

11 Survey and Excavations along the Kasai River

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Introduction

The Kasai River, flowing for more than 2000 km from its source in the Angolan highlands to its confluence with the Congo River, forms the largest sub-basin of the Congo River (N’kaya Moukandi *et al.* 2022). Due to its change in character over this long course, the Kasai is traditionally divided into two main sections: the Upper Kasai, between its Angolan headwaters and Ilebo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Lower Kasai, from Ilebo to its confluence with the Congo River at Kwamouth. The lowest stretch between Mushie and Kwamouth is also known as the Kwa. The Lower Kasai, the focus of the BantuFirst archaeological survey, ranges between 800 m and 5 km in width, with thousands of mid-channel river islands spread across its course. Along the northern banks of the river, the Lower Kasai is bordered by equatorial forests and in its southern part by a mosaic of shrubby savannas and gallery forests (Nicolai 1964). Because of its size and depth, this stretch of the Kasai is a major transport artery. Since the colonial period, it has been used to transport goods from Kinshasa to Ilebo, where it links up with the railroad network connected to Lubumbashi (Van Pul 2023).

Until the present study, archaeological research along the lower Kasai had been restricted to the investigations of Van Moorsel (1970) which largely focused on lithic collections. Therefore, the BantuFirst archaeological survey and excavations along the Kasai River were designed to fill in the missing gaps in our knowledge of the region, and collect archaeological materials from all periods. These investigations were carried out across three campaigns over more than 500 km between Mushie and the Loange River. The first campaign, directed by Igor Matonda in 2020, extended from the city of Bandundu to the locality of Panu Sumbu – a distance of more than 200 km. The second campaign, co-directed by Peter Coutros and Igor Matonda in 2021, was conducted along the Kasai between the Kwilu and Loange confluences. This investigation added a further 98 km to the ground covered by the first campaign, and targeted places downriver omitted during the first campaign – with particular attention paid to the left bank. During the third campaign in 2022, also co-directed by Peter Coutros and Igor Matonda, the work focused on the Bandundu-Mushie-Kwamouth axis. However, due to the serious security problems on the Mushie-Kwamouth axis, this was not the subject of surveys.

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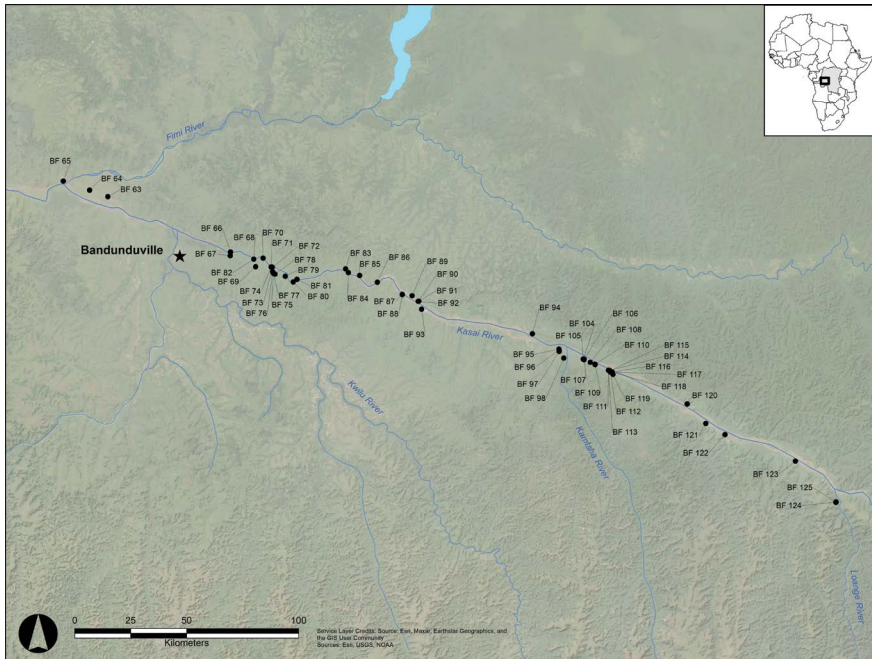


Figure 11.1 Map of the Kasai River and the sites investigated.

Still, the Kasai River as a whole has proven to be extremely rich in archaeological materials. Out of the thirty-five sites along the Kasai River identified over the course of the three BantuFirst campaigns, our team has excavated ten and produced a cultural chronology of the river that is anchored by thirteen new radiocarbon dates (Figure 11.1). These radiocarbon dates have been taken from wood charcoal and analysed by Beta Analytic or the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory at the Belgian Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA).

Excavated Sites

Presented here are the descriptions of the ten excavated sites along the Kwilu River, with a particular focus on the stratigraphy and context of the archaeological finds. For descriptions of the analysis and interpretations of the recovered materials, see [Chapters 18](#) (lithics), [19](#) (pottery), [20](#) (phytoliths), [21](#) (soil stable isotopes), and [22](#) (charcoal) in this volume. Likewise, detailed data can be found in the appendices for the locations ([Appendix 1](#)), dates ([Appendix 2](#)), and pottery (Appendices 3–4) from each site. Sites are presented below in order of site number, which generally corresponds to the movement of the archaeological team upriver. Radiocarbon dates were processed by Beta Analytic and the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory at the Belgian Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) and were calibrated using OxCal 4.4 with the SHCal20

calibration curve for the Southern Hemisphere within 2σ (Bronk Ramsey 2009; Hogg *et al.* 2020).

Mushie (BF 65)

Description

Mushie is a large town and the capital of the eponymous territory in the Mai Ndombe Province. It is located at the confluence of the Kasai and Fimi Rivers. The latter, characterised by its black colour, flows from Lake Mai Ndombe and meets the Kasai near Mushie. The two rivers then become the Kwa River, a sub-tributary of the Congo River which flows into it at Kwamouth. Three units were excavated at Mushie, including two (Tr 1 & 2) on intelligence service property and one (Tr 3) along an exposed clay/sand quarry in the nearby schoolyard. Only Tr 3 produced archaeological material.

