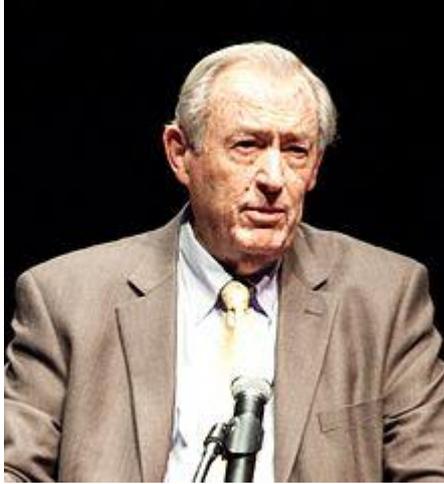


# Richard Leakey

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## Richard Leakey



Richard Leakey in 2010

<b>Born</b>	19 December 1944 (age 68)
	Nairobi, Kenya
<b>Nationality</b>	Kenyan
<b>Fields</b>	Paleoanthropology

**Richard Erskine Frere Leakey** (born 19 December 1944 in Nairobi) is a politician, paleoanthropologist and conservationist. He is second of the three sons of the archaeologists Louis Leakey and Mary Leakey, and is the younger brother of Colin Leakey.

## Early life

### Earliest years

As a small boy, Leakey lived in Nairobi with his parents, Louis Leakey, curator of the Coryndon Museum, and Mary Leakey, director of the Leakey excavations at Olduvai, and his two brothers, Jonathan and Philip. The Leakey brothers had a very active childhood. All the boys had ponies and belonged to the Langata Pony Club. They participated in jumping and steeplechase competitions but often rode for fun across the plains to the Ngong Hills, chasing and playing games with the animals. Sometimes the whole club were guests at the Leakeys for holidays and vacations. Leakey's parents founded the Dalmatian Club of East Africa and won a prize in 1957. Dogs and many other pets shared the Leakey home. The Leakey boys participated in games conducted by both adults and children, in which they tried to imitate early humans, catching springhares and small antelope by hand on the Serengeti. They drove lions and jackals from the kill to see if they could do it.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Fractured skull

When Leakey was 11, he fell from his horse, fractured his skull and lay near death. Coincidentally it was this incident that saved his parents' marriage. Louis was seriously

considering leaving Mary for his secretary, Rosalie Osborn. As the battle with Mary raged in the household, Leakey begged his father from his sickbed not to leave. That was the deciding factor. Louis broke up with Rosalie and the family lived in happy harmony for a few years more.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Duke of York Secondary School**

The Leakey boys had several nannies like their father before them. At age 11 Leakey entered the Duke of York Secondary School (later known as Lenana School). The Mau Mau rebellion was just winding down, the settlers believing they had won a victory, and the mood reflected that struggle and that belief. On his first day Leakey called for racial equality, like his father. Calling him a "lover of niggers", the other students locked him in a wire cage, spat and urinated on him and poked him with sticks. The school administration blamed Leakey. After he was caned for missing chapel, Leakey resolved never to be a Christian.

He skipped class frequently in favour of a business he started, selling small animals to be photographed by Des Bartlett. In December 1960, Leakey reached his 16th birthday and promptly quit the Duke of York. His parents gave him a choice: return to school or support himself.

## **Teenage entrepreneur**

Richard chose to support himself, borrowed 500 pounds from his parents for a Land Rover, and went into the trapping and skeleton supply business with Kamoya Kimeu. Already a skilled horseman, outdoorsman, Land Rover mechanic, archaeologist and expedition leader, he learned to identify bones, skills which all pointed to a path he did not yet wish to take, simply because his father was on it.<sup>[3]</sup>

The bone business turned into a safari business in 1961. In 1962 he obtained a private aeroplane pilot license and took tours to Olduvai. It was from a casual aerial survey that he noted the potential of Lake Natron's shores for palaeontology. He went looking for fossils in a Land Rover, but could find none, until his parents assigned Glynn Isaac to go with him. Louis was so impressed with their finds that he gave them National Geographic money for a month's expedition.<sup>[4]</sup> They explored in the vicinity of Peninj near the lake, where Leakey was in charge of the administrative details. Bored, he returned to Nairobi temporarily, but at that moment, Kamoya Kimeu discovered a fossil of *Australopithecus boisei*. A second expedition left Leakey feeling that he was being excluded from the most significant part of the operation, the scientific analysis.

