FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Renowned Paleoanthropologist Visits ECU for Voyages of Discovery Lecture

GREENVILLE, N.C. (Sept. 18, 2012) — East Carolina University soon will welcome to campus Dr. Louise Leakey, renowned paleoanthropologist, conservationist and explorer-in-residence at National Geographic, who will deliver the Premier Lecture of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series.

“Secrets in the Sands: Revelations into How We Became Human,” begins at 7 p.m. Oct. 2, in ECU’s Wright Auditorium.

Leakey is the youngest member of the famous Leakey family of fossil hunters in East Africa. With an adventurous spirit and unwavering focus on the advancement and understanding of human origins, she has spent much of her life leading expeditions into the remote badlands of northern Kenya. From these groundbreaking forays, she and her team have yielded some of our deepest insights into what it is that makes us human. Her team, The Koobi Fora Research Project, has made discoveries that have shaped modern thinking on the journey of humanity over the past 4 million years.

Like her parents, Richard and Meave Leakey, and her grandparents, the pre-eminent Louis and Mary Leakey, Louise focuses her study on the evolution of early human ancestors. Particularly interesting to her is the period between 2 million years ago and 1.5 million years ago. In August 2007, Louise and Meave dug up new H. habilis bones that have contributed to a rewriting of humanity's evolutionary timeline. The Leakeys’ find suggests that different species of pre-humans actually lived side-by-side for almost half a million years.

Through a rigorous process of searching, excavation, paleoecological and geological analysis, and a little bit of paleoanthropological intuition, Louise, along with Meave, has precisely pinpointed regions within the 1,200 square kilometer area of East Turkana that will most likely produce the answers to questions raised about this critical period in human evolution.

Leakey completed her PhD at London University. She has a position as a research assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at Stony Brook University, serves as the director of Public Education and Outreach at the Turkana Basin Institute, and is a National Geographic Society Explorer-in-Residence. In addition to her long-term field research projects in Kenya's Turkana Basin, Leakey is helping to develop the Turkana Basin Institute, a major multi-disciplinary scientific research center best known for its human origins research. Leakey is currently
working to transform the Koobi Fora Research Camp into a year-round research station on the shores of Lake Turkana.

Complimentary tickets are available to ECU students, faculty and staff members with a valid ECU ID. Tickets are $10 for the general public. For tickets, call the ECU Central Ticket Office at 252-328-4788 or 1-800-ECU-ARTS. Individuals requesting accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should call 252-737-1016 (voice/TTY) at least 48 hours prior to the event.

The Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series advances the spirit of exploration and discovery that is the hallmark of the liberal arts. Since its inception, it has featured speakers of international renown addressing compelling issues facing humanity.

The lecture series is made possible through contributions from Harriot College’s Dean’s Advancement Council, various university organizations, and many friends and supporters. To make a contribution, or for additional information, contact Dr. John A. Tucker, director of the lecture series, at 252-328-1028 or tuckerjo@ecu.edu, or visit the series’ website at http://www.ecu.edu/voyages.

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