Context and Finds

All three excavation units measured 2×1 m and were excavated in 20 cm artificial spits. The first two units (Tr 1 & 2) revealed a highly disturbed context – likely the result of several stages of modern construction – that only produced modern debris (e.g., concrete). Therefore, a brief survey was conducted in the area to search of additional, less disturbed locations. To the south of the first two units, archaeological material was identified in the profile of a large clay/sand quarry located on the property of a nearby school. Tr 3 was then established along the western edge of the quarry and excavated to a depth of 1 m (Figure 11.2a). The stratigraphy of Tr 3 contains two levels, including: (1) a loose reddish sandy clay that was determined to be partially the backfill from the quarrying activities, and (2) a very dense red clay (Figure 11.2b). Pottery was exclusively recovered from a context within the red clay between 20 and 60 cm. One wood charcoal sample was also recovered from the lowest spit of this context, and produced a recent date between the late 17th century and the present (Table 11.1).

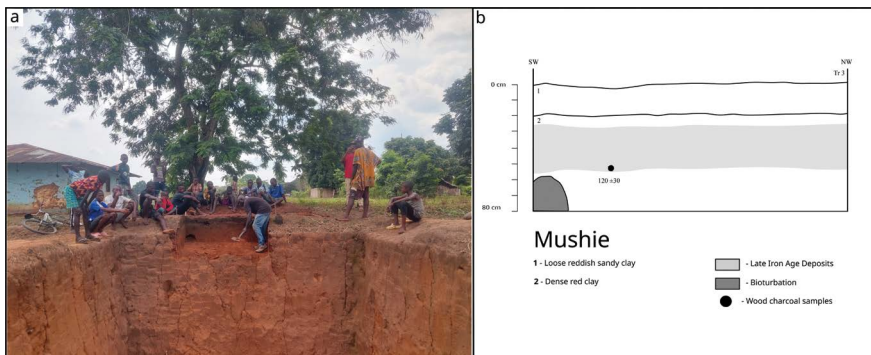


Figure 11.2 (a) Photograph of Mushie excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Mushie Tr 3.

Table 11.1 Radiocarbon date from Mushie excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
Beta-648826	Tr 3	40–60	Wood Charcoal	120 ± 30	1696 CE–present

Bosuka Ancien (BF 71)

Description

The site of Bosuka Ancien is located within the vicinity of the Bosuka village hosting so-called “Boma-Sud” people (Sulzmann 1983; Stappers 1986). This village is located on the left bank of the Kasai River at an altitude of 300 m and is administratively dependent on the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. Numerous lithics – including bifaces, blades, and microliths – are scattered along both the beach and the village itself. During the survey at the southern end of the village, a partially buried pot was located, the upper part of which was visible above the surface. In light of these surface finds, five units were established within the immediate vicinity of the buried pot. In addition to archaeological survey, a brief ethnographic study was conducted to gather information on the pottery production *chaîne opératoire* from the testimony of one of the last active potters of the village.

Context and Finds

Tr 1 and 2 were each 1 m² and oriented along a northeast-southwest axis, while Tr 3–5 were 1 × 2 m and were oriented along a northwest-southeast axis. The stratigraphy from all of the Bosuka Ancien units was the same, and was composed of three natural layers, including: (1) a compact and dry yellowish clayey layer, (2) a very dry whitish-grey clay layer, and (3) a humus layer that is also grey, measuring only a few centimetres (Figure 11.3). Unfortunately, while Tr 2 was excavated to

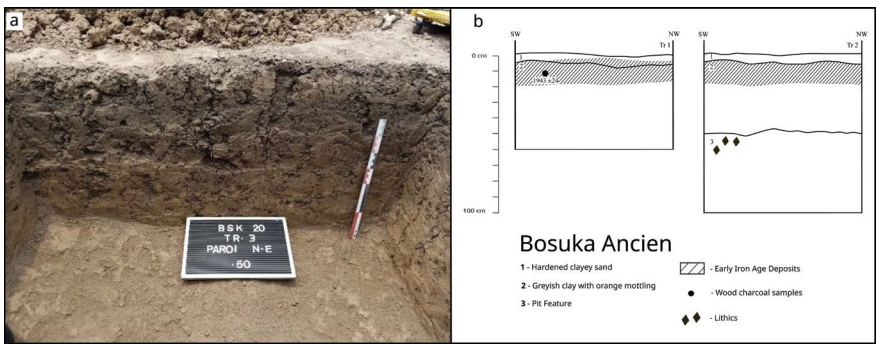


Figure 11.3 (a) Photograph of Bosuka Ancien excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Bosuka Tr 1 & 2.

Table 11.2 Radiocarbon date from Bosuka Ancien excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
RICH-29612	Tr 1	0–20	Wood Charcoal	1943 ± 24	30–203 CE

a depth of 1 m, an outcrop of rocks in Tr 1 did not allow us to go beyond 60 cm. Archaeological materials were only collected from Tr 1 and 2 and in both cases the Early Iron Age (EIA) pottery was present in the 0–20 cm spit, largely with the whitish-grey clay layer. In addition to the pottery, the excavation yielded flakes and debitage between 40 and 60 cm deep in Tr 2 and rare fragmented, eroded and undecorated sherds between the surface and 40 cm. One wood charcoal sample associated with a rounded pot base was collected for dating, placing this assemblage within the beginning of the first millennium CE (Table 11.2).

Iser (BF 75)

Description

The Iser site is located in the hinterland of the Boma-Sud village of Bosuka and was identified during the same stop as Bosuka Ancien. The area around Iser is open, and covered in grass with few shrubs as well as agricultural fields where peanuts and cassava are grown. However, there is a gallery forest, from which the site takes its name, nearby. It includes a steep slope inclined on a west-east axis, which allows for the sliding of artefacts toward the east which are brought to the surface by the effects of manual ploughing. On the flat area above, which is more open because it has been ploughed, there are a few trees such as both *Borassus* and *Elaeis* palms and a baobab which dominates the site. It is around this baobab that five excavation units were installed.

Context and Finds

Both Tr 1 and Tr 2 were 1 × 2 m units located within the vicinity of the large baobab tree. Tr 1 was installed on the flat area, approximately 60 m away from the baobab, and oriented on a north-south axis. Tr 2 was installed approximately 35 m away, at the beginning of the slight downward slope, and oriented on an east-west axis. In both units, the stratigraphy consisted of (1) a grey humus layer and (2) a fairly compact orange-brown clay (Figure 11.4b). Excavations in both units only yielded material in the grey humus layer between 0 and 20 cm and were concluded after 40 cm.

