Human Evolution and the First Stone Tools
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Approximately 500,000 years ago, during the Pleistocene epoch, a group of *Homo heidelbergensis* crossed the land bridge connecting France and England, setting up shop in what is now East Anglia. While much of their everyday lives remains inaccessible to us all these years later, we do know that they established camps where they butchered animals won on the hunt, where they processed hides and fibers, where they cooked and feasted. This evolutionary cousin of ours has since gone extinct, but the durable stone tools they produced and used for these tasks have endured, stubborn testaments to *Homo heidelbergensis*’s capabilities. By way of donations from academic and amateur collections, early stone tools like these have made their way to the Haffenreffer Museum, where students in my *Human Evolution* course have had the opportunity to engage with some of these oldest surviving artifacts.

With each stone tool technology, students have observed the patterns that paleoanthropologists and archaeologists use to make arguments about the course of human evolution. From *Homo heidelbergensis* to *Homo sapiens*, there are clear changes in fine motor skills, cognitive complexity, and symbolic thinking that are immediately clear when looking at these objects up close. Beyond the specific objectives I have for my *Human Evolution* students, the activity imparts other important lessons. Most of my students are first years, sophomores, or otherwise new to Anthropology, and this exercise was their first visit to the Haffenreffer. For these students, the wonder of seeing real examples of artifacts discussed in class was palpable. One student mused on how remarkable it was to hold a tool that was made hundreds of thousands of years ago by hands of a now-extinct species.

The story of human evolution is, in part, about the entanglement of people with objects, how *Homo sapiens* as a species has distinguished itself through the things it has made. How lucky we are at Brown—with access to the Haffenreffer’s Paleolithic collections—to teach this story from its beginning!

Teaching