

## New hominin skull from Kenya

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A new fossil discovery that is 'dated' as contemporaneous with *Australopithecus afarensis* in the middle Pliocene has caused paleoanthropologists to recognize that their interpretation of early hominin phylogeny, involving a single ancestral lineage through *A. afarensis*, was simplistic.<sup>1</sup>

The new fossil skull, dated at 3.5 Ma by the argon-40/argon-39 method, is quite distinct from *A. afarensis*, and has been given a new genus and species assignment—*Kenyanthropus platyops*, 'flat-faced human from Kenya'. It was found in the Lomekwi district, Nachukui formation, west of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya in August 1999 by Dr Meave Leakey's team. The National Museum of Kenya has designated it KNM-WT 40000. The discovery was announced in the 22 March 2001 issue of *Nature*.<sup>2</sup> The additional discovery in the same area of two mandibles, two partial maxillae, a well-preserved temporal bone, and isolated teeth may indicate multiple species existed between 3.5 and 3.0 Ma on the evolutionist time-scale.

The new skull has a rather unusual combination of features: a flat face, high cheek bones, moderate prognathism, small molars, and it lacks a depression behind the brow ridge. Of all the hominin fossils discovered thus far, the face of the new skull most closely resembles KNM-ER 1470, discovered in 1972 by Meave Leakey's husband, Richard, and dated at 1.8 Ma. The new skull has a much smaller cranial capacity than 1470, but because of post-mortem distortion its cranial capacity is difficult to measure. However, the new skull is said to be the size of a chimpanzee's skull, and in the range of the skulls of *A. afarensis*, *A. africanus* and *Paranthropus*.

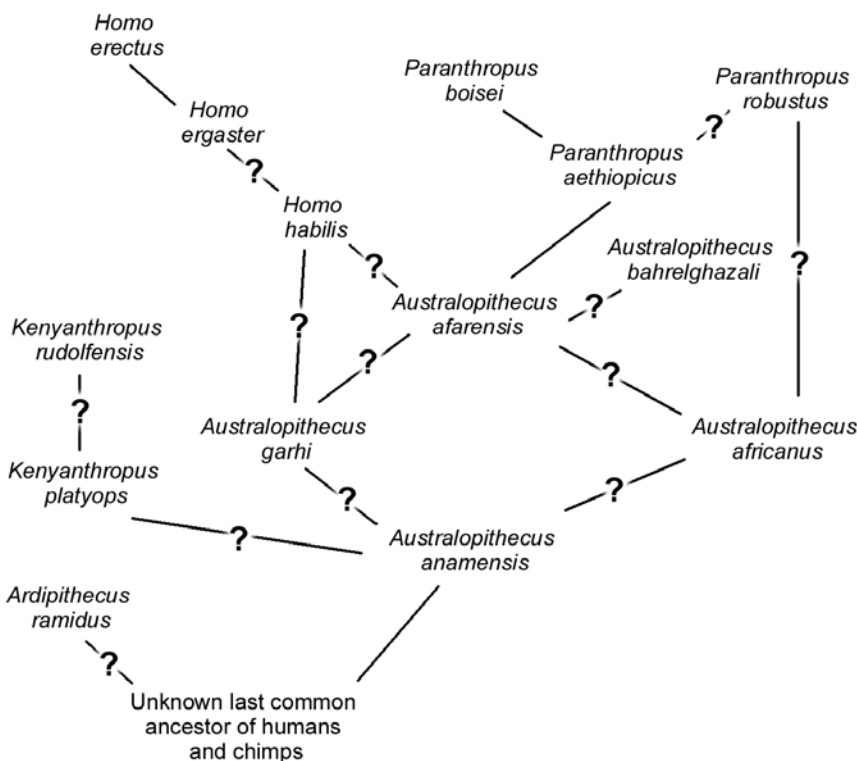
The authors of the *Nature* article show a humility quite different from those making sensationalized fossil discoveries in the past. Formerly,

discoveries such as this almost always involved claims of direct human ancestry. However, the existence of *A. afarensis*, together with Mrs Leakey's statement that other hominins will likely be found in the middle Pliocene, make all definitive claims of human ancestry by evolutionists very difficult. The abundance of alleged human species in the Pleistocene could well be matched by an abundance of possible human ancestors in the Pliocene. Certainty in the evolutionary fossil record of human ancestors is now being replaced with question marks.

Creationists claim, correctly I believe, that the lack of specificity in the Pleistocene and Pliocene fossil record is further proof that human evolution is a philosophical, rather than a scientific concept. Paleoanthropologists, untroubled by a lack of specificity, today claim that linear evidence for human evolution is not necessary. The diversity of the human fossil record is now so similar to the bush-like fossil record of other mammals that further evidence is deemed unnecessary.

As long as *A. afarensis* was the only possible human ancestor in its time-span, it was easy for evolutionists to claim that it was in our family lineage. This in spite of the fact that there is no diagnostic tool, no methodological formula, let alone any genetic technique, to prove such a relationship. Aside from evolutionary preconceptions, there is nothing in the morphology of this new fossil skull to link it to humans. There is every reason to believe that it is the fossil skull of a non-human primate.

