



Where I work Mina Weinstein-Evron

Photographed for *Nature* by
Corinna Kern.

I feel very tied to a dig site. In this picture, I am at the mouth of Skhul, one of Israel's Mount Carmel caves set in an abrupt cliff, overlooking coastal plains to the Mediterranean Sea.

The caves are a unique and splendid place, bearing witness to more than half a million years of human evolution. Skhul contains the most ancient ritual-burial sites known, approximately 100,000 years old.

The cliff into which the caves are set is a natural landmark. When people first saw it, maybe 200,000 years ago, they would have been overwhelmed. There is no way to be indifferent to it. It is easy to envisage how the scene would have looked in ancient times, with marshes, grassland and sand dunes.

A few kilometres to the north of Skhul is Misliya, the highest cave on the western cliff at 90 metres above sea level, and the last Mount Carmel cave to be excavated. In 2002, I was a member of a team that found part of a human jaw here, in a layer dated to more than 160,000 years ago. We immediately knew that it was from an anatomically modern human, but proving it was

painstaking work. The jaw is at least 177,000 years old, so is 55,000 years earlier than the previous oldest *Homo sapiens* found outside Africa. We now want to understand the place of the Misliya people in evolution, and how they interacted with Neanderthals and other ancient humans who were here before them.

Our fieldwork has not been much affected by coronavirus. The most recent season at the caves finished on 5 March, just before restrictions were imposed.

The Mount Carmel caves have become intimate parts of my professional and personal life. I have a feeling of ownership, but also one of responsibility.

In the case of Misliya, I am also grateful to the site for being so rewarding, yielding exquisite flint tools and many animal bones, let alone the human jawbone. I feel privileged to be part of the chain of researchers who have worked at the caves over the past 90 years.

Mina Weinstein-Evron is an archaeologist at the University of Haifa, Israel. **Interview by James Mitchell Crow.**

Correction**Mina Weinstein-Evron**

This Where I work article gave the wrong date for the layer dated as part of 2002 research. It was 160,000 years old, not 160 million years old.