

First humans in Europe

A big freeze previously unknown to science drove early humans from Europe for 200,000 years, until more resilient humans – with evolutionary changes that allowed survival – returned

1.5-1.2 million years ago:

Fossils and stone tools of ancient human species known as ***Homo erectus*** found in southern Europe



▲ ***Homo erectus***: Longest surviving of all human relatives. *H. erectus* lived 1.9 million-250,000 years ago

400,000 years ago:

Our species – ***Homo sapiens*** – evolves in Africa. ***Homo neanderthalensis***, believed to have descended from *H. erectus*, emerges in Europe



▲ ***Neanderthals***: Closest extinct human relatives

1 million

800,000

600,000

400,000

200,000

50,000

40,000

30,000

■ **1.12m years ago**: Ocean sediments show temperatures suddenly drop by 5-7°C – below freezing. No fossil evidence for next 200,000 years

■ **900,000 years ago**: More advanced species called ***Homo antecessor*** – resilient to colder conditions – returns to Europe



■ **320,000-298,000 years ago**: Middle Stone Age – *H. sapiens* in Africa develop spears and use animal hides for clothing

■ **60,000-50,000 years ago**: *H. sapiens* migrate out of Africa

■ **40,000 years ago**: *H. sapiens* becomes only human species as Neanderthals die out

