

# Questions about the Upper Paleolithic

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.anthropology.paleo/2005-08/msg00811.html>

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  - *Date:* Tue, 23 Aug 2005 20:07:49 GMT
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OK, Paleo newbie here.

In a TTC lecture on anthropology I was listening to recently, the professor was discussing the upper paleolithic in near halcion terms. The folks were taller, stronger, healthier, lived longer, had fewer diseases, a broader diet, little (if any) indication of warfare, no famine, more leisure time and no body odor (OK, that last one I made up). The professor went on to describe the neolithic revolution as a relative descent into "nasty, brutish and short". Once mankind began farming and herding, this lifestyle became a ball and chain, they became slaves to their own technological advances.

I am exaggerating the professor's position a bit, but not much. Is this rosy picture of the Upper Paleolithic generally accepted? Sounds like a Jean Auel version, and I always assumed she "cleaned it up".

Also, here is an excerpt from an article, and I was wondering whether there are any major mistatements in it:

"The archaeological picture changed dramatically around 40–50,000 years ago with the appearance of behaviorally modern humans. This was an abrupt and dramatic change in subsistence patterns, tools and symbolic expression. The stunning change in cultural adaptation was not merely a quantitative one, but one that represented a significant departure from all earlier human behavior, reflecting a major qualitative transformation. It was literally a "creative explosion" which exhibited the "technological ingenuity, social formations, and ideological complexity of historic hunter–gatherers."<sup>7</sup> This human revolution is precisely what made us who we are today.

The Upper Paleolithic lifestyle, as it was called, was based essentially on hunting and gathering. So successful was this cultural adaptation that until roughly 11,000 years ago, hominids worldwide were subsisting essentially as hunter–gatherers.

In the Upper Paleolithic of Eurasia, or the Late Stone Age as it is called in Africa, the archaeological signature stands in strong contrast to that of the Middle Paleolithic/Middle Stone Age. It was characterized by significant innovation:

\* a remarkable diversity in stone tool types

## Questions about the Upper Paleolithic

- \* tool types showed significant change over time and space
- \* artifacts were regularly fashioned out of bone, antler and ivory, in addition to stone
- \* stone artifacts were made primarily on blades and were easily classified into discrete categories, presumably reflecting specialized use
- \* burials were accompanied by ritual or ceremony and contained a rich diversity of grave goods