

Scientists find sign cave dwellers took care of elderly

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Workers carry out an excavation at the Atapuerca archaeology site in July 2010. Scientists said Monday they had uncovered evidence suggesting cave dwellers who lived in northern Spain some 500,000 years ago took care of their elderly and infirm.

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University of Madrid palaeontologists discovered the partial skeleton of a male of a European species ancestral to the [Neanderthals](#) who suffered from a stoop and possibly needed a stick to remain upright, they said in a statement.

"This individual would be probably impaired for hunting, among other

activities. His survival during a considerable period with these impairments allows us to hypothesize that the nomadic group of which this individual was part would provide special care to aged individuals," it said.

The remains suggested the cave dweller died when he was over 45. They were found at Atapuerca in northern Spain's Burgos province, the site of several [caves](#) containing evidence of prehistoric human occupation.

The results of the study have been accepted for publication in the online edition of the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) of the United States, the scientists said.

An earlier study carried out at the same site in 2009 concluded that the cave dwellers who lived there were cannibals who valued the flesh of children and [adolescents](#).

In 1994, palaeontologists also unearthed at Atapuerca the fossilised remains of Homo antecessor, or "Pioneer Man", believed to date back 800,000 years.

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