

Much Ida About Nothing

By Bill Fortenberry

The recent media hype about the latest “missing link” has produced an increased boldness among the ranks of evolutionary scientists. Many have touted this fossil as the proverbial nail in the coffin of creationism, but is the media hype just empty banter, or is Ida an actual “missing link”? To help you understand the situation, let me make a few observations about the actual study responsible for bringing this 30 year old discovery back into the limelight. The study itself is available in the public domain and can be downloaded from the following location:

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0005723>.

An Empty Boast

The first thing immediately apparent in the study is that the authors never once claim that Ida is a “missing link.” In fact, they go to great lengths to avoid that claim stating very clearly that “our focus here is on morphology and paleobiology.” The closest they ever came to actually attributing “missing link” status to this discovery was their statement that “Darwinius masillae [Ida], and adapoids contemporary with early tarsoids, could represent a stem group from which later anthropoid primates evolved,” but even that statement was immediately nullified by their rapid explanation of, “but we are not advocating this here, nor do we consider either Darwinius or adapoids to be anthropoids.” Clearly the authors of this study were wary of any association with even the slightest claim that Ida is a “missing link.”

A Glaring Contradiction

There is also a major contradiction within the pages of this report which brings serious doubt on the quality of its authorship. The authors stated that “plate B was restored and in the process partly fabricated to make it look more complete.” They later gave more details of this fabrication by explaining that “radiographs show that all of plate A is genuine, while cranium, thorax, upper arms, and lumbus, pelvis, base of tail, and upper legs of plate B are genuine.” But in the section describing the legs of the specimen the authors state that “most of the left lower leg is preserved on plate B.” How can most of the left lower leg be preserved on plate B if that part of the plate was fabricated? This contradiction brings into question all of the authors’ conclusions about plate B including their analysis of the contents of the digestive system which is also found only on plate B.

In light of this, it is significant to note further that the authors did not rely on the radiographs to determine which parts of plate B were fabricated as they claimed. Instead, they admit to simply accepting all of plate A as accurate and using it to validate parts of plate B. (“The Oslo specimen, plate A, clarifies exactly which parts of plate B were faked.”) This is truly remarkable given that the lower left leg and the contents of the digestive system are still claimed to be genuine in spite of their absence on plate A.

Graphic Reconstruction

While it is common for evolutionists to emphasize the results of their graphic reconstructions, it must be pointed out that these reconstructions are not true scientific evidence. They are simply guesses at what something would have looked like if it could be seen. They may be highly educated guesses, but they are

still guesses none the less. These guesses were employed in several parts of this study. For example:

“Innovative imagery” was used to overcome difficulties in examining the bones themselves. (“Individual bones and teeth cannot be physically removed to examine individually, a difficulty we have partially overcome with innovative CT imagery.”)

A “special algorithm” was used to overcome resolution difficulties. (“For the whole plate, the maximum resolution was 430 microns, even using micro CT. This problem was overcome using a special algorithm on the RayScan apparatus, which increased the resolution to 68 microns. Artefacts [errors] of this algorithm are progressive fusion and loss of contrast of bones and teeth in the images, due to averaging of originally different densities. However, compromises can be found that are still acceptable at this resolution.”)

And “graphic reconstruction” was employed in gaining critical data about Ida’s teeth. (“Little can be seen of the crowns of the molars in either plate A or plate B. However, we have succeeded in extracting three molars using micro-CT and graphic reconstruction.”)

As you can see the authors reliance on graphic reconstruction was extensive. Every conclusion derived from these techniques is suspect for errors and must be verified by other means before it can be accepted.

An Obvious Oversight

The absence of the grooming claw was stated as being of “particular importance,” but I searched in vain for an explanation of what methods were used in looking for this particular claw. All I could find was a single sentence stating that it was not present. (“The toilet or grooming claw reported on the second digit of *Europolemur kelleri* cannot be identified here.”) Of course, this sentence with its recognition as being of “particular importance” contradicts the statement made in the paragraph immediately preceding it. (“Little can be said about metatarsals II–V except for their proportions, which are not as slender as in Lemur.”) I would simply like to know how the authors came to their conclusion. Were they unable to identify the grooming claw because of the poor resolution of their imaging? Was the margin of error within the “special algorithm” too great for an acceptable identification? These questions are not answered anywhere within the text of the report thus forcing us rely solely on the claim of the authors. Such oversight is hardly worthy of scientific recognition.

An Audacious Assertion

From this single, partially fabricated fossil, the authors of the study have claimed that they can arrive at a “fairly complete reconstruction of life history, locomotion, and diet.” Such a claim is preposterous to say the least. By what means are they capable of discovering a complete life history? The authors presented evidence that the creature suffered a fracture. Are they able to discern how that fracture occurred? Can they say with any degree of certainty whether the limb was broken in a fall or in an attack? Of course not; the only thing they can state with any amount of certainty is that the limb was fractured. Anything further would be pure speculation.

The same speculation must be employed to claim knowledge of the creature’s diet. Even if the fossilized stomach contents were genuine, they do not give a dietary history of the animal. They merely show what her most recent meal consisted of. Perhaps the creature was sick or injured and unable to obtain

her food of choice, or perhaps it was her choice of last meals that killed her. It is simply impossible to determine habitual diet from the remains of Ida's stomach.

Conclusion

Rather than demonstrating the proof of evolution that has the popular media snapping their suspenders, this study of Ida merely exemplifies the desperation of evolutionists in clutching at anything that offers the slightest promise of supporting their theory. The study is filled with contradictions, inconclusive imagery, unsupported conclusions and grandiose claims of knowledge, but does not provide even the slightest proof of evolution. Creationists need not fear this study in the least, and may actually be able to use it to their advantage as it demonstrates the great desperation of the disciples of evolution. May all their studies prove equally invalid.