

# The prehistoric site at Petit - Lanaye - Caster (Caestert), community of Visé (Belgium). A short overview.

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Image 1. The location of Caestert at the border between Flanders and Walloon, just south of the Dutch city of Maastricht; the location in this article is part of the Walloon community of Visé

## General information:

Community: Visé – Belgium; Petit- Lanaye;

Fieldname : Caster / Caestert

Field surface ca 200 m. length / 140 m. wide

Altitude between ca + 111,0 m. a.s.l. - 115,5 m. a.s.l.

Period of prospectings: 2008 – 2012 Number of prospectings: 55

Numbers of field - hours: ca 200

Estimated number of artefacts noticed: > 1000 < 10.000

## 1. Introduction

The reason to publish this report on *surface finds* from a location which is part of the region of Mt. St. Pierre (both in the Netherlands and in Belgium) is the fact no real information or publications about the Stone Age period is available (yet) from any prehistoric presence from this particular location, unless this region has been surface prospected over long time by many others. This while there has been a large prehistoric activity in this part of Mt. St. Pierre.

The prehistoric site at *Caestert*, with code PLC (Petit - Lanaye (Visé) - Caster (in Dutch: Caestert), is located south of Maastricht in Belgium. Partially, the area of Caestert is Walloon territory and partially it belongs to Flanders. The find location PLC is located in the Walloon territory.

Caestert in general is known from the Iron Age fortification, (*Caster* or *Caestert* = ‘Castrum’, Roman military camp), which probably shortly has been *re-used* during the Roman period, after having served as a large Celtic fortification.

Meanwhile, we must not forget the name Caestert is also given to the lower eastern adjacent part of the area, at the other side of the Maas River, south of the dutch community Eijsden. This whole area would have served as a Roman military area, in the period before the forming of the ultimate Roman border in the common Maas- Rhine valley to the north, known as the 'Liemers', not long before the rise of Maastricht. The latter city became important in the connection of the so called 'Via

Belgica' route (a principle Roman road), after the rise of Tongeren, ca 10 BC.

An explanation for the name of the lower part "Laag- Caestert" (Low- Caestert) could refer to the control of the river as a possible water source for the fortification, as at the plateau only few ponds would have remained in the Iron Age, some of them still visible by satellite at Google Maps by a pattern of old drain gully's (which are now visible by plowing activities. coordinates p.e. 50.802163, 5.684683).

After some excavations in the 70s of the twentieth century, carried out by Mr. Roosens (1), an extensive investigation about the fortification has been carried out by RAAP, resulting in a large report (2). In this last report, several finds from the prehistory, i.c. Finds of flint artefacts from Mr. Roosens 's excavations with a possible Neolithic date are presented and discussed, but the numbers of the flint artefacts are too low to draw good conclusions. These flint artefacts have been found in the field and the earth wall of Caestert, and all were found in secondary context, moved by the Romans.

This large displacement of soil horizons for the construction of the fortification during the late Iron age- early Roman period could be one of the main reasons why so few artefacts from the Iron age have been discovered at Caestert (3): large construction activities by the Romans moved and demolished all traces and associate finds to lower parts of the large wall, resulting in a chance to find finds from the Iron Age only in the lower parts. Moreover, we find lots of moved Pleistocene gravels at the surface in the woods, demonstrating the local loess cover at many places has been lost (also due to post - medieval collapses forming (very) large sinkholes, so called 'dolines', caused by late medieval mining activities in this area; new collapses are still possible) so possible accompanying finds from previous periods could have disappeared as well.

Indeed, as the earth walls have been leveled from an existing natural hill form landscape, causing gravels at the surface everywhere where leveling took place, especially at the south - western part where we find remains of a double ditch and a second ring of walls in combination; probably because the natural landscape was not defensive enough.

At page 51 of the report, an image of the eleven flint artifacts underlines the given idea the by Roosens discovered artifacts do not reflect large prehistoric activity.

But this is only the case *by the lack of* more finds of Stone age tools from this part of Caestert. So it is not excluded, this part of Caestert has not been used less intensively during the prehistory.

