

Preface

Australopithecus holds a special place in the study of human evolution. From the initial description of the genus by Dart in 1925 through the present, there has been ongoing discussion and debate about whether this genus is best viewed as an ape with some human features or an old, somewhat primitive version of modern humans. How much like modern humans was *Australopithecus* in its locomotion, its social behavior, and its life history? As the hominid fossil record has expanded, indeed exploded, over the nearly nine decades since *Australopithecus* was first described, it has become the most speciose genus of human ancestors with no consensus regarding how many species should actually be recognized. Similarly, there is ongoing debate about the distinctions, boundaries, and phylogenetic relationships between *Australopithecus* and related genera, including *Homo*, *Paranthropus*, and *Kenyanthropus*. What kinds of biogeographical scenarios can best explain the evolution of *Australopithecus*?

In order to address these and other issues regarding the biology of *Australopithecus*, we organized the Fourth Stony Brook Human Evolution Workshop in 2007 with the title of “*Diversity in Australopithecus: Tracking the Earliest Bipeds*”. A group of scholars and students from all over the world assembled in Stony Brook New York between September 25 and September 29, 2007 for five days of presentations, discussions, and collegiality in an informal setting. This volume is derived from that workshop.

The workshop was sponsored by Stony Brook University and the Turkana Basin Institute, and was generously hosted by the President of Stony Brook, Dr. Shirley Strum Kenny in her home at Sunwood. The workshop and associated symposium were only possible through the efforts and contributions of many people and institutions, including the Provost of Stony Brook University, the LSB Leakey Foundation, Jim and Marilyn Simons, Mrs. Kay Harrigan Woods, Mrs. Mary Armour, Elizabeth Wilson, and Lawrence Martin. In addition to the contributors to this volume, numerous other people attended all or part of the workshop and contributed to the discussions (Fig. 1), including Meave Leakey, Terry Harrison, Bill Kimbel, Gary Schwartz, Fredrick Manthi, Francis Kirera, Jack Stern, Bill Jungers, Randall Susman, James Rossie, Kathryn Twiss, Lawrence Martin, Aryeh Grossman, Chris Gilbert, Ian Wallace, Jessica Lodwick.

The chapters in this monograph were formally peer-reviewed and we thank those reviewers for their time and effort in making this volume better. We thank Eric Delson, senior co-editor of the *Vertebrate Paleobiology and Paleoanthropology* Series, for his patience, guidance, good humor, and more patience in helping to publish this volume. Christopher J. Campisano, David A. Feary, and William H. Kimbel were of great support to Kaye Reed during the editorial work on this volume. In addition, we thank Andrea Baden and Ian Wallace for providing editorial and bibliographic assistance.



Fig. 1 Workshop participants. *Back row, left to right:* William Kimbel, Ron Clarke, Frank Brown, Richard Leakey, Matt Sponheimer, David Strait, Adam Gordon, Charlie Lockwood, John Shea; *Middle row, left to right:* Susan Larson, Terry Harrison, Carol Ward, John Fleagle, Andy Herries, Zeray Alemseged, Fred Grine, Gary Schwartz. *Front row, left to right:* Meave Leakey, Elizabeth Harmon, Kay Behrensmeyer, Fredrick Manthi, Kaye Reed, Francis Kirera, Robert Foley

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The Paleobiology of Australopithecus

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2013, XIII, 282 p. 92 illus., 69 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-007-5918-3