

*Syllabus: 1.6 Phylogenetic status, characteristics and geographical distribution of the following. Homo erectus: Africa (Paranthropus), Europe (Homo erectus heidelbergensis), Asia (Homo erectus javanicus, Homo erectus pekinensis).*

## **Homo erectus Existed 200,000 Years Earlier than Previously Thought**

An international team of paleoanthropologists has unearthed a 2-million-year-old skull of Homo erectus, the first of our ancestors to be nearly human-like in their anatomy and aspects of their behavior, in the fossil-rich Drimolen cave system north of Johannesburg, South Africa.



Homo erectus is one of our direct human ancestors and is best known for migrating out of Africa into the rest of the world.

They walked upright and were a more human-like species than the other hominins found in the Cradle of Humankind.

Homo erectus had shorter arms and longer legs. They could walk and run for longer distances over the African grasslands than the others.

“The Homo erectus skull we found shows its brain was only slightly smaller than other examples of adult Homo erectus,” said Professor Andy Herries, a researcher at La Trobe University and the University of Johannesburg and corresponding author of a paper published in the journal Science.

“It samples a part of human evolutionary history when our ancestors were walking fully upright, making stone tools, starting to emigrate out of Africa, but before they had developed large brains.”

The 2-million-year-old fossil, designated DNH 134, was reconstructed from more than 150 individual fragments recovered from the Drimolen site over a five-year period.

“Before we found DNH 134, we knew that the oldest Homo erectus in the world was from Dmanisi in Georgia dating to 1.8 million years ago,” said co-author Stephanie Baker, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Johannesburg.

“The newly-discovered fossil demonstrates that Homo erectus, our direct ancestor, clearly evolved in Africa,” added co-author Jesse Martin, a Ph.D. student at La Trobe University.

The age of the DNH 134 skullcap shows something else — that at least three hominins lived in southern Africa at the same time.