

Program: Discovering Humans

Speaker: John Langdon, Professor of Biology and Anthropology, University of Indianapolis **Introduced by:** Jim Willson

Attendance: 119

Guests: Chris Edwards, Carry Sievers, Matt Brenna, Hee-Myung Park, Mary Gobbett, Pat Keener

Scribe: Russell Judd

Editor: Ed Nitka

Today's talk was given by John Langdon, professor of Biology and Anthropology at the University of Indianapolis. He spoke of "the true story of the Piltdown forgery or bad data."

In 1913 fossil fragments of human skull and a quite thick jaw bone were found in Piltdown Commons, England by Charles Dawson. One year later a large canine tooth was found. Soon there was considerable debate whether the fossils really belonged together and the size of the skull when it was reconstructed. Arthur Keith believed that a large cranium was necessary to be human. One hundred years ago, discoveries were usually made by amateurs. They were not trained. They had no sophisticated dating method. Often they were ambitious and looked for notoriety. Nationalism was big and many in England thought that the "first Englishman" had been found. Questions of the authenticity of the fossils and where the Piltdown man belongs in the human evolutionary tree had persisted over the years. Other discoveries of fossils had filled in gaps in the tree, but it was difficult to place the Piltdown man. By reexamining the fossils and persistent questioning it was found that Dawson's fossils were forgeries. It has taken years, better science, and detailed reexamination to explain the Piltdown man. Scientists do make mistakes Questioning assumptions is very necessary. Corrections are usually performed by the scientific community.



John Langdon