



FIGURE 10.14.

The Piltdown Hoax and the Hominid Hoax. In their eagerness to link human ancestry to apes, anthropologists have committed major errors in interpretation. The Piltdown Man was the missing link from 1912 until 1953 when the clever forgery was finally unmasked. It now appears that the public has been misled by the Hominid Hoax. Upright-walking fossil apes formerly listed as the ancestors of human beings most probably belong in the ape's family tree.

The lack of present fossil evidence supports the latter possibility. David Pilbeam has indicated that *Ramapithecus* should be removed from the human family tree and assigned to that of the orangutan. Both Johanson and Leakey have eliminated *A. africanus* from the missing link lineup. And Leakey has charted *A. afarensis* (Lucy) as not belonging in human ancestry. In light of the current fossil evidence, it appears that the key question remaining is whether these fossil creatures became extinct or are the long-lost missing links in the ape's family tree.

Where does this leave *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*? Scientists have spent a great deal of time documenting the chimpanzee's use of tools and have even reported the crude manufacture of tools. Chimpanzees have been observed in the wild in the process of killing young baboons to eat. This evidence has been used in the past to indicate that the behavior of chimpanzees is so close to that of human beings that we must share a common ancestor. But this same evidence can also be used to indicate that *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* were hominids that became extinct. If paleoanthropologists can list australopithecines as extinct beings, they can surely consider the possibility that *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* met the same fate. At least we should keep an open mind on this question until further evidence is uncovered.