

**Why what's in the middle matters: An archaeological perspective on later Middle Pleistocene African paleoenvironments.**

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My aims are (1) to focus upon the importance of the later Middle Pleistocene (~400-130 ka) for human evolutionary studies, (2) to briefly describe recent investigations of hominin landscape use during this period, (3) to emphasize the varied level of temporal resolution available from archaeological and geological evidence, and (4) to stress the importance of spatial variation in paleoenvironments relative to the dispersal of hominin populations and behavioral innovations within Africa. I illustrate these points with examples drawn from my archaeological and tephrostratigraphic research in the Kapthurin and Olorgesailie Formations of Kenya, investigating the Acheulian to Middle Stone Age transition. This archaeological phenomenon marks a series of major hominin behavioral changes that occur broadly coincident with the appearance of *Homo sapiens*.