

The Later Pleistocene Archaeological Landscape of Karonga, Malawi

Thompson, Jessica (The University of Queensland), Menno Welling (African Heritage: Research and Consultancy, Zomba,), David Wright (Department of Archaeology and Art History, Seoul N), Flora Schilt (University of Tuebingen, Tuebingen, Germany) and Susan Mentzer (University of Tuebingen, Tuebingen, Germany)

The northern tip of Malawi contains a rich record of Middle and Later Stone Age behavior in Pleistocene deposits adjacent to Lake Malawi. The sites are situated within a dynamic landscape that has been highly sensitive to documented changes in climate and lake level over the last half million years. Work in the 1960s at several open-air sites hinted at a fascinating diversity of stone artifact manufacture and discard strategies with similarities that could be drawn to later Pleistocene assemblages in southern Africa. However, the chronological, palaeoecological, and depositional contexts within which to situate this diversity were unavailable. New work shows that the sites range from stratified, buried deposits to deflated/exposed surfaces and contain archaeological materials in both primary and secondary contexts. Landscape geometry, landform associations, and geogenic components of the sites therefore influence dating strategies and require that a local chronology be built from multiple localities, each with its own unique history of post-depositional alteration. Recent archaeological survey, test-pitting, excavation, and analysis of landscape morphology in the Karonga District of Malawi has now begun to reveal meaningful patterns in where these sites are located, how well they are preserved, how they were formed, and how old they are.