

From hominids to humans: An overview of the evolution of man



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In the last few million years or so, our earliest ancestors evolved. These ancestors were very human-like and are now known as hominids. Scientists are always discovering new fossils and links to earlier species, and the family tree is forever growing.

Hominids are all different making it difficult to identify fossils and some species [Figure 1]. But where did hominids come from? And how do we know about them? Like modern humans, these hominids used stone tools, had a human-like tooth structure, and also walked similarly to us; although, unlike modern humans, the brain case was smaller.

So as the hominid family diversified from apes, what happened next?

Australopithecines happened next. Now we don't have much of record of how they behaved, but we do have records of the change of the shape of the head

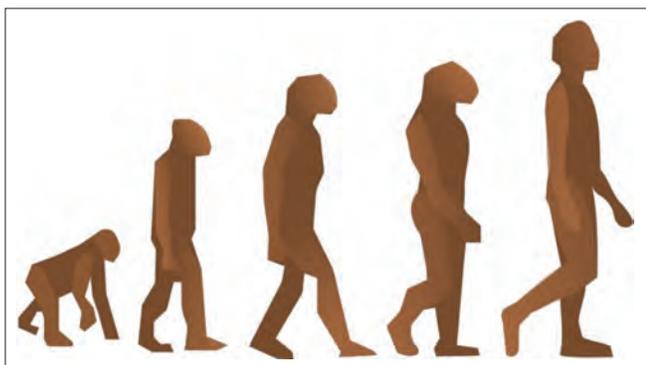


Figure 1: Main stature of hominid evolutionary stages [available from <http://www.edupics.com/image-human-evolution-i10176.html>]

to a more modern man-like shape. This species was a small species, with three distinct sub-species; they existed between three and five million years ago. It was thought that this species moved from the jungle into the open land; however, since they were not suitably adapted to this environment, they retreated back to jungle.

Australopithecus afarensis and 'southern ape from afar'

There are not a lot of records about the southern ape from afar; however, we do know it was slender built with smaller canines and molars and a relatively small brain size. This was getting closer and closer to human kind and existed about four million years ago.

Australopithecus africanus was also an early hominid, which was supposedly alive two to three million years ago and very similar to the 'southern ape from afar', thought to be a direct ancestor of modern humans of today. It had many similar features such as slightly larger legs than arms and human-like cranium features.

Around 1.5-two million years ago, following on from the development of the hominids, the 'homo' species was evolved. A very obvious change in the size of the brain was present. The change in the overall species structure meant that taxonomists gave an entirely new name to this evolved species. The homo

species is a more recent link to the modern day man. The first signs of intelligence were present in the 'homo' species; for example, they carved small stones to catch prey or cut branches off trees. This new-found intelligence gave them the chance to go back into the open land, much like the ambitions of their earlier ancestors. This huge advantage was natural selection in its prime, and a critical stage in the development of man.

Homo sapiens, meaning wise man, were moving even closer to modern man. It exhibited a larger head and heightened intelligence. The tools they used were sophisticated and the species found new ways of adapting to its environment. It has also been found that they used wooden tools such as spears. They arrived on earth about a quarter of a million

years ago. The Neanderthals were widespread around Europe and Asia during that time; they were slowly disappearing as this new intelligent species were developing, giving opportunity to develop and adapt.

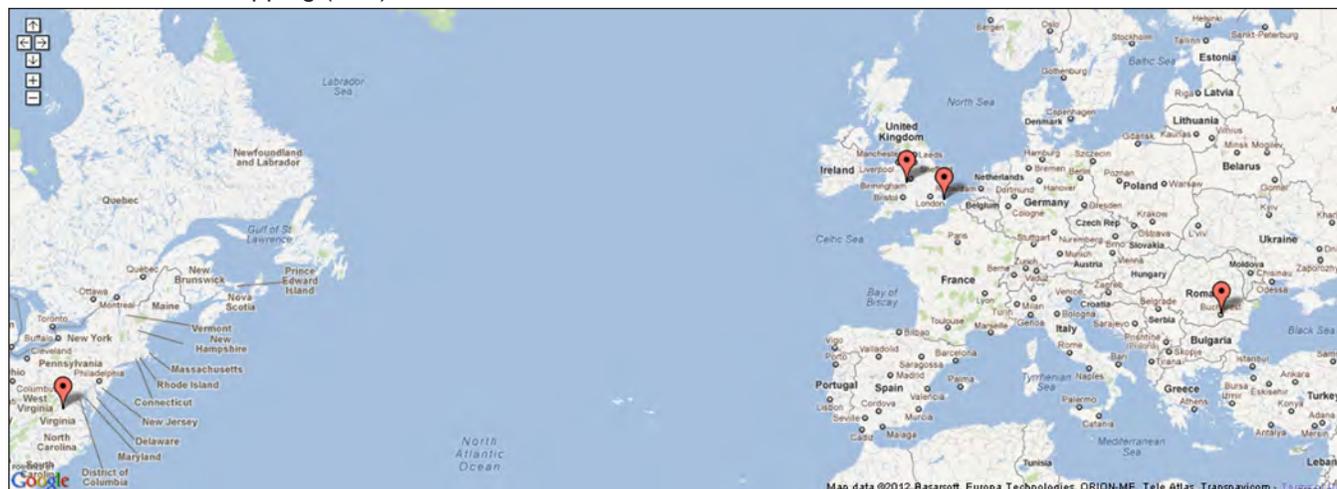
Homo sapiens from 30,000 years ago to modern day, have won many battles and environmental challenges. At this point, human history is being made.

So in conclusion, the human race has evolved and adapted to inhabit open land, originating from the jungle. We have developed longer legs and arms so we can walk vertically rather than horizontally, and we have also increased in intelligence along with head size.

About the Author

Emma Greaves is 16 years old. She is in year 11 at Haybridge High School. She is going to study Chemistry, Biology, Maths and P.E. at A Level. She would love to be a veterinary surgeon and is working really hard to achieve this ambition. She is a competitive swimmer and loves the sport!

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