

New York Times June 10, 1994

## New Discovery Rewrites Human History

Associated Press – Ethiopia

A team of **archaeologists**, led by Tim White, has made an earth shaking discovery in the Afar region of Ethiopia. While **excavating** an area of the Rift Valley that was once an ancient forest, White's team uncovered the **fossil** remains of what appears to be the earliest known **hominid**. While the excavation did not yield a complete skeleton, the archaeologists were able to piece together enough of the remains in order to get a good idea of what this individual might have looked like. According to White, this particular individual probably stood about four feet tall, weighed about 110 pounds, walked up-right some of the time, and may have lived on both on the ground and in the trees. White's team believes that this individual is part of a larger group known as **Ardipithecus ramidus**, Ardi for short. The name comes from the Ardi, the Afar word for ground/floor, and ramid, meaning root. As White explained, "as far as we can tell, *Ardipithecus ramidus* was primarily a plant eater because of the small canine incisors". White also believes that the presence of large opposable toes shows that *Ardipithecus* was also climbing and possibly living in trees. The fossil evidence also shows that *Ardipithecus* had a **cranial capacity** of 300-350 cubic centimeters, or about  $\frac{1}{4}$  the size of a modern human brain. Preliminary tests have dated these remains at about 4.4 million years old. White and his team plan to publish the full extent of their findings this fall.

### Vocabulary Word Bank

**Archaeologist:** scientist who studies the past through the things people leave behind.

**Excavation:** the systematic process of digging up items from the past.

**Hominid:** early human ancestors.

**Fossil:** the remains of something that was once alive.

**Ardipithecus ramidus:** group of early hominids.

**Cranial Capacity:** the size of the inside of an animal's skull.

**Canine Incisors:** sharp pointed teeth used for tearing flesh (meat).



Ethiopia: *A. ramidus* fossils have been recovered from the region circled in red.

Use the area below to take notes on *Ardipithecus ramidus*: