Continental breakup and the dawn of humankind

March 31, 2008

Geology and paleontology subject of upcoming lecture series

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, March 31, 2008—In the newest Los Alamos “Frontiers in Science” lecture series, geologist Giday WoldeGabriel will discuss the intriguing fossil findings from an African rift valley that he and partners at the University of California, Berkeley have been studying.

WoldeGabriel’s talk will focus on what it was about Africa that led to the proliferation of life in the midst of catastrophic volcanic eruptions and other environmental hazards. The answer, he posits, lies in the continent’s geographic position compared with the others during the later part of Earth’s history.

Africa was pinned down for tens of millions of years while the rest of the continents were globetrotting. Thus it experienced less dramatic climatic and environmental fluctuations, even though it was subjected to periodic complex internal forces that caused the outpouring of more than a million cubic kilometers of lava in the northeastern regions. Despite the inhospitable environment, this region contains the longest and most continuous human fossil record known today. And thanks to the exposed rock and the rapid rates of erosion, record numbers of fossils have been revealed to the science team's exploring eyes.

WoldeGabriel's talk, sponsored by the Fellows of Los Alamos National Laboratory, will explore how geological and climatic forces influenced the dawn of humankind over the last 6 million years. Admission is free, and for more information about the Fellows Frontiers in Science lectures, see http://www.lanl.gov/science/fellows/lectures.shtml online.

The talks are offered four times in four different northern New Mexico venues:7:00 p.m. Wednesday, April 2, 2008New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science1801 Mountain Road NW, Albuquerque7:00 p.m. Friday, April 4, 2008James A. Little Theater, New Mexico School for the Deaf1060 Cerrillos Road, Santa Fe7:00 p.m. Tuesday, April 8, 2008Taos Convention Center, Los Angelitos RoomCivic Plaza Drive7:00 p.m. Wednesday, April 9, 2008Duane W. Smith AuditoriumLos Alamos High School, Los AlamosFor more information, contact the Los Alamos National Laboratory Community Programs Office at (505) 665-4400 or (888) 841-8256 toll free.