So You Found Some Old Bones:  
The Role of South Africa in our Understanding of Human Origins

Monday, March 23rd @ 12:15 pm – 1:30 pm  
Godwin-Ternbach Museum (Klapper Hall) | Queens College

For over a hundred years, South Africa has produced some of the most important discoveries in palaeoanthropology and archaeology. In this lecture, Dr. George Leader will look at a selection of the most important finds and put them into perspective within the bigger picture of human evolution. These include beautifully preserved fossil finds that illustrate major transitions in diet, locomotion, and brain size, as well as archaeological finds that inform us about the cultural origins and mental capabilities of early forms of human.

As discussant we welcome Dr. Thomas Plummer (QC-Anthropology), who co-directs excavations at the Early Stone Age site of Kanjera, Kenya.

Dr. George Leader received his PhD in paleoarchaeology from the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. His research focuses on the stone tool technology that our hominid ancestors made during the Earlier Stone Age in southern Africa. He is particularly interested in the technological change through the Early Acheulean. During the emergence of Homo ergaster, the stone tool technology becomes increasingly complex and refined. Dr. Leader excavates the site of Canteen Kopje in central South Africa, which contains artifact assemblages in layers that are dated in sequential order from 2.3 Ma all the way down to 1.2 Ma. This provides his a unique opportunity to analyze the complexity of the methods used in the manufacture of tools over time at a single site. Dr. Leader’s research has pointed to origins of prepared core technology in the Early Acheulean as well as the roots of social traditions (culture) at an earlier point in time than previously suggested. The evolution of our cognitive abilities throughout this time period proves instrumental in our understanding of the past.

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