

Re: Questions about the Upper Paleolithic

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- *From:* lsj@xxxxxxxxxx
 - *Date:* 24 Aug 2005 06:04:45 -0700
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VBM wrote:

> 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".

There is some evidence that life did get nastier in the neolithic revolution. But life was no vacation before that either -- the average lifespan in the paleolithic was nowhere near threescore and ten. If the paleolithic had been a paradise, the population wouldn't have remained near-static for millennia, and then started to increase in the neolithic.

> 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."7 This
> human revolution is precisely what made us who we are today.

Here is what I wrote on this issue in my recent book about the origins of language:

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"The supposedly sudden appearance of advanced art and advanced tools in the caves of Europe about 40,000 years ago is taken as evidence of a cognitive leap. However, the appearance of a sudden dramatic 'cultural revolution' around 40,000 years ago, has turned out to be largely an illusion caused by the predominance of European sites in th