

Stone Age Settlements in the Pskov Region (Northwest Russia): A Review of Old Materials and New Fieldwork

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Abstract

The paper presents an overview of the Stone Age materials discovered in the central and northern parts of the Pskov district (Northwest Russia). There are 15 sites where stone and ceramic materials were identified. Some materials from the sites were lost, while others were identified only by artefacts from quartz, flint or ceramic fragments, which renders their cultural identification questionable. The most representative collection from the territory discussed was obtained from site 10 near the lake of Belaya Struga with stone (flint, slate, quartz) and ceramic artefacts. Analogies for pottery could be traced among Typical Comb Ware materials in Latvia, Estonia and the nearest Russian territories (Leningrad district), dating to the 5th millennium-4th millennium BC. Some micro-blades and micro-scrapers were also discovered, which could perhaps be attributed to the Mesolithic period. Further studies in this region seem promising in terms of searching for the cultural layer “in situ” of both the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods.

1 Introduction

Generally, the Pskov region can be included in the “Circum-Baltic” space of Stone Age cultures, but this territory is still a “white spot” on the Stone Age map of north-western Russia. The sites in question (including pile-dwelling settlements) were only studied in the southern part of the region (Miklyaev 1969). Numerous sites have been identified in Estonia (Jaanits 1959; Johanson et al. 2014; Roio & Kriiska 2015; Sikk et al. 2020; etc.) and Latvia (Loze 1979; 2015; Macāne & Nordqvist 2021; Zagorskis 1963; 1987; etc.), and a lot of Stone Age sites are also present in the Leningrad region (Gerasimov et al. 2010; Kriiska & Gerasimov 2014; etc.).

The Closest sites in Russia are located at the western part of the Leningrad district – Sokolok and Syaberskoe III (Timofeev 1985; 1993). Outside of Russia, the nearest sites

are located in south-eastern Estonia – Tamula I (Indreko 1945; Jaanits 1984; Jaanits et al. 1982), and in eastern Latvia – Osa, Piestina, Abora I, Asne I and others of the Lubāna Lowland (Loze 1979; 2000; Zagorskis 1965; Zagorskis et al. 1984).

When it comes to the central and northern parts of the Pskov region, however, only sporadic sites are known. Hence this region is of great interest for Stone Age archaeological surveys and excavations.

2 Stone Age sites in the Pskov region

The first mentions of Stone Age materials from the Pskov region date back to the beginning of the 20th century. They were signed on the archaeological map that was made for the XIV Russian Archaeological Congress in 1913 (Trudy 1914), but until the mid-20th century only a few sites with flint