This situation of lack of finds however is not the case in the wider area *outside* the fortification area, where prehistoric activity is evident. This is especially the case into the direction of the former highest point of the area (at over + 122 m a.s.l. ) now completely destroyed by the incision of the Albert Canal, where prehistoric activity increases. This coincidence in land use during prehistory is based on the landscape (a site between Maas and Jeker), a former well and the abundance of raw materials for tools.

The prehistoric situation inside the fortification has been largely disturbed and this is why also old landscape perceptions are almost excluded.

The author also noticed flint artefacts (see an example in the image below), excavated by badgers and rabbits from the lower part of the earth wall demonstrating Roman soil displacement from the surface to the lower parts of the wall. see also the article ( link):

[Some reflections on the Riemst Visé Caster fortification in Belgium](#)



*Image 2. A flint flake, made in local dark gray flint type displaced by the construction of the earth wall. The flake has an expressive bulb and scar and is not special. It could fit in the late Neolithic to Bronze Age period.*

So, at the site PLC, a very large plowed field, the situation is different. Though plowed and wedged in an area with several artificial interventions, such as the deep digging of the Albert Canal into the former local highest part of the Mt. St. Pierre, the field and the surrounding area still has several reference points in connection with prehistoric activities and landscape perceptions. At first, several soils - related features are visible by satellite, such as round shaped features with diameter of ca 4-5 m. and former drain patterns, all visible by a different vegetation growth (cropmark -indications). The PLC site is one of the most surface prospected and investigated areas by the author. This provided many archaeological artifacts during the years, (of which still a large amount is in Belgium to be analyzed) which all reflects long term and intensive prehistoric activity, ranging between the late Middle Pleistocene (before 250.000 BP) till the late Neolithic period (until ca 2200 BC).

It is striking that Roman finds or other finds from the Iron age are absent here, while the prehistory is abundant.

The reason for the absence of finds from later periods would be caused by intensive human activities during the long 2000 years period since the Roman period, as this part of the region always has been inhabited, causing large erosion, with exposed colluvial horizons, especially at the slopes, so both at the plateau as at the middle parts of the slopes we might expect stone age artefacts, while artefacts from later periods would only occur in the lower parts, free of colluvium covers, more near the village of Kanne (especially the eastern parts).

The site PLC has been prospected during four seasons, leaving many field notations and sketches about find circumstances.

#### **Notes:**

- (1) Roosens, H., (1976) De oude versterking te Caster. *Archaeologia Belgica* 186: 54-58
- (2) Verhoeven, M.P.F. (ed.), (2008) Studieopdracht naar een archeologische evaluatie van het plateau van Caestert (Riemst, Provincie Limburg) RAAP-rapport 1769 [PDF](#)
- (3) The author noticed many iron age pottery sherds in Iron age fortification- sites in France, e.g. at Bourguignon, where sherds are still visible besides the foot - paths in the area. Here we find similar disturbance of the surface for the making of a large wall, but it has never been leveled after use.

#### **2. The field PLC, descriptions and geological situation.**

The general geological situation of the field PLC is depicted in the image below, showing the PLC

site is located at an extended part of the St. Geertruid terrace, formed ca 900.000 BP.

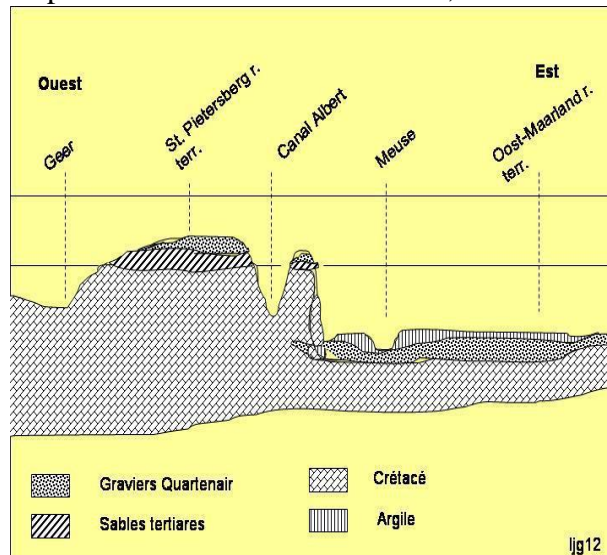


Image 2a. Geological situation of the wider region, the PLC site is located at the adjacent part of the St. Pietersberg terrace, the Wonck terrace at ca + 109 m. a.s.l.

