Archaeology team makes world-first tool discovery
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This sample, 17 tools tested positive for protein residue, i.e. blood and other animal products.

"Researchers have known for decades about carnivorous behaviours by tool-making hominins dating back 2.5 million years, but now, for the first time, we have direct evidence of exploitation by our Stone Age ancestors of specific animals for subsistence," says Nowell. "The hominins in this region were clearly adaptable and capable of taking advantage of a wide range of available prey, from rhinoceros to ducks, in an extremely challenging environment."

"What this tells us about their lives and complex strategies for survival, such as the highly variable techniques for prey exploitation, as well as predator avoidance and protection of carcasses for food, significantly diverges from what we might expect from this extinct species," continues Nowell. "It opens up our ability to ask questions about how Middle Pleistocene hominins lived in this region and it might be a key to understanding the nature of interbreeding and population dispersals across Eurasia with modern humans and archaic populations such as Neanderthals."

Another result of this study is the potential to revolutionize what researchers know about early hominin diets. "Other researchers with tools as old or older than these tools from sites in a variety of different environmental settings may also have success when applying the same technique to their tools, especially in the absence of animal remains at those sites," adds Nowell.


Provided by University of Victoria