

## Early Man

In 1974, a skeleton was found in Africa. The bones were those of a young female, approximately 20 years old when she died. Scientists named this "young lady" **Lucy**. About 3 million years ago, when Lucy was alive, she was rather short, about 4 feet tall, and probably weighed about 50 pounds. Her brain was about the size of an orange. **Her bones showed she probably walked erect**, although she still had the ability to climb trees easily. There were no signs of broken bones or teeth marks that might show why she died. Scientists suspect that she probably fell into a lake or river and drowned. (Scientists are like detectives. They can tell a great deal from a skeleton, whether it's a year old, or 3 million years old! )

### **Homo Habilis: "Handy Man" (1.8 to 1.6 million BCE)**

This was the beginning of the Stone Age, and the dawn of early man. This period of time is called the Stone Age because these very early men created tools made of stone. As far as we know, true humans first appeared in Africa.

Man did not have strong claws to help them fight. They could not out run cave lions. **Man had to get smart to survive.** The Homo habilis man is credited with creating stone tools to help live more comfortably, and to better protect themselves against the many carnivore (meat eating) animals of the time.

Homo habilis were taller than their ancestors, the human-like primates (*Lucy's* people), and had larger brains. They followed food sources, and set up camp as needed. They sheltered under cliffs, whenever possible. You might think they would look for caves to spend the night, but caves quite often had dangerous occupants, just as they do today. **Although this group made stone tools and weapons, these weapons were still pretty basic.** Their main diet was probably fruits, roots, nuts and vegetables that they found growing wild. **Small groups banded together** for protection.

Since **they did not have fire-making skills**, they had to wait until they found something burning from natural causes, set aflame, for example, from a lightning strike. A campfire had to be carefully watched, because if the fire went out, they did not know how to start it again. The area around the campfire was probably used as a sleeping area. A roaring campfire would keep most wild animals away, as most are afraid of fire. When they broke

camp, they probably attempted to bring their fire with them by carrying several lit branches, with which to start a new campfire when they stopped again. If their branches went out, they did without fire until they found something burning somewhere.

### **Homo Erectus: Upright Man"** (1,600,000 BCE to about 300,000 BCE)

**Homo erectus man was probably the first hunter. Very importantly, Homo erectus man had fire-making skills.** Like all new, major inventions, this discovery changed life dramatically.

Why was the ability to be able to make fire so important? As man had already discovered, most animals were afraid of fire, so a roaring campfire gave protection to the group or tribe. They no longer had to shelter out of the wind, unless they chose to do so. If their fire went out, they could relight it. They could choose where they camped. On a hot night, if they could find a relatively safe place, a breeze might feel good. Control of fire made moving into colder regions possible, as fire they could count on would provide them with warmth. It also changed the way they prepared food.

**About one million years ago, these people began to slowly leave Africa** and travel to other continents. They did not need a boat. The Ice Age was here! They traveled across **giant walkways**, natural bridges of solid, frozen ice and land. These "walkways" allowed them to travel over what would later be vast rivers and seas. For a very long time, the earth was frozen, creating giant walkways. Some of these walkways were a hundred miles wide! These early people wandered from Africa to Europe and Asia, and from Asia to America, probably in search of food.

### Homo Sapiens: "Wise Man" (500,000 BCE to 30,000 BCE)

From fossils, scientists have discovered that **these early men had skeletons shaped like ours are, today.** These early men were hunters & gatherers. They created stone tools, bone needles, and bone fish hooks. They sewed clothes from animal skins with thread made from other parts of the animal. They made warm boots.

Neandertals: One of the species of early man during this period was Homo Neandertalensis, the Neandertal man, named after the valley (Neander Tal) in which the skeleton of an old man was discovered.

Still, **Neandertals were different from other species of early man.** They were much taller, and very strong. They had an almost modern mentality. Their brains were actually larger than ours are today. (That doesn't mean anything, really. The size of your brain doesn't necessarily make you smarter. However, the Neandertals do seem to have been **very advanced** for their time!) They were **marvelous hunters.** They often used caves as their homes. They were adept at fire-making, and probably cooked their food, routinely. They **buried their dead with ceremony**, which suggests they may have had religious beliefs. Discoveries of Neandertal grave sites show that they decorated their bodies with paint, possibly for religious reasons, or perhaps for beauty. These sites provide the first evidence of the use of color, and suggest the Neandertals were the first to think about the possibility of an afterlife.

The Neandertals died out around 30,000 BCE. One theory is that they were killed off by some species of Homo sapien man, but there is no evidence of this. Another theory is that they married into other groups, and that over time, they ceased to exist as a separate species. But these are just theories. Nobody knows why they disappeared. Considering how smart they were, and how advanced for their time, it's an especially fascinating puzzle!

Homo Sapiens Sapiens: Cro-Magnon and Moderns(30,000 to 10,000 BCE)

By this time, **man had become very capable hunters/gatherers**, and had scattered all over the world. Scientists have found remains of these early people in Europe, Asia, America, Africa, all over, really. Life was harsh, but they had plenty of food and warm shelter. Many members of these groups lived to a very old age. The Homo sapiens sapiens who lived in Europe were called Cro-Magnon.

These early men built permanent homes, to shelter from the long, harsh winter of the Ice Age. In the summer, they followed the herds, and lived in tents.

Winter homes were Ice Age huts, built tepee style, from branches and mammoth bones, covered with animal skins. These huts were used for many years, so they built them carefully. Holes were dug, deeply into the ground. Poles were inserted into these holes, and then tied tightly together at the point of the tepee, at the top, with string made from animal guts. Warm furs

were laid over this structure and sewn tightly in place. Large rocks were piled around the bottom, to help hold the hut together.

**Cro-Magnon man**, for whatever reason, painted marvelous and astonishing paintings on rock walls, deep within caves. Paintings were added, until **a cave might have hundreds of different paintings, by many different painters.**

**Questions: Answer in complete sentences for #1-9 Write a PARAGRAPH to answer #10**

- 1- Who was Lucy and what do scientists know about her?**
- 2- What was the Stone Age?**
- 3- What could Homo Habilis do and not do?**
- 4- How did Homo Habilis differ from Lucy?**
- 5- How did Homo Erectus differ from Homo Habilis?**
- 6- What could Neandertals do that early humans could not do?**
- 7- Why is it surprising that Neandertals died out?**
- 8- What were some of the accomplishments of Cro-Magnon man?**
- 9- What can cave paintings tell us about prehistoric people?**
- 10- Imagine you are organizing an archaeological dig at a site where early people lived. Write a “Help Wanted” ad to find people to work on the dig. Describe the job. Then describe the qualities your workers should have.**