

As much mystery surrounds Neanderthals' evolution as their demise

The emergence of Neanderthals is just as mysterious as their disappearance about 30,000 years ago.

A study of skulls from a possible burial pit in northern Spain offers a glimpse into the early evolution of the big-bodied hunter-gatherers, who dominated Europe long before modern humans arrived there. The fossils seem to confirm that their distinctive facial features evolved stepwise.

Sima de los Huesos — Spanish for 'pit of bones' — is one of the richest human-fossil sites in the world. Since ancient human bones were first discovered there in the 1970s, a team now led by Juan Luis Arsuaga, a palaeoanthropologist at the Complutense University of Madrid, has recovered the remains of an estimated 28 individuals in the 13-metre pit.

Arsuaga sees this as evidence for the theory that Neanderthals evolved in a piecemeal fashion, after their common ancestor with *H. sapiens* left Africa more than half a million years ago.

Read the full, original story: [‘Pit of bones’ catches Neanderthal evolution in the act](#)