

A Closer Look at Tanzania's Zinjanthropus

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Most stamps have one subject which fit them easily into a category – Greek temples, Roman sculpture, Egyptian gods. However, an occasional stamp shows several different subjects.

Such a stamp is Tanzania Scott No. 14. I first saw this 1.30 shilling value of the December 9, 1965 regular issue when George Rohrer included a copy with his article “A Philatelic View of Early Man” (OWA III-4). At that time he drew our attention to the reconstruction of Zinjanthropus.

However, there is another major area of the stamp. This pictures an area covered with tarpaulins with a small group of people around it. In the foreground is what appears to be a group of workers. What struck me even more as I looked at the people at the tarp was the stooped man in khakis (4 in the figure). This seemed to me to be a characteristic pose of Dr. Louis Leakey.

But how to confirm this? On a pure guess I tried the National Geographic. I knew that from the late '50s the National Geographic Society had supported the Leakeys' investigations. Imagine my surprise and satisfaction when I found almost the exact picture on page 214 of the February, 1965 issue. This is contained in an article by Melvin M. Payne, then Executive Vice President and Secretary as well as Vice Chairman of the Committee for Research and Development. In this last role Mr. Payne visited the Leakey's at Olduvai Gorge. The resulting article is a combination description of what he saw and a review of the life and work of members of the Leakey family. This is accompanied by many photographs of the Leakeys and members of the National Geographic family.

I was now more convinced than ever that Person 4 was Louis Leakey. But I decided to write the National Geographic Society for confirmation. I also hoped that one of the two women (1 and 5 in the figure) would be Mary Leakey who does appear in many of the article's photographs. As I have found in the past, the National Geographic Society proved very cooperative. Gilbert Grosvenor, who took the original photograph, identified many of the individuals. They are: -1- Ms. Donna Grosvenor; -2- Dr. Melville Bell Grosvenor; -3- Richard Leakey; -4- Louis Leakey; and -5- Mrs. Melville Bell Grosvenor. The African in khaki -6- cannot be identified. Unfortunately for us the stamp designer eliminated -3- Richard Leakey. But Louis Leakey firmly remains.

Major changes have occurred in transferring the foreground of the photograph to the stamp. In the photo there are three groups of native workers who are in the process of sifting soil for any archaeological fragments. On the stamp this has been reduced to tone

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group which has been moved slightly closer to the tarped area. This is probably the only stamp which shows this standard archaeological procedure.

The National Geographic article identifies the photograph; "Workers sift Olduvai soil in search of bone fragments; here Homo habilis lay buried hundreds of thousands of years." This raised the question of the identity of the area under the tarpaulins. Their presence indicates the protection of a find. But is this the actual site of the find of homo habilis or is reference to the Olduvai Gorge in general as the site? I also asked the National Geographic Society this question. Their answer: "This picture was taken at Olduvai Gorge, the site of the first discovery o the bones of Homo habilis", seems to indicate the more general identification. The question then remains: What was under the tarpaulins?

Incidentally, -2- Dr. Melville Bell Grosvenor and the photographer, Gilbert M. Grosvenor, both could fit into a category of individuals who have encouraged archaeology. The National Geographic Society has helped finance archaeological expeditions throughout the world. The Grosvenor family has played a prolonged role in leading the National Geographic Society. In a family influence probably unparalleled in scientific history one would start with Dr. Gilbert H. Grosvenor, who served as Editor from 1899 to 1954 and President from at least 1920. in 1957 Melville Bell Grosvenor became Editor and President serving to 1967 when he became Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Editor-in-Chief. Today he is Chairman Emeritus. Gilbert M. Grosvenor is today the Editor and Vice President of the Society.

Thus this one stamp fits into a number of very different types of archaeological categories.

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