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THE MAGDALENIAN OPEN AIR SITE OF BAD KÖSEN LENGEFELD

FACES ITS FINAL SEASON

Overview and Outlook

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Bad Kösen-Lengefeld - Overview

Located south of Naumburg in Saxony-Anhalt/Germany (fig. 1), the site is situated on the left bank of the Saale River at an elevated position. Here, it overlooks steep cliffs to both sides of the river valley that transitions here from a wider plain into a narrow gorge situation. The site was already discovered in 1954, but excavations began only later in 2008 as a joint project between the universities of Cologne and Erlangen-Nürnberg in close cooperation with the Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt. A number of consistent radiocarbon dates place the occupation of the site firmly to approximately 15,300 cal BP.

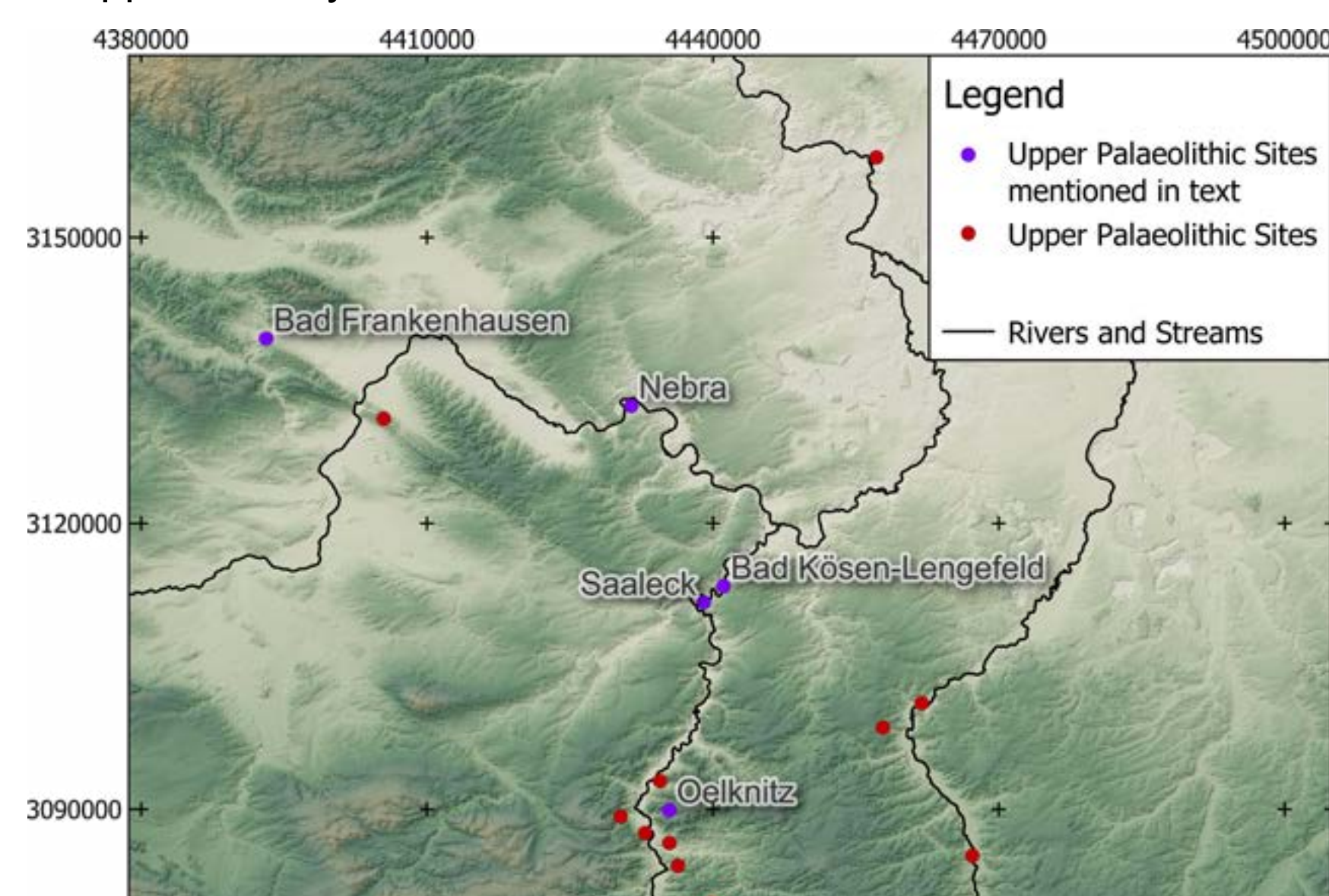


Fig. 1: Selection of upper Palaeolithic sites in the area (EPSG 3035).

Regional context

Bad Kösen-Lengefeld is part of a larger cluster of Magdalenian sites in the region (fig.1), with the well-known site of Saaleck in immediate proximity down at the valley floor (fig. 2). Along with abundant lithic and organic finds, settlement features, such as pits and fireplaces were preserved at numerous Magdalenian sites in the region. This cluster of caves, rock shelters, and open-air sites thus provide ideal conditions for investigations into land-use patterns of late Pleistocene hunter-gatherer groups. During the late Pleistocene the landscape was characterized by a steppic vegetation and horse usually dominates the Magdalenian faunal inventories in the region.



