
1 A simulation-based assessment of the relation between Stone Age
2 sites and relative sea-level change along the Norwegian Skagerrak
3 coast

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8 **1 Introduction**

9 The post-glacial relative sea-level fall that characterises large areas of Fennoscandia is fundamental to
10 its archaeology. This follows not only from the dramatic changes to the landscape that this process has
11 represented throughout prehistory, but also from the fact that if archaeological phenomena were situated
12 close to the contemporary shoreline when they were in use, a reconstruction of the trajectory of shoreline
13 displacement can be used to date these phenomena based on their altitude relative to the present day sea-level.
14 This method, also called shoreline dating, has long history of use in the region and is frequently applied
15 to assign an approximate date to diverse archaeological phenomena such as rock art, grave cairns, various
16 harbour and sea-side constructions and, as is the focus of this study, Stone Age sites (e.g. Åkerlund 1996;
17 Bjerck 2005; Nordqvist 1995; Schmitt et al. 2009; Sognnes 2003; Tallavaara and Pesonen 2020; Wikell et al.
18 2009).

19 The close association between Stone Age settlements in the northern parts of Scandinavia and shifting
20 prehistoric shorelines was apparent by the end of the 19th century (De Geer 1896), and was firmly established
21 and applied as a dating method in Sweden (Hollender 1901) and Norway (Brøgger 1905) at the turn of
22 the century. Shoreline dating has been fundamental to Stone Age archaeology in Norway ever since (e.g.
23 Berg-Hansen 2009; Bjerck 1990, 2008a; Breivik 2014; Johansen 1963; Mikkelsen 1975; Nummedal 1923;
24 Solheim and Persson 2018). The method is used both independently, and to compliment other sources of
25 temporal data such as typological indicators or radiometric dates. However, given the coarse and fuzzy
26 resolution of established typological frameworks, the vast amount of surveyed sites that only contain generic
27 lithicdebitage that could hail from any part of the period, and as the conditions for the preservation of organic
28 material is typically poor in Norway, dating with reference to shoreline displacement is often the only and
29 most precise method by which one can hope to date the sites. Shoreline dating is consequently fundamental to
30 our understanding of the Norwegian Stone Age. This is both because it is central to the temporal framework
31 on which our understanding of the period is based, but also because the method is only applicable so long as
32 the societies in question have continuously settled on or close to the contemporary shoreline. Consequently,
33 adherence or deviation from this pattern also has major implications for the socio-economic foundations of
34 the societies in question.

35 Despite its important role for Norwegian Stone Age archaeology, the applicability of dating by reference to
36 shoreline displacement has only been evaluated using relatively coarse methods. The aim of this paper is to
37 provide a systematic and comprehensive review of the degree to which radiocarbon dates correspond with the
38 dates informed by our current knowledge of shoreline displacement in a larger area of south-eastern Norway,
39 using a more refined methodological approach. The goal is to quantify the degree to which the assumption

40 of shore-bound settlement holds through the Stone Age, and in turn have this inform a refined method for
41 shoreline dating. As presented in more detail below, this problem involves the combined evaluation of three
42 major analytical dimensions. One is the questions of when the sites were in use, the second pertains to the
43 reconstruction of the contemporaneous sea-level, and the third follows from the fact that the relation between
44 site and shoreline is inherently spatial. Taking inspiration from studies that have integrated various sources
45 of spatio-temporal uncertainty through Monte Carlo simulation (e.g. Bevan et al. 2013; Crema et al. 2010;
46 Crema 2012, 2015; Yubero-Gómez et al. 2016), a similar approach is adopted here.

47 2 Background

48 Relative sea-level (RSL) can be defined as the mean elevation of the surface of the sea relative to land, or,
49 more formally, the difference in elevation between the geoid and the surface of the Earth as measured from
50 the Earth's centre (Shennan 2015). Variation in this relative distance follow from a range of effects (e.g.
51 Milne et al. 2009). Of central importance here is eustasy and istostasy. The eustatic sea-level is understood
52 as the sea-level if the water has been evenly distributed across the Earth's surface without adjusting for
53 variation in the rigidity of the Earth, its rotation, or the self-gravitation inherent to the water body itself
54 (Shennan 2015). The eustatic sea-level is mainly impacted by glaciation and de-glaciation, which can bind
55 or release large amounts of water into the oceans (Mörner 1976). Istostasy, on the other hand, pertains to
56 adjustments in the crust to regain gravitational equilibrium relative to the underlying viscous mantle. This is
57 often the result of glacial istostasy, which follows from glaciation and de-glaciation and corresponding loading
58 and unloading of weight, as well as from erosion of the crust, which causes its weight to be redistributed.
59 These effects thus causes the lithosphere to either subside due to increased weight, or to rebound and lift
60 upwards due to lower weight (Milne 2015).

61 Following the end of the Weichselian and the final retreat of the Fennoscandian Ice Sheet (e.g. Hughes et al.
62 2016; Stroeven et al. 2016, see Figure 1), the isostatic rebound has been so severe that most areas of Norway
63 have been subject to a continuous relative sea-level regression, despite corresponding eustatic sea-level rise
64 (e.g. Mörner 1979; Svendsen and Mangerud 1987). In other words, the RSL has been dropping throughout
65 prehistory. As this process is the result of glacial loading, the rate of uplift is more severe towards the centre
66 of the ice sheet. Thus, some areas on the outer coast have had a more stable RSL or been subject to marine
67 transgression (e.g. Romundset et al. 2015; Svendsen and Mangerud 1987). These conditions are directly
68 reflected in the archaeological record. In areas where the sea-level has been stable over longer periods of
69 time, people have often reused coastal site locations multiple times and over long time-spans, creating a
70 mix of settlement events that are difficult to disentangle (e.g. Hagen 1963; Reitan and Berg-Hansen 2009).
71 Transgression phases, on the other hand, can lead to complete destruction of the sites, or bury them in marine
72 sediments, leading to a hiatus in the archaeological record for certain sub-phases in the impacted areas (Bjerck
73 2008a; Glørstad et al. 2020). Comparatively, given a continuous and still ongoing shoreline regression from as
74 high as c. 220 m above present sea-level in the inner Oslo fjord, any one location in south-eastern Norway has
75 only been shore-bound within a relatively limited time-span, and the sites have not been impacted by any
76 transgressions (Hafsten 1957, 1983; Romundset et al. 2018; Sørensen 1979). This makes the region especially
77 useful for evaluating the assumption of a shore-bound settlement over a long and continuous time-span.

78 The method of shoreline dating has been met with scepticism as related to the degree sites would have
79 been consistently shore-bound, been characterised as a relative dating method for sites located at different
80 elevations within a constrained geographical area, or been argued to offer no more than a earliest possible
81 date for when a site could have been in use (Breivik and Bjerck 2018:174). The most common application in
82 Norway has arguably been to use the method to provide an approximate date for the occupation of the sites,
83 typically in combination with other dating methods [see for example chapters in @; ; and below]. Recently
84 the method has also been used independently to date a larger number sites to get a general impression of site
85 frequency over time, typically by aggregating point estimates of shoreline dates in 100, 200 or 500 year bins
86 (e.g. Breivik 2014; Breivik and Bjerck 2018; Fossum 2020; Nielsen 2021; Solheim and Persson 2018). In his
87 discussion of the method, Nordqvist (1999), in part drawing on Johansen (1963), argues that there can be
88 little doubt concerning its general applicability – what is less clear is the level of reliability and chronological

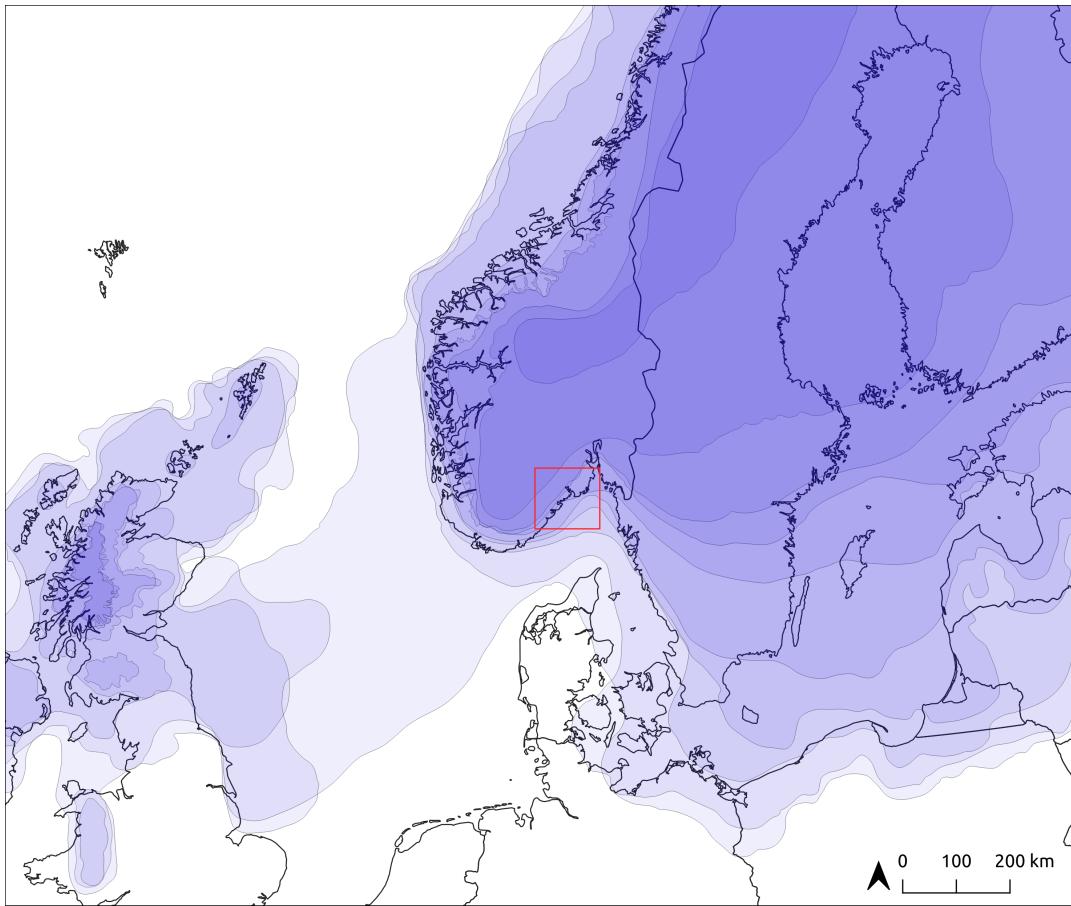


Figure 1: Deglaciation at 1000 year intervals from c. 17–8 kyr BCE. The study area defined later in the text is marked with a red outline (deglaciation data from Hughes et al. 2016, although see Romundset et al. 2019 for the study area).

