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Early humans used fire million years ago

4th April, 2012

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

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THE ARTICLE

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

The argument among scientists about when our human ancestors first used fire is a long-running one. A new study centred on a cave in South Africa casts new light on the debate. Prehistoric ash and the remains of burnt bones prove early humans used fire a million years ago. Scientists working at South Africa's Wonderwerk Cave have found evidence of multiple fires deep inside the cave, some over 30 metres from the entrance. This means it is very unlikely the fires were started naturally, by lightning strikes or from nearby bush fires. Scientists have also discounted the possibility that the fires were as a result of bat guano spontaneously combusting – a very rare but possible natural event.

The scientists are still none the wiser what our cave ancestors used fire for. They found no signs of a place for fire preparation, like a hearth or a deep hole in the ground. It is clear, however, that they started the fires by burning leaves, grass and small twigs. Scientists are now wondering about the burnt bones. Some say our ancestors could have cooked the meat, while others say they could have eaten the meat raw and tossed the bones into the fire. Cave researcher Francesco Berna of Boston University said other possible uses could be for warmth, light or protection from wild animals. The discovery means our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than previously thought.

WARM-UPS

1. EARLY HUMANS: Walk around the class and talk to other students about early humans. Change partners often. Sit with your first partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

> *argument / ancestors / casts new light on / lightning / bush fires / natural event / none the wiser / fire preparation / cooked meat / warmth / wild animals*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. ANCESTORS: How different would their life be from today? Complete this table with your partner(s). Change partners and share what you wrote. Change and share again.

	How different?	Better / worse than today?
Family life		
Stress		
Transportation		
Food		
Entertainment		
Safety		

4. FIRE: Students A **strongly** believe learning how to use fire is the most important discovery ever made by humans; Students B **strongly** believe not. Change partners again and talk about your conversations.

5. DISCOVERIES: What are the most important ones ever made? Rank these and share your rankings with your partner. Put the best at the top. Change partners and share your rankings again.

- fire
- how to use metal
- the computer
- penicillin
- the printing press
- television
- music
- hamburgers

6. CAVE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'cave'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

1. TRUE / FALSE: Read the headline. Guess if a-h below are true (T) or false (F).

a. Scientists have debated for a long time about humans' first use of fire. T / F
b. Remains of ash and bones were found in an old house in South Africa. T / F
c. Scientists have pretty much concluded lightning did not start the fires. T / F
d. It is possible that bat droppings can catch alight spontaneously. T / F
e. Scientists have a much clearer idea about why early humans used fire. T / F
f. Scientists found that early humans started fires by using animal fat. T / F
g. The researchers discovered the cave dwellers only ate raw meat. T / F
h. Humans started using fire 300,000 years earlier than earlier thought. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article.

1.	argument	a.	unmistakable
2	ancestors	b.	threw
3.	casts	c.	proof
4.	evidence	d.	earlier
5.	rare	e.	forefathers
6.	still	f.	pondering
7.	clear	g.	debate
8.	wondering	h.	uncommon
9.	tossed	i.	throws
10.	previously	j.	until now

3. PHRASE MATCH: (Sometimes more than one choice is possible.)

1.	The argument	a.	light on the debate
2	casts new	b.	the wiser
3.	unlikely the fires were started	c.	possible natural event
4.	spontaneously	d.	bones into the fire
5.	a very rare but	e.	previously thought
6.	still none	f.	among scientists
7.	Scientists are	g.	from wild animals
8.	tossed the	h.	now wondering
9.	protection	i.	combusting
10.	years earlier than	j.	naturally

WHILE READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

The argument (1) _____ scientists about when our human ancestors first used fire is a long-running one. A new study centred on a cave in South Africa (2) _____ new light on the debate. Prehistoric ash and the remains of burnt bones (3) _____ early humans used fire a million years ago. Scientists working at South Africa's Wonderwerk Cave have found evidence of (4) _____ fires deep inside the cave, some over 30 metres from the entrance. This means it is very (5) _____ the fires were started naturally, by lightning (6) _____ or from nearby bush fires. Scientists have also discounted the (7) _____ that the fires were as a result of bat guano spontaneously combusting – a very rare but possible (8) _____ event.

