

Homo Britannicus: The Incredible Story of Human Life in Britain

Chris Stringer

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Chris Stringer's *Homo Britannicus* is the epic history of life in Britain, from man's very first footsteps through to the present day.

When did the first people arrive here? What did they look like? How did they survive? Who were the Neanderthals?

Chris Stringer takes us back to when it was so tropical we lived here alongside hippos, elephants and sabre-toothed tigers or to times so cold we hunted reindeer and mammoth, and to others even colder when we were forced to flee a wall of ice. Here is the incredible truth about our ancestors' journey over millennia - and a glimpse of the future to see how it might continue.

'A beautiful book on a fascinating subject, written by a world authority'
Richard Dawkins

'Superlative ... Pure stimulation from beginning to end'
Bill Bryson

'Every chapter contains something new, and throws up a fresh location that deserves to become famous'
Sunday Times

'This important and eminently readable book pulls together all the best scientific work on the first humans to inhabit Britain'
Tony Robinson

Chris Stringer is Britain's foremost expert on human origins and works in the Department of Palaeontology at the Natural History Museum. He also currently directs the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain project, aimed at reconstructing the first detailed history of how and when Britain was occupied by early humans. His previous books include *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity*, *The Complete World of Human Evolution* and most recently, *Homo Britannicus*, which was shortlisted for the Royal Society Science Book of the Year in 2007.

Homo Britannicus: The Incredible Story of Human Life in Britain Details

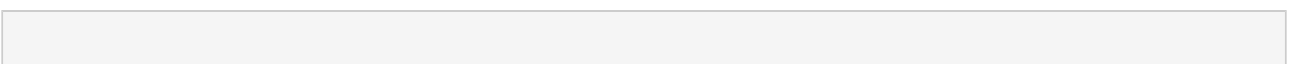
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From Reader Review Homo Britannicus: The Incredible Story of Human Life in Britain for online ebook

Michael Cayley says

A book about prehistoric hominids in Britain. Published in 2008, it has to some extent been overtaken by new research in a fast-developing field. It is not for the casual reader. Chris Stringer draws out in some detail the evidence on which experts have tried to reach conclusions. Despite the ostensible subject-matter, for me the main interest lay in the explanation of the widely - and at times very suddenly - varying climate over the last million years or so, and the effects of that on the geography of ice-free regions and on the fauna that inhabited them. A final chapter focuses on current concerns about climate change and seems artificially tacked on to the book.

Nikki says

I only had the chance to skim through this, because the library was tired of renewing it for me (not really, they're excellent to me), but it's an amazing resource. Limited, of course, in that it examines the development of humans in Britain, which doesn't allow for taking into account other parts of the story. And indeed, it was written in 2008, so I'm not sure if some of the vital parts of the human story were available then — when were the Denisovan caves discovered and published about? It's also pretty obviously for the layman (which would normally include me! but I've done so much reading on the subject, going over the basics again doesn't work for me).

It's a well-presented book, with plenty of photography, illustrations, etc. It links in the story of humans in Britain with the issue of climate change, which is on the one hand understandable — occupation of Britain fluctuated over and over again as Ice Ages came and went, and once hippos lived in the wild in Britain! — and a little disingenuous. Obviously, I'm not looking for a lecture on climate change when I want to read about humans.

(Not to mention: the choir? You're preaching to it. I'm well aware of the cycles of climate change on Earth, and their potential effects on all species and countries. And to me, it doesn't matter whether we're driving climate change or not. We're using an unsustainable fuel supply to do so, and in many other ways it measurably damages our world. Let's fix that and then wrangle about whether or not it's fixed the climate too.)

Originally posted [here](#).

Moataz says

That was quiet a journey, despite how short it was. The book is great, not beautifully written, neither capturing. The author is more a researcher than a writer. It's a short book and not detailed, so I had to read outside the book every now and then. At first, I didn't understand why there was a special book dedicated to human evolution history in Britain, but reading the book I understood how the discoveries in Britain shaped our understanding to the evolving of the human race. I loved the most, the begining of the book (about the

old discoveries and how old christian scientists interpreted the fossils they saw.), and the last part about Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons.

Steve says

In *Homo Britannicus*, Stringer explores the very early human occupation of Britain, from the first evidence of hominid activity some 700,000 years ago to the arrival of modern humans about 12,000 years ago. This vast stretch of time reveals a startlingly different Britain - one whose climate lurched from ice age to subtropical, and whose inhabitants would go from hunting reindeer and mammoth to living alongside hippos and elephants. For those of us more accustomed to red squirrels and "spits and spots of rain", the mental picture of such a volatile and unrecognizable Britain is one of this book's pleasures.