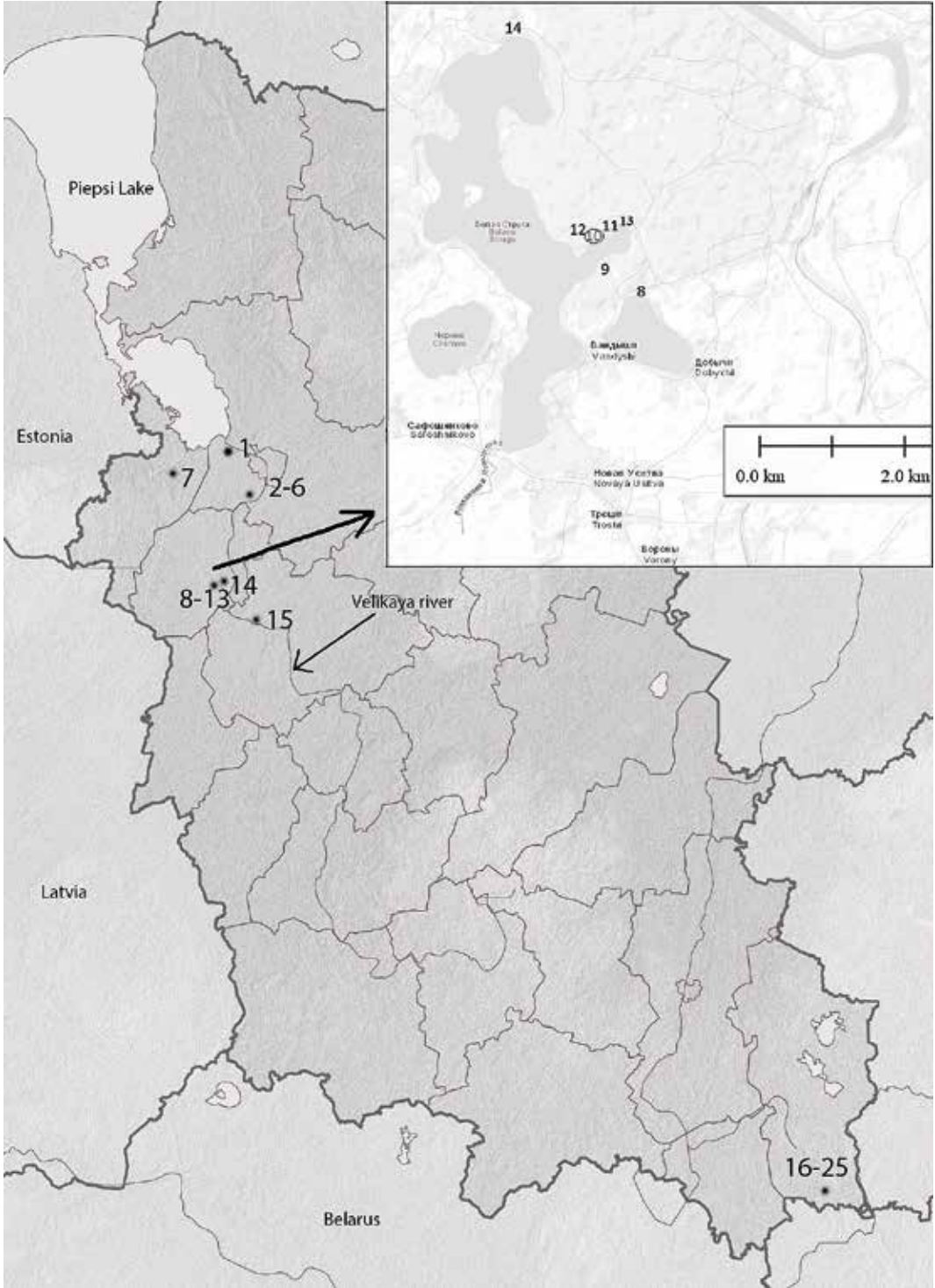


Figure 1. Locations with Stone Age materials in the Pskov region (1 – 15 – locations, found by N. N. Gurina and A. N. Scheglov; 16 – 25 – locations, found by A. M. Miklyaev).

and ceramic artefacts were known in this territory.

Further investigations in the region were connected with Nina N. Gurina's fieldworks in the 1950s. The main topic of her study was a history of the population of North-west Russia in the Stone Age (Gurina 1955; Mazurkevich 2008). She surveyed the shores of Lake Peipus in the northern part of the Pskov region and a course of the Velikaya River from the town of Ostrow to the river mouth at Lake Peipus in its central part.

During the 1955–57 field seasons, Gurina uncovered 11 sites (Gurina 1955), but for now the only available tools for locating the aforementioned sites are short descriptions and small-scale sketches of artefact findspots with no exact geographical coordinates.

All the sites are located on the left bank of the Velikaya River (Fig. 1). One of these sites, – Gogolevka (Fig. 1: 3), near Pskov, was already known earlier, – as research there was conducted in 1912 by Alexander Mednis, the employer of the Pskov Archaeological Society. The cursory results were published by Sergey Parkhomenko in 1916 (Parkhomenko 1916: 6–7). The site was located on the surface of a destroyed dune. Fragments of ceramic vessels with horizontal lines of pits and comb stamps, pieces of burnt bones (unidentified) as well as flint artefacts (flakes, chips, fragments of knives and arrowheads, scrapers) were found in the dune's blows. Unfortunately, the area of this site was destroyed by modern activities and the archaeological collection lost.

Some of the other potsherds discovered (Fig. 1: 15) could be attributed to Asbestos Ware (close to the Orovnavolok–XVI type – see: Zhulnikov 1999: 50) or Comb Ware (Fig. 1: 5, 9), but the fragments are largely indefinable due to their size.

3 Belaya Struga sites

In 1957 Aleksander Shcheglov carried out an archaeological survey along the shores of Belaya Struga lake in the Palkino district, in the central part of the Pskov region (Shcheglov 1957). He revealed six sites (Fig. 1: 8–13):

