

Life, Evolution and Palaeoecology at the Headwaters of the Nile (LEAP Nile)

LAURA BASELL

School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University
Belfast, UK

l.basell@qub.ac.uk

This paper focusses on new research into the Stone Age of the Kagera River, which flows through Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. To date the LEAP Nile Project has focussed on: the excavation of two new sites in Uganda, Rubirizi 1 and 2; geoarchaeological survey, particularly along the lower and middle reaches of the river; and the analysis of materials from the Tanzanian site of Nyabusora which was excavated in the 1930s and 1950s but never fully published. The interdisciplinary landscape approach adopted, has demonstrated that this area has great potential in contributing to debates on East African Quaternary landscape change and the evolution of our species.

An overview of preliminary results from the survey and excavations at both Rubirizi and Nyabusora will be presented, including OSL dates from the excavations at Rubirizi which yielded Sangoan tools. Fewer than five Sangoan sites have ever been reliably chronometrically dated, and the sites at Rubirizi represent the first chronometrically dated Early-Middle Stone Age sites in Uganda. It is clear that while some elements of the lithic assemblages resemble artefacts from sites of comparable antiquity further east, particularly the bifacial elements are locally distinctive and differ from Early Stone Age (Acheulean) assemblages. This implications of such similarities and differences will be considered, specifically in relation to notions of innovation and embodied technological practice as well as more traditional concerns such as function. Although it is not yet known which species of hominin produced these lithics it is hoped that the renewed interest in this important area will establish the western rift region as one that is just as relevant to debates concerning the evolution of *Homo sapiens* as areas further east.