

Breeder's Notebook

The missing lupine link

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When I was growing up, every book about dogs started with a story about how dogs were domesticated by cavemen who brought wolf pups home and raised them. The implication was that they then bred the tamed wolves together when they grew up. Nobody ever explained how they got from there to the next chapter, the one detailing how the ancient Egyptians used different types of dogs for hunting, guarding, and even companionship. Writers of the day avoided the question of how these wolf cubs became lap dogs. Mostly, writers today still avoid that question; that's probably because we know enough to know we don't know.

What we do know is that the "domestication by cavemen" theory doesn't make sense. Why would cavemen even think to bring home cubs and go through the immense trouble of hand-raising them? Wild wolves would not have done anything to convince cavemen that they would be handy to have around the cave. Modern attempts to tame wolf pups show that you have to start with them before their eyes open. Once tamed, they are difficult to train, and they exhibit virtually none of the behaviors we value in domesticated dogs. How do you get from a wolf to a dog?

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