

NEW FOSSIL FIND IN SIERRA DE ATAPUERCA, SPAIN

A team of paleoanthropologists working near the Atapuerca Mountains in Spain have uncovered a new “missing link” that may help to end the debate over one part of the human family tree. Homo Heidelbergensis, first discovered on October the 21st 1907, came from Mauer where a workman named Daniel Hartmann spotted a jaw in a sandpit. The jaw was in good condition except for the missing premolar teeth, which were eventually found near the jaw. But what may seem to be a simple case of a new hominid is actually a subject of controversy in the scientific community. Many scientists disagree on whether Homo Heidelbergensis is actually a new species, or an early form of Homo Sapiens.

Jack Wooldridge, who has unearthed the body of a 150,000 year old male, stands above the dig and peers down at his find. “You can see that the bone structure and anatomy are remarkably similar to those of Homo Sapiens.” he says. “Apart from a few small differences in the skull and upper body, you could pretty much say that they are the same. But DNA we have managed to extract proves that this is not a Homo Sapien, or a Homo Heidelbergensis, but a mix of the two. So we can see that Homo Heidelbergensis is most likely an early stage of Homo Sapiens.”

Despite criticisms from other scientists, who feel he may be jumping to conclusions, Mr Wooldridge says that he still firmly believes that he has found a missing link between Homo Heidelbergensis and Homo Sapiens. He will be making a presentation at the coming Paleoanthropological Society meeting in Chicago, where he will also have his find on display.

Another scientist, Professor Albert Calen, doubts Mr Wooldridge's claims. We talked to him at his college in New York, the Anthem Institute. He is a middle-aged man with thinning gray-brown hair, and seemed quite relaxed as he told about his studies and the conclusions they have led him to.

“You see,” he says as he pulls up some files on Homo Heidelbergensis on his computer, “the fossil record tells a very different story to the one Mr Wooldridge has told us. The differences in these fossils (he points to pictures of some fossil hominids) are larger than what he has claimed. I believe he has jumped to conclusions in deciding he has found a 'missing link'.”

We asked Mr Calen what species he thinks Mr Jack Wooldridge has found, if he doesn't think it's a missing link between Homo Heidelbergensis and Homo Sapiens. He laughed and told us “Oh no, don't get me wrong. I totally agree with Mr Wooldridge that he has found an early form of Homo Sapiens. I just don't think it has as much to do with Homo Heidelbergensis, if it has anything to do with Homo Heidelbergensis, as he does. I think that he has jumped to conclusions calling it a missing link. As they say, one piece of evidence does not a theory make!”

We wish Mr Jack Wooldridge and his team, Tommy and James O' Rourke, luck in presenting their discovery. This could be a new page in paleoanthropological lore, or as Mr Calen has said, it may just be another sentence on this page of hominid history.