

The word "osteo", comes from the Greek word "osteon", meaning bones. Archaeologists who study the bones of human skeletons are called osteoarchaeologists. We can find out a lot about a person when we study their bones – for

example, what sort of food they ate, if they were healthy, what diseases they might have had, their weight, their height, what they looked like, what their job might have been, who they were related to, and even where they were brought up!



The difference between a male pelvis (on the left) and a female pelvis (on the right).



Ötzi the Iceman

Sometimes, osteoarchaeologists only find quite small pieces of broken bone. Other times, they can be lucky enough to find an entire body, just like when Ötzi the Iceman was found in 1991. Ötzi, a very well preserved skeleton of a man, partially buried in ice, was found by two German tourists who were walking in the mountains between Italy and Austria.

Male or female?

Archaeologists can tell if bones are from men or women, by looking at the size of the bones. Men usually have longer and larger bones (especially the chest bone, and the skull), while women usually have a bigger pelvis than men.

How old is that skeleton?

Most of our bones don't stop growing until we're about 26 years old. This means that archaeologists can use this information to tell how old someone was when they died.



We can also look at teeth to see how old a person might be. If a skeleton still has milk teeth (or baby teeth), this would show that the it is probably under three years old. By the time we are six years old, our milk teeth will begin falling out, and our adult teeth will begin to grow.