



# in Situ

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Ansvarig utgivare

Kristian Kristiansen

[ansvarig@insituarchaeologica.com](mailto:ansvarig@insituarchaeologica.com)

Redaktörer

Håkan Petersson

Marianne Lönn

Tony Axelsson

[redaktion@insituarchaeologica.com](mailto:redaktion@insituarchaeologica.com)

Teknisk redaktör och grafisk form

Lisa K Larsson

Engelsk språkgranskning

Judith Crawford

Finansiärer

Bohusläns museum, Göteborgs universitet, Kulturmiljö Halland,  
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# in Situ

## Archaeologica

vol.14

*Tema: Rogaland*





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Sigrid Alæk Dugstad  
Arkeologisk museum, Universitetet i Stavanger  
sigrid.a.dugstad@uis.no

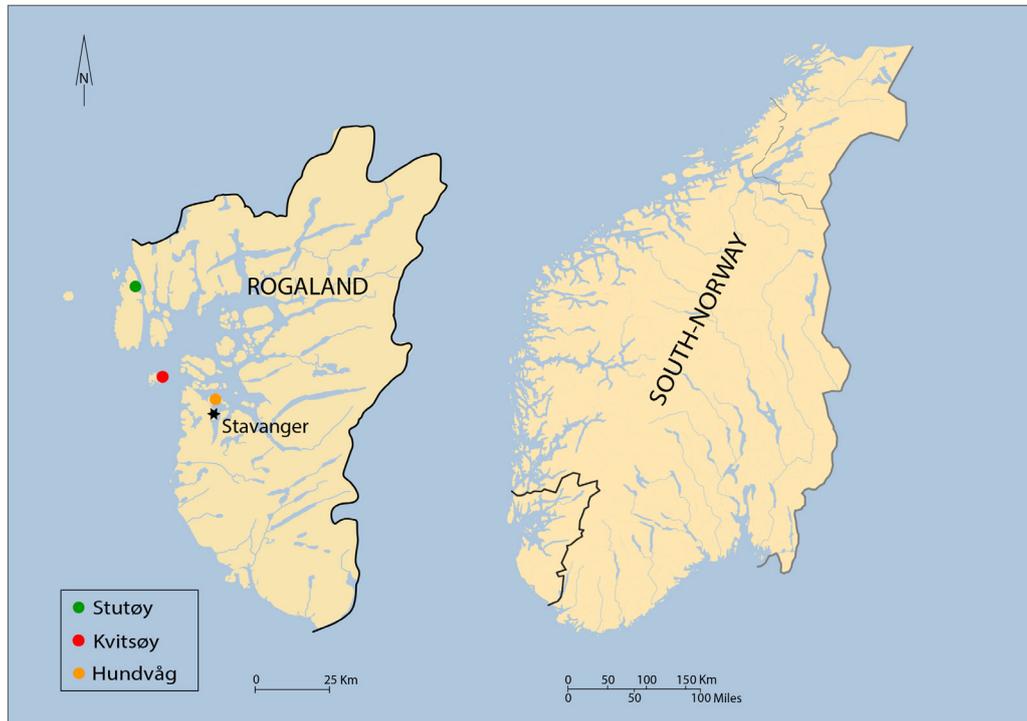
### *Tema: Rogaland*

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## **Small sites, great potential**

### **– The Mesolithic in Rogaland**

This paper looks at small Mesolithic sites with limited artefacts assemblages from Rogaland. A common characteristic of these sites is that they tend to lie in the vicinity of larger sites that contain a range of tool types and more extensive assemblages. The modest, rather unvaried artefacts from such smaller sites are indicative of specialized activities. In many cases both dating and location in the landscape suggest that these sites were integrated into larger nearby dwelling sites. This potential connection between larger dwellings and smaller adjacent activity sites challenges our perceptions of how settlement systems functioned.



1. | Southern Norway and Rogaland County with sites discussed in the paper highlighted.  
Illustration: Sigrid Alæk Dugstad, AM.

