

Early Europeans closer to Neanderthals than expected

One of Europe's earliest known humans had a close Neanderthal ancestor: perhaps as close as a great-great-grandparent.

The finding, announced on May 8 at the Biology of Genomes meeting in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, questions the idea that humans and Neanderthals interbred only in the Middle East, more than 50,000 years ago.

Qiaomei Fu, a palaeogenomicist at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, told the meeting how she and her colleagues had sequenced DNA from a 40,000-year-old jawbone that represents some of the earliest modern-human remains in Europe. They estimate that 5 –11 percent of the bone's genome is Neanderthal, including large chunks of several chromosomes. (The genetic analysis also shows that the individual was a man). By analysing how lengths of DNA inherited from any one ancestor shorten with each generation, the team estimated that the man had a Neanderthal ancestor in the previous four to six generations. (The researchers declined to comment on the work because it has not yet been published in a journal).

All humans who trace their ancestry beyond sub-Saharan Africa carry a sliver of Neanderthal DNA — [around 1 – 4 percent](#) of their genomes. Researchers have long thought it most likely that early humans exiting Africa interbred with resident Neanderthals somewhere in the Middle East around 50,000—60,000 years ago, before travelling on to Asia, Europe and the rest of the world.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Early European may have had Neanderthal great-great-grandparent](#)