidence could be explained by just a handful of groups coming to Britain for short, seasonal visits, while for much of the time Britain was a literal ‘human desert’. Chapters 6 and 7 also mark a change in the style and tone of the book, which becomes more methodical. The literature is now reviewed with less of the personal commentary that characterized the earlier chapters, and the finds and literature are summarized with only minimal additional thoughts. The summary tables in these chapters are, however, particularly useful for summarizing the scant finds in an easily accessible format. The final chapter is written in a similar style as Chapters 6 and 7, and covers the remaining history of Upper Palaeolithic occupation from c. 15,000–11,600 years ago, describing sequentially each of the various lithic industries represented in Britain during this period. Separate sub-headings deal with the organic tool finds and the art discovered recently at Creswell Craggs before the volume is brought to a rather abrupt close, finishing with a discussion of landscape use during the Ahrensburgian and a brief concluding paragraph.

In this book Pettitt and White have made the British Palaeolithic their own, offering their own thoughts and comments on much of the evidence that they discuss, particularly throughout the first half of the book. They have also taken care to justify and explain their opinions throughout, and it is the way they balance, assess, judge and weave together the evidence that will be of most interest to the readers of this book. The result is a coherent narrative on the Palaeolithic occupation of Britain. The climatic summaries given at the beginning of each chapter neatly summarize the main features and trends without going into the contradictions which inevitably arise when dealing with climatic evidence, while there is a very thorough coverage of the archaeological evidence. In sum, this book makes a much needed and very worthwhile contribution to Palaeolithic scholarship that will be of interest to all researchers working in British archaeology and the wider Palaeolithic in general.

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