

Re: Move over Piltdown, here comes AAH

Source: <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.anthropology.paleo/2005-11/msg00694.html>

- *From:* "Lee Olsen" <paleocity@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 15 Nov 2005 20:34:47 -0800
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Pauline M Ross wrote:

> On 14 Nov 2005 21:46:08 -0800, "Lee Olsen" <paleocity@xxxxxxxxxxxx>
> wrote:
>
>>> How many full-time scavengers are there?
>>
>>Vultures, and marabou storks are very close
>
> Yes, it's easier for birds to find and get to carcasses.

During daylight hours.

Terrestrial

> scavengers have a tougher time of it.
>
>>As Pat Shipman (1994) puts it: "Carnivores scavenge when they can and
>>hunt when they must."
>
> Nice quote!

Yes, sure fits the male lion's MO, who seldom wake up until after the
females catch a
zebra :-)

>
> [Big snip]
>
>>> Well, this is exactly what DR was assessing, and his conclusions are
>>> pretty clear: the tool-using hominids most often had primary access to
>>> carcasses, before other predators got to them.
>>
>>>Yes, O'Connell et al. cite DR and confirm what you said above for his
>>work. However, not everyone is in total agreement--- O'Connell
>>concludes: "Conflicting signals from these early sites almost certainly
>>reflect problems with both the experimental controls and the damage
>>pattern counts themselves (Lupo & O'Connell, 2002)."
>

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> Interesting. Is the paper available online?

Yes.

<http://www.anthro.utah.edu/papers.html>

Someone on this list may have referenced the URL a while back, but maybe not. Anyway, should keep you busy reading for a while.

I see in the refs of O'Connell's paper that DR answered Lupo & O'Connell. Should be an interesting read also. A new Binford vs Bunn type war in the making?

>

>> Does DR give any ideas on how he thinks early Homo could beat the rest
>> of the predators to these animals?

>

> Not his remit, I think. But if they were snatching them away from the
> primary predators straight after the kill, they would have to have
> been very close, perhaps trailing the same group of prey or the
> predators themselves.

>

>> Not only that, O'Connell points out that many were in the prime of
>> their lives.

>

> Good point, which I hadn't appreciated before.

Sounds like hunting to me, but O'Connell certainly doesn't think so.

>

>>> – Aggressive scavenging from the primary predator (driving them away
>>> from a kill). He and Tappen agree (and so do I) that, while early
>>> hominids would be perfectly capable of doing this, it would be a
>>> highly dangerous way to make a regular living.

>>

>> Nope, only lions would be a problem. O'Connell et al.: "In all 18
>> cases, Hadza drove them off immediately." These were mostly lion kills
>> (and the Hadza were armed with very good bows).

>> "Right on schedule, five hyenas appeared out of nowhere.....After we
>> filmed the hyenas feeding, we frightened them away and retrieved the
>> carcass (Johanson 1994:115)." Louis and Richard Leakey also duplicated
>> this feat using only sticks. Cheetahs are known to be simply chickens
>> and just about every predator on the savanna takes their kills away.
>> Sue Savage-Rambaugh (1994) scattered a pack of feral dogs stalking her
>> by just throwing a few rocks.

>

> Yes, it wouldn't be difficult to do this occasionally. I would be more
> convinced if the researchers were to replicate the proposed behaviour
> more accurately, that is, to use only the basic weapons available to
> the early tool-users, to dismember the carcass while continuing to
> keep the original predator(s) at bay, to leave with the chosen items,

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> and then to repeat the process two or three times a week indefinitely.

Well, I don't know of any big game sites (or small ones for that matter, scavenged or hunted) that contain the victims of a battle over a carcass. The tools are there, so it proves they could keep other scavengers away. Or maybe they knew the coast would be clear at mid-day?

> And bear in mind also DR's finding that medium-sized ungulates (>100kg) were the typical prey, and therefore the competitors are less likely to be cheetahs, and more likely larger cats or groups.

