

Beaver exploitation testifies to prey choice diversity of Middle Pleistocene hominins

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Exploitation of smaller game is rarely documented before the latest phases of the Pleistocene, which is often taken to imply narrow diets for earlier hominins.

Data regarding the subsistence base of early hominins are heavily biased in favor of the animal component of their diets, in particular the remains of large mammals, generally preserved much better at [archaeological sites](#) than the bones of smaller animals, let alone the remains of plant food. The fact that [exploitation](#) of smaller game is very rarely documented before the latest phases of the Pleistocene, is often taken to imply narrow diets of archaic Homo, and interpreted as a striking economic difference between Late Pleistocene and earlier hominins.

In a study [published](#) in *Scientific Reports*, a team of German and Dutch archaeologists present new data that contradict this view of Lower Paleolithic hominins: cut mark evidence—marks left by a cut—of systematic exploitation of beavers, identified in the large faunal assemblage from the c. 400,000-years-old [hominin](#) site Bilzingsleben (Germany), excavated decades ago by Dietrich Mania.

In combination with a prime-age dominated mortality profile, this cut mark record shows that the rich beaver assemblage resulted from repetitive human hunting activities, with a focus on young adult individuals.

The Bilzingsleben beaver exploitation evidence demonstrates a greater diversity of prey choice by Middle Pleistocene hominins than commonly acknowledged, and a much deeper history of broad-spectrum subsistence, already visible in prey choices 400,000 years ago.

More information: Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser et al, Beaver exploitation, 400,000 years ago, testifies to prey choice diversity of Middle Pleistocene hominins, *Scientific Reports* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-023-46956-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-46956-6)

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