

THE HADZA ORAL TRADITION

The Hadza of Tanzania continue to live as hunter-gatherers, just as they have for thousands of years. Historians believe that studying the Hadza today can reveal a great deal about early human life.

The ancestors of the Hadza are thought to have lived on their territory for tens of thousands of years. Hadza oral history supports this theory. So does archaeological evidence, which suggests that the area has been inhabited by hunter-gatherers much like the Hadza for at least 50 000 years.

The Hadza have no written language, so they share stories about their past through word of mouth. Hadza Elders are responsible for passing down their traditions, stories, and teachings.

Hadza oral history identifies four periods called epochs. Each epoch was inhabited by a particular group of ancestors.

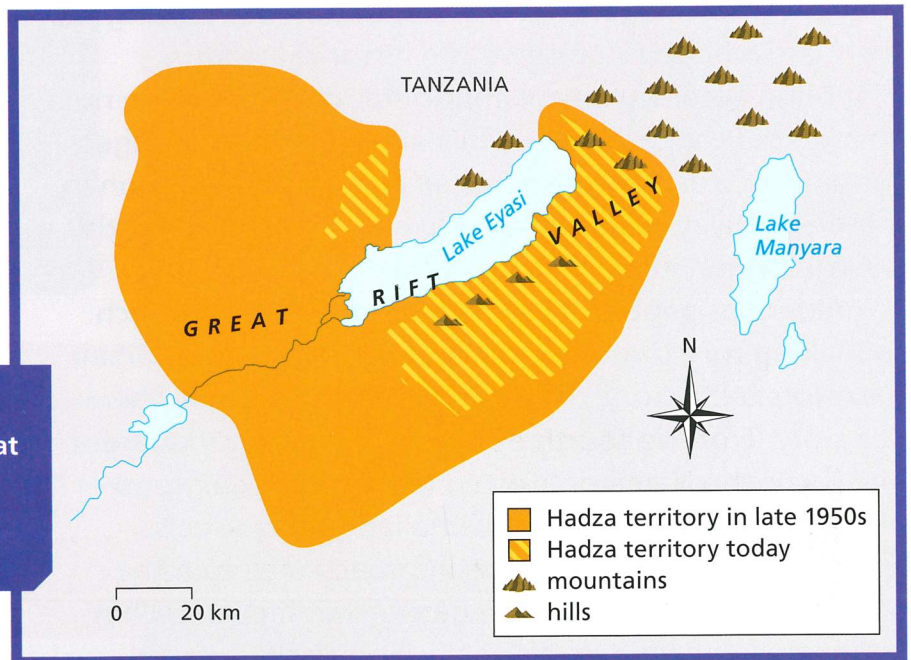
“Much of the local forest and bush [in Hadza territory] has been burned to make way for crops, or has been razed to produce water holes for irrigation.”
– Antonia Mortensen and Daisy Carrington, CNN

First Epoch

The Hadza call their earliest ancestors, and the very first people on their land, the Akakaanebe. According to the Hadza oral history, the Akakaanebe were large and strong, with hairy bodies. They did not have tools or fire. To kill an animal for food, the Akakaanebe stared at it until it fell dead. Then they ate it raw.

The Akakaanebe did not build houses. They slept under trees during the dry season, much as the Hadza do today.

Where the Hadza Live



The map shows Hadza territory in the late 1950s and today. **Q:** What do you notice? How would what you notice affect the ability of the Hadza to continue their lifestyle?

A Hadza woman and man set off to forage for food. **Q:** Examine the photo. What evidence do you see of knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation?



Second Epoch

The ancestors who lived in the second epoch are called the Tlaatlanebe. They were also large people, but they were not hairy. Hadza stories say that Earth, which had been very wet, became dry. This change enabled the Tlaatlanebe to use fire to cook meat. Animals started to mistrust people, so the Tlaatlanebe used dogs to hunt. The Tlaatlanebe were the first to use medicine, and they lived in caves.

Third Epoch

The ancestors of the third epoch are called the Hamakwabe. They were smaller in size, and they built houses that were similar to the Hadza houses of today. The Hamakwabe used containers for cooking and bows and arrows for hunting. They made contact with other groups, trading for iron to make knives and arrowheads.

Fourth Epoch

The people of the fourth epoch include today's Hadza. They are called the Hamaishonebe, meaning "modern."

Q: Think about what you have learned about how *Homo sapiens* evolved. What other evidence of early humans supports the stories told by the Hadza, and vice versa?