## **Marriage**

In 1964 on his second Lake Natron expedition, Leakey met an archaeologist named Margaret Cropper. When Margaret returned to England, Leakey decided to follow suit to study for a degree and become better acquainted with her. He completed his high school requirements in six months; meanwhile Margaret obtained her degree at the University of Edinburgh. He passed the entrance exams for admission to college, but in 1965 he and Margaret decided to get married and return to Kenya. His father offered him a job at Centre for Prehistory and Paleontology. He worked for it, excavating at Lake Baringo and continued his photographic safari business, making enough money to buy a house in Karen, a pleasant suburb of Nairobi. Their daughter Anna was born in 1969, the same year that Leakey and Margaret divorced. He

married his colleague Meave Epps in 1970 and they had two daughters, Louise (born 1972) and Samira (1974).<sup>[5]</sup>

## Paleontology

Leakey's career as a palaeoanthropologist did not begin with a dateable event or a sudden decision, as did Louis'; he was with his parents on every excavation, was taught every skill and was given responsible work even as a boy. It is not surprising that his independent decision making led him into conflict with his father, who had always tried to instill in him that very trait. After he gave some fossils to Tanzania and set Margaret to inventory Louis' collections, Louis suggested he find work elsewhere in 1967.

Richard formed the Kenya Museum Associates (now Kenya Museum Society) with influential Kenyans in that year. Their intent was to 'Kenyatize' and improve the National Museum. They offered the museum 5000 pounds, 1/3 of its yearly budget, if it would place Leakey in a responsible position. He was given an observer's seat on the board of directors. Joel Ojal, the government official in charge of the museum, and a member of the Associates, directed the chairman of the board to start placing Kenyans on it.

## The Omo

Plans for the museum had not matured when Louis, intentionally or not, found a way to remove his confrontational son from the scene. Louis attended a lunch with Emperor Haile Selassie and President Jomo Kenyatta. The conversation turned to fossils and the Emperor wanted to know why none had been found in Ethiopia. Louis developed this inquiry into permission to excavate on the Omo River.

The expedition consisted of three contingents: French, under Camille Arambourg, American, under Clark Howell, and Kenyan, led by Leakey. Louis could not go because of his arthritis. Crossing the Omo in 1967, Leakey's contingent was attacked by crocodiles, which destroyed their wooden boat. Expedition members barely escaped with their lives. Leakey radioed Louis for a new, aluminium boat, which the National Geographic Society was happy to supply.

On site, Kamoya Kimeu found a Hominid fossil. Leakey took it to be *Homo erectus*, but Louis identified it as *Homo sapiens*. It was the oldest of the species found at that time, dating to 160,000 years, and was the first contemporaneous with *Homo neanderthalensis*. During the identification process, Leakey came to feel that the college men were patronising him.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Koobi Fora

During the Omo expedition of 1967, Leakey visited Nairobi and on the return flight the pilot flew over Lake Rudolph (now Lake Turkana) to avoid a thunderstorm. The map led Leakey to expect volcanic rock below him but he saw sediments. Visiting the region with Howell by helicopter, he saw tools and fossils everywhere. In his mind, he was already formulating a new enterprise.

In 1968 Louis and Leakey attended a meeting of the Research and Exploration Committee of the National Geographic Society to ask for money for Omo. Catching Louis by surprise,

Leakey asked the committee to divert the \$25,000 intended for Omo to new excavations to be conducted under his leadership at Koobi Fora. Leakey won, but chairman Leonard Carmichael told him he'd better find something or never "come begging at our door again." Louis graciously congratulated Leakey.

