



# **PREISTORIA ALPINA**

Reprint from the proceedings of the international colloquium «Human Adaptations to the Mountain Environment in the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic»

Trento, 5-11 october 1992



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## Mesolithic Exploitation of the Highland Zone: a Case Study for the Southern Alps

### ABSTRACT

BIAGI P., 1993 - Mesolithic Exploitation of the Highland Zone: a Case Study for the Southern Alps. [Lo sfruttamento delle zone montane durante il Mesolitico: un esempio per le Alpi meridionali]. *Preistoria Alpina*, 28: 367-372.

This article considers the watershed comprised between Val Camonica, Val Trompia and Val Sabbia in the province of Brescia (Lombardy, northern Italy). The surveys produced several mesolithic stations three only of which have been excavated so far. Two of the sites are attributable to the Sauveterrian Culture and one to the Castelnovian. The Author also provides preliminary information on the sites distribution, on their 14C chronology and on the environmental studies carried out in seven years of research.

**Parole chiave:** Mesolitico, Zone montane, Alpi meridionali.

**Key words:** Mesolithic, Highland Zone, Southern Alps.

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### Preface

This paper is a preliminary report of the results of a long-term research project carried out by the Natural History Museum of Brescia along the watershed that separates Val Camonica from Val Trompia and Val Sabbia in the central alpine arc of Lombardy. The watershed extends for some thirty kilometres between Lake Iseo to the west and

Lake Idro to the east (fig. 1). This territory is deeply modelled by glacial action and characterized by the presence of small lakes sometimes delimited by morainic cordons. The surveys of the last ten years have led to the discovery of more than twenty sites, three only of which have been excavated since 1987. The sites are often scattered around small lakes or peat-bogs close to high altitude passes, with the exception of two middle elevation sites.

### The Mesolithic Sites

The site of Vaiale lies in Val Sabbia at an altitude of 830 metres on a terrace of the right bank of the River Abbioccolo at its confluence into the river Valle della Spina, some seven kilometres, as the crow flies, to the west of Lake Idro. Just to the north of the site is a small peat-bog from which a pollen core 1.10 metres deep, was taken. The northern and eastern shores of this basin show traces of prehistoric occupation, most probably Mesolithic, given the presence of strongly weathered flint artefacts including backed instruments, microburins and cores (fig. 2).

The prehistoric site was explored, mainly because of its singular geographic location, over a surface of 36 square metres. It produced evidence of two periods of occupation. The former of Early Mesolithic date, probably Boreal, characterized by hypermicrolithic scalene triangles, backed points, microburins and cores; the latter to be attributed to the Iron Age on the basis of several potsherds recovered from an erosional canal cutting the mesolithic surface. The mesolithic site gave no man-made features, such as pits or fireplaces. The only finds are 138 tools of exotic flint recorded *in situ*, mainly consisting of manufacturing debris such as core fragments, core trimming flakes and shatters as well as many small fragments of charcoal. Two only instruments, one triangle and one microburin show traces of wear (VOYTEK, pers. comm., 1992).

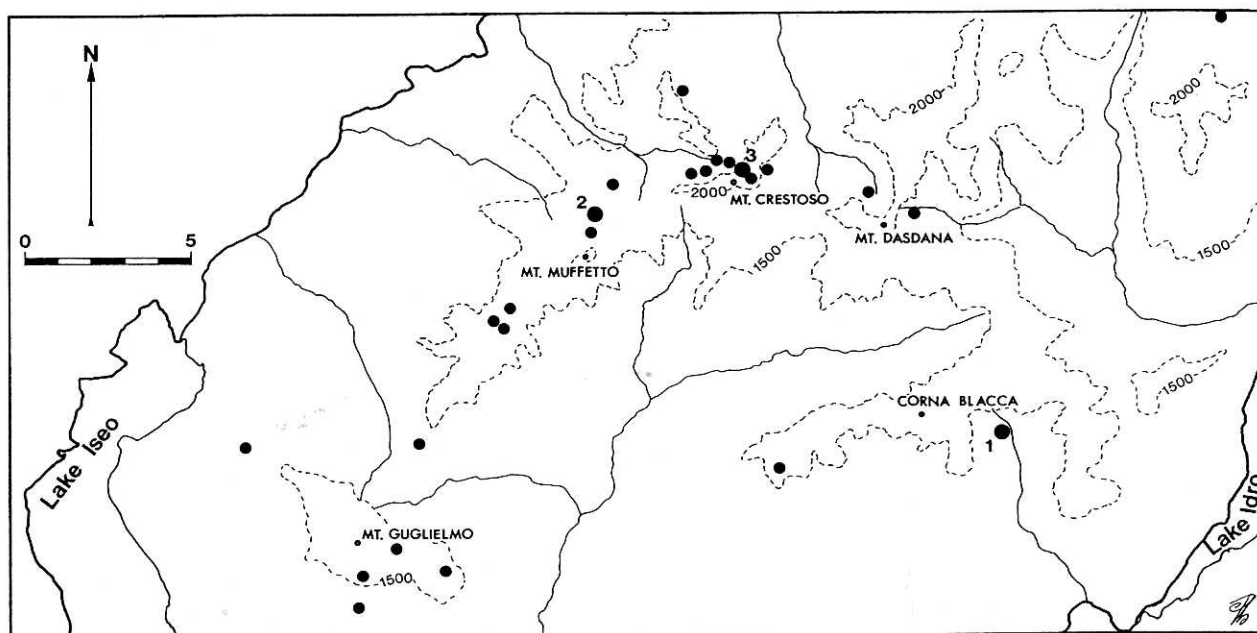


Fig. 1 - Distribution map of the Mesolithic sites in the study area (dots). 1) Vaiale, 2) Rondeneto, 3) Crestoso (Drawn by P. Biagi).

