

MEDIA RELEASE

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SEDIBA FOSSILS RETURN TO MAROPENG

This September sees the return of the two-million-year-old adult skeleton *Australopithecus sediba* (MH2) fossil to Maropeng. The two partial skeletons of a juvenile hominid male and an adult female were discovered by Professor Lee Berger of the University of Witwatersrand and his team in 2008.

On 8 September the astounding results of new research on the fossils will be revealed to the world by Prof Lee Berger and his counterparts.

The two skeletons are described in two papers published in April 2010, in the prestigious journal, *Science*, as a new species of early human ancestor called *Australopithecus sediba* (*Australopithecus* meaning “southern ape” and *sediba* meaning “natural spring”, or “well”, in South Africa’s Sotho language).

Found in the Malapa Cave, some 15km north-north-east of Sterkfontein, it is suggested that *Australopithecus sediba* might be a candidate for the transitional species between the southern African ape-man, *Australopithecus africanus* (of which Taung Child and Mrs Ples are examples), and *Homo habilis*, or even a direct ancestor of *Homo erectus* (of which Turkana Boy, Java Man and Peking Man are examples).

Australopithecus sediba has long arms like an ape, short, powerful hands, a very advanced pelvis (hip bone) and long legs capable of striding and possibly running, like a human’s.

Originally on display at Maropeng in April 2009, the fossils have attracted worldwide attention. Their unveiling was attended by Professor Lee Berger, University of the

Witwatersrand Vice-Chancellor Loyiso Nongxa, Deputy President of South Africa Kgalema Motlanthe and other dignitaries.

Extensive research has been carried out on the fossils but, now that they're back on display at Maropeng, those who missed out on the first opportunity to view them can take advantage of the limited package offer Maropeng has put together for September. This includes a private tour and discussion of the sediba fossils and other material on display by a member of the Malapa team. Dr Bernhard Zipfel, who has conducted research on the foot and ankle bone, and Dr Job Kibii, co-permit holder on the Malapa site and whose research focuses on the hand and pelvis, are scheduled to host discussions and tours. For more information on dates, times and price visit www.maropeng.co.za.

Fossil discoveries in the Cradle of Humankind have been fundamental to the understanding of evolution of humans. Nearly a third of all the evidence for humans originating in Africa came from just a few sites in this region. It is one of the most explored areas in Africa for evidence of human origins, having been investigated continuously since the first discoveries in the 1930s.

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