Layout and design: BIT&MINA Illustrations: Arkaitz Barriola

HEZURREN EGIA

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In the Urola River Valley

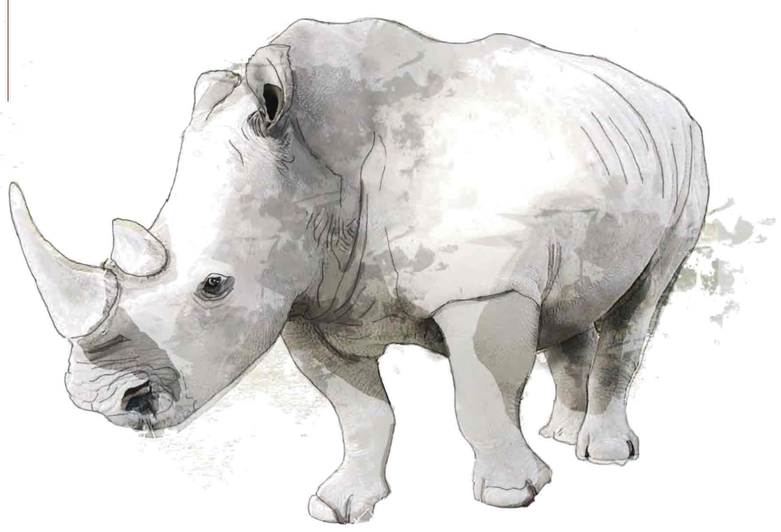
Before us, human beings had been living in the Urola River Valley for at least 300,000 years. During this long period, the climate and environment have changed since the first humans from the Urola River Valley lived among lions, elephants, hyenas, monkeys and other wild animals. Thousands of years later, during the Ice Age, they shared this land with mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, bison, bears, lions and cave hyenas. 40,000 years ago, humans similar to us managed to overcome the most severe cold, thanks to their way of life as nomadic hunters. When the weather finally improved 7,000 years ago, they became farmers and ranchers and settled in the territory.

In the Urola River Valley, you can find information about several different prehistoric periods. The archaeological sites with this information are essential for scientifically researching prehistory and the fact that so many have been found in the Urola Valley is the result of relentless work done over 50 years with a lot of desire and excitement.

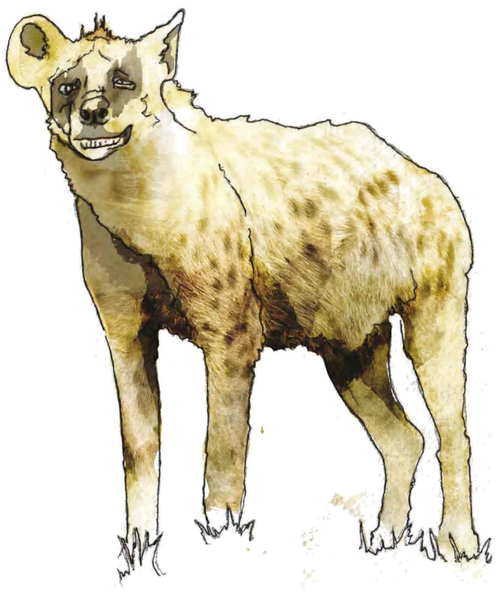
Antxieta Arkeologi Taldea (1965-2015)

