



ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

Artist, Author Wehr Passes

Burke Museum Affiliate Curator of Paleobotany, Wes Wehr, passed away Monday, April 12, 2004. By training and profession, Wehr was a composer and musician and a recognized painter and writer. Wehr's contributions range beyond his art to include two books and development of the Burke Museum's world-class paleobotany collection. Wehr is credited with developing the most productive source of plant fossils in North America, near the town of Republic Wa. The buried lake bed dating 50 million years old, has yielded more than 200 different fossil species.

Short Life in Shanghai

The lifespan of people in the Shanghai (China) region, now famous for the longevity of its citizens, seldom exceeded 30 years in ancient times, according to current archaeological research. A newly discovered 6,000-year-old skull at the Neolithic Songze site belonged to a man of approximately 30 years of age. Huang Xuanpei, an archaeologist at the Shanghai museum, says that analysis of bones from the same period in Shanghai all showed that the ages of people ranged from 20 to 30. The latest find was basically intact, apart from a destroyed nose bridge bone, cheekbones and upper jaw. The average life expectancy of the modern Shanghai resident is 79.13 years for men and 83.41 years for women.

Remains 2000-4000 Years Old

Remains found at an Indian burial site in southern Indiana are likely 2,000 to 4,000 years old. Jim Mohow, senior archaeologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, said the site was significant because fire pits or hearths also were found along with the burials. A backhoe operator unearthed two skeletons while working on a construction project

in western Spencer County. Archaeologists have not yet analyzed the bones, but Mohow said the condition of the teeth indicated the remains likely were at least 2,000 years old.

Wetlaufer Recognized

Boyd Wetlaufer, considered to be the "Father of Saskatchewan Archaeology" has been named a member of the Order of Canada. Wetlaufer, now 90 years of age and living in Langford just North of Victoria, was among the first archaeologists in Canada to use carbon 14 dating to estimate the age of ancient settlements. Other accomplishments during his fascinating career include the collection of countless arrowheads, identification of a Canadian Plains culture 5,500 years old and the discovery of ancient Peigan clothing he found atop a "burial" rock. His work in Western Canada is considered the foundation of our knowledge of the Northern Plains First Nations people.

Neanderthal Tooth

Archaeologists in Montenegro have discovered a tooth believed to belong to Neanderthal man dating back between 40,000 and 150,000 years, a museum official said. The tooth was found in Crvena Stijena (Red Rock) and "belonged to Neanderthal man," Zvezdana Lucic, director of the museum in the northwestern town of Niksic, told reporters. Mitra Cerovic of the Montenegrin Center for Archaeology Research said the discovery had been confirmed by US experts from the Archaeology Museum of the University of Michigan.

Pre-Inca Graveyard

A well-preserved graveyard possibly 1,000 years old has been discovered at an archeological complex of Inca and pre-Inca temples on the outskirts of the

Peruvian capital. Archeologists this week unearthed the remains of 30 people, including 19 still intact as mummies, dating from between 1000 and 1500, making them some of the oldest mummies ever found in Peru. They said the discovery was "exceptional" because the site had not been plundered by grave robbers and that some of the dead were religious sacrifices.

University of Alexandria

Polish archaeologists have unearthed 13 lecture halls believed to be the first traces ever found of ancient Egypt's University of Alexandria, the head of the project said Wednesday. "This is the oldest university ever found in the world," Grzegory Majderek, head of the Polish mission, told The Associated Press. The lecture halls, with a capacity of 5,000 students, are part of the 5th century university, which functioned until the 7th century, according to a statement from Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Mummies Found

An underground maze packed with hundreds mummies was most likely an ancient multifamily cemetery, Egypt's top archaeologist said. A French team made the discovery of hundreds of mummies crammed into deep shafts and corridors at Saqqara, 15 miles (25 kilometers) south of Cairo. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), said the burial site was used for many centuries, from the 26th dynasty (664-525 B.C.) through the end of the Ptolemaic period in 30 B.C. "Each family dug a shaft about 30 feet [9 meters deep] and buried all the members of the family there. Each shaft may represent a family of this period," he said. Saqqara is one of Egypt's richest archaeological sites. As the cemetery for the ancient capital city of Memphis, Saqqara's burials span 3,000 years and 31 dynasties.

Ancient Pet Cat

French researchers have discovered a 9,500-year-old tomb of a human and a cat buried together on Cyprus, which suggests felines were domesticated earlier than thought. Scientists thought the ancient Egyptians were the first to domesticate cats around 4,000 to 3,900 years ago, based on written records. Researchers suspected humans began taming wild cats much earlier but there was little evidence.

