THE PROGENITOR ENIGMA ARCHIVES
RESEARCH BRIEFING • ISSUE 010 • NOVEMBER 6, 2026 • PAGE 1

# BEFORE OUR SPECIES

## THE BUILDERS OF KALAMBO FALLS

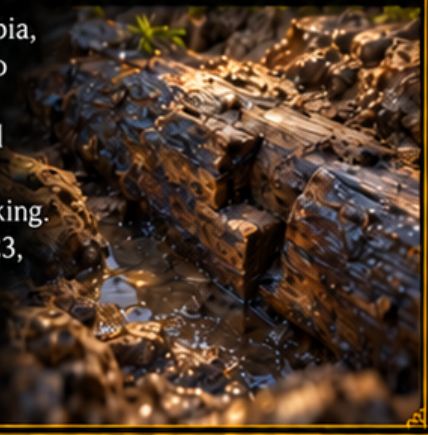
*Nearly half a million years ago, someone shaped two timbers to fit together. What else have we failed to find?*



*Artist's impression of the excavation*

### TWO LOGS. ONE EXTRAORDINARY FIND.

At Kalambo Falls in Zambia, researchers uncovered two interlocking timbers, one shaped with an intentional notch. Stone-tool marks reveal deliberate woodworking. Published in *Nature* in 2023, the discovery documents construction long before our species appeared.



### HOW OLD?

## 476,000 YEARS

The surrounding sediments yielded a luminescence age of approximately 476,000 ± 23,000 years. The method estimates when mineral grains were last exposed to light. This was not a radiocarbon date.



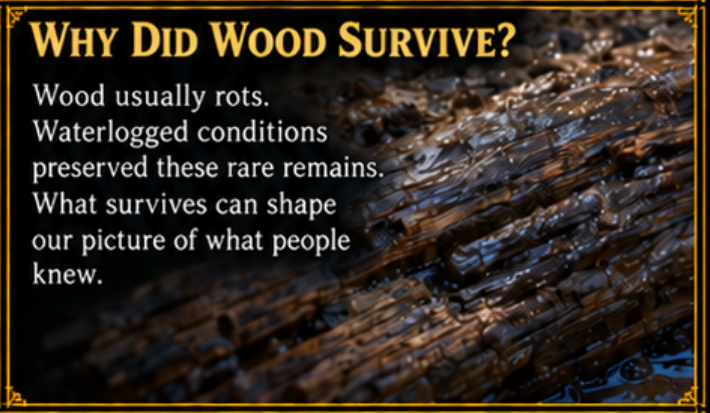
### WHAT WERE THEY BUILDING?

A platform, walkway, or part of a dwelling are possibilities. The surviving timbers do not reveal the complete structure. Its precise purpose remains uncertain.



### WHY DID WOOD SURVIVE?

Wood usually rots. Waterlogged conditions preserved these rare remains. What survives can shape our picture of what people knew.



### ENGINEERING PERSPECTIVE

A joint begins with a problem: how do you make two pieces work together? Shaping a notch requires choices about material, fit, and function. We cannot recover the builders' thoughts. We can examine the result of their decisions.



*The oldest surviving example is not necessarily the first ever made.*

# WHAT THE STONE AGE MAY BE HIDING

In Issue 009, we asked whether evidence of the past could disappear. Kalambo Falls gives that question something tangible: worked wood that survived when so much else did not. What picture would we draw of a workshop if only its stone tools remained?



*Illustrative scene.*

## WHAT WE KNOW—AND WHAT WE DON'T

### THE EVIDENCE

These builders worked wood about 476,000 years ago—roughly 160,000–180,000 years before the earliest widely accepted *Homo sapiens* fossils. This compares known evidence, not a precise birthday for our species. Their joined timbers demonstrate deliberate construction.

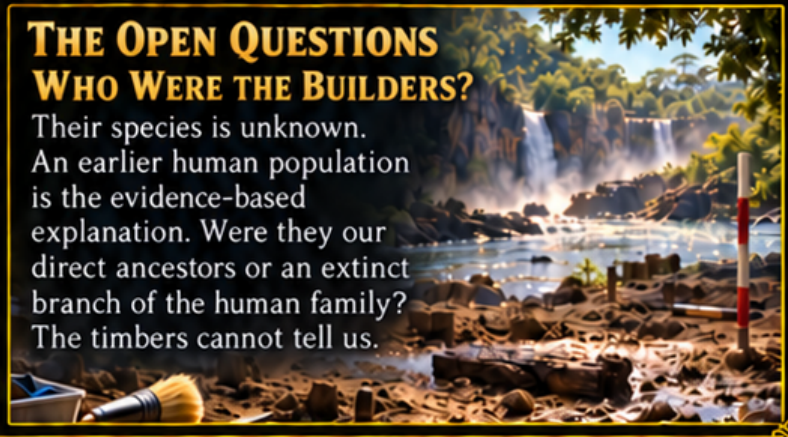


**160,000–180,000 YEARS EARLIER**

### THE OPEN QUESTIONS

#### WHO WERE THE BUILDERS?

Their species is unknown. An earlier human population is the evidence-based explanation. Were they our direct ancestors or an extinct branch of the human family? The timbers cannot tell us.



### QT'S OBSERVATION LOGS




> *They fitted timbers together nearly half a million years ago. Some of your furniture still requires three adults and an argument.* — QT

> *Calling it the Stone Age because the wood rotted is rather like judging your civilization by whatever survives in the cutlery drawer.* — QT

### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Could they have been survivors of a crashed alien craft? It is an intriguing science-fiction premise—but no evidence at Kalambo Falls supports it.

Were they our ancestors? Possibly; their exact relationship to us remains unknown.

What skills, stories, and entire ways of life have vanished from our record of the past?

### FROM THE AUTHOR

Two joined timbers leave me wondering about the hands that shaped them. Who taught the builder? What else could that community make? As a novelist, I can imagine extraordinary answers. As a reader of the evidence, I must leave room for what I do not know. How much of our past is still waiting in the ground? Or under the water?

*Aryl Sterling*

### CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

Explore *The Progenitor Enigma* in reading order:

- GENESIS *(Second Edition)*
- ORIGINS
- GRAND CANYON
- YUCATÁN
- DESTINY *(coming 2026)*

Visit my website for the books, past briefings, and your free download of *ORIGINS*.

*Sources: Barham et al., Nature (2023); Hublin et al., Nature (2017).*