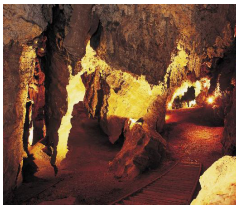


ICONIC AFRICAN ORIGIN FOSSIL SITES



Sterkfontein Valley (South Africa)

Fifty kilometres west of Johannesburg is a 47 000 hectare valley known as the Cradle of Humankind. Along with the sites of Taung and Makapansgat lying further afield in South Africa, the South African Cradle consists of 16 different fossil sites on record, 10 of which have yielded remains of fossil human ancestors. The biggest and best-known of the fossil sites is the Sterkfontein Caves, where over 500 hominid fossils have been uncovered – including the *Australopithecus africanus* specimens known as Mrs. Ples and Little Foot – together with thousands of stone tools. Other fossils discovered in the valley include those of sabre-toothed cats, at Bolt's Farm; early forest-dwelling monkeys, dating back 1,3 million years, at Haasgat; and – remarkably – evidence of the earliest known deliberate use of fire, over a million years ago, at Swartkrans. The valley also yielded the more recent discovery at Malapa of *Australopithecus sediba*, including the 1,95 million year old partial skeleton of the juvenile hominid known as Karabo.

The area was declared a World Heritage Site in 1999, ensuring that the area is protected for future generations.



Afar Rift (Ethiopia)

The Afar Rift or Afar Depression is found toward the northern end of East Africa's Great Rift Valley, in Ethiopia. The larger rift system was formed over millions of years as the earth's tectonic forces created a rift or fracture in the earth's surface, making new plates by splitting apart old ones. Ironically, the same destructive conditions that are responsible for driving these plates apart have also captured some of the world's most important fossil finds – preserving evidence of ancient life in layers of sediment, washed into the depression, and volcanic ash from the many active volcanoes in the region. Discoveries made in the Afar Rift include the world's earliest stone tools, dated at 2,6 million years old, and the famous human ancestor skeletons of Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*, discovered in 1974) and Ardi (*Ardipithecus ramidus*, discovered in 1994). Fossils have also been found of crocodiles, hippopotamus and ancestors of modern elephants.



Turkana Basin (Kenya)

The Turkana Basin is situated in north-western Kenya and southern Ethiopia, around Lake Turkana (which falls within the East African Rift System). Millions of years ago, the lake was larger and the area around the lake more fertile, making it an ideal environment for early hominids. Several hundred hominid fossils have been found in the Turkana Basin, including specimens of *Homo habilis*, *Homo rudolfensis*, *Homo erectus* (also known as *Homo ergaster*), *Paranthropus boisei*, *Paranthropus aethiopicus* and *Australopithecus anamensis*. The most famous hominid fossils found in the region are the Turkana Boy (a near-complete skeleton of *Homo erectus*, discovered in 1984) and a 3,5 million year old skull of *Kenyanthropus platyops* or "the flat-faced man of Kenya", which was discovered in 1999.



Olduvai-Serengeti (Tanzania)

Located in the vast Serengeti Plains adjacent to the Ngorongoro Volcanic Highlands is the Olduvai Gorge – a steep-sided ravine about 48 km long, famous for its mammalian fossils preserved in the exposed sedimentary rock, including many important hominid fossils, and early stone tools used by our ancestors – and Laetoli, where trackways of hominid footprints from 3,7 million years ago were preserved as fossils in layers of volcanic ash; these footprints provide some of the earliest evidence that hominids walked upright.