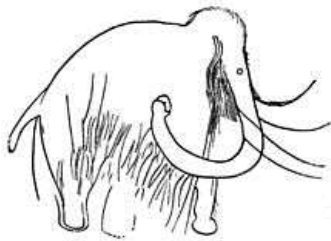


Diet in the Stone Age

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Little evidence remains of the peoples of prehistory in or around Pembrokeshire (due to acidic soils which do not allow for the preservation of remains) until hominids began to migrate away from their earliest points of origin in East Africa. 8 million years ago temperatures were on average 12°C warmer than present and supported large areas of Tropical Rain Forest and **Ramapithecus** survived by gathering fruits in the forest canopy – spending very little time on the ground. By 4 million years ago the forests had dramatically reduced, as rainfall decreased, so hominids had to leave the canopy and become fully bipedal (in order to adapt to finding food on the ground instead of in the trees). These evolved into the early **Australopithecus** who used their changed physique to use their hands to develop simple tools to help them dig up or kill their food.



By 1 million years BP across Africa and Europe – and even parts of Wales – the climate was the Warm Temperate of the Early Pleistocene. This is the time when savannah grasslands replaced the Tropical Rain Forests and the hominids had to adapt their food sources to what was available eg as scavengers to the more aggressive predators, such as lions. Hominids became more omnivorous as the amounts of meat available in their diet increased. This meant that they had to become more adept at making tools and developing these for hunting, skinning and butchering their kills as they

entered the **Palaeolithic** (Old Stone Age). For the next 500,000 years hominids became more organised in trapping, hunting and killing their food (mammoth, deer, hippopotamus, rhinos and birds) and the **Neanderthals** developed tools from the materials at hand to help them. Once a group had killed the large game, roaming the plains in large numbers, they would eat well before they had to organise another hunting party and this meant that this was a period of frantic activity followed by long periods of relative leisure - so this is the period of the most widespread cave art across North Africa and southern Europe. Evidence in Wales can be found at Pont Newydd (Clwyd). At the start of the Pleistocene, and the growth of glaciers across northern Europe, large game either migrated southwards towards warmer climes or died out, as tundra conditions replaced the temperate. From 4,000 years till the final retreat of the last glaciers, around 8,000 years Before Present, no populations could survive in Wales. With the end of the Ice Ages, during the **Mesolithic**, the big game was replaced by much smaller eg rodents, hares, rabbit, fox, badger, otter, snakes, birds and fish. Taking more effort to hunt or catch populations were becoming more 'fixed', with more competition for hunting grounds and settlements began to appear. By 8,000 BC the **Early Neolithic** (New Stone Age) farmers began to combine pastoral activities with cultivation of wild grasses for their grain. This spread across Europe and into southern Britain to reach Clegyr Bioa and Pentr Ifan by 3,600 BC and the settled communities started to construct homes, using local materials. More sophisticated tools were developed, including pottery – for the storage of grains.

Following the final glacial retreat the water that had been locked in the glacial ice was released and the sea level began a dramatic rise. The result of this was that the land access from the continent (now the English Channel) and the plains of the valley between South Wales and North Devon gradually became covered in water as a result of the rising sea levels. During this time people began to become more territorial – sharing with extended families but making a show of strength to potential rivals – achieved through 'ritual' features such as stone circles or prominent burial chambers. 1600 years BP marks the growth of the **Bronze Age** peoples using metal in place of stone and whilst there was trade between quite distant areas (evidence shows that along with trade in Blue Stones beef from West Wales was eaten at Woodhenge in Wiltshire!) but more clearly defined boundaries between local groups so that by the start of the **Iron Age** (c. 1200 BC) Hill Forts and Promontory Forts were being established all around Pembrokeshire eg Castell Henllys, Porth y Rhaw, Treheinif. People had to give up hunting as a major source of food as resources were depleted but food came instead from flocks reared and crops grown by the farmers. Sea trade with the continent – and the coming of the Romans – meant more sophisticated ways of preparing food were introduced to the mixed farming even as early as the Iron Age – when travel by sea was far easier (and safer) than travel over land. This is the reason the coastal locations of Pembrokeshire have the most evidence of early settlement and land-use.