
When Did Dogs Become Our Best Friends?



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We take it for granted that dogs are our best friends, vital and loving parts of our family and daily life. But this ultra-close relationship wasn't always the case. As we dig down through the sands of time, we discover the fascinating evolution of the human-canine relationship.

Centuries Ago

It's estimated that at some point between 12,000 and 14,000 years ago, the wolf (ancestor of the modern dog) made the transition from wild animal to domesticated companion.

As people learned how to train these animals more effectively, they began to assume more important roles in society and family life, including hunting, guarding and even companionship. The close feelings that people had for their domesticated four-legged companions can be seen in a Paleolithic tomb that was discovered in the Middle East in which a person was buried with a puppy — and the person's hand was positioned to be resting on the pup's shoulder.

Around 8,000 years ago, a time when more and more groups of people began to abandon nomadic ways in favor of settling down and farming, working dogs assumed increasingly important roles in daily life, such as herding and protection of livestock.

As far back as ancient Greece, people began to acknowledge the therapeutic ability of dogs. In fact, dogs were often kept in healing temples due to the belief that they could heal illnesses and other conditions.

Royal Pets

Royalty and nobility have long appreciated the special qualities of dogs, making them a common sight in castles and palaces. Ancient Egyptian murals show pharaohs with pet companions, and Tibetan Monks offered the Shih Tzus they bred as gifts to the emperors of China. There are also many recorded instances of members of the Roman and Greek nobility who admired loyal four-legged friends.

In the Middle Ages, European aristocracy clearly loved their canine companions. During this time, noble ladies developed a love of fashionable lap dogs and noblemen often went hunting with their hounds. With royal and noble sponsorship, the breeding of hunting dogs became a trend throughout Europe.

The People's Pet

Pet-keeping as a middle-class activity has roots that go back to the late 18th century. We can probably credit the Victorians in England with creating dog-friendly family households that ours resemble. In fact, Britain has long been a center for dog breeding, and the first formal competitive dog shows were held in Newcastle in the mid-19th century.

From ancient hunting companions that aided human survival to today's highly-trained service dogs, the long history of humans and canines is rich and fascinating. It's interesting to stop and wonder how this relationship may continue to evolve in the decades and centuries to come.

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