89 resolution that the method can offer.

90 The shore-bound settlement location of prehistoric hunter-fisher-gatherers in Norway is generally believed
91 to follow both from the exploitation of aquatic resources and from movement and communication, which
92 would have been efficient on waterways (discussed in Berg-Hansen 2009; Bergsvik 2009). The same logic
93 has also been extended to the hinter- and inland regions, where sites are to be located along rivers and
94 lakes (Brøgger 1905; Glørstad 2010:57–87; but see Gundersen 2013; Mjærum 2018; Schülke 2020). This is to
95 take a dramatic turn at the transition to the Late Neolithic, around 2400 BCE, with the introduction of
96 the Neolithic proper (Prescott 2020; Solheim 2021). The introduction of a comprehensive Neolithic cultural
97 package, including a shift to agro-pastoralism and the introduction of the farm is to have led site locations
98 to be more withdrawn from the shoreline (e.g. Bakka and Kaland 1971; Østmo 2008:223; **prescott2012?**).
99 That is not to say that waterways and aquatic resources were no longer exploited, but rather that these
100 activities would not have been as tightly integrated with settlement and tool-production areas as in preceding
101 periods (Glørstad 2011). At an earlier stage, at the transition to the Early Neolithic (c. 3900 BCE), pottery
102 is introduced to the sites, and there are some indications of an initial uptake of agriculture at some sites
103 in the Oslo fjord region. However, this appears to be small in scale and is believed to be combined with a
104 continued and predominantly hunter-gatherer life-way, possibly followed by a complete de-Neolithisation in
105 the Middle Neolithic (Nielsen et al. 2019; Østmo 1988:225–227; **hinsch1955?**). Nielsen (2021) has recently
106 argued that the initial uptake of agriculture in Early Neolithic south-eastern Norway is combined with a more
107 complex settlement pattern, and that a simple forager/farming dichotomy would underplay the variation
108 present in the Early and Middle Neolithic settlement data (see also e.g. Amundsen et al. 2006; Østmo 1988;
109 Solheim 2012:74). Seen in relation to the question of interest here, the empirical expectation for the above
110 outlined development would thus be a predominantly shore-bound settlement in the Mesolithic, possibly
111 followed by a more varied association between sites and the shore-line from around 3900 BCE, and finally a
112 decisive shift around 2400 BCE.

113 Based on the generally accepted premise that most pre-Late Neolithic sites in south-eastern Norway located
114 lower than the marine limit were situated on or close to the contemporaneous shoreline, it is common to err
115 on the side of a shore-bound site location unless there is strong evidence to suggest otherwise. This is for
116 example common in survey projects, which are often guided by both a digital and mental reconstruction
117 of past sea-levels (e.g. Berg-Hansen 2009; Eskeland 2017). Similarly, following an excavation, if typological
118 indicators in the assemblages correspond with available shoreline displacement curves it is common to assume
119 a shore-bound site location, even if the typologically informed date-span is too wide to decisively verify this.
120 It is also common to combine this with a qualitative consideration of the landscape surrounding the sites,
121 and an evaluation of the degree to which the site location would have been sensible if the site was not shore
122 bound (e.g. Jakslund 2014; Johansen 1963; Nummedal 1923). This can for example pertain to accessibility. If
123 the site is situated on a ledge in a steep and jagged area of the present day landscape it would make intuitive
124 sense that the site was in use when the ocean reached closer to its elevation, as the site would have been
125 accessible by means of watercraft. Although it appears that the arguments for such site locations are sensible
126 and can for the most part be assumed to hold, comprehensive evaluations and attempts at quantification of
127 this tendency are relatively few (see also Ilves and Darmark 2011).

128 One of the more comprehensive evaluations of the relationship between radiocarbon dates and RSL-change
129 was done by Solheim and colleagues (Breivik et al. 2018; Solheim 2020), who compared 102 radiocarbon
130 dates from 33 Mesolithic sites on the western side of the Oslo fjord to the displacement curve for the Larvik
131 area. They found an overlap between the probability density of the radiocarbon dates with the shoreline
132 displacement curve for 86.5% of the sites. However, where there was a discrepancy, the main occupation of
133 the sites are still believed to have been shore-bound rather than associated with the deviating ^{14}C -dates.
134 This is based on typological and technological characteristics of the assemblages. Whether these mismatches
135 represent later shorter visits that are responsible for the younger radiocarbon dates, or whether these are
136 entirely erroneous results can be difficult to evaluate (e.g. Persson 2008; Schülke 2020). However, this
137 distinction is not deemed critical here, as what is of interest is the relationship between the prehistoric
138 shoreline and settlements and tool-production areas evidenced by artefact inventories or multiple site features.
139 Not remnants of stays as ephemeral to only be discernible by individual features or dubious ^{14}C -dates. The
140 evaluation of the relevance of radiocarbon dates to settlement activity will here therefore be entirely dependent

on, and follow the discretion of the original excavation reports.

Other previous evaluations of the correspondence between radiocarbon- and RSL-informed dates have typically followed the same structure as that of Breivik et al. (2018), involving a visual inspection of radiocarbon probability density functions plotted against local shoreline displacement curves based on the elevation of the site (e.g. Åkerlund et al. 1995; Åstveit 2018; Solheim 2020; see also Bjerck 2008b; Kleppe 1985). This approach has a couple of limitations. First of all, the displacement curves are sometimes applied directly to larger study areas, with only some studies having taken the variable uplift-rates into account when performing this comparison (e.g. Åstveit 2018; Fossum 2020; Møller 1987; Persson 2008). Secondly, with this method, the wider the uncertainty range associated with either radiocarbon date or displacement curve, the higher the probability that the confidence intervals overlap, and the higher the probability that we conclude in favour of our hypothesis. This thus leads to an inferential framework that favours uncertainty, which is hardly desirable. In statistical terms this follows from the fact that while one cannot conclude that two dates are different if their confidence intervals overlap, this does not necessarily mean that they are the same. The question thus necessitates a flip from a null-hypothesis of no significant difference, to one of equivalence (e.g. Lakens et al. 2018), as the question of interest is effectively one of synchronicity between events (cf. Parnell et al. 2008). Another limitation of this often-employed method is that it only takes into account the vertical distance between the sites and the sea-level. While this is the main parameter of interest for shoreline dating, the practical implications of a vertical difference in RSL will be highly dependent on local topography and bathymetry. RSL-change can have more dramatic consequences in a landscape characterised by a low relief, as the horizontal displacement of the shoreline will be greater. Taking the spatial nature of the relationship between site and shoreline into account will consequently help get more directly at the behavioural dimension of this relation, and move the analysis beyond a purely instrumental consideration of the applicability of shoreline dating. Suggested ways to help mitigate and integrate the issues presented above into to the analysis are presented in the methods section.

3 Data

To get at the relationship between sites and the contemporaneous shoreline, this analysis was dependent on a study area with good control of the trajectory of prehistoric shoreline displacement. While there is displacement data available for other areas of south-eastern Norway (e.g. Hafsten 1957; Sørensen 1979, 1999), considerable methodological developments in recent years means that the most well-established displacement curves are from the region stretching from Horten county in the north-east, to Arendal in the south-west. This area has newly compiled displacement curves for Horten (**romundset2021?**), Larvik (Sørensen et al. in press, 2014; Sørensen, Høeg, et al. 2014), Tvedstrand (Romundset 2018; Romundset et al. 2018), and Arendal (Romundset 2018).

The employed shoreline displacement curves are all based on the so-called isolation basin method (see e.g. Kjemperud 1986; Romundset et al. 2011). This involves extracting cores from a series of basins situated on bedrock at different elevations beneath the marine limit, and dating the transition from marine to lacustrine sediments. Each curve is thus construed from a series of cored basins located at different elevations, each representing a high precision sea-level index point (SLIP). Furthermore, to minimise the impact of variable uplift rates, the basins are located in a as constrained area of the landscape as possible. Following from the morphology of the retreating ice sheet, the uplift is more severe towards the north-east, meaning that this needs to be adjusted for in the case that any basins are located any significant distance from a common isobase perpendicular to this gradient (Figure 2). The resulting SLIPs indicate the isolation of the basin from the highest astronomical tide. This is adjusted to mean sea-level for the compilation of the displacement curve based on the present day tidal range, which is assumed to have been the same throughout the Holocene (Sørensen, Henningsmoen, et al. 2014:44). Furthermore, the confidence bands of the displacement curves and their trajectory are quite complex constructs, and are the integrated result of both expert knowledge and more objectively quantifiable parameters. The reason for this is in part that the curves do not only contain uncertainty as related to radiometric dates, which are well-defined, but also hold potential error as related to the interpretation and analysis of sediment cores, the nature and condition of the basin outlets and the

190 adjustment to a common isobase, to name but a few (Romundset et al. 2011, e.g. 2019). For more details
191 and evaluations done for the compilation of each curve, the reader is therefore referred to the individual
192 publications.

193 The archaeological data compiled for the analysis consists of excavated Stone Age sites with available spatial
194 data from the coastal region between Horten county in the north-east, to Arendal in the south-west (Figure
195 2). These number 155 sites. Of these, 91 sites are associated with a total of 547 radiocarbon dates. Of these,
196 in turn, 69 sites are related to the 266 radiocarbon dates that fall within the Stone Age (9500–1700 BCE),
197 with 95% probability. These sites and ^{14}C -dates form the basis for the analysis. Spatial data in the form of
198 site limits and features, as defined by the excavating archaeologists, were retrieved from local databases at the
199 Museum of Cultural History—the institution responsible for archaeological excavations in the region. In the
200 compiled dataset, each radiocarbon date has been associated with the site features or excavation unit from
201 where they originate, or, where these weren't available, the spatial limit of the entire site. Due to somewhat
202 variable practices between excavations, what available spatial geometry best represents the site limit was
203 decided based on an evaluation of the excavation reports. This means that the limits are variably given as
204 that defined during initial survey, area de-turfed before excavation, area stripped with excavator following
205 the excavation, manually excavated area, or convex hull polygons generated around the site features.