Approximately 46 m to the south, a third unit (Tr 3) was installed on a north-south axis. The stratigraphy of Tr 3 consists of three natural layers, including: (1) a dark brown humus layer, quite loose with roots, (2) an orange-brown layer containing charcoal, pottery, and burnt earth, and (3) a compact yellow clay layer. Due to the presence of a small feature along the southeastern wall of the unit at 20 cm, a 1 × 1 m extension was installed connecting the southeastern corner. While the

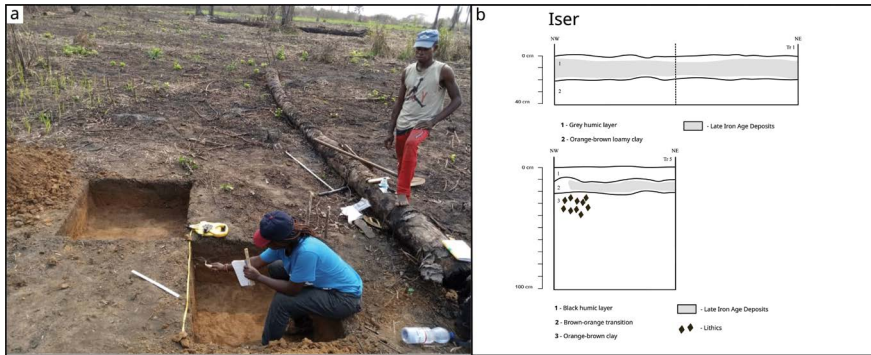


Figure 11.4 (a) Photograph of Iser excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Iser Tr 1 & 5.

eastern portion of Tr 3 produced some pottery on the boundary between the dark brown humus and yellow clay layers, between 20 and 40 cm, the western portion of the unit was completely sterile.

In addition, two 1×1 m test pits (Tr 4 & 5) were installed to the south of Tr 3 toward the steep slope of the hill. Here, the stratigraphy contained three natural layers: (1) a black humus layer, (2) a brown-orange transition layer containing a lot of charcoal, pottery sherds, and burnt earth, and (3) a compact orange-brown clay layer (Figure 11.4b). All of the pottery was collected from the brown-orange transition layer between 10 and 20 cm, while a series of lithics were recovered from within the orange-brown clay layer between 20 and 40 cm.

Salaminta (BF 84)

Description

Formerly a farm created around 1971 and located on the banks of the river at an altitude of 300 m, Salaminta has now become a village in its own right, also known as Minta. It is a small village, however, comprising thirty houses at most. It is directly across the river from the village of Seko, which can be seen from the bank. The populations claim to be from the Yansi community of the Bende Kasai group. It is administratively dependent on the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. The name Salaminta comes from the forest that surrounds it, and the settlement is covered with several fruit trees amongst the houses. The initial surface survey revealed very fragmented, friable, and eroded sherds appearing on the village's dry and compact clay soil. Six excavation units were established across the village and its northern slope down to the beach.

Context and Finds

Excavations began with three 1×2 m excavation units (Tr 1-3) on top of a ceramic concentration located on the flat area just above the slope toward the beach near a

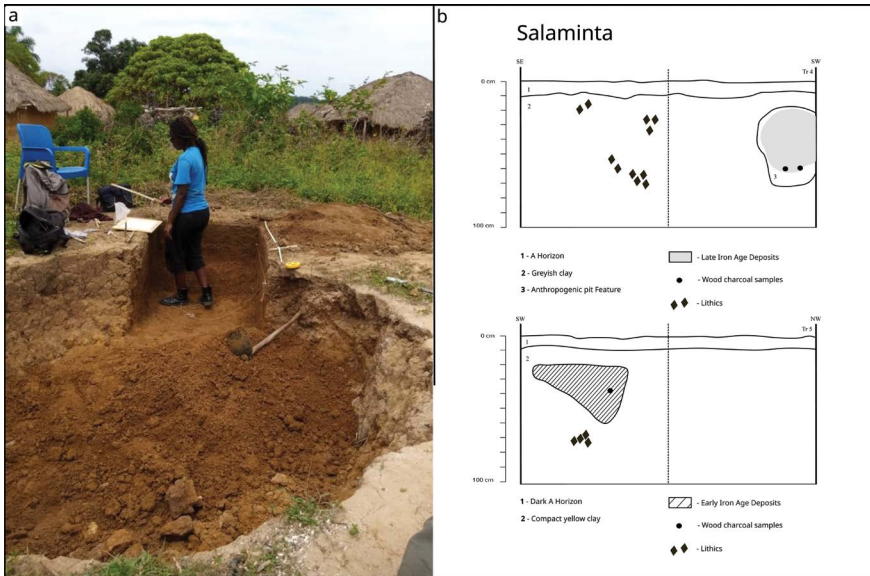


Figure 11.5 (a) Photograph of Salaminta excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Salaminta Tr 4 and 5.

church. Here, the stratigraphy is divided into (1) a 10 cm humus layer and (2) a dry and compact yellow clay layer up to 60 cm deep. These units yielded only a small number of very fragile sherds, two pieces of slag and two elongated pointed flakes all between 0 and 20 cm deep, which suggests some degree of mixing. From this level to 60 cm, the trenches were completely sterile.

Further in the centre of the village, a large clay extraction pit revealed lithics along the profile between 0 and 30 cm. Tr 4 (1 × 1 m) was opened along the profile and proceeded to excavate in 10 cm artificial spits. The stratigraphy of Tr 4 is divided into three layers, including: (1) a thin humic A Horizon, (2) a grey clay layer, and (3) an anthropogenic pit dug from 20 cm to 70 cm (Figure 11.5b). The bulk of the lithic material was recovered from the grey clay layer, between 0–20 cm and 20–30 cm. A unifacial tool made from *grès polymorphes* found at 40–60 cm. This tool is characterised by a flat ventral surface and convex dorsal presenting a bulge with a plano-convex section. In addition, a broken blade and several flakes were recovered at 53–70 cm. None of the lithic artefacts were found in association with pottery, nor was there any wood charcoal associated with these finds.

