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Age and context of the oldest known hominin fossils from Flores

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1 **Stratigraphic context and age of hominin fossils from Middle Pleistocene Flores**

2

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44

45 **Recent excavations at the early Middle Pleistocene site of Mata Menge in the So'a**
46 **Basin of central Flores, Indonesia, have yielded fossils of hominins¹ attributed to**
47 **a population ancestral to Late Pleistocene *Homo floresiensis*². Here we describe**
48 **the context and age of the Mata Menge hominin specimens and associated**
49 **archaeological findings. The fluvial sandstone layer from which the *in situ* fossils**
50 **were excavated in 2014 was deposited in a small valley stream around 700**

51 **thousand years (kyr) ago, as indicated by $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ and fission track dates on**
52 **stratigraphically bracketing volcanic ash and pyroclastic density current**
53 **deposits, in combination with coupled Uranium-series (U-series) and Electron**
54 **Spin Resonance (ESR) dating of fossil teeth. Palaeoenvironmental data indicates**
55 **a relatively hot and dry climate in the So'a Basin during the early Middle**
56 **Pleistocene, while various lines of evidence suggest the hominins inhabited a**
57 **savannah-like open grassland habitat with a strong wetland component. The**
58 **hominin fossils occur alongside the remains of an insular fauna and a simple,**
59 **'Mode 1'-like stone technology that is markedly similar to that of *H. floresiensis*.**

60

61 Mata Menge is located near the northwestern margin of the So'a Basin, a ~400 km²
62 geological depression in the interior highlands of central Flores (Fig. 1). The basement
63 substrate consists of the Ola Kile Formation (OKF), a >100 m-thick sequence of
64 indurated volcanoclastic deposits dominated by andesitic breccia and locally
65 alternating with lava flows, tuffaceous sandstones, and siltstones^{3,4}. Zircon fission-
66 track (ZFT) age determinations date the upper part of the OKF to 1.86 ± 0.12 million
67 years ago (Ma) (ref. 4). The OKF is unconformably overlaid by the Ola Bula
68 Formation (OBF)^{3,4}. The latter is up to 120 m thick, and comprises an intra-basinal
69 fossil- and stone artefact-bearing sequence deposited between 1.8 to 0.5 Ma. The ~5°
70 southward dipping volcanic breccias of the OKF are associated with a former volcanic
71 centre located on the northwestern edge of the basin. Inside the remnant of this 10 km
72 diameter caldera structure, known as the Welas Caldera, are well-formed intra-caldera
73 lake sediments punctuated by two intra-caldera basaltic cones that were the major
74 sources of primary and secondary basaltic volcanoclastic deposits within the OBF.

75

76 Since the 1950s, palaeontological and archaeological research in the So'a Basin has
77 focused on the OBF⁵⁻¹⁴, which is composed largely of undistorted volcanic, fluvial,
78 and lacustrine sediments^{3,4}. The volcanoclastic aprons that entered the central
79 depression from various directions, at times debouching into a lake, or series of small
80 lakes, were incised by erosional gullies during periods of volcanic quiescence, but
81 became sites of enhanced accretion following major volcanic influxes. Well-developed
82 paleosols and pedogenically altered fine-grained fluvial deposits intervening
83 between variably textured pyroclastic (primary) and fluvio-volcanoclastic (secondary)
84 deposits document intermittent periods of landscape stability that alternated with rapid
85 depositional events triggered by major volcanic eruptions, generating airfall tephra,
86 ignimbrites, and associated mass-flow deposits (see SI Table 1). A basin-wide, thinly-
87 bedded lacustrine sequence, consisting of an alternation of thin-bedded micritic
88 freshwater limestones, clays, and with numerous basaltic tephra inter-beds – the 'Gero
89 Limestone Member' (GLM) – caps the basin infill and registers the formation of a
90 basin-wide lake^{3,4}, which formerly extended into the Welas Caldera.

91

92 The total preserved thickness of the OBF at Mata Menge, up to the top of an adjacent
93 hill northwest of the site, is 40 m (Fig. 1). The uppermost interval of the GLM, with a
94 thickness of 9 m, outcrops at the summit of a hill 600 m west (Excavation #35, or E-
95 35). The main fossil-bearing intervals at Mata Menge form part of a roughly NNW-
96 SSE trending palaeovalley dominantly occupied by a sequence of cut-and-fill
97 fluvial and clay-rich mass-flow deposits. The hominin-bearing sedimentary layer
98 lies at the head of a modern dry stream valley at the base of a hill (ht = 397m). A slot-
99 trench excavated into the eastern side of this hill revealed an 18 m-thick sequence of
100 planar bedded lacustrine clays and micritic limestones containing oogonia and

101 diatoms, fluvial sandstone beds, massive tuffaceous clay-rich mass-flow (mudflow)
102 deposits, fine-grained well-developed clay-textured paleosols, and numerous
103 centimetre-thick basaltic tephra inter-beds, pertaining to the middle upper part of the
104 OBF. At the base of this slot-trench, a thin (<30 cm-thick) fossil-bearing fluvial
105 sandstone layer was exposed underlying a sequence of mudflow deposits (Layers Ia-f)
106 up to 6.5 m thick. This fossiliferous sandstone, named Layer II, represents the deposit
107 of a small stream channel that has an irregular lower bedding plane and was incised
108 into a well-developed, consolidated paleosol with prominent root traces (Layer III).
109

110 We conducted a 50 m² excavation (E-32) into Layer II in 2013 (Fig. 1 and Extended
111 Data Figs. 1-2). The sandstone layer yielded fossils of the dwarfed proboscidean
112 *Stegodon florensis*⁸, and numerous well-preserved dental and skeletal remains of giant
113 rat (*Hooijeromys nusatenggara*)¹⁵, as well as teeth of Komodo dragon (*Varanus*
114 *komodoensis*) and crocodiles, and flaked stone artefacts (Fig. 2). In 2014, we exposed
115 Layer II over a larger area by extending the initial trench (E-32A) to the south (E-
116 32B/C) and west (E-32D/E). A separate excavation was also opened upstream of the
117 palaeo-channel to the north (E-32F). These excavations recovered six hominin teeth
118 and a hominin mandible fragment from Layer II (ref. 1). Another less diagnostic
119 hominin fossil comprises a 60 mm² piece of a cranial vault. The hominin fossils
120 occurred at the stratigraphic interface between Layer II and the overlying mudflow
121 deposit, spread over a maximum linear distance of 15 m. The flow direction in the
122 sinuous stream tributary in which Layer II was deposited was from NNW to SSE,
123 based on the slight decrease in elevation of the top of this layer in the same direction
124 (i.e., 20 cm over a horizontal distance of 17 m). The fine- to medium-grained fluvial
125 sandstone has a maximum thickness of 30 cm, contains scattered pebbles, and occurs

126 13 m stratigraphically above the main (lower) fossil-bearing beds at Mata Menge,
127 which have a combined thickness of up to two metres (Fig. 1).

128

129 The mudflow sequence (Layers Ia-f) sealing in Layer II can be clearly related to
130 phreatomagmatic to magmatic eruptive activity occurring within the confines of the
131 Welas Caldera (then occupied by a lake). The formation of these multiple mudflow
132 events either relates to intermittent displacement of lake waters down adjacent
133 tributaries during cone construction, or, alternatively, failure of a lake outlet barrier
134 during and/or following intra-caldera eruptive activity. Four articulated thoracic
135 vertebrae of *S. florensis* were recovered from Layer II (Fig. 2k) near a concentration
136 of other vertebrae, ribs, and postcranial remains of a *Stegodon* carcass. These are the
137 only articulated stegodont elements so far recovered at Mata Menge, indicating
138 relatively limited post-mortem modification prior to burial by mudflows. We infer
139 that the artefacts and faunal remains, including the hominin elements, were exposed
140 to weathering on the ground surface, and could have been transported short distances
141 by the small stream, before a series of mudflows originating from the intra-caldera
142 lake system were channelized within adjacent stream tributaries, inundating these
143 valleys with metre-thick muddy debris. It is conceivable that the presence of elements
144 from multiple hominin individuals, including two juveniles, and several individual
145 stegodonts, could be the result of a volcanic event. However, other explanations are
146 also possible and more research into taphonomic factors is needed.

