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Reality Paleontology

Leslea J. Hlusko

Department of Integrative Biology, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, U.S.A. (hlusko@berkeley.edu). 17 X 07

The Ape in the Tree: An Intellectual and Natural History of Proconsul. By Alan Walker and Pat Shipman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

For readers weary of popular paleoanthropology books that glorify gossip, oversimplify context, provide a slanted viewpoint, and generally neglect the scientific process, Alan Walker and Pat Shipman's *The Ape in the Tree* provides the perfect antidote. This book captures the real excitement of paleontological science without all the baggage. A decade ago, Walker and Shipman collaborated on a similar description of the history, discovery, and scientific investigation of a famous *Homo erectus* skeleton nicknamed the Nariokotome Boy (*The Wisdom of the Bones*, 1996), a book that received the Rhône-Poulenc Award. In *The Ape in the Tree*, the authors focus on the less well-known but even more spectacular fossil assemblage of 20-million-year-old apes from near Lake Victoria in Kenya.

The book is narrated by Walker, who directed the research on which it is based. Chapter 1 starts with the tragic death (by crocodile attack) of the assistant district commissioner who first collected fossils around Lake Victoria in the 1900s and goes on to cover the subsequent work of Louis and Mary Leakey. Chapter 2 reviews Le Gros Clark and Leakey's 1951 description of six primate species from Rusinga (including three species of *Proconsul*), which inspired Leakey's hypothesis that we are direct descendants of *P. africanus*. The fieldwork through the late 1950s, revealing an amazing diversity of fossilized plants and animals (including ants, grasshoppers, and a fig with a bite taken out of it), is described in chapter 3, and here John Napier enters the story. Napier had worked as a physician in World War II, repairing hand injuries, and in the 1950s he applied his detailed anatomical knowledge to the inference of a locomotor pattern from *Proconsul*'s postcranial bones. Napier also introduced the impressionable young Alan Walker to *Proconsul*, asking him to pack the fossils when it was time to return them to Kenya. Walker's fascination with this primate has continued ever since.

In chapter 4 the story jumps to the 1980s, when Walker rediscovered *Proconsul* specimens that had been lost in the museum collections in Nairobi. He returned to the outcrop at Rusinga to find more (chap. 5) and then many more (chap. 6). In some ways, these chapters are dangerous reading for people contemplating a career in primate paleontology, for fieldwork is rarely as successful and fast paced as what happened at Lake Victoria between 1984 and 1987. The recounting of it is inspirational.

Once-in-a-lifetime fieldwork like this should be documented not only in scientific journals and field notebooks but also in ways that share the stories around the science. For example, Walker and Shipman describe how the team got to various islands and its relationships with the local people; the interface between international scientific field research and local traditions makes for an interesting, if anecdotal, ethnography of cultural contact. The tales of the accompanying difficulties—temperamental equipment, wild animals, and thunderstorms that destroyed excavations and threatened the entire project—bring life and excitement to the book. All of this is interwoven with a retelling of the process of discovery. Walker and Shipman answer the questions Why are there so many bones here? How do we know how old they are? How are fossils actually removed from the rock? They also describe how the wonderful mystery of “Whitworth's pot hole” was solved.

The second half of the book turns to laboratory analysis, specifically, the process of extracting as much information as possible from the fossils that were recovered in the field. Walker and Shipman describe how bone shape can reveal an animal's locomotion (chap. 7). They discuss the rules of taxonomic nomenclature (an unexpectedly interesting topic) and explain how paleontologists go about naming and then renaming fossil taxa (chap. 8). Chapter 9 is about dealing with fossils, which, as Walker is famous for pointing out, always

lack labels when they are found in the field. The clever and innovative ways of approaching paleontology for which he is well known are exemplified in chapters 10 and 11, which describe the wealth of information about *Proconsul's* growth and development deduced from the microscopic structure of its teeth. Chapter 12 reports that, given the shape of its inner ear, *Proconsul* did not jump through trees as much as some extant primates do—a finding that accords with the postcranial analyses discussed in chapter 6.