More was yet to come. By now the board of the National Museum was packed with Kenyan supporters of Leakey. They appointed him administrative director. The curator, Robert Carcasson, resigned in protest and Leakey was left with the museum at his command, which he, like Louis before him, used as a base of operations.<sup>[7]</sup> Although there was friendly rivalry and contention between Louis and Leakey, relations remained good. Each took over for the other when one was busy with something else or incapacitated, and Leakey continued to inform his father immediately of Hominid finds.

In the first expedition to Allia Bay on Lake Turkana, where the Koobi Fora camp came to be located, Leakey hired only graduate students in anthropology, as he did not want any questioning of his leadership. The students were John Harris and Bernard Wood. Also present was a team of Africans under Kamoya: a geochemist, Paul Abel, and a photographer, Bob Campbell. Margaret was the archaeologist. Leakey took to smoking a pipe to enhance his status, as did Kamoya. There were no leadership problems. In contrast to his father, Leakey ran a disciplined and tidy camp, although to find fossils, he did push the expedition harder than it wished.

In 1969 the discovery of a cranium of *Paranthropus boisei* caused great excitement. A *Homo rudolfensis* skull (KNM ER 1470) and a *Homo erectus* skull (KNM ER 3733), discovered in 1972 and 1975, respectively, were among the most significant finds of Leakey's earlier expeditions. In 1978 an intact cranium of *Homo erectus* (KNM ER 3883) was discovered.

Leakey was diagnosed with a terminal kidney disease in 1969. Ten years later he became seriously ill but received a kidney transplant from his brother, Philip and recovered to full health.<sup>[5]</sup>

Leakey and Donald Johanson were at the time considered to be the most famous palaeoanthropologists, and scientifically their views on human evolution were differing, a scientific rivalry that gained public attention. This culminated at the *Cronkite's Universe* talk show hosted by Walter Cronkite in New York in 1981, where Leakey and Johanson held a fierce debate on live TV show.<sup>[8]</sup>

## West Turkana

Turkana Boy — discovered by Kamoya Kimeu, a member of the Leakeys' team in 1984 — was the nearly complete skeleton of a *Homo ergaster* (though some, including Leakey, call it *erectus*) who died 1.6 million years ago at about age 9–12. Leakey and Roger Lewin describe the experience of this find and their interpretation of it, in their book *Origins Reconsidered* (1992). Shortly after the discovery of Turkana Boy, Leakey and his team made the discovery of a skull (KNM WT 17000, known as "Black Skull") of a new species, *Australopithecus aethiopicus* (or *Paranthropus aethiopicus*).

Richard shifted away from palaeontology in 1989, but his wife Meave Leakey and daughter Louise Leakey still continue palaeontological research in Northern Kenya.

## Conservation

In 1989 Richard Leakey was appointed the head of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Department (WMCD) by President Daniel Arap Moi in response to the international outcry over the poaching of elephants and the impact it was having on the wildlife of Kenya. The department was replaced by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in 1990, and Leakey became its first chairman. With characteristically bold steps Leakey created special, well-armed anti-poaching units that were authorised to shoot poachers on sight. The poaching menace was dramatically reduced. Impressed by Leakey's transformation of the KWS, the World Bank approved grants worth \$140 million. Richard Leakey, President Arap Moi and the WMCD made the international news headlines when a stock pile of 12 tons of ivory was burned in 1989 in Nairobi National Park.

Richard Leakey's confrontational approach to the issue of human–wildlife conflict in national parks did not win him only friends. His view was that parks were self-contained ecosystems that had to be fenced in and the humans kept out. Leakey's bold and incorruptible nature also offended many local politicians.

### Plane crash

In 1993, a small propeller-driven plane piloted by Richard Leakey crashed, crushing his lower legs, both of which were later amputated. Sabotage was suspected but never proved. In a few months Richard Leakey was walking again on artificial limbs. Around this time the Kenyan government announced that a secret probe had found evidence of corruption and mismanagement in the KWS. An annoyed Leakey resigned publicly in a press conference in January 1994. He was replaced by David Western as the head of the KWS.

