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New Findings of the Aliakmon Paleolithic Survey, Greece, 2004–2005

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The timing and routes of dispersal of the earliest European populations are central questions in European paleoanthropology. Greece lies on the hypothesized migration route of archaic hominids from Africa through the Near East into Europe and is the gateway into the continent through which migrant populations have repeatedly passed. The region's fossil human and Paleolithic records are therefore critical in addressing these questions. Nonetheless, Greek Paleolithic archeology and paleoanthropology remain largely unexplored.

We present preliminary results of the 3-year Aliakmon Paleolithic survey, conducted along the Aliakmon River, North-Central Greece. It is the first systematic survey for this time period in the region and focuses on the terraces of the Aliakmon. These preserve Upper Pliocene - Pleistocene fluvial sediments and a rich Plio-Pleistocene fauna. The area has also previously yielded Paleolithic artifacts, including one of the two Lower Paleolithic bifaces known from the country.

The 2004-2005 seasons confirmed the existence of the terrace systems at previously proposed levels, but indicated that their dating is much more complex than originally proposed, as most terraces are erosional rather than depositional in nature. Isolated patches of Pleistocene fossiliferous depositional terraces were found within the main erosional system, and several fossiliferous localities of Lower-Middle Pleistocene age were located. Faunal specimens collected include equids (quite possibly *E. stenonis*), bovids, cervids, suids, rodents, canids (possibly *Canis etruscus*), proboscideans (cf. *Elephas antiquus*) and cf. *Hippopotamus*. Several lithic artifacts were also collected and two possible Lower Paleolithic sites were located, although no uniquely characteristic Lower Paleolithic artifacts (e.g., handaxes) were found. Given the scarcity of such sites in Greece, these findings could be pivotal in documenting early human presence in the area.

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