206 Three of the sites have been associated with farming activities, either directly or in the form building
207 structures. The first is Nordby 1, at which the ^{14}C -dates are associated with a Late Neolithic long-house
208 (Gjerpe and Bukkemoen 2008). The Middle Neolithic phase at Kvastad A2 (Stokke and Reitan 2018) and
209 Late Neolithic phase at Nauen A (Persson 2008) are both directly related to farming. Both of these sites also
210 have radiocarbon dates and lithic inventory associated with Mesolithic forager activities. Following from the
211 expected deviance from the settlement patterns that are to characterise forager sites, these agricultural phases
212 are thus treated separately below. Finally, Nielsen (2021) has recently suggested that Early and Middle
213 Neolithic features from the otherwise younger sites Bratsberg (Wenn 2012) and Larønningen (Røberg 2012)
214 could be related to early agricultural activity in the Oslo fjord region. Due to the uncertain and somewhat
215 speculative nature of this suggestion, these are omitted here.

216 [Table with sites]

217 The elevation data used for the analysis is a digital terrain model (DTM) freely available from the Norwegian
218 Mapping Authority (**mapping2019?**). It was here opted for the 10m resolution DTM rather than the higher-
219 resolution 1m version. In addition to resulting in considerably less processing time, the higher resolution
220 elevation model is more vulnerable to smaller-scale modern disturbances that the 10m version is not impacted
221 by. The 10m DTM is a down-sampled version of the 1m resolution DTM, which is based on aerial laser
222 scanning using a minimum of two and up to five points per m² and has a vertical error of (**mapping2019?**).
223 All data and R programming code (R Core Team 2021) required to run the analyses, as well as the derived
224 data are freely available in an online repository at <https://osf.io/7f9su/>, organised as a digital research
225 compendium following Marwick et al. (2018).

226 4 Methods

227 The method of shoreline dating is based on the spatial relationship between two phenomena, occupation of
228 sites and shoreline displacement, each associated with their own range of temporal uncertainty. The first task
229 was therefore to ascribe likely date ranges and associated uncertainty to these dimensions. To take account of
230 the gradient in the isostatic rebound, the trajectory of shoreline displacement was first interpolated to each
231 site location from the displacement curves using inverse distance weighting based on the distance between the
232 site and the isobases of the displacement curves (e.g. Conolly 2020; Conolly and Lake 2006:94–97). This was
233 done for each year along the entirety of the curves, weighting the interpolation by the squared inverse of the
234 distances. The result of this process is shown for an example site in Figure 3. For the date ranges associated
235 with the sites, all radiocarbon dates were first individually calibrated using the IntCal20 calibration curve
236 (Reimer et al. 2020) using OxCal v4.4.4 (Bronk Ramsey 2009) through the oxcAAR package for R (Hinz et
237 al. 2021). Radiocarbon dates associated with each site were then grouped if they overlapped with 99.7%

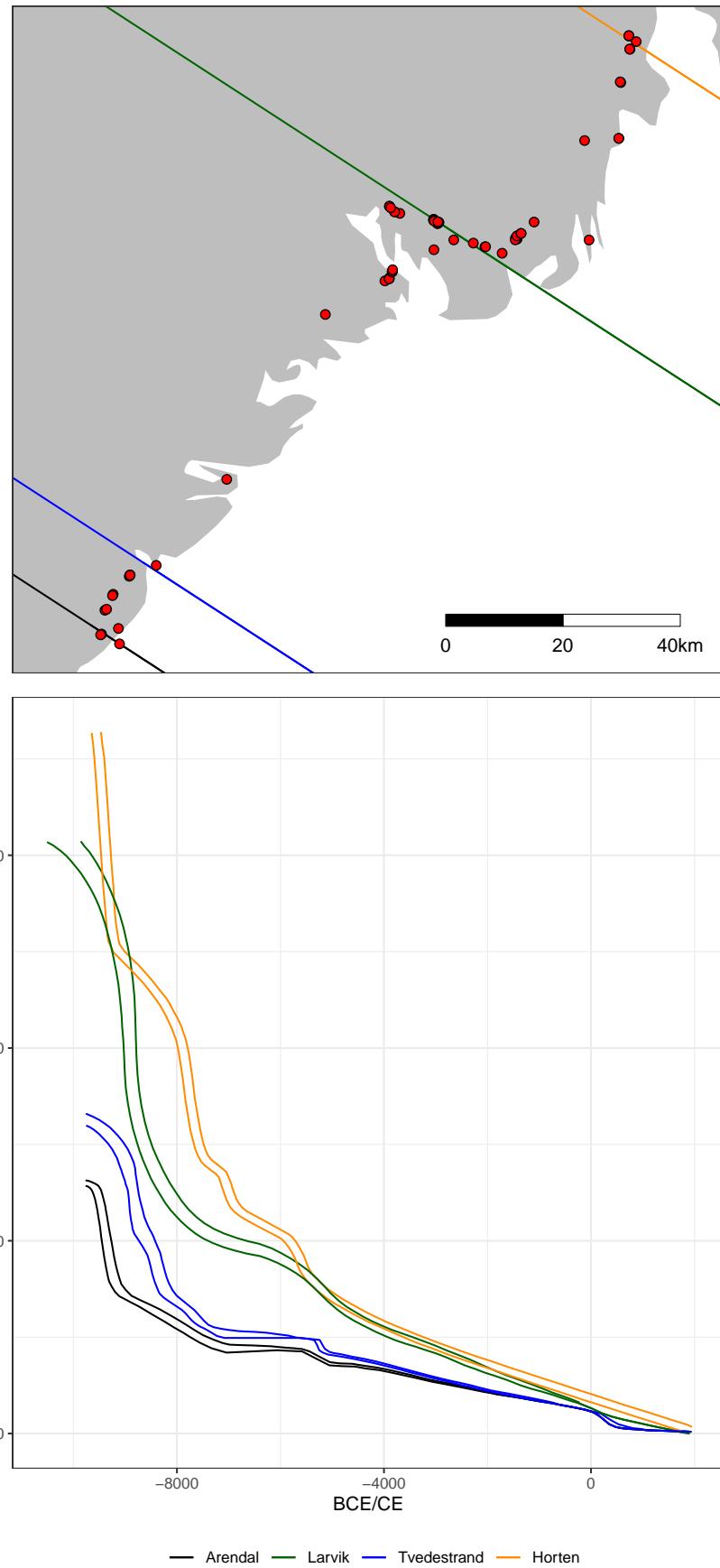


Figure 2: A) Distribution of the 69 analysed sites relative to the isobases of the displacement curves. The isobases have a direction of 327° (Romundset et al. 2018), B) Displacement curves. Note the increasing⁷ steepness of the curves towards the north-east.

238 probability, meaning these were effectively taken to represent the same settlement phase. In the case where
239 there are multiple dates believed to belong to a single phase, these were subjected to Bayesian modelling
240 using the Boundary function in OxCal and then summed. Multiple phases at a single site were treated as
241 independent of each other.

242 As the excavation of archaeological sites typically follow from residential and commercial development, as well
243 as the expansion of infrastructure, the area immediately surrounding the sites has sometimes been severely
244 impacted by modern disturbances. In addition to employing 10m resolution DTM to alleviate some of these
245 issues, this also necessitated some additional editing of the elevation raster. This involved manually defining
246 the extent of problem areas such as railways, highways, quarries and the like. The DTM values on these
247 were then set to missing, and new elevation values were interpolated from the surrounding terrain. This was
248 done using regularised spline interpolation with tension (e.g. Conolly 2020), using the default settings of
249 r.fillnulls from GRASS GIS (GRASS Development Team 2017) in R through the package rgrass7 (Bivand
250 2021). In addition to code and original spatial data being available in the research compendium for this
251 paper, it has also been noted in the supplementary material when the area surrounding a site has been edited
252 in this manner.

253 Armed with a likely date range for the occupation(s) of each site, an estimated trajectory of relative sea-level
254 change at that location, and a DTM edited to remove substantial modern disturbances, the simulations were
255 performed. A single simulation run involved first drawing a single year from the posterior density estimate of
256 a given occupation phase of a site (Figure 4). This year then has a corresponding likely elevation range for
257 the contemporaneous shoreline from which an elevation value was drawn uniformly, using intervals of 5cm.
258 The sea-level was then raised to this elevation on the DTM by defining all elevation values at or below this
259 altitude as missing. Polygons were then created from the resulting areas with missing values. The horizontal
260 distance was then found by measuring the shortest distance between site and sea polygons, and the vertical
261 distance by subtracting the elevation of the sea-level from the lowest elevation of the site polygon. The
262 topographic distance between site and sea was also found by measuring the shortest distance while taking into
263 account the slope of the terrain on the DTM. This was done using the topoDistance package for R (Wang
264 2019). The topographic distance was measured between site polygon and the horizontally closest point on the
265 shoreline. This means that the distance is not necessarily measured as the closest topographic distance to the
266 shoreline, but rather as the shortest topographic path to the horizontally closest point on the shoreline. Not
267 finding the topographically closest point significantly reduced the computational cost of the analysis, and is
268 deemed unlikely to have a considerable impact on the results, given the distances considered. The shortest
269 topographic path was found using the Moore neighbourhood of eight cells (e.g. Conolly and Lake 2006:253;
270 Herzog 2013). In the case where the sea-polygons intersects the site polygon, all distance measures were set
271 to zero. In the case that the sea-polygon completely contain the site, the horizontal and topographic distance
272 measures were made negative, and the vertical distance was instead measured to the highest point on the site
273 polygon. While it is safe to assume that an archaeological site was not occupied when it was located beneath
274 sea-level, a negative result can reflect the inherent uncertainty in this procedure, and might also help identify
275 discrepancies in displacement data or radiocarbon dates. Negative values were therefore retained, with the
276 exception of for the sites Gunnarsrød 5 and Pjonkerød R1, where the negative values are believed to result
277 from modern disturbances in the DTM rather than the ^{14}C -dates or displacement curves (see supplementary
278 material for more details).

