

Preface

Vegetation and fauna are continuously changing, because of natural causes, human induced changes, or both. During historic and prehistoric time several major changes are known, and humans also had to adapt to the new situations in order to survive.

Humans followed the retreat of the Weichselian ice margin as hunters, and today hunting is still of great importance for people living close to



Fig. 1. Summer-farming at the tree-line is well known in alpine and arctic-alpine regions during historic times both within and beyond Europe. Suitable grazing-land occurred above the tree-line, and wood for heating or other uses could be obtained close by. The people living in the valleys were able to keep a large stock of animals at high altitude and save the infields at home for haymaking for winter fodder and/or crop-growth. Intensive summer-farming has, however, changed or reduced the tree-line by 100 to 150 metres in some cases. This kind of known activity can be traced back into prehistoric times. (Drawing : Hilary H. Birks).

arctic-alpine regions. Today, areas above the tree-line in Europe and in parts of Asia are used by humans for grazing their animals during summer, for hunting and gathering etc.

Archaeological excavations in alpine and/or arctic-alpine areas today above the tree-line show a relatively large number of artefacts from different periods, but information about changes in the tree-line and about moist and dry periods is in general sparse. Botanical research has provided some evidence for human impact in such areas.

Alpine and/or arctic-alpine areas are one kind of marginal area for humans. These areas are, in most cases, more sensitive to human impact and climate than the lowlands. While deposits in the lowlands are reworked during hundreds or thousands of years by house, road-building and agricultural management, nearby areas at higher altitude are less disturbed, and may be more useful for detecting the fluctuations in intensity of human impact. Results obtained so far seem most promising.

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