

# First Footsteps

**I**magine digging through layers of rocks and sand to find out about people and places of the past. That is what scientists do to help us learn about the world's prehistory. **Prehistory** is history that happened before the invention of writing. To find out about prehistory, experts must look at **evidence**, or proof, rather than written words. They must search for clues to piece together the puzzle of the distant past.

## Fossil Finds

Many different kinds of scientists work to uncover facts about the past. Together, they find out how, where, and when early people lived. Among these detectives of the past are archaeologists and paleoanthropologists.

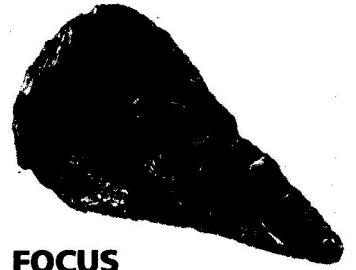
**Archaeologists** (ar•kee•AH•luh•jists) locate and study the things left behind by people. **Paleoanthropologists** (pay•lee•oh•an•thruh•PAH•luh•jists) study the ancestors of modern people. They carefully look at **fossils** (FAH•suhlz), or remains of once-living things.

For more than 100 years, people have been searching for the fossils of early human ancestors, or hominids. In 1896 Eugene Dubois (dyoo•BWAH), a Dutch surgeon, dug beneath a river in Indonesia in southeastern Asia. He uncovered what he believed to be the remains of a human ancestor. He named his find *Homo erectus*, meaning "human who stands upright." Other scientists laughed at Dubois's claims. However, in 1927 another hominid was found near Beijing, China.

At about the same time, a South African scientist named Raymond Dart found a still earlier human ancestor in his home country. He had unearthed fossils of an australopithecine (aw•stray•loh•PIH•thuh•syn). Later,

LESSON

1



### FOCUS

Why do people today want to find out more about the past?

**Main Idea** Read to find out how present-day experts have learned about human ancestors.

### Vocabulary

prehistory  
evidence  
archaeologist  
paleoanthropologist  
fossil  
excavate  
band

Paleoanthropologist  
Don Johanson

