

Preamble

After the meetings of Paris (2007 and 2012), Madrid (2009), Vienna (2010), Florianopolis (2011) and Burgos (2014), it was a great pleasure for the Cultural Heritage Department of the Public Service of Wallonia (in French, *Département du Patrimoine*, renamed Walloon Heritage Agency - in French *Agence wallonne du Patrimoine* - on 1st January 2018) to welcome the 7th Conference of the UISPP Commission on Flint Mining in Pre- and Protohistoric Times from 28th September to 1st October 2016 on the topic 'Mining and Quarrying. Geological Characterisation, Knapping Processes and Distribution Network during Pre- and Protohistoric Times'.

Professor Jacek Lech, past president of the UISPP Commission on Flint Mining in Pre- and Protohistoric Times, had proposed holding the conference in Mons and Spiennes (Province of Hainaut, Wallonia, Belgium) several years ago when visiting the ongoing excavation at the Neolithic flint mines of Spiennes. Indeed Belgium and Wallonia had never previously hosted any Flint Symposium or the UISPP Flint Mining Commission Conference. The flint mines of Spiennes had been only the destination of an excursion during the Flint Symposium held in Bochum in 1999. The conference held in Mons and Spiennes fixed this oversight. The Cultural Heritage Department expresses its gratitude to Professor Lech for this proposal and for his deep interest in the Flint Mining site of Spiennes.

And, as a matter of fact, Spiennes and the Mons basin are perfect locations to welcome a conference on prehistoric flint mining. The basin is rich in prehistoric sites from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic period; in flint mines from the Neolithic period, such as Mesvin 'Sans Pareil', Flénu 'l'Ostienne' and Baudour-Douvrain; and in gunflint quarries from the 19th century AD! Together with the British Neolithic flint mines, the Neolithic flint mines of Spiennes were the first prehistoric mines to be investigated, as early as the second half of the 19th century. In the 1850s the engineer and amateur archaeologist Albert Toilliez collected numerous axehead preforms at Spiennes and claimed that Spiennes was the place of a large 'axehead factory' dating from the end of Prehistory. The significance of Spiennes was also emphasised by John Evans, the famous antiquary, who visited the site in the 1850s. The profile of the Neolithic flint mines of Spiennes was raised yet further by the research conducted by Auguste Houzeau de Lehaie, Alphonse Briart and François-Léopold Cornet in 1867; by the detailed cross-section of the railway trench that was cut at this time; and by the excavation of deep shafts at Camp-à-Cayaux by Alfred de Loë in 1912-1914. The research continued throughout the 20th century. In the 1960s and the 1970s François Hubert conducted exemplary excavations of workshop places at Camp-à-Cayaux and of a Michelsberg ditched enclosure at Petit-Spiennes. This research increased the scientific interest in Spiennes. At the same time, the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS) started investigations on the Palaeolithic in the area, revealing a succession of four alluvial terraces associated with Lower and Middle Palaeolithic industries.

During the last 20 years, the Public Service of Wallonia, *Direction de l'Archéologie* (now integrated into the *Agence wallonne du Patrimoine*), together with the City of Mons and the *Société de Recherche préhistorique en Hainaut*, invested in the protection, management, promotion and research on flint mining of the site of Spiennes. The Public Service of Wallonia proposed the site to the UNESCO World Heritage List and it was inscribed in December 2000. Since 1997, important excavations of shafts and chipping floors have been undertaken by the Archaeological Service of the Public Service of Wallonia in partnership with the Society for Prehistoric Research in Hainaut (*Société de Recherche préhistorique en Hainaut* - SRPH). These excavations have enhanced knowledge about Spiennes in various topics such as raw material procurement, mining methods, flint products,

paleoenvironment and the daily life of the miners. In 2003, the Public Service of Wallonia renewed the old museum located upon the deep shafts at Camp-à-Cayaux, transforming it into a centre dedicated to archaeological research in Spiennes.

The opening, in April 2015, by the City of Mons of an Interpretive Centre dedicated to the Neolithic flint mines of Spiennes – aptly called SILEX'S – lends all the more interest and value to the site. This new cultural and educational centre was co-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund), Wallonia (*Commissariat général au Tourisme* - General Commission for Tourism) and the City of Mons.

Additionally, Mons has a long-standing tradition of scholarship and research in mining engineering and geology, thanks to the Mining School, the oldest university of the City of Mons, set up in 1836. This school – now associated with the University of Mons and called the Faculty of Engineering – still has an important department of Geology and Applied Geology which collaborates in research on flint mining. Mons is therefore the perfect place to share the experiences of archaeologists and geologists around a common interest: prehistoric flint mining.

The conference took place in the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences, a museum created as early as the 1830s, initially linked with the City of Mons and the School of Engineering. This Museum is now an education centre for sciences attached to the Direction of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of the Public Service of Wallonia.

Finally, we especially thank the institutions who cooperated in the organisation of the conference and the publication of the proceedings: the UISPP Commission on Flint Mining, the 'Events Unit' attached to the DGO4 of the Public Service of Wallonia (*Direction générale de l'Aménagement du Territoire, du Logement, du Patrimoine et de l'Energie*), the Society for Prehistoric Research in Hainaut, the Natural Sciences Museum of the SPW in Mons (*Musée des Sciences naturelles du SPW*), the Museums of the City of Mons (*Pôle muséal de la Ville de Mons*), the Educational Service for the Promotion of Sciences at the University of Mons (SciTech2), the Association for the Diffusion of Information in Archaeology (*Association pour la Diffusion de l'Information archéologique, ADIA*), the Belgian Society for Anthropology and Prehistory (*Société royale belge d'Anthropologie et de Préhistoire, SRBAP*) and the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels (*Institut royal des Sciences naturelles de Belgique, IRSNB*). We also thank all the Cultural Heritage employees and volunteers who gave their time to ensure the success of the meeting.

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