

Archaeology: Fossilized footprints suggest ancient humans divided labor

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The largest collection of footprints from the human fossil record in Africa is described in *Scientific Reports* this week. The findings, which further our understanding of human life during the Late Pleistocene

period (126,000 to 11,700 years ago), suggest a division of labour in ancient human communities.

Kevin Hatala and colleagues uncovered 408 human footprints in Engare Sero, Tanzania after the site was discovered by members of a nearby Maasai community. The researchers dated the footprints to between 19,100 and 5,760 years ago. Based on their size, the distances between them and their orientations, the authors suggest that 17 tracks of footprints were created by a group of individuals moving together at walking speed in a southwesterly direction. The group was likely made up of 14 [adult females](#), two [adult males](#) and one young male. The authors speculate that the females who made the tracks were foraging together and were visited or accompanied by the males, as this behaviour is observed in modern hunter-gatherers such as the Ache and Hadza. The findings may indicate a division of labour based on sex in ancient human communities.

For an additional six tracks of footprints oriented to the northeast, the authors estimate a broader range of variation in speed, which may suggest that they were not created by a single group travelling together, but by various individuals running and walking at different speeds.

The findings provide a snapshot of the movements and group behaviour of modern humans living in east Africa during the Late Pleistocene period.

More information: Hatala, K.G., Harcourt-Smith, W.E.H., Gordon, A.D. et al. Snapshots of human anatomy, locomotion, and behavior from Late Pleistocene footprints at Engare Sero, Tanzania. *Sci Rep* 10, 7740 (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-020-64095-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-64095-0)

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