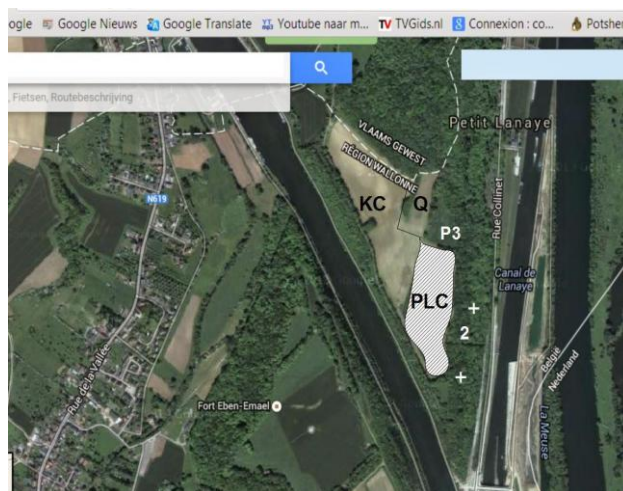


Image 3. The main investigated area labeled PLC (oblique dashed) and the surrounding area. KC= Kanne Caestert, Q = extension of PLC, 2 = PLC 2 a ridge sloping down towards the valley, + = forested slopes, P3= PLCP 3 a very small local pit with local stratigraphy, corresponding with the field PLC.

### Subdivision of the field PLC

Artefacts from PLC are labeled with a code corresponding with the part of the field where the artefact has been found. These codes are : PLCA, PLCB, PLCC, PLCCB, PLCD, See locations in the map below( Image 4)

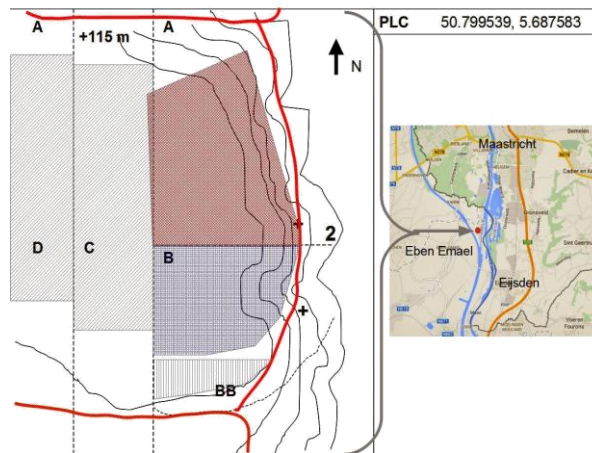


Image 4: Subdivision of the field PLC, partially corresponding with different soil types, visible at the surface

In the stratigraphy of a local small pit some hundred meter to the north of the field (code PLC3), the main stratigraphy is visible for ca. 1 meter below surface.

The horizons of PLC 3 are linked to the assumed position of these soil layers at the field PLC, visible in the scheme below.