147

148 A total of four new radiometric determinations, with ages in sequential order and in
149 accordance with the stratigraphic sequence, as well as previously published estimates,
150 provide a robust chronological framework for the hominin fossils (Fig. 1; see also

151 Supplementary Information). Near the base of the OBF at Mata Menge, a widespread
152 ignimbritic marker bed (the Wolo Sege Ignimbrite; T-WSI) with an $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ age of
153 1.01 ± 0.02 Ma (ref. 13; and see Fig. 1) is recognised on the combined basis of its
154 stratigraphic association, unique depositional architecture, and glass-shard major
155 element chemistry (see Extended Data Fig. 3). In addition, the hominin find-locality
156 in E-32 is situated 12.5 m stratigraphically above a ZFT date of 0.80 ± 0.07 Ma from
157 Mata Menge⁴. To verify this prior estimate⁴, we conducted Isothermal Plateau
158 Fission-Track (ITPFT) dating of glass shards from an inter-regional tephra marker
159 (T3) identified at several So'a Basin localities, including just above the T-WSI at
160 Mata Menge (in E-34/34B), returning a weighted mean age of 0.90 ± 0.07 Ma (based
161 on two independent age determinations) (see Extended Data Fig. 3). Moreover,
162 $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ single crystal dating of hornblende from the Pu Maso Ignimbrite (T-Pu)
163 located just above T3 in E-34/34B yielded a weighted mean age of 0.81 ± 0.04 Ma,
164 which is stratigraphically consistent with that of underlying T3 (Extended Data Fig.
165 4). These ages demonstrate that Layer II was deposited after ~ 0.80 Ma.

166

167 To further constrain the age of the hominin fossils, we carried out $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating on
168 one basaltic tephra and one rhyolitic tephra from the GLM above Layer II (E-12 and
169 E-35). The GLM contains at least 85 crystal-rich tephra inter-beds of basaltic
170 composition, collectively named the Piga Tephra (the lower 56 tephra are
171 sequentially numbered PGT-1 to PGT-56). At Mata Menge, PGT-2 occurs 13.5 m
172 above Layer II, and produced a $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ weighted mean age of 0.65 ± 0.02 Ma from
173 single crystal dating of hornblende (Extended Data Fig. 5). This is in accordance with
174 the published ZFT age of a basaltic tephra inter-bed from the lower part of the GLM
175 (0.65 ± 0.06 Ma)⁴. Finally, a biotite-bearing vitric-rich ash of distinctive rhyolitic

176 composition (T6; see Extended Data Fig. 3) from the top of the GLM has an $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$
177 age of 0.51 ± 0.03 Ma, based on the weighted mean of single grain feldspar analyses.
178 Thus, the hominin fossils constrained by the lowermost of these two radiometric dates
179 within the GLM have an established minimum age of ~ 0.65 Ma.

180

181 In order to demonstrate that the hominin fossils and associated faunal assemblage do
182 not reflect vertical displacement of chronologically more recent finds into older
183 sediments, we conducted laser ablation U-series analysis of a hominin tooth root
184 fragment from Layer II (specimen SOA-MM6), and combined U-series/ESR-dating
185 of two *S. florensis* molars excavated *in situ* from the same sedimentary context (see
186 Extended Data Fig. 7 and Supplementary Information). U-series dating of the hominin
187 tooth root independently confirms this specimen was deposited at least 0.55 Ma,
188 whereas combined U-series/ESR indicates minimum and maximum ages of around
189 0.36 Ma and 0.69 Ma, respectively, for the *Stegodon* molars. In sum, therefore, we
190 have used multiple dating methods to establish a secure age of ~ 0.70 Ma for the Layer
191 II hominin fossils.

192

193 Our systematic, high-volume excavations (~ 560 m²) at Mata Menge between 2010–15
194 have yielded a wealth of fossil vertebrate remains (see Supplementary Information).
195 To date, 75% of the >7000 vertebrate fossils recovered from E-32 have been
196 analyzed, and include *S. florensis* (23.7% of the number of identified specimens, or
197 NISP), *V. komodoensis* (0.6% of NISP), freshwater crocodiles (3.7% of NISP), frogs
198 (0.3% of NISP), murine rodents (15.6 % of NISP), and birds (0.5% of NISP), the
199 remainder comprising unidentifiable bone fragments. From the lower fossil-bearing
200 interval (E-1 to 8 and E-11 to 31D) the remains of at least 120 *S. florensis* individuals

201 are represented by dental elements spanning all ontogenetic stages¹⁶. The age profile
202 of the Mata Menge lower level death assemblage corresponds to that of a living
203 population, suggesting a mass death event. The lack of age-selective mortality does
204 not fit a pattern of hominin predation, such as in the *H. floresiensis* type-locality,
205 Liang Bua¹⁷. In Layer II, remains of juvenile, sub-adult, intermediate-aged, and very
206 old *Stegodon* individuals are also present, but the Minimum Number of Individuals is
207 too low to allow for the construction of a reliable age profile.

208

209 We conducted carbon and oxygen isotope analysis of tooth enamel samples collected
210 from several *S. florensis* and murine rodent individuals from the two fossil-bearing
211 levels at Mata Menge (Extended Data Fig. 8). The results indicate a diet heavily
212 dominated by C₄ grasses, suggesting both animals were grazers, and implying that
213 open grasslands were the major vegetation type in the So'a Basin. The recovery of
214 rare fossils of rails, swans, ducks, eagles, and eagle owls from the lower trenches
215 (~0.80 to 0.88 Ma) further evidences the presence of a savannah-like biome with a
216 strong wetland component, as well as scattered patches of forest¹⁸. Fossil pollen and
217 phytoliths from both fossil levels, while poorly preserved, offer additional evidence
218 that grasses dominated the Middle Pleistocene vegetation (SI Table 9). Abundant
219 moulds and casts of two species of freshwater gastropods (Cerithoidea) were
220 recovered from Layer II and the base of the overlying mudflow sequence, pointing to
221 the existence of permanent freshwater bodies in the ancestral stream valley.

222

223 Our excavations uncovered 149 *in situ* stone artefacts in E-32, including 47 artefacts
224 from Layer II, in direct association with the hominin remains (Fig 2; Extended Data
225 Fig. 9). Some of the artefacts from E-32 are lightly to heavily abraded from low-

226 energy water transport¹⁹, but 74.5% are in fresh, as-struck condition, suggesting
227 minimal dislocation from nearby stone-flaking areas. Hominins gathered coarse- to
228 fine-grained rounded volcanic cobbles from local fluvial gravels and struck them with
229 hammerstones to create sharp-edged flakes and cores. Reduction was mostly bifacial,
230 with blows struck to two faces of the stone from one platform edge (Fig 2a). Two
231 cores were rotated and a second bifacial platform edge was established, resulting in
232 multi-platform cores. Core platform surfaces or edge-angles were unprepared, and
233 core reduction was not intensive. The edges of flakes struck from these cores were
234 sometimes retouched for use, or possibly to produce additional flake tools. One
235 heavily abraded core was scavenged and further flaked. Overall, the E-32 assemblage
236 reflects a technologically straightforward core-and-flake approach to stoneworking²⁰.
237 The function of the implements is unknown; as yet, no butchery marks have been
238 conclusively identified on the faunal remains at Mata Menge, and the tools may have
239 been used for modifying other organic materials.

240

241 Notably, the tools and flaking technology in E-32 are nearly identical in size and
242 nature, respectively, to the assemblage dating some 110 kyr earlier at Mata
243 Menge^{12,21-23}, including 1186 analysed stone artefacts from E-23 and E-27 excavated
244 between 2011–14 (Table S6). The E-32 assemblage is also technologically similar to
245 the artefacts from Liang Bua, dating ~600 kyr later^{12,24} and associated with *H.*
246 *floresiensis*^{25,26}. The long persistence of this technical approach to stone-flaking on
247 Flores¹², together with the close anatomical similarities between the Mata Menge and
248 Liang Bua hominins¹, suggests remarkable stability in the behaviour of the *H.*
249 *floresiensis* lineage. In contrast, the only lithic assemblage thus far recovered *in situ*
250 below the T-WSI, which has a minimum age of 1.01 ± 0.02 Ma and is therefore the

251 earliest known stone technology from Flores¹³, whilst also ‘Mode 1’ in character,
252 features a typologically distinct element: large Acheulean pick-like implements²⁷ that
253 in Lower Palaeolithic industries of Africa and western Eurasia are emblematic of
254 cognitively advanced tool-making^{20,28-29}. The reason for the absence of these more
255 sophisticated components from the later technology of Flores remains unknown;
256 however, possible explanations include: i) a reduction in the behavioural flexibility of
257 *Homo erectus* due to island-dwarfing¹; ii) by ~880 Ma the hominin population size
258 had dropped below a minimum threshold required to maintain cultural complexity³⁰;
259 iii) the older, Acheulean-like artefacts were made by a separate hominin lineage.

