



Late Palaeolithic Hunter/Forager Settlement

IRN 14086	Zemono near Vipava 2
<i>Location</i>	Vipava
<i>Site type</i>	Settlement
<i>Excavated area</i>	8,000 m ²
<i>Date</i>	ca. 10,000–8,000 BC
<i>Period</i>	Palaeolithic period, Bronze Age
<i>Excavation director</i>	Gojko Tica
<i>Date of excavation</i>	2000–2001

The archaeological site of Zemono 2 is located on the alluvial deposits in the valley of Vipavska Dolina beneath the isolated hill of Zemono. The high plateau of Trnovski Gozd is raised above it to the north-west and the flysch hills of Vipavska Brda to the south-west. The geological foundation of the site was formed in harsh climactic conditions of the late Pleistocene as a consequence of a landslide (debris) that moved to the present location from the foothills of Trnovski Gozd, forming a mound.

Fragments of Bronze Age pottery were discovered during excavations in the ploughsoil and the layers directly beneath it. An earlier occupation layer containing hearths, numerous stone tools and animal bones was discovered buried beneath the layers of alluvial deposits. That layer probably served as an occupation surface, which means that the archaeological remains within it probably belong to different occupation phases.

Apart from a large number of flakes, the stone finds comprised several typologically undefined tools. Tools with semi-circular retouched edges prevail, probably



▲ View of the site with Zemono Castle (Photograph by M. Prešeren)

◀ View of the site in September 2003 and its ideal reconstruction

disc scrapers for working leather, wood, bones as well as minerals, e.g. the natural ochre that was used to impregnate and colour the leather. Small cutting tools – backed blades, which were helved together to form composite tools, were also common. Such composite tools served as knives or arrowheads. The next most common tool types were scrapers, retouched blades and retouched flakes.

The stone tools were mostly made of local quartz, an



View of the excavation (Photograph by M. Prešeren)

aggregate rich in silicon with regular breaks, while materials of better quality were procured from more distant sources.

Numerous animal bones were also preserved at the site and many of them were burnt. The bones identified so far belong to red deer and wild boar that hunters caught and brought to the site.

Two especially interesting finds were a piece of slate and an ironstone cobble, both decorated with incised geometrical patterns. The slate is decorated with eight single parallel waves on one side and incisions forming a herring-bone pattern on the other. The cobble was decorated with parallel and rectangular incisions. Since it contains a great amount of iron, the fresh incisions were red, which probably attracted the attention of people at that time.

The site can be classified on the basis of numerous tools with a steep retouched side as belonging to the late Palaeolithic Gravettien cultural complex. It is assumed on the basis of typical stone tools that Zemono 2 was a late Palaeolithic site occupied towards the end of the Ice Age. However, the date is still in doubt, and the doubts



Scraper – a stone tool with a semi-circular retouched edge

will only be resolved on the completion of post-excavation analyses.

Although the valley was surrounded by hills, the area was exposed toward the west to the warm influences of the Mediterranean during the Ice Age. The valley was broad and the area between the level bottom with the river and the foothills was cut by numerous small streams.

Longer summers and milder winters at the end of the Ice Age caused the disappearance of large herds of herbivores that were adapted to the cold climate. How-



Hearth – patches of red burnt soil (Photograph by Ana Plestenjak)

ever, their ecological niche was soon occupied by smaller herds of red deer and roe deer. The need to migrate constantly with human communities following the prey decreased, since the game remained in verdant forests containing increased numbers of deciduous trees. Apart from pines at exposed or elevated locations and spruce trees in sheltered areas, deciduous trees gradually returned to the forests. The first species that was established again was birch, to be followed by oak and other deciduous trees.

The human presence influenced the plants so that they regenerated in a different way in areas exploited by people from that in virgin forests. People transformed the appearance of the forest not only by picking fruit and digging roots, but also by gathering firewood, peeling off the bark and breaking small twigs and branches. Bark was used for covering the roofs of huts and for making mats, while flexible rods were used for nets and wicker baskets. Modern species of animals prevailed after the extinction of Ice Age species; in addition to roe deer, red deer, bison and wild boar, the species hunted also included predators (brown bears, wolves and various martens), smaller mammals (hares, voles) and birds (capercaillie, quail and pheasant). Men hunted for roe deer



Backed blade – cutting tool with steep retouched edge (Photograph by M. Prešeren)

and red deer in groups near the foothills and set traps for predators and wild boars. Chamois and ibex were tracked higher in the mountains. The remaining members of the community – women, old men and children – picked edible plants, set traps and organised communal drives of animals into nets set in the forests; most of the game consisted of birds, hares and rodents. Wicker traps were used for catching fish and frogs in the streams.

In order to avoid the winds, settlements were placed in sheltered areas beneath the hill, where Zemono Cas-



Slate decorated with geometric pattern on both sides (Drawing by Ida Murgelj)

tle is now located. They were built on a gentle slope to the south, not far from the stream. The dwelling structures consisted of joined birch poles covered with branches and bark. Branch covered paths wound between them. Summer hearths outside the houses were surrounded by mats and skins. People spent an increasing amount of their time in the settlement and its immediate vicinity, where they made wicker baskets as well as vessels, platters, spoons and ladles of wood and

bark. Hunters manufactured wooden handles for stone tools and replaced the jagged blades of knives. Women made wood- and leather-working tools of inferior local materials and they prepared food out of plants. Food was boiled in leather bags heated by dropping red-hot stones into the water. Food wrapped in leaves was baked in hot coals in large fireplaces and meat was roasted over the fire. Meat was also dried and smoked as provisions for times when the hunting was lean. Game was butchered by men with stone tools on the bank of the stream and handed over to the women for drying and tanning. The clamour of children echoed throughout the settlement and its vicinity.

That was roughly the way of life beneath Zemona at the end of the Ice Age. Some evidence of such activities has been preserved in the archaeological record on the site, whereas other characteristics can be inferred on the basis of analogy with finds from contemporary Later Palaeolithic sites.

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References

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