

Alabama Archaeological Society

Associate Editors
Bart Henson
Dorothy Luke



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Editor
Amos J. Wright
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THE CULTURE THIEVES

(Follow-Up on Article in Last Month's S&B)

In the spring of 1985, while inspecting archaeological ruins in South Cottonwood Wash, Utah, Chas Cartwright noticed something lying on the dark contours of the earth. Near the mouth of a cave lay two objects as round and smooth as melons. As Cartwright moved closer to investigate, he realized they were the tiny skulls of two infants who had been buried inside the cave 700 years ago.

Two weeks later, Bureau of Land Management ranger Pete Steele led a visitor through the sagebrush and juniper of Recapture Canyon to an ancient dwelling in the side of a cliff. Here, too, looters had recently left their marks. In a scene resembling a combat zone, broken sherds and human bones lay in deep craters.

The plundering of ancient graves is becoming more frequent in southeastern Utah and elsewhere in the Southwest because of the profits to be made by selling the artifacts on the black market. Despite strict state and federal antiquity laws designed to protect such sites, authorities say the looters have recently become more aggressive as the number of artifacts dwindles and the prices rise. "They're like sharks in a feeding frenzy", says Utah State Archaeologist David B. Madsen.

The Southwest has an estimated 1.5 million archaeological sites, and law enforcement officials are desperately trying to protect artifacts on land they control. In southwestern New Mexico, for example, 90 percent of the classic Mimbres sites, dating to around A.D. 1000, have been looted or destroyed. In southwestern Colorado, 60 percent of the prehistoric Anasazi sites have been vandalized. In Arizona, 70 percent of the sites in national forests have been significantly damaged or destroyed.

Most professional looters, however, know exactly what to look for: finely woven baskets and elaborately painted pottery that they can sell to unscrupulous or unwitting dealers, collectors, and museums across the United States and in Europe, Japan and the Middle East. At \$10,000 to \$30,000 for some of the rarer, museum-quality pieces, the incentive is high.

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"Pot hunters have developed elaborate schemes of eluding the authorities", says Steele. "They use hit-and-run tactics, and they work under the cover of night with two-way radios, scanners, and look-outs. In a very real sense, they fight a guerrilla war".

Some blame the recent rise in looting on the romantic, swash-buckling image of raider-as-hero in the Indiana Jones pop-archaeology movies. But in San Juan County, Utah, where the uranium industry has all but collapsed and the unemployment rate is 13 percent, pot hunting is often the only source of income.

The arrival of Mormons in 1912 led to further exploitation of the ruins, particularly in San Juan County. These large pioneer families - Redds, Blacks, Shumways, and others - settled on ranches in Blanding, raising cattle and sheep, farming the dry mesas, and supplementing their meager incomes by trapping and hunting game. In 1924, Andrew A. Kerr, a Mormon archaeologist from the University of Utah, made them an enticing offer. In order to furnish the university's museum with artifacts, Kerr hired Blanding-area residents to dig in the trash middens, paying them \$2 for each Anasazi pot they uncovered. "It was a bonanza, a godsend", says ranger Steele. "They could make \$40 in a day, which was unheard of".

When Kerr died in 1929, he was replaced by another University of Utah archaeologist, Julian Steward, who tried to organize the diggers into excavation teams. But his inability to communicate with the unschooled ranchers led to a bitter contempt for archaeologists, which continues to this day.

"The diggers had been good guys, then suddenly they were bad guys", says Winston Hurst, curator of the Edge of the Cedars Museum. "It created a situation where the locals considered themselves to be in competition with the archaeologists. People have been going out with Dad and Uncle John for generations here. They've grown up with the land and they resent bureaucrats coming in and interfering in their affairs".

In Santa Fe, a major market for prehistoric artifacts, the mood among dealers is tense. "You're bordering on a totalitarian state when it's illegal to own an artifact", says Forrest Fenn, a well-known gallery owner. "That's a dangerous, dangerous thing, the same kind of thing Hitler did".

Today, most Santa Fe galleries are surprisingly bare of prehistoric artifacts. According to Steve Allaire, a special agent with the Forest Service, however, people are still selling. "Most of the wheeling and dealing is going on out of hotel rooms and other clandestine meeting places in Santa Fe. The other big scam is donating these artifacts to museums as tax write-offs".

Perhaps in the long run the real battle is not so much between looters and authorities as it is a war for the minds of the public. Utah archaeologist Madsen is convinced that with enough education, it may someday become socially unacceptable to own a prehistoric artifact. "Right now it's a wonderful thing to have a cocktail party and chat about the pot you've got on your mantle and how you've just picked it up at an auction in Boston", he says. As long as that kind of attitude prevails, there's little hope in protecting these sites. Instead of admiring a pot on someone's mantle, people should be saying, "Well, that's a real low-life thing to do". What people don't realize is that for every one or two artifacts, several whole sites may have been destroyed".

