3.3-million-year-old fossil reveals how humans started walking on two legs

The fossilized piece of a cheek bone was spotted in a chunk of sandstone sticking out of the dirt in the scorching badlands of northeastern Ethiopia.

Zeresenay Alemseged knew almost immediately that he had stumbled upon something momentous.

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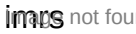
The fossil, also called “Selam,” has revealed numerous insights into our early human relatives. But Alemseged said one of the most startling findings comes from the toddler’s spine, which had an adaptation for walking upright that had not been seen in such an old skeleton.

The result, he said, is a creature whose upper body was apelike, but whose pelvis, legs and feet had familiar, human-like adaptations.

“If you had a time machine and saw a group of these early human relatives, what you would have said right away is, ‘What is that chimpanzee doing walking on two legs?’ ” Alemseged said.



Newly revealed spinal column and vertebrae of Selam, a 3.3 million-year-old Australopithecus afarensis fossil. Credit: The University of Chicago.

For researchers, the skeleton is a window into the transition between rib-bearing vertebrae and lower back vertebrae, which allowed our early human ancestors to extend at the waist and begin moving upright, eventually becoming highly efficient walkers and runners.

[Read the original source here]

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: How a 3.3 million-year-old toddler offers researchers a window into human evolution