



Press Release

Stone tool tells the story of Neanderthal hunting

Museum of Prehistory in Blaubeuren presents the “Find of the Year”, a leaf point from the University of Tübingen’s excavation at Hohle Fels Cave

Tübingen, den 22.07.2021

65,000 years ago Neanderthal from the Swabian Jura hunted horses and reindeer with hafted leaf-shaped stone points. A newly discovered leaf point from the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hohle Fels Cave documents the evolution of hunting. A team under the direction of Professor Nicholas Conard for the University of Tübingen and the Senckenberg Centre for Human Evolution and Palaeoenvironment in southern Germany recovered the artifact underlying a layer dating to 65,000 years ago, which represents a minimum age for the find. Microscopic studies document that this carefully made projectile point was mounted on a wooden shaft and used as a thrusting spear to kill large game. Results of the excavations and analysis of the leaf point appear in two papers in this week’s publication of *Archäologische Ausgrabungen in Baden-Württemberg* and *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte*.

“The new discovery represents the first time a leaf point has been recovered from a modern excavation, allowing researchers to study the fresh find with state-of-the-art methods,” says Conard. The last time researchers in the region recovered such artifacts was in 1936. The chert artifact is 7.6 cm long, 4.1 cm wide, 0.9 cm thick and weighs 28 grams. Conard adds that “our results document how the tool was made, used and why it was discarded.” Thanks to a series of four ESR-dates the find is securely dated to over 65,000 years ago. Until now finds of leaf points were interpreted as belonging to the period between 45,000 and 55,000 years ago, and belonging to the last cultural phase of the Neanderthals in Central Europe. Conard reports “The new results demonstrate that our assumptions about the dating of the cultural groups of the late Neanderthals were wrong and need revision.”

University of Tübingen
Public Relations Department

Dr. Karl Guido Rijkhoek
Director

Antje Karbe
Press Officer

Phone+49 7071 29-76788
+49 7071 29-76789
karl.rijkhoek[at]uni-tuebingen.de
antje.karbe[at]uni-tuebingen.de

www.uni-tuebingen.de/aktuell

Museum of Prehistory
Blaubeuren

Dr. Stefanie Kölbl
Managing Director

Prof. Nicholas J. Conard Ph.D.
Scientific Director

Heike Roth M.A.
Media contact

Phone +49 7344 96 69-90
+49 7344 96 69-911
presse[at]urmu.de

www.urmu.de

Dr. Veerle Rots from the University of Liège in Belgium conducted detailed microscopic analyses of the leaf point. Damage to the tip indicates that the artifact was used as a hafted spear point, and that the spear was likely thrust into prey rather than being thrown. Rots' work documents how Neanderthals used plant-based glue and bindings made from plant fibers, sinew or leather to secure the leaf point to the spear. Neanderthals clearly used the spear for hunting. While they re-sharpened the tool it broke, leading to its discard. Rots remarks "Neanderthals were expert stone knappers and knew exactly how to make and use complex technologies combining multiple parts and materials to produce and maintain deadly weapons." Earlier fossil humans during the time of *Homo heidelbergensis* used sharpened wooden spears for hunting, but these spears lacked mounted stone points like those used by Neanderthals.

The leaf point from Hohle Fels will be on display at the "Find of the Year" at the Museum of Prehistory in Blaubeuren from July 22 until January 2022. "Hohle Fels is a remarkable site where after 25 years of excavation by the current team, spectacular discoveries from the period of the Neanderthals and early modern humans are still being made," says Dr. Stefanie Kölbl, the director of the Museum of Prehistory.

The Museum of Prehistory in Blaubeuren is the central research museum for topics related to the UNESCO World Heritage sites of the Swabian Caves and for Ice Age Art. It contains many of the earliest examples of figurative art including the Venus of Hohle Fels and the earliest musical instruments known worldwide.

The Museum is open from Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am – 5 pm (www.urmu.de).

Please note the current restrictions for museum visitors due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Publications:

Nicholas J. Conard, Alexander Janas: „Ausgrabungen im Hohle Fels: Fundschichten aus dem Mittelpaläolithikum und Neues zur Jagdtechnik der Neandertaler.“ *Archäologische Ausgrabungen in Baden-Württemberg 2020*, Juli 2021, S. 60-65.

Veerle Rots, Justin Coppe, Nicholas J. Conard: „A Leaf Point Documents Hunting with Spears in the Middle Paleolithic at Hohle Fels, Germany / Eine Blattspitze belegt die Jagd mit Speeren im Mittelpaläolithikum am Hohle Fels, Deutschland.“ *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte 30 (2021)*, S.1-28.

Contact:

Prof. Nicholas Conard PhD
University of Tübingen, Pre- and Early History and Scientific Archaeology
Senckenberg Centre for Human Evolution and Palaeoenvironment
Scientific Director Museum of Prehistory Blaubeuren
Phone +49 7071 29-72416
[nicholas.conard\[at\]uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:nicholas.conard[at]uni-tuebingen.de)

Dr. Veerle Rots
University of Liège
Head of TraceoLab
Phone +32 4366 54 36
veerle.rots[at]uliege.be

Dr. Stefanie Kölbl
Managing Director Museum of Prehistory Blaubeuren
Phone +49 7344 9669 911
koelbl[at]urmu.de

Press photos of the following images can be found at:
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Hohle Fels. Leaf point.
Photo: University of Tübingen



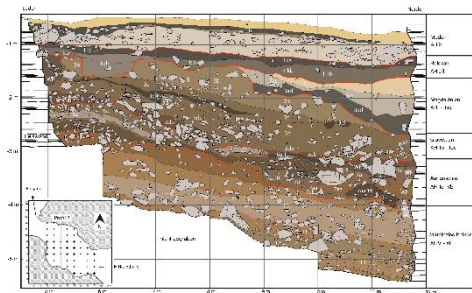
Hohle Fels. The chert artifact in finding position.
Photo: A. Janas/University of Tübingen



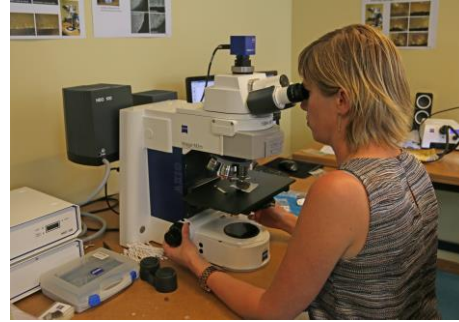
Hohle Fels. Mario Mata-Gonzalez at the discovery
of the leaf point.
Photo: A. Janas/University of Tübingen



Hohle Fels. Overview of the excavation in July 2020.
Photo: N. J. Conard/University of Tübingen



Hohle Fels. Profile 2 with cultural layers
Graphics: University of Tübingen



Dr. Veerle Rots at the University of Liège.
Photo: University of Liège



Hohle Fels near to Schelklingen.
Photo: Jens Burkert/Copyright Weltkultursprung



Cave hall in Hohle Fels
Photo: Jens Burkert/Copyright: Weltkultursprung