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Scientists announce discovery of earliest prehuman skeleton

'Ardi' lived 4.4 million years ago

By Carolyn Johnson

More than a hundred crushed fossil fragments unearthed in Ethiopia have been painstakingly pieced together to reconstruct "Ardi," the earliest skeleton of a prehuman ever found, providing an extraordinary new glimpse into the largely mysterious period when the ancestors of humans and chimpanzees split, paleontologists said today.

At simultaneous press conferences held in Addis Ababa and Washington, D.C., scientists announced the results of 17 years of excavation and study: the partial skeleton of a 4.4 million-year-old female specimen who would have stood about four feet tall and weighed 110 pounds. Ardi is nicknamed for her species, *Ardipithecus ramidus*, and offers scientists a bevy of body parts -- skull, teeth, pelvis, hands, legs, and feet -- to examine for clues about the deepest roots of our evolution.

Ardi's skeleton will be studied for years to come. But in a special issue of the journal *Science* to be published tomorrow, 11 papers representing the work of an international team of 47 scientists reveal the initial findings and interpretation -- including the conclusion that she was less like a chimpanzee than expected.

"This is a spectacular collection of fossils from an especially important ancestor; this is one of the biggest finds in the last 50 years of human evolutionary studies," said **Carol V. Ward, a professor of anatomy at the University of Missouri-Columbia who specializes in studying apes that lived more than 5 million years ago, and was not involved in the research.** "You have an animal ... that is quite clearly a close cousin of ours, if not an ancestor, but [from] earlier in time than most fossils ever found. It is really an outstanding opportunity and is just unparalleled."

The new creature was farther back on the human side of the primate family tree than *Australopithecus afarensis*, best known by the famous 3.2 million-year-old Lucy skeleton. Ardi is discernibly more primitive than Lucy, scientists found, and might even have been an ancestor of *Australopithecus*. But perhaps most striking is its bizarre mixture of traits.

Ardi's pelvis is a mosaic -- some features are specialized for climbing, but some indicate the creature would have walked upright, a hallmark of the human lineage. Her hands and feet are like those of primitive extinct apes, with a grasping toe, and -- unlike humans and Australopithecus -- no arch in the foot. There is no evidence she walked on her knuckles.

"A lot of people were happy to hypothesize that as you went back, into that first half of human evolution since the last common ancestor, as you found these fossils they'd be increasingly chimpanzee-like," said Tim D. White, a paleontologist at the University of California, Berkeley, and a leader of the research team. "We have something getting pretty close to it in time, and it turns out it doesn't look chimpanzee-like; it's an unexpected combination of characteristics, some of which are new in evolution and put this pretty firmly on our side of the family tree and some others that are very primitive."

Ardi's fossilized remains were very fragile, sometimes disintegrating when they were touched -- and splintered into many pieces as if they had been trampled by a large animal, such as a rhinoceros, White said. But after years of excavation, reconstruction, and analysis he and others think her remains provide further evidence that contrary to the widespread belief, depicted in the familiar cartoon of a chimpanzee slowly "evolving" into a caveman holding a club, that our last common ancestor was not in fact chimplike.

Donald Johanson, the founding director of the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University and the scientist who discovered Lucy, said the find had been eagerly awaited by scientists, and was likely to spark vigorous debate as outside scientists began to examine and interpret the finding themselves.

"I think it's a significant discovery ... and will generate an enormous amount of controversy," said Johanson, anticipating the storm of debate over the coming years as scientists try to understand whether this creature walked on two feet or how to understand its strange mixture of traits. "I think it's very important to say that this supports the long held idea that we did not evolve from things that look like modern apes." ■

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU researchers block consumption in binge-eating study

By Michael Sewall

October 2, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Give a mouse a cookie, and it'll ask for a glass of milk. But give a rat some junk food, and it might just say, "No thanks."

MU researchers used rats in a binge-eating study and found that deactivating a rat's brain region involved with emotion could block the consumption of certain foods but might not necessarily stop the craving.

Matthew Will, an assistant professor of psychological sciences at MU, said his team of researchers might have "short-circuited" brain networks associated with moving from craving to consumption.

