



# The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know About Human Evolution

By Ian Tattersall



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## The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know About Human Evolution By Ian Tattersall

Extensively revised and updated, the second edition of *The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know About Human Evolution* offers a colorful history of fossil discoveries and a revealing insider's look at how these finds have been interpreted--and misinterpreted--through time. It covers the dramatic increase in the size and scope of the human fossil record as well as new techniques for analyzing and interpreting that record that have emerged in the thirteen intervening years since the first edition's publication. Author Ian Tattersall, Curator in the Division of Anthropology of the American Museum of Natural History, places the researchers and their discoveries within the context of their social and scientific milieus and reveals the many forces that shape our interpretation of fossil findings.

*The Fossil Trail* provides an up-to-the-minute overview of paleoanthropological thought and discovery and presents our "family tree" as it is portrayed in the Spitzer Hall of Human Origins at the American Museum of Natural History.

### New to the Second Edition

- \*Revisions throughout bring this edition thoroughly up to date
- \*New chapters: Chapters 17 and 18 include a discussion of the state of paleoanthropology as the first decade of the 21st century concludes and thoughts on the future of the field
- \*A new gallery of maps of major fossil sites, in Western Europe, Central Europe, the Caucasus and Near East, East Asia, Northern Africa, and Southern Africa
- \*Updated opening timeline includes the stratigraphic ranges of twenty-three hominid species
- \*In addition to over 90 high quality fossil renderings, new photographs illustrate new findings in the field



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## **The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know About Human Evolution By Ian Tattersall Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #1110667 in Books
- Published on: 2008-11-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .90" w x 9.20" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Head of Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History's anthropology department, Tattersall here weaves a vigorous historical narrative of paleontologists' attempts to reconstruct human origins from the fossil record. Beginning with the unearthing of Neanderthals and "Java Man," he carefully sifts through a remarkable succession of hominid finds from Africa, Eurasia, China, Indonesia and Israel, including Don Johanson's 1973 discovery in Ethiopia of "Lucy," a 3.4-million-year-old female hominid skeleton, and the Leakey team's 1984 find, "Turkana Boy," a 1.6-million-year-old *Homo erectus* skeleton uncovered in Kenya. Citing disagreements among scientists over interpretations of radiocarbon dating, comparative anatomy and biochemical techniques, Tattersall unreels a catalogue of paleoanthropological misidentifications, dogmas and misperceptions. He draws a hypothetical evolutionary tree that includes three genera of our hominid ancestors—*Homo* and *Australopithecus* (accepted by conventional wisdom) plus a new genus, *Paranthropus*—altogether embracing a dozen species leading to *Homo sapiens*. Illustrated.

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From Library Journal

This informative and highly readable introduction to paleoanthropology by the head of the anthropology department at the American Museum of Natural History surveys the major discoveries in hominid evolution (fossils and artifacts) and examines both past and present principal interpretations of this growing empirical evidence for the complex emergence of humankind. Important fossils from Olduvai and other sites are critically discussed in terms of modern hominid taxonomy within the framework of climatic fluctuations, environmental changes, and morphological variety (species diversity). Throughout this detailed story, Tattersall argues against both human orthogenesis and the one-species hypothesis for explaining hominid evolution. He focuses on australopithecine diversity and behavior, those questions still surrounding *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis*, and the recent appearance of our own unique species in Africa. A fascinating and provocative overview of human paleontology that is highly recommended for all anthropology collections.

*H. James Birx, Canisius Coll., Buffalo, N.Y.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Tattersall is curator of human evolution exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History, which coincidentally sponsors the stunning *Illustrated History of Humankind*, the fourth volume of which is *New World and Pacific Civilizations*, edited by Goran Burenhult. Tattersall's independent volume cuts back on the visual spectaculars in favor of more detail about paleoanthropology. As much concerned with the dialectic of scientific advancement as with the specific, though fragmentary, fossil evidence, Tattersall courses through the interpretations of excavated discoveries since the days of Darwin. Given the meager evidence, a skull from China, a tooth from Java, most theories about the relics' relationship to modern humans are necessarily provisional, and with consummate objectivity, Tattersall outlines the debates about speciation or classification (the latter his own microspecialty), yet he doesn't shrink from offering his own opinions. Modern dating techniques have begun to sort out viable theories from crackpot notions, but Tattersall reminds us that somewhere in the eroding deposits lining Africa's Great Rift Valley there lurks the next Lucy, Turkana Boy, or Laetoli footprints that could completely revolutionize the field. That sense of ongoing discovery should appeal to the detail-demanding reader for whom even the best-done illustrated book is not enough. *Gilbert Taylor*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Robert Prather:**

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#### **Leigh Weimer:**

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