

Palaeolithic Period 40000 years ago - 15000 years ago



- The Earth in Ice Age
- The Japanese archipelago was covered by grassland (steppe)
- Large mammals such as Naumann's elephants occupied

- Clothes** Animal fur
- Foods** Hunter life and roasting on heated rocks
- Housing** Nomadic (moving) life by chasing animals
- Tools** Mainly chipped (or flaked) stone tools such as spears and knives



3.The Coldest Time

It was the coldest 20,000 years ago during the Final Ice Age. It was probably 7-8°C cooler than today's average temperature, so Miyazaki and Fukuoka in the south would have been the equivalent of Hokkaido in the north. During the cold period, evaporated sea water fell as snow and became an ice sheet on the land. Then, the sea level became lower because of the reduced amount of sea water. This is how Hokkaidō, Honshū, Shikoku and Kyūshū were all joined up to make one island.

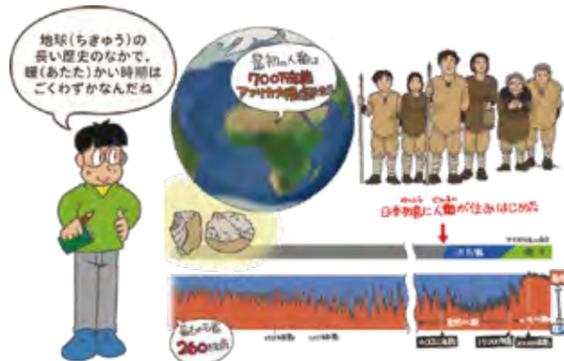
The land was covered with alpine plants, and not many trees. There were large animals such as Naumann's elephants and Giant Japanese elks, as well as smaller ones such as boar, rabbits and badgers.

Naumann's elephant bones have been found on the seabed of Setonai Inland Sea. They were indeed roaming around then even though it is under the water today!



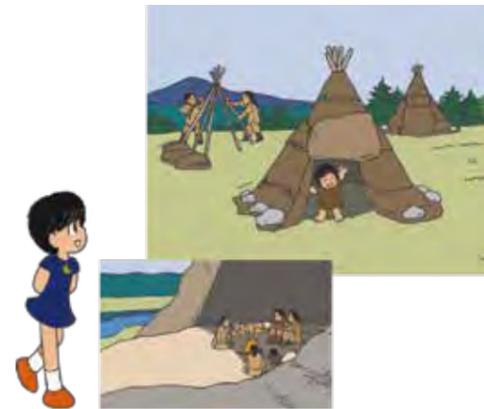
1.It was Cold during the Palaeolithic Period

The first human beings appeared in Africa about 7 million years ago. About 2.6 million years ago, people started to make 'chipped (or flaked) stone tools'. Tool-making is almost unique to human beings; few other animals do that. The time when people started tool-making is called the 'Palaeolithic Period'. In the past, the Earth has experienced several Ice Ages. Between Ice Ages, there were some warmer intervals but they were very short. The Final Ice Age (Last Glacier Stage) lasted from about 70,000 years ago to 10,000 years ago. Japan had its Palaeolithic period during the Final Ice Age.



4.People's Life

It seems that there were forests with larch and beech but not many nut-bearing trees. Human beings were hunting animals and moving from one place to another. They caught animals with spears and by trapping in holes (pit traps). In those days people were living in tents on grassland (or steppe), or in caves and rock shelters which were also used as graves. Their shelters were very simple so that there aren't many sites which have been discovered as residences. However, there are plenty of sites discovered with stone tools which show signs of people's life.



2.Japan's Palaeolithic Period

About 40,000 years ago, human beings arrived on the Japanese island chain (archipelago). At that time, the land was not connected to the Eurasian continent, so people came across the ocean by boat. However, no boat has been discovered at any Palaeolithic site; it is still a big mystery how people moved to Japan. People spread across the land, and the population started to grow. Today, there are over 10,000 Palaeolithic sites discovered in Japan. That is quite a large area when we think of the area of the land.



5.Various Tools

Hardly any wooden and bone tools from this period have survived, as they rot, but there are many chipped and flaked stone tools which have been discovered. Not just any stone can be used to make tools. People created stone tools with sharp blades by chipping edges. Among the stones, a natural glass called obsidian is very sharp. Other types of rocks such as chert, shale and sanukite were used depending on their regional availability. Stone tools were mainly used for spears for hunting and cutting meat. Some of them were fine pointed knife-like tools to shave bones and wood as well as gimlets (small hand-held drills) to pierce. There were also polished stone axes, which were rare anywhere in the world. Stone axes were probably used for hunting large animals, tree-felling and chopping wood, and butchering animals.

