Tropical rainforests are dense and scarcely accessible. They are often considered as virgin spaces untouched by human activities. This is untrue: man has lived in them since prehistoric times, as archaeological remains testify.

The richness and productivity of the great forest formations have since ancient times benefited the development of many populations and, more recently, that of industrialised societies. This means that they have been formed largely by man.

- Although climate changes have played a key role in the evolution of tropical rainforests since the last glaciation (18,000 to 15,000 years BP), humans have added their mark to these landscapes right from those times.

- Hunting and gathering are the most ancient forms of use of these systems. Some 8 to 10,000 years ago, they also became reserves of land for agriculture and pastoral practices.

Archaeological remains

Archaeologists have discovered traces of agriculture dating back to 3,000 years in the forests of the Congo (oil palms, banana plantations), to 3,500 years in the Amazon Basin and to 7,000 years in Papua New Guinea (banana plantations). In southern Thailand, evidence for tree cultivation dating from 8,000 years BP has even been found.

Humans have made tracks to gain access to the tropical rainforests.

A 4,000 year old two-coloured polished stone recipient, discovered in the south of Ecuador. The engraved motifs (feline heads, snakes, birds...) reflect symbolism linked to the tropical rainforest.

Did you know? The charcoal found in the soil along with archaeological remains is evidence of past deforestations and reveals old fires generated deliberately to create spaces for cultivation.

Humans have been using the tropical rainforest since prehistoric times.

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