Stringer begins by examining the topic of fossils generally, chronicling the shift from Biblical explanations to scientific ones. For those who still buy into the religious-based myth that mankind (indeed the earth itself) is a mere 6,000 years old, Stringer details the numerous dating methods and spells out just how we know what we know. He devotes much of the book to revealing the key fossil sites, and pieces together the evidence from these different locations to create a picture of the first hominids to inhabit Britain.

Elegantly written, the text is not overly-technical, and it's noticeable that Chris displays an open mind throughout, taking an honest and measured approach to conflicting evidence and uncertainty - the sign of a true scientist. Good quality colour photographs of the artefacts also help this book come alive, as do the various black and white maps that pinpoint key fossil sites. If you have the slightest interest in Britain's distant origins, I would recommend this.

Paul says

This book didn't really deliver what it promised: instead of a good overview of the human predecessors and ancestors that have lived in Britain, how they lived, etc., '*Homo Britannicus*' is more of a pat on the back for archaeology as a discipline - a bit contrived, as it is written by an archaeologist.

There are lots of references to dig sites around Britain (gets confusing after a while - did Boxgrove man come before Swanscombe man or vice versa? Etc.), most of which contain inconclusive materials, and lots of lists of the fauna that lived in Britain at certain times. There are interesting tidbits here and there but the book didn't give me any more info on *homo heidelbergensis*, *neanderthalensis*, *archaic sapiens* etc., and that's what I was looking for.

In all, this is a strange book. Parts of it read like a pamphlet for AHOB, the author's ongoing archaeology project, and the last chapter is pretty much an essay on global warming that has nothing at all to do with the humans who lived in Britain from 700,000 years ago other than the implication that "the climate changed back then and they had a hard time so we'll probably have a hard time too if we carry on". It seems like Stringer is far more passionate about climate than unearthing the human past, and as a result he doesn't really try to understand ancient humans.

Iset says

My initial thoughts upon completing this book were that it was too short and over all too quickly. So I guess on the positive side it was an easy read and not a slog. But I expected more. There's a prologue in which Stringer summarises the book's aims, an introduction in which he details the work of early antiquarians, a final chapter in which Stringer talks about climate change over the entirety of human history and going into the future, and a final section in which all of the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain members talk about what they do. So only pages 35 to 159 actually discuss early human occupation in Britain. Of a 242 page book. That's only 124 pages on the book's actual subject, strictly speaking, and the other 118 pages are kind of superfluous. Plus a prologue which doesn't have page numbers. Needless to say I feel a little disappointed about that. I was hoping for a really thorough read about Neanderthals, homo erectus, and homo sapiens in Britain in the Stone Age. It'd be okay if all of these add-ons were small additions to a much larger, meatier main text, but the main text is so short. Stringer discusses climate, flora, fauna, and archaeological work, but I was hoping for more on the actual people. What Stringer does write is clear, accessible, and lucid, and does provide a focus on specifically British material, and one can hardly sniff at Stringer's extensive professional credentials... But this is just not what I was looking for.

7 out of 10

Shaun Hatelly says

I found the parts about the prehistory of Britain fascinating - and that is after all why I was reading the book, but I found the discussion of the current climatic situation in the final chapter overpowering and out of place. It wasn't that it was bad, and I think it was important and if I had read it as a standalone piece I'd have been impressed by it - but it seemed to go from a book that was talking specifically about Britain to one that was suddenly about problems on a global scale without clearly laying out their implications for Britain. When the whole book has laid out the case about how warm periods have been good for human habitation in Britain, to some extent I came away with the impression that while climate change may be disastrous for the world in general, it might actually be good for Britain - and I am sure that is not what the author was intending to suggest.

Dale Noble says

I am sorely disappointed in this book, particularly with the author. For the most part, this is an informative guide to the history of human habitation of the British mainland which I would have highly recommended. However, the final chapter of this book offsets the rest of the content (at least for myself) as it tenuously links the focus of the book into the phenomenon of 'global warming'. The forced shift that is taken here highlights a blatant attempt on the authors behalf to jump onto the climate science bandwagon that marked the mid-2000's, something that I am very disappointed to find in this book. I read this book to learn more about human evolution and the rise of Homo Sapiens habitation upon the British mainland. I did not want to be lectured about the climatic stress that we as humans are putting upon the world, if I had wanted that I would have read something more closely associated with said subject. As I said, this turn sorely disappointed me and ruined an otherwise good read hence why I gave it such a low rating. Without the problematic chapter, this book would have easily received a four star rating, as it is shame on the author for cashing in on a subject that had no place in this book.

Marcus says

Reasonably interesting read about the glacial fluctuations that affected humans in the British Isles.

Essentially the book describes various sites and what was found there which have enabled construction of a prehistoric timeframe for human occupation in Europe.

