

Where Did We Come From?

Early Man

Understanding where we came from is a question that archeologists and historians have been studying for years. We still find new evidence and draw new conclusions trying to answer this very complicated question. We do know that man has evolved over millions of years. Evolution is the gradual, slow process in which something changes into a different and usually more complex or better form. The family of mankind is known as Hominids. Hominids have evolved over time to become the humans we are today.

Before we study hominids, it is important to realize that early man did not live during the same period in history as dinosaurs! Dinosaurs died out about 65 million years ago. The first human like hominids did not appear until around 3-4 million years ago.

Many people believe that humans evolved from apes, but there are major differences between the two life forms. Early human-like hominids could stand upright and walk on two legs. They were bipedal which means they were able to walk on two legs. Apes could not. Their hands were different, too. Ape hands were made for climbing and clinging. Man's hands were jointed differently, which allowed them to make and use tools to help them survive.

In 1974, a skeleton was found in Ethiopia, Africa. The bones were those of a female, about 20 years old or so when she died. Scientists named her Lucy and they concluded she was about 3 million years old. By studying the remains of Lucy, archeologist concluded she had a small brain, but walked on two feet. Lucy was identified as part of one of the earliest group of hominids known as Australopithecus which means "Southern Ape". Australopithecus lived between 3.75 million and 1 million years ago. At the time, Lucy was the oldest hominid skeleton ever found. However, in 1992 archeologist in Ethiopia discovered another skeleton that they assembled from a hundred shards of bones and named her Ardi. She was found just 46 miles from where Lucy was discovered, but she was a million years older than Lucy!

Our early ancestors started to evolve and change over time. Their brains got larger and their skulls changed. Homo habilis is a direct ancestor of modern humans. The name means "Handy human" because this group was the first to use primitive tools about 2.5 million years ago during the Old Stone Age. During the Stone Age, man made tools out of stone. "Handy Man" was one of the first hominids to use stone tools.

It took man another 200,000 years to grow up. Homo Erectus, "Upright Man", was about the same size as modern humans, although they only had two-thirds the size of our brains. Their tool-making skills were considerably improved. Their weapons included stone axes and knives. Homo erectus man was probably the first hunter.

Lucy in the sky

Ardipithecus Ramidus

AAAA. The Homo erectus species was the first to look like actual people, because their teeth and jaws were shaped somewhat like ours our today.

These early people also learned to make fire! They were probably a bit startled when they saw what they had created. They had no idea how the invention of fire would change their life dramatically!

Why was the ability to able to make fire so important?

1. Location: They could choose where they camped. They did not have to stay where there was fire. 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.
2. Warmth -Control of fire made moving into colder regions possible. They could count on fire to provide them with warmth.
3. Protection -Man had discovered most animals were afraid of fire, so a roaring campfire gave protection to the group or tribe.
4. Light -The control of fire provided man with more light. He could work during the night and see into dark caves. He was able to accomplish more because they did not need to depend on sunlight.

5. Improved Weapons - Man learned they could harden the tips of spears with fire to create stronger weapons. They also could create torches.
6. Cooking Food - It also changed the way they prepared food. These people began to cook their food consistently. Food that is cooked is more secure from disease and much softer to eat. It tastes better and it does not take as long to have a meal.
7. Social life - Thanks to their fire-making skills, a nightly campfire became a possibility and a routine. What was once combat and safety was now also a social occasion. People collected around the fire each night to share stories of the day's hunt and activities, to laugh, and to relax.

About one million years ago, Upright Man began to slowly leave Africa. They did not need a boat because The Ice Age was here! They traveled across giant walkways of frozen ice to travel to different continents. Man had started to populate the earth.

One day, scientists found a new skeleton in Europe. This skeleton was from another group of early men. Scientists named this man *Neanderthal man*, after the valley in Germany in which the skeleton had been found. He was taller, stronger and had large brains. Neanderthals also created stone tools, but

they were much more advanced. They were great hunters and used Caves as their homes. They used bone needles and sewed clothes made with others animal parts. They even made boots! They also buried their dead with ceremony, which suggests they may have had religious beliefs. Discoveries of Neanderthal grave sites show that they decorated their bodies with paint, possibly for religious reasons, or perhaps for beauty. These sites suggest the Neanderthals were the first to think about the possibility of an afterlife.

Another group of early men stood out during this period. Scientists nicknamed this group "Cro-Magnon man". This group did not live a life of constant struggle for survival because they worked together to provide food for their tribe. These Stone Age people learned to cure and store food for the long winter. They had improved hunting techniques. They used traps, which allowed them to catch food while they were busy doing something else and invented the bow and arrow. Some groups built safes and canoes to catch bigger fish in deeper waters. They made clothing and jewelry as well. They also built tepee style homes from branches and mammoth bones. They would travel during warmer months to follow food and return to their homes during winter.

Cro-Magnon man did something rather unusual. For some reason, he drew Paintings deep inside dark caves, on cave walls. Colors used most often were brown, yellow/tan, dark red, and coal

black. Animals were well drawn and filled in with natural colors to give them even more shape and substance. They drew stick figures for hunters and drew stencils of their hands.

We know about early Stone Age people because scientists have found fossils and artifacts that reveal traces of their life.

Man went through many stages to evolve into the humans of today! Since this evolution covers roughly 3-4 million years, you might say it took man a long time to grow up!