

Alabama Archaeological Society

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2602 Green Mountain Rd.
Huntsville, Alabama 35803

MEMBER OF THE EASTERN STATES ARCHEOLOGICAL FEDERATION

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*Official Press Secretary of the Society

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CHAPTER NEWS

Auburn Chapter*

This chapter meets on the first Thursday of each month in Room 2169, Haley Center, Auburn University, at 7:00 p.m. For information call Mr. Baker Dean, Jr. at 745-2495. Speaker for the April meeting was Joe Hershel, archaeological consultant to Auburn University, who presented a program on lithic artifacts.

Birmingham Chapter

The Birmingham Chapter meets the second Thursday of each month at the Red Mountain Museum. Call Tom Hutto for further information at 956-1895.

Huntsville Chapter

The speaker at the April chapter meeting was Mr. Lawson Corley of Birmingham, who was responsible for classifying the Indian artifacts in the Red Mountain Museum. Mr. Corley displayed part of his own collection at the chapter meeting and gave a most interesting presentation, which covered the importance of proper classification of artifacts and recording of sites.

Members of the Huntsville Chapter attended the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Tennessee Anthropological Association at Middle Tennessee State University in Murphreesboro, Tenn., on April 11. The well-balanced program included papers on Color Symbolism in Post-Mortem Ritual; Distributional Patterns of Selected Types of Middle Woodland Earthworks and Artifacts; Shell-Covered Graves: a Middle Tennessee Folk Custom; Archaeological Research in the Columbia Reservoir, Tennessee; and The Big South Fork Folklife Study.

The Huntsville Chapter meets the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 in the Arts Council Conference Room, Von Braun Civic Center.

Muscle Shoals Chapter

The Muscle Shoals Chapter held its April meeting on Monday night, April 13, at the Indian Mound Museum in Florence. Twenty-one members and guests were present. Charles Moore led the discussion and study of the "Point of the Month", which was the Gary. The program was presented by Bill Strong, who is a trained archaeologist and an assistant professor of geography at the University of North Alabama. His program was an interesting slide narration on "Mexico, Past and Present". The next chapter meeting will be Monday night, May 11, at 7:15.

A.H.C. PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

The 14th Annual Preservation Conference of the Alabama Historical Commission will be held in Mobile on May 8, 9 and 10, 1981. For registration and program information, write to the Mobile Historic Preservation Society; 300 Oakleigh Place; Mobile, Alabama 36604.

*Due to oversight on the Editors' part, this report was inadvertently omitted from the April STONES & BONES.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Gen. Gates P. Thruston: Archaeologist is a new pamphlet reprinted from the Quarterly of the Tennessee Historical Society by H. C. Brehm, an amateur archaeologist. It is available in the bookstores at \$2.50; mailed, \$2.75.

If I were starting today to collect material on the ancient Indians, I would start with this pamphlet. It is scholarly and informative, and it opens doors to more than a century of investigative archaeology in Middle Tennessee.

The title of the article offered in the pamphlet is "Tennessee Antiquities Re-Exhumed". It is divided into parts, the first by Robert McGaw and the second by Richard Weesner.

In his opening section, McGaw has an account of the life of Gen. Gates Thruston, tells how the Thruston collection was formed, and how it came to be at Vanderbilt.

Weesner, in turn, writes of the artifacts in the collection, of the people who made them, and how the collection was restored and displayed in the middle 60s.

Weesner and his wife, McGaw, Brehm and Lawrence Russell, with the permission and cooperation of Vanderbilt, cleaned up the artifacts in the somewhat neglected Thruston collection and placed them on display on the ground-floor level of Kirkland Hall. They can be seen there today - a truly beautiful display of the handwork of ancient peoples.

(From an article by Hugh Walker in THE TENNESSEAN, Sunday, March 1, 1981.)

Archaeology of the Funeral Mound - Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia - by Dr. Charles Fairbanks. The Ocmulgee National Monument Association, a non-profit organization organized to assist in the historical, scientific, educational and interpretive activities of the Ocmulgee National Monument, Macon, Georgia, is proud to announce the limited second edition of Archaeology of the Funeral Mound Ocmulgee by Dr. Charles Fairbanks. Originally published by the National Park Service in 1956, this important work in American archaeology has been out of print for 25 years. This report on the excavations of the Funeral Mound, Ocmulgee National Monument, is the first publication to summarize the prehistory of the southeastern United States for the scientist and layman alike. Spanning 10,000 years of cultural changes, the book provides solid descriptions of Indian cultures on the Macon Plateau and Ocmulgee River floodplain.

Soft-cover edition: \$11.50 (add \$1.50 postage and handling). Order from: Mercer Press Services; Mercer University; Macon, Georgia 31207.

Two Prehistoric Villages in Middle Tennessee - by William Edward Myer.

The author conducted studies of the culture locally called "The Middle Cumberland Culture" or "The Stone-Box Grave People" in the early 1920s which were reported in the above-named article in the Forty-first Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology. He includes a general summary of the "Indian Remains in Central Tennessee Basin".

The two sites are near Brentwood, Tennessee (which is a short distance from Nashville) and are both Mississippian expressions. They are the Gordon Town Site and the Fewkes Group (of five mounds).

One-hundred-thirty-one pages plus 42 pages of plates. Paperback on substantial stock. Complete reprint. Price each: \$3.95 (this includes postage). Order from: Middle Cumberland Archaeological Society; c/o John T. Dowd; 210 Lucky Drive; Nashville, Tennessee 37211.

The Editors

SALVAGING THE OXFORD

The prestigious Paris-based jewelry firm of Cartier has announced plans to raise the Oxford, an English ship of plunder that was sunk 300 years ago by the actions of a drunken sailor. The vessel is located at the bottom of the Caribbean off the coast of Haiti. The three-masted ship is believed to contain the personal fortune of Capt. Henry John Morgan, a flamboyant 17th-century Welsh buccaneer who operated in the Caribbean against the Spanish. The booty, gathered in the pillage of the city of Portobello, Panama, is believed to contain a vast quantity of gold coins, silver plates and goblets, precious gems, and weapons trimmed in gold. In 1978 Cartier sponsored an exhaustive search through old documents in order to pinpoint the location of the Oxford. Sea exploration began last July with the use of sonar devices, metal detectors, and deep-sea divers. The exact location of the ship was discovered in December. Once the ship is raised, Cartier plans to create a museum in Haiti about the ship and to auction off the treasure for charity.

(From "Features & Profiles" - Publication of the Archeological Society of South Carolina - February, 1981)

The Editors

WEST VIRGINIA ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY INFORMATION

During the past two years the West Virginia Archeologist has changed its format to include two issues a year accompanied by six issues of our Newsletter.

Regular membership is \$7.00 per calendar year. All correspondence concerning membership should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer, Thomas Kuhn; 2124 11th Avenue; Huntington, West Virginia 25703.

The latest issue of the Archeologist, No. 30, has just been issued and contains two major articles and two book reviews. The lead article is "Childers (46-Ms-121): A Terminal Late Woodland Village", by R. F. Maslowski and D. L. Dawson; and the second article is "Basketry, Cordage and Bark Impressions from the Northern Thorn Mound (46-Mg-78) Monongalia County, West Virginia, by J. M. Adovasio and R. L. Andrews.

Thomas Kuhn
Huntington, WV

PUBLICATION AVAILABLE

The Bellefonte Site, 1JA300, by Eugene M. Futato. Research Series No. 2, Office of Archaeological Research, University of Alabama. Available from: Mapping Services Branch, TVA; 200 Haney Building; Chattanooga, Tennessee 37401.

The Editors

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO ISRAEL

The Tel Batash (Timnah) Archaeological expedition offers a combination of travel, field experience and academic credit. This expedition to the Sorek Valley of Israel is sponsored by the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in collaboration with The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Expedition Director is George L. Kelm; Archaeological Field Director, Amihai Mazar. The program outline includes comprehensive sightseeing in Israel, three- or six-week field experience, personalized instruction in archaeological method and a lecture program in archaeology. There will be two sessions between June 9 and July 24, 1981. For details and applications, write to: Dan Browning; c/o Dr. George L. Kelm; Timnah Expedition; P. O. Box 22417; Fort Worth, Texas 76122.