"The hope is that the more detailed we can biologically define the feeding process from beginning to end, the more we will understand how to address a feeding disorder such as overeating," Will said.

The brain contains chemicals called opioids, which are released to reward pleasurable behavior. Opioids can produce binge eating in nonhungry rats and humans. In the study, rats were presented with a 40-percent-fat chunk of sugar, carbohydrates and protein that Will likened to cookie dough. The researchers deactivated the basolateral amygdala, a brain region associated with emotion, to block binge eating on fatty diets such as this.

"Since overeating is not a product of a hunger epidemic in this country but rather an addiction to food, this model is trying to figure out what in the brain regulates this latter type of feeding," Will said.

It is estimated that about 4 percent of the population has binge-eating disorder, which can cause medical complications such as obesity and heart disease.

Researchers also found that rats that had been deprived of food for 24 hours ate the same amount, regardless of whether the basolateral amygdala was out of action. Will said this confirmed the opioid feeding model represents bingeing driven by the pleasure aspects of food, instead of hunger.

Laurie Mintz, an MU psychology professor who has studied the prevention of eating disorders, said targeting areas of the brain might not be the best method.

"I don't think we should be going into people's brains and turning off their emotions, because they're a hugely important part of us as people," Mintz said. "I think we need to do interventions to help people deal with their emotions, not block them."

Will said this research could lead to more of its kind.

"It seems that we have a model that will help us isolate the circuits in the brain that control cravings," he said. "This would prove very useful in producing medical treatments to curb the overeating that contributes to obesity."

Orthopedic chief wants MU to excel

New chairman foresees role with Army trainees.

By Janese Heavin

Thursday, October 1, 2009

James Stannard wants to take the University of Missouri School of Medicine's Department of Orthopaedic Surgery from "good to great."



Stannard

Stannard began duties as chairman of the department Sept. 1, replacing Jason Calhoun, who left in January. Surgeon B. Sonny Bal had been filling in as interim chairman.

"When Dr. Calhoun came to the department, he took something that was in bad shape and made it good," Stannard said. "I'm taking something that's already good with really nice assets and opportunities coming up in the next year or so to take good and make it great. ... There are some really nice opportunities to take a department that has grown very rapidly in the last five years or so to take it to the next level."

Stannard had been chief of orthopedic trauma at the University of Alabama School of Medicine in Birmingham since 1996. Before that, the University of Virginia School of Medicine graduate spent 10 years with the U.S. Army before retiring as a major.

"Dr. Stannard is an outstanding clinician, researcher, educator and administrator with a remarkable record of accomplishment," Robert Churchill, interim dean of the medical school, said in an e-mailed statement. "We are proud to recruit a physician leader of Dr. Stannard's

caliber to MU and look forward to the improvements he will bring to health care in Missouri and beyond.”

Stannard already has a laundry list of initiatives.

Recently, Fort Leonard Wood administrators contacted University of Missouri Health Care officials with the idea of creating a preventive program to reduce injuries during Army basic training. Stannard, whose father also was military, said he jumped on the idea. He’s heading to the base later this month to begin hashing out details.

Stannard already is working on research with doctors at the MU School of Veterinary Medicine and hopes to collaborate more with MU’s Athletics Department on various training programs.

And he plans to better collaborate with the private Columbia Orthopaedic Group in treatment of Mizzou athletes.

Calhoun left MU partly because of disputes over a contract between the MU football team and the Columbia Orthopaedic Group. He told the MU Faculty Council in December 2008 that the contract hurts MU’s ability to recruit and retain faculty and residents in sports medicine by not working with the school’s most visible sports team.

Stannard said he understands that point, but he also knows doctors at Columbia Orthopaedic Group provided “many years of outstanding care” to the team.

“Pat Smith does a superb job,” he said, referring to the longtime Columbia Orthopaedic Group surgeon who specializes in sports medicine. “Right now, sports medicine care for MU athletes are done by both surgeons at the university group and at Columbia Orthopaedic Group, and our current plan is to continue that arrangement and hopefully increase the collaboration. ... I’m approaching these as an opportunity to bury the hatchet and figure out ways to work together to provide the best possible care to the athletes.”

Stoddard said he is looking forward to the opening of the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute, a 113,500-square-foot, \$48 million building expected to be complete next year. The building will house nearly 200 staff members and more than 20 orthopedic surgeons. The university now is seeking an executive director for the institute who will report to both Stannard and MU Health administrators.

Jim Ross, chief executive officer of MU Health, said administrators are “confident Dr. Stannard has the skills and experience to realize our vision of a comprehensive center for orthopedic care that will serve patients from our community, across the state and throughout the nation.”

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.



Fire sprinklers soak historic documents

Published October 1, 2009 at 1:59 p.m.

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Fire sprinklers soak historic documents

State Historical Society of Missouri staff members this morning were trying to determine the extent of water damage to books and documents caused yesterday by a fire-sprinkler malfunction at Ellis Library.

No unique, one-of-a-kind materials were damaged, the historical society said in a news release.

Columbia firefighters responded at about 5:30 p.m. to the University of Missouri's Ellis Library for a report that an automatic fire alarm system was activated. There was no fire, but the activated sprinklers damaged numerous books and documents stored in the room. Fire crews shut off the water and tried to control water already in the room.

The historical society uses the space rent-free and is responsible for maintenance, said Shannon Cary, spokeswoman for the library.

Historical society administrators were evaluating the damage this morning and weren't available by the Tribune's deadline.

The fire department said it's impossible to estimate the cost of the damage because of the contents' historical value. A fire marshal was trying to determine what caused the sprinklers to go off.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

ESPN to air Children's Hospital, Missouri School of Journalism commercials

By Michelle Hagopian

October 2, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The MU-Nebraska football game will be the only televised college game on Thursday evening, and that means the spotlight will extend well beyond Memorial Stadium.

ESPN has announced it will feature two other facets of MU — the Missouri School of Journalism and Children's Hospital — during the broadcast. The hospital will get a 30-second commercial slot, said Whit Babcock, MU senior associate athletics director.

ESPN will produce the Journalism School spot. Babcock said several MU journalism graduates work for ESPN, which added to the appeal of featuring the school.

"The Journalism School was a no-brainer, but the athletics department's partnership with the Children's Hospital was a draw for them, too," he said. "There are so many areas of this university that could've been featured — we are grateful for ESPN's coverage of these two great aspects of MU."

The featured slots are in addition to the typical university spots that accompany a nationally televised college game, Babcock said.

"It's added exposure because we're still getting general Mizzou commercials during the game," he said. "It's great visibility for the university on all levels."

Babcock said the athletics department has worked hard to educate fans and the community on the logistics of the first midweek game at MU in 17 years.

"We know it's going to be a bit of a hassle with a weekday kickoff as opposed to a Saturday kickoff," he said. "We have had a 20-person campus task force working diligently to spread the word and educate our community, students, faculty and staff. ...

We hope that folks can forgive the slight inconveniences for a day to benefit the entire institution.”

Babcock encourages alumni and fans to go to MizzouGameday.com for more information on the game, parking, traffic flow and tailgating.

MU Health Care spokesman Matt Splett said the Children's Hospital is recognized in mid-Missouri as a leader in pediatric care. The hospital is consolidating its services with Columbia Regional Hospital, which will create mid-Missouri's only stand-alone health care facility for pediatric patients. Phase one of the plan is scheduled for completion by next summer, Splett said.

“We were flattered to be chosen because any time we can get exposure, especially on a national level, it's an added benefit,” he said.

Splett said a previously used advertisement for the hospital will run in the allotted slot.

Splett said the hospital partners with the athletics department to host various events in the community, including the “Miracles for Kids” radiothon taking place this week. The radiothon, which is sponsored by Children's Miracle Network and Zimmer Radio Group, raises money to improve treatment and to benefit children with various health issues. MU athletes and coaches are frequently seen in the hospital volunteering their time.

“Athletes volunteer with the phone bank, answering calls and also visiting patients on the floors,” he said. “Nothing uplifts the spirit of those kids more than seeing an MU Tiger or coach they've seen on TV.”

The hospital also pairs with the MU gymnastics team in January for a “Pink Out” meet to raise money for breast cancer research. In February, the women's basketball team hosts a game from which the proceeds go to cardiovascular research.