Earliest Fire

Ancient hearths unveiled as nearly 800 millennia old. There is already good evidence for hearths that are 250,000 years old, and it was widely believed that the first controlled handling of fire occurred 400,000 to 500,000 years ago. But an analysis of burned remains carried out by Naama Goren-Inbar of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and her team now proves that fire was tamed at least 300,000 years earlier than that. The researchers have spent the past 15 years unearthing and sorting sediments at a site called Geshar Benot Ya'aqov in Israel. The site is of particular interest to archaeologists because it was an old crossroads between Asia and Eurasia. It is also waterlogged, which means that any ancient remains are extremely well conserved.

Maya Queen's Tomb

While excavating an ancient royal palace deep in the Guatemalan rain forest, archaeologists made a rare discovery — the 1,200-year-old tomb and skeleton of a Maya queen. Archaeologists said the woman appears to have been a powerful leader of a city that may have been home to tens of thousands of people at its peak. They found her bones on a raised platform, with evidence of riches scattered around her body. "We find clues of people's existence in the past all the time, from the garbage they left or the buildings they built. ... But when you actually come face-to-face with human beings, it's a deeply sacred moment for all of us," said David Freidel, an anthropology professor at Southern Methodist University, which sponsored a team of 20 archaeologists excavating the site.

Oldest Bedding

An Upper Paleolithic camp, once submerged by the waters of the Sea of

Galilee, has yielded the world's oldest evidence of bedding, according to Israeli archaeologists. Known as Ohalo II, the site was abandoned by Stone Age fishermen and hunters nearly 23,000 years ago, following a flood. "Calm, relatively deep, water covered the site, and the immediate deposition of fine clay and silt layers began. Together, the water and sediments sealed the site and protected the remains for millennia," archaeologist Dani Nadel and colleagues wrote in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Archaeologists have so far excavated one fourth of the camp, bringing to light six oval-shaped huts and open air hearths, a grave of an adult male, and fragments of hundreds of species of mammals, birds, fruits, and vegetables.

World War II Plane

Archaeologists said they have unearthed parts of a World War II fighter plane that crashed after downing a German bomber near Buckingham Palace. Archaeologist Christopher Bennett said the plane's engine and control panel were located late Sunday during excavations in Buckingham Palace Road in the center of the capital. The Battle of Britain was raging over the skies of London when pilot Ray Holmes spotted the German Dornier bomber on Sept. 15, 1940. Historians believe the German plane may have been on a mission to destroy Buckingham Palace. Holmes had run out of ammunition so he flew his Hurricane directly into the German plane. He managed to use his aircraft to slice off the bomber's tail and parachuted out of his plane before it hit Buckingham Palace Road. The Dornier plunged into part of Victoria Station. Holmes's plane, which hit the ground at around 350 miles (560 kilometers) an hour, was largely buried under a water main and never recovered. The road was later paved over.

Arrow Not Cook Bone

An arrow in the Australian Museum said to be made from a bone of the explorer Captain James Cook is being reclassified as part of an animal, probably an antler. "There is no Cook in the Australian Museum," said the museum's collection manager, Jude Philp. DNA tests by Australian and New Zealand laboratories severed the supposed link with the British

explorer, who was credited with discovering the Great South Land (Australia) in 1770 and was subsequently clubbed to death in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). The legend of Cook's arrow began in 1824 when the Hawaiian king Kamehameha gave it to a relative of Cook's wife, a London surgeon, saying it was made from one of the captain's bones after his skirmish with the islanders. It was given to the Australian Museum in the 1890s.

Pharaoh Portrait Found

Piecing together 14 wooden fragments found in a necropolis in Luxor, Spanish researchers have brought to light the first frontal portrait of a pharaoh. Found in the Dra Abu el-Naga necropolis, in the courtyards of the tombs of the high officials Djehuty and Hery, the fragments make up a 20 by 12 inch wooden tablet, covered with a thin layer of plaster and painted in yellow. "It is a unique finding. Not only does it show the first known portrait of a pharaoh drawn from the front rather than in profile, but it also features the image of a pharaoh hunting ducks on the other side. This is a very unusual representation indeed," team leader Jose Manuel Galan, an archaeologist at the Spanish Supreme Council for Scientific Research in Madrid, told Discovery News. Ancient Egyptians always portrayed figures in profile, except for enemies, foreigners and weird creatures.

Noah's Ark Found?

Satellite pictures of Mount Ararat in Turkey may reveal the final resting place of Noah's ark, according to Daniel McGivern, the businessman and Christian activist behind a planned summer 2004 expedition. "We're telling people we're 98 percent sure," said McGivern, a member of the Hawaii Christian Coalition. "In one image we saw the beams, saw the wood. I'm convinced that the excavation of the object and the results of tests run on any collected samples will prove that it is Noah's ark." This satellite image of Mount Ararat in Turkey shows what looks like a large object emerging from melting snow. An expedition is planned to visit the site to see if it is Noah's Ark.