

vital missing links in our ancient past, and gives them the hot tip that if they would only take the trouble to search around the areas that constituted the African coastal sea-shores of a million or so years ago, they might find something that would be to their advantage.

Unfortunately this has yet to be done and, despite its most appealing indirect evidence, the aquatic theory lacks solid support. It neatly accounts for a number of special features, but it demands in exchange the acceptance of a hypothetical major evolutionary phase for which there is no direct evidence. (Even if eventually it does turn out to be true, it will not clash seriously with the general picture of the hunting ape's evolution out of a ground ape. It will simply mean that the ground ape went through a rather salutary christening ceremony.)

An argument along entirely different lines has suggested that, instead of developing as a response to the physical environment, the loss of hair was a social trend. In other words it arose, not as a mechanical device, but as a signal. Naked patches of skin can be seen in a number of primate species and in certain instances they appear to act as species recognition marks, enabling one monkey or ape to identify another as belonging to its own kind, or some other. The loss of hair on the part of the hunting ape is regarded simply as an arbitrarily selected characteristic that happened to be adopted as an identity badge by this species. It is of course undeniable that stark nudity must have rendered the naked ape startlingly easy to identify, but there are plenty of other less drastic ways of achieving the same end without sacrificing a valuable insulating coat.

Another suggestion along the same lines pictures the loss of hair as an extension of sexual signalling. It is claimed that male mammals are generally hairier than their females and that, by extending this sex difference, the female naked ape was able to become more and more sexually attractive to the male. The trend to loss of hair would affect the male, too, but to a lesser extent and with special areas of contrast, such as the beard.