## Introduction

Mesolithic sites are primarily interpreted on the basis of lithic artefact distribution and composition, and in rarer cases cultural layers and structures. One of the main focusses of settlement archaeology has traditionally been using these to differentiate between dwelling areas and different activity zones as a means of identifying the extent, function and organization of a site (e.g. Bjerck 2008, Boaz 1998, Dugstad 2010, 2017, Nærøy 2000, Skar & Coulson 1986). This in turn provides a basis for interpreting group size, specialization, division of labor and population demography.

Coastal Rogaland has produced numerous large Mesolithic sites with rich artefact assemblages that are critical to our understanding of the period (e.g. Skjelstad 2011). Recent years have also seen the identification of several smaller sites with less impressive artefact assemblages, most in the vicinity (10–100 m distant) of larger sites. Should these smaller sites be considered parts of the larger ones and, if so, how will this affect our perception of Mesolithic settlement organization?

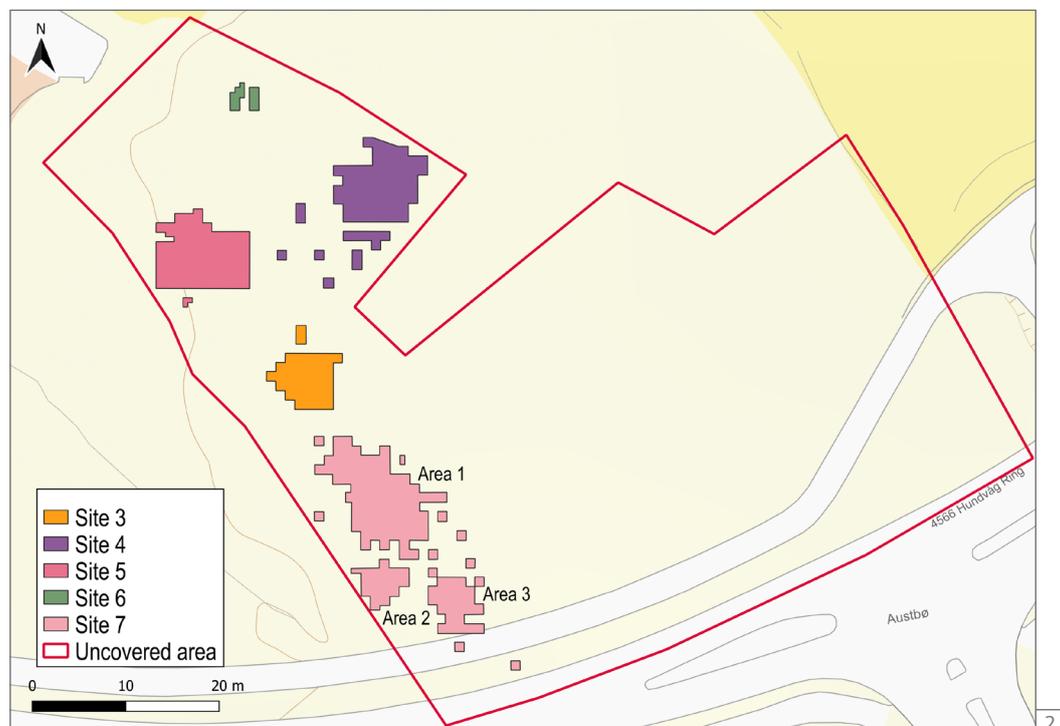
Three settlement areas on the islands of Hundvåg, Stutøy and Kvitsøy provide the basis for this discussion. These areas have undergone thorough excavations using mechanical topsoil stripping. This has provided a good overview of the topography and the relationship between different sites within each area. The lack of radiocarbon dates is a characteristic common to Mesolithic sites in southwest

Norway, and the site complex at Hundvåg as well as most of the sites at Stutøy are no exception. Nevertheless, typology, technology, raw material composition and the local shoreline displacement levels indicate that the sites and activity areas in these cases are from the same chronological phases and may have been used contemporaneously. The few radiocarbon dates support this, to a certain extent.