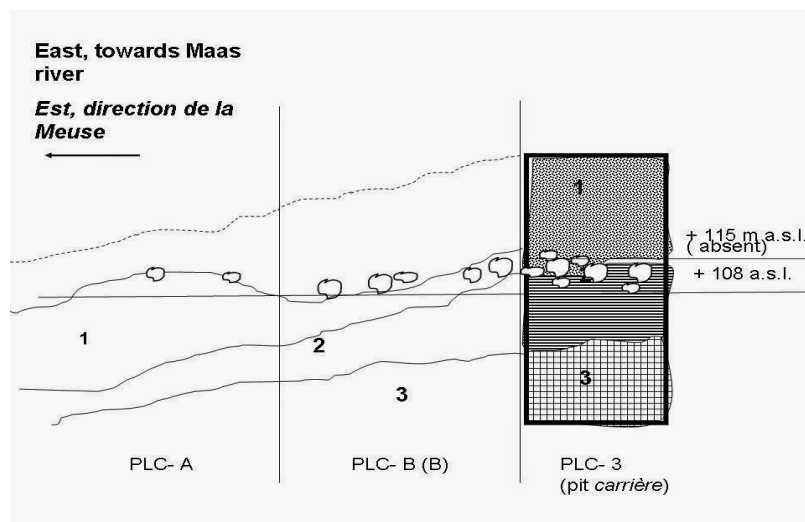


Image 5. Generalized cross cut section of the field PLC based on observations at PLC3 for location of this pit see map above. 1 = Loess depositions, 2 = red colored soil type, 3 = bedrock. A deposition of gravels (fine gravels and large boulders) is visible at + 108 m. a.s.l., corresponding with the gravel containing horizon in the field, where large boulders appeared.

For many artefacts and concentrations of artefacts sketches are made to point their find position in the field; in the scheme below this is visible for cores and core types.

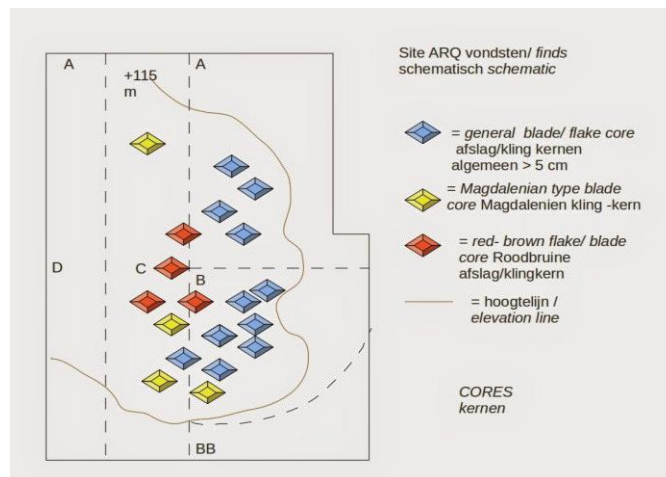


Image 6. Repartition of flint cores and types of flint cores at the PLC site.

### (LBK?) Flint tool production at Visé - Caster- Caestert

A large amount of flint cores with additional hammer- stones have been noticed at field PLC, indicating tool production at this site. Though flaked cores do exist, the main focus was the production of long blades. The find of a typical mining pick is indicating possible local extraction of the flint; this could have been the case at the surface by open air mining, comparable with periodical (pre - mining) flint extracting at sites like Spiennes and Rijckholt, or from the upper parts of the adjacent slope, comparable with very local mining activities in the southern part of Mt. St. Pierre, especially at Heyoule.

For an image about surface mining in England and related features: [image from Grimes Graves](#), image from English Heritage.

Surface mining is also known from Banholt (NL) from the early Neolithic.

Indeed, LBK blade core types from Banholt (Brounen/ Peeters 2000/2001 139 fig 6: mediolithic blade cores) look similar to the ones, found at Caestert.

The flint type used at Caestert is a local flint type, which is in very many cases covered with a slightly shiny patina. The connection of the flint tool production with circle shaped features in the field, visible in a picture by satellite at Google Maps (picture below) at this location is unclear. In any case, surface extracting of flint cannot be excluded.

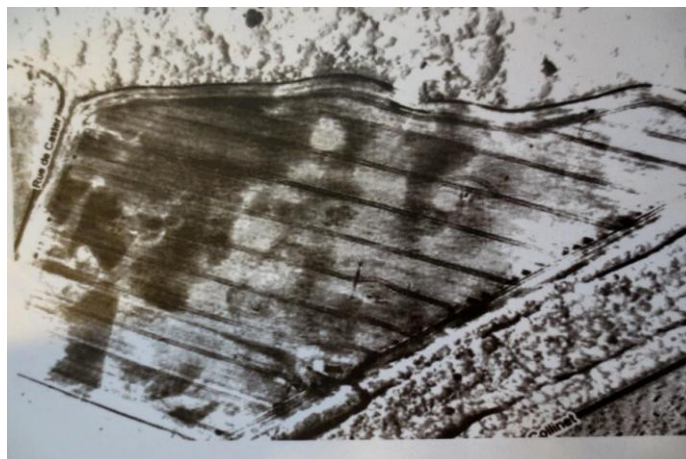


Image 7. Image from Google Maps, where rounded features are visible as light circles. The diameter of these features is ca. 4-5 m cross cut. The features also were visible in the field by crop marks, i.c. by premature growing of herbs in a more moist micro environment, most likely caused by changed soil structure. The B site of PLC is adjacent to the features.