Tr 4 was extended by an additional 1 × 1 m square to the western edge of the unit. Along the southeastern portion of the unit a 60 cm deep pit was identified, which was full of dark sandy soil, charcoal, and pottery. Indeed, all of the pottery from this unit was recovered from this feature. Two wood charcoal samples associated with the pottery from the pit were taken at 60 cm and dated it to between the 15th and 17th centuries CE (Table 11.3).

Table 11.3 Radiocarbon dates from Salaminta excavations.

<i>Lab number</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Depth (cm)</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Date BP</i>	<i>Calibrated date (2σ)</i>
RICH-29621	Tr 4	60	Wood Charcoal	402 ± 23	1455–1625 CE
RICH-29618	Tr 4	60	Wood Charcoal	365 ± 23	1485–1637 CE
RICH-29609	Tr 5	20–40	Wood Charcoal	1695 ± 24	338–519 CE

Two additional 1 × 2 m trenches (Tr 5 & 6) were installed at the place indicated as the location of the former village. The stratigraphy of these units contains two natural layers: (1) a dark humic A Horizon, and (2) a compact yellow clayey layer (Figure 11.5b). Likely due to the high water table, the latter layer became wetter as the excavations progressed. Tr 5 yielded ceramic material up to 60 cm deep with a high concentration between 20–40 cm and iron slag at the same level. One associated wood charcoal sample taken from this layer has been dated between the 4th and 6th centuries CE. All of the lithic material was collected from the yellow clay layer, between 60 and 80 cm, but was not associated with the pottery. Tr 6 was completely sterile.

Ntswu (BF 88)

Description

Ntswu is a small Yansi village located on the left bank of the Kasai River in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. However, this village is not directly visible from the river not only because trees obscure the view, but also because the Kasai stretches out in width and curves away from the channel at this location. There are not many trees in the village itself, and it is a fairly open place with short grasses. Several informants told us that the location of the old village, Muyumb a Ntswu, was further south. Still, the presence of large amounts of surface material as well as material identified in the profile of a clay quarry led us to install a total of six excavation units in the current village.

Context and Finds

The stratigraphy of all six units were remarkably consistent: (1) a loose grey humic A Horizon containing roots, (2) an orange sandy loam layer containing charcoal, burnt earth, and archaeological materials, and (3) a dry and compact orange clay layer (Figure 11.6b). The first trench (Tr1) measured 1 × 2 m, and was installed along the edge of a clay quarry in order to excavate the context that contained material visible in the profile at 50 cm (Figure 11.6a). By far, Tr 1 produced the most material at Ntswu. Ceramic material was collected from the orange sandy loam layer between 40 and 60 cm, including one flat-bottomed vessel. One wood charcoal sample was collected for dating from the associated context, and placed the Early Iron Age context between the 5th and 7th centuries CE (Table 11.4). Tr 1

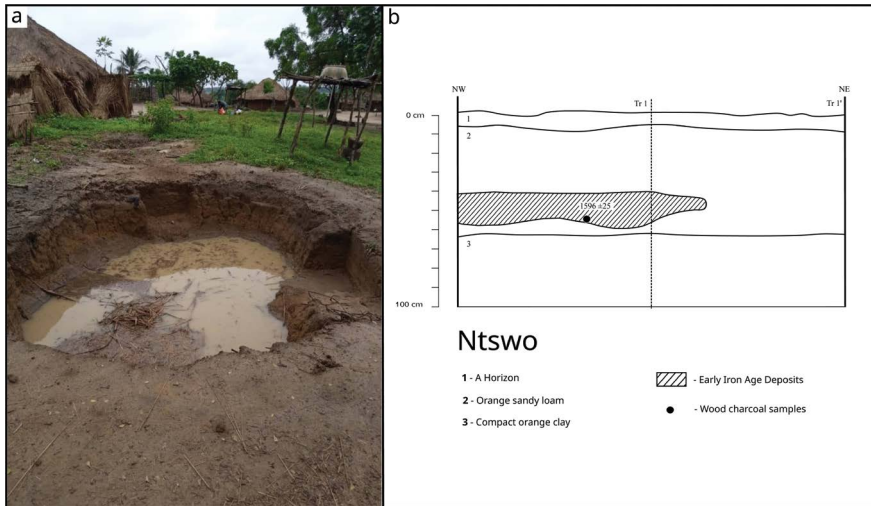


Figure 11.6 (a) Photograph of Ntswo excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Ntswo Tr 1 and 1'.

was extended by an additional 1×1 m square (Tr 1') to the east, which produced little material. Likewise, Tr. 2, which was a 1×1 m test pit placed along the edge of the same clay quarry, was also not very rich – with very little material that was limited to between 0 and 20 cm. A third 1×1 m excavation unit (Tr 3) was opened along the edge of a separate clay quarry, approximately 5 m from Tr 1. This pit was already covered by modern waste and only yielded material in the first 10 centimetres.

The repeated presence of sherds on the surface and the near absence of good context in stratigraphy prompted us to excavate a 1×1 m test pit (Tr 4) further away from the previous units. Here the remains of a furnace bottom were identified – despite the notable absence of slag. These excavations produced one wood charcoal sample that was dated to the 12th and 13th centuries CE. Unfortunately, excavations were stopped at 20 cm because the survey was too close to the playground of a house whose owner categorically refused further research.

Both Tr 5 and Tr 6 were installed over large surface scatters of pottery. Again, the vast majority of the material was collected from the upper portions of the orange sandy-loam layer between 0 and 20 cm. While Tr 6 produced a large amount of ceramic material, both units were stopped at 50 cm due to the lack of deeper contexts.

Table 11.4 Radiocarbon dates from Ntswo excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
RICH-29611	Tr 4	0–20	Wood Charcoal	881 ± 23	1157–1269 CE
RICH-29620	Tr 1	40–60	Wood Charcoal	1596 ± 25	436–628 CE

Eolo (BF 96)*Description*

Eolo is located on the left bank just downstream from the confluence of the Kamtsha River with the Kasai. It is a large municipality that has had the status of a commune since Decree No. 13/025 of 13 June 2013. Administratively, it depends on the Mateko Sector in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. Its boundaries are set to the north by the Kasai River, to the east by the Kamtsha River, to the west by the Molili River and to the south by a stream flowing between the Molili and Kamtsha Rivers.

