

**RESEARCH REPORT
IREX STG**

**Grantee: Olga Soffer
Grant Year: 2002**

1. Topic of research and countries visited:

A. Topic: A STUDY OF PALEOLITHIC WEAVERS AND THEIR TOOLS

B. Countries visited & dates: Russia, May 8 - June 9, 2002

2. Relevance and contribution to field - brief description of the scholarly significance of your research and its impact on the field:

I am an anthropological archaeologist specializing in hunter-gatherer lifeways in Eurasia during the last Ice Age. My research and publications have not only brought the wealth of the little known Central and East European record to Anglophone scholars, but also highlighted the need for the familiarity with the pan-European record for our reconstructions of the Paleolithic past.

My recent research on Paleolithic weaving and net and basket making is dramatically changing our images of Ice Age life. The hunter-gatherers who occupied the Eurasia some 50-10, 000 years ago left a voluminous material record that is extraordinarily rich in technical diversity. These technologies have certainly informed our reconstructions of Ice Age lifeways, but our insights have almost exclusively come from the study of durable materials : stone, ivory, antler, and bone. This has occurred in spite of ample ethnographic evidence that perishable plant-based organic technologies form the bulk of hunter material culture both in the ethnographic present as well as in the past. The wealth and diversity of perishable inventories which likely existed in Upper Paleolithic times, as well as our past failures to recover them, have strongly biased our understanding of life in the deep past. Since ethnographic evidence indicates that perishable technologies are very strongly associated with women, children, and older individuals , our past failure to recover them has concealed the work and lives of the majority of Ice Age people and resulted in scenarios of Paleolithic life lived almost exclusively by prime-aged males. My work with Paleolithic perishables - the textile impressions and "Venus" figurines - as well as the work on the recognition of bone, ivory, and antler tools used to weave and to construct baskets and nets conducted this past May under IREX Short Term Travel Grant support - is

dramatically diversifying our understanding of Upper Paleolithic lifeways. It is revealing not only the labor of the "unseen majority", but also giving us a social perspective on those lifeways, including insights into gender and status in prehistory.

3. A concise summary of your approach and research methodology including a list of research sites:

As noted in my research proposal, my prior research with analogous ethnographic tools and implements used to produce perishable textile products has shown that the diagnostic edgewear can be seen both with the naked eye and at low power magnification. Because of this, I devised very "low tech" non-destructive but effective study methods during my work with the ethnographic materials. I favor them over other methods because they can be used study archaeological collections even in the most poorly equipped locales, including the field. As anticipated, this was indeed the case in the Russian museums and institutes where I worked and where I :

- a) visually examined bone, ivory, and antler implements from Upper Paleolithic sites to select suitable specimens for further study.
- b) examined the selected specimens in detail both visually and under low-power magnification (up to 10x) to ascertain the presence and location of diagnostic wear.
- c) measured and record pertinent information about each identified tool and about the location and extent of the diagnostic edgewear - documenting this information both in writing as well as through photography (black and white; color).

This work was done with the materials from the listed sites at the following institutions:

1. Moscow, - Museum of Anthropology, MGU -work with collections from the Upper Paleolithic site of Avdeevo.
 - Institute of Archaeology, RAN - work with collections from the Upper Paleolithic site of Zاراиск,
2. Saint Petersburg: - Paleolithic Sector, IIMK RAN - work with collections from the Kostenki and Yudinovo sites.
 - Paleolithic Department, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, RAN - work with materials from Kostenki, Eliseevichi and Yudinovo curated there.

4. A summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions:

As anticipated, I was able to definitely identify antler, ivory, and bone tools that bore the diagnostic use-wear indicating that they had indeed been used to produce perishable plant-based items. Specifically, this wear was most unambiguous on items used

as weaving sticks and battens (or fragments thereof) which I observed in the inventories from the Upper Paleolithic sites of Avdeevo, a number of the Kostenki sites, as well as from Eliseevichi. Organic preservation and post-depositional damage at the sites of Zaraisk and Yudinovo, however, were such that I was not able to spot the anticipated use wear on items which morphologically were similar to weaving tools and implements.

My preliminary conclusions are that weaving tools are indeed present in the inventories of Russian Upper Paleolithic sites. Their existence in the inventories thus augments other evidence for weaving and basket making in the Paleolithic obtained from different sources of data.

I am currently in the midst of analyzing my data. Once this is complete I intend to write up the results of this research and submit it for publication in both English and Russian.

5. Suggestions for future research agendas in your field for the scholarly community:

As I have argued repeatedly in a number of publications, it is imperative that archaeologists working on remains from the deep past in all parts of the world be aware of the strong biasing that a focus on durable media such as stone bring to our reconstructions of the past. Past hunter-gatherers, just like ethnographically documented ones, did not "live by stone alone". Thus, in order for us to reconstruct the past as fully and as diversely as it was lived, we need concerted efforts to recover and study more than stone tools. As my and my colleagues' work is showing, doing so opens new vistas into the hitherto unseen past and brings into focus the lives of people beyond prime age male hunters.

6. Any recommendations for the US Policy Community: none