260

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362 **Supplementary Information** is available in the online version of the paper.

363

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390 model, based on drone aerial photographs taken by K. Riza, T.P. Ertanto, and M.
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393 Australian National University, for his assistance with the mass spectrometric
394 measurements.

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396

397 **Author contributions**

398 A.B., G.D.v.d.B., I.K. and M.J.M. directed the Mata Menge excavations. M.S., B.A.
399 and R.S. collected tephra samples and M.S. undertook $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating.
400 G.D.v.d.B. described the site stratigraphy, with R.S., D.Y. and B.V.A.. J.A.W.

401 conducted ITPFT-dating of T3 with B.V.A. and comparative trace element analyses
402 of interregional markers (with N.J.P. & B.V.A.). E.S., F.A. and T.S. oversaw key
403 aspects of the field project. M.W.M. analysed the stone assemblage, and G.D.v.d.B.,
404 H.I., I.S., M.R.P. U.P.W. and H.J.M.M. analysed the fauna. M.P. conducted isotopic
405 analyses, R.G. and M.D. undertook U/Th and ESR analyses of faunal remains, and
406 S.v.d.K. carried out the palynological analysis. A.B. and G.D.v.d.B. prepared the
407 manuscript, with contributions from other authors.

408

409 **Figure legends (main text)**

410

411 **Figure 1:** Context and chronology of the hominin fossils at Mata Menge. **a-b**,
412 location of Flores and the So'a Basin; **c**, Digital Elevation Map of the So'a Basin,
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414 outlet of the main river system (the Ae Sissa) drains the basin via a steep-walled
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416 bearing intervals and intervening Ola Bula Formation (OBF) deposits at Mata Menge.
417 Several basin-wide key marker tephra beds that are exposed in the hill flank on the
418 northern side of Mata Menge (trench E-34/34B) are eroded in the central part of the
419 stream valley, where they are replaced by a 4-5 m thick sequence of tuffaceous
420 mudflows with intervening fluvial lenses forming the lower fossil-bearing
421 paleovalley-fill sequence; **e-f**, context of the hominin fossils; **f** is a 3D image of Mata
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423 3D representation of the stratigraphy exposed by trench E-32A-E, with coloured ovals
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431 Tephra); T-WSI (Wolo Sege Ignimbrite); T-W (Wolowawu Tephra). The original
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434 study (1.185 Ma; see SI ref. 25), T-WSI becomes 1.01 ± 0.02 Ma.

435

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437 **Figure 2:** Stone artefacts and fossils from Mata Menge. All specimens are from the
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449 Excavation 32 (trench E-32) in 2014, taken towards the north-north-west. The dip
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451 the source for many of the volcanic products deposited in the So'a Basin; **b**, E-32A-E
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457 of a freshwater gastropod (Cerithoidea) from a sandy lens in Layer II; **e**, Detail of the
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459 Note the abundance of muddy rip clasts around the transition. At other places, the
460 boundary is sharp; **f**, West baulk of E-32C. Large *Stegodon florensis* bones occur at
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471 dotted line indicates the western margin of the ancient streambed.

472

473 **Extended Data Figure 3: ITPFT dating and glass chemistry analysis. a-c,**
474 Selected major element compositions (weight percent FeO vs. K₂O and CaO and SiO₂
475 vs. K₂O) of glass shards from key rhyolitic pyroclastic density current (PDC) and

476 airfall deposits at Mata Menge; **d-h**, Weight percent FeO versus CaO composition of
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478 at Mata Menge (in stratigraphic sequence – youngest to oldest) compared with
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480 compositions of T-WSI, T-T and T-Pu are all geochemically indistinguishable (i.e.,
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483 geochemical differences exist between T-WSI, T-T and T-Pu, these tephra can also be
484 readily distinguished in the field by a combination of stratigraphic position and
485 association, as well as by morphological expression; **i-j**, Selected trace element
486 compositions Sr versus Th and Zr, and **(k-m)** Y versus Nb, Ce and Th of glass shards
487 from T3 correlatives at Mata Menge, Lowo Mali and Kopowatu as well as T6
488 (uppermost inter-regional marker) from Mata Menge. All trace element
489 concentrations are in ppm unless otherwise stated. This data is plotted against
490 equivalent elemental mean and standard deviation (represented as $\pm 1\sigma$ error bars)
491 reference data from potential distal tephra correlatives (i.e. Youngest Toba Tuff
492 [YTT], Middle Toba Tuff [MTT], Oldest Toba Tuff [OTT] and Unit E from ODP-
493 758) acquired on the same instrument using the same standards and under the same
494 analytical conditions^{31,32}. Trace element data indicates that the upper (T6) and lower
495 (T3) inter-regional marker beds occurring at Mata Menge cannot be geochemically
496 related to any known Toba-sourced tephra. On this basis, the eruptive sources of T6
497 and T3 currently remain unknown. However, this absence of eruptive source certainly
498 does not diminish their importance within the overall So’a Basin stratigraphy.

499

500 **Extended Data Figure 4: $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating results. a**, Age probability plot for single

501 crystal laser fusion data for hornblende from the Pu Maso ignimbrite (sample FLO-
502 15-15; SI Table 5); the vertical scale is a relative probability measure of a given age
503 occurring in the sample³³. We applied an outlier-rejection scheme to the main
504 population to discard ages with normalized median absolute deviations of >1.5 (ref.
505 34) and these are shown as open circles. %⁴⁰Ar* refers to the proportion of
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507 filtered hornblende data for the Pu Maso ignimbrite is 0.81 ± 0.04 Ma (1σ ; msd =
508 0.59, prob = 0.93; n = 23/29). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) for these 23 analyses gives
509 a statistically overlapping age of 0.78 ± 0.07 Ma (1σ ; msd = 0.6, prob. = 0.92). The
510 ⁴⁰Ar/³⁶Ar intercept of 303 ± 10 is statistically indistinguishable from the atmospheric
511 ratio of 298.6 ± 0.3 (ref. 35), thus supporting the more precise weighted mean age
512 result.

513

514 **Extended Data Figure 5: ⁴⁰Ar/³⁹Ar dating results. a**, Age probability plot for single
515 crystal laser fusion data for hornblende from the PGT-2 tephra (sample T XII 252-
516 261; SI Table 5). ⁴⁰Ar* ranges from < 10% to nearly 60%. The weighted mean age of
517 the filtered hornblende data for the PGT-2 tephra is 0.65 ± 0.02 Ma (1σ ; msd = 0.78,
518 prob = 0.71; n = 17/24). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) gives a statistically overlapping,
519 but less precise age of 0.61 ± 0.04 Ma (1σ ; msd = 1, prob. = 0.19).

520

521 **Extended Data Figure 6: ⁴⁰Ar/³⁹Ar dating results. a**, Age probability plot for single
522 crystal laser fusion data for anorthoclase from the T6 upper inter-regional rhyolitic
523 tephra (sample FLO15-09/2; SI Table 5). ⁴⁰Ar* ranges from 20% to nearly 100%. The
524 weighted mean age of the filtered feldspar data for the T6 tephra is 0.51 ± 0.03 Ma
525 (1σ ; msd = 0.20, prob = 0.94; n = 5/8). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) gives a

526 statistically overlapping, but less precise age of 0.45 ± 0.04 Ma (1σ ; $m_{swd} = 0.8$,
527 $prob. = 0.54$).

528

529 **Extended Data Figure 7: U-series and ESR samples and dating results. a,**

530 Hominin tooth root samples (#3543A and #3543B) from Layer II, Mata Menge; **b, d,**

531 U-series laser tracks for *Stegodon* molar samples from Layer II; **e, f,** Dose response

532 curves obtained for the two powder enamel samples from #3541 and #3544,

533 respectively. Fitting was carried out with a SSE function through the pooled mean

534 ESR intensities derived from each repeated measurement. Given the magnitude of the

535 D_E values, the correct D_E value was obtained for $5 > D_{max}/D_E > 10$ (ref. 36).

536

537 **Extended Data Figure 8. Carbon and oxygen isotope analysis of dental enamel. a,**

538 $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{18}O$ values of *Stegodon florensis* and murine rodent tooth enamel. All but

539 one of the $\delta^{13}C$ ratios corresponds with a C_4 diet, indicating that both *Stegodon* and

540 murine rodents were predominantly grazers in both fossil-bearing horizons. The

541 positive shift observed in $\delta^{18}O$ of the younger *Stegodon* samples (from the hominin-

542 bearing Layer II) is more difficult to interpret with the limited data available, but

543 could mean a distinct source of drinking water (run-off versus lacustrine) and/or

544 warmer conditions; **b,** Benferroni corrected p values for a pairwise Mann-Whitney

545 statistical analysis to test for similarity of $\delta^{13}C$ between subsamples; **c,** Benferroni

546 corrected p values for a pairwise Mann-Whitney statistical analysis to test for

547 similarity of $\delta^{18}O$ between subsamples; p values showing significant differences in

548 median values are in bold.