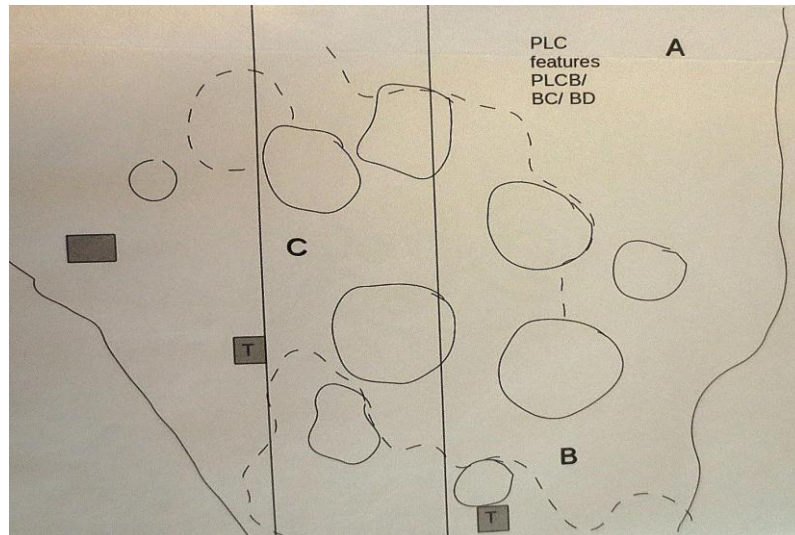


Image 8. Features in the map of PLC with sections, used in this article by the author. Especially the B section would have served as tool production station

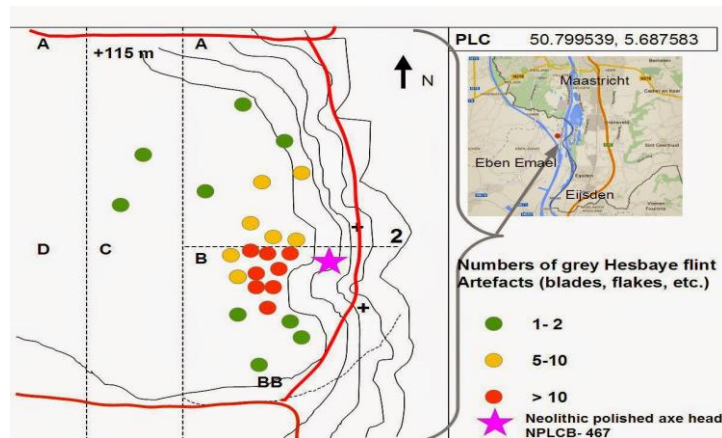
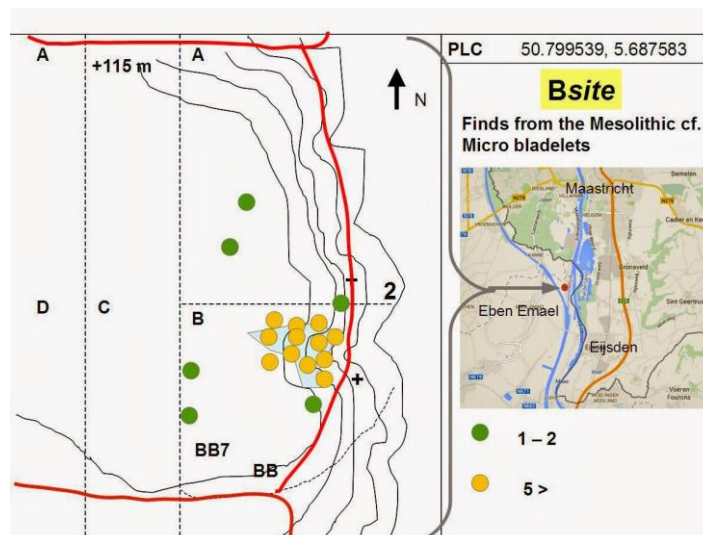


Image 9. Spread of concentrations of artefacts in (local) gray Hesbaye flint -type (often forming retouched flakes and blades) spread over the PLC terrain. The axe head NPLCB 467 is represented by the pink star in the picture is depicted below.



