

Nebraska Man

Rancher and geologist Harold Cook collected a human-looking tooth in Miocene strata in Nebraska in 1917. In March 1922, Cook sent the specimen to Henry Fairfield Osborn, an eminent vertebrate paleontologist and President of the American Museum of Natural History, to determine the tooth's identity. In 1922, solely on the evidence of a worn fossil tooth from Nebraska, Osborn described *Hesperopithecus haroldcookii* (Hespero= western + pithecus = ape), as the first anthropoid ape from North America. Five years later, Osborn's colleague William King Gregory concluded that the tooth most likely came from an extinct peccary (pig)!

- Nebraska Man was accepted by many eminent scientists and was only found to be a pig's tooth after more digging was done on site 5 years later (Gregory 1927).
- Nebraska man was used as evidence for the evolution of man in the popular press and scientific journals (Osborn 1922, Gregory 1923).
- The illustrations on the left were published in the *Illustrated London News* by Amedee Forestier in June 24, 1922. It showed Nebraska Man and his wife gathering food. It was all based on the evidence from a single worn tooth that later was identified as a pig tooth (Forestier 1922).

Had scientists learned their lesson from the Nebraska Man episode? Obviously not, consider the example that occurred a few years later, involving another eminent paleontologist—the discoverer of Peking Man...

"Although he (Davidson Black) was operating on the thinnest kind of a fossil shoestring—a single molar—he confidently announced a new genus of man who later would become known as Peking man" (Howell 1965). Interestingly he did not find the molar, he was told that it had come out of a cave. He did not know its sedimentary context, its age, or anything else but he 'knew' that it belonged to our fossil ancestors.

Evolution is a philosophy and it is based on faith!