

Man's best friend also our closest evolutionary ally

Dogs are humanity's oldest friends, renowned for their loyalty and abilities to guard, hunt and chase. But modern humans may owe even more to them than we previously realised. We may have to thank them for helping us eradicate our caveman rivals, the Neanderthals.

According to a leading US anthropologist, early dogs, bred from wolves, played a critical role in the modern human's takeover of Europe 40,000 years ago when we vanquished the Neanderthal locals.

"At that time, modern humans, Neanderthals and wolves were all top predators and competed to kill mammoths and other huge herbivores," says Professor Pat Shipman, of Pennsylvania State University. "But then we formed an alliance with the wolf and that would have been the end for the Neanderthal."

If Shipman is right, she will have solved one of evolution's most intriguing mysteries. Modern humans are known to have evolved in Africa. They began to emigrate around 70,000 years ago, reaching Europe 25,000 years later. The continent was then dominated by our evolutionary cousins, the Neanderthals, who had lived there for more than 200,000 years. However, within a few thousand years of our arrival, they disappeared.

The question is: what finished them off? Some scientists blame climate change. Most argue that modern humans – armed with superior skills and weapons – were responsible. Shipman agrees with the latter scenario, but adds a twist. We had an accomplice: the wolf.

Modern humans formed an alliance with wolves soon after we entered Europe, argues Shipman. We tamed some and the dogs we bred from them were then used to chase prey and to drive off rival carnivores, including lions and leopards, that tried to steal the meat.

Read full, original article: [How hunting with wolves helped humans outsmart the Neanderthals](#)