

Stone Age Kaustinen – From a Seashore Settlement to a Great Village

Life Began by the Sea

It may be hard to imagine, but around 6,000 years ago the sea reached the site of what is now Kaustinen's church village. As the land gradually rose after the Ice Age, the shoreline slowly retreated westwards. Sea bays became lakes, and islands turned into peninsulas. This changing coastline provided excellent conditions for both wildlife and people.

Stone Age communities lived from nature's resources. Seal hunting was their principal livelihood, while fishing, hunting and the gathering of plants and berries also provided food.

Kaustinen Was One of Finland's Largest Stone Age Villages

Seal hunting required cooperation, which encouraged people to settle in large communities near river mouths. The earliest major settlement was located at the mouth of the Perho River, but as the land continued to rise, it gradually shifted to the Kangas area near the present-day church village of Kaustinen.

Around 130 house pits have been identified at Kangas in Kaustinen, making it one of Finland's largest Stone Age settlement sites. At its peak, the settlement may have been home to as many as 200–300 people—an exceptionally large community in Stone Age Finland.

At the same time, another settlement developed at the mouth of the Köyhäjoki River in what is now the village of Timonen, where around 50 house pits have been discovered.

Seals Brought Prosperity and Long-Distance Connections

During the Stone Age, the climate was warmer than today and seals were abundant in the Gulf of Bothnia. Rich hunting grounds made permanent settlement possible and allowed large village communities to flourish.

The people of Kaustinen also took part in extensive exchange networks. Amber ornaments and flint artefacts found at Kangas reveal connections with the Baltic region, as neither material occurs naturally in Finland.

Red Ochre Burials Reveal Ancient Beliefs

Stone Age people were often buried close to their dwellings in graves covered with red ochre. The ochre is thought to have symbolised life, blood or rebirth, while the grave goods suggest a belief in life after death.

In 1996, archaeologists excavated three red ochre graves at Kangas in Kaustinen. They uncovered amber ornaments, a stone axe, a flint arrowhead and other personal belongings. Differences in the grave goods may indicate that members of the community already held different roles or social status during the Stone Age.

Our Shared Heritage

Kaustinen's Stone Age settlement sites tell the story of a time when the sea reached the present-day church village and people lived in harmony with the rhythms of nature. Preserved for thousands of years, these archaeological remains help us understand the earliest history of our region.

Please remember: Protected archaeological sites are safeguarded under the Finnish Antiquities Act. They must not be excavated, damaged or altered without official permission.

The coastline in the Kaustinen area approximately 5,000 years ago. Red squares indicate Stone Age settlement sites from that period. Large squares represent major central settlements, or Stone Age villages.

Settlement Sites

1. Isoklumpi
2. Kangas
3. Puumala
4. Käsälänkangas
5. Kirkkoharju 1
6. Harjunlaita–Koppeloharju
7. Kaunola
8. Peltokydönharju
9. Hautaneva
10. Pihlaja
11. Hietaranta
12. Pläkkisenharju 1–2

The map also shows several present-day landmarks and places, marked with blue dots:

- A. Kaustinen Folk Arts Centre
- B. Kaustinen Local Heritage Museum
- C. Kaustinen Church
- D. Lake Tastula

Caption:

Reconstruction of a Stone Age house pit from the Stone Age village at Saarijärvi. House pits are the remains of sturdy rectangular timber houses. The foundations, consisting of three or four courses of logs, were partly dug into the ground. Roof rafters were supported by the timber frame, then covered with a layer of birch bark and topped with turf. The dwellings were always built on dry, sandy ground.

Photo: Lauri Skantsi / K.H. Renlund Museum.

Caption:

Source: National Land Survey of Finland, Open Data, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Second page:

Stone Age house pits can still be clearly seen in the landscape today as circular or oval depressions, typically measuring 8–10 metres across. They are surrounded by a low bank of earth and stones, often with one or two visible entrances. The photograph shows a house pit at the Stone Age settlement site of Pihlaja in Kaustinen. Photo: Lauri Skantsi / K.H. Renlund Museum.

Map: Map of the Stone Age house pits at Kangas in Kaustinen. The house pits are marked with green dots on a shaded digital elevation model produced by the Geological Survey of Finland (GTK). Illustration: Lauri Skantsi / K.H. Renlund Museum.

Stone Age samples in the images, from left to right:

Diamond-shaped flint arrowhead (KM29906:2015) from the red ochre burial at the Stone Age settlement site of Kangas in Kaustinen. Photo: Ritva Bäckman. Finnish Heritage Agency, Archaeological Collections. CC BY 4.0. Available via Finna.

Amber pendant (KM29906:2052) from the red ochre burial at the Stone Age settlement site of Kangas in Kaustinen. Photo: Ritva Bäckman. Finnish Heritage Agency, Archaeological Image Collection, Slide Collection. CC BY 4.0. Available via Finna.

Comb Ware pottery from the Stone Age settlement site of Kangas in Kaustinen (KM29906:1931). Finnish Heritage Agency, Archaeological Collections. CC BY 4.0. Available via Finna.

Amber button from the red ochre burial at the Stone Age settlement site of Kangas in Kaustinen (KM29906:2017). Finnish Heritage Agency, Archaeological Collections. CC BY 4.0. Available via Finna.

Timeline:

- c. 7,000 years ago – The first major settlement at the mouth of the Perho River**
- c. 6,000 years ago – Kangas in Kaustinen emerged on the seashore**
- 5,800–5,000 years ago – The largest phase of settlement at Kangas**
- 1996 – The red ochre burials are excavated**