The municipality itself is a complicated network, with the centre of Eolo being built across two hills separated by a stream-cut valley. However, the broader settlement is divided into eight large districts spread out across numerous hills, valleys, and plains. At first, the entire team moved together and attempted to survey as many places as possible within the city. After the first few hours, it became clear that the complexity of the city required us to adapt our typical prospecting strategies. The survey teams then spread out in the districts of Kapela or Bela Bela, Kinshasa, Bambinga, Mimbiem, Plateau, Cité verte, and Ngaliema, as well as along the beach. However, due to the large amount of surface material, the Kapela district – on top of the eastern hill close to the shore – has received the majority of archaeological attention. Five excavation units were opened there over a radius of 500 meters.

Context and Finds

The first two excavation units were placed within an empty plot of land approximately 5 m apart, with Tr 1 at the base of a gentle eastward slope and Tr 2 at the top. Tr 1 measured 1×2 m and was excavated to 110 cm, as archaeological material was continuously collected from the 0–100 cm levels. Similarly, Tr 2 began as a 1×2 m unit and yielded material throughout the first 120 cm and was therefore excavated to a depth of 140 cm. The stratigraphy of trenches 1 and 2 was quite similar, and consisted of four layers: (1) a dark orange humus layer, (2) a loose yellowish sandy layer, (3) compact yellow layer, and (4) a pit feature (Figure 11.7b). Interestingly, though, the distribution of material across the stratigraphy was quite different between these two excavation units. In Tr 1, the material largely came from the western portion of the unit, but was generally evenly distributed throughout each natural layer. In Tr 2, however, the majority of material was found in the dark orange humus layer as well as the anthropogenic pit feature. This feature was found in the southwestern corner at approximately 100–120 cm, and was apparently dug into the consolidated red clay layer. The unit was then expanded by an additional 1×2 m (Tr 2') to the south in an unsuccessful attempt to capture the rest of the feature. However, within the portion of the feature in Tr 2 there were numerous pieces of wood charcoal, ashy stains, and a nearly complete vessel. Two wood charcoal samples were taken for dating from Tr 2 – one from the bottom of the dark orange humus layer at 100 cm, and the second from the pit feature at

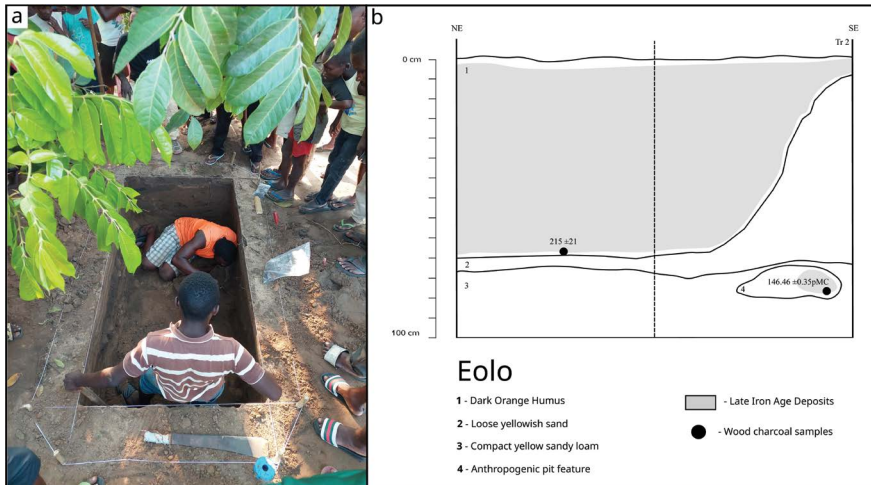


Figure 11.7 (a) Photograph of Eolo Tr 5 excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Eolo Tr 2.

120 cm. Both of these samples produced a date between the 17th and 20th centuries CE (Table 11.5).

In order to map the stratigraphy of the Kapela hill and the archaeological contexts therein, the rest of the excavation units were placed to the north, south, and west of the first two. Therefore, the next unit (Tr 3) was placed approximately 400 meters west of Tr 1. The stratigraphy of Tr 3 consists of (1) a grey humus layer, (2) a dark brown sandy layer, and (3) an orange and compact clayey layer. Trench 4 was established approximately 400 meters west of Tr 1 and the stratigraphy was composed of (1) dark black sand over 60 cm which rests on (2) a yellow sandy layer, and (3) a compact orange clay. Neither Tr 3 or Tr 4 produced any archaeological materials.

The final excavation unit, Tr 5, measured 1×2 m and was opened approximately 230 m north of Tr 1 in the front yard of a newly constructed house. While material was only collected until 100 cm, an ashy layer was encountered between 100 and 120 cm. Therefore, the excavations here continued until 140 cm. The stratigraphy of Tr 5 was more complex than the previous units, revealing several layers of pit digging and filling, and contained six main layers: (1) a dark grey A Horizon, (2) a dark brown sandy loam in the north of the unit while the south of the unit was

Table 11.5 Radiocarbon dates from Eolo excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
RICH-30975	Tr 2	100	Wood Charcoal	215 ± 21	1661–1810 CE
RICH-30976	Tr 2	120	Wood Charcoal	146.46 ± 0.35pMC	1680–1941 CE
RICH-30977	Tr 5	150	Wood Charcoal	102.04 ± 0.27pMC	1893 CE – Present

dominated by (3) a fairly recent pit descending to 80 cm, followed by (4) a second anthropogenic pit feature in the north of the unit, and (5) a fairly humid light ashy grey sand pit layer and (6) a hard orange clay layers across the entire unit. The material from this unit came from two different contexts, representing two different deposition events. The recent pit yielded a combination of pottery and plastics, while the second pit feature yielded several superimposed pots, bone remains, and metal objects below 80 cm depth located near the north wall. However, as with Tr 2, a single wood charcoal sample from the ashy layer just below the second pit feature gave a date of between the 19th and 20th centuries CE.

