

400,000-year-old teeth suggest Neanderthals and humans split much earlier than thought

Our distant cousins just got a little more distant.

A [new study](#) suggests that modern humans and our closest relatives, the Neanderthals, may have split 800,000 years ago, hundreds of thousands of years earlier than had been thought.

How do scientists know this? The truth is in the teeth: Anthropologist [Aida Gomez-Robles](#) of [University College London](#) analyzed 400,000-year-old teeth from a Neanderthal ancestor, which had been discovered in a cave in Spain.

She determined that the choppers weren't at all similar to modern humans' teeth, which they should have been if the two species had been together at that time. The "teeth are very different from those that we would expect to find in their last common ancestral species with modern humans," Gomez-Robles said, "suggesting that they evolved separately over a long period of time (before that) to develop such stark differences."

The most recent common ancestor of Neanderthals and modern humans must have lived well before this time, probably hundreds of thousands of years earlier, according to [New Scientist](#).

The study concludes that any divergence between Neanderthals and modern humans after 800,000 years ago would require "unusually and unlikely rapid dental evolution."

Read full, original post: [Neanderthals split from modern humans much earlier than thought, study suggests](#)