

FOSSIL SKELETON

MAY BE HUMAN

"MISSING LINK"

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Scientists in South Africa believe a two million-year-old creature could be the "missing link" between apes and humans.

The fossilised skeletons of a female and child, known as *Australopithecus sediba*, were discovered in the Malapa caves near Johannesburg in 2009.



Until now it was believed *Homo habilis* or *Homo rudolfensis*, which post-dated *Au. sediba* by several hundred thousand years, were the most likely ancestors of *Homo erectus*.

Professor Lee Berger who led the team that found *Au. sediba*, said: "The fossils demonstrate a surprisingly advanced small brain, a very evolved hand with a long thumb like humans."

They also show "a very modern pelvis, but a foot and ankle shape never seen in any hominin species that combines features of both apes and humans in one anatomical package."

X-ray analysis of the skull showed that although only slightly larger than a chimpanzee's brain, it was human-like in appearance.

The hands and feet of the adult female displayed a unique mix of modern and primitive features.

Anthropologist Professor Darryl de Ruiter, from Texas said: "We examined the remains and found several distinct individuals - possibly representing a family group.

"They all seemed to have died suddenly in the same event about 1.9 million years ago, but the remains are in surprisingly good shape."

The professor added: "It's a great find, because it provides strong confirmation for Darwin's theories about evolution."

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