"Typical prey" of what gets preserved he means.

There is a big hole in the data bank. Out on the open savanna victims get completely gobbled up or rot away. Any bone away from a water source has almost a zero chance of being preserved. Johanson (1994:264): "In one year they averaged one kill every 12 hours—hardly what you would call gentle herbivores." He was referring to baboons catching Thompson's gazelles. How much of this kind of activity is available in the archaeological record? No much I'll guess.

>

> I'm not one of those armchair westerners who says, oooh, big fierce lions, our ancestors could never have tackled them. Sure they could, but as a *way of life*, something you do regularly week in, week out, to feed your group – that strikes me as a very high risk strategy.

I still disagree here. What humans are victims of today's predators?

1. People alone, particularly at night. Same for baboons, they take away kills from leopards during the day, the reverse is true at night, leopards kill baboons (Johanson 1994:113).
2. Getting in-between a mother and her cubs is always bad.
3. Small children.

Groups of hunters don't get killed when working together.

>

> In Tappen's research, two of the 15 carcasses were in situations where the original predators could have been driven off, and according to her data this would have happened every 70 days or so (perhaps more often 3Mya, but perhaps also the hominids would not have been numerous or well-armed enough to attempt this on every occasion). But this sort of frequency would not bother the original predators too much.

I'm not sure an anthropologist's personal data is meaningful since the Hadza chase off predators with a 100% success rate with bows. The number of days between opportunities depends on biomass, something that can't be duplicated for the Plio/Pleistocene. Masai can drive a lion off a kill with only a shield and a spear one-on-one (they do lose

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warriors this way). If they gang up on a lion with more than one hunter involved, it's no contest, hunters win.

If the only weapons allowed are clubs or rocks (the ones most likely used in the Plio/Pleistocene), no leopard, hyena, jackal, or cheetah can stand up to a group of rock-throwing hominids. Lions still are the only predators that need heavy weapons to drive off a kill. I would agree that one-on-one with predators early Homo might not fare so well, but I can't see any reason they couldn't have formed groups to drive off hyenas and the smaller cats off kills. Or, if Homo did get there first, as DR claims, I see no reason why only one person would be involved in the butchery process. Maybe several of the group just stood around throwing rocks at hyenas while the others did the cutting.

>

- > But to deliberately target predator kills would mean trailing
- > predators pretty closely, and having their prey taken *regularly*
- > would be likely to seriously piss off the targeted predators. I would
- > suggest that there were easier and less risky methods of getting meat.

Johanson (1994:93): "At Olduvai, the bones are smashed to smithereens and the stone tools are everywhere. That visual evidence alone suggests the hominids at Olduvai behaved in a fundamentally different way from those at Hadar about a million years earlier."

OK, what's your less risky method of getting meat?

<snip>

>

- >>I think one needs to follow the history of anthropology here also,
- >>besides looking at the current evidence. Many of the same people that
- >>were selling the scavenger hypothesis, were also saying the same thing
- >>about Neandertals, they couldn't hunt, they were nothing but
- >>scavengers. Then smoking-gun evidence turned up (Schöningen,
- >>Germany; Clacton, England spears, hafted points, Mareans papers, etc)
- >>and they all shut up. No reason to believe, based on the same type
- >>arguments, that they are any more correct about no hunting in the Lower
- >>Paleolithic.

>

- > Oh, absolutely. But it is quite funny when people decide, on
- > impeccable theoretical grounds, that hominids couldn't have
- > hunted/tackled big predators/whatever (too small, weak, timid....) and
- > therefore must have crept around scavenging brain and marrow from
- > abandoned carcasses, and someone like DR comes along and says – well,
- > no, actually, the evidence says that they had primary access to good
- > amounts of meat.

Well, I've got his reply to Lupo & O'Connell (2002) on my must-read list, it will be interesting to see who is the most convincing.

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> --
> Pauline Ross

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• **References:**

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