The Lives of Hunter-Gatherers
During the Old Stone Age

The earliest people lived during the Old Stone Age. The period is also called the Paleolithic Era. The Paleolithic Period lasted from about 70,000 B.C. to about 10,000 B.C.

During the Old Stone Ages, glaciers covered nearly ¼ of earth. Glaciers are large sheets of ice that covered large areas of Europe, Asia, and North America. Since the climate of the earth was cold, there were few plants. People had to follow animals from place to place because they had to rely on animals for food. Plant food sources were often scarce. These people of the Old Stone Age were called hunter-gatherers. Hunter-gatherers moved from place to place, hunting animals and gathering fruit, nuts and berries. Life for the hunter-gatherer was hard. People often went hungry when they could not find food to eat.

Early people were quite smart. They developed technology that made their lives easier. Technology is the use of skills and tools to meet practical human needs. The people of the Old Stone Age developed tools from stones, sticks, bones that made hunting and defense easier for them. For example, a spear-thrower or a bow made it safer to hunt animals because the hunter did not have to get close to an animal to kill it. They could now throw a spear or arrow from far away to kill the animal. The people of the Old Stone Age also developed skills that improved their lives. For example, by learning to use fire, early people had a source of heat, light, and a way to cook their food.
Since people had to constantly move around to find food, populations were small. People generally lived in small groups that were less than 20 people. These groups helped them achieve more success with hunting and survival than working alone. In order to communicate, early man developed a very simple language that usually consisted of simple grunts or babbles.

In these small groups, the men were the hunters and provided food for the group. This job was difficult and time consuming because often the men were not able to kill an animal. Men could hunt for days or weeks before killing an animal. Women found nuts and berries while the men hunted. They were the “gatherers.” The food gathered by the women helped the group eat when the men were unsuccessful in finding food. Most people died at a very early age because of hunger, disease, or injury.

The people of the Old Stone Age left cave paintings behind. Most of the paintings are of animals. Some of the paintings show people hunting and gathering food or taking part in religious ceremonies. These paintings have helped us understand the lives and religious beliefs of the early people that lived during the Old Stone Age.