

We are what we eat: Hunting the Hadza way with bows, arrows and ingenuity

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Image 1. Portrait of a Hadzabe (or Hadza) young bushman. The Hadza are an indigenous ethnic group in north-central Tanzania, living around Lake Eyasi in the central Rift Valley and in the neighboring Serengeti Plateau. The population of Hadza tribe is just under 1,000. They are among the last hunter-gatherers in the world. Photo from Getty.

Matthieu Paley was tracking the history of what we humans eat. He had already traveled to five different countries. Then came Tanzania, the last stop in his journey. Below, Paley describes some of his experiences in the African country.



April 2014

I am a photographer and I take pictures for National Geographic magazine. I came to Tanzania to look for a community that doesn't get any of its food from outside sources. I wanted to take pictures of a people who get their food in the ancient way. Everything they ate either had to be gathered, hunted, grown or herded.

I decided to visit the Hadza people, who have what are probably the most ancient food customs on Earth.

The meat the Hadza eat comes only from hunting, which they do with bow and arrow. To experience a Hadza hunt, I tailed along with two hunters, named Kauda and January.

We walked for three days in search of game. We shot at a warthog, but the arrow just bounced off its head. Other animals were too far away to shoot at.

Then, we saw a huge giraffe in the distance. January took off his sandals to avoid making noise and walked barefoot and half-bent for half a mile. When he was close enough he carefully aimed and shot off a poisoned arrow. Not for fun or because I was there, but to get food for himself and his people.

No Giraffe Meat This Time

Large animals like giraffes provide so much meat that the whole Hadza camp moves next to a kill. The camp is made up of between 20 and 30 people.

January's arrow went in near the giraffe's stomach. We then tracked the wounded animal for over an hour. It started to get "drunk" as the poison took effect. After a while, January said we needed to return to camp before it got dark. We would continue tracking in the morning.



The next day, we set out to look for the giraffe, but the track had grown faint. The giraffe had survived the poison and moved on.

On our way back to the camp, Kauda spotted a hyrax sitting on a rock and managed to kill the creature. It looked like a large rat, though I've read hyraxes are distantly related to elephants. That was the end of my hunting story. Instead of a large and mighty giraffe, we had to settle for a small, ratlike creature.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

The Hadza do not grow crops, herd animals or even store any food. There is nothing to eat at camp in the morning. Each day, they walk in the surrounding plain for a few hours and gather berries, honey, tubers and baobab-fruits. And yes, sometimes they kill animals. However, they do not hunt for cruel fun or out of greed, but simply to feed themselves.

Our ancestors all had that lifestyle at some point in history. The Hadza are one of the oldest peoples on Earth, perhaps even the very oldest. Some scientists believe they have been where they are for 50,000 years.

The Hadza travel from place to place, with no fixed home. They live in camps made of twigs covered with grass, like upside-down nests. When they leave a camp behind, the twigs and grass fall off and go back into the soil. There are no graveyards, no piles of garbage, no traces left behind. Over thousands of years, the Hadza have caused no damage to their environment.

What struck me most about the Hadza is how happy they seem. In their language, there is no word for "worry." Worrying is related to either the future or to the past. The Hadza truly live in the moment. When you spend your time focusing on the here and now, on day-to-day living, there is no need for worrying about unimportant things. The Hadza may have something to teach us.

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Quiz

1 Read the following selections from the section "April 2014."

I am a photographer and I take pictures for National Geographic magazine. I came to Tanzania to look for a community that doesn't get any of its food from outside sources. I wanted to take pictures of a people who get their food in the ancient way. Everything they ate either had to be gathered, hunted, grown or herded.

I decided to visit the Hadza people, who have what are probably the most ancient food customs on Earth.

Which sentence from the selections BEST helps the reader to understand the food customs of the Hadza people?

- (A) I came to Tanzania to look for a community that doesn't get any of its food from outside sources.
- (B) I wanted to take pictures of a people who get their food in the ancient way.
- (C) Everything they ate either had to be gathered, hunted, grown or herded.
- (D) I decided to visit the Hadza people, who have what are probably the most ancient food customs on Earth.

2 What is the relationship between the way the Hadza live and their environment?

- (A) The Hadza spend a lot of time killing many different animals for fun in their environment.
- (B) The Hadza move from place to place leaving piles of garbage behind in their environment.
- (C) The Hadza spend a great deal of time growing crops so they can get food from their environment.
- (D) The Hadza move from place to place without causing any damage to their environment.

3 What effect did the Hadza have on the author?

- (A) He started to worry more often.
- (B) He decided that food from supermarkets was bad.
- (C) He liked how happy they seem.
- (D) He decided he would start hunting for his food more often.

4 Read the section "No Giraffe Meat This Time."

Which sentence explains WHY the author and the Hadza hunters were willing to spend more than an hour tracking the wounded giraffe?

- (A) Large animals like giraffes provide so much meat that the whole Hadza camp moves next to a kill.
- (B) After a while, January said we needed to return to camp before it got dark.
- (C) The next day, we set out to look for the giraffe, but the track had grown faint.
- (D) The giraffe had survived the poison and moved on.