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THE STONE AGE

When was the Stone Age?

The Stone Age covers a huge period of time, over 3 million years! It starts from when the first human like animals came into existence. The earliest evidence has been found in Africa.

Early humans arrived in Britain more than 800,000 years ago but Britain has not been constantly lived in since that time due to climate changes. The ice and the cold temperatures during the last period of time known as the Ice Age meant that early humans left Britain in search of warmer climates.

At this time Britain was not an island so they could walk across the land into Europe and Africa.

Stone Age Time Periods

Palaeolithic – around 3,000,000 BC

During this long period of time, the earliest hominids (humans or close relatives of humans), Homo habilis, who used simple stone tools, slowly developed into the modern humans we call Homo sapiens.

Britain was still connected by land to France and Denmark.

Mesolithic – around 10,000BC

People led largely nomadic lives as hunter-gatherers, constantly on the move in order to survive.

It was during this time that Britain became an island.

Neolithic – around 4,500 BC – 2,400BC

This is the time that farming began, pottery was developed and villages were built.

Why is it called the Stone Age?

The Stone Age is so called because the earliest humans used stone to make tools with a sharp edge or point. Stone was the material predominantly used for tools throughout the Stone Age.

Which countries were populated?

Today there are over seven billion people in the world (7,000,000,000).

Even at the peak of the stone age it was likely that there were less than five million (5,000,000).

- About 2 million years ago Homo habilis appeared in eastern Africa.
- About 1.5 million years ago Homo erectus were living in the Southern Caucasus and Northern China.
- By 400,000 years ago the early human population had spread to Indonesia and Europe.
- By 27,000 years ago they had set foot in Australia, Poland, Japan and Siberia.
- It wasn't until around 10,000 BC that early humans reached North and South America via the Bering land bridge that at that time connected Siberia and North America.

What type of houses did they live in?

This depended on the time, and the country. In Britain, archaeologists have found evidence of four different types of dwelling.

What clothes did they wear?

People wore animal skins to keep them warm, sewn together using bone needles.

The fine bone needles that have been found were probably used for embroidery as well.

The bodies of a boy and a girl buried around 28,000 years ago in Russia were found with thousands of ivory beads and fox teeth covering them, work that would have taken years to complete.

We also know that people were weaving fabric back then (which could have been used for clothes) and dyeing spun plant fibres different colours, so maybe fashion started a lot earlier than you might think!

What food did they eat?

Animals were the main source of food. They would eat all of the animal. When all the meat was stripped off the bones, the bones would be smashed so the marrow could be eaten from the inside.

Marrow is high in fat and would have been a good energy source.

Although it is thought that farming largely began in the Neolithic time, when many more plant based foods became part of people's diets, there is evidence that people were eating food such as beans, seeds, lentils, nuts and grains over 23,000 years ago in the Palaeolithic period.

Their diet was a lot more varied than you might think, including many plants that today we treat as weeds.

How did they communicate?

Symbols have been found alongside cave paintings in Europe, used repeatedly in the same clusters in different caves. Similar symbols have also been found on jewellery, suggesting that there was possibly a communication system in existence 30,000 years ago.

Dogs

Dogs would help with hunting. Graves have been found where dogs had been buried with tools, like they buried humans with. This tells us that dogs were treated like part of the family.

STONE AGE COMPREHENSION TASK

- 1) Where was the earliest evidence of the Stone Age found?
- 2) During which time period were villages built?
- 3) Why is it called the Stone Age?
- 4) When did early humans reach North and South America and how did they get there?
- 5) How many different types of Stone Age dwelling have archaeologists found in Britain?
- 6) What did people wear to keep warm?
- 7) What was the main source of food for Stone Age people?
- 8) Explain what Marrow is and why it was good to eat.
- 9) How did they communicate?
- 10) How do we know dogs were treated like part of the family?

