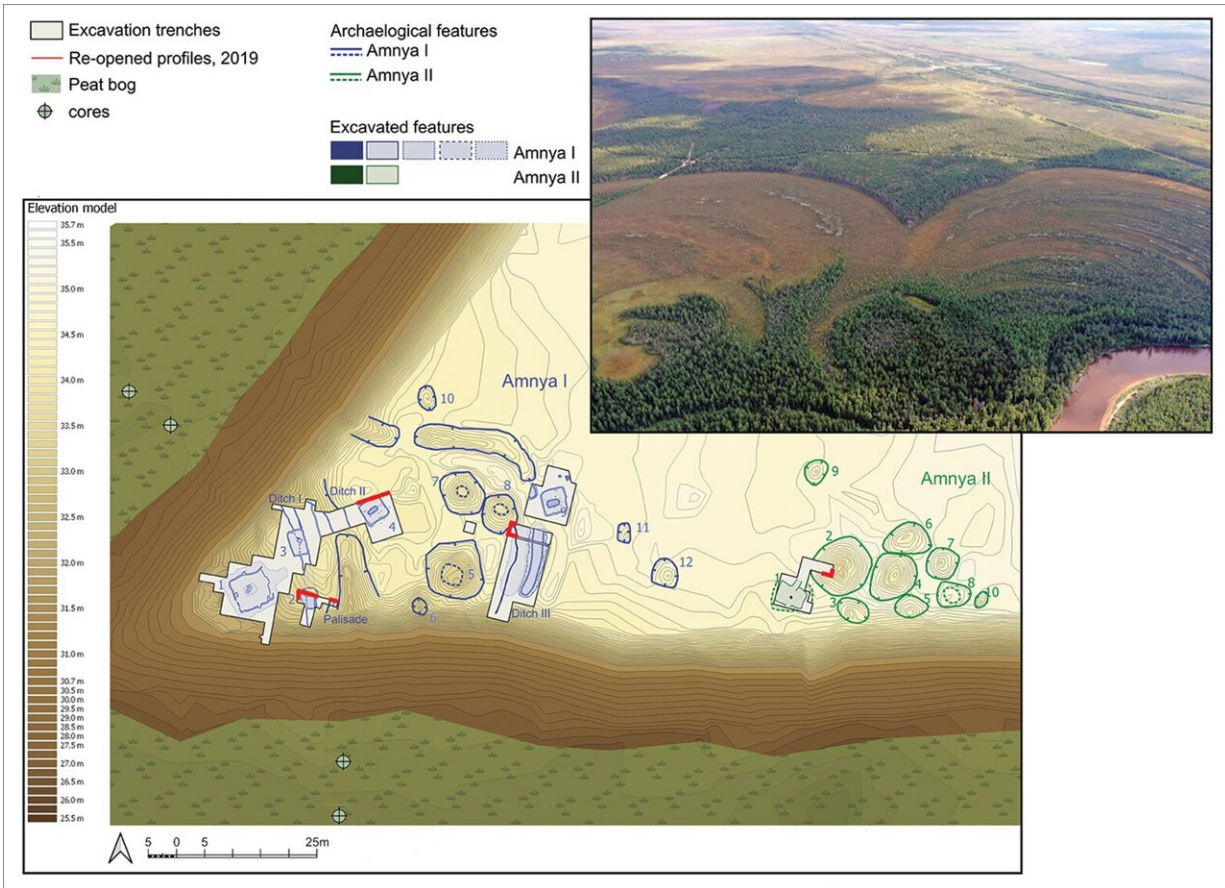


# Oldest fortresses in the world discovered

December 7 2023, by Japhet Johnstone



Top: aerial view of the Amnya river and promontory; bottom: general plan of Amnya I and II, showing location of excavation trenches and features visible in the surface relief. Credit: Illustration by N. Golovanov, S. Krubeck and S. Juncker/*Antiquity* (2023). DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2023.164

In a groundbreaking archaeological discovery, an international team led

by archaeologists from Freie Universität Berlin has uncovered fortified prehistoric settlements in a remote region of Siberia. The results of their research reveal that hunter–gatherers in Siberia constructed complex defense structures around their settlements 8,000 years ago.

This finding reshapes our understanding of early human societies, challenging the idea that only with the advent of agriculture would people have started to build permanent settlements with monumental architecture and developed complex social structures.

The study, "The World's Oldest-Known Promontory Fort: Amnya and the Acceleration of Hunter-Gatherer Diversity in Siberia 8000 Years Ago," was [published](#) in the journal *Antiquity* at the beginning of December.

The investigation centered on the fortified [settlement](#) of Amnya, acknowledged as the northernmost Stone Age fort in Eurasia, where the team of researchers conducted fieldwork in 2019. The group was led by Professor Henny Piezonka, archaeologist at Freie Universität Berlin, and Dr. Natalia Chairkina, archaeologist in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Among the team's members were German and Russian researchers from Berlin, Kiel, and Yekaterinburg.

Tanja Schreiber, archaeologist at the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology in Berlin and co-author of the study, explains, "Through detailed archaeological examinations at Amnya, we collected samples for [radiocarbon dating](#), confirming the prehistoric age of the site and establishing it as the world's oldest-known fort. Our new palaeobotanical and stratigraphical examinations reveal that inhabitants of Western Siberia led a sophisticated lifestyle based on the abundant resources of the taiga environment."

The prehistoric inhabitants caught fish from the Amnya River and

hunted elk and reindeer using bone and stone-tipped spears. To preserve their surplus of fish oil and meat, they crafted elaborately decorated pottery.

Approximately 10 Stone Age fortified sites are known to date, with pit houses and surrounded by earthen walls and wooden palisades, suggesting advanced architectural and defensive capabilities. This discovery challenges the traditional view that permanent settlements, accompanied by defensive structures, only emerged with farming societies, thus disproving the notion that agriculture and animal husbandry were prerequisites for societal complexity.

The Siberian findings, along with other global examples like Gobekli Tepe in Anatolia, contribute to a broader reassessment of evolutionist notions that suggest a linear development of societies from simple to complex.

In various parts of the world, from the Korean peninsula to Scandinavia, hunter-gatherer communities developed large settlements by drawing on aquatic resources. The abundance of natural resources in the Siberian taiga, such as annual fish runs and migrating herds, probably played a crucial role in the emergence of the hunter-gatherer forts.

The fortified settlements overlooking rivers may have served as strategic locations to control and exploit productive fishing spots. The competitive nature arising from the storage of resources and increased populations is evident in these prehistoric constructions, overturning previous assumptions that competition and conflict were absent in hunter-gatherer societies.

The findings underscore the diversity of pathways that led to complex societal organizations, reflected in the emergence of monumental constructions such as the Siberian forts. They also highlight the

significance of local environmental conditions in shaping the trajectories of human societies.

**More information:** Henny Piezonka et al, The world's oldest-known promontory fort: Amnya and the acceleration of hunter-gatherer diversity in Siberia 8000 years ago, *Antiquity* (2023). [DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2023.164](https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.164)

Provided by Free University of Berlin

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