Changing ibex habitat? The view from zooarchaeological evidence in Italy (40,000-10,000 BP)

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The alpine ibex faced near extinction in the 19th century and it is only after almost 150 years of reintroduction attempts that it can now safely be counted among the fauna of a number of European countries. To what extent is its habitat today a result of modern human interventions and present-day climatic conditions? This presentation will address this question by exploring the geographical and altitude distribution of archaeological sites across Italy, which have yielded ibex remains, dating to the Upper Palaeolithic (40,000- 10,000 BP); this is a period that also incorporates the climatic extremes of the Last Glacial Maximum and the Late Glacial Interstadial. Although archaeological faunas are generated through past human choices rather than simply reflecting natural availability, it will be demonstrated that ibex was a species much more widespread than its present-day geographical distribution would suggest and not confined to any particular altitude zone, thus supporting zoological work that suggests that ibex is a cliff rather than a mountain ungulate.