

The origins of the Acheulean at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania

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This talk will introduce recent archaeological research in Middle and Upper Bed II at Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania) by OGAP (Olduvai Geochronology and Archaeology Project). The archaeological objective of our current work is to address the demise of the Oldowan and the dynamics that led to the emergence of the Acheulean at Olduvai in Middle Bed II. Our recent fieldwork combines surveys in search of new assemblages, with excavations at sites previously investigated by Mary Leakey, including HWKEE, EFHR, MNK, and FC West. HWKEE, located in lower Middle Bed II, has revealed a large bone and lithic assemblage that, together with new fieldwork at MNK, is allowing us to characterise the technology and subsistence strategies of Olduvai hominins just before the emergence of the Acheulean, also present at the site. Ongoing excavations at EFHR aim to refine the stratigraphic position of this site, which Leakey believed to be the earliest Acheulean at Olduvai. Fieldwork at EFHR is also extending the fossil and lithic sample, which is vital for understanding the character of the earliest Olduvai Acheulean. Resumed excavations at FC West are unearthing a dense bone and lithic assemblage, which will help us to investigate subsistence and technological adaptations of Olduvai hominins after the emergence of the Acheulean, and will contribute new data to help assess the validity of the Developed Oldowan as a lithic technology separate from the Acheulean.