

## Early humans loved living near water, too

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The lure of waterfront property goes back a long way in human history, according to researchers. *Ardipithecus ramidus*, one of the earliest known ancestors of modern humans, preferred to live close to the water's edge rather than in the interior regions of East Africa where previous research suggested the ancient hominins resided.



Research of sedimentary layers in Ethiopia, showing ancient hominins' preference for riverside living, gives evolutionary clues, says Nahid Gani of the Tulane Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences. (Illustration by Melinda Viles)

These latest findings, revealing predecessors of today's coast-hugging populations, appear in a Dec. 20 article in the online journal *Nature Communication*. The article is co-authored by Nahid Gani, a professor of practice in the Tulane Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences Department.

Gani and her co-author husband, Royhan Gani, an assistant professor in the earth and environmental sciences department at the University of New Orleans, studied sedimentary layers in Aramis, Ethiopia, where fossils of at least 36 members of the

4.4 million-year-old *Ardipithecus ramidus* have been found.

Layers of sediment around the fossils revealed ancient channels indicating the presence of major rivers. Carbon isotope analysis from ancient soils showed the signs of decayed mixed vegetation (grasses and trees) prevalent in river-adjacent floodplains.

The habitat of “Ardi,” as scientists have nicknamed the tree-climbing Pliocene-age species, has far more implications than providing the antecedent for modern-day real estate preferences.

“East Africa has been the centre place for human evolutionary studies, including investigation of why and how hominins split off from early apes,” the Ganis write. “Understanding the dynamic nature of the early Pliocene landscape and environments, once frequented by hominins, both at a regional and local scale, is critical to evaluate the role of physical environment as a driver for hominin evolution.”

*Nature Communications* is a weekly peer-reviewed scientific journal published by the same group that produces the 142-year-old *Nature*, the world's most cited scientific journal.