279 This process was repeated 1000 times for each phase for each site. The choice of 1000 simulation runs follows
280 from an evaluation of when the mean distances between site and shoreline converged when running 5000
281 iterations of the simulation on the site Hovland 5, available in the supplementary material (cf. Crema et al.
282 2010:1125). Hovland 5 was chosen for this evaluation as it has a fairly uncertain date, and is located in area
283 of quite complex topography.

284 5 Simulation results

285 Overall, as is indicated by the measures for central tendency and the almost solid line along the 0m mark
286 on the y-axes, the simulations show that the sites tend to have been situated close to the shoreline when

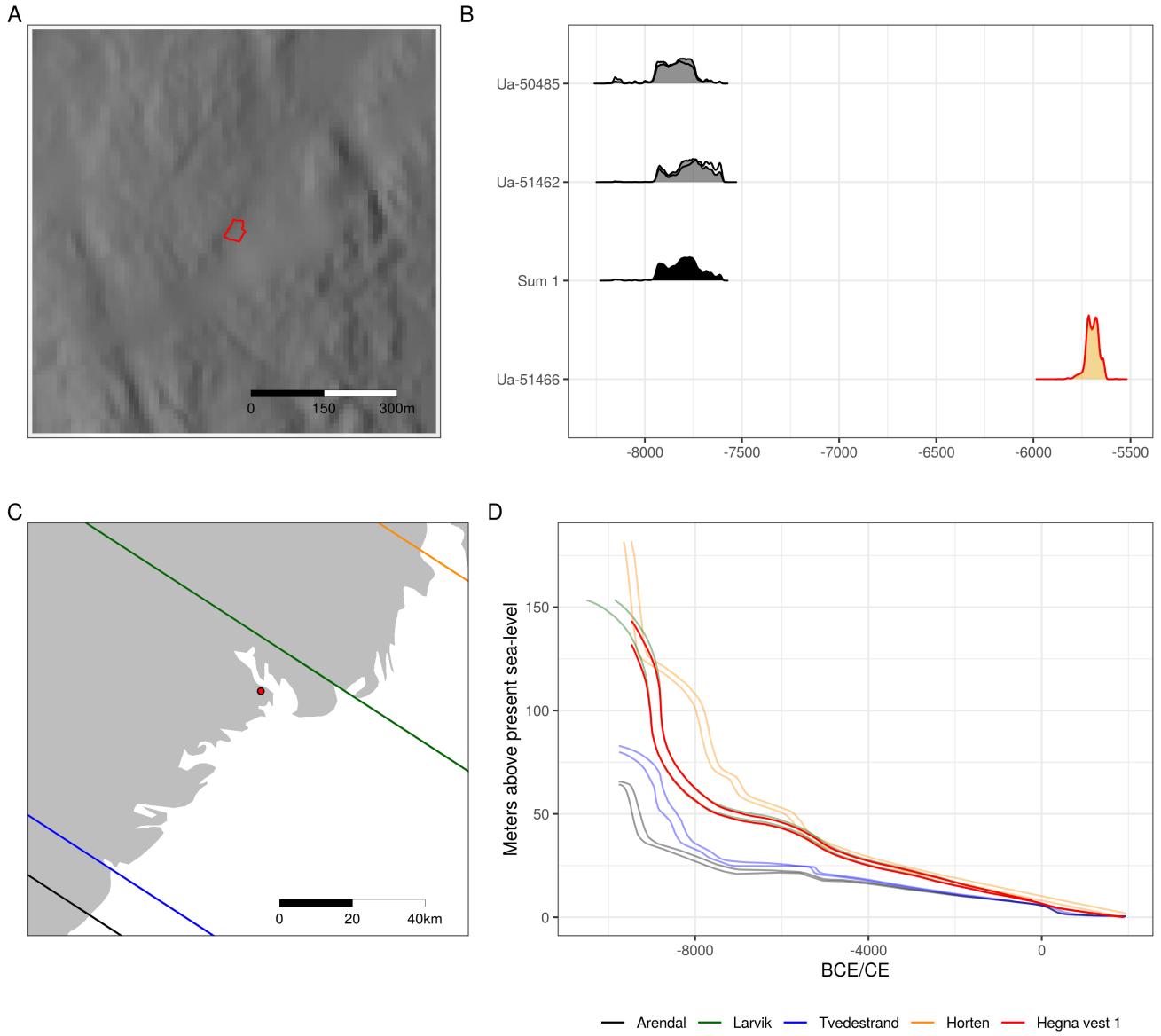


Figure 3: Example site Hegna vest 1 (Fossum 2017). A) Location of the site in the present day landscape. The red outline is the site limit. B) Radiocarbon dates associated with the site. Fill colour indicates what dates are assumed to belong to the same settlement phase. Multiple dates are modelled using the Boundary function in OxCal and then summed. The red outline indicates that the date does not match the typological indicators in the artefact assemblage of the site. C) The location of the site within the study area relative to isobases of the employed displacement curves. D) Displacement curve interpolated to the site location.

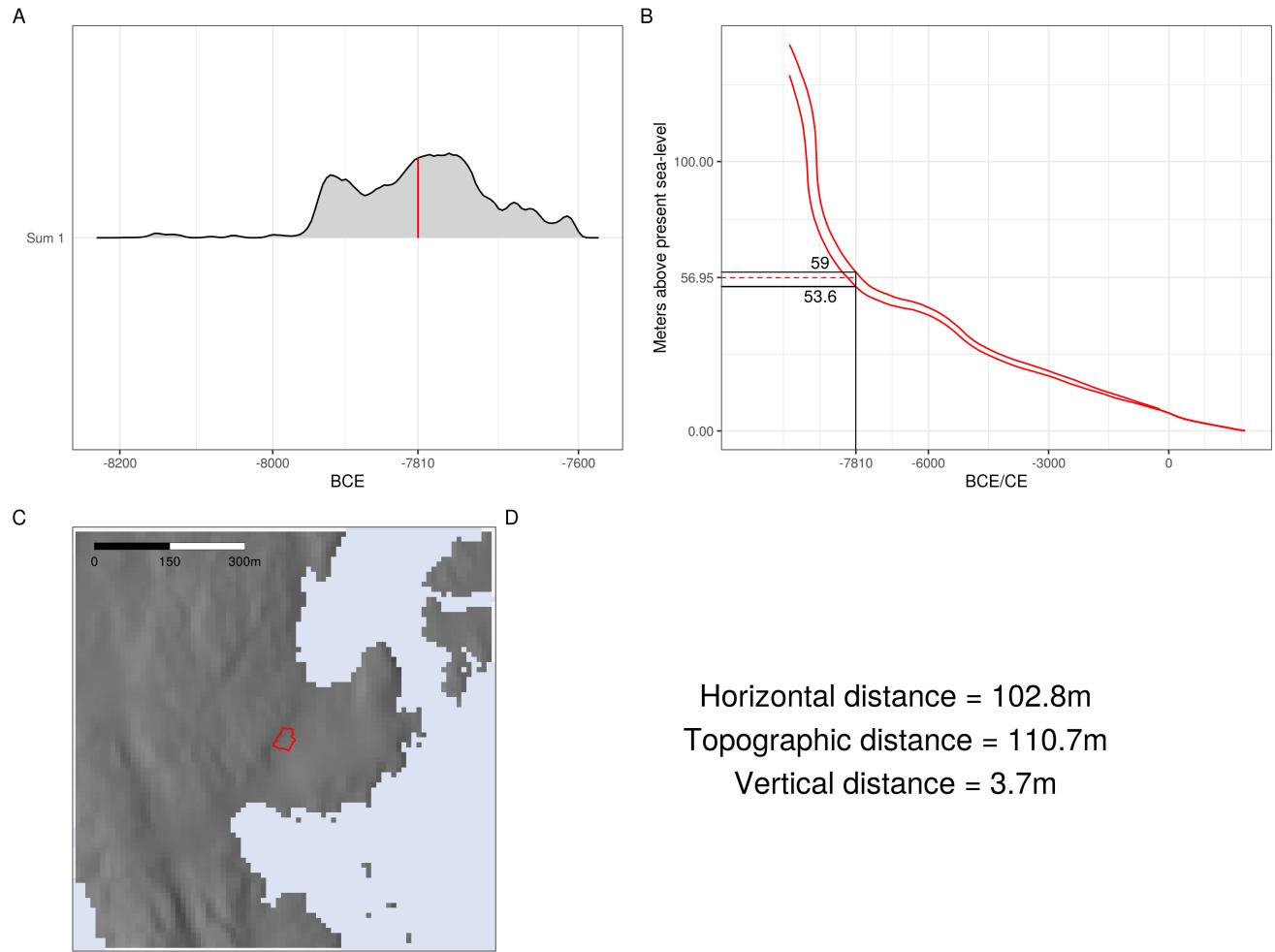


Figure 4: Example of a single simulation run on the site Hegna vest 1. A) The simulation starts by drawing a single year from the posterior density estimate. B) This then corresponds to an elevation range on the interpolated displacement curve. A single elevation is drawn uniformly from this range using 5cm intervals. C) The sea-level is then adjusted on the DTM to this elevation and the various distance measures are found. D) The numerical result of the simulation run.

