

# Looking at Upper Paleolithic humans!

An intriguing question for many researchers revolves around the demise of *Homo neanderthalensis*. Since the disappearance of this species coincides with the rise of modern humans, it suggests there might be a link. Speculation has raged about this topic for decades but in recent years the combination of multi-disciplinary evidence and a greater understanding of the ancient world has led professionals to believe: maybe. One old refrain claims modern humans killed off the Neanderthals through conflict and warfare – but no evidence points to this scenario, yet still, the idea persists. Population densities at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic must have been very low (by comparison to today) and it's possible the two groups were rarely at odds with each other over resources. We also know that modern humans utilized a much wider subsistence strategy than Neanderthals, who were apex predators and survived primarily on protein. Consequently, when the climate began to change, the weather warmed, the ice sheets receded and the megafauna began to disappear – this must have impacted the Neanderthal diet more strenuously. Most extinctions are a complex result of multiple factors and Neanderthal will likely turn out the same. Genetic evidence indicates an admixture of human and Neanderthal genes, interbreeding that resulted in a portion of the world's population deriving part of their heritage from Neanderthals.

It is in the Upper Paleolithic world that something remarkable happens. Culture appears in the form of art. This is the first evidence of not just complex cultural behavior, but also the emergence of symbols and abstract thinking. The Upper Paleolithic was a period of great transition in the world. The Neanderthals in Europe disappeared by 33,000 years ago, and modern humans began to have the world to themselves. Stone tools of the Upper Paleolithic were primarily blade-based technology. They were used to create an astonishing range of formal tools, tools created to specific, wide-spread patterns with specific purposes. In addition, bone, antler, shell and wood were used to a great degree for both artistic and working tool types, including the first eyed needles presumably for making clothing about 21,000 years ago.

The Upper Paleolithic is perhaps best known for the cave art, wall paintings and engravings of animals and abstractions at caves such as [Altamira](#), Lascaux and Coa . Another development is mobile art, including the famous [Venus figurines](#) and sculpted batons of antler and bone carved with representations of animals. Debate has raged for twenty years about the [Slovenia artifact](#) . This 50,000 year old bone fragment found in Slovenia might just be a flute manufactured by a premodern human.

**THE TASK:**

- 1 Surf the web for a specific Upper Paleolithic site or object that appeals to you and provide an image and link for further reading. (10 points)**
- 2 Write a brief report to explain what you find fascinating about your selection. (10 points)**