

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.

The Stone Age is called so 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.

Stone Age Time Periods

Palaeolithic: 3,000,000BC

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: 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 had become an island.

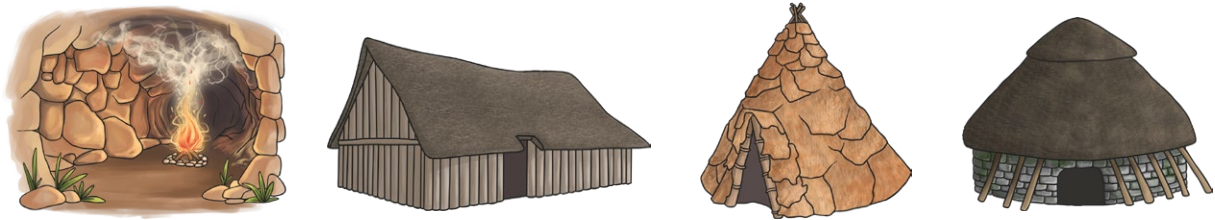


Neolithic

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

Homes

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



Populated Countries

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 10,000BC that early humans reached North and South America via the Bering land bridge that, at the time, connected Siberia and North America.

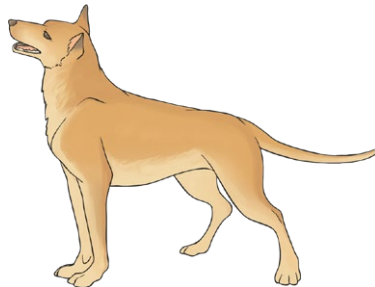
Homes

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 dying spun plant fibres different colours, so maybe fashion started a lot earlier than you might think!found evidence of four different types of dwelling.



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 a part of the family.



Communication

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.



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 times, when many more plant based foods became a part of people's diets, there is evidence that people were eating foods 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.

Questions

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 that dogs were treated like part of the family?

Answers

1. Where was the earliest evidence of the Stone Age found?
The earliest evidence of the Stone Age was found in Africa.
2. During which time period were villages built?
Villages were built during the Neolithic period.
3. Why is it called the Stone Age?
It is called the Stone Age because the earliest humans used stone to make tools.
4. When did early humans reach North and South America and how did they get there?
Early humans reached North and South America 10,000BC via the Bering land bridge which connected Siberia and North America.
5. How many different types of Stone Age dwelling have archaeologists found in Britain?
Archaeologists have found evidence of four different types of dwellings.
6. What did people wear to keep warm?
People wore animal skins sewn together using bone needles to keep warm.
7. What was the main source of food for Stone Age people?
The main source of food for the Stone Age people was animals.
8. Explain what marrow is and why it was good to eat.
Marrow is found inside bones and is high in fat and therefore a good energy source.
9. How did they communicate?
Stone Age people used symbols to communicate (found on cave paintings and jewellery).
10. How do we know that dogs were treated like part of the family?
We know dogs were treated like part of the family as graves for dogs have been found with tools buried with them, which is how humans were buried.

The Stone Age: Skara Brae

Skara Brae is a remarkably well preserved Stone Age village built in the Neolithic period, around 3000BC. It was discovered in 1850 after a heavy storm stripped away the earth that had previously been covering what we can see today.

The remains of eight houses stand on the site. They were not all built at the same time, so at some point the original village was added to. Apart from one building, which stands slightly separate from the others, the layout of the houses had more of a circular shape. There was one main room with a fire pit in the middle, and beds built into the walls at the sides. Each house had a set of stone shelves, called a dresser. The later houses were slightly bigger and more rectangular, although the corners were still rounded. They still built stone beds, but not into the walls. Although the doorways seem very small to us, early humans were shorter than we are today. Lower doorways would also have helped keep the weather out. The doors were stone slabs, and could be bolted shut.

The Orkney Islands sit off the North coast of Scotland. Skara Brae can be found on Mainland, the largest of the Orkney Islands.

House 7

At first glance, house 7 is the same as all the others. However, it's worth looking at little more closely. Some interesting facts about house 7:

- The bodies of two women were found in a stone grave under a wall. They were buried before the house was built. This could have been part of a ritual.
- The door could only be bolted from the outside. The people inside the house would not have been able to leave of their own free will.
- Unlike the other passageways, the passage to house 7 went only to house 7.