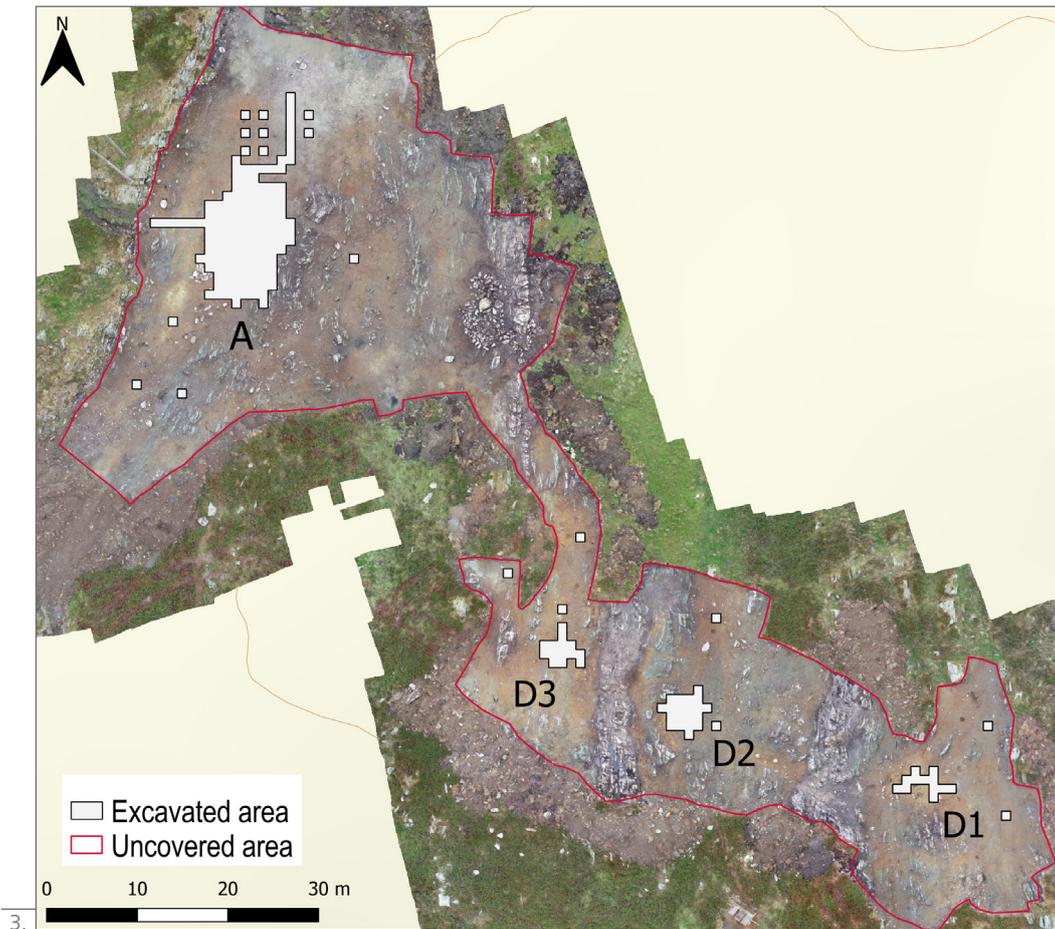
### Hundvåg, Stavanger municipality

The Early Mesolithic settlement complex at Hundvåg consists of five sites, lying within 10–15 m from each other (Figure 1). Three of these sites (4, 5, 7) contain 3 000–4 000 lithic artefacts each, the majority of these distributed within areas of 35–43 m<sup>2</sup>. The sites have several primary deposits, with a broad range of formal tool types, as well as many informal tool types, and are interpreted as dwelling places for households. Site 7 also consists of two small areas used specifically for the production and maintenance of projectiles. (Dugstad 2007, 2017).