- 1) Site 1 by A. N. Shcheglov (Fig. 1: 8) by the northern shore of Lake Shchadritskoe. Finds: flint chips and small fragments of ceramic vessels.
- 2) Site 2 by A. N. Shcheglov (Fig. 1: 9) by the southern cape of the eastern bay of Belaya Struga lake. Finds: Pit-Comb Ware fragments and a few flint chips.
- 3) Site 3 by A. N. Shcheglov (Fig. 1: 10–12) by the northern cape of the eastern bay of Belaya Struga lake, opposite site 2. A. N. Shcheglov has defined three concentrations of finds there: a) western, on the cape. Finds: numerous flint artefacts and several ceramic fragments (Fig. 1: 10); b) materials from the central part, including thin-walled ceramics with cut-in ornament of straight lines forming shaded triangles (Fig. 1: 11); c) eastern. Finds: flint artefacts including large scrapers, fragments of thick-walled ceramic vessels (Fig. 1:12).
- 4) Site 4 by A. N. Shcheglov (Fig. 1: 13) located 150–200 metres to the east from site 3 and containing two Mesolithic blades (according to his description).

The archaeological surveys at the shores of Belaya Struga lake were continued in 1958 by Nina Gurina, during which she found a site on the left bank of the River Struglitsa containing Mesolithic materials (according to her notes) (Fig. 1: 14).

In 2018–2019 the fieldworks were continued by the author, during which site 10 was revealed. A test pit of 2x2 sq.m. was excavated. The total area of the site is around 90 sq.m. The finds contained stone artefacts, pottery fragments and a large number of pieces of burnt bones. Unfortunately, these materials cannot be separated based on stratigraphy or spatial analysis. The materials were deposited at the edge of the terrace in the sandy soil. The excavation was conducted in 5–7 cm horizons and the finds were documented with a laser total station. Neolithic and Iron Age ceramics were found together, and pieces of burnt bones were found in all horizons. The cultural layers are not distinguished by lithology.

