Fieldwork at Kostenki 14, Russia

PHILIP NIGST (Division of Archaeology)

Kostenki 14 is well known for its long sequence, rich archaeological assemblages, and one of the oldest modern human burials. Its lowermost cultural layer is currently the most ancient Upper Palaeolithic one in Eastern Europe.

Work in 2012, directed by Philip Nigst and Andrey Sinitsyn (Institute for the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg), focused on two parts of the site. In the western part, work concentrated on the study of cultural layer III-d (31/30 ka BP) (A. Bessudnov, A. Artushenko, N. Burova - IHMC) and a stratigraphic study of the sequence (A.A. Velichko - Institute for Geology, Russian Academy of Sciences). In the eastern excavation area, a small part of the cultural layer in volcanic ash was examined. Work included archaeological (A. Sinitsyn, K. Stepanova, N. Burova - IHMC and P.R. Nigst) and geological analyses (P. Haesaerts - Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences and S. Pirson - Service Public de Wallonie, Jambes). Excavations and sampling of the lower part of the sequence paid particular attention to the microstratigraphic position of lithics and bones belonging to the so-called ‘cultural layers inside and beneath the ash’.

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Rock Art of Northern Russia

LILIANA JANIK (Division of Archaeology)

The aim of this research season was to record the rock-art panel of the Besove Sledki component of the White Sea rock-art carvings. For the last few decades this panel had been covered and was therefore inaccessible. This year, however, permission to gain access was obtained and the carvings were recorded comprehensively for the first time since the late 1930s.

Recording of this panel is of great importance as it means we are now able to fully document all the prehistoric carvings of the White Sea region. In the future this will allow us to assess the destruction of the carvings through weathering. This is certainly the first case in this region, and one of only a few in the world, where rock art has been recorded in order to understand its preservation. In addition, recording of this hitherto ‘lost’ panel enhances our interpretation and understanding of the White Sea rock-art complex, especially as it is one of the earliest panels consisting of around 300 carvings (almost 10% of all the images in the complex).

Exposure of the site will also allow us in the future to measure the elevation of the carved rock with an accuracy which we have not been able to achieve in the past. This in turn means that we will be able to date the panel more accurately. Finally we are now able to reconstruct the composition as a three-dimensional panel revealing how prehistoric fisher-gatherer-hunters would have seen it.

The project is funded by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

Excavation of the eastern part of Kostenki 14, in and below the volcanic ash.

Part of the Besove Sledki rock-art panel, White Sea region, Russia.