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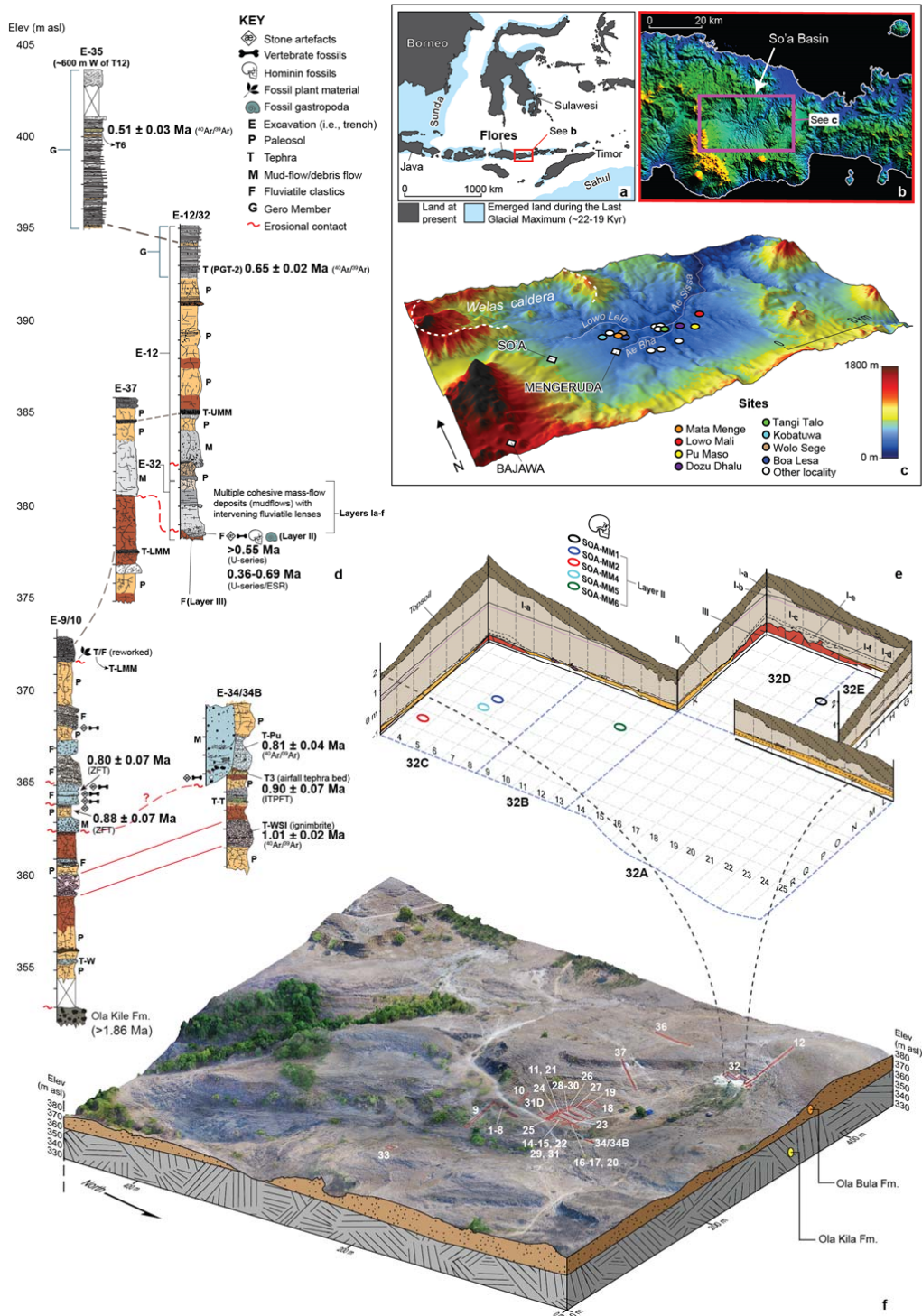
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552 **Extended Data Figure 9:** Analytical data for the Mata Menge stone technology. **a**,
553 Artefact counts and provenance, Trench E-32 (artefact definitions after ref. 37); **b**,
554 raw materials used to manufacture the stone tool assemblage, Trench E-32; **c**,
555 Platform types on flakes and modified flakes, E-32. Cortical: the blow was struck
556 onto the cortical surface of a cobble. Single-facet: the blow was struck on a scar
557 produced by previous reduction. Dihedral: the blow was struck on the ridge between
558 two scars produced by previous reduction. Multifacet: the blow was struck on the
559 surface of multiple small scars produced by previous reduction. Edge: the blow was
560 struck on the edge of the core and a platform surface is not retained on the flake; **d**,