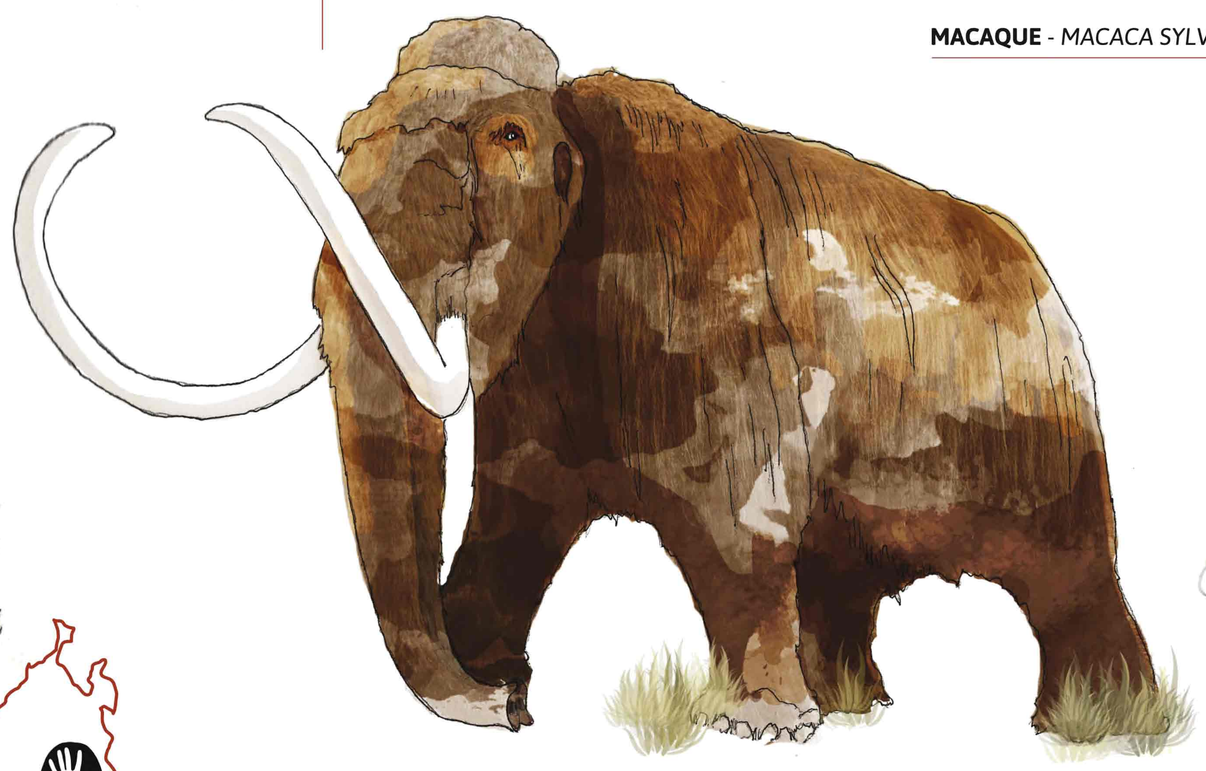
MAMMOTH - *MAMMUTHUS PRIMIGENIUS*

RHINOCEROS - *STEPHANORHINUS HEMITOECHUS*

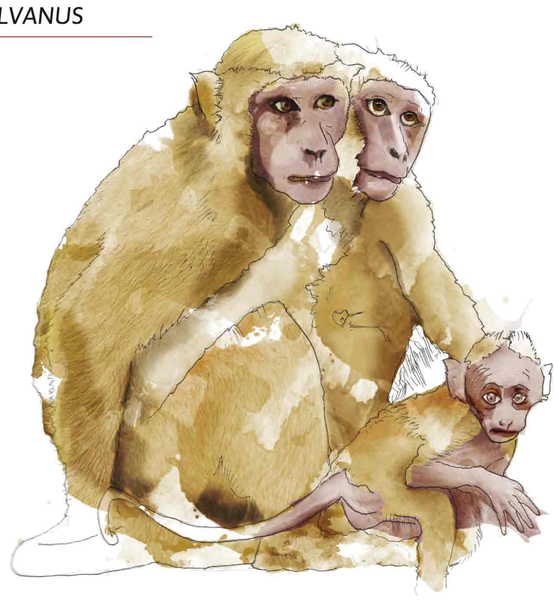


CAVE HYENA - *CROCUTA CROCUTA SPELAEA*





MACAQUE - *MACACA SYLVANUS*



The First Inhabitants of the UROLA RIVER VALLEY

They lived in caves and outdoor camps, adapting to environments with different varieties of flora and fauna, constantly adjusting their lifestyles and techniques to new situations. Although they were nomadic at first and lived by hunting and gathering fruits, they gained more and more skills for hunting and fishing, and in the last years of this period, they became farmers and ranchers, starting the first villages in the region.

They had a great capacity for survival, despite using simple technologies. They were responsible for the most important basic inventions (fire, the bow, hunting techniques, sewing, domestication of animals, metallurgy, knowledge of foods to eat or not, etc.) and managed to deal with other needs with great will and intelligence by making use of tools made from stone, wood or bone. In this long period, there was also a place for artistic sensibility. The cave paintings and decorated bones make it clear that there were other interests in their lives beyond food.

