

From Stone Tools to Satellites: Recent Research into the Prehistory of Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of our recent research into the prehistoric archaeology of Tamil Nadu. Excavations at Attirampakkam and regional studies of Palaeolithic landscapes led to a fresh understanding of the nature, context and age of prehistoric sites in this region. At Attirampakkam, investigations led to the discovery of Acheulian artefacts within sediments previously considered to be Cretaceous in age. New dates from the Acheulian levels at this site indicate that these horizons exceed approximately 1 million years in age, with significant implications for theories on hominin dispersals across Asia. The application of satellite remote sensing, field studies and GIS over an area of around 8,000 sq km in northern Tamil Nadu and ongoing studies in the extreme south are also discussed here.

In addition to research, the project included a significant component of impact assessment studies and addressed issues related to heritage management for prehistoric sites in India. Owing to rapid destruction of sites by infrastructure development, we also propose a predictive model to locate areas where new sites have a high probability of being detected.

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