561 Cortex coverage on the dorsal surface of complete unmodified flakes, E-32. Percent
562 cortex coverage refers to the proportion of the dorsal surface covered in cortex; **e**,
563 Artefact counts, Trenches E-32 and E-23/27 (artefact definitions after ref. 37); **f**, Sizes
564 of artefacts and attributes, E-32 and E-23/27; **g**, Raw materials used to manufacture
565 the stone tool assemblage, E-32 and E-23/27; **h**, Scatterplot of complete flake sizes,
566 E-32 (total sample size [N] = 68 complete flakes) and E-23/27 (N=443). With regards
567 to raw materials, coarse- and medium-grained materials include andesite, basalt,
568 rhyolite, and tuff. Fine-grained materials include silicified tuff, chalcedony, and opal.
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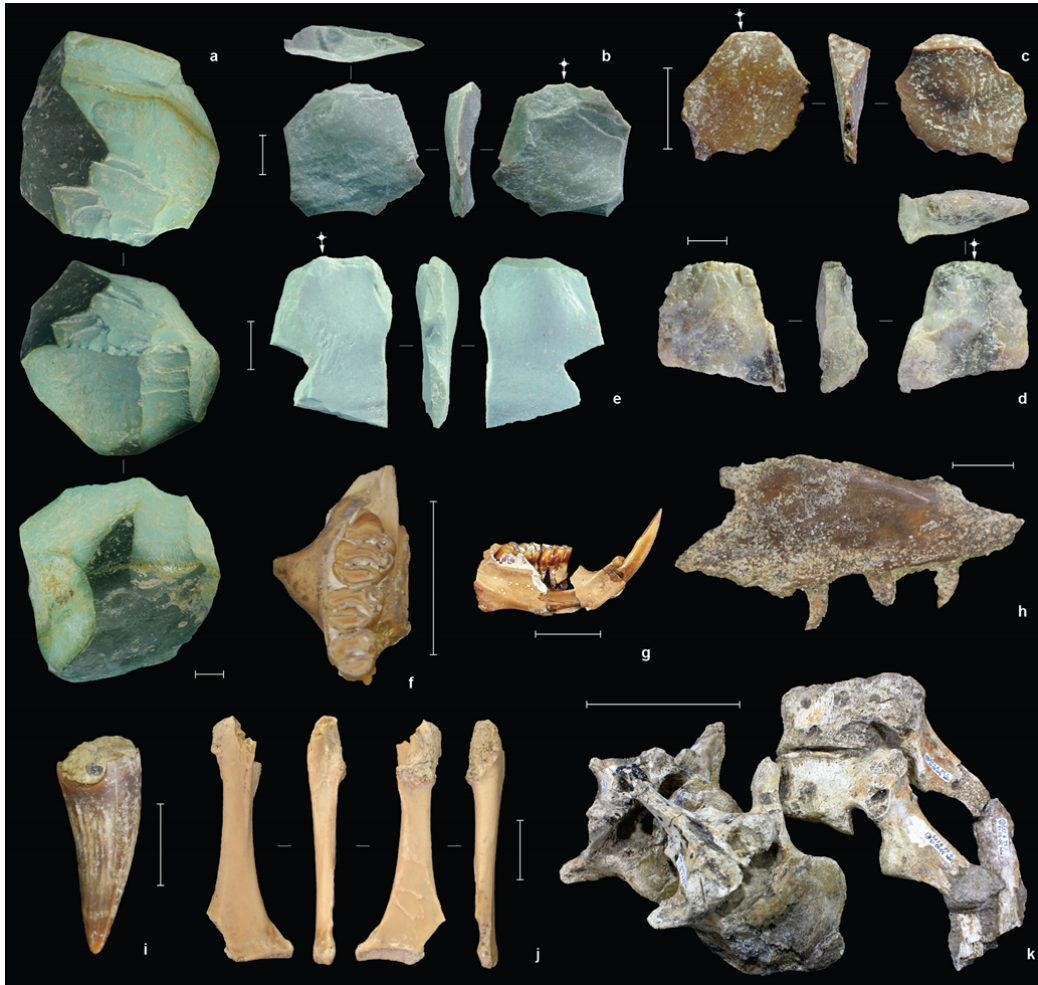
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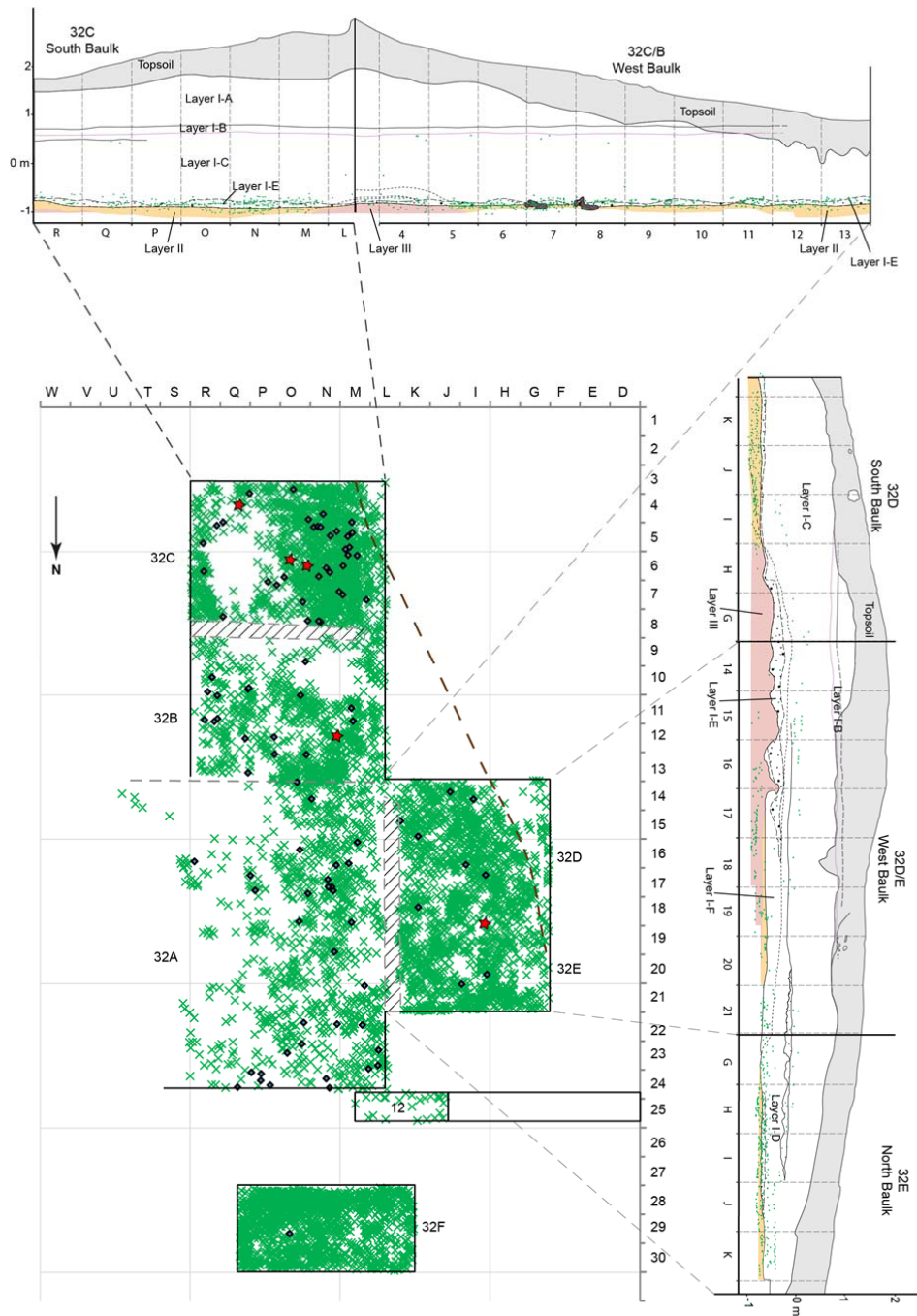