Fig. 2: View of the site from the south, taken from the tower of Saaleck Castle. 1: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld, 2: Saaleck.

The faunistic remains

Given the general pattern of horse-dominated faunal remains, it is particularly interesting that remains of horse (fig. 3) and reindeer (fig. 4) were found at the site. Furthermore, it seems that these remains correspond with specific areas, since reindeer bones were primarily identified in the southern part of the site. Remains of ice fox are also present. For both horse and reindeer, it can be assumed that the killing took place at or in the immediate surroundings of the site, since all body parts of both taxa were identified.

Features and findings

Out of more than 26.000 artefacts (as of 2021) recovered during the excavations, only 5% were transformed into tools. This tool/blank ratio is thus considerably smaller than at other Magdalenian assemblages from central Germany. Of the present tools, backed bladelets are the dominating tool from the northern and southern part of the lithic assemblage. This is in line with a typical Magdalenian assemblage. A special category of findings are engraved limestone slabs.

The features of the site (fig. 5) can be broadly divided into three groups: Hearths (e.g., fig. 9), slab layers (e.g., fig. 7) and pits (e.g., fig. 6). Feature 15 can most likely be regarded as a central hearth feature. Most of the small pits are arranged around it. While only a small area of the site was disrupted through modern day ploughing, it is still difficult to determine whether this circular cluster of small pits is the remnant of some sort dwelling.

Feature 6 (fig. 8) is remarkable inasmuch as its densely packed content of lithics might be interpreted as a depot, showing the potential variety that is to be found within the large group of pits.



Fig. 3: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 13, Pl. 2.3. Jawfragment of a horse with a burin lying on top.



Fig. 4: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 12, Pl. 2.2. Limestone slabs and reindeer remains.



Fig. 7: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 25, Pl. 2.6/2.7. Slab layer. Fig. 7: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 25, Pl. 2.6/2.7. Slab layer.

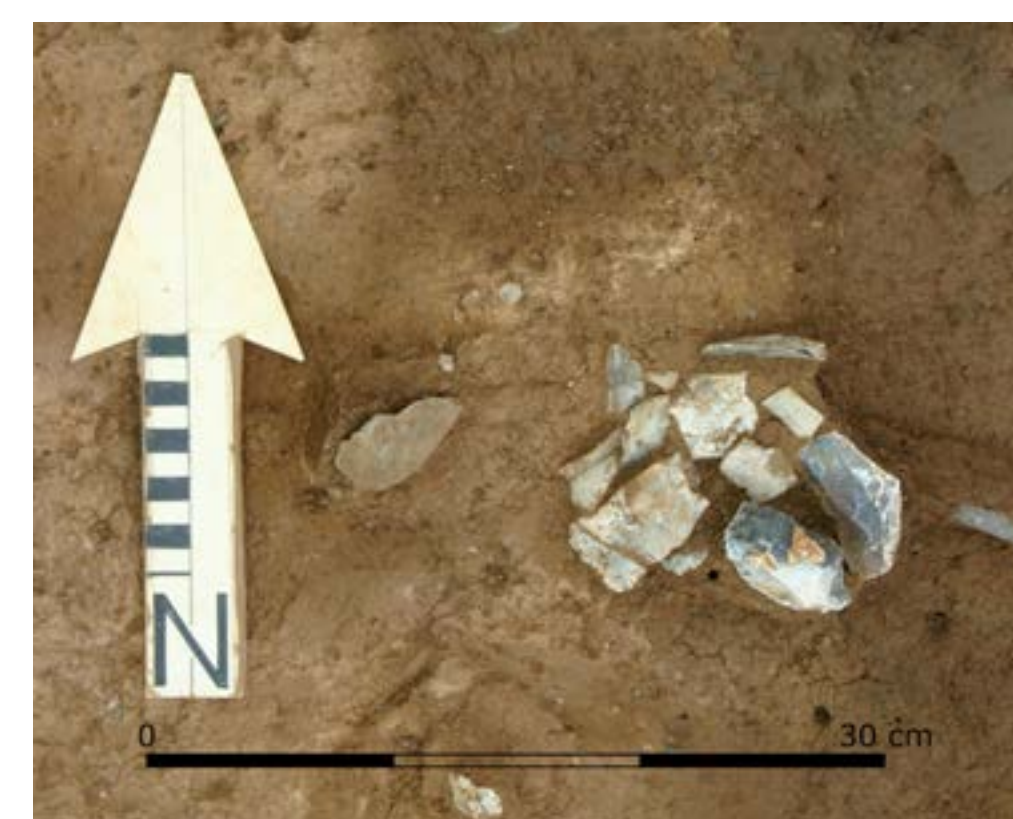


Fig. 8: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 6. The densely packed feature might be a depot.



Fig. 9: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 15, Pl. 2.2. Hearth feature with quartz boulders.