There is a curious lack of logic in evolutionist thinking. To illustrate: humans have small molars; living primates tend to have large molars; therefore, to an evolutionist, a fossil primate having small molars (and appearing in the proper timeframe) becomes a candidate for human ancestry. Since evolutionists believe that dentition reflects diet, why should only humans and their alleged ancestors have small molars? However, in evolution, need always supersedes logic. Lucy has large molars. But she filled a need as



Evolutionary relationship of the hominins and australopithecids. Question marks indicate hypothetical or conjectural relationships (after Leakey et al.).<sup>2</sup>

a human ancestor in that timeframe. Now that a supposedly better candidate has appeared, Lucy's large molars may be her undoing.

Evolutionists do not deserve the almost child-like faith that untold millions of people have placed in them. For twenty-five years evolutionists have confidently assured the public that Lucy, *Australopithecus afarensis*, was our ancestor. Yet, one new fossil discovery has revealed how tenuous evolutionary pronouncements are. Dr Meave Leakey states: 'It is impossible to tell whether we are more closely related to Lucy or *K. platyops*. There is simply too much missing from the fossil record since then'.<sup>3</sup> With so much missing from the fossil record since then, is it not child-like faith to believe (even if evolution were true) that either one of these fossils represents our ancestor? An old geological proverb states: 'If I hadn't believed it, I wouldn't have seen it'. It works in paleoanthropology, too.

This new discovery should encourage paleoanthropologists to be more cautious in their assessments. One of the most honest statements made recently by a paleoanthropologist is by Daniel Lieberman (George Washington University, Washington, DC) in the same issue of *Nature*.<sup>4</sup> He writes: 'The evolutionary history of humans is complex and unresolved'. He goes on to say:

'I suspect the chief role of *K. platyops* in the next few years will be to act as a sort of party spoiler, highlighting the confusion that confronts research into evolutionary relationships among hominins.'

Since paleoanthropologists are working on a false paradigm, it is not surprising that each major fossil discovery presents more questions than it does answers.

An interesting footnote to the discovery of this fossil is that one of the authors of the *Nature* article is Louise N. Leakey, age 29. She is completing doctoral studies at the University of London, is the daughter of Richard and Meave Leakey, and is the granddaughter of Louis and Mary Leakey. She thus represents the third generation of

this amazing fossil-hunting family.

### References

1. **Hominin** = member of subfamily Homininae so relates to genera including true humans and excluding australopithecines. Often used interchangeably with hominid, the evolutionist term for a species more closely related to humans than to chimpanzees.
2. Leakey, M.G., Spoor, F., Brown, F.H., Gathogo, P.N., Klarie, C., Leakey, L.N. and McDougall, I., New hominin genus from eastern Africa shows diverse middle Pliocene lineages, *Nature* **410**:433-440, 2001.
3. Cohen, P., Who's the daddy, *New Scientist* p.5, 24 March 2001.
4. Lieberman, D.E., Another face in our family tree, *Nature* **410**:419-420, 2001.

### What evolution really means

[Most Americans] believe that evolution was a means by which God carried out a plan to create humans. For tactical reasons, Darwinists don't rush to tell all these people that they are *missing the point*, but all in good time. Let people first learn that evolution is a fact. They can be told later *what evolution means* (emphases added).

Phillip E. Johnson  
*Los Angeles Times*,  
3 November, 1990.

## Did Lucy walk upright?

Michael J. Oard

For over 20 years, Lucy or *Australopithecus afarensis* has been considered one of our first 'ancestors', mainly because it supposedly walked upright.<sup>1</sup> Donald Johanson, the discoverer of Lucy near Hadar, Ethiopia, reflects on the significance of walking upright:

'In 1973, when I was barely out of graduate school, I found a human-like knee joint that proved beyond doubt that our ancestors walked erect close to three and a half million years ago—long before they developed the big brains that had once been thought to be the hallmark of humanity.'<sup>2</sup>

Evolutionists place great importance in walking upright and use it to define man's ancestors, although the origin of bipedalism is shrouded in mystery:

'Bipedalism has traditionally been regarded as the fundamental adaptation that sets hominids apart from other primates. Fossil evidence demonstrates that by 4.1 million years ago, and perhaps earlier, hominids exhibited adaptations to bipedal walking. At present, however, the fossil record offers little information about the origin of bipedalism ...'<sup>3</sup>

So it is important to know whether some fossil ape-like creature was bipedal or not.

Regardless of the status of Lucy's knee joint, new evidence has come forth that Lucy has the morphology of a **knuckle-walker**,<sup>4</sup> which is a distinctly quadrupedal specialization characteristic of some living apes and is quite different than walking upright. Richmond and Strait identify four skeletal features of the distal radius of the living knuckle-walking apes, chimpanzees and gorillas. They also identify similar morphological features on two early 'hominids', including Lucy:

'A UPGMA clustering diagram ... illustrates the similarity be-