

Final Paleolithic Hunting Strategy on the Polish Plain

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During the last few decades some fairly intensive research concerning Final Paleolithic was conducted on the Polish Plain. As Final Paleolithic I understand here only the very most cool period of the Final Pleistocene, namely, the Younger Dryas. At this time the Central European Plain was inhabited by two relatively well defined cultures—Sviderian and Ahrensbourgian, both belonging to the so-called Tanged Point Technocomplex. Most of Poland belonged to the Sviderian, but in the west the Ahrensbourgian was also present. There are hundreds of sites dated to Younger Dryas known from our area, most of them, of course, from the surface collections, but also some from regular excavations.

The study of location of sites left by Sviderian and Ahrensbourgian people permits us to state that these groups pitched their camps according to special principles, and these are as follows:

1. the sites are situated on narrow isthmuses between lakes (fig. 1);
2. on elevated head-lands accompanying the mouth of the rivers or streams joining large valleys (fig. 2);
3. on solitary sandy “islands” (dunes or sand-bars) located at the bottom of large valleys (fig. 3);
4. on the upper terraces of great river valleys (fig. 4);
5. on top of large dunes bordering vast flat areas (fig. 5).

For all these types of location it is easy to provide instances of excavated sites.

The careful study did not reveal any connection to cardinal points. No southern, northern, western or eastern slopes were preferred.

Morphological features were used not to protect the camps against strongly blowing western and northwestern winds, certainly uncomfortable for the inhabitants of the camps.

There is only one common feature connecting all types of camp locations demonstrated above. All of them allow a direct observation of large open areas, mainly large sections of river or marginal valleys.

As we know well, Younger Dryas in Central European Plain was a cool period of tundra or park-tundra. Fauna was dominated by large herds of reindeer. The herds were the main interest of highly specialized Final Paleolithic hunters of Sviderian and Ahrensbourgian cultures. From the point of view of reindeer hunting all types of site location described above were strategically positioned.

The first of them (on the narrow isthmuses between the lakes) was most probably used during seasonal reindeer migrations. The animals were forced by natural topographical conditions to choose this pass, where they were butchered as an easy prey. Other types of site locations could have been used during seasonal migrations as well as for hunting during other periods of the year. Large valleys were attractive for grazing reindeer. Elevated stands, solitary sandy “islands”, high terraces of the valleys or high dunes dominating flat plains were a perfect strategic observation posts for highly specialized reindeer hunters. This was the reason why they were so much preferred by Sviderian and Ahrensbourgian people.

The principles of the Final Paleolithic site locations on the Polish Plain prove well the necessity of human adaptation forced by special environmental conditions.

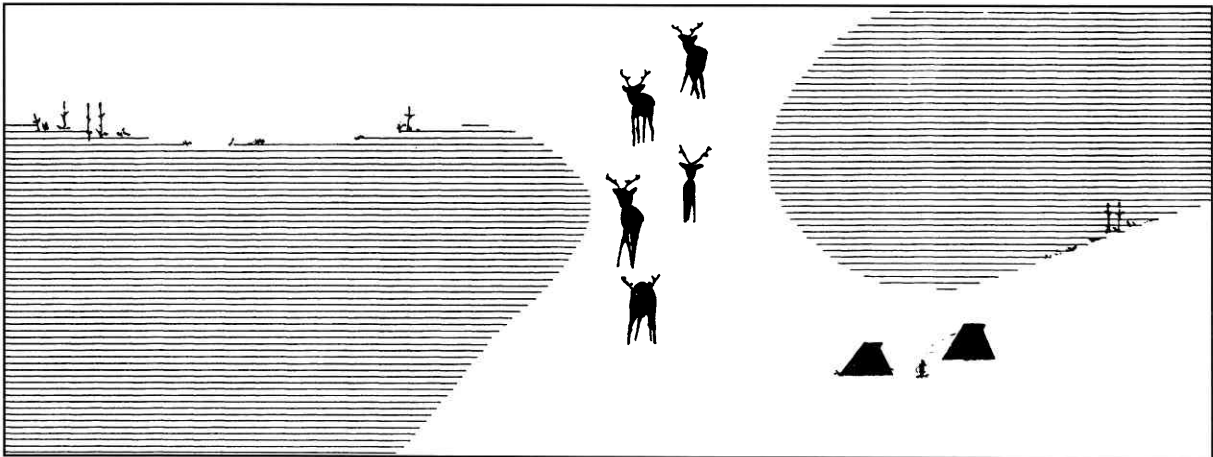


Fig. 1 — Site situated on narrow isthmus between lakes.

