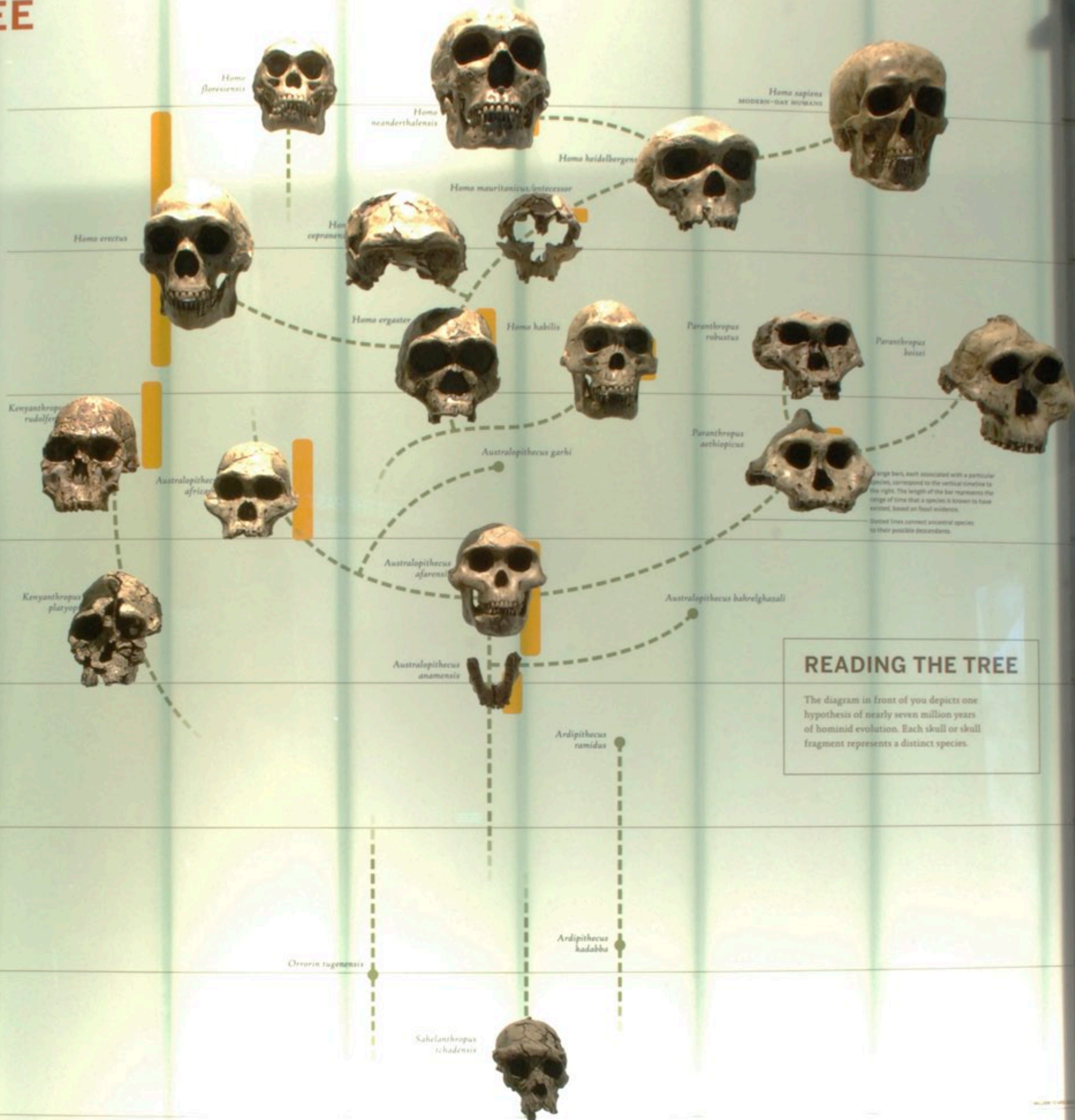


OUR FAMILY TREE

Humans are the only remaining descendants of a once-varied family of primates called Hominidae. In different places over the past six or seven million years, groups of early hominids adapted to their habitats and many distinct species emerged — including some that lived simultaneously. Most of these species became extinct, and only one — modern humans, *Homo sapiens* — ultimately survived and flourished.

Since the first hominid fossil was recognized in 1856, thousands of others representing many distinct species have been discovered. Using an array of techniques to analyze these fossils, paleoanthropologists continually develop a better understanding of the history of human evolution, represented here as a “family tree.” New fossil finds and new technologies promise to refine the tree even further.



READING THE TREE

The diagram in front of you depicts one hypothesis of nearly seven million years of hominid evolution. Each skull or skull fragment represents a distinct species.