possibility

unlikely

prove

natural

among

multiple

casts

strikes

The scientists are still (9) _____ the wiser what our cave ancestors used fire for. They found no (10) _____ of a place for fire preparation, like a hearth or a deep hole in the (11) _____. It is clear, however, that they started the fires by burning leaves, grass and small (12) _____. Scientists are now wondering about the burnt bones. Some say our ancestors could have cooked the meat, while others say they could have eaten the meat (13) _____ and (14) _____ the bones into the fire. Cave researcher Francesco Berna of Boston University said other possible uses could be for (15) _____, light or protection from wild animals. The discovery means our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than (16) _____ thought.

raw

previously

signs

twigs

warmth

none

tossed

ground

LISTENING – Listen and fill in the gaps

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

The argument among scientists about when our _____ used fire is a long-running one. A new study centred on a cave in South Africa _____ on the debate. Prehistoric ash and the remains of _____ early humans used fire a million years ago. Scientists working at South Africa's Wonderwerk Cave _____ of multiple fires deep inside the cave, some over 30 metres from the entrance. This means it is very unlikely the fires were started naturally, by lightning strikes or from _____. Scientists have also discounted the possibility that the fires were as a result of bat guano spontaneously combusting – a very rare _____ event.

The scientists are still _____ what our cave ancestors used fire for. They found no signs of a place _____, like a hearth or a deep hole in the ground. It is clear, however, that they started the fires _____, grass and small twigs. Scientists are now wondering about the burnt bones. Some say our ancestors could have cooked the meat, while others say they could have _____ and tossed the bones into the fire. Cave researcher Francesco Berna of Boston University said other possible uses could be for warmth, _____ from wild animals. The discovery means our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than _____.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionary / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms … for the words 'human' and 'ancestor'.

human	**ancestor**

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning…?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

• among • running • prove • lightning • result • natural	• wiser • preparation • leaves • cooked • tossed • previously

EARLY HUMANS SURVEY

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

Write five GOOD questions about early humans in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.
When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

EARLY HUMANS DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

a) What did you think when you read the headline?

b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'ancestors'?

c) What do you think about what you read?

d) How interesting is this news to you?

e) How important a discovery is this?

f) How did our ancestors start a fire?

g) Do you have any experiences with starting fires?

h) What do you think life was like a million years ago for our ancestors?

i) What do you think early humans would make of our modern world?

j) Do you think early humans were happier than we are?

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EARLY HUMANS DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

a) Did you like reading this article?

b) What would change in our understanding about our ancestors if scientists knew what the early humans used fire for?

c) Hoe do you think the knowledge of how to use fire spread around the prehistoric world?

d) What do you know about early human life in your country?

e) What do you think of meat that is cooked over an open fire?

f) What other things do you think early humans used fire for?

g) Do you think early humans were happier than we are?

h) Is it important that we now know that our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than previously thought? Why?

i) What questions would you like to ask cave researcher Francesco Berna?

LANGUAGE – MULTIPLE CHOICE

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

The argument (1) _____ scientists about when our human ancestors first used fire is a long-(2) _____ one. A new study centred on a cave in South Africa casts new light on the debate. Prehistoric ash and the (3) _____ of burnt bones prove early humans used fire a million years ago. Scientists working at South Africa's Wonderwerk Cave have found (4) _____ of multiple fires deep inside the cave, some over 30 metres from the entrance. This means it is very unlikely the fires were started naturally, by lightning (5) _____ or from nearby bush fires. Scientists have also discounted the possibility that the fires were as a (6) _____ of bat guano spontaneously combusting – a very rare but possible natural event.