Although on initial inspection the pottery both on the surface and from the excavations appeared quite old, i.e. the EIA, all three wood charcoal samples taken from Eolo provided quite recent dates. There are two likely explanations for the site development, either the older-looking material is indeed quite recent, or this is an indicator of major disturbances at the site. Based on the stratigraphy, it appears that at least some of the contexts may have been compromised. Indeed, Tr 5 clearly shows the presence of very recent material (i.e., plastic bags) in the pit features that contain archaeological deposits. However, the dated pit feature from Tr 2 at 120 cm does not show any evidence of mixing or disturbance. It is also interesting that all three dates from two different excavation units all essentially correspond to the same period. Therefore, only additional excavations, paying particular attention to identifying uncontaminated contexts, can confirm the date of the site.

Mpwom (BF 106)

Description

The village of Mpwom is located in the Idiofa Territory of the Kwilu Province. This village is the first in the series that are located at a higher altitude and surrounded by dense vegetation. As a result, the village is not directly visible from the channel. The name of the forest that surrounds the village is Ivang (not to be confused with the village (BF 100) along the Kamtsha River) and the communities claim to be from the Ngwi community. The erosive effects of the rising waters of the Kasai are quite significant on the bank and have forced the inhabitants to move their homes a few meters away from the river. Several homes and some of the tombs were reportedly submerged. Given this information, the surveys concentrated within the village and with particular attention along the bank.

Context and Finds

Due to the presence of sherds that appeared to date from the EIA, four trenches (1 × 2 m) were installed along the northern section of the village along the beach. Unfortunately, despite excavating to a depth of 1 m, Tr 2, 3, and 4 were sterile. On the other hand, excavations at Tr 1 were more fruitful. The stratigraphy of Tr 1 is composed of (1) a thick grey humus layer, (2) a yellow clayey layer, (3) a blackish brown layer containing large amounts of charcoal coal, and (4) a white and greyish

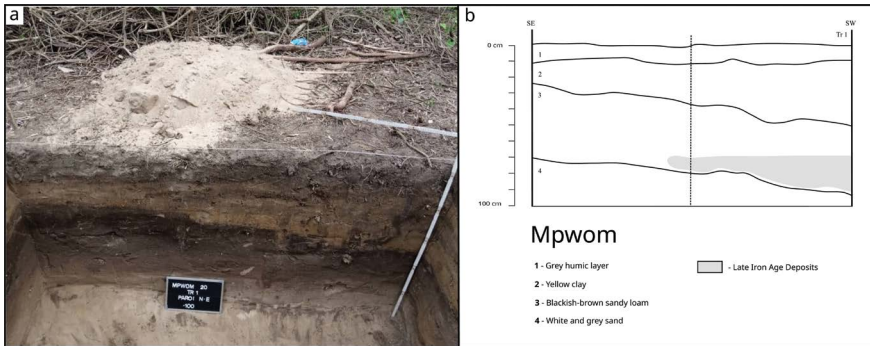


Figure 11.8 (a) Photograph of Mpwom excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Mpwom.

sandy layer (Figure 11.8b). Aside from the surface material, the unit was essentially sterile between 0 and 60 cm. The archaeological material was exclusively in the black layer between 60 and 100cm. No dates were collected from this site.

Ngiebun (BF 108)

Description

Ngiebun is a site hidden in the forest on the left bank of the Kasai River. While the site has long been abandoned as a village, it is currently still used for rural activities by the inhabitants of the Bwana Mataka farm located further upstream. It is precisely through these people that informed the team of the site's archaeological potential. The dense vegetation and the presence of large trees make it a suitable place for people who engage in charcoal production. As such, they had dug a pit 2.5×8 m wide and more than 1 m deep in order to place the bundles of wood to be carbonised (Figure 11.9a). Along the profile of this trench, at 60 cm, archaeological materials were visible.

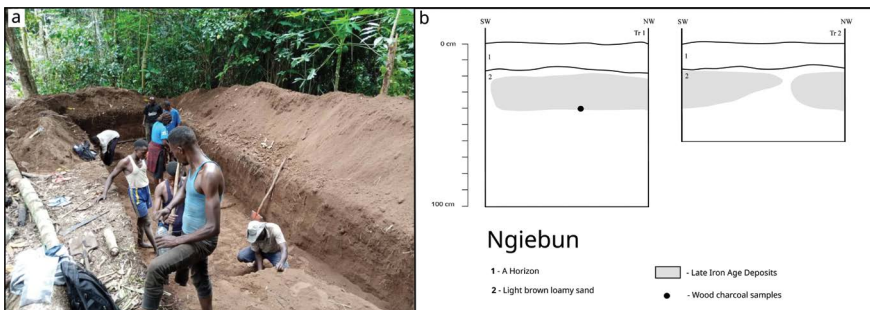


Figure 11.9 (a) Photograph of Ngiebun excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Ngiebun Tr 1 & 2.

Table 11.6 Radiocarbon date from Ngiebun excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
RICH-29610	Tr 1	40–60	Wood Charcoal	242 ± 24	1649–1804 CE

Context and Finds

Two 1 × 1 m test units were placed along the edge of the trench. Both excavation units had the same stratigraphy of two natural layers, including: (1) a thick dark brown A Horizon, and (2) a light brown loamy sand (Figure 11.9b). Tr 1 was excavated to a depth of 1 m. It yielded ceramic material only in the first 40 centimetres. Likewise, Tr 2 yielded ceramic material between the surface and 40 cm. However, excavations were stopped at a depth of 60 cm because a human skull was encountered and the local workmen did not allow further excavation. One wood charcoal sample was collected from between 40 and 60 cm, which produced a date between the 17th and 19th centuries (Table 11.6).

Makanga (BF 109)

Description

Makanga used to be an OTRACO port on the left bank of the Kasai during the Belgian colonial era. The modern village of Makanga occupies the top of a hill at an altitude of 360 m. Hidden behind a forest, its presence is betrayed by its beach. Natural erosions are clearly visible from the beach up toward the village. It is populated by communities claiming to be Nzadi and Lwel. Prospecting was done in the village, where habitants indicated two sites were ancient villages: Okiname and Le Bal. Despite the few pottery sherds recovered from the surface of these locations, the tall grass and trees made identifying any concentrations difficult.

