

Mesolithic Presentation Sites

This catch-all term encompasses [museums](#), [archaeoparks](#) and [excavation-based centres](#) as the overlap between these makes it difficult to draw simple boundaries between them. As analysis progresses it is hoped that the various strengths and weaknesses of each type as a means to present Mesolithic material will become clear.

Sites presenting at least some Mesolithic material are common in much of Europe but tend to be general archaeological or historical museums with a small space presenting the Mesolithic as part of a more general display on prehistory or the Stone Age as a whole.

Most [excavation-based centres](#) and many [archaeoparks](#) have a focus attached to some local discoveries and – given the rarity of discoveries of Mesolithic structures – very few have the Mesolithic as a major focus.

Methods

This framework will be the basis of the analysis of each site but may not be fully applied to those that are less informative due to a low quantity or quality of Mesolithic presentations.

Desk-based assesment

- **Categorisation:** Is the site a [museum](#), [archaeopark](#) or [excavation-based centre](#), is it public /private, profit-making/non-profit
- **Heritage role:** Is the site a collecting museum with responsibility for archiving the material in its catchment area? Is it connected to government, heritage agencies or universities?
- **Online presentation:** the quality, usability and accessibility of the sites online presence for local and international audiences.
- **Visitor data:** Is the museum popular? Is there any visitor feedback on Mesolithic displays? Are there studies on 'dwell time' at the Mesolithic displays?
(such data will have to be gathered through contact with museum staff)

Onsite assessment

- **Representation of the Mesolithic in the catchment area:** Is the Mesolithic over- or under-represented in the displays when compared to its presence in the archaeological remains of that area?
- **Representation of the Mesolithic as part of a narrative:** Is the Mesolithic presented as a legitimate period between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic? Is it presented as filler, merely because there are Mesolithic artefacts in the collection?
- **Gallery presentation:** How much space is given to the Mesolithic as a proportion of the whole museum? Is the material/interpretation up-to-date? How is it displayed? Cases? Artefacts? Texts (multiple languages)? Images? Models? Dioramas? Audio-visual material? What is the use of space, lighting and other architectural factors like? Does the museum 'flow'? Is the visitor encouraged to engage with the Mesolithic more or less than with other elements of the museum?
- **Personal engagement:** Is there direct engagement from archaeologists/museum staff? Experimental archaeology? Lectures? Workshops? Performances? Handling sessions? Who are these aimed at? Are they popular? How well trained are the presenters? Are they archaeologists? How up-to-date is the material?

Pro-forma will be designed to facilitate the assessment of each of these questions.

Though they will be assessed in a similar theoretical framework there will be different levels of attention paid to [UK sites](#) (the study area) and those in [the rest of Europe](#).

The analysis is anticipated to take place in several stages though some may run concurrently:

1. International comparisons and a survey of European Mesolithic presentation sites
2. Initial survey of British Mesolithic Presentation sites (including those currently in development)
3. Selection of British Mesolithic sites for case studies
4. Visits and analysis
5. Synthesis and recommendations