

Our Stone Age ancestors wore bright and garish clothes

By [David Derbyshire for MailOnline](#)

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They are normally pictured wearing drab furs and skins. But an astonishing new discovery suggests that our Stone Age ancestors had a taste for garish, colourful clothes.

Archaeologists have uncovered an extraordinary haul of pink, turquoise and black fibres that were used to make thread more than 34,000 years ago.

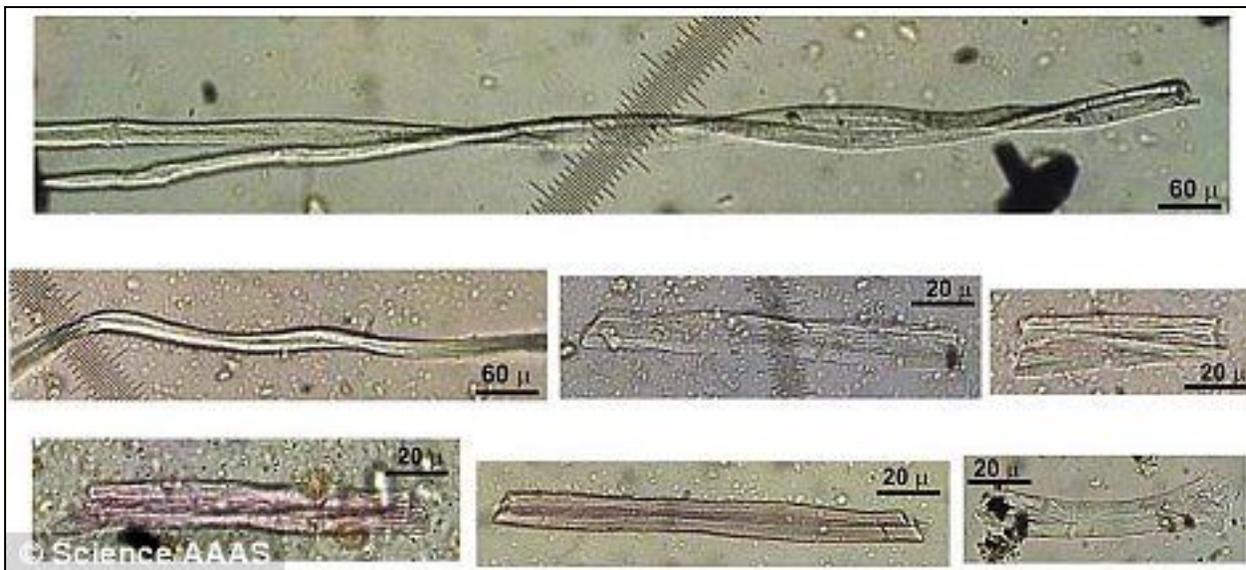
The flax fibres, which were buried in a cave in the hills of the Republic of Georgia, were discovered by an international team of fossil hunters.

Our stone age ancestors may have worn brightly coloured threads rather than drab skins as portrayed in films like *One Million Years BC*

The flax would have been collected from the wild and spun, knotted and tied to make linen and thread, the researchers report today in the journal *Science*.

Cloth and thread would then have been used to make clothing, sew together pieces of leather and tie together bundles.

Prof Ofer Bar-Yosef of Harvard University said: 'This was a critical invention for early humans. They might have used this fibre to create parts of clothing, ropes, or baskets - for items that were mainly used for domestic activities.'



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The flax, which would have been collected from the wild and not farmed, is believed to be more than 34,000 years old

'We know that this is wild flax that grew in the vicinity of the cave and was exploited intensively or extensively by modern humans.'

Conditions were harsh in the hillsides of Georgia more than 30,000 years ago. The world was still gripped in the last great Ice Age and clothing was essential to survive the freezing winters.

Hundreds of fibres - too small to see with the naked eye - were found in 27 samples of clay scraped out of the cave floor. The layers of soil around the fibres were dated to around 30,000 to 34,000 years ago using carbon dating techniques.

The fibres could have been used to sew hides together for clothing and shoes. They could have been used to make packs which could have allowed Stone Age people to go on long hunting expeditions.

Some of the fibres were twisted and were probably used to make ropes or strings. Others were dyed with natural colours from plants and roots - including pink and turquoise strands.

Young flax fibres dating back to around 21,000 years old were also discovered in the cave.

The scientists were not looking for fibres but were trying to study ancient tree pollen.

Previously the oldest known fibres came from the Czech Republic which were made around 28,000 years ago.

He added: 'We were looking to find when the cave was occupied, what was the nature of the occupation by those early hunter-gatherers, where did they go hunting and gathering food, what kind of stone tools they used, what types of bone and antler tools they made and how they used them, whether they made beads and pendants for body decoration, and so on.'

'This was a wonderful surprise, to discover these ancient flax fibres at the end of this excavation project.'

The researchers also found remains of animal hair, skin beetles and moths.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1212692/Our-stone-Age-ancestors-wore-bright-garish-clothes.html#ixzz4x7PebJVg>

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