House 7

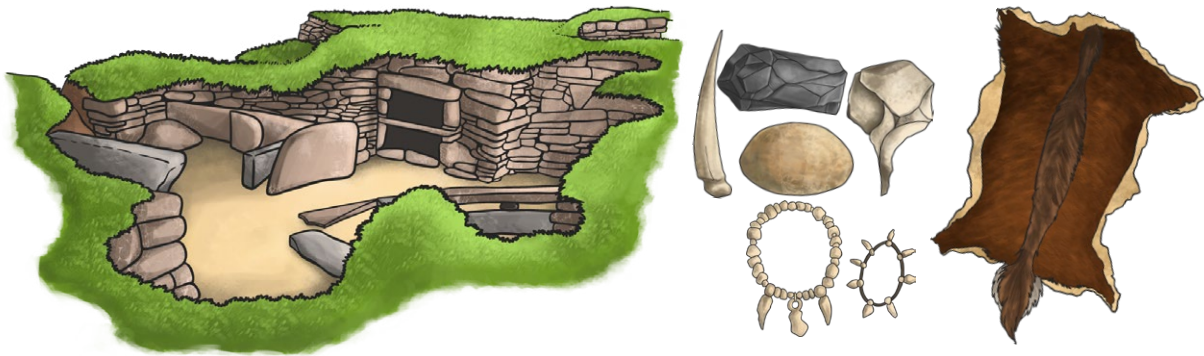
Unlike the other houses, all built closely together and linked with passageways, house 8 stands alone. It had carved patterns on the walls and no beds or shelves. It could have been a workshop or meeting place, or simply built on the site at a later date.



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Homes

There were no windows, but there may have been a smoke hole in the roof. There would have been some light from the fire. As wood was scarce in the Orkney Islands, they were more likely to have burnt seaweed, dried animal dung and peat. The floor area inside would be between 36 and 40m². Some people today who live in small apartments might have the same living space. With straw and heather to make mattresses and animal skins for blankets, it would have been relatively cosy - at least compared to outside! The walls of the houses were built against 'middens', piles of discarded rubbish that would have protected the walls from the elements as well as provide a layer of insulation. None of the houses still have a roof, so they must have been made from something that has since perished. A common early roofing material in Orkney was seaweed, fixed with ropes and stones.



What Else Was Found There?

- Animal bones including cattle and sheep, and barley and wheat grown nearby, suggest a farming community.
- Plentiful remains of fish and shellfish indicate they were also skilled fishermen. Large piles of limpets were found, but these weren't necessarily part of their diet, they may have been used for bait.
- The lack of weapons found suggest that life was peaceful.
- Richly carved stone objects might have been used in religious rituals.
- Bone tools, along with the absence of tools for weaving, indicate that animal skins were used for clothing.
- Many examples of jewellery were found, including pendants, pins, necklaces and beads.

Questions

1. What do you think house 7 was used for? Why?

2. What do you think house 8 was used for? Why?

3. Can you describe a difference between the earlier houses and those that were built later on?

4. What was an advantage of a lower doorway?

5. What might the roof have been made from?

6. What could you find in the centre of each house?

7. Draw a diagram of the inside of a Skara Brae house and label the different items of furniture you would find.



Answers

1. What do you think house 7 was used for? Why?

Children provide appropriate answer using evidence from the text e.g. a prison because the door could only be bolted from the outside so you couldn't get out.

2. What do you think house 8 was used for? Why?

A workshop or meeting place because it has no beds or shelves and had carved patterns on the walls.

3. Can you describe a difference between the earlier houses and those that were built later on?

The later houses were slightly bigger and more rectangular. The stone beds were no longer built into the walls.

4. What was an advantage of a lower doorway?

Having a lower doorway meant that it helped to keep the weather out.

5. What might the roof have been made from?

Children right one of the following:- The roof might have been made from seaweed, fixed with ropes and stones.

- The roof could have been made from straw, animals skins or turf, laid over a frame of driftwood or whale bones found on the shore.

6. What could you find in the centre of each house?

In the centre of each house was a fire.

7. Draw a diagram of the inside of a Skara Brae house and label the different items of furniture you would find.

Children to draw and label the inside of a Skara Brae house.