Cynthia Sims
Huntsville

OLDEST TOOL KIT YET

Tool making has long been recognized as an ability unique to humans, and tools made of stone have long been used to date the antiquity of humanity. Now the date is being pushed back 500,000 years to at least 2½ million years ago. The reason: the discovery of 48 sharp flaked stone knives and three larger choppers in the Hadar of the Afar region of northeastern Ethiopia.

The story of this find begins in December 1976. While surveying in the Gomo River, Helene Roche of the Musee de l'Homme in Paris found a number of artifacts in geological sections that had been cut away by erosion. John W. K. Harris of the University of Pittsburgh was asked to take a closer look at the site. In January 1977 Harris found stone tools on the surface near the original find and he, Donald Carl Johnason of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and others began excavation. The result was a large kit of tools made of volcanic rock. Closely associated with the tools were a number of broken-up bone fragments in what is believed to be a primary, or undisturbed, context.

"It wasn't a natural process that deposited those artifacts in that place", says Harris. "They were dropped there by some agency", he explains, "and we, of course, make the assumption that it was a human agency". He further suggests that the excavation may be of a campsite or sort of home base used by creatures who lived in or operated in groups and who had meat as at least part of their diet. "This concept of a home base", Harris told Associated Press, "is a possible example of group behavior. They may have been bringing food back to a central location to be shared". Harris plans to publish a scientific description of the items discovered at the site this spring.

The discovery of the tools has been kept on ice since 1977 so that the tools could be examined and adequate dating could be done. But Glynn Isaac of the University of California at Berkeley (and currently at Harvard University) knew of the find, and he says, "There isn't any doubt that they are stone tools. They are very simple, but that's not an issue. The issue was the age". But now he and some others who know of the find are satisfied. "Even good geologists can be wrong", he admits, but he goes on to say "the chances that the age is as they say seem to be very good". And the age is the crucial point.

James Aronson of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland says he and the others are fairly confident of the dates they got, which range from 2.9 to 2.7 million years old. Also involved in the dating project were Maurice Taieb of the French National Center for Scientific Research in Marseille; Robert Walker of the University of Toronto; Jean-Jacques Tiercelin of the Center for Scientific Research in Marseille and Michel Beden of the University of Poitiers in France.

If the dating holds up as it is expected to, these tools will be the oldest known human artifacts. They will, however, fall into a gap in the story of human evolution as we know it. The Afar region has yielded fossil hominids (*Australopithecus afarensis*) that roamed eastern Africa between approximately 3 and 4 million years ago. Many researchers feel that *A. afarensis* was on the direct line of human evolution, but it was a small-brained creature that probably was not capable of manufacturing tools. Hominids with larger brains have been dated back to 2 million years ago, as have stone tools, but that leaves nothing between 3 and 2 million years ago - until now. "That's why this thing is exciting and intriguing", says Isaac. It opens the possibility that perhaps the first use of stone tools preceded the development of a significantly enlarged brain and were part of the behavior or way of life that helped to induce, or influence, the enlargement of the brain. That's one possibility. The other, he says, "is that the trend toward brain enlargement began earlier than the oldest fossils we yet have".

The question posed by these possibilities will not be answered until the toolmaker is found. In the meantime, the tools themselves are likely to create some excitement. Elwin L. Simons of Duke University (who also knew of the find) puts it this way: "The oldest documentation of stone tools is the beginning of archaeology; it's the beginning of cultural history".

(From an article in Science News; Volume 119; February 7, 1981)

The Editors

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Available issues of <i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i> Vol. 13-18	\$1.00 pp
Vol. 20-24 (\$2.50 to Members)	\$4.00 pp
<i>Stanfield-Worley Bluff Shelter Excavations</i> (<i>Journal of Alabama Archaeology</i>)	
Vol. VIII Nos. 1 & 2 - Reprint)	\$5.00 pp
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<i>Handbook of Alabama Archaeology Part I, Point Types</i>	\$7.35 pp
Lively, Long, Josselyn - <i>Pebble Tool Paper</i>	\$3.00 pp
<i>Investigations in Russell Cave</i> , published by the National Parks Service	\$5.00 pp
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1 Mound State Monument, Moundville, Alabama 35474	

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