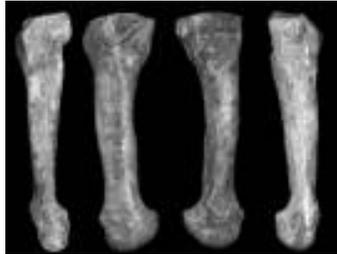


Lucy Was a Walker, Study Finds

by Mike Krumboltz 2/12/2011



Four images of the fourth metatarsal

Lucy may be 3.2 million years old, but she still has the ability to surprise. Scientists recently reported that Lucy, aka *Australopithecus afarensis*, likely walked on two feet.

The findings came when researchers discovered a new foot bone belonging to Lucy. The bone's structure suggests that Lucy walked much like we do today. National Geographic explains that "until now it had been unclear just how upright -- in a sense, just how human -- Lucy really was."

The bone, which was found in Ethiopia, connected the toe to the base of Lucy's foot. It helped researchers confirm that Lucy's feet had "well-defined" arches, which likely helped the famous fossil to strut around on two feet and not via a grasping movement.

So, is an ancient foot really a big deal? Well, yeah. An article from LiveScience.com explains that this discovery "could change the story of human evolution, or at least the story of human foot evolution." The presence of an arch is key, because it makes "climbing trees much harder" and serves as a kind of shock absorber.

The news launched a slew of Web searches on Yahoo!. Immediately, online lookups for "lucy discovery" and "Australopithecus afarensis" surged over 500%. Impressive, but we were even more impressed that so many people knew how to spell "Australopithecus afarensis" on their first attempt. You guys are good.

Lucy's partial skeleton has, of course, been around for a while. The New York Times writes that she was first discovered in 1974, and has retained her title as the "most famous fossil hominid" ever since. However, she isn't the oldest skeleton from the human family tree. Several years ago, scientists discovered a skeleton that was 4.4 million years old.