

When we think of Neanderthals we tend to think of primitive "cavemen". A bunch of stupid, much hairier, humans who lived a long time ago and probably waved spears around or rode on the backs of dinosaurs.

While they were definitely hairy and sometimes did wave spears around, there's a lot about our idea of these "cavemen" that is far from the truth.

Neanderthals first popped up around 200,000 years ago, a long time after the dinosaurs had already died out. The closest they got to dinosaurs were animals like the Woolly mammoth (which they sometimes hunted) and sabre-toothed tigers (which sometimes hunted them). And they were *not quite* human beings. Certainly not like you and me. Or Mark.

Mark is a modern human (scientists call us *Homo sapiens*). Shanidar is a *Neanderthal*. As you can see, they have a lot in common. They both love and care for their families. They both enjoy painting. And they both enjoy eating tasty food. Mark and Shanidar could walk past each other on the street and not realise they belonged to two different species.

However, if they stopped to chat, the differences would become obvious. Shanidar hasn't got the equipment in his throat or his brain to be able to speak with words and sentences like Mark. Shanidar's huge brain is able to memorise all the places he has been in his head so he never gets lost, whereas Mark often forgets where he put his house keys [short pause] (in a pretend whisper) they're in your back pocket, Mark.

There's also the fact that Shanidar actually died at around 35-45 years old, whereas Mark is 50 and still hasn't gotten his pension yet. But life was a lot tougher about 40,000 years ago when Shanidar was actually alive, and his shorter, stockier body and bigger nose was perfect for surviving the colder temperatures and the demanding physical activity.

If Mark took a time machine to Shanidar's time, he's probably keel over and die at 35, too. Thankfully, time machines don't exist.

What Mark and Shanidar don't know, is that they could actually be related. Mark could be Shanidar's great great great great greatgreatgreatgreat GREAT grandson. Because although Shanidar isn't a human like Mark, there were *Homo sapiens* like Mark who lived at the same time as Shanidar. At first they lived very far apart but Mark's great great great great greatgreatgreatgreat GREAT grandma could have been one of the first humans to move in next door to the Neanderthals, meet them and end up falling in love. The rest, as they say, is history.