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Abstract: The article provides information on the results of a test conducted to discern whether the gathering skill is still present in women. The experiment required that men and women be taken to a farmer's market, led around and then asked to recall where certain foods were located from a central location. Women performed better in the exercise.

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Modern women are excellent gatherers

Women can accurately remember the location of fruit and vegetables, a skill that would have been valuable in our distant past

MEN hunted, women gathered. That is how the division of labour between the sexes is supposed to have been in the distant past. According to a new study, an echo of these abilities can still be found today.

Max Krasnow and colleagues at the University of California, Santa Barbara, have discovered that modern women are better than men at remembering the location of food such as fruit and veg in a market.

The researchers led 86 adults to certain stalls in Santa Barbara's large Saturday farmer's market, then back to a location in the centre of the market from where the stalls could not be seen. They were then asked to point to each stall's location. This requires -- a skill that men may once have used to return from hunting, and one that men today still usually perform better than women in experiments. Despite this, the women performed 27 per cent better than men at locating the food (Proceedings of the Royal Society B, DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2007.0826).

They were also consistently better at locating high-calorie foods such as olive oil and honey than low-calorie foods such as cucumbers, regardless of whether they liked the stall or the food. Observations of modern tribes suggest that foragers need to preferentially remember where such high-value foods are, the researchers say.

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By Staff

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