Babcock said ESPN is sending T-shirts to patients at the hospital and also hopes to have on-air personalities visit the children on Thursday. He said the athletics department is thrilled MU will be featured on a national stage.

“A lot of people will be watching the game and hopefully it draws them to Mizzou in some form or fashion,” he said.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Ellis Fischel Cancer Center to auction decorated bras

By Jessica Matteson

October 2, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — More than 100 bras will line the hallways and lobby at Ellis Fischel Cancer Center next week when it holds its first Decorate-a-Bra Contest to raise money to fight breast cancer.

A silent auction of the decorated bras and a wine and cheese reception will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m Tuesday in the cancer center's main lobby. Admission is \$20 per person or \$15 per person for groups of 10 or more.

All funds raised will support breast cancer projects at Ellis Fischel.

“We’re hoping to raise a lot of funds for our program,” said Edlyn Donovan, supervisor of Ellis Fischel Cancer Center Auxiliary. The auxiliary is sponsoring the event.

There were no official rules to decorating the bras, so participants had the opportunity to let their imaginations run wild.

The bras will be judged in five categories:

- “A” cup is artful
- “B” cup is bodacious
- “C” cup is cancer-themed
- “D” cup is delightful
- “F” cup is funny

There have been 133 entries submitted from throughout Columbia and mid-Missouri for the contest.

The first-place winners will receive blue ribbons and gift baskets of prizes donated by Columbia restaurants and shops. The highest bidders will be able to take home the decorated bras and certificates to show that they donated.

“Sometimes cancer can be a little depressing, but this has been a lot of fun for patients as well as staff,” Donovan said.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call 884-7676.

theman eater

MSA provides T-shirts to protest Reactor closing

MSA aims for broad student support to push through proposed legislation.

By Megan Pearl
Published Oct. 2, 2009

Rally for Reactor T-shirts are being sold by the Missouri Students Association for \$3.

The T-shirts will be worn Thursday, Oct. 8 to advocate the student tailgating cause in what has been designated as a "silent rally."

"When they took Reactor we had nowhere to go, nowhere to call our own for us to get our spirit before the game," freshman MSA Senator Xavier Billingsley said. "It's not just for Greek life and not just seniors. We as student fans need somewhere to call our own."

Recently, MSA officials and MU administrators have been talking about what needs to happen with tailgating. When Reactor Field was shut down, 800 public tailgating spots were lost due to inappropriate fan behavior. The new tailgating plans must address those problems. The administration has given students the job of finding a solution.

"The students have to come up with a proposal that addresses safety and security concerns, and also meets state and local laws," Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs said. "We haven't received any proposals yet."

MSA attributes the lack of formal proposals to never needing them in the past, as well as the rejection of the administration to make any changes before the Nebraska game.

MSA President Jordan Paul said the organization has worked with the administration successfully in the past without formal proposals for issues not requiring funds. He said he felt the movement needed strong student support, and not just proposals and resolutions.

Undergraduate and graduate students, teachers and construction workers have all bought T-shirts to support the tailgating cause.

"We've sold a little over a thousand T-shirts so far," Department of Student Communications Director Tim Noce said.

Although the title of the campaign is "Rally for Reactor," it has been acknowledged by MSA the chance of Reactor Field reopening is highly unlikely because the parking lot is being used for other things during the games. The Rally for Reactor campaign means to increase the student voice in decisions about tailgating on campus — a cause that has been granted by the administration — and Reactor Field has become a symbol of the student voice in the tailgating issue.

"The T-shirts are really bright and hopefully people will notice," DSC Publicity and Promotions Chairwoman Kaitlan Whiteberry said. "We picked Oct. 8 because it is a game day so it's easy to remember. We haven't been telling students to wear the shirts to the Nebraska game though."

For MSA, selling the T-shirts and creating the petition has been a new experience in student body involvement because of the wide variety of students who tailgate.

"We're also getting the word out about MSA," Whitteberry said. "Most people don't even know that we have a student government, and now more people are aware that there is an organization that they can go to for decision-making issues on campus."

