

Excavations at the high altitude mesolithic site of Pian de La Lóra (Val Civetta – Venetian Dolomites)

New data on the last hunter-gatherers of northern Italy

by Carlo Franco*

In July 2007, the Department of Humanities of Ca' Foscari University (Venice) in partnership with the "Gruppo Archeologico ARCA" of Agordo and the "Associazione Amici del Museo di Belluno", carried out the first season of excavations at the site of Pian de La Lóra, an open-air mesolithic station located at 1930 m a.s.l. in the western fringe of the Civetta Group (Venetian Dolomites). Field research, coordinated by the author, focused on a marginal moraine in southern Val Civetta, a spot surrounded by boulders, marshes and a seasonal basin (the eponymous "Lóra") where previous surveys had collected a few flint artefacts preliminary attributed to a Late Mesolithic tradition. This preliminary sondage progressively entailed the opening of a 12 square meters trench at coordinates 46°22'15" N – 12°01'02" E (WGS84). Since the beginning, research process involved systematic wet sieving of the excavated soil, taking advantage of an artificial stream flowing next to the site from a rainwater container at an higher quote. After removing the topsoil, the archaeological deposit showed a maximum depth of 15-30 cm, depending on the excavated sector. Such variability was directly linked to the natural profile of the sterile base layer, made by an incoherent bed of limestone cryoclasts. The whole excavation area then showed a basic pedo-stratigraphic profile: a very dark brown and clayish upper level (US1) and a light brown, thinner and slightly coarser lower lever (US2). Almost all the finds (limited to charcoals and lithics) emerged from the second one, which was referred to a single short-term occupation. Creating the conditions for later refitting and spatial analysis, flint artefacts recognized at sight in the trench were recorded according to their precise grid coordinates, while all the finds recovered through wet sieving operations were recorded following the square of provenance.



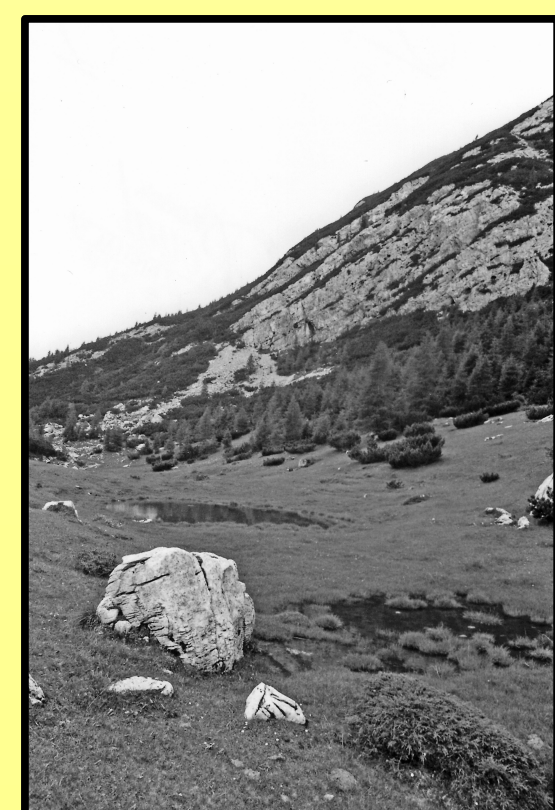
Opening of the excavation: preliminary check of the deposit below the topsoil



The manual, tireless wet sieving of the archeological deposit



The sterile layer at the bottom of the excavation trench



Marshes, south of the site

The accurate methodology applied in the excavations led to the discovery of a significant flint assemblage, whose richness and variety went far beyond expectations. Preliminary results from a deeper typological and typometrical analysis still to be published show the presence of more than 1200 unretouched lithic artefacts, most of which burnt or fragmented. As regards the complete specimens, they are mainly composed by microlithic and ipermicrolithic very flat modules, along with a few blades/bladelets whose features (regular, thin, sub-parallel edges) are clearly attributable to a *Montbani* style of production. No pre-cores were found in the collection, while it is possible to count at least 5 small polyhedral or prismatic cores with one or two prepared platforms, generally exhausted. Retouched artefacts are equally shared between common tools and armatures. Significantly, the first group consists of 10 end-scrapers on bladelet or blade-like flake, a single burin on thick blade with simple *biseau*, one scraper on flake with a bilateral retouch, a truncation on bladelet and, most of all, 16 notched or retouched blades/bladelets. Along with them, the toolkit is completed by at least 10 asymmetrical trapezes on blade/bladelet, 7 hypermicrolithic scalene triangles, one backed segment, one double-backed point and a few other microliths with a steep, abrupt retouch. Furthermore, the collection includes a couple of flint percussors and more than a hundred discards of the preparation of the geometric projectile points (trapezes and triangles), subdivided in 89 microburins, 6 "chevrons" and 7 bladelets fractured at (or close to) a notch.

