INSIGHT

The Columbus Dispatch
SUNDAY
OCTOBER 11, 2009
G

Our opinion
VOTE NO ON ISSUE 3
Casino plan bad for Ohio | G4

Global spasm?
Evidence flimsy for 'Maya prediction' | G3

Online
FALL VOTERS GUIDE
Dispatch.com/votersguide

ARDIPITHECUS RAMIDUS | WHAT SCIENTISTS LEARNED

The discovery of a set of fossilized bones in 1994 set off 15 years of research into a new species some 4.4 million years old. The work on "Ardi" culminated on Oct. 2 with a series of papers published in the journal *Science*. What the research team has uncovered:

Skeletal fossils recovered by researchers.

SKULL

Ardi's teeth are more like ours than like a modern ape's. Like us, she had small canine teeth, as did males of her species. (The recovered skull was compacted.)

PELVIS

Ardi could walk upright and also climb trees. The hipbone includes structures unique to hominids like us, but not found in modern apes.

HANDS

Ardi was a careful climber. Her wrists were flexible like ours, not stiff like those of chimpanzees and gorillas, which often support their heavy upper bodies on their knuckles. Ardi could easily cling to trees with her hands, but lacked the powerful upper torso and stiff wrists needed to swing from branch to branch as easily as modern apes.

FEET

Ardi had a relatively stiff outer foot, more like ours than an ape's. She also had a large toe that's useful for gripping branches. This suggests a transition between tree climbing and upright walking.

Sources: *Science*, skeletal structure redrawn from sketch by J.H. Matternes

Understanding Ardi

Hominid discovery rewrites book on human ancestors

By Doug Caruso
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Ohio-based scientists played key roles in finding, reconstructing and analyzing the 4.4-million-year-old species called *Ardipithecus ramidus*. After 15 years, the work of 47 researchers was published Oct. 2 in the journal *Science* and has shaken up several key ideas about human evolution.

We sat down last week with four of the scientists at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to discuss the discovery and its effect on the scientific world. A fifth, C. Owen Lovejoy, was interviewed by phone.

Excavating Ardi

It was late in the afternoon on Nov. 11, 1994, and Yohannes Haile-Selassie was on his hands and knees in the bottom of an Ethiopian river valley.

At the time, the anthropologist was a graduate student. Today, he is curator of physical anthropology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

That day, he was among a group of researchers crawling through the area, picking up every bone they could find.

"We were surveying this little area, shoulder to shoulder, to make sure we didn't miss anything," said Haile-Selassie.

That's when he saw the finger bone.

"When I picked it up, I knew it was a hominid," he said. "I found a second piece of the same finger bone right away."

Starting in 1992, researchers had found teeth and small

Yohannes Haile-Selassie
DAVID L. BRILL

See **ARDI** Page **G2**

OUTLOOK | TRENDS SHAPING OUR WORLD

KIDS' CANDY HABIT LINKED TO VIOLENCE

Children who eat too much candy might be more likely to be charged with violent behavior as adults, new research suggests. British experts studied more than 17,000 children born in 1970 for about four decades. Of the children who ate candies or chocolates daily at age 10, 69 percent were charged with a violent offense by age 34. Of those who had no violent clashes, 42 percent ate sweets daily. The study was published in the October issue of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

AVERAGE LIFESPAN COULD BE 100 YEARS

Most babies born in rich countries this century will make it to their 100th birthday, new research says. Danish experts say that since the 20th century, people in developed countries are living about three decades longer than in the past. Surprisingly, the trend shows little sign of slowing down. In a recent article in the medical journal *Lancet*, the researchers write that the process of aging may be "modifiable."

COSTS OF SECURITY BIG BURDEN ON IRAQ

Iraq's government payroll has become so heavy with soldiers and police that it's hindering reconstruction, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki warned. About three-quarters of Iraq's $58.6 billion budget this year was used to develop and pay security ministries and the more than 640,000 army and police forces.

GENOME MIGHT BRING BETTER SPUD

A global team of researchers has mapped the genetic code of the world's most popular vegetable — the potato. The draft of the potato genome released last month represents the work of more than 50 scientists from 16 institutions and will provide a starting point for other researchers to develop sturdier, more nutritious potatoes.

DROPOUTS OFTEN WIND UP IN JAIL

On any given day, about one in every 10 young male high-school dropouts is in jail or juvenile detention, compared with one in 35 young male high-school graduates, according to a new study. The picture is even bleaker for African-Americans, with nearly one in four young black male dropouts incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day. Researchers at Northeastern University used census and other government data for the study.

— From wire reports

THE INSIDE STORY

Being first but wrong is no good

Did you hear that author and poet Maya Angelou died?

It wasn't true. A Los Angeles-based Web site reported her death last week and then had to retract it.

Did you know that actor Patrick Swayze was reported dead weeks before he actually died?

BENJAMIN J. MARRISON

That wasn't true either, of course, although it was widely distributed through the social-networking Web site Twitter.

A month ago, Los Angeles consultants — hired to help *The Dispatch* become more effective on our Web sites — suggested that we should take readers behind the scenes more.

They said Internet readers want to be part of the reporting process. The consultants continued: Online news consumers don't mind if your initial report is inaccurate. They just want it first. Online readers know that, over time, the truth will come out.

Maybe that's why newspapers have struggled with the Internet.

Being first is preferred. Being correct is paramount.

We don't catch all of our mistakes, but we strive to. We employ skilled editors who do multiple reviews. We have talented reporters who check and double-check facts. When mistakes occasionally slip by, we fix them in print and online.

Two weeks ago, we published a correction about an error we made in May. It wasn't a bad error, but when we learned about it, we corrected it.

Some might question the value of a correction published so long after the fact. We make corrections because we want to get it right.

We also correct our mistakes so they aren't repeated. In our archives, a correction is attached to the story.

We hope those corrections send you a subtle message: We care about accuracy. It isn't just a slogan. To us, it's what journalists do.

That some organizations are so cavalier about accuracy is astonishing. We regret every error, knowing that each one chips away a piece of our credibility.

If the latest research is accurate, we've already made a mole hill out of a mountain of credibility.

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found that just 29 percent of those surveyed say news organizations generally get the facts straight, while 63 percent say news stories are often inaccurate.

Pew has been studying the public's trust of the media since 1985. As time has passed, the news media's credibility has slipped.

"The news media" is a broad term, and it's likely that people evaluate it as they do "Congress." People often tell researchers that they don't trust or like Congress, but they adore their own congressional representatives.

So we hope that if central Ohioans are among those who really don't trust "the media," they still view *The Dispatch* as credible.

Every day, we send between three and five accuracy surveys to the subjects of *Dispatch* articles. The feedback is that more than 99 percent of the stories are accurate.

If our surveys are accurate (and we have no reason to believe they are not), and if the Pew research is accurate (and we have no reason to believe it is not), then how can these two viewpoints co-exist?

Here's one school of thought: People who are partisan, or get a lot of information from partisan sources, will look at a neutral or nonpartisan story and view it as inaccurate. Why? Because it doesn't match what they heard from the partisan source.

The newsroom has no agenda other than to inform readers and shine a bright light on important topics. We'll continue to do our best to get it to you accurately, and swiftly.

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