(From an article by Carol Ann Bassett in "Science", July/August 1986)

The Editors

POTHUNTERS INVADE TUSCALOOSA AND HALE COUNTIES

Recently I have had three different visits with some North Alabama pothunters. They range in age from 25 to 32, and are former members of the Alabama Archaeological Society and the Rebel States Archaeological Society. In contrast to what one would think a pothunter would look and act like, these three young men definitely surprised me. All three of them were neat, clean cut, well mannered, and intelligent. When I asked them why they became pothunters, they said it was because of the actions of the TVA and the Federal Government banning all surface collecting and metal detecting on lands owned by both in North Alabama. My next questions were: did they mark their artifacts with a site number, and did they sell their artifacts. Their response was "yes" to marking their artifacts with a site number and "no" to selling their artifacts. Then I asked if I could see their equipment, and they said "yes"; their equipment consisted of three home-made probe rods, three long-handled shovels, three mason trowels, three five-gallon plastic buckets, three metal detectors, and three maps. The maps were: one Alabama state highway road map, one University of Alabama 1978 Warrior River Basin Indian site map, and some of C. B. Moore's old maps. Another thing that shocked me was that they were seeking the land owners in both Tuscaloosa and Hale counties for permission to dig.

John Wm. (Bill) Adkison
Tuscaloosa

EDITOR'S NOTE: If anyone else has had a similar experience, let us hear from you.

CHAPTER NEWS

The Tuscaloosa Chapter meeting was held on the first Monday of January 1987. Guest speaker was Dr. Kenneth Turner, head of the Osteology

Department of The University of Alabama. Dr. Turner spoke on Mississippian, Protohistoric, and Historic mortuary practices in Alabama.

John Wm. (Bill) Adkison

ANATOMICAL, CELLULAR AND MOLECULAR ANALYSIS OF 8,000-YEAR-OLD
HUMAN BRAIN TISSUE FROM THE WINDOVER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Recovery and analysis of ancient tissue and bone of human origin has long been extensively investigated. Only recently, however, has it been technically possible to recover genetic material from ancient human and animal samples. As both previous studies involved dried tissue, it is important to determine whether other conditions may also preserve ancient tissue and genetic material. We describe here an analysis of preserved human bone and soft matter discovered in 1984-1985 buried in a small swampy pond in central Florida. The recovered skeletal material represented a minimum of 40 individuals of both sexes and various ages. Corrected radiocarbon dates directly from bone and from peat matrix gave consistent ages in the range of 7,790 to 8,290 years before present (BP). Nine individuals with intracranial soft matter were recovered and, in five of these, material recognizable as preserved or replaced brain tissue was present. Further analysis demonstrated gross anatomical features, remnant cellular structure and human DNA. As this find appears to be the oldest-known example of preserved human cell structure and DNA, it represents a significant resource for both anthropological and genetic studies.

(From an article by Glen H. Doran et al in "NATURE", October 1986)

The Editors

BOOK REVIEW

ATLAS OF ANCIENT AMERICA - by Michael Coe et al. 1986. 240 pages, 56 maps, 329 illustrations (233 in color). \$35. Available from Facts on File, Inc.; 460 Park Avenue South; New York, New York 10016.

This large (9 x 12) atlas may seem to be all pictures, but due to its size there is plenty of text with the maps and pictures. It is an outstanding summary of the civilization and cultures in the Americas, covering North, South and Mesoamerica. The photographs are excellent in both quality and selection. The book is hardback with glossy paper, a bibliography and an index. This is a quality book - one of the best we have seen from this publisher, and we recommend it as a nice addition to anyone's library. The photographs are well worth the money.

The Editors

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST MYTH

Many anthropologists and archaeologists believe that pre-industrial civilizations did far less damage to their environment than do their modern industrial counterparts. Derived from Rousseau's romanticized concept of the "noble savage", this view holds that hunter-gatherers and neolithic agriculturists feel a reverence for nature, live in harmony with their environment, practice a conservation ethic and avoid the short-sighted destructive exploitation rampant in industrial societies. What reality does this postulated golden age of environmentalism possess? New evidence adds support to the view that the golden age is a myth.

Recent archaeological discoveries have destroyed the assumption that Eden's hunters were conservationists. On every oceanic island for which we have adequate knowledge, the first arrival of humans was quickly followed by the extermination of all or most large animals, the best-known victims being the moas of New Zealand; the giant lemurs and elephant birds of Madagascar; and the flightless geese of Hawaii. (It is still debated whether the late Pleistocene extinctions of most large animals of North and South America and Australia were similarly caused by the arrival of humans.) More recently, it has become clear that pre-industrial societies were also prone to habitat destruction on a scale sufficient to destroy them.

