

# The Stone Age



Quick summary



The **Stone Age** lasted a very, very long time. The oldest period of the Stone Age, the Palaeolithic period, began approximately 2.5 million years ago. The Middle Stone Age is called the Mesolithic period. The Neolithic period, often called the New Stone Age, dates back approximately 8–10,000 years. During the Stone Age, our **ancestors** started to use tools and weapons made out of stone to help them hunt and eat food. As a **consequence** of changes in global **climate**, crops became more readily available, and Stone Age humans began to farm the land. The Stone Age ended when humans began to use metal to make tools and weapons.



Food and farming

In early Stone Age times, humans lived in small groups, using stone tools as they hunted for large mammals and gathered plants, fruit and berries. These hunter-gatherers were almost always moving (**nomadic**) to find food. About 10,000 years ago, as the climate warmed, certain crops like wheat and barley became more plentiful. Humans no longer needed to move around as much to find food and started building permanent homes to live in near land that they could farm.



Settlements

Skara Brae is a well preserved Stone Age village in the Orkney Islands, Scotland. This ancient settlement dates back to about 3000 BCE and was made up of several one-room dwellings with a **communal** room for cooking and working. These small houses were notable for their stone furniture, a drainage system and even indoor toilets!



Location



Artefacts

The village at Skara Brae was discovered in 1850 and has provided lots of artefacts which help us understand what life was like in the Stone Age. **Historical sources** from Skara Brae include jewellery, ornaments and dice games.



Vocabulary

**ancestors**: relatives from long ago  
**consequence**: result or effect  
**climate**: weather conditions of a place  
**nomadic**: travelling from place to place  
**communal**: shared by a group of people  
**historical sources**: things that give information about the past



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



Location



Main events



Food and farming



Travel and exploration



Conflict



Society



Artefacts



# Stone Age tools and weapons



Quick summary



The Stone Age saw the beginning of the use of tools and weapons, made out of stone, by our human ancestors. These tools and weapons gave early humans a competitive advantage in hunting over animals such as woolly mammoths and bison. The earliest evidence of humans using simple tools is from about 2.5 million years ago. As technology developed, Stone Age humans began using tools like hand axes, spears, scrapers and nets. Archaeologists have found lots of similarities between early Stone Age tools. However, over time, different groups of humans in different places had different ways of making tools. This gave these groups their own separate cultural identities.



Food and farming

Early Stone Age humans moved in nomadic groups as they hunted sabre-toothed cats, woolly mammoths, bison and deer. They developed different tools to help them kill these large, dangerous animals. Some weapons and tools were made from bone, ivory or antler. Others were made by sharpening sticks. Nets made out of tree branches were used to catch fish and smaller animals. Also, in the late Palaeolithic period, humans started using bows and arrows to help them catch prey.



Conflict

Stone Age humans became much better at hunting using spears, bows and arrows and other weapons. However, it is unlikely these new types of tools and weapons were used in regular conflict with other groups. The population density was so low that different groups would rarely bump into each other – with plenty of space to go around, fighting was rare. However, as humans began settling in small communities and storing food, it is likely that conflict started to increase as rivals competed for resources.



Artefacts

The Oldowan toolkit is the name given to the oldest known stone tools used by early humans. It includes hammerstones, stone cores and sharp stone flakes. Its name comes from the area in Northern Tanzania where the archaeologist Louis Leakey identified stone tools that were almost 2 million years old.



Location



Vocabulary

**ancestors:** people who someone is descended from, older than a grandparent  
**archaeologists:** people who study the past by examining remains and objects  
**identities:** who people are  
**nomadic:** travelling from place to place  
**density:** how much an area is filled or covered with people or things



Settlements



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Conflict



Society



Artefacts

# Stone Age hunter-gatherers



Quick summary



The Stone Age period saw our human ancestors using more advanced stone tools to help them survive. The period also saw a significant change in how humans found food. Some of our earliest human ancestors survived at first by using simple tools and scavenging for meat and other food. Changes in technology meant that they were soon hunting for food and eating much more meat, as well as fruit and grains. As the climate changed, in the late Mesolithic period, these hunter-gatherers were able to migrate in search of more food and safer places to build permanent settlements.



Food and farming

Early Stone Age humans moved in nomadic groups as they tried to find food and shelter to survive. They used controlled fire to cook and ward off predators. People lived on a diet of fruits, seeds, grasses and wheat. (Historians have proof of this by examining teeth from Stone Age remains.) Sometimes people would eat meat that had been found by scavenging. As tools and weapons became more developed, Stone Age humans started to hunt and kill animals to eat, rather than hoping to find dead animals as they searched for food.



Settlements

Our ancestors were always searching for good sources of food, avoiding predators and trying to cope with the weather conditions of different seasons. As a consequence, they were constantly on the move. In the early Stone Age, humans would have slept in basic temporary shelters, often in the open air, or in caves. There is evidence that by c. 50,000 BCE more permanent huts were being built from wood and rock. By the Neolithic period, stable settlements like those at Skara Brae were being made.



Location

Climate was a significant factor in the migration of early Homo sapiens (the species to which all modern human beings belong). About 60,000 years ago, humans started to leave Africa on explorations that spread across the globe.



Vocabulary

**scavenging:** searching for something  
**technology:** the use of scientific discoveries for practical purposes  
**migrate:** move from one place to another  
**permanent:** lasting forever  
**predators:** animals that kill and eat other animals



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



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Artefacts