

New footprints from Ileret, Kenya

Michael J. Oard

A new discovery has just been made of hominin footprints at Ileret, Kenya, and dated at 1.51 to 1.53 Ma.^{1,2}

They were found along with footprints of animals on two different levels of strata, separated vertically by 5 m, in what are described as fine-grained, normally-graded silt and sand units deposited as overbank flood deposits. The dates were based on a tenuous interpretation of three volcanic layers within the strata—tenuous because the ash layers had been reworked by flowing water.

The footprints are essentially like those of modern humans, having the same size and sometimes showing the toes as well. However, the researchers were able to conjure up a little evidence to justify saying the prints are only “human-like”. The evidence they relied on was the angle between the impression of the big toe and the long axis of the foot. The angle they measured for the Ileret prints ranged from 9° to 17° whereas the angle for modern humans is about 8°. The angle for supposedly more primitive footprints found in Laetoli, Tanzania was 22° to 34°. Apart from this, the characteristics of the Ileret prints were almost identical with modern humans. The researchers attribute the Ileret footprints to the only alleged human ancestor supposed to be around at the time, which is *Homo ergaster/erectus*.

How could the human foot evolve?

The human foot shows amazing design among its twenty-six bones, such as the ability of the bones to absorb shock, and to flex at the mid foot and push off. How such a design could have come about by undirected processes is another one of those evolutionary miracles. Evolutionists commonly attribute such

amazing design to natural selection,³ often claiming that the design is only apparent, and rarely explaining how natural selection combined with random mutations could accomplish such feats. Natural selection has been shown to be predominantly conservative, and not a creative force.⁴ Observed mutations generally degrade the genetic information, even when beneficial to the organism’s survival.⁵

In the supposed evolution of humans, many changes would need to have been made to the ape-like creature. In fact, a whole series of transitions in many structures is required. The evolutionists are very motivated to find evidence to support their beliefs and fill in the hundreds of missing links. Among the long series of transitions (called hominins) that must have occurred between the ape-like creature and humans, evolutionists envisage that the early human ape-like ancestors had some type of bipedal gait as long ago as 6 Ma.⁶

So, if this were the case, you would expect that the hominin foot would have become quite human-like right away.

The human foot is significantly different from an ape’s foot. In particular, the human foot has 1) shorter toes, 2) a big toe that lies alongside the others instead of angling out, and 3) an arch. So, it is relatively simple to distinguish between human and ape footprints.

Footprints are rare in the fossil record, especially footprints of humans or their supposed ape-like ancestors. One of the supposed earliest such find of prints was uncovered at Laetoli, Tanzania.

The Laetoli footprints assumed to be from Lucy

The Laetoli prints were discovered in 1978 by Mary Leakey and her team, and are the earliest claimed hominin footprints. The prints were dated at 3.75 Ma according to the evolutionary timescale, using samples from ash layers. The footprints were from two or three bipedal individuals and aligned in parallel track-ways.⁷

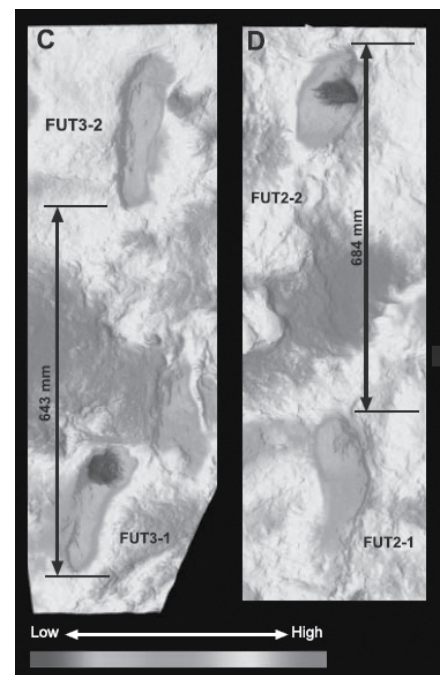
In one set the tracks were small, probably by a child. The other tracks seemed disproportionately large and the researchers claimed that the individual’s feet slid a little in the rain-slick ash layer.⁸

There is still considerable controversy over the interpretation of the Laetoli footprints, with some claiming they are fully human and others that they were made by “an inverted foot with a divergent, grasping big toe.”⁹

Yet, the footprints had an over-whelming modern human appearance:

“A study of the footprints, reported here, has shown that when these hominids walked, they transmitted their body weight and the forces of propulsion to the ground in a manner very similar to that of modern man ... The remarkable similarities between the modern human footprint contour patterns and those of the fossil hominids can be seen at a glance.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, these very human-like footprints at Laetoli were attributed to *Australopithecus afarensis*, that is Lucy—not surprisingly, since



Optical laser scan of footprints in the second and third trail at Ileret, Kenya.

From Bennett et al., ref. 2

that is the only supposed ape-like ancestor evolutionists believe to have been around at that time!

Another claimed evolutionary ancestor

The researchers claim the new footprints from Ileret, Kenya, are morphologically distinct from the Laetoli prints; the main evidence being the angle of the big toe. Yet, the larger angle of the Laetoli prints compared to modern human footprints and the Ileret prints could be simply due the individuals at Laetoli slipping along on the wet surface, or to other similar factors. Of course, attributing the Ileret footprints to *Homo ergaster/erectus* is supposed to indicate that these prints were made by an ape-like ancestor, and raises the significance of the find.