*Image 10. Spread of concentrations of micro-blades (wide < 1 cm) and Mesolithic cf. type artefacts (i.e. truncated blades) at site PLC. The main concentration could be regarded as a site, but if this were only for tool production is unknown.*

## **Description of the sections of PLC**

**PLCA.** Central part at 50.801143, 5.686794 (coordinates by Google Maps)

The northern part of the field is sloping to the north and the east, forming some sort of elevation, characterized by a loess cover at the highest part. Gravels are visible at large parts of this section, especially the sloping part. Large boulders appear at different places, and these have been plowed up and are sometimes damaged.

**PLCB** Central part at 50.799983, 5.686558 (coordinates by Google Maps)

The southern section of the field has a large depression at the east side, probably the remains of a much more large local (temporary) source, that disappeared long time ago; at the slope, a deep gully is visible, forming at the northern side a ridge, that is coded PLC2; some artefacts have been found here as well.

In the southern part of the field, large amounts of gravel are present at the elevation itself. The highest part of the field in the south is reached at the southern ridge, which part is coded BB, as the loess cover is complete here, without any gravel mix.

Around the depression most artefacts have been found, suggesting this was a local site for tool production or other prehistoric activities.

As almost all the flint blade- cores have been found in this part of the field, together with a hammerstone, it looks like this is a tool production site, probably used during the early Neolithic for the production of long blades.

As the cores are not exhausted and sometimes only partially used, the flint was abundant and similar core reduction is noticed at the LBK extracting site at Banholt in the Netherlands and at a large late LBK tool production activity zone in Liers in Belgium. This is in concordance with the fact local flint horizons are exposed in this part of the Mt. St. Pierre, and like elsewhere in the Hesbaye region, where the highest parts of the slopes have been used for extraction of flint, which is highly accessible here (see also Hauzeur, Jadin & Jungels, 2011). It is not excluded the flint production at PLC served for use at the nearby LBK site at Maastricht- Cannerberg, ca 2 km from this location. PLCB is containing a smaller part named B-site, where concentrations of small artefacts have been noticed (Image 10).

**PLCBB** Central part at 50.799244, 5.686258 (coordinates by Google Maps)

Description of the part PLCBB at PLC Friday, August 18, 2010 Field Tour at PLC from 12:30 to 16:30 h Exploration of the higher part of the field (southern part), known as code BB, an extension of part B, as seen from the pylon. The edge section, immediately adjacent to the adjacent road has already received a code BBR, a strip of about 10 meters wide, in direction of the west where quite a lot of broken flint has been noticed, consisting of chunks in variable sizes, and possibly debitage waste, mainly flakes or hand- shaped tools; these have been noticed in particular in the more swampy parts. Several bigger hand tools are prefinished BB, most bifacial adapted. Frequent is also another stone material than flint in the field: like is slate, lydite and quartzite. Part BB, where a thicker loess horizon is present, is characterized by the presence of more "stylized" artefacts, several are Neolithic. Where the Albert Canal makes an incision in the Mt. St. Pierre, we find the formerly e highest point, about 123 m. asl.

At the locations where many large boulders (and gravel) have been plowed up, the loess cover is



clearly thinner or even virtually absent. To the west we find a plowed horizon consisting of a soil type which is dominated by a dark, reddish-brownish soil type (field Part D), which might very well be an ancient steppe soil exposed cause of erosional processes.

**PLC2** Central part at 50.800024, 5.688275 (coordinates by Google Maps)

A ridge as a continuation of the field, sloping down towards the middle terrace. eroded into the loess cover. Eroded gravel horizons have been noticed, probably as a result of solifluction.