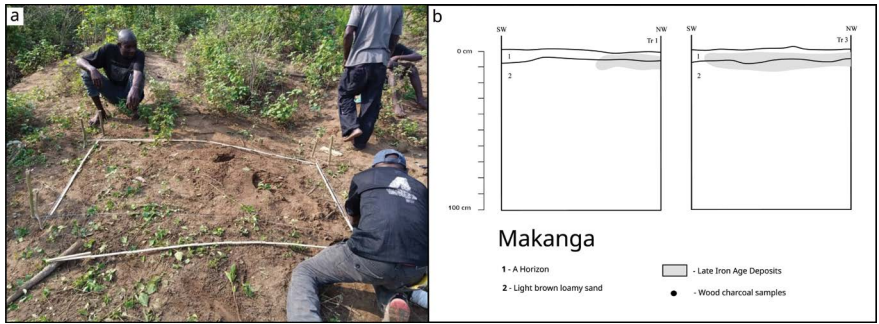


Figure 11.10 (a) Photograph of setting up Makanga excavation unit, and (b) Stratigraphy of Makanga Tr 1 and 3 (BF 109).

Contexts and Finds

In total, five excavation units were opened at Makanga. The first three (Tr 1, 2, and 3) were 1×1 m test pits installed in the village on a flat surface near a church and a dispensary where, during surface survey, copper rings were found near a space set up to produce charcoal (Figure 11.10a). The stratigraphy of these units was similar and consisted of two natural layers: (1) a this A Horizon, and (2) a dark brown sandy loam (Figure 11.10b). Unfortunately, below 20 cm, all three test pits were sterile to a depth of 1 m. Likewise, further up the hill, coming from the beach, concentrations of surface pottery were identified. Two additional 1 × 1 m test pits were installed along this gentle sloping hill which proved to be completely sterile.

Ntabitele (BF 119)

Description

Ntabitele is a quarter of Panu Sumbu, which is itself an administrative extension of the city of Panu located approximately 3 kilometres to the east. Having the status of a rural commune, Panu Sumbu is also a riverside town on the Kasai. Customary power is held by a group leader claiming to belong to the Lwel community. In addition to surface survey along the beach and within the village, the inhabitants told us that there was an ancient settlement of their ancestors nearby, where a large mound with surface material was identified.

Contexts and Finds

Excavations at Ntabitele consisted of five 1 × 1 m units, including Tr 1 and four additional (Tr 2–5) contiguous units. The first unit (Tr 1) was installed on the southern part of the large mound identified by our local informants. This produced very little material which was restricted to the surface and a small concentration at approximately 40 cm.

The second unit (Tr 2) was placed on the northern slope. At approximately 30 cm, a large anthropogenic pit feature was visible extending east-west across most of the unit. In order to better capture the feature, the unit was extended with three additional contiguous units (Tr 3, 4, and 5). The stratigraphy for these units consisted of five layers, including: (1) a dark A Horizon, (2) a brown loamy sand with tree roots, (3) dark brown loamy sand, (4) an anthropogenic pit feature with pottery, charcoal, and ash, and (5) an orange sand layer (Figure 11.11b). Excavations reached a depth of 150 cm in Tr 2 and 3, but were restricted to 70 cm in Tr 4 and 5. This was because the staining in the southern half of Tr 2, that initially appeared to be a continuation of the pit feature, turned out to be a different (and sterile) stratigraphic unit. The pit feature, and the ceramic materials found therein, were restricted to an east-west stretch between Tr 2 and 3. Two wood charcoal samples were taken from the pit feature – both associated with pottery fragments in Tr 2 and 3 – provided a date range between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE (Table 11.7).

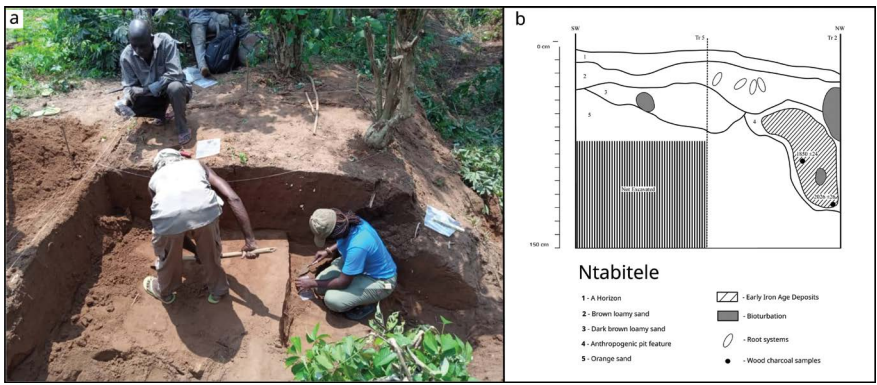


Figure 11.11 (a) Photograph of Ntabitele excavations, and (b) Stratigraphy of Ntabitele Tr 2 and 5.

Table 11.7 Radiocarbon dates from Ntabitele excavations.

Lab number	Unit	Depth (cm)	Material	Date BP	Calibrated date (2σ)
RICH-29617	Tr 2	80–100	Wood Charcoal	1850 ± 24	128–328 CE
RICH-29619	Tr 3	120	Wood Charcoal	2026 ± 26	54 BCE–69 CE

Surveyed Sites

Bendela (BF 66)

Bendela in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province is a city on the right bank of the Kasai that is home to a large Sakata community. Today, it is an important port and acts as a landing stage for vehicles that want to reach the left bank on their way to Bandundu. On the bare and wide beach there was a large concentration of lithic material mainly composed of bifaces.

Mondaie (BF 67)

This Boma-Sud village is located on the left bank of the Kasai in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province, diagonally opposite Bendela. The former location of this village would have been on the banks of the Kasai, yet the current settlement is approximately 1 km from the river. The road leading to the village is covered with rubble. Lithic artefacts were collected from along this track consisting of flakes and parallel-edged bifaces.

Kisamukila (BF 68-69)

Kisamukila is a plain that rises to 324 m above sea level and is crossed by the Mukila River, which has its source there. Surrounded by a gallery forest, surface

pottery was sampled from an open grassland that was covered in places with cassava and peanut fields, banana trees and palm trees.