Sites 3 and 6 produced few tools and more concentrated artefact distributions of 453 and 407 lithics, respectively. Site 3 has been interpreted as a knapping site, and a number of the finds can be associated with the production of a single flake axe. Site 6 is a secondary deposit comprised of production waste and a few diagnostic tool types.



Location of the five sites in the area investigated at Hundvåg, Stavanger. Illustration: Sigrid Alæk Dugstad, AM.



Aerial view of Site A, D1, D2 and D3 in the area investigated at Stutøy, Karmøy. Drone photo: AM.

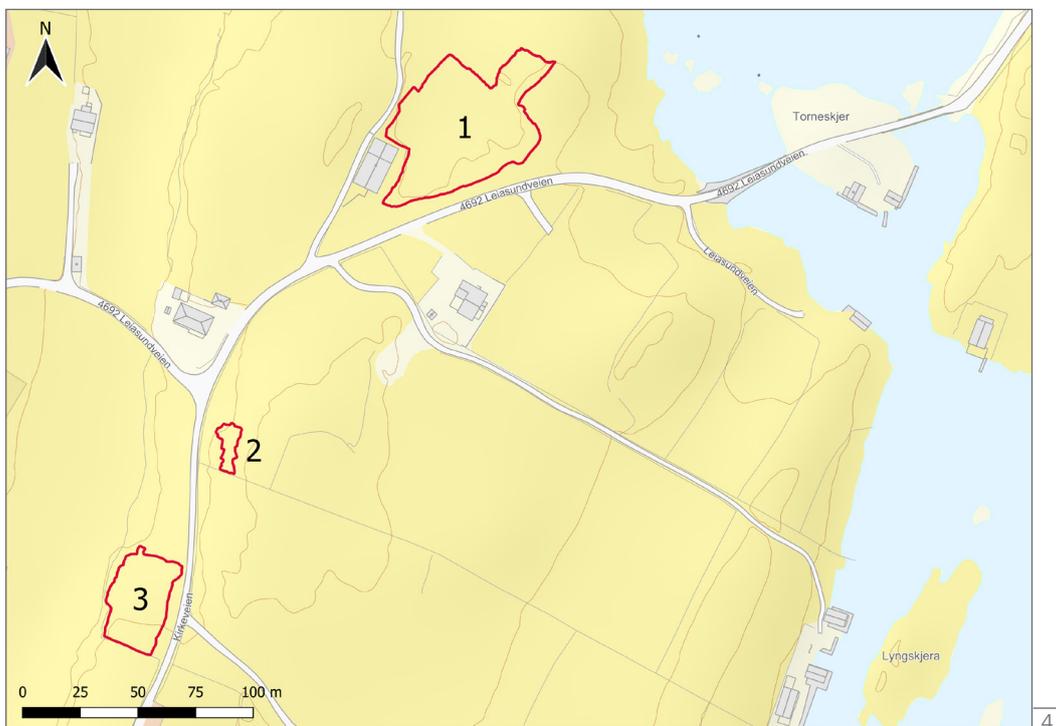
### Stutøy, Karmøy municipality

The settlement area at Stutøy comprises four sites dating to the Late Mesolithic (Dugstad et al. 2020). These sites lay in a hilly landscape amongst outcrops of bedrock (Figure 2). Site A, the largest in terms of both area and artefacts assemblage, lies on top of a small isthmus with access to two natural harbors. While the artefacts ( $n=2046$ ) were spread over an area of more than  $120\text{ m}^2$ , the main concentration was limited to an area of  $40\text{ m}^2$ . A broad range of tool types were present, and several artefacts bore evidence of secondary working and wear marks.