### **PLCQ**

This part of the field is dominated by the presence of many gravels. Partially there is a disturbance visible, that is probably connected with the making of the earth wall, north of the field.

### **KC**

#### **Kanne- Caestert**

This a southwest to west oriented field forming the adjacent part of a large depression, water containing in prehistory. Artefacts from a mix of periods have been found here as a result of palimpsest building over very long time.

### **Discussion**

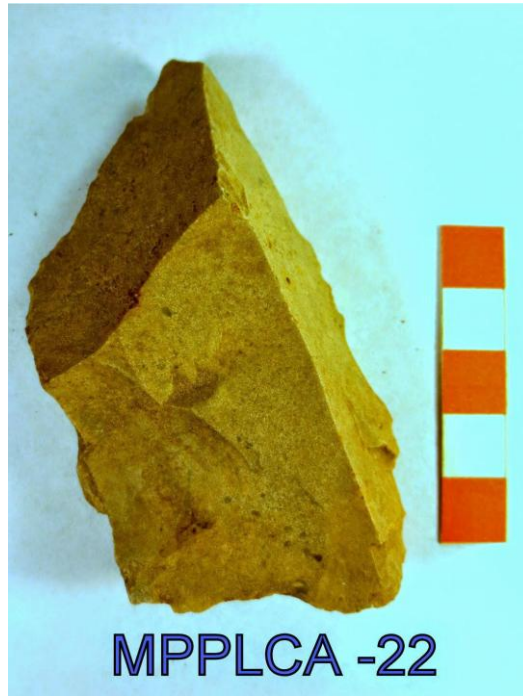
This report only gives a short overview about surface finds from prospections during four years at a single field. The main result from the prospections is the clear evidence for large prehistoric activity in this southern part of Caestert, where the landscape played a dominant role, in combination with the abundance of good quality flint. As Caestert is mainly known for its Iron age fortification, it is more justified to speak of this area in connection with the whole prehistoric period, from the late Acheulian till the late Neolithic and Iron age/ Roman period. The examination of the finds from PLC is still ongoing.

### **IMAGES of artefacts.**

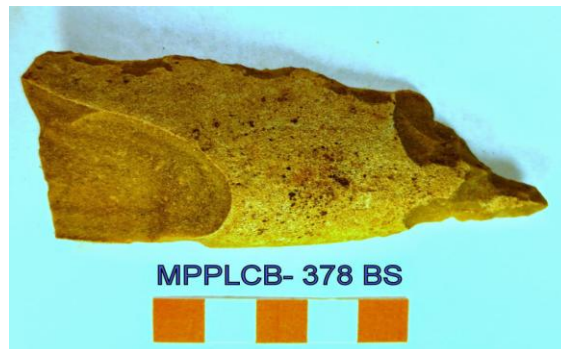
A brief selection of images of finds from Caestert, presented in chronological order, showing long term prehistoric activity from this location.



*Image 11. The assumed oldest find from Caestert is this Acheulian pebble tool, a chopping tool made on a milky quartz, with 2: 1 flake removals, with heavy patina. It has been found in the gravels of the upper terrace of the Pleistocene Maas - river, and would date till 300.000 BP or even more.*



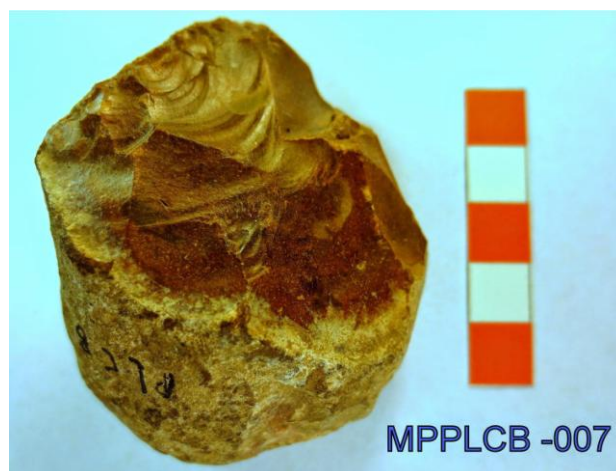
*Image 12. A Levallois point, found at Caestert, showing the location was favorite by Neanderthals during the Middle Paleolithic . This artefact has been made of local Lanaye flint which is rather granular. Date: ca 250.000 - ca 50.000 BP.*