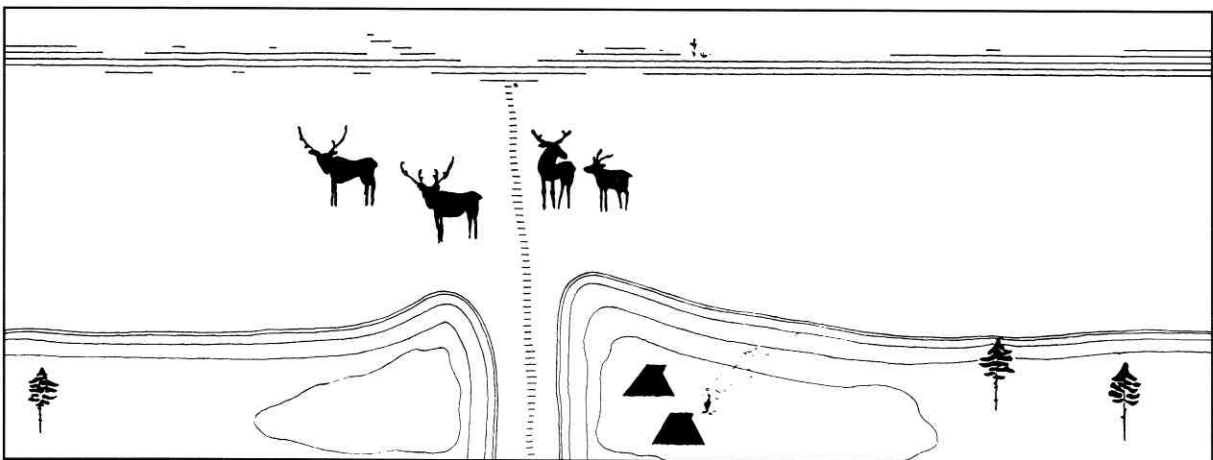


Fig. 2 — Site situated on elevated head-lands accompanying the mouth of the river or the river or stream joining large valley.

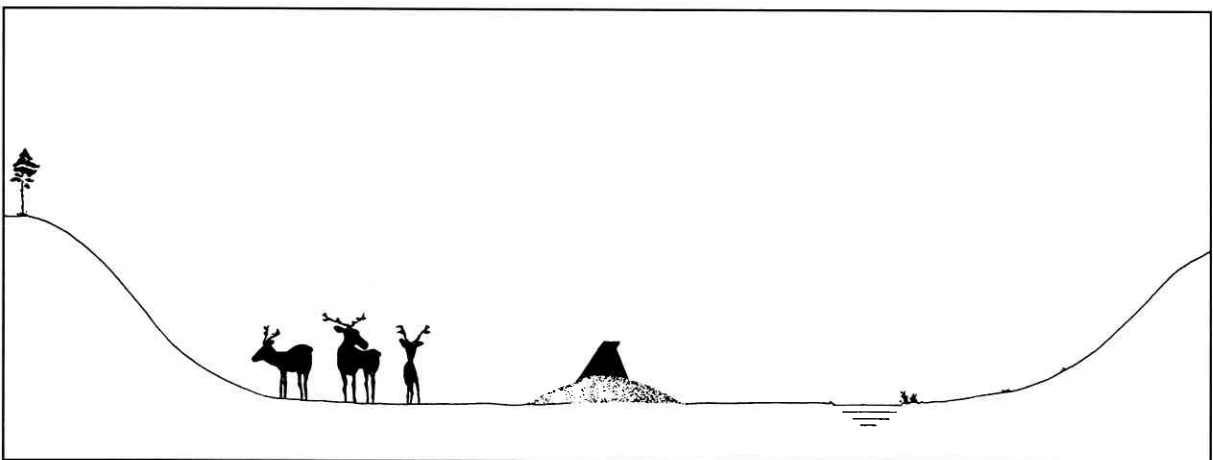


Fig. 3 — Site situated on solitary sandy "island" (dune or sandbar) located at the bottom of large valley.