The research on prehistory is based on remains found underground and in caves. What we present here is just a summary of the most important sites of the Urola River Valley.

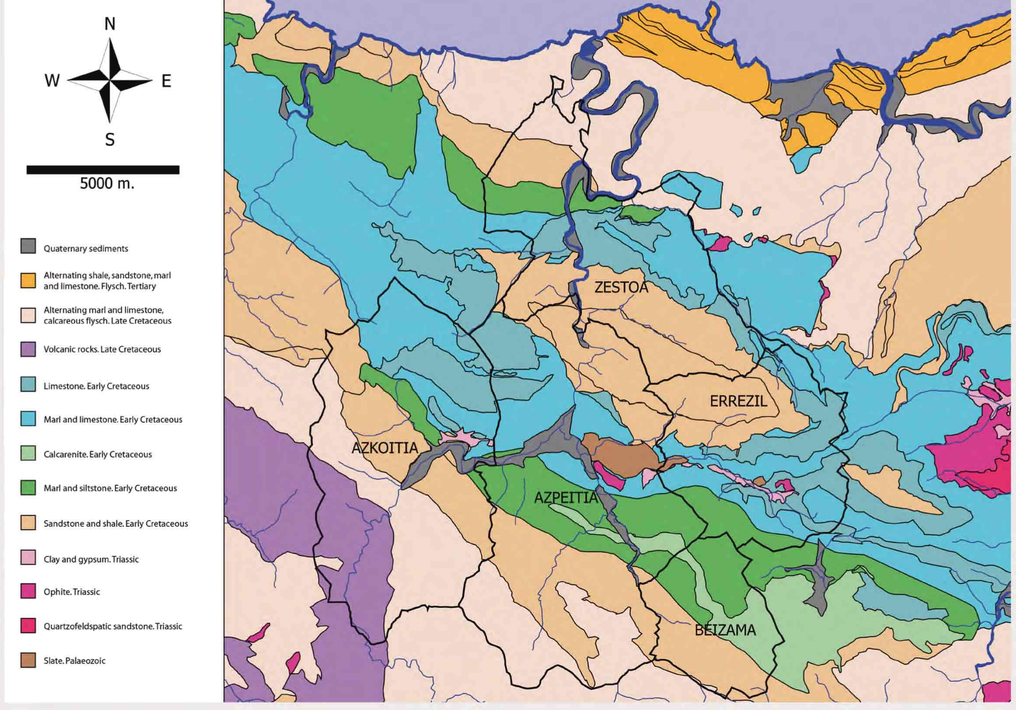
SYMBOLS

- HOMO HEIDELBERGENSIS Lower Palaeolithic
- HOMO NEANDERTHALENSIS Middle Palaeolithic
- HOMO SAPIENS The hunter and art Upper Palaeolithic
- HOMO SAPIENS The Farmer
- HOMO SAPIENS The Farmer Megaliths
- HOMO SAPIENS The Farmer Settlements

Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia
Azkoitiko Udala Ayuntamiento de Azkoitia
azpeitia udala
Beizamako Unibertsitateko Udala
Errezilgo Unibertsitateko Udala
Zestoako Udala

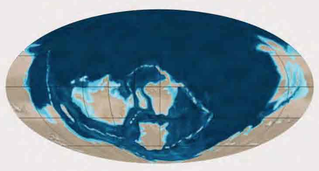
The evolution of the EARTH

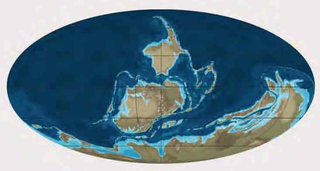
- Our planet came into being 4.6 billion years ago.
- Since then, over millions of years everything has changed: the seas, continents, mountains and living organisms.
- Each mineral and each type of stone formed under certain conditions. So, if we know about the type of stone that was formed in a certain environment, we know about the conditions of that time. Land and continents erode due to rain, ice and wind. These weather patterns have also changed over time.
- Through geology, we can learn how the soil, landscape, climate and different ecosystems used to be.