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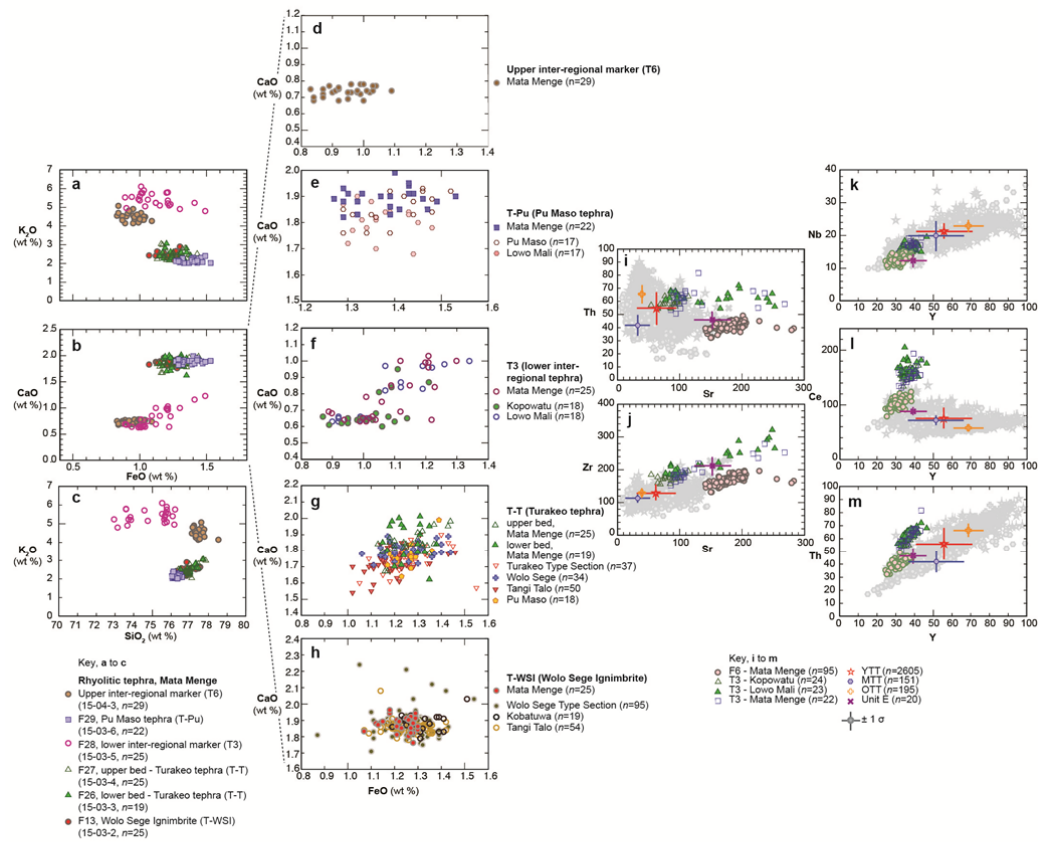
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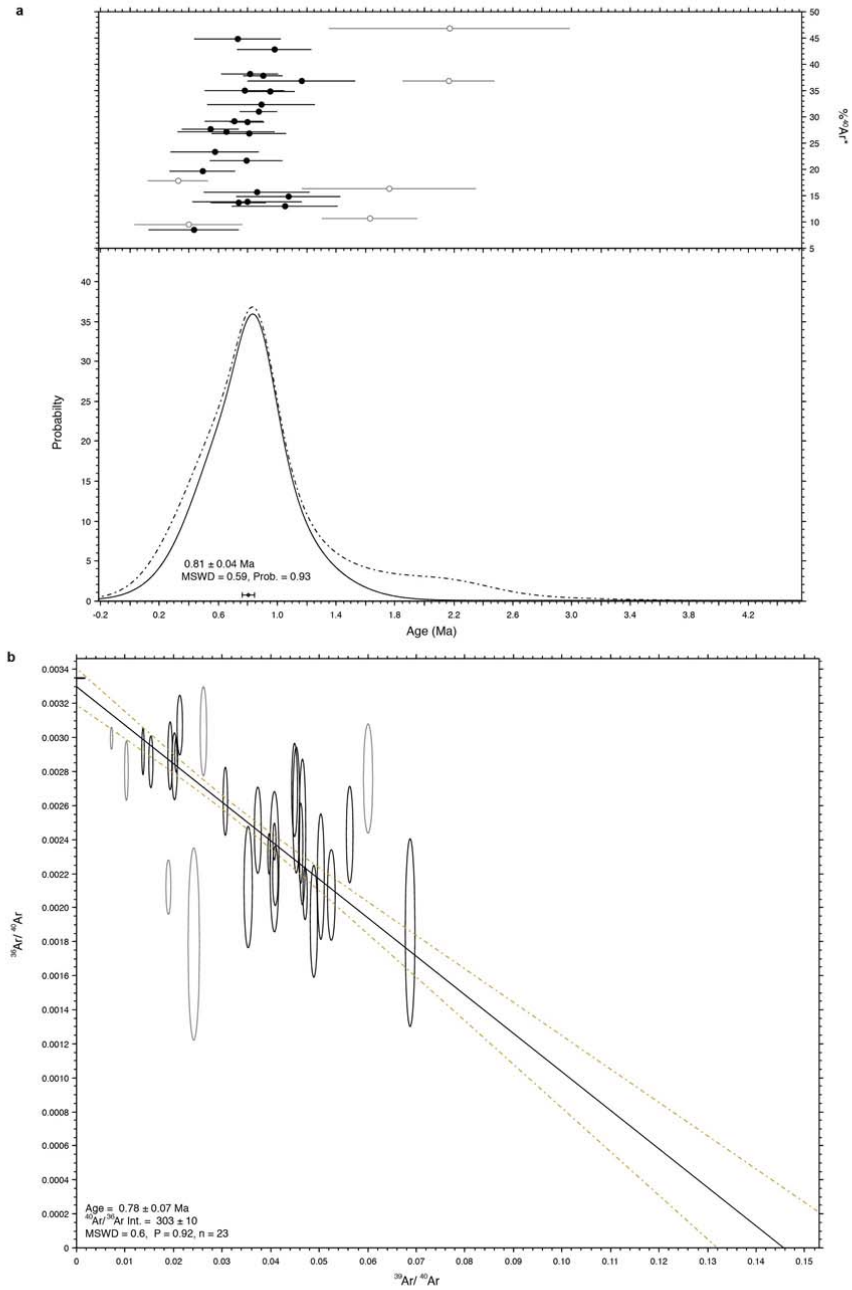
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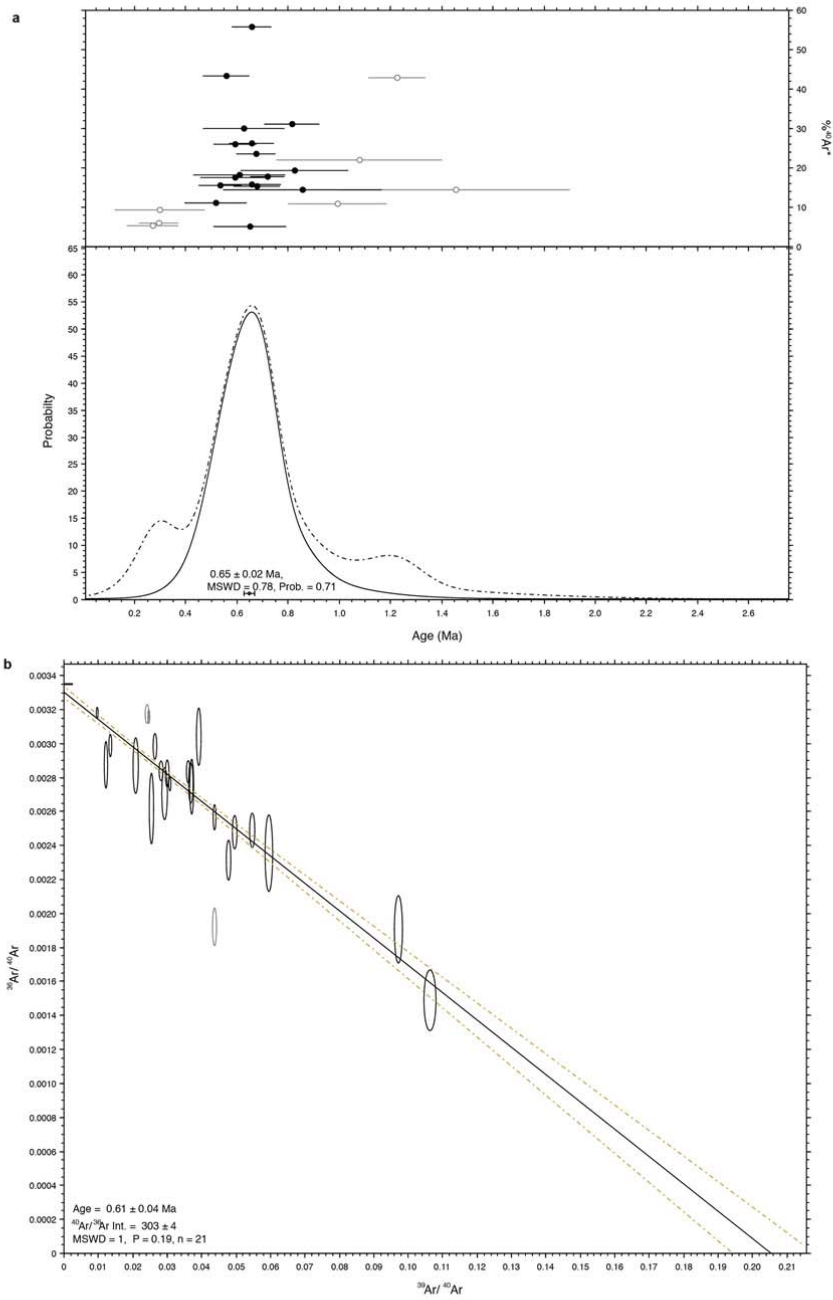
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720 0.59, prob = 0.93; n = 23/29). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) for these 23 analyses gives
721 a statistically overlapping age of 0.78 ± 0.07 Ma (1σ; msd = 0.6, prob. = 0.92). The
722 ⁴⁰Ar/³⁶Ar intercept of 303 ± 10 is statistically indistinguishable from the atmospheric
723 ratio of 298.6 ± 0.3 (ref. 35), thus supporting the more precise weighted mean age
724 result.
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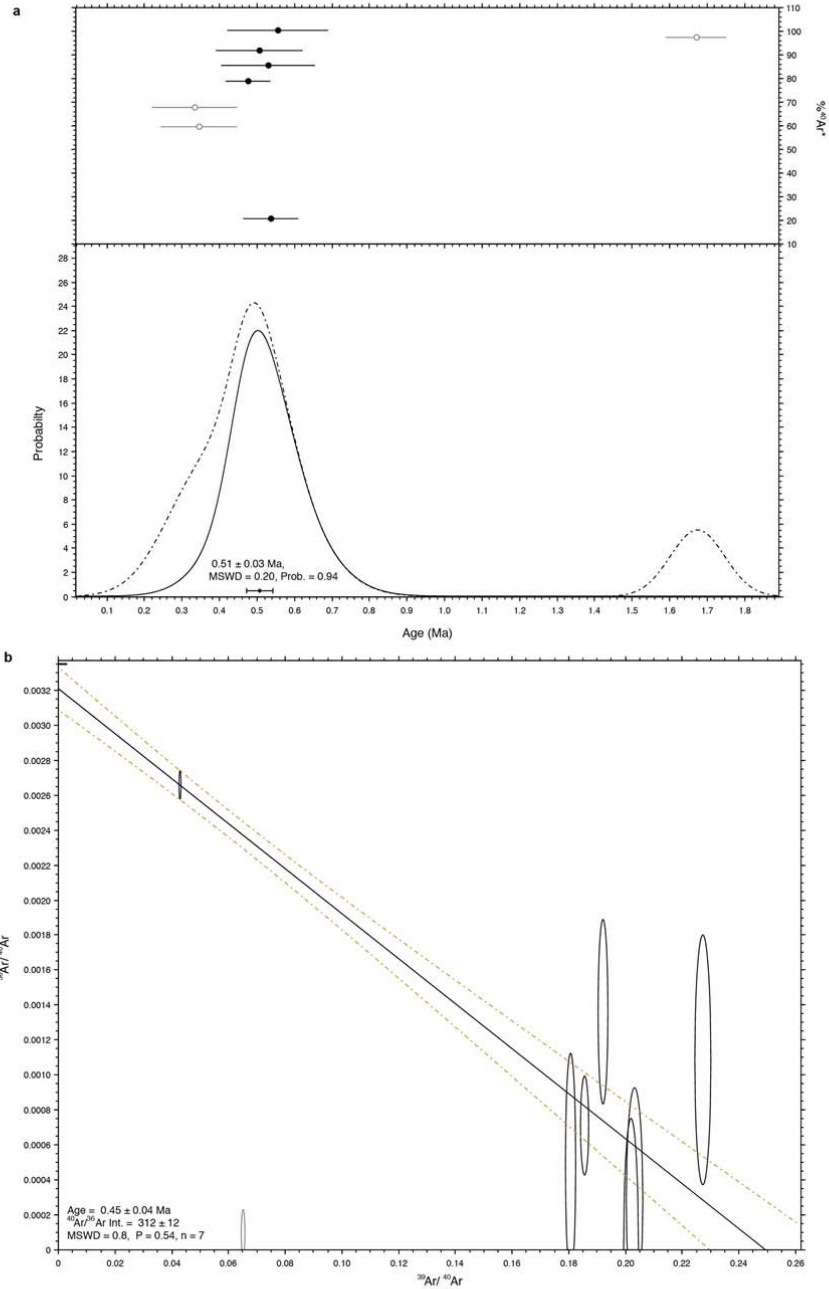
728 **Extended Data Figure 5: $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating results. a,** Age probability plot for single