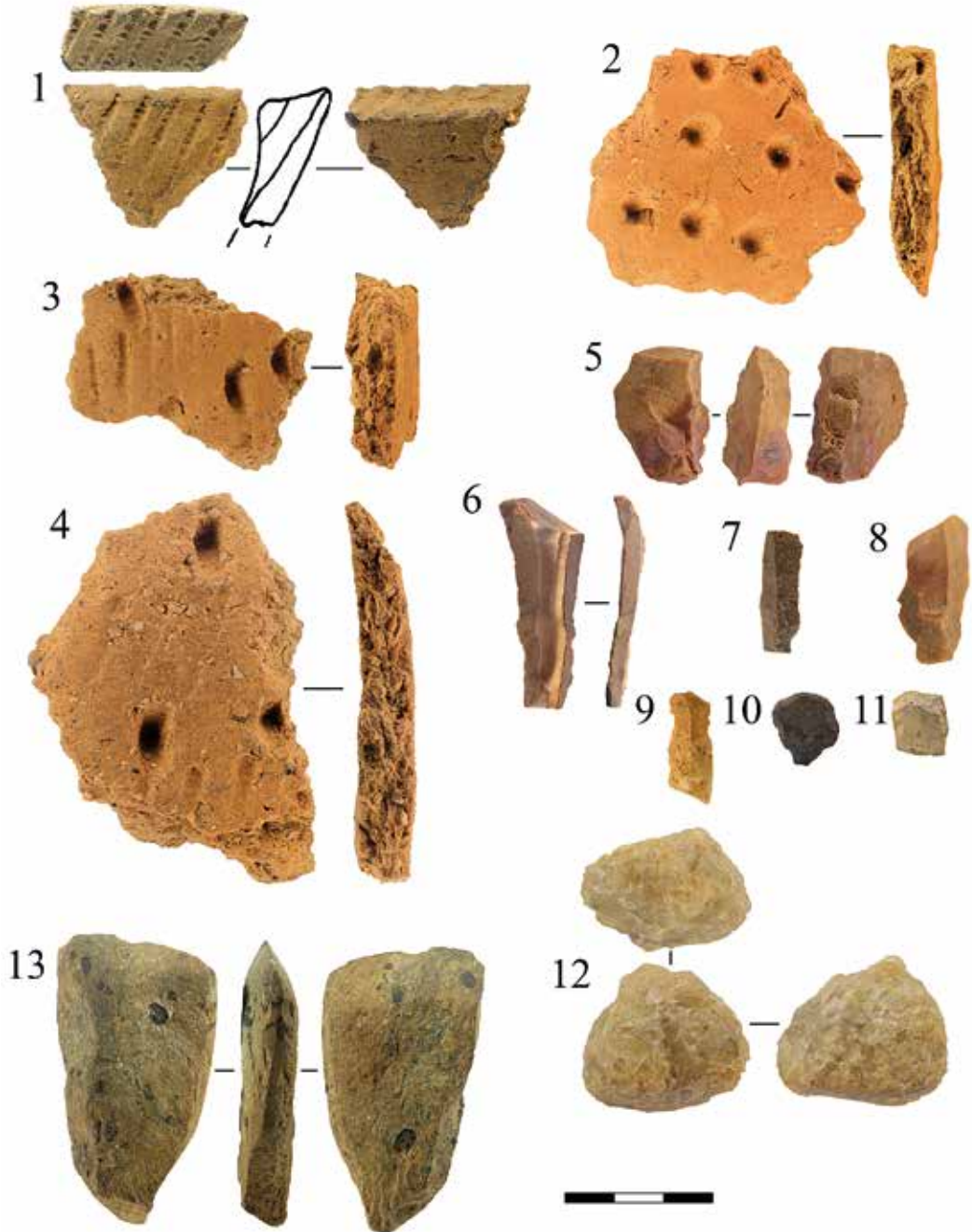


Figure 2. Materials from the Belaya Struga site, no. 3: 1 – 4 – ceramic; 5 – 11 – flint; 12 – quartz; 13 – slate.

Type	Material			
	flint	slate	quartz	
microscrapers	4			
microblades	2			
blades and fragments	2			
cores	2		1	
flake-blades	3			
flakes	2	2		
tools fragments with polishing		2		
axe		1		
chips	64	4	3	
total	79	9	4	92
total (%)	86%	10%	4%	100%

Table 1. Stone materials from site 10 (Belaya Struga lake).

So far, a total of five Stone Age sites have been identified along the shores of Belaya Struga lake. The most representative archaeological collection was obtained from site 10.

3.1 Stone artefacts

More than 103 fragments of stone artefacts were found, mostly grey and black flint. Some slate and quartz artefacts were also found (Table 1).

The materials consisted mostly of debris (86 %). The collection includes two microblades (Fig. 2: 7), four small scrapers on the ends of blades (Fig. 2: 10), two fragments of flint amorphous cores (Fig. 2: 5) and one quartz core (Fig. 2: 12). The slate materials include an axe (Fig. 2: 13), flakes, chips and fragments of slate tools with polishing.

3.2 Ceramic vessels

Overall, 196 fragments of ceramic vessels were found. Some of them were attributed to the Iron Age – such as a flat-bottomed vessel with an artificial gruss admixture. The rim is slightly bent outwards. The vessel has no ornamentation.

There are a minimum of seven vessels (according to a complex of features: moulding clay, the rim’s profile, ornamentation elements and motifs, technology of making pottery) with pit and comb stamps in ornamentation (Fig. 3). They have been made via the patching technique, the thickness of the wall ranges from 6 to 9 mm, and the surface is well-smoothed. The clay mass contains an artificial gruss admixture. The rims are straight and thickened. The ornamentation has been made with deep conical pits (Fig. 2: 2), less often in combination with a comb stamp (Fig. 2: 4). Some of the rims have only been ornamented with comb stamps. Sometimes the edge of the vessel is also ornamented (Fig. 2: 1).

The ceramic collection also features fragments of a vessel with organic temper as an admixture. The wall’s thickness is 5 mm. The rim is bent outwards. The ornamentation features a horizontal line of the notches’ imprints.

4 Conclusions

There are 15 sites containing Stone Age materials in the central and northern parts of the Pskov region. Most of them are sites that were uncovered in the middle of the 20th cen-