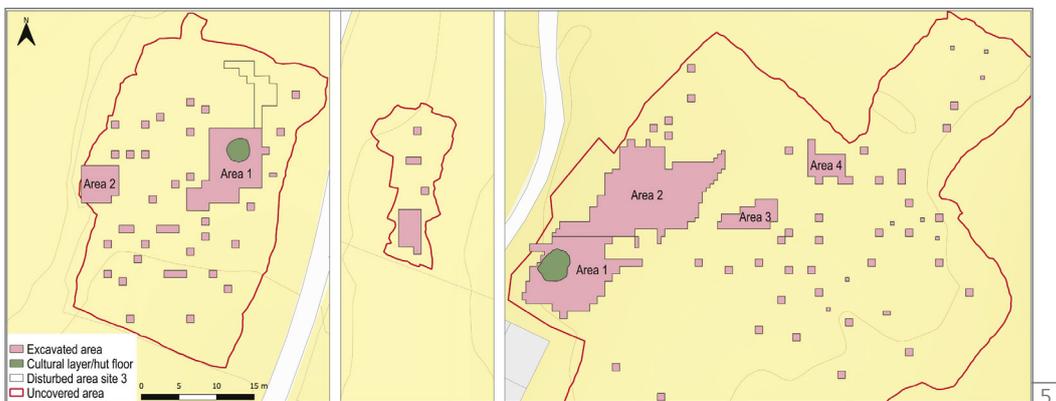
Three smaller sites (D1, D2 and D3) were identified 50–100 m distant from Site A. Sites D1 and D3, each less than  $10\text{ m}^2$  in size, produced 12 and 58 flint artefacts, respectively. Site D2 produced 226 lithic artefacts across an area of  $16\text{ m}^2$ , and was radiocarbon dated to the Late Mesolithic.

## Nordbø, Kvitsøy municipality

Three Late Mesolithic sites were excavated at Kvitsøy (Dugstad et al. 2018) (Figure 4). The largest, Site 1, produced a total of 16 463 lithic artefacts. The majority of these were associated with cultural layers, although lithics were spread across the entire 3 000 m<sup>2</sup> uncovered during soil stripping. Four areas were prioritized, two of which comprised cultural layers of 77 m<sup>2</sup> and 14,5 m<sup>2</sup>. The smaller of these interpreted as the remains of a floor. Several knapping sites were identified, and the variation in tool types reflects a range of different activities. It is also evident that Site 1 was used several times over the course of the Late Mesolithic and the transition to the Early Neolithic, as reflected through typology/technology, stratigraphy and <sup>14</sup>C-dates.



Location of the three sites at Nordbø, Kvitsøy. Illustration: Sigrid Alæk Dugstad, AM.



Map showing Kvitsøy site 3 to the left, site 2 in the middle and site 1 to the right. Illustration: Sigrid Alæk Dugstad, AM.

Site 2 lay 155 m to the southwest of Site 1. A majority of the 118 lithic artefacts were recovered from a 2 m broad surface edged by an outcrop of bedrock (Figure 5). While the site produced no diagnostic tool types, secondary working can be seen in the form of five retouched flakes. The artefacts point to a limited production and use of flint tools in the Late Mesolithic, and a radiocarbon date also points to Late Mesolithic activity.

Site 3 lay 70 m southwest of Site 2 and 225 m southwest of Site 1. Approximately 7 200 lithic artefacts, dating to the Late Mesolithic and the transition to the Early Neolithic, were recovered, most from within a 30 m<sup>2</sup> area. This area included a thin cultural layer of 9 m<sup>2</sup>, which overlay a packed stone surface interpreted as a floor layer. The artefact distribution suggests that there were also several activity zones scattered outside the floor layer. Radiocarbon dates from the cultural layer and beneath the stones support the typological dating supplied by the lithics.

