

Communiqué de presse
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Neandertal, knocking on Paris's door

A team of Inrap archaeologists, geomorphologists and paleo-environmentalists is currently excavating a site in Clichy-la-Garenne (prescribed by the State, Drac Île-de-France). They have just discovered a prehistoric Middle Paleolithic site (350,000/45,000 BP), as well as the remains, in the ancient frozen sediments, of an elephantid tusk that belonged to a mammoth or a straight-tusked elephant (*Palaeoloxodon antiquus*).

Back to... Clichy and Levallois

The rock and sand quarries on the Seine meander between Clichy and Levallois are well-known by prehistorians and Quaternary geologists. Between 1860 and 1870, during Haussmann's renovation of Paris, many discoveries were made there: lithic industries, fauna, and rare fossils demonstrating that humans were present in the Paris Basin during early Prehistory. At the same time, based on flint artifacts found in the Levallois-Perret quarries, researchers identified the flaking method they would name the "Levallois method." This method has since been recognized on an international scale.

And now, *déjà vu*, "Levallois tools" have again been discovered in the context of a peri-urban renovation of Grand Paris.

Frozen ground on the banks of the Seine

Since the 19th century, this part of the middle Seine valley has been poorly known. This new research provides a unique opportunity to observe its stratigraphies across a large space and conduct geomorphological and paleo-environmental studies to understand the landscape's formation and apply the latest research methods.

Under more than four meters of modern backfill, there are very well preserved ancient alluviums of the Seine. The alluvial layers at the base of the stratigraphic section were altered by the frequent glacial processes during Prehistory. In a highly urbanized and constricted space, the archaeologists employed an unusual excavation method, combining a large trench (generally used in diagnostic operations) with successive surface strippings (*décapages*).

Levallois flakes

In the oldest layers, the discovery of several knapped flint artifacts, especially tools, in association with faunal remains, revealed that Neandertals were present on the river banks. These sharp flakes, made from local flint using the "Levallois method," are typical of the Middle Paleolithic. This method consists of controlling the volume of the core (the matrix from which flakes are detached) to obtain predetermined flakes (Levallois flakes) that could (or not) be transformed into tools.

Prehistoric fauna

Three faunal assemblages were uncovered during the excavation at Clichy. The first is composed mainly of large herbivores, including horse and bison, while the second assemblage analysis is in progress. In the upper stratigraphic layers, the Inrap team has just discovered the remains of an elephantid, the species of which remains to be determined: is it a woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus* sp.) or straight-tusked



elephant (*Palaeoloxodon antiquus*)? This fragmented tusk confirms the presence of these prehistoric giants on the Seine River banks. This animal has not yet been dated because ¹⁴C AMS analysis (accelerator mass spectrometry method) was unsuccessful due to the absence of collagen in the fossil. Other analyses are in progress. In less than ten years, Inrap had discovered several woolly mammoths (*Mammuthus primigenius*) in Île-de-France, including those from two Middle Paleolithic sites: Changis-sur-Marne and Montereau-sur-le-Jard (Seine-et-Marne).

Inrap

The French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research is a public institute under the tutelage of the Ministries of Culture and Research. It identifies and studies archaeological heritage sites in advance of development projects, each year conducting some 1,800 diagnostic operations and more than 200 excavations on behalf of private and public developers in metropolitan France and its overseas territories. Its work also includes the scientific analysis and interpretation of excavation data, as well as the transmission of archaeological knowledge. Its 2,200 agents, distributed among eight regional and interregional directorates, 42 research centers and the headquarters in Paris, constitute the largest archaeological research operator in Europe.

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