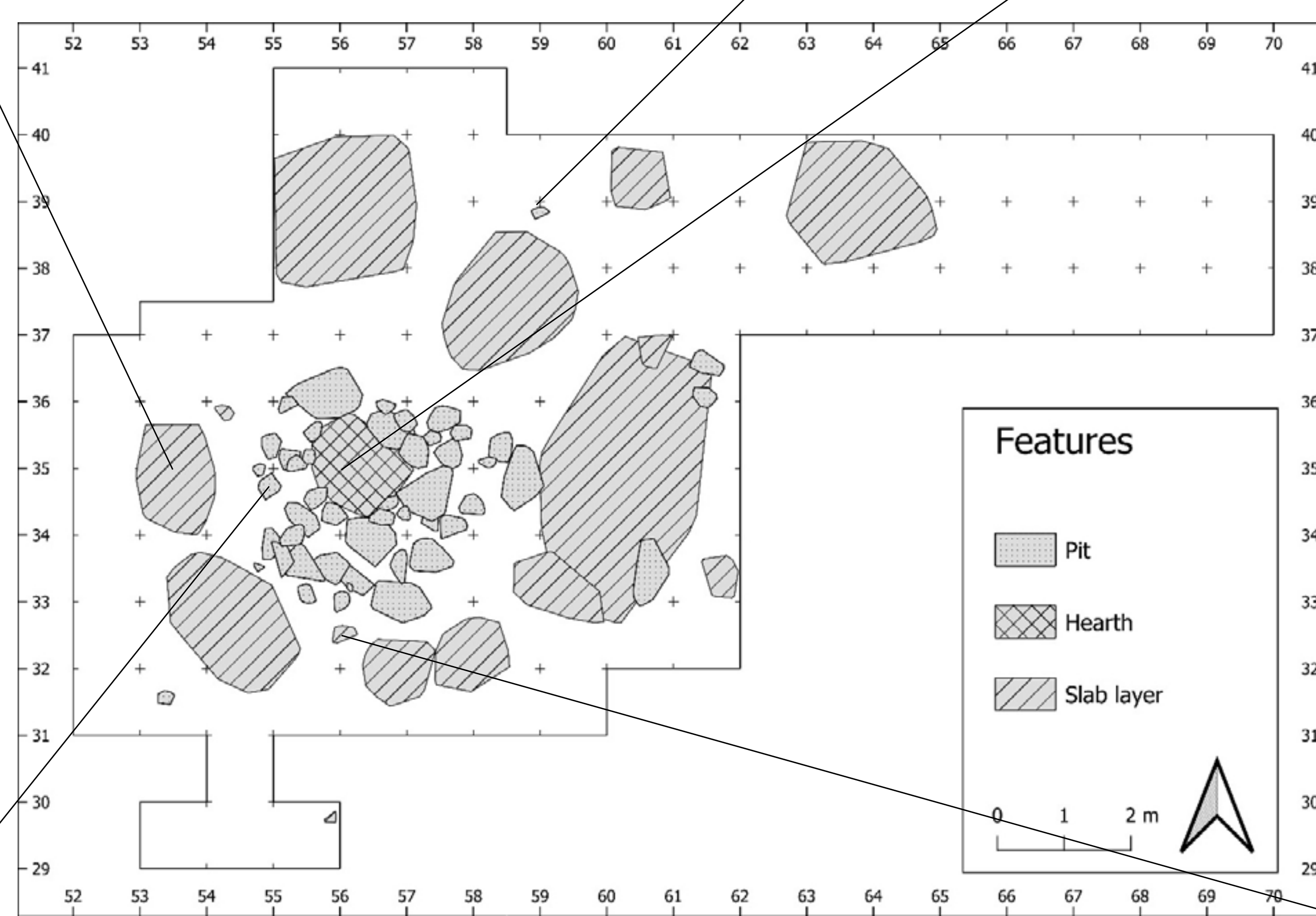


Fig. 5: The features of the Magdalenian site of Bad Kösen-Lengefeld (created by M. Schemmel).



Fig. 6: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Feature 41, Pl. 2.9. Pit with multiple visible artifacts.



Fig. 10: Bad Kösen-Lengefeld. Profile of feature 46. Pit feature with multiple visible artifacts and faunistic remains.

Bad Kösen-Lengefeld - Outlook

After 15 years of excavations, the work will come to an end this year. However, much remains to be done and the analysis and evaluation of the finds, settlement features and their position in regional context will take some time. The cultural and natural transformation processes are currently addressed as part of a Master thesis by M. Schemmel. A second Master thesis will start soon, dealing with an approximately circular structure of small pits - most of them probably postholes (Uthmeier/Richter/Maier 2021; fig. 3) - and the question of how GIS tools can contribute to the understanding of such features. The planned research strategy aims at deciphering a possible contemporaneity of the pits (in synchronous groups), the internal stratigraphy of the individual pits (subdivided into several functional and filling phases) and the settlement-wide relationships between the features. Special attention is paid to the inclination of the feature structures in the profile and the features they contain. Indeed, feature structures represent a frequent object of discussion in archaeological research and a methodology for evidencing the cohesiveness of several features to a larger structure could make a valuable contribution, also to the analysis of other sites with similar features.

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