

What is This?

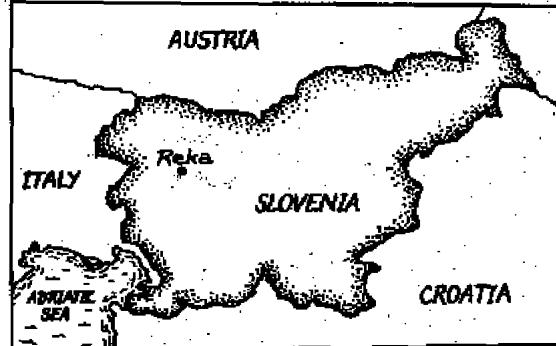
NOVA Activity **Neanderthals on Trial**

The artifact at the bottom of the page was discovered in a cave in western Slovenia. It is believed to be between 43,000 and 82,000 years old and determined to be from the thighbone of a juvenile cave bear. It was found at a former Neanderthal camp known as Divje Babe I near the town of Reka. But what is this artifact? What, if anything, was it used for? Use the information about Neanderthal life below to see whether you can figure out what this artifact might be.

Neanderthal Life

Who were the Neanderthals, the *hominids* that existed before and during part of the same time as modern *Homo sapiens*? While scholars disagree about exactly who the Neanderthals were, they have some idea of how they lived from sites that have been excavated in Europe and Western Asia. The Neanderthals lived from about 200,000 years ago to around 30,000 years ago, during the Ice Age.

They made tools from stone gathered nearby their camps and presumably used them for such things as shaping wood, butchering animals, and scraping hides. They lived in caves, rock shelters, and open-air sites. They used fire. There is only limited evidence of artistic expression. A few pierced animal teeth have been found, probably worn as personal adornment, but no cave paintings or figurative carvings on bone or stone have been found. There is no way of knowing, however, whether their artistic talents took another form that would not be preserved, such as wood carving or storytelling.



In terms of diet, they subsisted on meat from hunting small game and herd animals such as wild horses, deer, and caribou. Larger and more dangerous animals such as mammoths and bears were either ambushed or trapped, or—more likely—scavenged after another predator had killed them. They also ate plant foods, although little of the evidence for this aspect of their diet has survived. The question of whether Neanderthals deliberately buried their dead, as opposed to merely disposing of bodies in trash heaps at their living sites, is still controversial. There is good evidence from at least one site that they cared for disabled individuals.

Questions

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- ① What do you think this object is? What might it have been used for? What level of confidence do you have in your conclusion? Defend your reasoning.
- ② What else could this be?
- ③ What other information would you want to get to help you figure out what this might be?