Site name	Area	Cultural layer/structure	Amount of artefacts	Total artefact distrib.	Main artefact concentr.	Thickness of deposits	M.a.s.l.	Time period	Cal. age BC, 2 sigma
Hundvåg 3		-	453	27 m <sup>2</sup>	3-4 m <sup>2</sup>	15-20 cm	15	EM	-
Hundvåg 4		-	3053	43 m <sup>2</sup>	18-21 m <sup>2</sup>	35 cm	16	EM	-
Hundvåg 5		-	4135	35 m <sup>2</sup>	14-16 m <sup>2</sup>	35 cm	15	EM	-
Hundvåg 6		-	407	1,5 m <sup>2</sup>	0,5 m <sup>2</sup>	40 cm	15	EM	-
Hundvåg 7		-	Total: 3393	111 m <sup>2</sup>			15	EM	-
	Area 1		2658	38 m <sup>2</sup>	23-26 m <sup>2</sup>	25 cm			
	Area 2		248	14 m <sup>2</sup>	3-4 m <sup>2</sup>	15 cm			
	Area 3		487	26 m <sup>2</sup>	6-7 m <sup>2</sup>	15 cm			
Stutøy A		-	2046	122 m <sup>2</sup>	40 m <sup>2</sup>	30 cm	10-11	LM	-
Stutøy D1		-	12	7 m <sup>2</sup>	1 m <sup>2</sup>	10 cm	11	LM	-
Stutøy D2		-	226	16 m <sup>2</sup>	7 m <sup>2</sup>	20 cm	11	LM	5209-4992
Stutøy D3		-	58	8 m <sup>2</sup>	1 m <sup>2</sup>	10 cm	11	LM	-
Kvitøy 1			Total: 16463 <sup>†</sup>	337 m <sup>2</sup>			8-10	LM, LM/EN	4233-3991 5040-4800 5304-5056 5616-5474 5721-5566 5738-5657 5874-5740 6344-6091
	Area 1	14,5 m <sup>2</sup> (hut floor with two hearths)	8499	109,5 m <sup>2</sup>	36-40 m <sup>2</sup>	30 cm			
	Area 2	77 m <sup>2</sup>	6004	153 m <sup>2</sup>	30 m <sup>2</sup>	25 cm			
	Area 3	-	226	22,5 m <sup>2</sup>	2 m <sup>2</sup>	10 cm			
	Area 4	-	839	20 m <sup>2</sup>	6 m <sup>2</sup>	20 cm			
Kvitøy 2			118	14 m <sup>2</sup>	3-4 m <sup>2</sup>	20 cm	12	LM	5195-4837
Kvitøy 3			Total: 7220*	148 m <sup>2</sup>			8-9	LM, LM/EN	3976-3811 4041-3972 4225-3975 4449-4263 4487-4354 4518-4346
	Area 1	9 m <sup>2</sup> (partly covering remains of a stone paved floor of c. 2x2 m)	5015	71,5 m <sup>2</sup>	30 m <sup>2</sup>	25 cm			
	Area 2	-	367	18 m <sup>2</sup>	3-4 m <sup>2</sup>	20 cm			

6. |

Table 1: Key information about the sites discussed in the text. \*Of the 16 463 lithic artefacts from Site 1 c. 895 are stray finds or from test pits. \*Of the 7 220 artefacts from Site 3 a total of 5 382 are from Area 1 and 2, c. 1600 from an area with modern disturbances on the northern outskirts that are not included in the discussion, and the remaining ones are stray finds or from test pits.

## Discussion

Three of the sites at Hundvåg have been interpreted as dwelling sites lying short distances from specialized activity areas (Dugstad 2007, 2017). The secondary deposits suggest there was a need to clean up sections of the settlement area to avoid accumulation of waste or to free up space for new tasks. A failed attempt at axe production, undertaken by an unskilled knapper, was identified in-between the dwelling sites. This seems to reflect the efforts of a child or young individual practicing knapping techniques, and illustrates the activities of individuals of varying age within the household (Dugstad 2010). Early Mesolithic groups are often characterized as small, with a high degree of mobility (Bang-Andersen 2012:110, Bergsvik 1995:122–123, Bjerck 2017, Bjerck 2008:570, Breivik & Callanan 2016, Fuglestedt 2012:5, Nærøy 2000:25, 2018). However, recent studies suggest that a rethinking of group size and length of settlement periods might be in order (e.g. Dugstad 2014, 2017, Åstveit 2014). The clear organization amongst the sites at Hundvåg, the division into several dwelling places and specialized activity areas, the large range of tool types, as well as evidence for practice-knapping and clearance activities suggests that several households occupied the site concurrently, and for longer periods than typically assumed (Dugstad 2017:328–330). Similar results, where finds distribution and structures reflect several general and specialized activities within connected areas, are being uncovered in increasing numbers, and this is largely due to the use of mechanical top-soil stripping (e.g. Bjerck et al. 2008, Jakslund 2012, Reitan et al. 2018).