729 crystal laser fusion data for hornblende from the PGT-2 tephra (sample T XII 252-

730 261; SI Table 5). $^{40}\text{Ar}^*$ ranges from < 10% to nearly 60%. The weighted mean age of
731 the filtered hornblende data for the PGT-2 tephra is 0.65 ± 0.02 Ma (1σ ; $\text{mswd} = 0.78$,
732 $\text{prob} = 0.71$; $n = 17/24$). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) gives a statistically overlapping,
733 but less precise age of 0.61 ± 0.04 Ma (1σ ; $\text{mswd} = 1$, $\text{prob.} = 0.19$).

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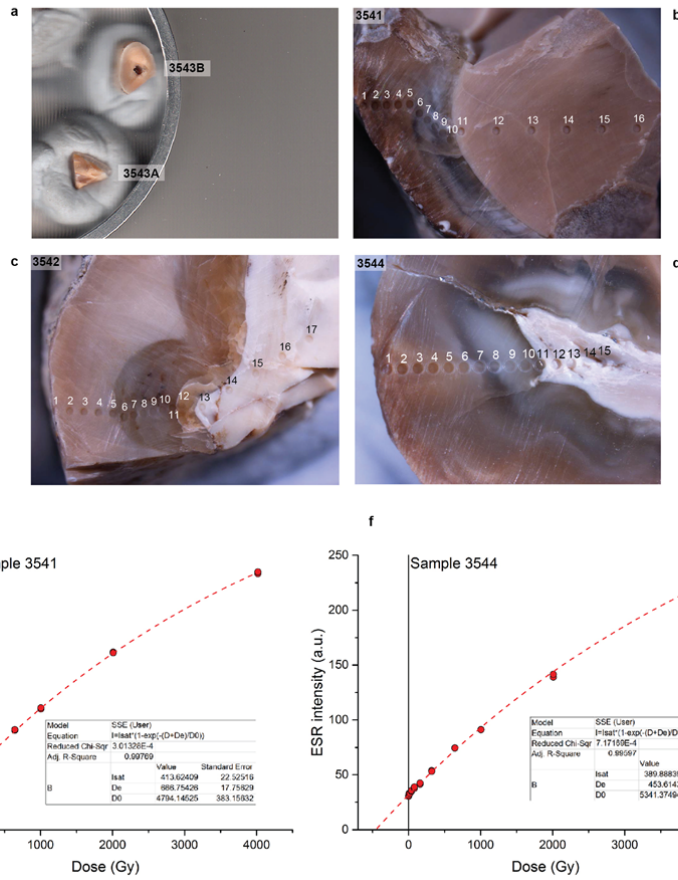
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737 **Extended Data Figure 6: $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating results.** **a**, Age probability plot for single
 738 crystal laser fusion data for anorthoclase from the T6 upper inter-regional rhyolitic
 739 tephra (sample FLO15-09/2; SI Table 5). $^{40}\text{Ar}^*$ ranges from 20% to nearly 100%. The

740 weighted mean age of the filtered feldspar data for the T6 tephra is 0.51 ± 0.03 Ma
741 (1σ ; $\text{mswd} = 0.20$, $\text{prob} = 0.94$; $n = 5/8$). An inverse isochron plot (**b**) gives a
742 statistically overlapping, but less precise age of 0.45 ± 0.04 Ma (1σ ; $\text{mswd} = 0.8$,
743 $\text{prob.} = 0.54$).
744



745

746 **Extended Data Figure 7: U-series and ESR samples and dating results. a,**

747 Hominin tooth root samples (#3543A and #3543B) from Layer II, Mata Menge; **b, d,**

748 U-series laser tracks for *Stegodon* molar samples from Layer II; **e, f,** Dose response

749 curves obtained for the two powder enamel samples from #3541 and #3544,
750 respectively. Fitting was carried out with a SSE function through the pooled mean
751 ESR intensities derived from each repeated measurement. Given the magnitude of the
752 D_E values, the correct D_E value was obtained for $5 > D_{\max}/D_E > 10$ (ref. 36).

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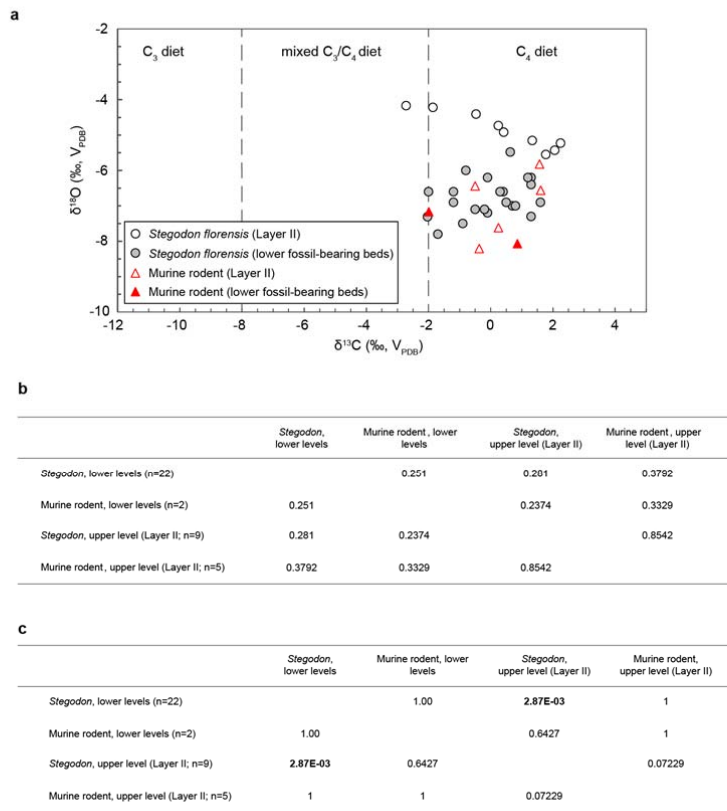
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764 **Extended Data Figure 8. Carbon and oxygen isotope analysis of dental enamel. a,**

765 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values of *Stegodon florensis* and murine rodent tooth enamel. All but

766 one of the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ratios corresponds with a C_4 diet, indicating that both *Stegodon* and

767 murine rodents were predominantly grazers in both fossil-bearing horizons. The

768 positive shift observed in $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ of the younger *Stegodon* samples (from the hominin-

769 bearing Layer II) is more difficult to interpret with the limited data available, but

770 could mean a distinct source of drinking water (run-off versus lacustrine) and/or

771 warmer conditions; **b**, Benferroni corrected p values for a pairwise Mann-Whitney

772 statistical analysis to test for similarity of $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ between subsamples; **c**, Benferroni
773 corrected p values for a pairwise Mann-Whitney statistical analysis to test for
774 similarity of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ between subsamples; p values showing significant differences in
775 median values are in bold.

