

reviews

Outweighing bones of contention

By any standards, the life and career of Louis Leakey was extraordinary. Kenyan by birth, Kikuyu by adoption and anthropologist by education he was still more: contemporary historian, palaeontologist, graphologist, museum curator, Criminal Investigation Department investigator, zoologist. But in this age of specialisation he was no less remarkable for his diversification than for his accomplishments, as these two books amply demonstrate.

By *The Evidence*, the second instalment of Louis Leakey's memoirs, covers the years from 1932 to 1951 and follows the initial volume, *White African*, which dealt with his first thirty years. *By The Evidence* encompasses a period of remarkable and varied productivity but also of serious professional conflict and controversy. These are the years of the initial explorations at Olduvai Gorge, Rusinga Island and other sites, the first Pan-African Congress, the discovery of *Proconsul*; they are also the years of stinging criticism and debate over his claims for the fossil hominids from Kanam and Kanjera. This was also a period of active involvement with police investigations in Kenya and of the development and expansion of the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi into what eventually became the National Museum of Kenya. The book eloquently describes his concern for the vanishing cultures and languages of East Africa; it also documents his efforts and ultimate frustrations in preserving something of the past for the future. His three-volume, 700,000-word monograph on the Kikuyu is still unpublished, although funds from the Leakey Foundation may soon solve this problem.

By the Evidence: Memoirs, 1932-1951. By L. S. B. Leakey. Pp. 276+12 photographs. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York and London, January 1975.) £2.95.

Leakey's Luck: The Life of Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, 1903-1972. By Sonia Cole. Pp. 448+50 photographs. (Collins: London, May 1975.) £5.50.

Louis with man-eating crocodile on Rusinga Island, Kenya



Sonia Cole's excellent book, *Leakey's Luck*, is a fine complement to the memoirs. Her close involvement with both the events and personalities she describes makes her book a particular delight. Moreover, her background in prehistory eminently qualifies her as both biographer and critic, and her book constitutes, in fact, a chronicle of studies of early man in East Africa. Although a small amount of fossil human material had been recovered there in the early years of this century, notably "Olduvai Man" by Hans Reck in 1913, it was Leakey's initial work in 1926 which marked the real beginnings of such studies in East Africa.

The controversy which followed so much of Leakey's life began with the report of the human material from Kanam and Kanjera, recovered during the third East African Expedition, in 1931. Leakey contended that the Kanjera skulls and the Kanam mandible represented evidence of an advanced type of human at a very early period in the Pleistocene. This controversy has yet to be finally resolved and his search for a morphologically more modern type of man in the early Pleistocene continued unabated throughout his life. It is ironic that whereas his own candidates for this group, which included *Homo habilis*, have not found wide acceptance in the field, his son Richard's discoveries at east Rudolf have been accepted, almost without equivocation, as very early members of the genus *Homo*.

But Louis Leakey's contributions to

the development of Palaeoanthropology as a discipline, far outweigh such "bones of contention", to use Mrs Cole's phrase. In 1947, he organised the First Pan-African Congress on Prehistory, which was held in Nairobi. This Congress represented an important turning point in the evolutionary study of man; not the least of its effects was to remove the focus of fossil man studies from Asia and to re-direct it to Africa where it has remained ever since. At the Congress in 1947 scientists from many different and yet inter-related disciplines met and discussed aspects of their own research involving human evolution in Africa. It was here that Le Gros Clark, in opposition to then widely held opinion, gave convincing arguments why the South African Australopithecines should be included within the human family. It was also at this time that the enormous potential and importance of the East African Miocene deposits became more widely appreciated. As a result of this Congress Leakey received a grant to continue his explorations in deposits of this age and in the following year Mary Leakey found the skull of *Proconsul* on Rusinga Island; to date, this remains the only Miocene hominoid skull known.

Both books are rewarding. *By The Evidence* is a unique and personal anecdotal remembrance, whereas *Leakey's Luck* provides a broad perspective on East African prehistoric studies.

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