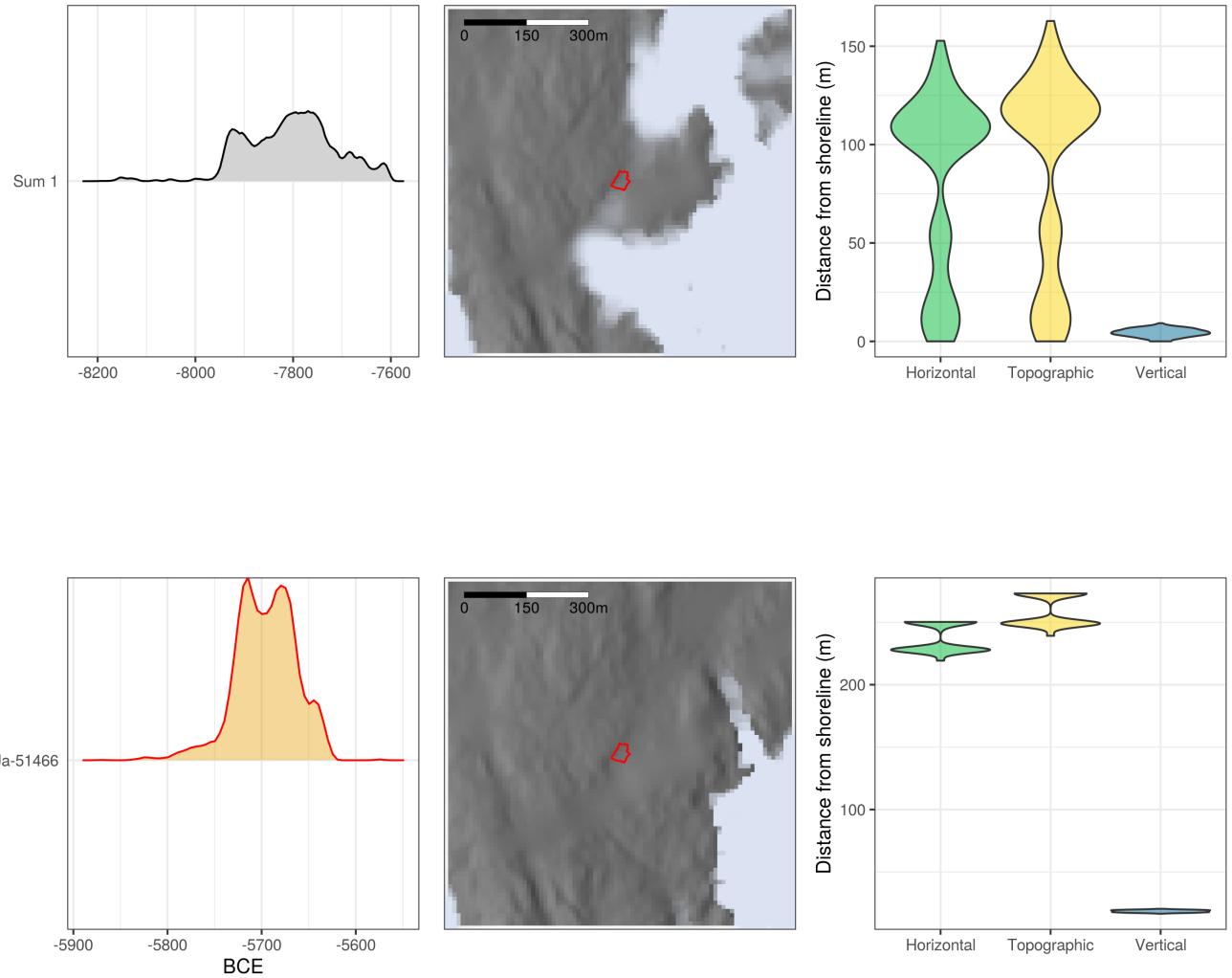


Figure 5: The result of 1000 simulation runs for each of the two groups of dates on the site Hegna vest 1. The first column of plots shows the radiocarbon probability density function from where dates were drawn during simulation. The second column displays the result of simulating the raised sea-level 1000 times. The more opaque the colour, the more times the sea-level was simulated to that location. The third column shows violin plots of the different distance measures across all simulations.

they were in use (Figure 6). Some of the sites are situated considerable distances from the shoreline when the dates believed to be erroneous in the original reports are included, but if one accepts the interpretation that these do not date the main occupation of the sites, as is indicated by the artefact inventories, the second row of Figure 6 gives considerable support to the notion that the sites were in use when they were situated on or close to the contemporaneous shoreline. The distances for some of the earliest sites appears somewhat high, but this can likely be explained as the result of the steepness of the displacement curves for the earliest part of the Holocene (Figure 2B), which leads the uncertainty of the ^{14}C -dates to give a wider possible elevation range for the sea-level. Another immediately striking result is the apparent deviation from the shoreline towards the end of the Stone Age, corresponding with the literature. From around 2500 BCE several sites are situated a considerable distance from the shoreline, and while a couple remain horizontally and topographically close, most appear to be elevated a considerable distance from the sea-level, as indicated on the plot for vertical distance. There are also a couple of sites located some distance from the shoreline just after 4000 BCE. While the sample size is limited, this would thus be in line with a development that sees an increase in settlements located in the immediate inland around this time.

The negative values around 8000 BCE originate from the sites Løvås 1, 2 and 3. These are recently excavated, well-dated sites situated in a relatively undisturbed area of the landscape. While there would be a danger of circularity of having archaeological sites inform a reconstruction RSL-change, and in turn use these to evaluate the degree of shore-bound settlement, the sites do clearly represent a upper limit for the sea-level, as they would not have been in use when located under water. It could therefore seem that the Løvås sites represent a case where the archaeological material indicates a slight discrepancy in the geological reconstruction of shoreline displacement in the area.

Accepting that shoreline dating appears to loose utility around the transition to the Late Neolithic, as indicated by the clear deviation in site location from the shoreline after this, the results for the second row of Figure 6 is given again in Figure 7, excluding all simulation results younger than 2500 BCE. Furthermore, all negative values have here been set to zero, under the assumption that these result from uncertainty or errors in the data, and not actual site locations. The resulting best point estimate for the vertical distance between sites and shoreline for the pre-Late Neolithic is given by the median at 4m, while 95% of the values fall within the range 0–17m. That is, for 95% of the cases, the shoreline was simulated to be situated on or down to 17m below the site location. While these values remain the same when only the Mesolithic dates are included in the second row of Figure 7, the mean and standard deviation is slightly constrained. Furthermore, while the median for horizontal and topographic distance is only 10m across all plots in Figure 7, the variation in statistics for dispersion is also highly more variable, illustrating the point that minor variations in vertical distance can have substantial consequences for these distance measures, depending on the surrounding topography.

An exponential function has been fit to the distributions for vertical distance using maximum likelihood estimation (Figure 7). While it makes theoretical sense that a process of exponential decay explains this relationship, it is also clear that this does not perfectly match the data. However, this can at least in part be related to methodological factors, where the accumulation of distance-values on the 0m mark likely follow from forcing negative values to zero, from the resolution of the spatial data, and from defining intersecting sea- and site polygon as having a distance of zero. If one accepts this, having derived an exponential decay function for describing the vertical distance between sites and shoreline can be combined with the displacement data to provide a method for shoreline dating that takes this distance into account:

Where x is [...] In Figure 8 this formula is used to shoreline date the same sites from where this relationship was derived. Following from having defined the distance between intersecting sea- and site polygons as zero during simulations, the sites were dated using the mean elevation of the site polygons to allow for some deviance in elevation over the site limits. The synchronicity between radiocarbon and shoreline dates was then evaluated using the method presented by (Parnell et al. 2008, Figure 9). Here, 100,000 age samples drawn from the probability density function of each shoreline date were subtracted from 100,000 age samples drawn from the corresponding ^{14}C -date. The resulting range of the 95% highest density region (HDR, Hyndman 1996) was then checked to see if it crosses zero, in which case the dates are considered to be in agreement. The overall success of this procedure is If one only includes sites older than 2500 BCE with 95% probability, this improves to, while only including dates older than 4000 BCE with 95% probability increases this further

339 to a success rate of. Thus, if there in the dating of sites are reasons to
 340 The result of this procedure indicates that the shoreline date correspond to the radiocarbon dates for 46
 341 out of 49 sites (94%). The deviation from the shoreline date at Gunnarsrød 5 is to be expected based on
 342 the simulation results (see above), but not at Langemyr and Kvastad A2. For these two sites the zero age
 343 difference can be seen to fall just outside the 95% interval (Figure 8B). If one accepts that sensitivity in the
 344 method leads to the failure to accurately date these two sites, and that the failed dating of Gunnarsrød 5 is
 345 instead due to extraneous factors related the DTM and not the method itself, one could alternatively see the
 346 success rate as defined by 44 out of 46 sites (96%) having been correctly dated. However, another possible
 347 implication of the failed dating of these two sites could be that a lower decay ratio than what is used for
 348 characterising the distance between site and shoreline for all sites in aggregate should be used for sites from
 349 the earliest part of the Mesolithic (cf. Figure 6).

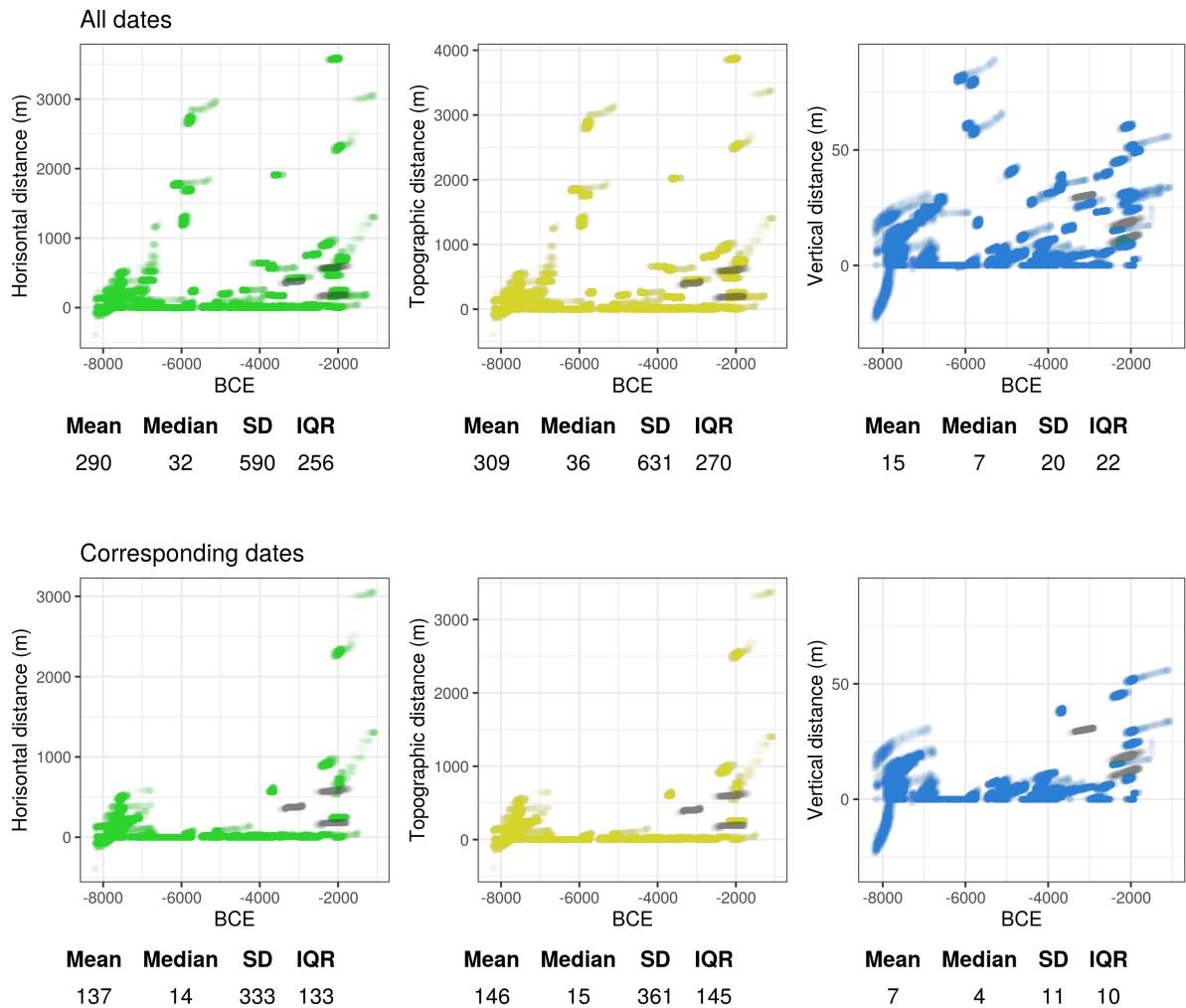


Figure 6: The result of running the analysis across all sites. Each data point is plotted with some transparency, meaning that the more intense the colour, the more often those values occurred. Results associated with agricultural activities are plotted in grey. The first row shows the result of including all dates to the Stone Age, including those seen as otherwise unrelated to the main occupation of the sites. The second row shows the result of excluding these. The table under each plot lists some corresponding statistics for central tendency and dispersion.

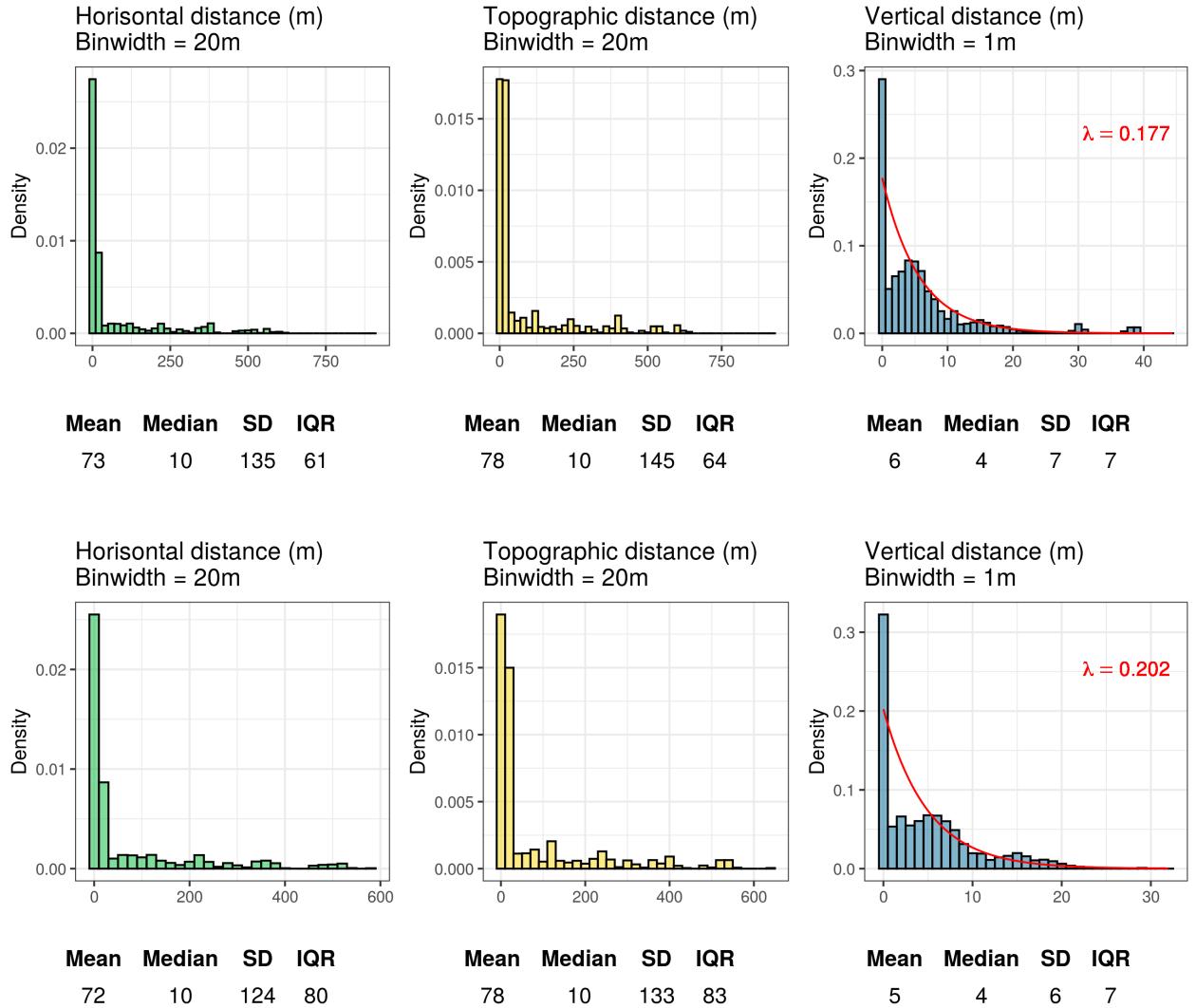


Figure 7: Histograms showing the simulated distance from the shoreline using dates corresponding to the site inventory. Negative values have been set to zero. The first row only includes simulated results older than 2500 BCE and the second row only results older than 4000 BCE.

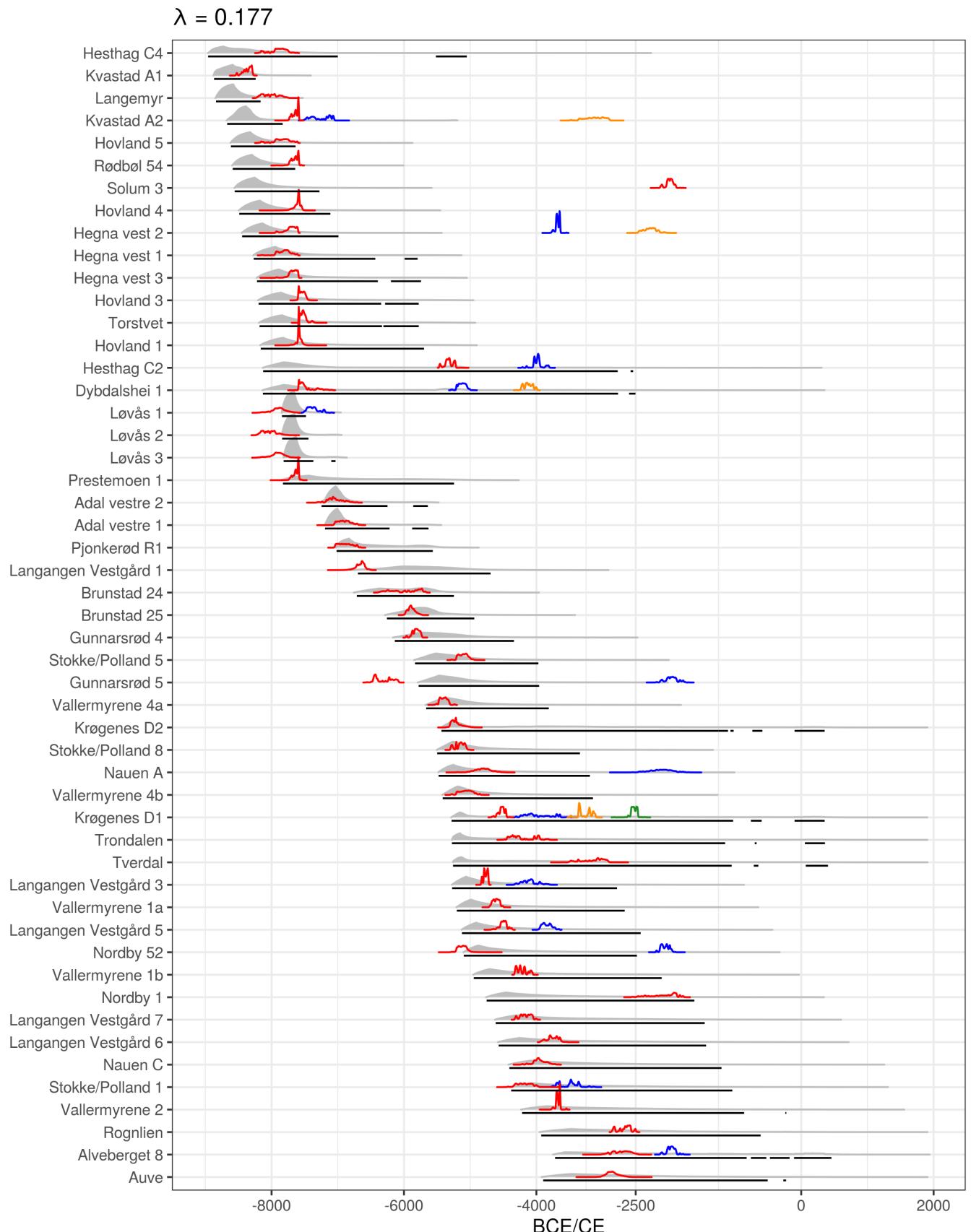


Figure 8: The result of backwards shoreline dating the sites with radiocarbon dates corresponding to the artefact inventory using the method proposed here. The shoreline dates are plotted in grey and underlined¹⁵ with the 95% HDR in black. These are plotted against the modelled radiocarbon dates, which are given colour from oldest to youngest phase for each site.

