

Horseback Riding May Date Back As Early as the Bronze Age

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Archaeologist (Noun) /ˌɑrkiˈælədʒɪst/ a person who studies human history by finding and examining objects buried in the ground
Example: Archaeologists have found hundreds of fragments of Roman pottery on the site.
2. Skeleton (Noun) /ˈskelɪtn/ the structure of bones that supports the body of a human or animal
Example: The museum has an almost fully complete Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton.
3. Syndrome (Noun) /ˈsɪndroum/ a medical condition with a particular set of symptoms
Example: Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder that causes a person to make sudden movements or sounds.
4. Harness (Noun) /ˈhɑːrnɪs/ a set of leather bands fastened around an animal that are used to control it or attach it to a vehicle
Example: Make sure that the harness fits the horse tightly but doesn't cause discomfort.
5. Expansion (Noun) /ɪkˈspænjən/ the process of becoming bigger, more successful, etc.
Example: The expansion of the airport brought a much needed boost to the local economy.
6. Alliance (Noun) /əˈlaɪəns/ a deal between groups, countries, political parties, etc. to help each other reach their goals
Example: In 2021, France and Greece formed an alliance, vowing to support each other in the event of an attack.



Archaeologists believe they have found the earliest direct evidence of horseback riding in 5,000-year-old human skeletons in central Europe. Researchers analyzed more than 200 Bronze Age skeletal remains in museum collections in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

They were looking for signs of what co-author Martin Trautmann calls "horse rider syndrome" — six marks that indicate a person was likely to have ridden an animal, including on the hips, thighs and pelvis. The researchers focused on human skeletons — which are often better preserved than horse bones — and identified five likely riders who lived around 4,500 to 5,000 years ago and belonged to a Bronze Age people called the Yamnaya.

Archaeologists have previously found evidence in dental remains of people drinking horse milk, and of horses controlled by harnesses dating back more than 5,000 years, but that does not necessarily mean that the horses were ridden.

The Yamnaya culture came from what is now part of Ukraine and western Russia. Co-author Volker Heyd said that the Yamnaya were known for their expansion across Eurasia in the space of only a few generations — moving west to Hungary and east to Mongolia. And their relationship with horses may have been part of the reason that they were able to expand in this way, the researchers suggest.

Horses may have allowed the Yamnaya to more effectively send communications, build alliances and manage the herds of cattle that were important for their economy. "Horseback riding was the fastest a human could go before the railroads," said co-author David Anthony, an archaeologist from Hartwick College in New York. "Horses expand the concept of distance — you begin to think about places previously out of reach as being reachable," he explained.

DISCUSSION

1. What are your thoughts on this discovery?
2. Do you find it surprising that humans rode horses about 5,000 years ago?
3. Have you ever ridden a horse? If so, did you enjoy it? If not, would you like to?
4. What ancient civilizations do you find fascinating?
5. What areas of the world would you like to work in if you were an archaeologist?