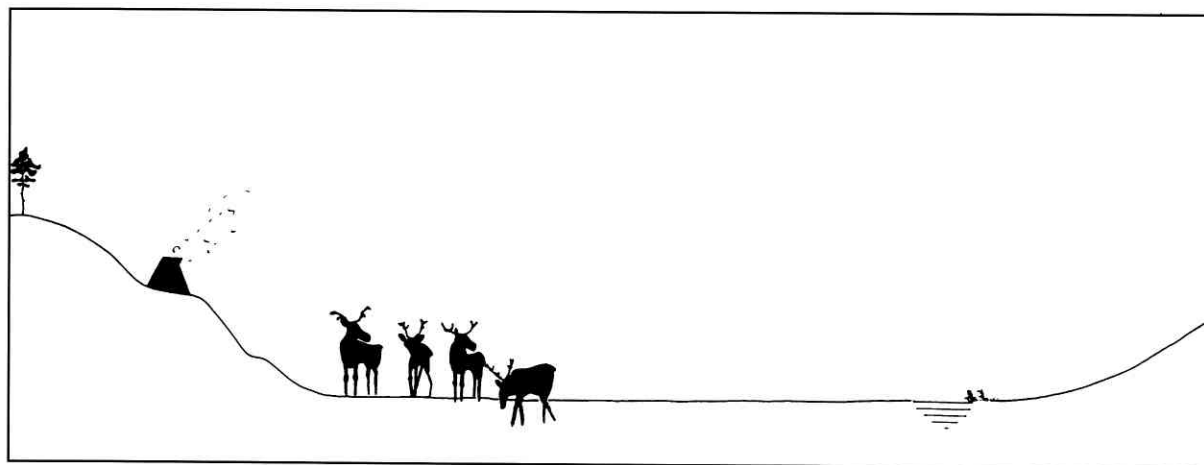


Fig. 4 — Site situated on the upper terrace of great river valley.

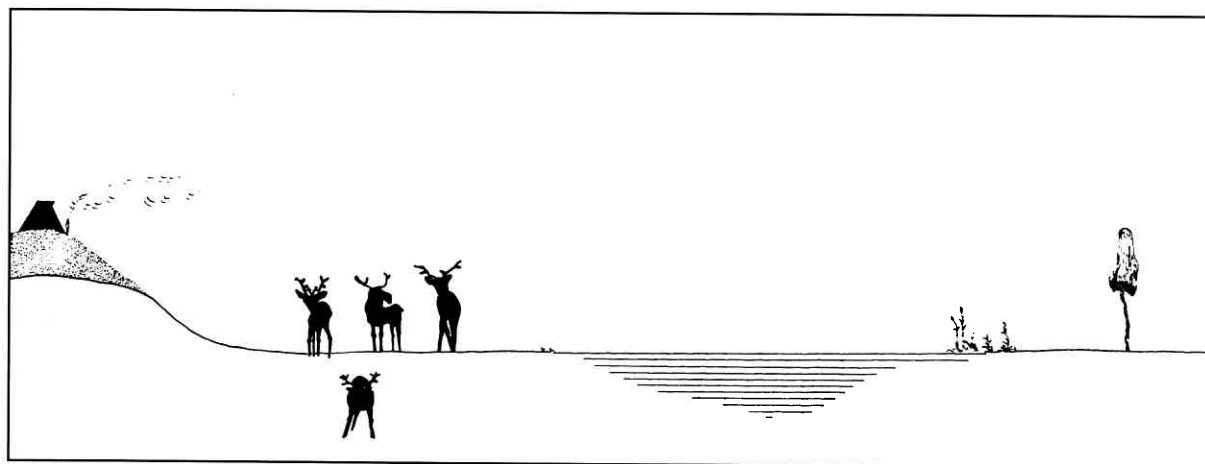


Fig. 5 — Site situated on top of large dune bordering vast flat area.

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