

Harold L. Dibble

CURATOR,
EUROPEAN
ARCHAEOLOGY
SECTION
BY DEBORAH I.
OLSZEWSKI

HAROLD L. DIBBLE, Curator-in-Charge of the European Archaeology Section at the Museum, has been fascinated with stone tools and archaeology since he was a small child. He fondly remembers poring over C. W. Ceram's *The March of Archaeology* (Knopf, 1958). Some might think his career path as a

Paleolithic archaeologist was long since chosen when he entered college, but this was not the case. Dibble first majored in liberal arts, then humanities, then mathematics, before finally pursuing anthropology. In the years before college, it simply never occurred to him that archaeology and anthropology were actually job options until he took his first anthropology course.

While an undergraduate at the University of Arizona, Dibble was initially interested in the complex societies that developed in Egypt and Mesopotamia during the Neolithic and Bronze Age (ca. 8000–1200 BC). William Rathje introduced him to McGuire Gibson, and Dibble became intrigued first by the Sumerians and then by the development of early agriculture. His conversion to the study of the Paleolithic period came as a graduate student at the University of Arizona. Working with Arthur Jelinek, who had just finished his excavations at the Middle Paleolithic site of Tabun in Israel, Dibble wrote his dissertation on Tabun's stone tools.

After completing his Ph.D. in 1980, Dibble worked at the Arizona State Museum before coming to Penn as a lecturer in 1982. In 1985 he was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department, later becoming an Associate Professor in 1990 and a full Professor in 1995.

Dibble's research interests include computers, stone artifacts, the Middle Paleolithic (ca. 130,000–30,000 BP), and Neandertal behavior, language, and culture—he was featured



Harold Dibble (inset), using a total station in the field.

in the NOVA production *Neandertals on Trial* (2002). His field projects were among the first in archaeology to use a total station (a combination of a theodolite, an electronic distance measuring device, and computer software) for accurate 3-D spatial recording of artifacts, animal bones, archaeological layers, and site topography (*Expedition* 29(2):10-11). In collaboration with one of his former students, Shannon McPherron, Dibble also wrote the software for an early generation of what today would be called GIS (Geographic Information Systems). This program allows data, such as the distribution of stone tools, to be viewed on a computer as separate layers which can then be overlain with other layers, for example, the geological stratigraphy of a site.

His field work concentrates on Neandertal behaviors and adaptations during the Middle Paleolithic in France, where he



Excavations at Pech de l'Aze IV, France.

has worked professionally since 1983. Among his first experiences there were two summers spent as a graduate student in 1976 and 1977 working with the eminent French prehistorian François Bordes at Pech de l'Aze IV. True to the small world of archaeology, Dibble found himself back at Pech IV from 2000 to 2004, where he directed new excavations and assessed Bordes's earlier work from when Dibble was a crew member at the site. In 2004 Dibble began excavating the French Middle Paleolithic site of Roc du Marsal.

In addition to working in France, Dibble is a co-principal investigator for the Abydos Survey for Paleolithic Sites (ASPS) in Middle Egypt. This project is linked to the Penn-Yale-Fine Arts Institute Historic Abydos Project under the

Excavations at Roc du Marsal, France.



Harold L. Dibble

direction of David O'Connor. A reconnaissance season in 2000 (*Expedition* 43(2):31-37) preceded a field season during the winter of 2002–2003. With funding from the National Science Foundation, Dibble and his colleagues are currently spending December 2005–January 2006 in Egypt investigating Middle Paleolithic use of the high desert landscape. They will return for a second field season in December 2006–January 2007.

Dibble has no plans to slow down his fast-paced research schedule. In 2007 he hopes to begin excavation in Morocco at Smuggler's Cave. Located near Rabat, this site has an unusual Middle Paleolithic tool industry with tanged points called the Aterian (*ca.* 90,000–60,000 BP), as well as later Upper Paleolithic occupation (*ca.* 45,000–10,000 BP). The Aterian industry—made by early modern humans—is important for



Surface collecting on the ASPS project, Egypt.

understanding the behaviors and adaptations of Africa's early modern humans during the Middle Paleolithic. Since Neandertals never inhabited Africa, the aim will be to contrast this Middle Paleolithic early modern industry with Europe's Middle Paleolithic Neandertal industries, the focus of Dibble's research in France. 🏠

DEBORAH I. OLSZEWSKI is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the University of Pennsylvania's Anthropology Department and a Research Associate at the Museum.