

# Best of Last Week—Human fossils older than thought, cause of long COVID and monkeypox evolving faster than expected

July 5 2022, by Bob Yirka

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Four different *Australopithecus* crania that were found in the Sterkfontein caves, South Africa. The Sterkfontein cave fill containing this and other *Australopithecus* fossils was dated to 3.4 to 3.6 million years ago, far older than previously thought. The new date overturns the long-held concept that South African *Australopithecus* is a younger offshoot of East African *Australopithecus afarensis*. Credit: Jason Heaton and Ronald Clarke, in cooperation with the

It was a good week for Earth history research as a team of researchers using a newly developed dating method found evidence that some of the fossils found in the "Cradle of Humankind" in South Africa [might be more than 1 million years older than thought](#). Also, a team with members from Uppsala University, the University of Oregon, Deutsches GeoForschungsZentrum and the University of Iceland found that [the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Fagradalsfjall opened a rare window into the Earth beneath our feet](#). And an international team of researchers found evidence that [dinosaurs took over amid ice, not warm weather, following the Triassic-Jurassic Extinction](#).

In technology news, a team at the Berlin Institute of Technology created [a model that allowed robots to follow and guide humans in crowded environments](#). Also, a team at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Thailand, developed an [Android app capable of discerning how roasted a sample of coffee beans have become after cooking](#). And a team at the University of California, Irvine, developed [a light, thin composite material capable of stretching to twice its normal size](#)—called cephalopod skin, the material was found to work well as an insulator. And a group from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Yangtze River Delta Physics Research Center, HiNa Battery Technology Co., and the Tianmu Lake Institute of Advanced Energy Storage Technologies, developed [a type of anode-free Na battery with high energy density and long cycle lifetimes](#).

In other news, a large team with members from several institutions in Canada and the U.S. used an innovative lung imaging technique to show that [the cause of many long COVID symptoms is microscopic abnormalities resulting from viral damage that negatively impact how](#)

[oxygen moves from the lungs to red blood cells](#). Also, a group at the University of Chicago developed [an algorithm capable of predicting crime in a given area up to a week in advance](#)—it also revealed a bias in the way police typically respond to crime calls. And finally, a team of researchers at the National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge in Portugal, working with a colleague at Lusófona University, also in Portugal, found that [the virus behind monkeypox has been evolving at a faster rate than expected](#).

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