

Oregon Sea Monster



Some fossils are rare, but this one recently unearthed in eastern Oregon may be positively mythic. In life, the 2-meter-long Jurassic seagoing crocodile (above), discovered by members of the North American Research Group, sported scales, needlelike teeth, and a fishtail. Some paleontologists, including Stanford University researcher Adrienne Mayor, think similar fossils may have inspired Native American representations of water monsters. Mayor notes the croc's "remarkable" resemblance, for example, to a 19th century Kiowa artist's drawing (inset) of a legendary water serpent.

sharper, the scientists report in the current issue of *Chemical Communications*.

The new method could be "revolutionary" for crime fighting, says Antonio Cantu, chief forensic scientist for the U.S. Secret Service in Washington, D.C. But first, says Almog, it has to be refined, standardized, and field-tested in police labs.

Modern Humans in Borneo

An international team claims to have nailed the earliest evidence for *Homo sapiens* in Southeast Asia—to about 46,000 years ago.

In 1958, excavators working at Niah Cave on the island of Borneo unearthed a skull cap and upper jaw of an anatomically modern human. Although radiocarbon dating of nearby charcoal fragments put the age at about 40,000 years, many experts suspected the skull was a newer "intrusion" into an older layer.

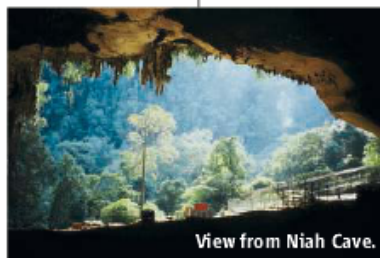
Since 2000, researchers led by archaeologist Graeme Barker of Cambridge University in the

United Kingdom have been reexamining the site. New radiocarbon dates, reported in the March issue of the *Journal of Human Evolution*, show that the cave was continuously occupied between 46,000 and 34,000 years ago. What's more, the group has now been able to date the skull itself, using a technique called uranium series that revealed it was up to 37,000 years old.

The scientists contend that Niah Cave is the earliest securely dated sighting of modern humans in Southeast Asia. They also uncovered evidence that the occupants were sophisticated hunter-gatherers, hunting pigs and monkeys and detoxifying poisonous yams and nuts before eating them.

Sandra Bowdler, an archaeologist at the University of Western Australia in Crawley, says the new dates "suggest that we can forget about the skull being from an intrusive ... burial." James O'Connell, an archaeologist at the

University of Utah in Salt Lake City, adds that the work shows that the Niah Cave people's sophisticated subsistence activities "were practiced at a surprisingly early date."



View from Niah Cave.

Figure 1