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## A Natural Selection for Museum: New Hall to Focus on Evolution

By JACQUELINE TRESKOTT  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The National Museum of Natural History announced Wednesday that it is dedicating a new hall to the story of human evolution, giving emphasis not only to how we became humans but also to how changes in the natural world affected human development.

The Hall of Human Origins, tracing a 6 million-year history, is scheduled to open March 17 — 100 years to the day after the museum opened.

"Humans evolved over millions of years in response to a changing world," said Rick Potts, the Smithsonian's director of the Human Origins Program and an internationally known anthropologist. The work of his team in Kenya and China will be a keystone of the hall, with the working title "What Does It

Mean to Be Human?" Potts said the materials will enable the public "to put humans in their place."

The 15,000-square-foot space will be named for David H. Koch, a chemical engineer and executive vice president of Koch Industries, who gave \$15 million for the hall's construction. The other primary donor to the project is Peter Buck, a physicist and co-founder of Subway restaurants, who gave \$15 million to an endowment for research and accompanying education programs.

The total cost of the hall is \$20.7 million, with \$3.5 million from other private sources and \$2.2 million from the Smithsonian's federal funds.

In a statement, Koch saluted the Human Origins Program, saying it "has the power to

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## Hall Will Highlight Evolution

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influence the way we view our identity as humans, not only today, but for generations to come." Koch, an MIT-educated engineer, has given generously to many educational, cultural and medical institutions, as well as to conservative political groups. He was the 1980 Libertarian vice presidential candidate.

To tell the biological, cultural and ecological story, the exhibitions will include 75 cast reproductions of skulls from the past 6 million years, a reconstructed face of *Sahelanthropus* (one of the oldest known hominids), fossils of early apes and humans, a large exhibit devoted to the human family tree and a bone bed where visitors can learn about different kinds of fossil evidence.

One of the hall's highlights will be a display of original fossil skulls from the Cro-Magnon period and France's La Ferrassie cave, plus major discoveries from the 19th century. The materials are being lent by the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, which is closed for renovations. Another exhibit will contain a specially designed case with an original Neanderthal skeleton excavated from the Shanidar Cave in Iraq. The skeleton was discovered in the 1950s and has been in storage at the Smithsonian for the past 10 years.

"One of the threads throughout the hall is 'How do we know?'" said Potts. "How do we know a footprint is a human footprint?"

And that became a timely question earlier this month when scientists announced the discovery of a skeleton in Ethiopia, which they named Ardi; she lived 4.4 million years ago. The discovery immediately upstaged Lucy, the 3.2 million-year-old fossil previously believed to be the most complete human an-

cestor. Potts knew about Ardi and told his design team not to panic about the news; for now, Lucy will be a major part of the Smithsonian's story. Models of her standing and then climbing are on order.

The scientific conclusions about Ardi will be in a section that includes the latest news about discoveries and anthropological fieldwork, Potts said.

The scientists are also creating a wall of human development, with the milestones of walking upright, a larger brain size, development of tools, and creating symbols and rituals. The text will explain how those advances "equipped us to react to environmental and social settings," Potts said.

Teasing out the link between humanity

**In the 15,000-square-foot space, the Smithsonian plans to include exhibits featuring original fossils from the Cro-Magnon period.**

and the natural world is a different approach, Potts said. Another theme is that the shared origins have a deeper and longer history than the differences and diversity the public discusses today.

Many of the presentations will be in cave-shaped enclosures and circular settings.

"This is about the sweep of 6 million years in time," said Michael Atwood Mason, the chief of exhibit development, explaining the many curves in the hall.

"One of the challenges is, we do get

7.5 million visitors a year. Our concern is to give people a variety of experiences. So we have them moving off the main track and dipping into other areas," Mason said.

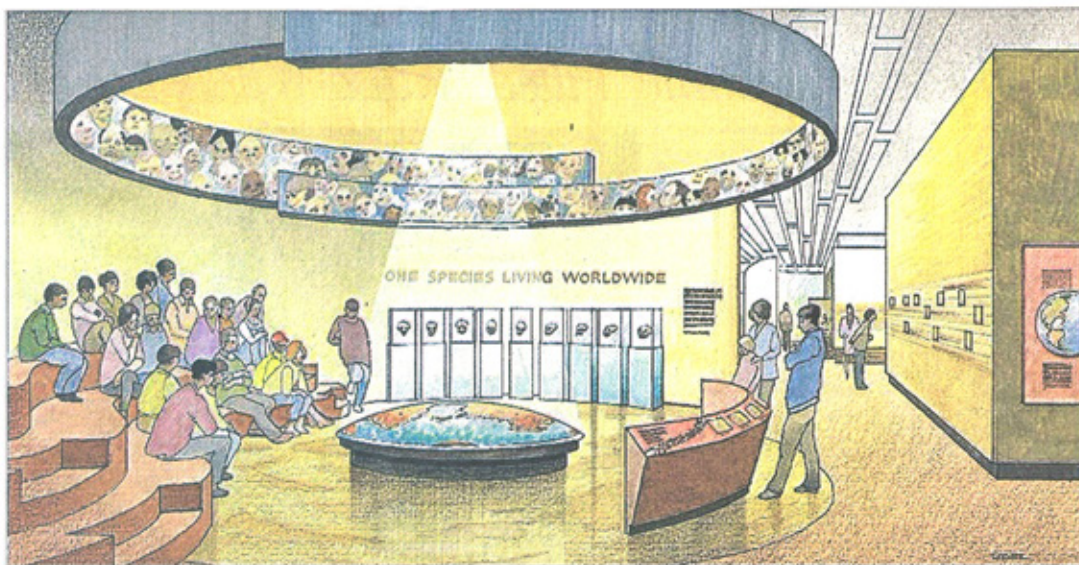
On one end the visit will start with a time tunnel, showing faces on an eight-foot-high projection and environments from several millennia that appear and disappear through the ages. Visitors can also start from another entrance, where a film will echo similar themes. "We want the deconstruction of the story told as well as the construction of the story," Potts said.

Visitors will be able to choose from eight reconstructed faces of early human species and select whom they might want to be. Nearby will be cases with bronze busts of these spe-

cies, designed by artist John Gurche, standing at whatever height scientists have determined.

The Smithsonian team worked with colleagues from 50 U.S. and international organizations and enlisted the expertise of 70 scientists and educators for the outreach programs.

Since 2000, the museum has renovated three major halls without closing. The Hall of Mammals and the Ocean Hall are larger than the Human Origins space. The Ocean Hall opened in September 2008, cost \$49 million and covers 23,000 square feet. Through September, the Natural History museum has had 6 million visitors this year, making it the most popular facility on the Mall.



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1867 Yonge Street Toronto, ON Canada M4S 1Y5  
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[www.reich-petch.com](http://www.reich-petch.com)  
[info@reich-petch.com](mailto:info@reich-petch.com)