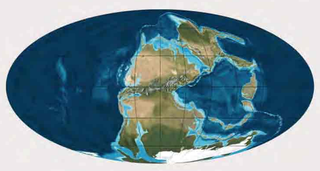


THE BASQUE COUNTRY
Under the sea

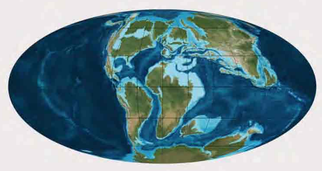
The ground beneath our feet has also changed over time; in fact, the mountains in the Urola Valley were formed from rocks created under the sea. Millions of years ago, Iberia and Europe were separated and the land that is now the Basque Country was beneath the ocean. In this underwater environment, seashells fell to the ocean floor, turning into fossils. Later, when Iberia and Europe joined together, underwater deposits were folded and pushed up to the surface. That is why we can find fossils of seashells in our mountains.


500 million years ago


400 million years ago


280 million years ago

200 million years ago


105 million years ago

50.000 years ago

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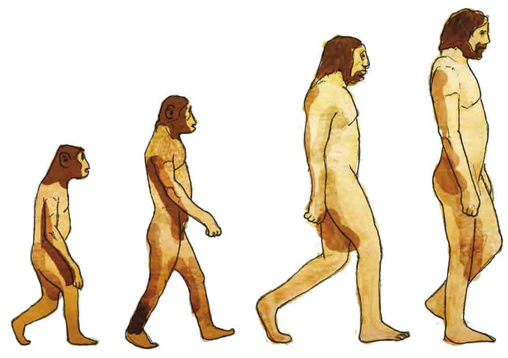
HUMAN origin and evolution: FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE

- The driving force of EVOLUTION is competition, both within a species and between different species.
- In order to evolve, the GENETIC information that drives changes must be spread throughout a group.
- Since environmental conditions change over time, being strong is not as important as the ability to ADAPT.

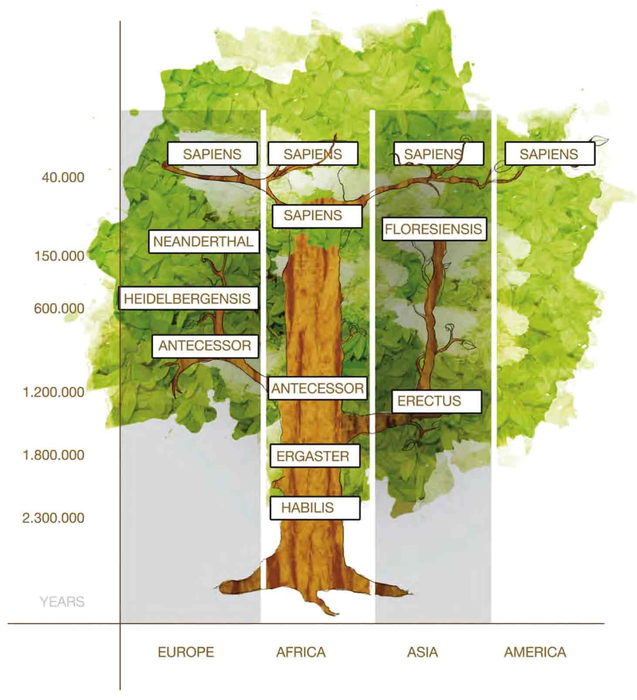


Evolution is a long-term change: a group from a species changes until it becomes a new species.

The changes that occur in individuals are mutations, and it is when these changes spread to the whole group, separating it from its original species, that we are talking about evolution. If mutation helps to better adapt to the environment, then it spreads throughout the entire population, thus increasing the possibility of having more offspring and surviving. Since climate and the environment change over time, eventually those who do not adapt to the new conditions disappear. Thus, natural selection is the factor that determines whether a mutation is adaptative or not.

WE USED TO BE BLACK TOO
We came from Africa

Four million years ago in Africa, the branch that comes to us and the branch that carries modern apes completely separated from the same trunk. Since then, during our species' evolution, there were several branches that adapted to different environments and locations. While our ancestors became increasingly more advanced species, there were several lineages that did not survive. The lineages that travelled from Africa to Eurasia gave rise to the apparition of *Homo neanderthalensis* and finally disappeared. However, those that stayed in Africa evolved, becoming *Homo sapiens*, which spread throughout the world, being the only surviving human species today.

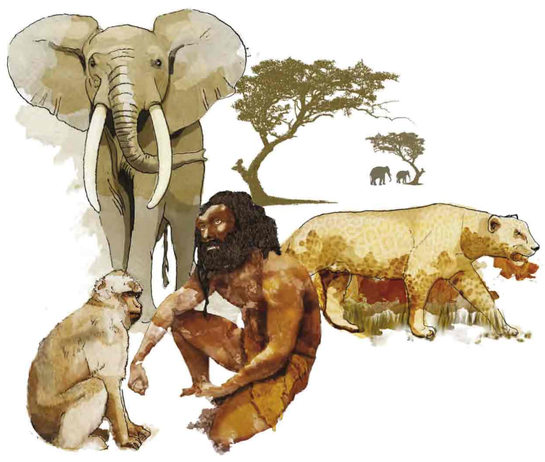


The first inhabitants of the UROLA RIVER VALLEY

HOMO HEIDELBERGENSIS
LOWER PALAEOLITHIC
(600,000-150,000 years ago)

1 **Human**

- They were robust human beings with strong bones. Their brain size was somewhat smaller than ours (1,300 cm3).
- They stood over 1.70 m tall and weighed around 90 kg.
- They were intelligent and lived in small nomadic groups.
- They were omnivores, but also knew how to hunt. They also ate large animals.



2 **Environment**

- Although there were cold periods, the overall climate in the Urola River Valley was temperate.
- 300,000 years ago, several species found today in Africa lived in the Basque Country: elephants, rhinos, lions, hyenas, monkeys, etc.

3 **Abilities**

- They had an ability to hear and speak similar to our own and they could work in groups.
- They were skilled at making stone tools and also made spears from wood for hunting.
- They were the first species to learn to use fire.

4 **Remains**

- They lived outdoors and in caves, moving throughout the country. In the sites, we usually find stone tools left by this species.
- In the Urola River Valley, their remains have been found in three sites: Irikaitz (Zestoa), Loiola (Azpeitia) and Arnailleta (Errezil).

HOMO NEANDERTHALENSIS
MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC
(150,000-40,000 years ago)

1 **Human**

- They were a new species that descended from *Homo heidelbergensis*. Their brain size was similar to our own (1,650 cm3).
- They were a little shorter (1,65 m), although their body was very strong and robust, adapted to the cold climate.
- They led a nomadic life adapted to a cold climate. Finally, due to living in very small groups, they ended up isolated and went extinct 40,000 years ago.

2 **Environment**

- They lived during the Ice Age. The place where there used to be a forest gave way to a steppe.
- Northern Europe and the highest peaks were covered with ice and snow throughout the year.
- Cold weather animals lived in the Basque Country: mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, bison, bears, lions and cave hyenas.

3 **Abilities**

- They were crafty hunters and armed their spears with stone tips.
- They were skilful making fire and regularly made fires. When there was no wood, they burned the bones of the animals they hunted.
- They had the ability to speak and hear like us. They had symbolic beliefs and buried their dead.

4 **Remains**

- Though they also lived outdoors, the majority of sites are found in caves. There, have been found remains of fires, animal bones and stone tools. The most relevant sites are in Amalda (Zestoa) and Urkulu (Lastur, Deba).

HOMO SAPIENS
UPPER PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC
A modern human, hunter-gatherer (40,000-7,000 years ago)

1 **Human**

- Our species emerged in Africa 200,000 years ago and arrived in the Basque Country 40,000 years ago through Europe.
- They were like us; they had all the physical and mental capabilities that we have today.
- They lived a nomadic life and travelled the countryside hunting, fishing and gathering wild fruits.

2 **Environment**

- They appeared towards the end of the Ice Age and after the next climate change, they also knew the current landscape.
- At the end of the last glacial period, climate and scenery were arctic. They saw reindeer, horses, bison and mammoths. After the climate improved (10,000 years ago), the forest expanded and other plants and animals appeared in a temperate climate: wild boar, deer, etc.
- During the glacial period, the sea was much farther away than it is now. Due to later climate change, glaciers (ice masses) in northern Europe melted and the sea reached its current level.

3 **Abilities**

- They improved their hunting techniques and weapons with the invention of the spear-thrower (lever for throwing arrows) and the bow. Furthermore, they domesticated dogs to help with hunting.
- Thanks to their ability to deal with the cold and find food, they spread throughout the world.
- They significantly improved their weapons and tools, harpoons for fishing, spears for hunting, arrows, etc. They armed projectiles with tips of stone or antler.
- They made needles and awls for making clothes and they used decorations (earrings, necklaces, etc.).
- They had a highly developed symbolic and aesthetic capacity. They made paintings and mobile art pieces made from bones.

4 **Remains**

- They lived outdoors and in caves. In the Urola Valley, we found camps established both outdoors (Irikaitz, in Zestoa) and in caves (Erralla, Ikeitz and Amalda, in Zestoa; Ezkuzta, in Azpeitia). Among them are the domestic dog found in Erralla (17,000 years ago) and the cave paintings in Ekain (Sastarrain, Deba), Danbolinzulo (Zestoa) and Erlaitz (Zestoa/Deba). With regards to the mobile art, excellent examples have been found in Ezkuzta (Azpeitia).

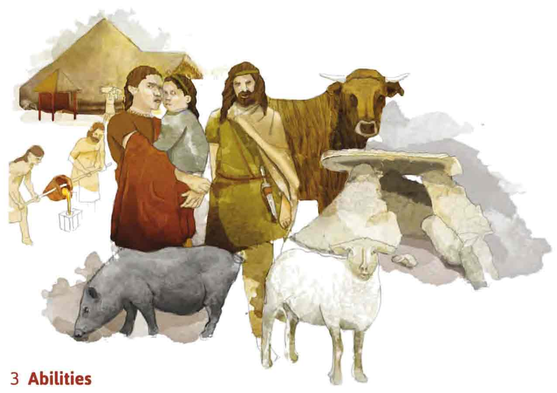
HOMO SAPIENS
NEOLITHIC AND METAL AGES
A modern human, farmer and rancher (7.000 years ago-Roman era)

1 **Human**

- 7,000 years ago, humans left the nomadic life behind with the creation of the first villages.
- The ability to store food throughout the year led to a growth in population.
- The need to manage the population growth and resources caused social relationships to become more complex.

2 **Environment**

- The climate was very similar to today, but the landscape began to change, opening up to meadows, fields and crops.
- They began to organise the territory: property and territoriality came into being, emphasizing the distinction between domestic and wild, as well as the distinction between the living and the dead, separating villages from cemeteries.
- Along with the indigenous species, they grew plants and raised animals from other zones (wheat, sheep, etc.).



3 **Abilities**

- They invented new techniques and materials: stone polishing, pottery and later, metallurgy (copper, bronze and finally iron).
- They started to grow new food and other kinds of products (wool, bread, cheese, beer, etc.).
- Beliefs and calendars emerged based on the solar and lunar cycles in relation to the tasks of farming. The population growth promoted the creation of specialised professions: blacksmiths, potters, etc.

4 **Remains**

- Although no Neolithic settlements have been found in the Urola River Valley, several tombs (dolmens) are known in Beizama (Illaun, Basagin, Maramendi), Errezil (Belanburu) and Azkoitia (Iruarrieta, Marikutx and Keixeta). It is common to find human bones or ceramics from the Bronze Age (4,000-2,800) in caves (Urkitte-Aitz, in Azkoitia; Ertxina, in Zestoa; Aitzorrotz II and Aintzulo, in Errezil; and Aiertza and Errentxorta, in Beizama). However, Bronze Age settlements are very rare, among which are Ikuluteko Gaine and Asurtzu (Azpeitia).
- A good example of Iron Age hillforts (2,800 years ago-Roman Era) is Munoandi (Azkoitia/Azpeitia).

HOMO HEIDELBERGENSIS
Lower Palaeolithic

HOMO NEANDERTHALENSIS
Middle Palaeolithic

HOMO SAPIENS
The hunter and art
Upper Palaeolithic

HOMO SAPIENS
The Farmer

HOMO SAPIENS
The Farmer
Megaliths

HOMO SAPIENS
The Farmer
Settlements