



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Tests Suggest 10,000-Year-Old Brit Had Dark Skin, Blue Eyes

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Genetic material from a 10,000-year-old skeleton suggests the oldest-known Briton had dark skin and blue eyes.

Scientists from Britain's Natural History Museum and University College London reported the finding Wednesday after studying the remains of an individual known as "Cheddar Man."

The skeleton was discovered over a century ago. It was found inside a large hole in the Cheddar Gorge area of southwest England.

The researchers cut a hole into the skull of the human remains and removed DNA from bone powder.

The letters DNA are short for the term deoxyribonucleic acid. Scientists call it the chemical of life.

DNA is made up of genes. Genes, like letters in words, carry a huge amount of information. They tell cells how to make all the materials for life.

The British scientists say their tests showed Cheddar Man had dark, wavy hair, blue eyes and "dark to black" skin color.

The researchers say the evidence suggests that Europeans' light skin coloring developed much later than experts had thought.

Cheddar Man overturns people's expectations of what kinds of genetic qualities go together, said Tom Booth, who worked on the project.

"It seems that **pale** eyes entered Europe long before pale skin or **blond** hair, which didn't come along until after the arrival of farming," he added.

Some experts believe that ancient humans who lived in extreme northern areas may have developed light colored skin. They note light skin is able to take in more sunlight than darker skin. Sunlight is required for the body to produce vitamin D.

Cheddar Man shares genetic similarities with other human remains found in Spain, Hungary and Luxembourg. All those individuals lived in the Mesolithic Period, also known as the Middle Stone Age Period. The group, known as Western Hunter-Gatherers, moved to Europe from the Middle East after the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago.

The Associated Press says Cheddar Man is the oldest complete skeleton found in Britain. Human beings had lived on the island **off and on** for thousands of years before his time, but they disappeared during periodic ice ages.

Cheddar Man would have been one of a very small population of hunter-gatherers in Britain at the time. Scientists, who have been studying his skeleton, say he appears to have had a healthy diet but died in his 20s, possibly through violence.

I'm Jonathan Evans.

Jill Lawless reported this story for the Associated Press (AP). George Grow adapted her report for VOA Learning English. Hai Do was the editor.

Words in This Story

powder – *n.* a very fine, dry substance

pale – *adj.* lacking in color; not bright

blond – *adj.* of light color; a golden or yellowish brown color

off and on – *adv.* now and then

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