

Teacher Background on Laetoli Trackways

- The Laetoli footprints were found in East Africa, and have been reliably dated at 3.4–3.8 million years old by radiometric dating of the ash found above and below them.
- The tracks that look like human prints were very likely made by early hominids. All the skeletal fossils we have for hominids of that age clearly indicate creatures who walked fully erect, as we do today, but were rather short, and had brain cases that were very similar in size to modern chimpanzees. All of the evidence confirms that bipedalism arose very early in human evolution, while increased brain size was a much later development.
- There were at least two individuals walking side by side, one about 4 feet, the other about 5 feet. They seemed to be walking in step with each other. A third individual may have followed, walking in the footprints of the taller individual.
- The other animals that left tracks included Hipparion (a small, 3-toed, now extinct cousin of the horses), a young Hipparion (a foal), and a carnivore. They may have left their tracks before, after, or during the time the hominids walked there.

For more information see:

Agnew, N. and M. Demas. "Preserving the Laetoli Footprints." *Scientific American* (September 1998): 26–37.