

Some new information on *Ardipithecus ramidus*

*Ardipithecus ramidus* was a species of hominin that has been discovered in East Africa dating back 4.4 Ma. Some fragmentary remains of this species were discovered back in 1994. These finds are described in your text on pages 274–275. The data at that time indicated a species that was probably bipedal but with some ape-like characteristics in the teeth.

Several weeks ago, the results of 15 years of reconstruction and analysis of a crushed skeleton of *Ardipithecus* were released. Certain predictions about *Ardipithecus* were revealed, and new features (and surprises) were discovered.

*Ardipithecus* lived in a woodland environment, showing that our ancestors evolved bipedalism before moving into the grasslands. The skeleton is an adult female about four feet tall and weighing about 120 pounds. Her pelvis is humanlike in many ways, showing she walked upright, but still apelike in some features. She also had a divergent grasping big toe, and her arms were longer relative to her legs than is the case for modern humans. Her brain was small (chimp size) and her face protruded like an ape. Her teeth showed a number of ape characteristics as well.

From what we can tell, *Ardipithecus* was a biped that walked upright on the ground, but still spent a fair amount of time in the trees using all four limbs.

If you want more information on this find, I suggest an article entitled “A new kind of ancestor: *Ardipithecus* unveiled” by science writer Ann Gibbons. This article appears in the October 2, 2009 issue of the journal *Science*, and is available for free with registration at: <http://www.sciencemag.org/ardipithecus/>

There is also a podcast containing interviews on the same web page.