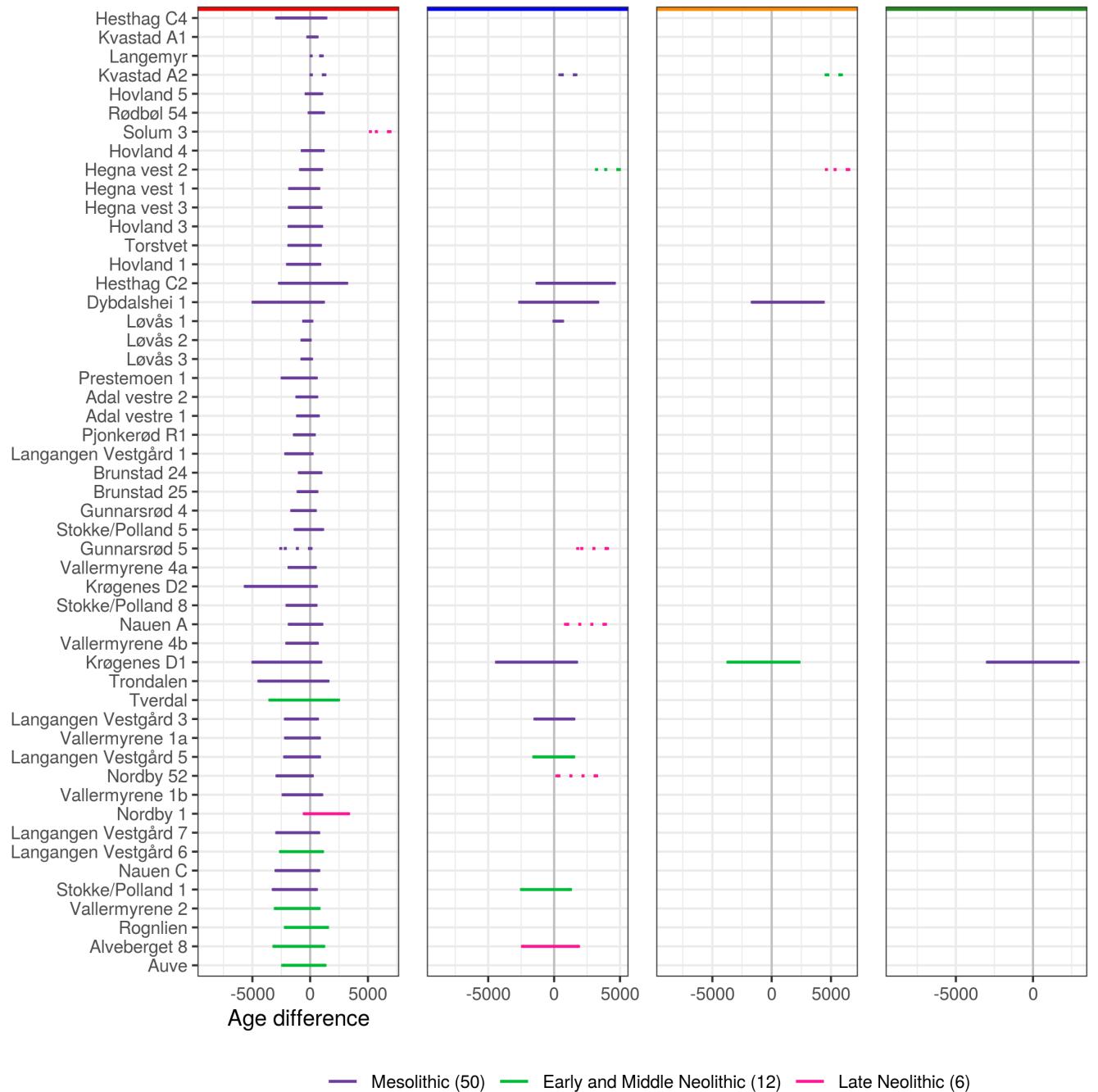


Figure 9: Evaluation of the agreement between the shoreline dates and radiocarbon dates given in Figure 9. When the range of the 95% HDR for age difference crosses zero, indicated by a solid line, the shoreline- and radiocarbon dates are considered synchronous. The division and colour coding at the top of the plots reflects the division of site phases given in Figure 9.

350 6 Shoreline dating

351 To further explore the implementation for shoreline dating outlined above, excavated and shoreline-dated
352 Stone Age sites within the study area where ^{14}C -dates are not available or are not believed to date the main
353 occupation of the sites have been subjected to the method (Figure 10). The resulting dates are compared to
354 those originally proposed in the excavation reports for the sites (the numerical results are available in the
355 supplementary material). To avoid issues with recent disturbances on the DTM, the sites have been dated
356 based on the mean of the altitudes provided in the report for each site. The results highlight the spatial and
357 temporal contingency of the method, illustrated by the variation in the range of the 95% intervals for the
358 dates. In some cases the method provides a very precise date range and in others it offers little more than a
359 *terminus post quem*. This is dependent on the steepness of the displacement curves, leading to the general
360 pattern of older sites situated towards the north-east getting more precise dates (cf. Figure 2B).

361 The comparison with previously reported dates is an illustrative, but unfair exercise for a few reasons. First of
362 all the dates provided in the reports are typically stated to be a very rough estimate, and are sometimes given
363 as a point estimate with an implied or explicit, but undefined uncertainty range. Secondly, seeing as these
364 reports are from various dates in time, many are based on now outdated data on RSL-change. Finally, they
365 are sometimes only meant to indicate a lower bound for when the sites could have been in use. Nonetheless,
366 the results indicate that shoreline dating, in general, has been applied with a fairly reasonable degree of
367 success, seeing as these dates have typically been interpreted and informed research in an approximate manner
368 (although see e.g. **roalkvam2022?**). That being said, the results do also indicate that shoreline dating has
369 at times been applied with an exaggerated degree of precision, and while the implications of a more stable
370 RSL-change for the duration and re-use of site locations, and consequently the precision of shoreline dating
371 is well known, it appears to be somewhat under-appreciated. Some of the date ranges resulting from the
372 method outlined here clearly extend well beyond major chronological divisions, even into the Iron Age, and
373 could be severely and securely constrained with only cursory reference to typology. However, while this is
374 obvious in some cases, the nature and uncertainty inherent to the method still means that this is arguably a
375 required exercise that should be explicitly performed. This final point also points to the possibility of drawing
376 on other temporal data, for example within a Bayesian framework, to further improve the precision of the
377 dates that can be achieved with shoreline dating.

378 Not least following from the fact that relatively few Preboreal ^{14}C -dates associated with anthropogenic
379 activity have been achieved in Norway (Åstveit 2018; Kleppe 2018; **damlien2018?**), the shoreline dating
380 of the earliest sites is essential for understanding the pioneer settlement and the initial colonisation of the
381 Scandinavian peninsula (e.g. Bang-Andersen 2012; Breivik 2014; Glørstad 2016). The shoreline-dated
382 Preboreal sites from the Brunlanes-project are among the earliest known sites in Norway (Jaksland 2012a,
383 2012b; Jaksland and Persson 2014). These have a distinct Early Mesolithic artefact inventory and are situated
384 in a steep area of the landscape where it would be difficult to envision use of the sites after the sea retreated
385 any significant distance from their location. In the original publication of the sites, Jaksland (2014) provides a
386 thorough discussion of shoreline dating in general, and as used for the dating of the Brunlanes sites specifically.
387 A comparison of his results and the ones achieved using the above-outlined approach are given in Figure
388 11A. The sites have been dated using what Jaksland (2014) gives as the lowest elevation of finds at each site,
389 and by employing a exponential decay ratio of , to allow for more deviance in the distance between site and
390 shoreline. This corresponds to the decay ratio for sites older than 7000 BCE in Figure 7.

391 The small discrepancies between the achieved results mainly follow from the fact that a slightly updated
392 version of the local displacement curve is applied here (cf. Sørensen et al. in press). Jaksland's dates are
393 given a flat 200 and 50 year uncertainty range starting from what he gives as the earliest possible date. The
394 200 year uncertainty range is given if the sites were to be considered in isolation, while the argument for
395 the uncertainty range of only 50 years is based on the location of the sites relative to each other. Since they
396 are located in such a constrained and steep area of the landscape, the difference in elevation between the
397 sites is argued to establish their relative date and thus constrain the uncertainty ranges so that they don't
398 overlap. This information is not integrated in the approach outlined here, but could justify further reducing
399 the uncertainty ranges. Although their accuracy is of course ultimately dependent on the veracity of the
400 geological reconstruction, the high rate of RSL-change in this period does nonetheless result in very precise

