

The great time span of the 'Old Stone Age'.

Please read the text of the 'Lost lands of Our Ancestors' website for more information on man's history up until the end of the Mesolithic period.

The term 'Palaeolithic', meaning Old Stone Age, covers a vast time span. In northern Europe it stretches from some 800,000 to 12,000 years ago, covering a startling 98.5% of the time that modern and pre-modern humans (Neanderthal) are known to have occupied what we now call Britain. However, it is also the least known period of British archaeology due to the sparseness of the evidence. Palaeolithic sites in Wales are rare in comparison to the lowlands and river valleys of south and east England that appear to have been more favourable for habitation.

It is thought that Neanderthals and modern humans probably coexisted across Europe for several thousand years, but exactly how long they coexisted for and how much contact there was between the two is not known.

The Palaeolithic in Britain has been divided into the Lower (approximately 800,000 - 180,000 years ago), Middle (180,000-40,000 years ago) and Upper (40,000-12,000 years ago). Four Ice Ages are known to have occurred during this period, the last ending around 12,000 years ago, with long periods called interglacials of more temperate warmer conditions between. We live in an interglacial period today. During these warmer periods the Welsh landscape would have been cloaked in forest but during cooler periods the landscape was more open allowing people and animals to migrate.

At the beginning of the Palaeolithic there was no British Isles as we know today, and wouldn't be for thousands of years, as it formed part of one landmass that included Europe, Asia and Africa. Sea

levels were much lower because a great deal of the earth's water was then locked up in the enormous ice-caps in the polar regions and in the form of upland glaciers. Therefore people and animals could migrate from the rest of Europe into Wales and back again when the climate changed and more suitable living conditions had to be sought elsewhere.