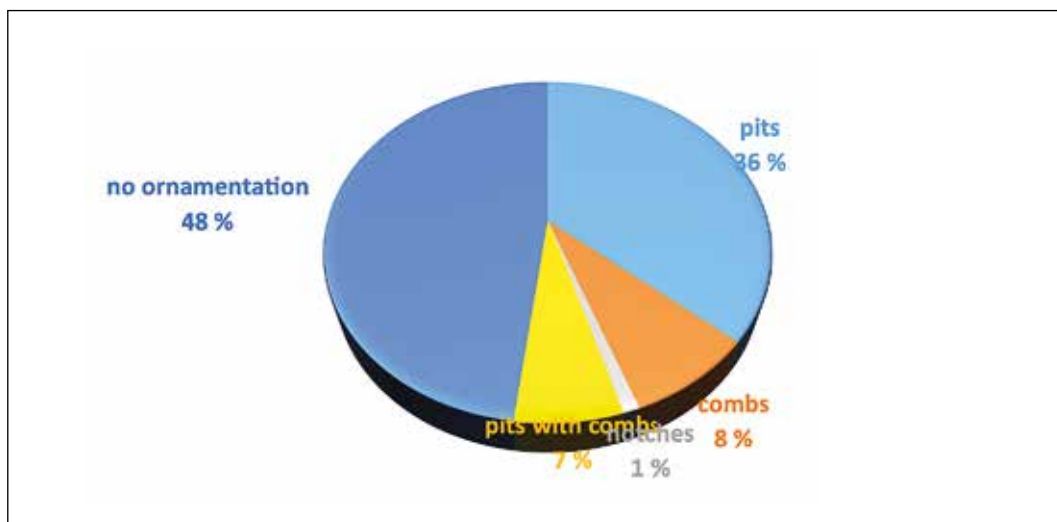


Figure 3. Ornamentation stamps and their combination on ceramics (Belaya Struga lake, site 10).

tury by Nina Gurina. Some materials were lost (like at Gogolevka), while others only consist of artefacts from quartz, flint, or ceramic fragments.

The most representative collection from the territory discussed was obtained from site 10 near Belaya Struga lake. This is the multi-layer site. The cultural layer consists of stone, ceramic materials and pieces of burnt bones. Some pottery (flat-bottomed vessel with artificial gross admixture without ornamentation) has analogies in Iron Age materials.

The ornamentation of ceramic fragments with pits and combs could be attributed as Neolithic. There are a lot of similar ceramics among the materials of the Typical Comb Ware, which was used in north-eastern Europe in the 4th millennium-5th millennium BC (Nordqvist & Kriiska 2015). Sites with Typical Comb Ware materials have been identified in Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Russia (the Karelian Isthmus, Leningrad district, etc.).

The nearest sites with Comb Ceramic pottery (Loze 1984) are located in Latvia (site Zvidze – see: Loze 1988: 268; site Sulka – see: Loze 1988: 268), Estonia (burial Tamula I – see: Indreko 1945; Jaanits 1984) and the Leningrad district. The Comb Ce-

ramic pottery from the Syaberskoe III site in Russia dates to the end of the 3rd millennium BC (Timofeev et al. 2004: 96–97). Perhaps the Gogolevka site (according to the description) could also be attributed to this cultural group. The nearest Typical and Late Comb Ware materials in the burial Tamula I in Estonia date to the end of the 5th millennium-middle of the 4th millennium BC (4200–3495 cal BC) (Kriiska et al. 2007: 107), while in Latvia the Comb Ware materials from the site of Zvidze date to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC (Loze et al. 1984: 54).

Cultural identification of the stone (flint) artefacts from site 10 is problematic. There are no tools which could be attributed to some cultural tradition or archaeological culture. Most of the materials in the collection consist of debris. The slate axe has analogies among the Comb Ware materials (Loze 1988: tab. XXXII). Quartz tools also feature among the artefacts of the Comb Ware culture in Latvia and Russia. This material was also used during the Mesolithic in Estonia (Rostedt & Kriiska 2019), but it was widespread during the Neolithic.

The analysed collection contains some micro-blades and micro-scrapers that have

been made from the local materials. These materials are not characteristic of the Middle Neolithic, but are representative of the Mesolithic. According to Gurina's description, site 14 at the River Struglitsa can be attributed to the Mesolithic.

A lot of Mesolithic sites have been discovered in Latvia (Zvejnieki II, the lower layer, Suliagals, Osa, etc.) (Loze 1988; Zagorskis & Zagorskis 1977) and Estonia (Jaanits & Jaanits 1978: 63; Jaanits et al. 1982; Johanson et al. 2021). In the southern part of the Pskov region materials of the final Paleolithic and the Early Mesolithic (Ivantsov Bor, Baburova Gora, Lukashenki I and III) were also found (Lisitsyn 2003: 40–41; Zheltova 2003: 39).

The late stage of the Mesolithic (end of the 8th millennium – middle of the 5th millennium BC) at the eastern part of the Baltic coast (Gerasimov & Kriiska 2018: 307; Kriiska & Gerasimov 2014) is marked by

the use of local materials, small sized tools (micro-scrapers) and the absence of morphologically expressed tool types (Kriiska & Gerasimov 2014: 18).

Thus, we can suppose that more Mesolithic sites could be discovered near the lake of Belaya Struga. And perhaps the presence of microblades and microscrapers at site 10 is related to this period.

We hope that during the future excavations at the central part of the Pskov region more cultural and chronological data will be obtained.

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Abbreviations

ИЯЛИ – Институт языка и литературы
 КарНЦ – Карельский научный центр
 ПГОИАХМЗ – Псковский государственный объединенный историко-архитектурный и художественный музей-заповедник