

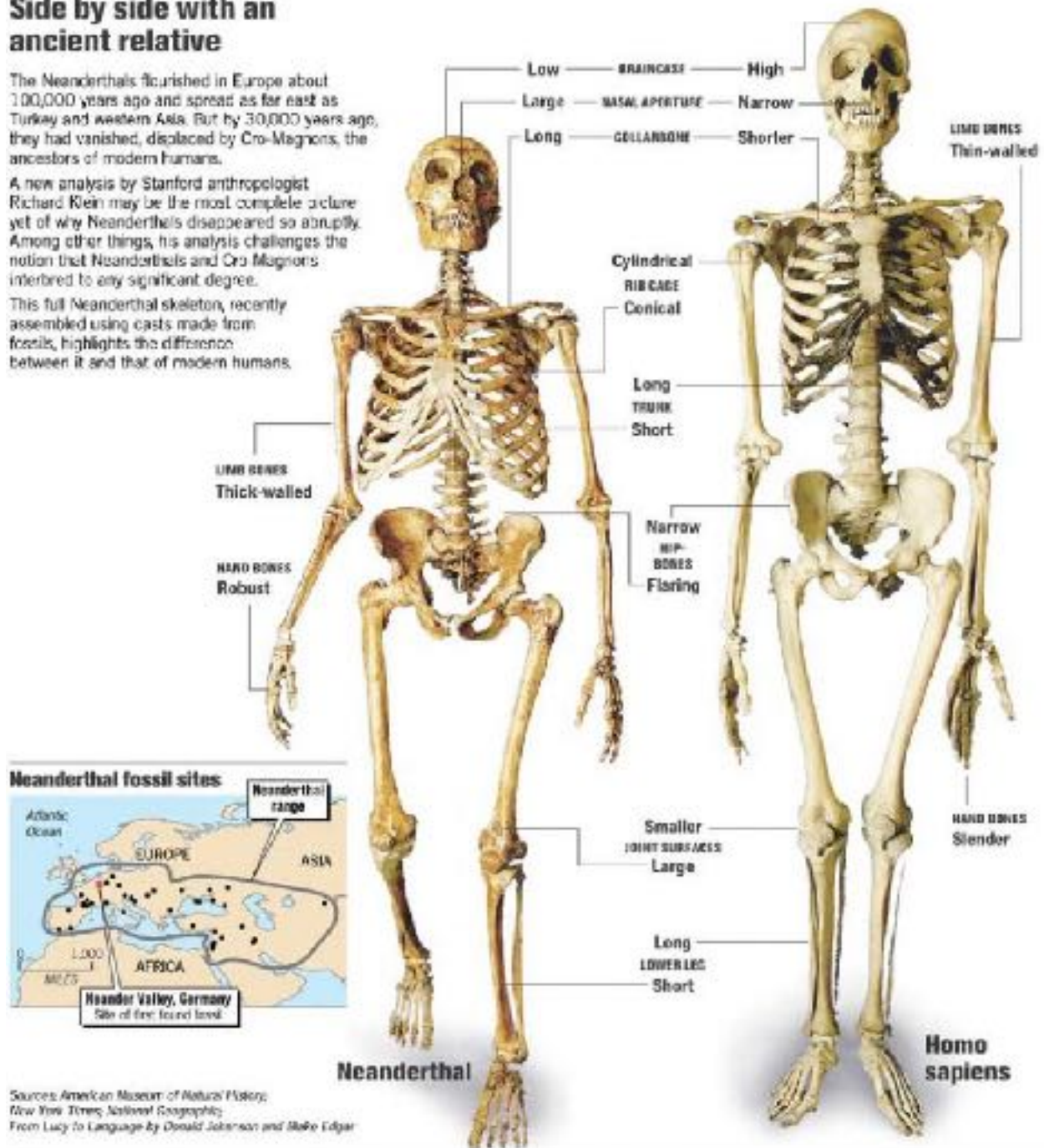
Forum #9 - Looking at Homo neanderthalensis!

Side by side with an ancient relative

The Neanderthals flourished in Europe about 100,000 years ago and spread as far east as Turkey and western Asia. But by 30,000 years ago, they had vanished, displaced by Cro-Magnons, the ancestors of modern humans.

A new analysis by Stanford anthropologist Richard Klein may be the most complete picture yet of why Neanderthals disappeared so abruptly. Among other things, his analysis challenges the notion that Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons interbred to any significant degree.

This full Neanderthal skeleton, recently assembled using casts made from fossils, highlights the difference between it and that of modern humans.



If you spend even a small amount of time researching the controversy regarding whether or not modern populations are the genetic descendants of Neanderthals, you'll quickly learn how contentious this idea remains. There is a fascinating side note to recent research (based on comparative genetic investigation of the human genome and the Neanderthal genome) that suggests Neanderthal had full language and speech capability – an enormous change from the time when I was a student and this was a hotly debated topic at professional meetings. The crux of the argument about the

relationship of Neanderthals to modern humans boils down to these two questions:

(1) Were Neanderthals an evolutionary side branch gone extinct without significant contribution to modern gene pools?

(2) Were Neanderthals an immediate ancestor of modern people who interbred with emerging *Homo sapien* populations?

The richest human fossil and archaeological records are in Europe and western Asia, so we know more about Neanderthal morphology and behavior than any other archaic human population. Our current interpretation of Late Pleistocene fossil and archaeological evidence is conditioned by the long history of (good and bad) research on the subject of early humans. Our view of Neanderthals has changed considerably since their initial discovery. Check out these sites for a quick look at some interesting ideas about *Homo neanderthalensis*:

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/evolution/neanderthals-us.html>

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8660940.stm>

-<http://archaeology.about.com/od/neanderthals/fr/Decoding-Neanderthals.htm>

- <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/05/100506-science-neanderthals-humans-mated-interbred-dna-gene/>

(Links to an external site.)