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Richard Potts

Director, Human Origins Program, National Museum of Natural History

Richard Potts, a paleoanthropologist and curator of anthropology at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, is also director of the Human Origins Program. As the program's director, Potts oversees teams of specialists in Africa and Asia who research early human adaptation, evolution and environmental change. Potts' research and vision is the foundation of the Smithsonian's Human Origins Initiative, which combines scientific research on the evolutionary origin of human beings with educational outreach programs and the newest addition to the museum—the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins.

Potts is also the Peter Buck Chair in Human Origins, and in this role he creates and implements the vision for human origins research plans at the Smithsonian. He has been with the Institution since 1985, developing a program of international collaboration among scientists interested in the ecological aspects of human evolution.

Over the past decade, Potts has led excavations at early human sites in the East African Rift Valley, and he currently directs a multidisciplinary research team at the famous handaxe site of Olorgesailie, Kenya. In 1995, Potts began a project in southern China devoted to comparing evidence of early human behavior and environments from eastern Africa to eastern Asia.

He has authored numerous research articles and five books—most recently the companion book to the Human Origins exhibition titled, *What Does It Mean to Be Human?* His ideas and comments have aired several times on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* and PBS's *Newshour*, and he was awarded a Certificate of Honor by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences for the Emmy-winning *Tales of the Human Dawn* on PBS.

Potts received his bachelor's degree in anthropology from Temple University in 1975 and his doctorate in biological anthropology from Harvard University in 1982. He taught at Yale University from 1981 to 1985, where he was also curator of physical anthropology in the Yale Peabody Museum.

About the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., welcomed more than 7.4 million visitors in 2009, making it the most visited museum in the United States. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. More information about the museum is available at www.mnh.si.edu or by calling (202) 633-1000, TTY (202) 633-5285. In addition to the Web site, learn more about public programs and get the latest updates and access to insider videos and images via [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

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