Noce said much of MSA legislation is passed through the MSA Senate body and then implemented on campus. Reactor Field has presented a new problem of decisions that the representative student body does not have control over.

"In my experience, MSA can just pass legislation and get things done," Noce said. "The reason we're doing the petition and the T-shirts is because usually the MSA pull is enough, but this is a different beast."

theman eater

Letter to the Editor:

MU takes right steps toward alternative energy

By Rebecca Nordenholt, sophomore

Published Oct. 2, 2009

It was great to see students at Mizzou take a stand against coal on the National Day of Action. I find this issue to be really important and I'm glad awareness is growing.

The United States burns over a billion tons of coal a year in coal-fired power plants. Coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel used today and a major contributor to global warming yet it provides 80 percent of our energy here at Mizzou. Scientists predict that by the end of the century, Missouri's climate will resemble Texas', causing extreme weather that will devastate agricultural production. Even though I'm a proud Texan, there's a reason Missouri's climate is the way it is.

Because Mizzou has its own power plant, it gives us the freedom to choose an alternative to coal energy. Through energy efficiency and conservation programs, Mizzou has cut its energy costs by over \$4 million annually. These are great first steps but we need to do so much more.

University campuses have the opportunity to be national leaders in moving beyond coal and generating their own sustainable power. Let's take the lead in pioneering a clean energy future, starting right here at Mizzou.



Suit claims injuries on Hearnnes stairway

Thursday, October 1, 2009

A Platte City woman is suing the University of Missouri System after falling last year at the Hearnnes Center in Columbia.

Kathy Young went to the center to watch a children's wrestling match, according to the lawsuit filed in Boone County Circuit Court.

Walking up a flight of concrete stairs to her seat, she slipped on a "glazed, slippery substance" that was on a step. The lawsuit says she fell down about seven steps to a concrete landing, where she smashed her face into a metal rail.

Young suffered nasal fractures, a concussion, a cracked rib, three damaged teeth, neck and back strains and a loss of income, according to court documents.

She has retained Kansas City attorney Mark Meyer and is seeking at least \$50,000.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU staff, faculty not included in Nebraska game parking recommendations

By Ben Wieder

October 2, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The task force that set parking and early dismissal recommendations for the Oct. 8 MU-Nebraska football game at Memorial Stadium did not include representatives from the MU Staff Advisory Council or the MU Faculty Council, said Marijo Dixon, staff advisory council chairwoman.

Dixon said the staff council was informed of the task-force recommendations before the official policy was released in an e-mail written by Karen Touzeau, MU assistant vice chancellor for human resource services.

The e-mail mandates that students and employees who park near Memorial Stadium move their cars "closer to heart of campus" by 4 p.m. and encourages department heads to "work with their staff to adjust their schedules or use vacation or personal days to take off a few hours early on October 8."

The faculty council was told about the Thursday evening game last year, said Leona Rubin, council chairwoman, but its members didn't anticipate how early fans would begin to arrive before the 8 p.m. kickoff.

"That was a totally alien thing to a lot of the faculty," Rubin said.

Both Dixon and Rubin have heard some complaints about the recommendations, particularly the request that faculty and staff adjust their schedules or use vacation or personal time to accommodate the influx of visitors to campus.

MU is not the only school with these recommendations for weeknight games. The University of North-Carolina Chapel Hill, which hosts Florida State University for an ESPN-broadcast game on Oct. 22, mandated that employees leave by 3 p.m. that day and make up the time.

Touzeau was not available for comment, but Jatha Sadowski, MU director of human resource services, confirmed that faculty and staff would be asked to make the same adjustments in any situation in which the university asked employees to leave early.

The e-mail from Touzeau encourages but does not require employees to leave early and attempts to be flexible, Sadowski said, "by giving lots of options."

Dixon sees no better alternative. If some workers were allowed to leave early without making up the time, she said, "how is that fair to people who have to stay?"

Touzeau's e-mail stated that the Nebraska game is the first midweek game at MU in 17 years, and Dixon sees the game as an isolated incident.

Still, if the football team were to schedule another Thursday game in the future, she would like to be consulted about it.

"If it becomes a regular thing," Dixon said, "it would be nice for faculty council and staff council to participate."