In spite of the headlines that were flashed around the globe, the claim that the footprints are from our evolutionary ancestor does not rest on a very secure footing. Overwhelmingly, the evidence is that *Homo erectus* as well as Neandertal man were fully human, the minor skeletal differences representing simply variation within the original created kind.¹¹

References

1. Crompton, R.H. and Pataky, T.C., Stepping out, *Science* 323:1174–1175, 2009.
2. Bennett, M.R. et al., Early hominin foot morphology based on 1.5-million-year-old footprints from Ileret, Kenya, *Science* 323:1197–1201, 2009.
3. Dawkins, R., *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, W.W. Norton & Company, London, 1986.
4. Johnson, P.E., *Darwin on Trial*, Regnery Gateway, Washington D.C., pp. 15–31, 1991. See also <creation.com/muddy>.
5. See <creation.com/beetle>.
6. Bennett et al., ref. 2, p. 1197.
7. Johanson, D. and Shreeve, J., *Lucy's Child: The Discovery of a Human Ancestor*, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1989.
8. Johanson and Shreeve, ref. 7, p. 192.
9. Crompton and Pataky, ref. 1, p. 1174.
10. Day, M.H. and Wickens, E.H., Laetoli Pliocene hominid footprints and bipedalism, *Nature* 286:385–386, 1980.
11. Lubenow, M.L., *Bones of Contention: A Creationist Assessment of Human Fossils*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004.

Dinosaur stumble preserved in trackways, Utah, USA

Tas Walker

Scientists have described a trackway of a theropod dinosaur beautifully preserved in soft mud, now turned to stone, within Lower Jurassic strata at St George in south-western Utah, USA (figure 1).¹ As well as leaving a trail of footprints, they report the dinosaur left intermittent tail drags, and in one place sat in the mud and left impressions of both of its hands, its feet, its tail, and its buttocks.² The tracks were found in the Whitmore Point Member of the Moenave Formation at the Dinosaur Discovery Site at Johnson Farm, St George.

The report focused on connecting the dinosaur traces with the anatomy, posture and behaviour of birds, citing as evidence the rotation of the dinosaur's forearm and the way it sat in the mud. However, in their preoccupation with

the unsubstantiated speculation of birds evolving from dinosaurs the authors overlooked the obvious evidence of huge watery catastrophe recorded by the fossils and the rocks.

The Whitmore Point Member is a 20-m-thick deposit of mudstone, shale and sandstone strata, and has abundant horizons containing dinosaur trackways (figure 2), including tracks of theropods that were larger and smaller than the ones described in the report.³ The strata also contain clawmark tracks, indicating times when the animals were swimming in deep water and just managing to scratch their claws along the sand on the bottom.⁴ The sediment beds are also packed with body fossils including megaplants, sharks, lungfish, coelacanths, ray-finned fish, crustaceans, clams and dinosaur remains. To preserve such an abundance of body fossils and footprints requires rapid sedimentation in order to prevent the degradation processes that would normally destroy them.

The paper documents other features within the strata that point to rapid sedimentation in association with moving water, including ripples, tool marks, flute marks, rill marks and load casts.⁵ Many

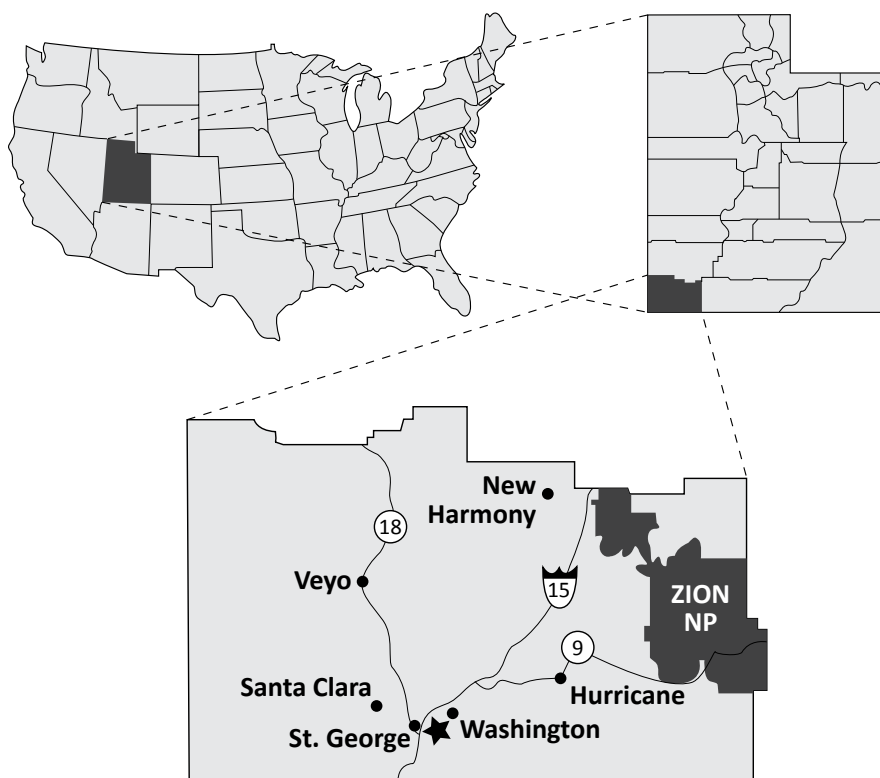


Figure 1. Location of the St George Dinosaur Discovery Site at Johnson Farm (star) in southwestern Utah.