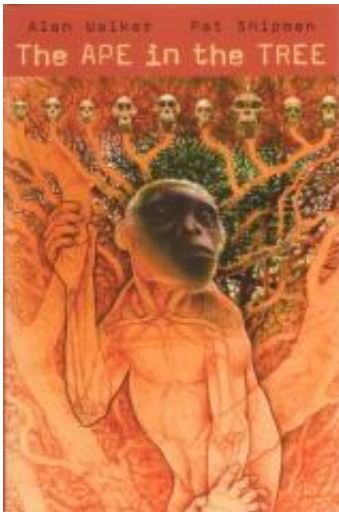


# Book on ape evolution wins W. W. Howells Award

September 29 2009

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A science book for the general public, "The Ape in the Tree, A Natural and Intellectual History of Proconsul," is the winner of the 2009 W.W. Howells Book Award. The book is authored by Penn State University scientists Alan Walker and Pat Shipman, and is published by Harvard University Press. Credit: Harvard University Press

For the second time, Penn State University scientists Alan Walker and Pat Shipman together have won a national book award. A book they coauthored, The Ape in the Tree, A Natural and Intellectual History of Proconsul, has been awarded the 2009 W.W. Howells Book Award, which is administered by the Biological Anthropology section of the American Anthropological Association. The book is published by Harvard University Press. In 1997, the husband-and-wife team won the

prestigious Rhône-Poulenc Award for another of their coauthored books, *The Wisdom of the Bones*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Written for a general audience, *The [Ape](#) in the Tree* offers a unique insider's perspective on the unfolding discovery of a crucial link in our [evolution](#): a fossil ape whimsically named "Proconsul" after a once-famous performing chimpanzee called Consul.

*The Ape in the Tree* is written in the voice of Alan Walker, whose involvement with Proconsul began when his graduate supervisor analyzed the tree-climbing adaptations in the arm and hand of this extinct creature. Today, Proconsul is the best-known fossil ape in the world.

The history of scientific ideas surrounding Proconsul is set against the vivid adventures of Walker's fossil-hunting expeditions in remote regions of Africa, where the team met with violent thunderstorms, dangerous wildlife, and people isolated from the Western world. Analysis of the thousands of new Proconsul specimens the scientists recovered provides revealing glimpses of the life of this last common ancestor between apes and humans.

"The attributes of Proconsul have profound implications for the very definition of humanness," Shipman said. "This book speaks not only of an ape in a tree but also of the ape in our family tree."

A Royal Society and MacArthur fellow, Walker is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is also an Evan Pugh Distinguished Professor of [Anthropology](#) and Biology at Penn State. Shipman is a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and is the author of ten [books](#). She also is an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at Penn State.

Source: Pennsylvania State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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