



THE STONE AGE

Human history for a long time was defined by the main material used to make tools. The Stone Age was no exception. It was a long period of history from before 300,000 BC all the way to 3,000 BC. However, these are just guesses. Finding evidence from this period in history is very hard. It also depends on what you class as human ancestors.

Evidence of Australopithecus - a very early ancestor of homo sapiens (modern humans) - have been found from as long ago as 3.9 million years. This is why the Stone Age is often recorded as starting “before 300,000 BC”. It is also important to remember that not all human ancestors would have started using stone, or moved on to using bronze, at the same point. By that point, humans were spread across the Earth and would have progressed at different times.

The Stone Age is split into three sections by archaeologists. The earliest period was the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) period, which started at the beginning of the Stone Age and continued until about 10,000 BC. The Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) period then continued until roughly 8,000 BC and the Neolithic (New Stone Age) until 3,000 BC.

The people who lived in the Paleolithic period were hunter-gatherers. They were nomadic, which means they didn’t build cities or villages. Instead, they would move around looking for food. Any remains from this period are often found in caves. These people would have lived alongside and hunted woolly mammoths and sabre-tooth tigers. There is evidence that they held funerals and created art.

During this period, the landscape of Britain and Europe changed considerably. There were many significant ice ages during this time. 500,000 years ago, the whole of Europe was buried beneath a vast ice sheet. 16,000 years ago, most of the ice had melted but Britain was joined to Europe by land. The area is referred to as Doggerland by archaeologists.

By the Mesolithic age, sea levels had started to rise and the land between Britain and Europe

began to flood. Britain finally separated roughly 7,500 years ago. There is evidence that, whilst Mesolithic people were still nomadic, there were large sites where they would return for special events each year. The first evidence of humans building houses comes from this period in history. People had started to strap flint heads to pieces of wood by now to make more advanced tools. However, the wooden handles were still crude.

The Neolithic period saw a rise in farming of domestic species. One of the most important animals appears to have been cattle. These, along with sheep and pigs, seem to be the main animals farmed. During this time, people seemed to eat a lot less fish. Rivers were considered sacred, so it is possible that this put people off eating from them. This was also the first time that people seem to have started deliberately planting crops. However, this was much more time consuming than farming animals.

The Neolithic period is also the first time that archaeologists can find evidence of people making pottery. They also began to use polished stone for their tools which made them stronger and more ornate. Examinations of the pottery show evidence that they contained dairy products. This means that farmers would have milked their cattle, much like we do today.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What is the Paleolithic area called where Britain was joined to Europe?
2. When was the whole of Europe under an ice sheet?
3. Who would have hunted woolly mammoths?
4. What was one of the animals farmed by the Neolithic people?
5. Why might Neolithic people not have eaten fish?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

Where do you think Paleolithic people sheltered? What tells you this?

V

Which word means there was a lot of change?

V

Find a word or phrase that means something wasn't finished to a high standard.

E

The author has used brackets in this text. What impact does this have on the reader?

S

What were the three periods of the Stone Age, in order from earliest to latest?

Answers:

1. Doggerland
2. 500,000 years ago
3. Paleolithic people
4. Cattle, sheep or pigs
5. Rivers were sacred

I: Their remains are often found in caves.

V: Considerably

V: Crude

E: Accept explanations that are well reasoned and consider the presentation of extra information for clarity

S: Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic