

## F. Clark Howell (1925–2007)

The Journal of Archaeological Science customarily does not publish obituaries. However, the passing of F. Clark Howell deserves notice, because of his significance for the strands of interdisciplinary research reflected in the pages of this medium. Howell did not wave empty slogans about multi-disciplinary collaboration, instead choosing to lead by example. He had little patience with rhetorical ‘theory’, and directed his energies to identification and understanding of significant problems about human origins. His research methods were omnivorous – everything that could shed light on a problem was explored, and then assembled by his synthetic mind.

Howell’s intellectual home, reflecting his training at the University of Chicago of his day, was in physical anthropology, anatomy, and primate ethology, all focused on human evolution. On the receipt of his Ph. D. in 1953, he joined the Anatomy Department at the Washington University School of Medicine. Two years later, the Department of Anthropology at Chicago invited him back and he remained there until 1970, when he moved to the University of California-Berkeley. In Berkeley, he helped to develop a human origins group that no other has ever exceeded in productivity and influence. He retired from teaching at Berkeley in 1991, but he remained active in research there until his death. Throughout his career, he was expert on the human fossil record and on everything associated with it, especially fossil faunas and Pleistocene stratigraphies. Along the way, he acquired a strong grasp of environmental issues and geoarchaeology. He never took a narrow disciplinary stance, and was ever receptive to alternative approaches for interconnected questions. He coined the term paleoanthropology for the multifaceted approach that he pioneered and that proved so fruitful under his leadership.

Clark Howell had a strong sense of intellectual history, respecting earlier efforts and freely acknowledging his predecessors. Similarly he insistently drew non-anglophone scholarship into his ambit. Although not a gifted linguist, he carefully used literature in other languages, with the help of a translator when necessary. He negotiated with cultural skill, in diverse parts of the world, with or without an interpreter. That mediating, international attitude was equally evident in his dealing with prickly personalities, highly possessive of their sites or their fossils.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, with proximal rural roots, Howell was comfortable dealing with farmers or with chanting tribal delegations, whether bargaining about a fair price for the

lost productivity of a field, or explaining his appearance on a chieftain’s territory. At Torralba, in central Spain in 1961, he listened patiently to the outbursts of the mayors of two feuding villages who did not want their people to work together in his excavations at a local Acheulean site. His solution was to have both serve as foremen, each with authority for his own.

Such skills were indispensable for making a reality of the international Omo Research Expedition of 1967–1973, bringing together the University of Chicago, the Musée de l’Homme, Paris, and the National Museum of Kenya. Howell, who had supervised his first dig at Isimila, Tanzania, in 1956, had visited Ethiopia’s Omo Valley in 1959 and again in 1966, to lay out an investigative program to Camille Arambourg and Louis Leakey. They in turn intervened directly with Emperor Haile Selassie and President Jomo Kenyatta, to secure approval for an unprecedented expedition of such scope, scale, and expense. Personnel, equipment, and supplies were primarily flown in by bush aircraft or helicopter from Nairobi, 800 km away. The costs to the National Science Foundation, the CNRS, and the National Geographic Society were staggering, yet the broad level of popular interest in human origins assured support for similar work in eastern Africa throughout the 1970s.

But Clark Howell was not an entrepreneur. He came to the Omo project at age 40 with a record of powerful analytical and synthetic papers, a strategic vision of the possibilities of such an unparalleled collaboration, and a mix of enthusiasm and dogged hard work that all served to persuade his much older colleagues. He was unstintingly supported by a group of dedicated students and diverse professionals, with expertise ranging from lithostratigraphy and novel dating methods to fossil and artifact collections and preparation. He encouraged geological exploration and mapping, and the keeping of regular weather records in this poorly known part of Africa. Before its close, the project had begun to apply taphonomic study to key fossil beds. While the hominin fossils found in the Omo were not as exceptional as those later discovered in East Turkana and the Afar, it was the interdisciplinary style and quality of the research that set a high bar for all who came after.

In the early 1980s, Howell returned to research on the Acheulean in central Spain, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he oversaw a fruitful project on the Paleolithic of Turkey. In his new work, he continued to engage specialists in

geomorphology, geochronology, and vertebrate paleontology not simply as consultants, but as equal contributors to paleoanthropology. In his selfless effort to promote the discipline, in 1968 he helped found the L. S. B. Leakey Foundation, and by the late 1980s, his dedication and enthusiasm had gained it an endowment from which it can support paleoanthropology indefinitely. In his spirit, the Foundation defines paleoanthropology broadly to include not only the recovery and study of ancient human fossils, but also the comprehensive analysis of their geologic, paleontologic, and archaeologic context. In keeping with his vision, it also funds projects on hunter-gatherers and on free-ranging non-human primates whose socioecology helps illuminate the behavior and ecology of long-vanished humans.

Howell's extraordinary personal contribution to the field he defined cannot be exaggerated, but he will be remembered at least equally for his ability to inspire, support, and mentor students and younger scholars. No paleoanthropologist has ever encouraged the careers of so many others, and the writers are among the many who benefited from his generous patronage. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, he productively addressed a remarkable range of topics, from the australopiths through *Homo erectus* to the Neanderthals, and his influence thus extended to every corner of paleoanthropology.

Howell's life achievements should continue to provide important lessons, namely his challenge to disciplinary boundaries, his multinational view of science, and his personal generosity and ever constructive role. The Human Evolution Research Center at Berkeley has established a website ([http://herc.berkeley.edu:16080/fc\\_howell\\_memorial/](http://herc.berkeley.edu:16080/fc_howell_memorial/)) where the many specialists whose careers and research Howell helped shape can add their personal tributes.

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