



A 3.8m-year-Old Skull was Discovered in Northern Ethiopia

Recently, a remarkably complete adult male skull called MRD-VP-1/1 or MRD for short., was found in Ethiopia.

- It is being dubbed as **the face of the oldest species** (ever known yet) that is part of the human evolutionary tree.
- It is the oldest-known member of the **Australopithecus group**.
 - Australopithecine, a pivotal group of early human ancestors, lived between **1.5 and 4 million years ago**.
 - It dates back to a time when our ancestors were **emerging from the trees to walk** on two legs but still had distinctly ape-like protruding faces, powerful jaws and small brains.
- **MRD's species, which was bipedal but may also have been able to move around in trees, was much smaller than modern humans.**
- This species is considered the **direct ancestor of Australopithecus afarensis**, the species are best known from the famous partial skeleton **nicknamed Lucy** unearthed in 1974.
- The 3.2-million-year-old Lucy belonged to a species of hominins (which include humans and their ancestors) called Australopithecus afarensis, the newly investigated skull belongs to the older species Australopithecus anamensis.
- Also after examining the skull it has been found that MRD's species could have coexisted with Lucy's because of a **"speciation event"**.
 - It is possible that a small group of MRD's species became genetically isolated from the rest of the population and evolved into Lucy's species, whose population eventually out-bred MRD's species.
- The finding also helps **bridge a big gap between the earliest-known human ancestors (about 6 million years old) and species like Lucy (2-3 million years old)**.
- The evolutionary lineage that led to people **split from the chimpanzee lineage** roughly 6 million to 7 million years ago, gradually acquiring traits such as bipedal walking, flatter face and increased brain size through a succession of species.
- Our species, **Homo sapiens**, appeared roughly 300,000 years ago in Africa.

Source: IE

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/a-3-8m-year-old-skull-was-discovered-in-northern-ethiopia>