

# Lucy: Ethiopia's Star Skeleton

**Context:** Lucy, the skeleton of an early human ancestor, *Australopithecus afarensis*, was found in the Western Afar Rift, Ethiopia, in Africa. The archaeologists who found Lucy's remains named her after a popular song.

	Annotations and Notes
<p>How did one of Ethiopia's most famous "residents" come to be named after a Beatles' song? It all began on November 30, 1974. It started out the same as any other day at Hadar, an archaeological site in Ethiopia. Paleontologists Tom Gray and Donald Johanson were exploring an area where they had found <b>fossils</b> before. As they walked along, <b>surveying</b> the area, Johanson happened to notice a small, broken piece of bone sticking out of the ground. As he examined it, Johanson realized that the bone was anatomically similar to a human bone. As the two men continued to search the area, they realized that they had found about 40 percent of a skeleton, and one that was very well <b>preserved</b>.</p> <p>When they returned to collect and map the hundreds of pieces of the skeleton, a team of <b>geologists</b> and <b>paleontologists</b> realized that these bones belonged to a hominid that was approximately 3.18 million years old and, based on the size of the bones, female. It was also the first evidence of a new species called <i>Australopithecus afarensis</i>. They named the skeleton Lucy (because they had listened to the Beatles' song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" when they were celebrating the discovery), and she has become one of Ethiopia's most famous "residents."</p> <p>Lucy's skeleton was amazing not only because she was a new species of hominid (apes and humans that walk upright), but also because her skeleton was so complete. She seemed to have died and been buried quickly in mud or sand, so that her bones were not scattered by water or destroyed by <b>weathering</b>. Only about one in every one million animals ever becomes a fossil, and the chances of so many bones from one individual being preserved together is even more rare. For these reasons, Lucy became famous around the world.</p> <p>Until the summer of 2007, Lucy's bones were kept in a specially constructed safe in the Paleoanthropology Laboratories of Ethiopia's National Museum in Addis Ababa. Because her bones were so rare and fragile, she could not be kept on public display. Visitors to the museum actually saw <b>replicas</b> of the skeleton pieces. There was even a reconstructed full skeleton of Lucy to show how tall she would have been and how she stood.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued on next page</i></p>	<p><b>fossil:</b> remains or traces of an organism turned to stone by geochemical processes</p> <p><b>surveying:</b> an act of measuring and examining an area of land</p> <p><b>preserve:</b> to keep (something) in its original state or in good condition</p> <p><b>geologist:</b> a person who studies rocks, layers of soil, etc., in order to learn about the history of the Earth and its life</p> <p><b>paleontologist:</b> a person who studies fossils of animals and plants that lived very long ago, especially in the time of dinosaurs</p> <p><b>weathering:</b> to change in color, condition, etc., because of the effects of the sun, wind, rain, etc., over a long period of time</p> <p><b>replica:</b> an exact or very close copy of something</p>

Lucy is considered to be one of Ethiopia's national treasures, and her preservation and security have always been important. Much to the surprise of the Ethiopian public, in August 2007 the museum decided to allow Lucy's skeleton to leave the museum and be sent on a 6-year traveling exhibit tour to other museums around the world. Even in Ethiopia, Lucy's real remains had been displayed only twice, and many people felt she was too fragile to travel. Many other museums and paleontologists have complained about the decision to send Lucy around the world, but the Ethiopian government claims that the money raised by sending Lucy on tour will help to improve its existing museums and build new ones.

Lucy is scheduled to return from her world tour in 2010, and hopefully she will still be in good condition and will spend many more years protected in the Ethiopian National Museum. One thing is for sure: For a 3-million-year-old, she'll be very well traveled!

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