The larger sites at Kvitsøy and Stutøy, where the tool composition and distribution of artefacts suggest a broad range of activities, are interpreted as dwelling sites. A division of general and specialized activity zones spread over larger, connected areas, are also reflected through the artefact distribution at Kvitsøy sites 1 and 3. In addition, the results from both Kvitsøy and Stutøy reveal small, topographically delimited sites within the immediate vicinity of the larger ones. Radiocarbon dates from Kvitsøy indicate that Site 2 may have been in use at the same time as the larger Site 1 (middle of the Late Mesolithic), whereas Kvitsøy sites 1 and 3 produced overlapping radiocarbon dates towards the latter half of the Late Mesolithic. The radiocarbon date from Stutøy places Site D2 in the middle of the Late Mesolithic. This site is one of three small, adjacent sites at the same height above sea level. It is therefore natural to assume that they represent smaller zones for specialized tasks associated with the larger settlement area. The smaller sites mentioned above, and their narrow range of tool types, give the impression of specialized activity areas rather than independent dwellings. They appear to be systematically organized and not the result of temporary or occasional stations along a communication route. These smaller sites may be representative of activities such as butchery or skills training that were somewhat detached from the dwelling areas.

Ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological studies stress that hunter-gatherers tend to make use of large areas. The settlements may consist of several contemporaneous dwellings and many of the daily activities are undertaken in the surrounding landscape. Ainu settlements consisted of house structures several hundred meters apart each other, with each dwelling surrounded by associated activity areas and structures covering areas of 150–400 m<sup>2</sup>. There appears to have been strict rules governing the separation of activities, with special areas for such as skinning, deposition of waste, storage, preparation of fish, etc. (Watanabe 1973:8–48). Similar settlement organization can be seen amongst the Nunamiut (Binford 1991:29). It is likely that in a traditional archaeological investigation such a collection of sites would not be interpreted as a single, interconnected settlement area (Grøn 2000:189, Grøn & Kuznetsov 2003:219). In unique cases, with exceptional preservation conditions, it has been possible to demonstrate this type of varied activity taking place in the Mesolithic (e.g. Bokelmann 1995, Sjöström 2015, Sjöström & Hammarstrand Dehman 2013).

In contract archaeology, construction areas or administrative boundaries, rather than cultural historical or scientifically defined boundaries, determine the degree of visibility of sites and settlement areas. Thus, the understanding of Mesolithic settlement and activity we derive from contract excavations may be influenced as much by modern factors as by the material itself. It is crucial to maximize the potential within the construction area, and there are many opportunities and choices when approaching the fieldwork which may facilitate this. The examples above illustrate not only the importance of large projects, which provide opportunities to survey and excavate extensive areas, but also the importance of looking for Mesolithic activity in less traditional, less obvious areas. In Rogaland, many of the small sites are located in topographically delimited areas, and an increased awareness of this phenomenon has led to a more concerted effort to recover the faint but important traces. This approach has produced several closely spaced sites of different sizes and with complementary areas of activity.

### Concluding remarks

Recent work in Rogaland has demonstrated that there may often be smaller sites with few lithic remains in the vicinity of larger settlement sites, suggesting that Mesolithic settlements were larger and more complex than traditionally assumed. Clearly the lithic evidence captures only one facet of settlement activity, and this makes a strict definition of settlement sites based on lithics distribution problematic. Given this, the small, lithic-sparse sites adjacent to larger settlement sites take on a greater significance for our understanding of hunter-gatherer settlement organization, and excavation strategies that prioritize their investigation become more relevant.

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