

Vittrup Man crossed over from forager to farmer before being sacrificed in Denmark, study finds

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The cranial remains of Vittrup Man, who ended up in a bog after his skull had been crushed by at least eight heavy blows. Photo: Stephen Freiheit. Credit: Fischer et al., 2024, PLOS ONE, CC-BY 4.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Vittrup Man was born along the Scandinavian coast before moving to Denmark, where he was later sacrificed, according to a study published in *PLOS ONE* by Anders Fischer of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and colleagues.

Vittrup Man is the nickname of a Stone Age skeleton recovered from a peat bog in Northwest Denmark, dating to between 3300–3100 BC. The fragmented nature of the remains, including a smashed skull, indicates that he was killed in a ritualistic sacrifice, a common practice in this region at this time.

After a DNA study found Vittrup Man's genetic signature to be distinct from contemporary, local skeletons, Fischer and colleagues were inspired to combine additional evidence to reconstruct the life history of this Stone Age individual at an unprecedented resolution.

Strontium, carbon and [oxygen isotopes](#) from Vittrup Man's tooth enamel indicate a childhood spent along the coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Corroborating this, [genetic analysis](#) found a close relationship between Vittrup Man and Mesolithic people from Norway and Sweden. Additional isotope and protein analysis of the teeth and bones indicate a shift in diet from coastal food (marine mammals and fish) in [early life](#) to farm food (including sheep or goat) in later life, a transition that happened in the later teen years.



End of life for Vittrup Man. Credit: Anders Fischer (contents) and Niels Bach

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These results suggest that Vittrup Man spent his early years in a northern foraging society before relocating to a farming society in Denmark. It isn't clear why this individual moved, though the authors suggest he might have been a trader or captive who became integrated into local society. Mysteries remain about Vittrup Man, but this detailed understanding of his geographic and dietary life history provides new insights into interactions between Mesolithic and Neolithic societies in Europe.

The authors add, "To our knowledge, this is the first time that research has been able to map a north European inhabitant's life history in such a high degree of detail and in such high distance of time."

More information: Vittrup Man—The life-history of a genetic foreigner in Neolithic Denmark, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0297032](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0297032)

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