

A Brief History of the Bow

Whenever archers get together there are always those among them who would have us believe because our ancestors shot a bow five thousand or fifty thousand years ago that we moderns can shoot a bow instinctively and all that we have to do to hit a mark or bag our buck is to take a deep breath, look at the target, draw the arrow back to the ear, and let fly.

Well, if you buy that line, you will not be any better a marksman than your remote ancestors. Legends about Robin Hood's merry men to the contrary, your ancestors were inferior marksmen by modern standards. With primitive equipment, they developed the art of stalking game to a high degree in order to close to point-blank-range to register a hit.

In the thousands of years since man first stood on his feet and walked, the period in which he has used missile weapons is of relatively short duration. No one can fix the exact "time" of man's arrival on earth and even as late as the year 1860, the majority of scientists believed man's existence covered a span of less than 6,000 years.

Since that date, evidence of man's antiquity yielded through the discovery of ancient graves, fossilized remains found in geological formations laid down in the past, and excavations carried out in the exploration of caves in France and elsewhere in Western Europe, permitted archaeologists to establish that man was certainly in existence at the beginning of the Pleistocene period. Unfortunately no sure means of estimating the duration of these periods in terms of years is as yet known to geologists. Estimates vary from two hundred and fifty thousand years to one million and five hundred thousand years as the length of the period. The most reliable evidence now at our disposal indicates that man made his first appearance in Europe late in this period between forty thousand and twenty-five thousand years ago and near the end of the Fourth Glacial Age.

From ten thousand to twelve thousand years ago, Neolithic man migrated to Western Europe. The Neolithic men of Europe were white men ancestral to the modern Europeans. This stage in culture is characterized in part by the abundance of stone arrow heads. And so we conclude that at this relatively recent stage in our human history our ancestors learned to use the bow. The origin of the bow, however, is lost in the uncertainties of fixing exact dates for the different cultures of mankind. Excellent drawings of archers are found in the Palaeolithic carvings at Castellon, Spain and elsewhere. These carvings date back according to anthropologists from fifteen thousand to thirty-five thousand years.

In Asia, during the early periods of recorded history, great military nations used a composite, reflexed bow of horn, wood, and sinew, that had a drawing weight up to one hundred pounds. The ancient Greeks, Assyrians, Turks, and Chinese, were adepts in the use of this type of bow. The metal bow, however, is a product of the twentieth century, while one of the latest developments in the bowyer's art is the fibre-glass bow.

Even a casual reader or a student of history must conclude that individual aimed fire of missile weapons is a relatively modern development. The tactics employed by the military nations of the, past in the use of missile weapons such as the bow and in still more recent times, firearms, are indicative of the little importance attached to accurate individual marksmanship in the relatively recent past.

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About the Author

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