I found it interesting to read about the tools found and what this might tell researchers about human cultures at the time, also the time-scales involved are mind-blowing!

However like other books on this topic that I've read, it got a little dry, and a speculative last chapter on climate change also felt a bit out of place, i.e., documented past changes versus what might change in hundreds of years.

Richard Thomas says

A good description of the course of human life in Britain which doubtless will be superseded by time, archaeology and greater knowledge. Presumably the acceptance that there was some interbreeding of the Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens will necessitate a revised edition. Notwithstanding this, it is a scholarly book essential to an understanding of the emergence of man in the Islands.

Pete daPixie says

Excellent read this! The author, Chris Stringer is research leader in Human Origins at the Natural History Museum in London and his depth and wide range of expertise on the subjects of archaeology, human evolution, genetics, anthropology and even climate science fill every page.

'Homo Britannicus' is such a well written and entertaining journey across hundreds of thousands of years of human history. Stringer takes the reader along a fascinating road of discovery that has provided our current understanding. From the fog of biblical timescales and geological ignorance through the rapid acceleration of archaeological finds with modern scientific analysis.

As a long time member of Greenpeace I also found the final chapter 'Our Challenging Climates' to be fully in tune with my own opinions of what may well lie ahead in the human story in the very near future.

Richard Lee says

This is a very comprehensive and detailed description of man's early evolution focusing on Britain. It avoids technical language wherever possible but because the wealth of information it's not easy for the average reader to absorb it all. It helps that the book is well illustrated, although some illustrations (like old newspaper headlines of archaeological discoveries) don't add much to the text.

Terri says

There is a reason that this book was shortlisted in 2007 for the Royal Society Prizes for Science Non Fiction. It is brilliantly done. Chris Stringer brings you pre-historic humans in an accessible way. That does not mean that it is playful and whimsical, quite the opposite. Neither is it dry and exhaustive which may be what you expect from a book such as this.

I relished this book all the way through. Loved it. Didn't want it to end. And then I hit a wall. A far too long chapter preaching about climate change.

Climate Change. Yes it's real. Yes we're all screwed if we don't lift our game. But it is not what I expected from this book. It went from fascinating archaeological finds in caves with suspect clay roofs to, here's the ways we can stop climate change and if we don't do this by this time, here's what is going to happen, and here's what some countries are doing to stop it and will it be too late.

If I wanted such details and preaching on climate change, I would have picked up a climate change book. I wanted prehistoric finds and archaeology. It gave me the latter for most of the book, so I enjoyed much of the ride.

I feel it would have served this book better to have had this climate change chapter as an 'Afterword'. A *read it if you want* type Afterword, a closing comment.

I was disappointed with the back end of *Homo britannicus* and up until then it was a 5 star book and I was thinking about adding it to my favourites.

I still recommend it though. Ignoring that hiccup, this book is fabulously transportive.

Dana says

Human ancestors in Africa turned to be carnivory about two m.y.a

Three ancient routs into Europe have been proposed : the most abvious one is via western Asia- either from Caucasus (modern country such as Georgia and Armenia) or from Levant, including countries such as Syria and palastine.

Two other posibble routs have been proposed as will via north Africa into southern Europe. Across the Mediterranean. From Morocco into Spain or Gibraltar. While a central one may have been led from Tunisia to Italy via Sicily. The ice age helped by lowering the Mediterranean and exposing more lands bridges between Africa and Europe.

Homo ergaster in Africa gave a rise to Homo Georgicus in Europe and Homo Antecessor. And to homo Erctus in S.E. Asia. Which gave a birth to Homo floressiensis in S.E Asia. Homo ergaster, it gave a rise to Homo Heidelbergensis in Africa and then later Neanderthal in Europe and also Homo Sapiens in Africa.

the Earth changed its orbit from the sun. This was the pacemaker of the ice age

Homo Floressiensis : known as Hobbit. They went extenct because of a volcanic eruption of Keli Mutu volcano.

CFCs is the name of the gas that have been widely used in sprays, refrigerators which was affecting the atmosphere

Stephen Dawson says

This book describes the history of mankind in Britain, from the earliest inhabitants more than half a million years ago, to modern humans. The book explains the archaeological evidence found so far and how that fits with our knowledge of the major climatic shifts over the past million years, and in turn how those impacted on the natural world in which man tried to survive. It is accompanied by a wealth of attractive illustrations, some directly relevant, some less so.

The book is very readable and not hard going at all in any one section, but the style does seem disjointed at times and the many strands of evidence, while presented well, aren't always tied together to create a fully coherent picture - or at least that is where the effort on the part of the reader is needed.

Nevertheless, it is a fascinating read, offering the lay reader a glimpse of a story which cannot fail to capture the imagination.
