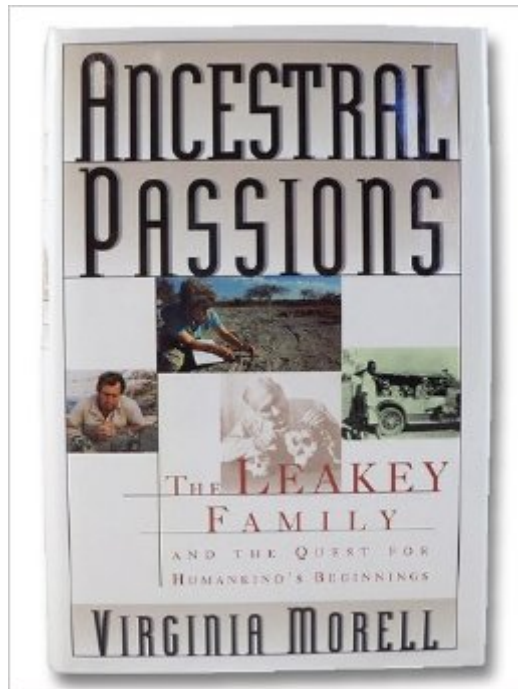


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Ancestral Passions: The Leakey Family And The Quest For Humankind's Beginnings



Synopsis

This is a biography of the first family of anthropology - Louis, Mary and Richard Leakey, whose discoveries have laid the foundations for much of our knowledge about the origins of man. The Leakeys have dominated their science. Not only did each of them make key fossil discoveries, but Louis (who argued that man did not originate on the Eurasian continent tens of thousands of years ago, but was more likely to have evolved in Africa millions of years ago) helped to establish the theoretical groundwork for the science of paleoanthropology. The biography explores the Leakeys many significant finds, as they exposed our ancestry and articulated our relationship to the other primates, especially the early hominids. It also exposes the rivals and jealousies within the family and in relation to other scientists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Morell's astounding level of research reveals the Leakeys individually, as a family, and as dogged searchers for the truth about man's origins--and as living, breathing humans. Through letters, diaries, journals, personal interviews, and family archives, they speak to the reader with unprecedented candor about their personal travails, but more importantly, about their early struggles for funding, their fossil discoveries in remote desert locations, their constant surprise by the historical record, and their uncertainty, to this day, about modern man's exact lineage. Some Leakey peccadilloes, never secret, are fully documented here: Louis's constant womanizing and his "adoption" of young female researchers, such as Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas; Mary's scotch-drinking, her cigar-smoking, and her intolerance of those on her Stinker List, some of

them other researchers; and Richard's boyish brashness and arrogance, along with his health problems and dislike of Donald Johanson. Less appreciated, however, is the fact that before Louis's work and significant discoveries, people still believed that early man was from China or Europe, not Africa. Mary Leakey was the first person ever to excavate a Paleolithic site, and her meticulous care about documenting the tools and animals found in the same stratae as her hominid fossils, told here in detail, revolutionized the way fossils were recovered and catalogued. Richard found as many hominid fossils in two years (1971 and 1972) as Mary and Louis found in 36 years, and his level of dedication to research since finding his first hominid fossil at age 6, his mentoring of young researchers, and his creation of museums and foundations in Nairobi have perhaps received less attention than they deserve.

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