Kisakinda (BF 79)

This village is located on the left bank of the Kasai in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. Not only was it a large pottery production market, but the last Boma-Sud village going upriver along the Kasai. On the wide and fairly open beach, lithic objects – including debitage, cores, and bifacial tools from different materials (obsidian, polymorphic sandstone, etc.) – were very numerous.

Ferme Bakongo (BF 80)

This farm is located on the left bank of the Kasai. Few lithics were collected there, including a bifacial piece shaped on a large flake with convex lateral edges. Remarkably, its proximal part is rounded, while its distal part is pointed.

Kisaka Kimbambili (BF 81)

This village is located on the right bank of the Kasai in the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. As with many of the beach sites along the right bank of the Kasai, the site was very rich in lithic material.

Camp Yolo (BF 82)

Located on the left bank and on the edge of the Kasai, Camp Yolo was originally a workers' camp. The village is administratively located in the Bagata Territory of the Kwilu Province. The region is covered with fruit trees and other thick vegetation and the population living there claims to be "Boma-Sud". Both surface pottery and lithics were collected.

Seko (BF 83)

This village is located on the right bank of the Kasai River in the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. It is a large town diagonally across the river from the village of Salaminta whose population claims to be part of the Sakata community. A small survey on the village beach allowed us to collect dozens of lithics on the surface.

Kese-Amont (BF 85)

Kese-Amont is a village with a large Sakata community along the right bank of the Kasai in the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. The village is quite large with a presence of many fruit trees and very good mechanics. The short survey was limited to the edges of the river, yet resulted in the identification of a large concentration of surface pottery. This material was brought to the surface through

the combined effect of the recent expansion of the settlement eastwards and natural erosion.

Mission Makaw (BF 89)

As its name suggests Mission Macaw is an important village on the right bank of the Kasai because of the establishment of a large Catholic mission. It is administratively in the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. A short surface survey on the path leading from the beach to the mission resulted in a few rare pottery sherds.

Semondane (BF 90-92)

This village is located on the right bank of the Kasai River in the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. It is a very large village on the edge of the forest where the community claims to be Sakata. Rapid prospecting yielded a number of pottery sherds from both the surface and a roadcut profile.

Mbien (BF 94)

The village of Mbien is located on the right bank of the Kasai River and administratively within the Kutu Territory of the Mai Ndombe Province. While our prospecting was limited to the beach, surface survey revealed the presence of dozens of lithics on the surface. The site is extremely rich in material.

Panu (BF 111-118)

Located on the left bank of the Kasai, Panu is a vast city in the Idiofa Territory of the Kwilu Province. Since Decree No. 13/025 of 13 June 2013, Panu has the status of a commune and also includes the rural commune of Panu Sumbu. It is bordered to the north by the Kasai River, to the south by the Nzu River, and to the east by the Nzukwi River, which separates it from the Sedzo sector, and to the west by the Ntwong and Sekubili streams.

The team also surveyed the Makayabu quarter (BF 105), which was formerly an independent village that has since been absorbed by the city, in the Ipanga quarter (BF 117-118) and the Lemba quarter (BF 111). On the grounds of the Kimbanguist church (BF 116), near the Nzu River, quartz lithics and pottery sherds were collected from the surface and from the profile of the escarpment overlooking the beach. Survey in the Lemba quarter, both around the houses and toward the beach, yielded a few pottery sherds on the surface.

Ikulu (BF 121)

This village is located on the left bank of the Kasai River, downstream from Mangai, in the Idiofa Territory of the Kwilu Province. The rapid prospecting in the village allowed for the collection of few sherds on the surface and in walls of small slopes of land.

Mangai (BF 122)

Mangai is a large town on the banks of the Kasai River built on a large hill, approximately 45 km downriver from the city of Dibaya Lubwe on the left bank and upstream from Yuki on the right bank. Since Decree No. 13/025 of June 13, 2013, Mangai has the status of a city. Its southern boundary is the line that runs from the Kasai River to Impiri-Ikundu passing through the villages of Ikunda and Mangai 2 as well as Tembe on the Kasai River. To the north, the Kasai River serves as the boundary while to the east, it is the Mbungu-Vien River, which flows into the Kasai. To the west, it is the Impiri River flowing into the Kasai, which serves as the administrative boundary. Some lithics were collected from a stone line eroding out of a wall profile on the edge of the Kasai near the port. Additional surface survey of the port district also yielded few pottery sherds.

Dibaya-Lubwe (BF 123)

Dibaya-Lubwe is a large municipality on the left bank of the Kasai River in the Idiofa Territory of the Kwilu Province. It is located 23 km downstream from the Loange River which flows into the Kasai River. Since Decree No. 13/025 of 13 June 2013, Dibaya-Lubwe has the status of a city composed of two communes, namely Tshenza and Ndambu. It is bordered to the north by the Kasai River, to the south by the Lubwe River, to the east by the Kasai River and to the west by the villages of Bulum and Bangyende. Surface surveys along the road that leaves the port and goes up to the headquarters of the naval forces of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo yielded few pottery sherds.

Discussion

Over the course of three field seasons, the BantuFirst archaeology team surveyed more than 500 km of the Lower Kasai River between Mushie and its confluence with the Loange River. This resulted in the identification of thirty-five new sites spanning more than 30 kya from the early Late Stone Age through the Late Iron Age. Ten of these sites were excavated, providing important new radiometrically anchored cultural sequences for the region. Taken as a whole, several key findings are apparent. The first is that the region itself is extremely rich in archaeological sites. Every village, port, and beach that was surveyed produced some archaeological material. Secondly, Stone Age material ([Chapter 18](#) in this volume) is particularly prevalent along the right bank of the Kasai River around Kisaka Kimbambili (BF 81) and Mbien (BF 94). Additional studies focused on Stone Age sites should pay particular attention to this section of the river, conducting surveys further inland from the beaches and possibly further north into the Mai Ndombe Province. Future Iron Age investigations should attempt to fill in the gaps left by the BantuFirst team, particularly upriver from Kinko (BF 93). Time and fuel did not allow the team to conduct a systematic survey of this portion of the river, yet the richness of the sites that were visited suggests the region contains many more important sites.

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