The end of the book feels a bit abrupt; the paleontological investigation of *Proconsul* is not finished, and there is clearly more to be learned. More fossils will be found (one of Walker's former students is already following in his footsteps on Rusinga Island), and new analytical techniques will be developed. This book demonstrates that the process of discovery may well be more exciting than any conclusion.

Although I am an admirer of *The Wisdom of the Bones*, in some ways I prefer *The Ape in the Tree*. One of the most important concepts in evolutionary biology is variation: variation within a population and variation through time. The many *Proconsul* fossils found in the rocks around Lake Victoria (more than 1,000) provide unique insight into the variation of this genus across space and through time. Hominid evolution will always be a popular topic, but the hominid fossil record is often too sparse to permit the exploration of many interesting questions. Arguably, *Proconsul* serves as a more satisfying subject for evolutionary biology.

The Ape in the Tree is an engaging tale of paleontological research, an inspiration for the budding primate anatomist, and a source of excellent context for teaching (or engaging stories for the next family dinner). But the book also makes wonderful reading for those now in the thick of fieldwork. A *Nature* article or a detailed monographic description of a fossil makes a discovery seem straightforward, but field paleontology is far from easy. It is good, perhaps even novel, to have one of our best paleontologists share his experiences and thoughts with humility.

Paleoanthropologists are often perceived as hominid focused and mediaphilic. This book demonstrates perfectly why so many of us love the fossils and the science despite this stigma and how fossils that never make the front page of the newspaper can be more interesting and informative than those that do.

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Defining Jane Goodall

Pascale Sicotte

Department of Anthropology, University of Calgary,
Calgary, Alberta T2N 0S7, Canada (sicotte@ucalgary.ca).
28 IX 07

Jane Goodall: The Woman Who Redefined Man. By Dale Peterson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Jane Goodall, the subject of Dale Peterson's recent book of the same name, is a woman whose contribution to anthropology has been fundamental and who has been a model for generations of girls aspiring to careers in science. The subtitle of the book, *The Woman Who Redefined Man*, illustrates the depth of her influence. Peterson's collaboration with Goodall on several book projects no doubt contributed to the relationship that allowed him to write this sympathetic authorized biography.

Jane Goodall was not the first person to try to study wild apes. Peterson provides a good summary of the early attempts at studying African apes in the wild. He also describes anthropologist Louis Leakey's sustained efforts to find people to study the behavior of chimpanzees and gorillas in their habitats, which he believed was necessary to complement the material provided by paleontology (fossils and stone tools) for an understanding of early hominids. Peterson also gives the reader a useful account of both the history of animal behavior studies and the developments in biological anthropology that allowed the integration of primate behavior as a field of study. These sections, which focus on both the disciplines and the people who were shaping them (Harlow, Tinbergen, Lorenz, and Washburn, to name just a few), will appeal to anyone interested in understanding the evolution of the fields of animal behavior and physical anthropology. Peterson emphasizes, rightly, in my opinion, the fact that Goodall focused on the individual, as opposed to the group, as a unit of data collection. In the early days at Gombe and later under the guidance of her academic supervisor at Cambridge, Robert Hinde, this focus allowed her to record the intricacies of the social life of the chimpanzees and to document differences between individuals in behaviors such as mothering style. The chimpanzees themselves are, of course, prominent in the book. Peterson describes the first attempts at habituation, the banana feedings, and the major events in the lives of the individuals followed by the researchers at Gombe. Inevitably, some of these events parallel those unfolding in the human saga at and around Gombe: courtships, changes in dominance, intercommunity guerrilla warfare, etc.

Goodall's ample correspondence (with her family, Leakey, the National Geographic Society, and others) and Peterson's conversations with Goodall herself and with former students and colleagues are the material for this book. In an appendix, Peterson lists the sources for each chapter and the origin of quotes or comments. The extensive use of Goodall's correspondence means that it can sometimes be difficult to "reach" Jane Goodall the person, as opposed to the image she wanted to project. Only in the last section, "The Activist," does the book let us see Goodall as a warm, caring human being. This may be partly because this section describes a period of her life in which Peterson was directly involved, and therefore he