

# Early human evolution

[Science](#), [Anthropology](#)



Due Anthropology: Australopithecus Afarensis Human beings are innately curious beings and one thing that human beings want to understand are the origins of themselves. Where did humanity come from? The answers range from the mythological theories of creationism to the scientific perspectives of evolution. The latter, of course, offers an archaeological treasure trove of proof, at least in part, of the human evolutionary history. One of the very important aspects of that history is the discovery of Australopithecus afarensis. Over three hundred paleontological specimens have been uncovered in the East African regions of Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya. This particular species is the longest lived and most recognizable of all human ancestors, they lived between, approximately, 3.85 and 2.94 million years ago. In fact, the species may have lived for nearly 900,000 years, which makes them a prominent species for 4 times longer than modern man has existed (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History).

Australopithecus afarensis was only a 1/3 the size in comparison to modern human's today. It has characteristics of both human and ape ancestry. They possessed flat noses, thick, protruding lower jaws, a small brain, long curved fingers, and long legs that had adapted to upright walking. By studying their dentition we can learn about the kinds of foods they were adapted to eat and what foods they may have actually been eating. Researchers are confident that Australopithecus afarensis survived on a primarily plant-based diet, consisting mostly of leaves, seeds, roots, and nuts, however they might occasionally consume insects and small vertebrates like lizards.

(Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History). Australopithecus afarensis represented a unique bridge between the times when human

ancestors began to walk upright. They had the ability to both walk bipedally, but also the ability to efficiently climb and maneuver in the trees (Choi 1). In 1974 the first nearly intact skeleton of *Australopithecus afarensis* was discovered. The female fossils, found in the Hadar region of Ethiopia, were given the name Lucy and she became the quintessential example of human evolution, inspiring a book, "Lucy: The Origins of Mankind" that introduced the ideas of human evolution to the mass public. (Hirst). Other famous finds have included the "Dikika," or child skeleton and the Laetoli find, which included fossils, but, also, the first bipedal footprints ever found. Like human beings today, our most ancient ancestors were highly adaptable to their environments, so much they proved to be highly successful as a species (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History).

Although research has taught humanity much about their ancient ancestral lineage from the fossils found of *Australopithecus afarensis*, however, there are many things that we still do not know. We still do not know entirely how they lived, what they ate, and what inspired the move into bipedal locomotion. However, there is so much more to the puzzle of human evolution that we still do not know, but the discoveries that have been made and those that will be made in the future, will only add to that knowledge. For the scientific community understanding the origins of man, the evolution of man, may help us to understand the purpose and potential of mankind as well.

#### Work Cited

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