The Bronze Age runs from 1700 to 500 BC. Researchers have divided this period in our history into six parts. Periods 1 to 3 are designated the late Bronze Age and periods 4 to 6 are designated the early Bronze Age. We call it the Bronze Age quite simply because there are lots of bronze objects dating from this era.

During the Bronze Age people also used flint and other stone tools. Bronze was used during the Iron Age and iron began to be used during the Bronze Age. The transition between the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age was not something that took place overnight and was more of a gradual process. It almost certainly took many years from the point at which the first bronze object appeared in Sweden to the point at which bronze became known among the people and we began producing our own bronze objects.
Bronze

Bronze is a copper and tin alloy. It comprises one-tenth tin and nine-tenths copper. Traces of this process have been found at the settlements.

Bronze, copper and tin were imported from southern and western Europe. It was also from there that we acquired knowledge of the different materials.

At this time the raw materials in bronze were extracted far beyond the present-day borders of Sweden. Tin came mainly from Cornwall in England whilst copper was extracted in mines on the continent in the Alps and on the Iberian Peninsula for example.
Long distance trading

Bronze was a material that was much sought after and during the Bronze Age an international network for trading and exchange of metals was developed. In order to obtain bronze, people had to travel to the continent.

Travelling traders were a very special fraternity. They were a group that had mastered the art of navigation, crafts, warfare, metals, international codes and languages.

In order to establish new alliances, representatives from the upper echelons of society often accompanied them on their journeys. A number of researchers state that the boats in the rock carvings and their locations can be regarded as part of the increasing trade that emerged in conjunction with the import of bronze objects into southern Scandinavia.

It is possible to follow these trade networks from the Far East, out into the Mediterranean and up through central Europe to southern Scandinavia. The route taken by the metal to the Nordic region passed in part via the Central European river systems, including the Elbe, Oder, Rhine and Danube.

Another route ran from the Mediterranean, around the Iberian Peninsula, along the French coast and via the North Sea to the Kattegatt strait.

Bohuslän enjoyed a very strategic location as the final stop and it could have functioned as a key location for trading in bronze. New analyses of bronze objects have revealed that the majority of objects are made of metal from the Western Mediterranean and the British Isles.
Agricultural and cultivation

Agriculture was introduced in the southern parts of Sweden, up to Bohuslän, Västergötland, Närke, Västmanland and Uppland, around 3900 BC. It was roughly the same throughout the whole of the area. However, agriculture at that time was not the same as it is today.

There was a mixture of cultivated land, tame animals and wild animals. There were numerous local variations. People gradually opted for different solutions. Some cultivated various types of crops and kept certain types of animals whilst others chose alternatives based on their needs and the area of the country in which they lived. It took a long time before agriculture spread throughout the whole of the area that we now call Sweden.
Agricultural tools

During the Bronze Age, the plough as we know it today had still not been invented and a simpler variant was used instead. The difference was that the plough turns the soil whilst its predecessor simply scratched the surface. With the simpler version you needed to go backwards and forwards in different directions several times.

Traces of the forerunner to the modern-day plough can be found at archaeological excavations in the form of a checked pattern in the ground. They are most often found under burial mounds or similar formations where they had not been erased by ploughing in later years. So-called ploughing scenes can be found in rock carvings but in reality the tools depicted are the precursors to the plough that is shown being pulled by one or two draught animals, either oxen or horses.

Throughout the entire Bronze Age flint sickles were often made from flint chips. During the late Bronze Age half-moon-shaped flint sickles began to appear. Gradually, sickles made of bronze began to be used and towards the end of the early Bronze Age the first sickles made of iron appeared. Iron began to be produced in Scandinavia around 1000-800 BC although objects made of iron have been found that are few hundred years older.
During the Bronze Age people cooked food over an open fire or in cooking pits. Sometimes they burnt the food. As it is possible to analyse the burnt residue on fragments of pots we can see what they ate. A great deal of what was used in cooking, such as wood, birch bark and raffia, disappeared long ago. People ate fruit, nuts, berries, fish and game and they slaughtered their pets for meat.

They probably also used milk from the animals. It is also likely that they extracted blood from their animals regularly. Blood was a common ingredient in the food residue that has been found. Remnants of bone also show that they ate marrow. Examinations of skeletons from that time reveal differences between those whose diet derived largely from the sea and those who mostly ate meat from animals that lived on land. It is also possible to see whether a person’s diet was dominated by meat or plants.
Houses

How did they live during the Bronze Age?
There are many variants and exceptions although the most common was still the longhouse. From the early Neolithic period to the second period of the Bronze Age the buildings were two-aisled and the roof was supported by a row of poles running through the centre of the building. These buildings could stand for up to 100 years although rebuilding work, extensions and repairs were necessary. Sometimes there was also an outhouse close to the dwelling house and they even had a barn for the animals.

From the third period of the Bronze Age they began constructing three-aisled buildings. In that case the roof was supported by trestles made of posts placed in pairs. By doing so they could use wood that was less solid. These houses were not quite as durable and they had a lifespan of around 60 years. The farm comprised a dwelling house and two or three outhouses.

There were also storage pits, cooking-pits, fire hearths, waste pits, piles of cutting stones, wells and clay pits. The area was thus quite large. Sometimes they used part of the house as a barn and the people lived together with their animals. When they abandoned the house they often built a new one immediately beside it. Villages, however, were more unusual and it was rare for houses to be built beside the houses of other families.
A Bronze Age farm naturally had animals. The oldest of our tame animals is the dog. As far back as 25,000 years ago the first wolves were tamed in central and Eastern Europe. The oldest Swedish canine finds date back to 8000-7000 BC. They usually had a shoulder height of 30-60 cm and they were probably used for hunting and as guard dogs and sheepdogs. When people eventually began working the land our most common tame animals were also used.
Textiles

Materials made of wool found in Sweden date from the second and third period of the Bronze Age. We have also found loom weights and whorls. Even older are findings of shards from pots with patterns made using string or Neolithic fishing nets made of lime bark that was pressed against the wet clay.

Sheep did not need to be shorn as they shed their wool automatically in May or June. Either the wool was pulled from the sheep or it was collected from where the sheep were grazing. Here on the farm we have Gute sheep, which also shed their wool automatically.

The people probably wove on an upright loom. This is indicated at least by the loom weights. Use was also made of a technique similar to knitting known as needle binding. It is not inconceivable that the people during the Bronze Age dyed their materials using plants even if there are no findings to confirm this. A small number of remnants of leather clothes have also been found.
What was a Bronze Age family like and how many people lived in one household? Perhaps there was the mother, father, children and grandparents? Or was it completely different? Researchers have compared Bronze Age graves and they believe that a household comprised three women and three men plus two to four children. We can also see how old they were by examining the skeletons found in the graves. It has been ascertained that their average height was 170-180 centimetres.

A number of researchers state that during the Bronze Age we began to see for the first time a community where there were differences in how much people owned. Families who had acquired possessions and had a higher status than others began to emerge. We sometimes find magnificent graves with large numbers of metal objects. Some people earned more from trading and agriculture than others. Not everyone had items made of bronze or copper. They were objects that had a strong significance and reflected power and status. ‘Ordinary’ people, for example, still used a flint axe for the most part instead of a bronze axe.