

Pick and Mix

Before Farming is both easy and hard to pigeonhole – easy because it covers all there is to cover about hunter-gatherers – hard because in any given issue the contents might be so diverse as to be almost unconnected. But when it comes down to it, the ultimate root of all this is human behaviour unconstrained by arbitrarily imposed limitations of time, space or theoretical orientation – whether it be art, debate about the use of pigment, how humans relate to the landscape or what makes them human. It is an interesting issue for its sheer diversity, and should appeal to people like me who are always willing to learn from the work of others. Lyn Wadley casts a critical eye over ochre crayons as an artefact type in the southern African Middle Stone Age, and challenges long-held assumptions about their use in symbolic contexts. Ed Eastwood examines images of women from the central Limpopo Basin of South Africa, situating the imagery within current debates about female representation, in particular the application of shamanic interpretations to this data. Shifting continents but remaining in the southern hemisphere, Mariano Bonomo re-visits an old model of hunter-gatherer land use in the Patagonian cone with a fresh archaeological perspective. The reviews on offer typify the eclecticism of the field that is hunter-gatherer research and the personalities involved. An extended and candid critique by David Whitley of a recent volume on aesthetics in rock-art makes the case for incorporating emotive perceptions into the interpretation of imagery, but grounded in ethnography and cognitive neurosciences. The recently held ‘Rethinking the Human Revolution’ conference in Cambridge is reviewed by a participant-observer (myself) who had a ringside seat to a sometimes fractious event that was enlightening and entertaining for its broad range of perspectives and personalities – rather like *Before Farming*, I hope.

The Editor
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