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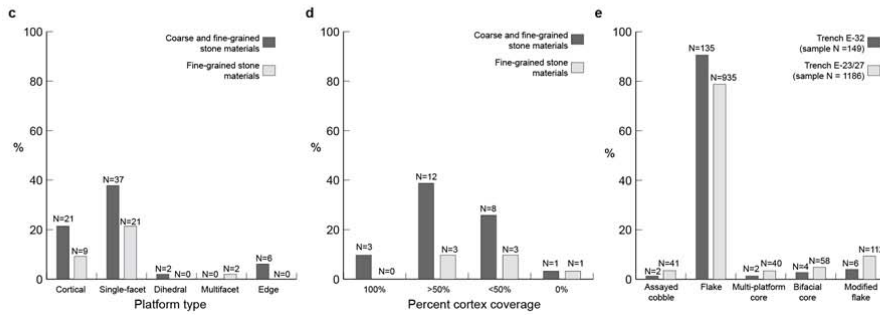
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a

Trench	Layer	Assayed cobble	Flake	Multi-platform core	Bifacial core	Modified flake	Total
E-32A	I	1	9	-	-	-	10
	II	1	24	-	-	-	27
	III	-	5	-	-	-	5
E-32B	not determined	-	1	-	1	-	1
	I	-	34	2	-	-	39
	II	-	2	-	-	-	2
E-32C	not determined	-	2	-	-	-	2
	I	-	4	-	1	-	5
	II	-	7	-	-	-	7
E-32D	not determined	-	16	-	1	-	17
	I	-	1	-	-	-	1
	II	-	9	-	-	-	9
	I, II interface	-	3	-	-	-	3
	not determined	-	3	-	-	-	3
E-32E	I	-	3	-	-	-	3
	II	-	1	-	-	-	1
	III	-	1	-	-	-	1
	II, III interface	-	2	-	1	-	3
	not determined	-	4	-	-	-	4
E-32F	I	-	2	-	-	-	2
	II	-	1	-	-	-	1
	not determined	-	2	-	-	-	2
Total		2	135	2	4	6	149

b

Artefact type	Coarse- and medium-grained volcanics	Fine-grained volcanics and silicates	Total
Assayed cobble	2	-	2
Flake	90	45	135
Multiplatform core	1	1	2
Radial core	2	2	4
Retouched flake	2	4	6
Total	97	52	149

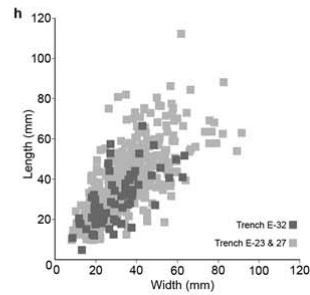


f

Artefact Type	Trench	Largest linear dimension of complete artefacts (mm) (Mean \pm SD, sample size)	Grams of complete artefacts (Mean \pm SD, sample size)	Largest linear dimension of flake scars on cores and modified flakes (mm) (Mean \pm SD, sample size)
Core	E-32	56.4 \pm 31.9 (N=6)	189.9 \pm 256.9 (N=8)	20.3 \pm 12.8 (N=83)
	E-23/27	66.4 \pm 27.4 (N=102)	294.1 \pm 346 (N=102)	21.3 \pm 13.5 (N=1116)
Flake	E-32	33.7 \pm 13.5 (N=68)	15.6 \pm 21.1 (N=70)	-
	E-23/27	41 \pm 16.6 (N=450)	24.5 \pm 28.7 (N=451)	-
Modified flake	E-32	34.9 \pm 14.5 (N=4)	17 \pm 24.8 (N=6)	-
	E-23/27	44.9 \pm 16 (N=74)	39.1 \pm 73.4 (N=74)	-

g

Trench	Coarse- and medium-grained volcanics	Fine-grained volcanics and silicates
	No. %	No. %
E-32	97 (65.1%)	52 (34.9%)
E-23/27	1025 (86.6%)	158 (13.4%)



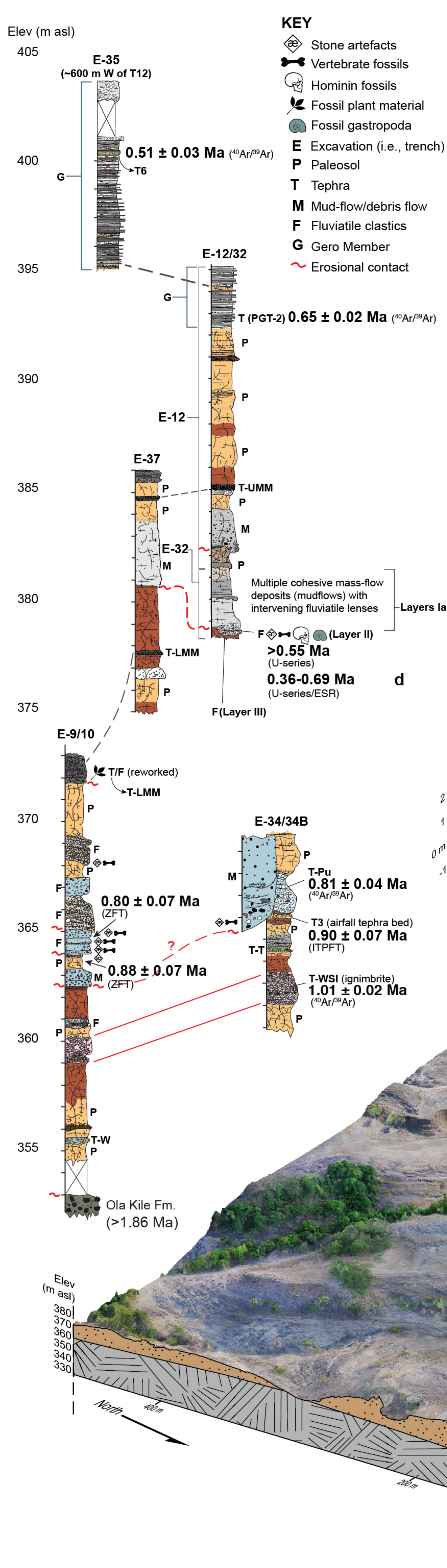
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780 **Extended Data Figure 9:** Analytical data for the Mata Menge stone technology. **a**,

781 Artefact counts and provenance, Trench E-32 (artefact definitions after ref. 37); **b**,

782 raw materials used to manufacture the stone tool assemblage, Trench E-32; **c**,

783 Platform types on flakes and modified flakes, E-32. Cortical: the blow was struck
784 onto the cortical surface of a cobble. Single-facet: the blow was struck on a scar
785 produced by previous reduction. Dihedral: the blow was struck on the ridge between
786 two scars produced by previous reduction. Multifacet: the blow was struck on the
787 surface of multiple small scars produced by previous reduction. Edge: the blow was
788 struck on the edge of the core and a platform surface is not retained on the flake; **d**,
789 Cortex coverage on the dorsal surface of complete unmodified flakes, E-32. Percent
790 cortex coverage refers to the proportion of the dorsal surface covered in cortex; **e**,
791 Artefact counts, Trenches E-32 and E-23/27 (artefact definitions after ref. 37); **f**, Sizes
792 of artefacts and attributes, E-32 and E-23/27; **g**, Raw materials used to manufacture
793 the stone tool assemblage, E-32 and E-23/27; **h**, Scatterplot of complete flake sizes,
794 E-32 (total sample size [N] = 68 complete flakes) and E-23/27 (N=443). With regards
795 to raw materials, coarse- and medium-grained materials include andesite, basalt,
796 rhyolite, and tuff. Fine-grained materials include silicified tuff, chalcedony, and opal.
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798
799



- KEY**
- ◊ Stone artefacts
 - ☠ Vertebrate fossils
 - 👤 Hominin fossils
 - 🌿 Fossil plant material
 - 🐚 Fossil gastropoda
 - E** Excavation (i.e., trench)
 - P** Paleosol
 - T** Tephra
 - M** Mud-flow/debris flow
 - F** Fluvial clastics
 - G** Gero Member
 - ~ Erosional contact