$$\lambda = 0.177$$

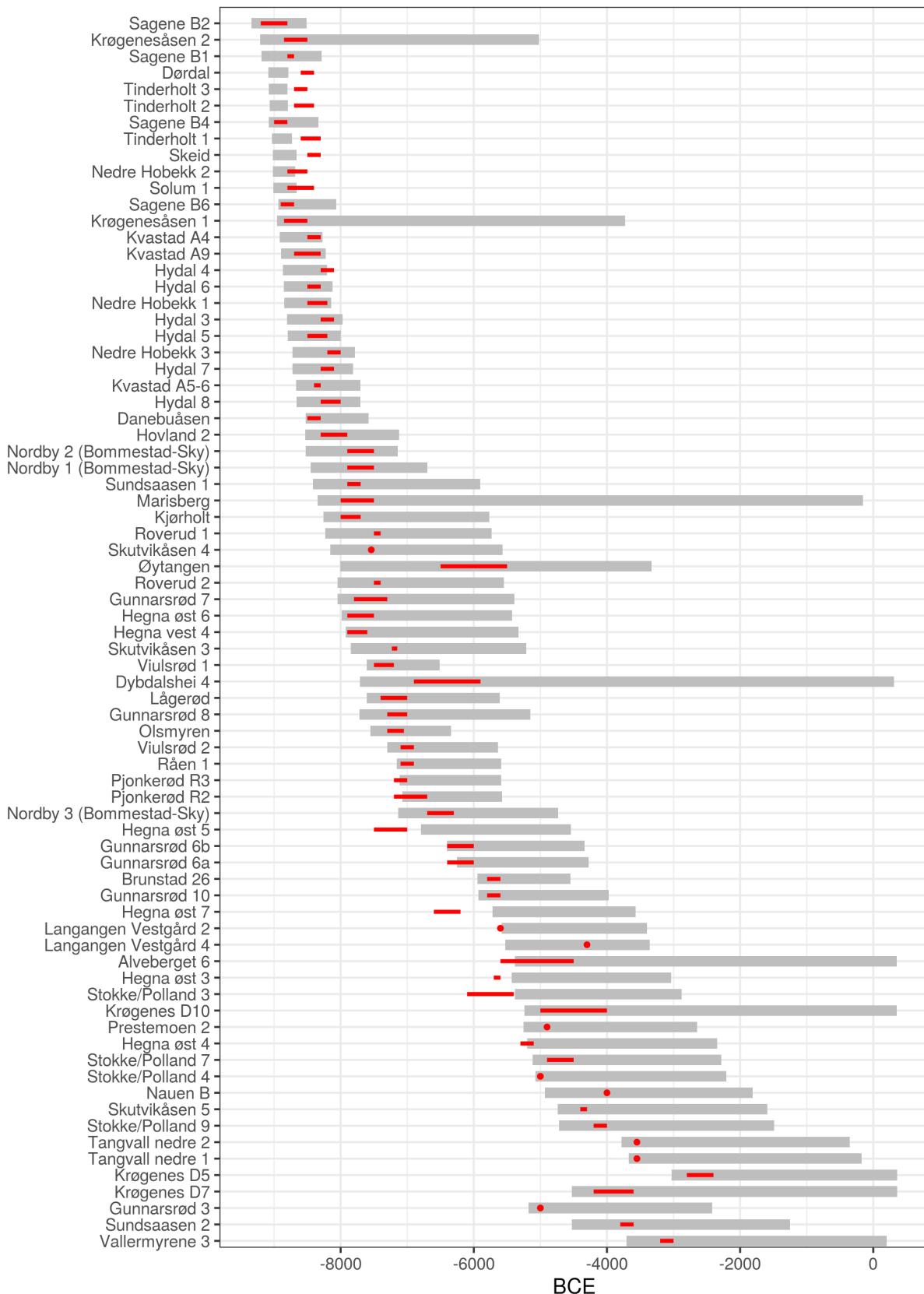


Figure 10: Re-dating previously shoreline dated sites in the study area without radiocarbon dates or with radiocarbon dates that do not correspond to the artefact inventories. The range of the 95% HDRs in grey are compared to the dates originally proposed by the excavation reports in red.¹⁸

401 dates. Above it was shown how additional temporal data could be combined with the method to improve its
 402 accuracy and precision. This example, on the other hand, highlights the fact that the spatial nature of the
 403 method means that a consideration of the surrounding terrain and other sites can also help in increasing the
 404 precision of the method if this can be used to exclude certain sea-levels as unlikely for when a site was in use.
 405 One approach could also be to assess the spatial implication of a proposed shoreline date by simulating the
 406 adjusted sea-levels, as is done for Paurer 1 in Figure 11B, followed for example by a visual evaluation of the
 407 topography or by evaluating the distance and steepness of the slope to the shoreline. Based on this, it could
 408 conceivably be possible to exclude certain elevations as unlikely for the position of the shoreline when the site
 409 was in use. Such approaches would make less of an impact in this setting, where the 95% HDR is already
 410 quite constrained, but could considerably improve the precision of the method in cases where RSL-change
 411 has been less severe (cf. Figure 10).

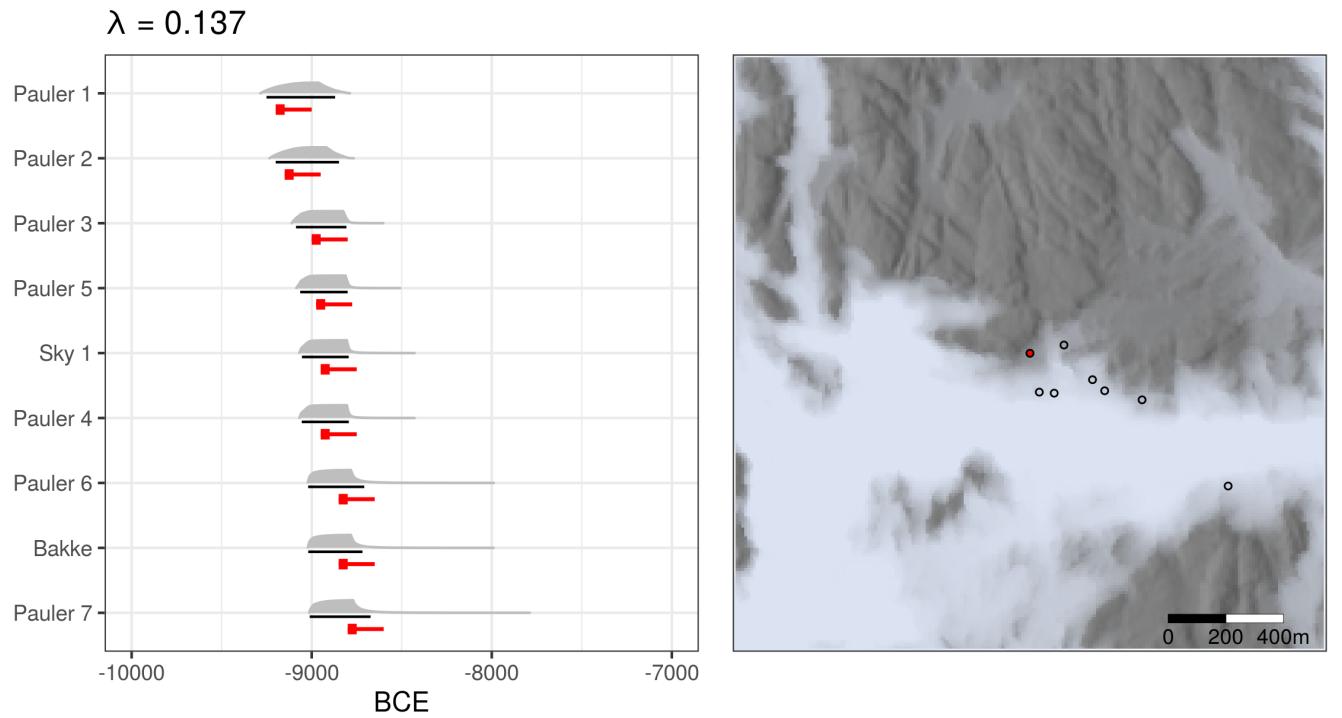


Figure 11: Shoreline dating of the Brunlanes sites using site altitudes provided by Jaksland (2014:tab.4).
 A) The result of applying the approach to shoreline dating outlined above. The shoreline date in grey is
 underlined with the 95% HDR in black. Dates provided by Jaksland (2014) are plotted in red. The box
 indicates a 50 year uncertainty range which in combination with the red line extends 200 years, following his
 approach. B) Map showing the centroids of the Paurer sites and Sky 1. The sea-level has been simulated using
 the probability density associated with the shoreline date for Paurer 1 (see also map in Jaksland 2014:fig.12a).
 Paurer 1 is the red point.

412 7 Concluding remarks

413 It is worth highlighting some limitations and sources of likely variation and uncertainty that have not been
414 considered here. First of all the sample size is quite strained, and the future addition of only a few sites might
415 skew the picture significantly. Secondly, the DTM has only been corrected for major modern disturbances.
416 This means that erosion, although likely not that prevalent, has not been taken into account. Thirdly, the
417 DTM has a vertical error of, which could also benefit from being integrated in the analysis (cf. Lewis 2021).
418 Fourthly, the displacement curves were here interpolated to all site locations without accounting for increased
419 uncertainty as one moves further away from the isobases of the displacement curves. Fifthly, neither the
420 question of how site limits are defined nor the elevation range over which these extend was given much
421 consideration. Finally, the division of phases at each sites was here simply done by treating While each of
422 these factors will have variable impact on the final results, they clearly represent dimensions which would all
423 benefit from further consideration.

424 The most immediate contribution of this paper is what must be considered a confirmation of previous research
425 into the relation between coastal Norwegian Stone Age sites and the prehistoric shoreline. This is indicated
426 by the close relationship between sites and the shoreline up until the transition to the Neolithic at c. 3900
427 BCE, after which a couple of sites become situated some distance from the shoreline. This is followed by
428 a more decisive break at the transition to the Late Neolithic at c. 2400 BCE – in clear agreement with
429 the literature. Furthermore, based on the quantitative nature of these findings, a refined method for the
430 shoreline dating of pre-Late Neolithic Stone Age sites has been proposed. This involves both taking the
431 distance between sites and the isobases of the displacement curves into consideration when dating the sites,
432 and implementing formula X to account for the distance between the sites and the shoreline. When no
433 other information is available, it can at present be recommended to use the empirically derived exponential
434 decay ratio identified in Figure 10 to characterise this relationship. However, the accuracy of the method
435 can be improved by including more information, both with reference to the topographic location of the sites
436 and other temporal data such as radiocarbon dates and typological indicators in the artefact inventories.
437 The precision of the method is, as shown above, both geographically and temporally contingent due to the
438 trajectory of RSL-change, where older sites situated towards the north-east in the study area will get a more
439 precise date than younger sites located towards the south-west. The impact of such additional information
440 will therefore also vary.

441 Future investigations and radiocarbon dates from Stone Age sites in the region can not only be used to further
442 evaluate and adjust the findings reported here, but a larger sample size could also lay the foundations for
443 refining the method by identifying subsets of sites for which the application of the method could be adjusted
444 and refined. Given it's behavioural nature, it would for example seem likely that dimensions such as the
445 nature and purpose of visits to the sites will have implications for how close to the shoreline they were located.
446 Furthermore, other dimensions related to the topographic location of the sites could be similarly explored.
447 This for example pertains to the exposure of sites to wave action, which is likely to have been of concern
448 (e.g. Roalkvam 2020), and which presumably has implications for how close to the shoreline people settled
449 (Blankholm 2020; Helskog 1978). This is also related to the fact that while the mean sea-level is used for
450 dating the sites, a consideration of the tidal range could possibly also have implications for the site location
451 relative to the shoreline, depending on the topography (Helskog 1978). Dimensions such as these was given
452 a cursory treatment here, with the estimation of the horizontal and topographic distance to the shoreline,
453 but these dimensions could also be investigated further. If patterns related to such locational patterns can
454 be discerned, this will not least be useful for improving the shoreline dating of sites which have only been
455 surveyed and where little information on the site beyond its location is available.

456 Finally, this analysis employed a simulation approach to integrate multiple sources of spatio-temporal
457 uncertainty. Here this was simply used to inform the question of the distance between sites and the shore-line.
458 However, this method and general framework can be extended to a wide range of use-cases where one needs
459 to visualise, and quantitatively or qualitatively evaluate the relationship between archaeological phenomena,
460 the prehistoric shore-line, and the uncertainty inherent in this reconstruction.

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