

M0006505: "Skeleton from Fish to Man", display from the American Museum of Natural History, left panel

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THE SKELETON FROM FISH TO MAN

THE skeleton of man, like that of all other vertebrate animals, is the passive part of the locomotor machinery, while the muscles and nerves are the active part. Comparative study of the skeletons of all known types of fossil and modern animals has made it possible to decipher the record of progress from fish to man. The series of forms here shown does not form a *direct* line of descent from fish to man but each stage shown is the nearest to the direct line so far discovered.

KEY

- Skull
- Backbone and Ribs
- Girdles and Limbs



PRIMITIVE SHARK FISH



CAVE SHARK FISH



GENERALIZED AMPHIBIAN



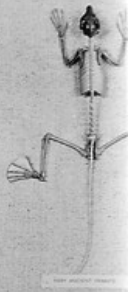
PRIMITIVE REPTILE



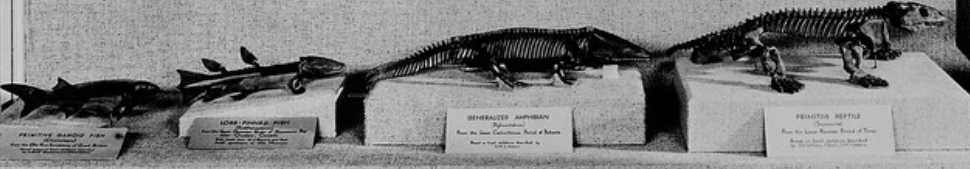
CYNODONT REPTILE OR PREDATOR



ANCESTRAL MAMMAL



MODERN MAMMAL

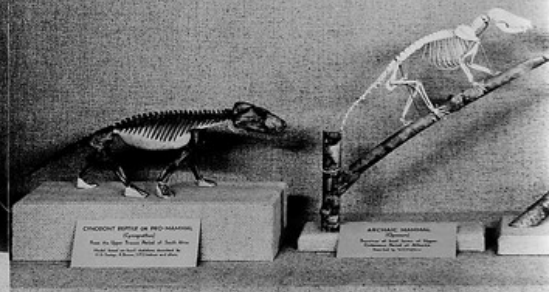


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ANCESTRAL MAMMAL

The earliest vertebrates lived exclusively in the water and swam by undulating the body. The fins were projections of the skin and body-wall that served chiefly as rudders and balancers (Stage 1).

Gradually, in the swamp-living, air-breathing fishes, the pectoral and pelvic fins were transformed first into paddles (Stage 2) and then into limbs (Stage 3), as the animals crawled out of the swamps. After many ages the animals invaded the uplands (Stage 4) learning to crawl like turtles and lizards.

Next, they learned to raise the belly off the ground and run about (Stage 5). Then they climbed up into the trees and became very expert in running and leaping about among the branches (Stages 6, 7, 8).