

The Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age)

450,000–10,000 BC

The Palaeolithic, or Old Stone Age, was a period in history when humans began to use simple stone tools, produce artwork and take part in spiritual and religious activities. It was a time when many great mammals such as woolly mammoths, sabre-toothed cats and woolly rhinoceroses walked the Earth. A lot of the land was covered in ice during the Palaeolithic.

Tools

Palaeolithic humans often used tools made out of wood and bone, but they also started to use flaky stones, such as flint, to create tools. Harder stones were used to cut away at the flaky stones to form sharp tools such as tips for spears or hand axes. Thousands of these tools have been found in southern Britain, and many more have been found across the world. One historian has suggested that humans from this time used flint hand axes as 'killer frisbees' to stun animals.



Settlements

During the Palaeolithic, humans were mainly nomadic hunter-gatherers. This means they moved from place to place, hunting and gathering food along the way, rather than living in one location. Keeping moving meant they could avoid cold weather and follow herds of animals to hunt. People lived and worked in groups, often living in caves or makeshift wooden huts for a short time. Towards the end of the Palaeolithic, people finally began to settle down and live in one place.

Monuments and art

Humans first began to create artwork in the Palaeolithic. Patterns on elephant bones, jewellery, rock art, figurines and cave paintings were all popular, especially towards the end of the period. Bracelets, beads and rock art from this time have all been found at Blombos Cave, in South Africa. Some historians believe Palaeolithic humans created cave paintings as a kind of magic to make sure they would have a successful hunt.