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Mesolithic archaeology of the southern North Sea and Rotterdam area, and the significance of Yangtze harbour.

About one century ago, some first thoughts were aired about the existence of land inhabited by Stone Age people in what now is the southern North Sea. This submerged land, today widely referred to as 'Doggerland', has become the focus of – inspiring – speculation about its significance to Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. Bone, antler and stone tools brought to the surface in fishing nets clearly demonstrated the exposure of archaeological sites at the sea floor. In order to get more grip on the survival of this Stone Age landscape and assessment of research potential, a major leap forward was taken through the analysis of seismic data, which permitted the identification and mapping of landscape features, such as rivers and coastal salt flats. However, it is still difficult to reach and investigate the archaeological find zones themselves. The investigations in the Yangtze harbour basin are among the very few that have permitted to gain some insight into aspects of Mesolithic life in this drowned world. This paper will discuss the results of the Yangtze investigations in the broader archaeological context of the southern North Sea and the adjacent Rotterdam area. It will be shown how the Yangtze site fits into the landscape dynamics that characterised an era of rapid environmental change, which involved the disappearance of large swaths of land inhabited by generations of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers.