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Neanderthals at the Beach

In two sea caves on the east side of Gibraltar, paleontologists have discovered the remains of sea creatures that they suggest were eaten by Neanderthals. Vanguard and Gorham's caves were previously known to have been occupied by Neanderthals at least 32,000 years ago. Clive Finlayson, Chris Stringer, Yolanda Fernández-Jalvo and colleagues identified the remains of fish, mussel shells, and seal bones—along with the remains of other land animals that Neanderthals hunted and ate—in sedimentary layers corresponding to the era when Neanderthals lived in the caves. The findings provide the clearest evidence to date that Neanderthals, like prehistoric humans, actively sought out and consumed animals from the ocean. The researchers show that the bones of some animals from the caves showed signs of having the meat stripped off by stone tools associated with Upper Paleolithic and Mousterian technologies used by Neanderthals. The seal remains are those of juveniles, suggesting the Neanderthals may have actively tracked down the animals at calving season. The sites on Gibraltar show that hunting and gathering of marine animals was a regular, seasonal part of the coastal Neanderthal lifestyle, the authors say.

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