

Important events in evolution

Significant events which impacted the history of Earth

500 thousand years ago

First appearance of Neanderthals

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Neanderthals were a human species that diverged from our lineage around 500,000 years ago. They all used tools like the ones Homo erectus had mastered for 2 million years. Neanderthals survived in Europe and Asia for 300,000 years, much longer than our own existence. Moreover, they did so in the most inhospitable conditions, during the last ice age.

Many Neanderthal remains found since Darwin's times come from Europe. Before 2010, no one knew for sure how they were related to humans.

More recently, discoveries made in Israel, at the Tabun Cave in Mount Carmel, showed that human ancestors had settled in nearby sites: es-Skhul, Kebara, Jebel Qafzeh, and Amud.

The dating of these remains showed that Neanderthals and the ancestors of Homo sapiens coexisted in the Middle East around 100-130 thousand years ago. These human ancestors disappeared from the Middle East 80,000 years ago, when temperatures began to drop. However, Neanderthals survived climate change and populated Europe and western Asia until their disappearance 30,000 years ago. Archaeologists have found what is probably the last habitation of the European Neanderthals, in Gorham's Cave, in Gibraltar.

Today we know that some of us, modern humans, share genes with Neanderthals, so we can confidently say there was interbreeding.

