**Neanderthals & modern humans may have interbred**

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Did Neanderthals and humans evolve together? (Image: [Andy Kramer](http://web.utk.edu/~akramer/))

New evidence suggests that Neanderthals and modern humans were not distinct species as previously thought, but evolved together and probably interbred.

Head of [anthropology](http://web.utk.edu/~anthrop/) at the [University of Tennessee](http://www.utk.edu/), Dr Andrew Kramer, studied Neanderthal and human skulls from the Levant region in the eastern Mediterranean.

This is thought to be the very place where the two groups first encountered one another in the Late Pleistocene.

Neanderthals first appeared in Europe about 250,000 years ago and disappeared 25,000 to 30,000 years ago. There have been extensive debates between archaeologists as to what happened to them.

According to the 'Out of Africa' theory, Neanderthals were one of several species of hominids replaced by modern humans who migrated out of Africa around 200,000 years ago.

Alternately the 'multiregional' hypothesis asserts that these different hominids evolved into modern humans through constant intermingling between groups and more modern forms migrating throughout the world.

The skulls Kramer analysed from the Levant are dated to 60,000 years before Neanderthals disappeared from Europe. He measured skulls identified as Neanderthal and as modern human who were apparently living side-by-side during this period.

The results, published in the January 2001 issue of [Quaternary International](http://inqua.nlh.no/qi.html), suggest that the two populations intermingled in the Levant.

It further suggests that Neanderthals and early modern humans were members of a single species - a product of interbreeding with new human races migrating from Africa.

"Demonstrating that there is no defining difference between the skulls from the Levant hardly lays the Out of Africa issue to rest," Kramer admits, "but it does give strong support to a model of multiregional evolution where humans with modern characteristics appeared first in Africa and, as they spread and expanded their range, mixed with the other human populations they encountered rather than replacing them."

A similar analysis of Neanderthal and early modern human crania from Europe separated them into two distinct groups indicating there was no mixing between the two species.

http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2001/04/05/272265.htm