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# Mountain Africa: prehistoric peoples and palaeoenvironments

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## Résumé

Africa of the popular western imaginary conjures images of low-lying rainforests, rolling savannas and desert plains. Yet, nearly half of the continent has slopes of at least 8%, while a fifth sits higher than 1000 m. The interior African Plateau comprises much of this elevated land, with the highest altitudes (~3000-5000 m a.s.l.) occurring around its periphery. Here, intense volcanism and erosion has generated soaring mountain systems, deep rifts and spectacular escarpments, though prominent massifs and inselbergs also dot the continent's interior (especially desert) landscapes. The broad geographic distribution of Africa's mountain regions – spanning the continent's full 70° of latitude, numerous geological substrates and multiple rainfall zones – makes them extremely diverse. Nevertheless, all are essentially biogeographical islands of heterogenous, cool-adapted habitats relative to the warmer lowlands that surround them. As with mountain systems the world over, their ecological structure and contrasts with adjacent lowlands presented African foragers and food-producers with both distinctive resource opportunities and adaptive challenges. But Africa's unparalleled time-depth and diversity of human evolutionary events, including our own speciation, also offers a window into the changing human relationship with mountain environments that is unique.

This session aims to explore emergent insights from accelerated archaeological and paleoenvironmental research in Africa's mountain regions, broadly defined. We seek contributions from continent's entire breadth and length, both sub-Saharan and North, and spanning its full prehistory, from the earliest Pleistocene to the late Holocene.

Themes of particular interest include (but are not limited to): (1) diachronic patterns and trends in human settlement of African mountain regions in evolutionary context; (2) responses and sensitivity of African mountain palaeoenvironments and prehistoric peoples to climatic flux (3) specific cultural attributes of varying African mountain cultures in prehistory, including settlement dynamics, subsistence practices, technological or other adaptive innovations, and belief systems and associated ritual practices; (4) relationships between ancient societies inhabiting mountain adjacent lowland regions; and (5) trajectories of, or transitions to, subsistence intensification, food production, sedentism and sociopolitical complexity in Africa's mountain regions.

**Mots-Clés:** Mountain Africa, prehistoric peoples, palaeoenvironments

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