Richard Leakey wrote about his experiences at the KWS in his book *Wildlife Wars: My Fight to Save Africa's Natural Treasures* (2001)

## Politics

In May 1995 Richard Leakey joined some Kenyan intellectuals in launching a new political party – the Safina Party, which in Swahili means "Noah's Ark". "If KANU and Mr. Moi will do something about the deterioration of public life, corruption and mismanagement, I'd be happy to fight alongside them. If they won't, I want somebody else to do it," announced Richard Leakey. The Safina party was routinely harassed and even its application to become an official political party was not approved until 1997.

In 1999, Moi had to appoint Richard Leakey as Cabinet Secretary and overall head of the civil service at the insistence of international donor institutions as a pre-condition for the resumption of donor funds. Leakey's second stint in the civil service lasted until 2001 when he was forced to resign again.

## Later activities

Leakey joined the Department of Anthropology faculty at Stony Brook University, New York in 2002.<sup>[9]</sup> He is currently a professor of anthropology at Stony Brook, where he is Chair of the Turkana Basin Institute.

In 2004, Richard Leakey founded and chaired WildlifeDirect, a Kenya-based charitable organisation. The charity was established to provide support to conservationists in Africa directly on the ground via the use of blogs. This enables individuals anywhere to play a direct and interactive role in the survival of some of the world's most precious species. The organisation played a significant role in the saving of Congo's mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park in January 2007 after a rebel uprising threatened to eliminate the highly vulnerable population.

In April 2007 he was appointed interim chairman of Transparency International Kenya branch.<sup>[10]</sup> The same year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society<sup>[11]</sup>

In June 2013, Leakey was awarded the Isaac Asimov Science Award from the American Humanist Association.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Opinions

Leakey stated in his autobiography that he is an atheist.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Bibliography

Leakey's early published works include: *Origins* and *The People of the Lake* (both with Roger Lewin as co-author); *The Illustrated Origin of Species*; and *The Making of Mankind* (1981). Leakey had an open scientific rivalry with Donald Johanson during the 1980s.

- *Origins* (with Roger Lewin) (Dutton, 1977)
- *People of the Lake: Mankind and its Beginnings* (with Roger Lewin) (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978)
- *Making of Mankind* (Penguin USA, 1981)
- *One Life: An Autobiography* (Salem House, 1983)
- *Origins Reconsidered* (with Roger Lewin) (Doubleday, 1992)
- *The Origin of Humankind* (Perseus Books Group, 1994)
- *The Sixth Extinction* (with Roger Lewin) (Bantam Dell Pub Group, 1995)
- *Wildlife Wars: My Fight to Save Africa's Natural Treasures* (with Virginia Morell) (St. Martin's Press, 2001)

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## References

1. ^ Virginia Morell, *Ancestral Passions*, Copyright 1995, Chapter 18, "Richard Makes his Move".
2. ^ Morell, Chapter 17, "Chimpanzees and Other Loves."
3. ^ Richard E. Leakey, *The Making of Mankind*, Copyright 1981, Chapter 1 Page 1. He says he wished to be "free" of his parents' world, a sentiment both Louis and Mary must have understood very well, even though they opposed his freedom.
4. ^ Morell, Chapter 18, "Richard Makes his Move." Besides Leakey and Glynn, the roster included Barbara Isaac, Philip Leakey, Hugo van Lawick and six of Mary's African assistants.
5. ^ <sup>a b</sup> Talk Origins – Richard Leakey
6. ^ This section is based on Morell Chapter 20, "To the Omo."
7. ^ Morell, Chapter 21, "Breaking Away."
8. ^ Roger Lewin: *Bones of Contention* University of Chicago Press, 1997. ISBN 0-226-47651-0
9. ^ Stony Brook University, Press release, 27 March 2007: World-Renowned Anthropologist Richard Leakey to be Honored at Stony Brook University's 50th Anniversary Gala April 11
10. ^ The Standard, 4 April 2007: *Leakey takes over at TI*
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13. ^ Leakey, Leakey (1983). *One Life: An Autobiography* (p. 38)