The scientists are still (7) _____ the wiser what our cave ancestors used fire for. They found no signs of a place for fire preparation, like a hearth or a deep hole in the ground. It is (8) _____, however, that they started the fires by burning leaves, grass and small twigs. Scientists are now wondering about the burnt bones. Some say our ancestors could have cooked the meat, while others say they could have eaten the meat raw and (9) _____ the bones into the fire. Cave researcher Francesco Berna of Boston University said other possible uses could be for (10) _____, light or protection (11) _____ wild animals. The discovery means our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than (12) _____ thought.

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

1.	(a)	via	(b)	through	(c)	around	(d)	among
2.	(a)	walking	(b)	pacing	(c)	running	(d)	strolling
3.	(a)	confirms	(b)	remains	(c)	maintenance	(d)	means
4.	(a)	evidence	(b)	coincidence	(c)	remembrance	(d)	stance
5.	(a)	pokes	(b)	thunders	(c)	strikes	(d)	booms
6.	(a)	equals	(b)	sum	(c)	cause	(d)	result
7.	(a)	knowing	(b)	none	(c)	noon	(d)	no one
8.	(a)	clear	(b)	clearly	(c)	clearance	(d)	clears
9.	(a)	flossed	(b)	tossed	(c)	embossed	(d)	grossed
10.	(a)	warms	(b)	warmer	(c)	warmth	(d)	warmed
11.	(a)	from	(b)	re	(c)	of	(d)	for
12.	(a)	purposely	(b)	porpoise	(c)	porous	(d)	previously

WRITING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1204/120404-ancestors.html

Write about **early humans** for 10 minutes. Correct your partner's paper.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about early humans. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. EARLY HUMANS: Make a poster about early humans. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. FIRE: Write a magazine article about the early use of fire. Include imaginary interviews with an early human and one of today's scientists.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. LETTER: Write a letter to cave researcher Francesco Berna. Ask her three questions about early humans. Give her three of your ideas on the way they lived. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. F c. T d. T e. F f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

1.	argument	a.	debate
2	ancestors	b.	forefathers
3.	casts	c.	throws
4.	evidence	d.	proof
5.	rare	e.	uncommon
6.	still	f.	until now
7.	clear	g.	unmistakable
8.	wondering	h.	pondering
9.	tossed	i.	threw
10.	previously	j.	earlier

PHRASE MATCH:

1.	The argument	a.	among scientists
2	casts new	b.	light on the debate
3.	unlikely the fires were started	c.	naturally
4.	spontaneously	d.	combusting
5.	a very rare but	e.	possible natural event
6.	still none	f.	the wiser
7.	Scientists are	g.	now wondering
8.	tossed the	h.	bones into the fire
9.	protection	i.	from wild animals
10.	years earlier than	j.	previously thought

GAP FILL:

Early humans used fire million years ago

The argument (1) **among** scientists about when our human ancestors first used fire is a long-running one. A new study centred on a cave in South Africa (2) **casts** new light on the debate. Prehistoric ash and the remains of burnt bones (3) **prove** early humans used fire a million years ago. Scientists working at South Africa's Wonderwerk Cave have found evidence of (4) **multiple** fires deep inside the cave, some over 30 metres from the entrance. This means it is very (5) **unlikely** the fires were started naturally, by lightning (6) **strikes** or from nearby bush fires. Scientists have also discounted the (7) **possibility** that the fires were as a result of bat guano spontaneously combusting – a very rare but possible (8) **natural** event.

The scientists are still (9) **none** the wiser what our cave ancestors used fire for. They found no (10) **signs** of a place for fire preparation, like a hearth or a deep hole in the (11) **ground**. It is clear, however, that they started the fires by burning leaves, grass and small (12) **twigs**. Scientists are now wondering about the burnt bones. Some say our ancestors could have cooked the meat, while others say they could have eaten the meat (13) **raw** and (14) **tossed** the bones into the fire. Cave researcher Francesco Berna of Boston University said other possible uses could be for (15) **warmth**, light or protection from wild animals. The discovery means our ancestors used fire 300,000 years earlier than (16) **previously** thought.

LANGUAGE WORK

1 - d 2 - c 3 - b 4 - a 5 - c 6 - d 7 - b 8 - a 9 - b 10 - c 11 - a 12 - d