*Image 13. Paleolithic drill, type 'bec' with handle at one side, made of a brown flint, made on a Levallois flake with remains of original cortex, showing its fluviatile origin. This artefact would have a Middle Paleolithic date.*



*Image 14. Levallois flake, forming a small hand - axe, made in a brown reddish flint type. Middle Palaeolithic.*



*Image 15. Unifacial chopper made of a flint pebble, with rolled cortex showing its fluvial origin. It has been surface collected from the upper terrace gravels of the Pleistocene Meuse River and is of a Lower- Middle Paleolithic date.*



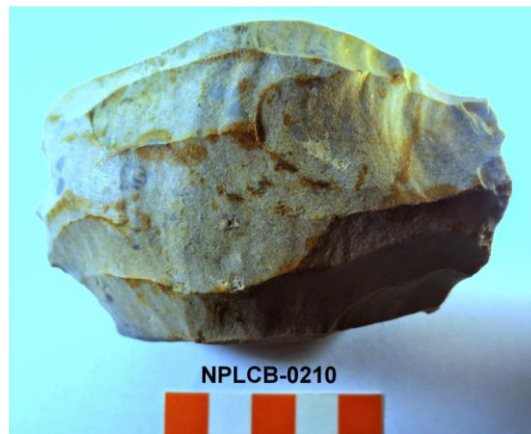
*Image 16. A probably late Paleolithic flake with retouch at one edge. the period is based on the intense patina and the imported flint type.*



*Image 17. Tools used by hunter gatherers at Caestert, showing the location was a good place to stay during the Mesolithic- Neolithic. Left a small borer, middle a point, right a notched blade*



*Image 18. Micro blades- used by hunter gatherers at Caestert, showing the location was a good place to stay during the Mesolithic- Neolithic. The flint type of all three artefacts is imported.  
(Probably from the adjacent in the south located region of Tilice- Anixhe region, thus corresponding with the late Mesolithic- Early Neolithic )*



*Image 19. A flint core in local flint type, evidence for tool production at this location during the Neolithic.*



*Image 20. Flint core, used for the production of long blades. The core is covered with glued loess particles, probably by resin.*



*Image 21. Flint blade core in reddish brown flint type with black / gray dots. This flint type is ought to be local, as many tools were found in the same flint type. Its source is unknown.*



*Image 22. Several examples of flint artefacts in the reddish brown flint type, which could be a local deviant flint type of the gray flint. This flint is however more fine in structure. The lack of cortex makes it difficult to interpret the original position of the flint (mined, fluvialite, surface collected)*



*Image 23. Flint artefacts from PLC; the diversity in flint type objects is relatively large and is spread to different Stone Age periods.*



*Image 24. Neolithic mining pick head , used for the excavation of flint.  
Ca 4000 - 3000 BC.*



*Image 25. A very large flake – tool made in local flint, used as some sort of large scraper and large borer, found at PLC part B.*





*Image 26. Damaged and reshaped polished ax head in local granular flint type from the Late Neolithic (ca 2500 BC), found at Caestert*



*Image 27. Iron Age shard, found in the lower part of the Caestert fortification. It shows intense weathering, like rounded edges and a very smooth surface.*



*Image 28. Six shards, probably from the Iron Age, found in the lower part of the Iron age fortification of Caestert (dug up by badgers, found near their holes), showing displacement of soil from the surface to the lower parts of the earth wall*

## **References**

**Brounen, F. T.S. and Peeters, H.** (2000/2001): Vroeg - neolithische vuursteenwinning en -bewerking in de Banholtergrubbe (Banholt, gem. Margraten) 139 : 6 [Downloadable link PDF](#)

**Hauzeur, Jadin, Jungels, I and C.** (2011) 5000 ans avant J-C, la grande migration ? Le Néolithique ancien dans la collection Louis Eloy

[Bandkeramiek. nl](#)