One such case involves the collapse of the Polynesian society that erected the famous giant statues of Easter Island. This collapse proves to have been at least partly caused by deforestation, documented by pollen records. When Polynesians reached the island around AD 400, they found it covered with palms, other trees and shrubs. By AD 1500 the human population had grown to about 7,000 and had erected some 245 stone platforms, carved more than 800 giant statues and destroyed the forest so completely that its tree species are now extinct. Deforestation had three harmful consequences: soil erosion, hence lower crop yields; no trees to build canoes, hence lower yields of fish, the main protein source on Easter Island other than chickens; and inability to erect statues (weighing up to 85 tons), which had probably been raised to an upright position with the help of logs used as levers. The human population now exceeded the carrying capacity of the island. Warfare, cannibalism and slavery became chronic, a warrior class took over, spearpoints were manufactured in enormous quantities and people reverted to living in caves for defense. By the time that Europeans discovered Easter Island, they found a panorama of destruction: the population may have crashed, many of the statues had been toppled and intentionally decapitated during battles between rival factions, and the island had been converted to barren treeless grassland.

(From an article by Jared M. Diamond in "Nature", November 6, 1986)

The Editors

PEOPLE IN AMERICAS BEFORE LAST ICE AGE?

A rock shelter on a sandstone cliff in northeastern Brazil has yielded evidence of the earliest known human occupation in the Americas, approximately 32,000 years ago, according to a report by two French scientists.

Although the discovery, reported in the June 19 "Nature", does not resolve long-standing archaeological disputes over when and how people first arrived in the New World, the site is much older than others where human occupation has been firmly established.

Carbon dates from the sedimentary layers indicate, according to the researchers, that the shelter was occupied repeatedly by different groups of tool-making people from at least 32,000 years ago until as recently as 6,000 years ago.

In addition, the investigators note that a hearth in the shelter dated at 17,000 years old contains a rock with two red painted lines, suggesting that cave art began in the Americas about the same time it appeared in Europe and Africa. The walls and ceiling of Pedra Furada are still covered with prehistoric paintings.

(From an article in "Science News", June 28, 1986)

The Editors

SKULL GIVES HOMINID EVOLUTION NEW FACE

A 2.5-million-year-old fossil skull recovered in East Africa last year is causing paleoanthropologists to reconsider ideas about the sequence of evolutionary changes and who is related to whom among the earliest species of hominids, or humanlike creatures.

The discovery, reported in the August 7 "Nature", represents the oldest known hominid not directly related to modern humans. The skull was found in a gully west of Kenya's Lake Turkana by Alan Walker of Johns Hopkins University.

(From an article by B. Bower in "Science News", August 16, 1986)

The Editors

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THE TREASURES OF THE NILE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

Between April 15 and August 31, 1987, Memphis, Tennessee will host an exhibition on loan from the world-famous Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt. The Ramesses The Great Exhibition is the largest assemblage of Egypt's national treasures to ever visit the United States, and Memphis is one of only five American cities hosting this event.

Ramesses II, the last great warrior-pharaoh, ascended the throne of Egypt in 1279 B.C., beginning a remarkable reign that would last 66 years. He built magnificent monuments, temples, obelisks, and colossal statues throughout all Egypt. He claimed many wives and sired nearly a hundred children. He turned back a wave of powerful troops during the historic Battle of Kadesh. Many historians believe Ramesses was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Ramesses is remembered as a prolific builder of temples. Many of the remaining monuments in Egypt were built by him. Depicted with Ramesses on many of his monuments is Nefertari, the pharaoh's chief and favorite queen. Ramesses built the magnificent hall of columns in the massive temple of Amun at Karnak, a structure large enough to contain the Houston Astrodome. Ramesses also built The Ramesseum, his funerary temple, the temples at Abu Simbel, well known to Americans, and added to the temples at Luxor, Abydos, and Memphis.

The travelling exhibition features exquisitely crafted gold jewelry, highlighted by an almost unbelievable 19-pound gold necklace. Also in the exhibition are Ramesses' gold bracelets, Seti II's earrings and a beautiful ivory inlaid jewelry box. Ramesses' striking coffin lid and other funerary artifacts are featured; including a sarcophagus, beautifully carved and painted coffins, a canopic jar stopper and the door to a burial chamber.

The exhibition will be at the Memphis Convention Center; advance reservations are strongly recommended.

The Editors

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Available issues of <i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i> Vol. 20-29 each issue	(\$2.50 to Members) \$5.00 pp
<i>Stanfield-Worley Bluff Shelter Excavations</i> (Journal of Alabama Archaeology) Vol. VIII Nos. 1 & 2 - Reprint, each issue	\$5.00 pp
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