



BECOMING HUMAN

UNEARTHING OUR EARLIEST ANCESTORS



3 x 60 HD



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NOVA's three-part special *Becoming Human: Unearthing Our Earliest Ancestors* examines what the latest scientific research reveals about our hominid relatives—putting together the pieces of our human past and transforming our understanding of our earliest ancestors. Featuring interviews with world-renowned scientists, each hour unfolds with a CSI-like forensic investigation into the life and death of a specific hominid ancestor. *Becoming Human* was shot “in the trenches” where discoveries were unearthed throughout Africa and Europe. Dry bones spring back to life with stunning computer-generated animation and prosthetics. The series offers a vivid picture of human evolution that highlights the latest groundbreaking discoveries and, more importantly, explains how each new finding fits together with earlier ones to reveal a truly compelling story of survival.

The first hour explores the fossil of “Selam,” also known as “Lucy’s Child”—an amazing, nearly complete child fossil, which helps shed light on our ancestors’ early development and how we began to depart from that of chimps. NOVA takes viewers “inside the skull” to show how our ancestors’ brains had begun to change from those of the apes. This hour also explores a provocative “big idea” that sharp swings of climate were a key factor in driving human evolution. This theory suggests that such sudden flips may have been an essential creative engine that helped shape the emergence of our ancestors.

In gripping forensic detail, the second show in *Becoming Human* investigates the first skeleton that really looks like us—“Turkana Boy”—an astonishingly complete specimen of *Homo erectus* found by the famous Leakey team in Kenya. These ancestors are thought to have developed many key innovations such as hunting, use of fire, and extensive social bonds. “Turkana Boy” also marks the first time in human evolution that there is strong evidence of an extended period of childhood and parenting. New analyses of fossil bones and teeth are giving us direct evidence of how, why, and when humans’ uniquely long childhood and parenting began, and how the empathy of the family bond got started and why it proved vital.

The final program examines the roots of our own species, *Homo sapiens*, which new evidence pinpoints to southern Africa some 200,000 years ago. New discoveries suggest that our exodus from the continent was due to a period of intense cold climate—so severe that at one point the entire human population may have been reduced to perhaps only a few thousand or hundred. But the world into which modern humans slowly spread around 80,000 years ago was not empty. There were other ancient human species already there, and they were destined to become extinct. The best known of them are the Neanderthals, our European cousins who died out as modern humans spread from Africa into Europe during the Ice Age. The program investigates whether modern humans interbred with Neanderthals or exterminated them.

0908027

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CREDITS

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Produced by Shining Red Productions, Inc. for NOVA



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