

Imagine someone coming into your kitchen and taking a few tools, a pan and your garbage.

Then they bury everything in the woods. 12,000 years later an archeologist is trying to figure who you were.

What was important to you, what video games you played, what you believed in

and what informed your decisions. Because you happened to live during a remarkable time in human history:

The Planetary Revolution, when humanity transitioned, becoming a multiplanetary species.

In that time, our numbers would explode by orders of magnitude, our technology and standard of living would improve to levels previously thought impossible

and our self conception would change forever. And all the future archaeologist has to learn about is your junk in the woods.

While we can only hope this will be someone's problem in 12,000 years, we have the same problem today.

We are trying to reconstruct a revolution that took place 12,000 years ago.

Today, only shadows remain of the people who experienced our distant past as their present.

What Remains from our past

We can look at our present in crispy 4K, in color and sound.

Three generations ago the world was just black and white.

One more generation and we see the world through blurred photographs.

Further back paintings and texts become our main way of experiencing the past.

A mere 20 generations before us today, every written word had to be copied by hand

and reports became more scarce and less reliable.

The first historian lived a mere 100 generations ago.

Before him, there are only epics and legends and dead kings bragging on pieces of stone.

250 generations ago there are only fragments left in the ground and images stripped of their original meaning.

Eventually humanity becomes basically invisible.

Still, we do know some things about our ancestors.

Let's try to tell their story and what it means for us today.

#1 The Greatest Transition in Human History

For some two million years or roughly 80,000 generations, the life of our ancestors was basically the same.

It was around 20,000 years, or 800 generations ago that the behaviorally modern humans began a process that would change our lifestyle forever.

At first, gradually, for some of us. Then faster for more of us. And then suddenly for almost all of us.

Back then there were about one million modern humans on earth.

Most other human species had died out, probably with a little help from us.

Our ancestors' biology had given them the necessary tools: ,

A general intelligence to understand things a social intelligence to understand each other

and language to express abstract ideas and create new concepts.

These were people just like you. They suffered and experienced joy, were bored, cried and laughed.

They lived in communities of a few dozen people.

They controlled fire and had tools made from wood, stone and bone,

told stories, mourned their dead and created art.

They traded with other tribes, from obsidian to shellfish.

Some hunted big game and were very mobile, others relied more on plants they collected

and others mostly stayed in one area with an abundance of seafood.

This was the common state of humanity for most of our history.

Until a slow transition, step by step, turned into a revolution.

#2 Step by Step

The first solid evidence for this stems from the Jordan Valley,

where our ancestors collected wild wheat more than 20,000 years ago.

They noticed that seeds in the ground made more plants the next year.

If they put good ones in one place, the next year they had more of the good ones.

This was a great supplement to hunting and gathering.

You could prepare some crops, return next year, build a temporary settlement and have a secure food supply.

Our ancestors used these bonus crops to bake the first bread and to brew the first beer.

With every generation, they gathered deeper knowledge about the plants and animals around them

and how to manipulate them to their advantage.

But there was a lot to learn.

Very slowly, from generation to generation pockets of knowledge expanded

and were passed along to be expanded again.

This early agriculture started to drastically reduce the space our ancestors needed to feed one individual.

Which made it possible to stay in one place longer.

Around 12,000 years ago these little pieces of progress had reached a critical mass.

Most of the calories we consume today stem from about 15 different founder crops

that humans began to domesticate in earnest in the next few thousand years.

What we call the agricultural revolution was not a thing that began suddenly one day.

It was a slow process driven by small groups over many generations.

Eventually gradual change gave rise to a new era.

#3 The Human Era.

During the next few thousand years, progress would speed up and turn hunter gatherers into farmers who lived in villages, towns and then cities.

When farmers moved into new areas they replaced the nomadic tribes or turned them into farmers too.

This was neither easy nor painless.

In the early days people had a diverse diet made of up to 250 different plants and animals.

For some of the groups transitioning to agriculture the variation in their diets declined drastically and some even seem to have been undernourished.

And living close together and with animals

created a breeding ground for disease.

Virtually every infectious disease caused by microorganisms that have adapted to humans arose in the last 10,000 years.

Cholera, smallpox, measles, influenza, chickenpox and malaria.

Mortality, especially among children, rose drastically.

Still, our numbers grew because living in the same place enabled women to bear far more children than before –

and for a farmer more kids mean more hands to work the fields.

Even with more people dying younger, villages and towns grew. The number of humans on earth exploded.

About 100 generations after the beginning of the Human era, there were already four million of us.

This increased the need for food and forced people to come up with ever more efficient ways of producing calories -

solidifying our new lifestyle.

Going back to hunting and gathering would just have meant death by starvation for most.

One question remains unanswered: Why?

Why would people exchange the freedom of living off nature with a huge variety in food for the grind of agriculture and often more limited diets?

Nobody knows for sure. Climate change seems to have made the transition possible

and some scientists argue that it was caused by external factors like undernourishment or overpopulation,

both highly contested.

Today the most widely accepted idea is that it was a deliberate choice, made by countless communities around the globe.

Maybe it is also connected with what makes us human.

The ability to come together, develop shared identities and exchange stories and knowledge.

Some archaeologists think that groups of hunter gatherers traveled long and far to celebrate, to hold feasts and rituals.

They would have used these occasions to talk about their version of innovation:

better hunting and tool making techniques, how to catch and breed animals and which plants could be collected and multiplied,

maybe they even exchanged seeds.

It is not unlikely that these gatherings were the catalysts that spread the knowledge of agriculture

through the many isolated groups of humanity.

Ultimately ending a lifestyle that was common to our species for thousands of generations.

So by being able to come together, celebrate, share and learn from one another,

these humans might have taken the steps that lead to our modern world and we have much to be grateful for.

We are still the same humans today, even if it often doesn't feel that way.

Maybe it is time to come together to share what we know and celebrate our existence once again,

to begin another peaceful transition, maybe the planetary revolution, that will change everything once more.

So hopefully, in another 12,000 years, our descendants will look back on us today with gratitude,

for the amazing world they are able to inhabit.

To celebrate the achievements of our ancestors in the last 12,000 years and to look with hope towards the next 12,000

we present you with the fifth Human Era Calendar for the year 12,021 -

this time it is all about the journey of humanity, beginning tens of thousands of years ago,

leading into the revolution in agriculture, to ancient high civilizations and the beginning of modern times, culminating in a vision for our future.

You can get the limited Edition now until we sell out and then never again.

As always the calendar features 12 illustrated pages printed on high quality paper in Europe and the US.

And this year the cover is especially shiny.

Not only does the calendar look great on walls and makes it easier to dream about a glorious future and realize how far we have come as a species.

It is also the best way to support kurzgesagt. The calendar enables us to put in the time our videos need and release them for free, for everyone.

If you want, you can get the calendar with a Hoodie or infographic posters or plushie. We've made a few deals for you.

Thank you so much to the thousands of people who get the calendar every year and to the birbs who love what we try to do on this channel.

We wish you a happy year 12,021 – And let's all hope that it will be less exciting than 12,020!