

# HOME, SWEET COMB

by Trish Puharich

We're not sure how long humans have been gathering honey. Maybe our ancestors were still cave dwellers when they first discovered how delicious it was.



## The natural beehive

In the wild, bees make nests in hollows in trees or rocks.

The first record of humans hunting for honey is in rock paintings found in Europe and Asia. These paintings are about 15 000 years old.

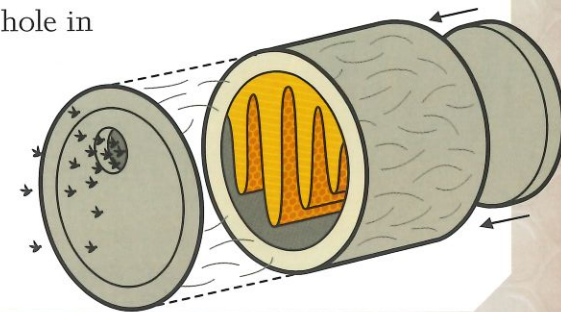
At first, people ate honey when they found bees' nests. Looking after bees' nests began when people settled down to farm animals and grow crops.

Key			
<b>MATERIALS:</b>		<b>BEE-FRIENDLY:</b>	
			yes
			no

## Ancient Egyptian beehives



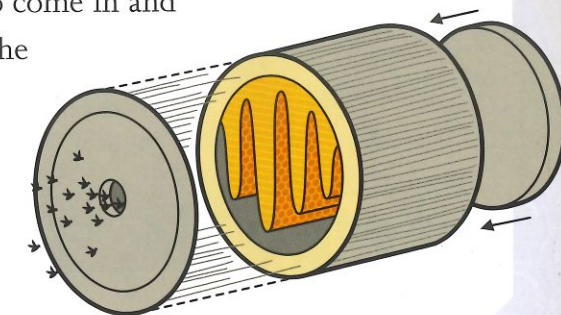
Five thousand years ago, the Egyptians started making hives for honey bees. They made their beehives out of cylindrical pipes. Their design was simple – a hollow pipe with a hole in one end for the bees to come in and out and a removable slab on the other end. Beekeepers used smoke to force the bees out of the hives. Then they removed the slab to get to the honeycomb.



## Ancient Israeli beehives



The oldest beehives ever discovered are 3000 years old. They were found in an ancient city in Israel. These hives were hollow, like the Egyptian pipes. They had a hole at one end for the bees to come in and out. At the other end there was a lid that the beekeepers could remove to reach the honeycomb. The hives were found in rows in a room that could have held up to 200 hives. A bee farm that contains many hives is called an apiary.



## Traditional Ethiopian beehives



Many cultures weave basket beehives because they are cheap and easy to make. Traditional long hives in Ethiopia are placed high up in trees. They are hollow with an open end for the bees to enter. The hive has to be destroyed to remove the honeycomb.



## Log beehives from Poland

These log hives were vertical rather than horizontal. The bees went in and out through the holes in the front. A lid was placed at the top so that beekeepers could reach the honey. When they collected the honey, beekeepers often used sulphur smoke, which killed the bees.

## Skeps and bee boles

In some countries, people made hives from straw and hung them from a hook in a "bee bole" (a niche built into a wall to protect a hive from the weather). The hives were called skeps. There was no framework in the skep for the bees to build their honeycombs. The beekeeper had to destroy the bees and the skep to harvest the honey.

## Top bar beehives

Top bar hives have wooden bars laid across the top of the hive. The bees attach their honeycomb to these. The bars can be lifted out to harvest the honey without destroying the hive or harming the bees.

Top bar hives have been used for thousands of years. They are popular in developing countries because they are easy and cheap to build. They have only three parts: the body of the hive, the top bars, and a roof. No special equipment is needed to harvest the honey. The top bar is lifted, the comb cut off, and the bar replaced.

## The Langstroth beehive

This is the most common hive now used in most parts of the world. Lorenzo Langstroth designed the first of these hives in 1851.

The Langstroth hive is a box with four sides, a roof at the top, and a floor at the bottom. Boxes can be stacked on each other to make room for more honeycombs. This type of hive has removable square or rectangular frames.

## BEE SPACE



Langstroth observed that bees leave a gap of about 7–9 millimetres between honeycombs. This is known as "bee space". Langstroth designed frames with this exact space separating the frames from each other and from other parts of the hive. These frames can be removed without disturbing the queen and the larvae, which are housed in a lower chamber.

If you were keeping bees, what sort of beehive would you choose? Why?

For an activity related to beehives and honeycomb, see Designer Homes on page 28.