Alabama Archaeological Society

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STONES & BONES NEWSLETTER

NADB DOC # - 4,058,526

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Volume 35 *Number 8*

Drums Along The Warrior

The heartbeat of all Indian music is the drum. Silent for five hundred years, drums will again sound at Moundville Archaeological Park during the week of September 27-October 2, 1993.

Creek, Choctaw, Seminole, Shawnee, and Cherokee artisans will demonstrate Native American basketweaving, finger weaving, feather work, dressmaking, beadwork, blowgun making, and flintknapping. Potters and silversmiths will recreate ancient designs. Alabama Indians will prepare Native American foods and show how medicines are made from herbs. Storytellers will recall a simpler time when people lived close to nature and talked with animals. A guided visit to an archaeological excavation will be one of the stops for special group tours.

Saturday activities will include Indian stickball and lacrosse games as well as Choctaw singers and dancers performing traditional music in the Choctaw language. The renowned Raven Rock Cherokee dancers from the Blue Ridge mountains will give a special performance, and on Saturday night an Indian drummer will summon visitors to a ceremonial bonfire among the mounds.

The Moundville Native American Festival will open to the public Monday, September 27, through Friday, October 1, from 9:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m., and on Saturday, October 10:00 a.m. till 8:00 p.m. These dates coincide with the Alabama Archaeology Week. Admission fees are charged and groups of ten or more from schools or other organizations may request tours and group rates Monday through Friday by calling the Alabama Museum of Natural History at (205) 371-2572. Call the Alabama Indian Resource Center (205) 371-2234 for further information.

The Alabama Archaeological Society will have a table at the Festival on Saturday, October 2, that will include Artifact Identification, Paleo Point recording, publication sales, and membership information. All A.A.S. Members are invited to the barbeque at Moundville Friday night, October1, with the Festival participants and Museum Staff. Tickets will cost five dollars, and resrvations are requested. All money should be sent to Eugene Futato.

Flightless Bird in Waterlogged Cave

The cave has been hailed as a sort of underwater Lascaux, the most exciting find since Lascaux's painted galleries were discovered five decades ago in southwest France. The hyperbole is understandable. The Cosquer cave, whose discovery was formally documented last year, can't really match Lascaux for artistry, but its images are unique and

In the Alabama Archaeological Society's Past

Who Scalped Bodo and Why?

Foul doings in prehistoric Ethiopia. Bodo man, a late Homo erectus and one of the closest known relatives of Homo sapiens, was scalped following his death 300,000 years ago, according to new evidence introduced this week by Berkeley anthropologist Timothy D. White. White has completed an electron microscope investigation of the case, and he is convinced that the jagged cuts he has found on the skull fossil of Bodo provide solid evidence of the earliest known scalping, apparently executed with a primitive stone knife. The weapon has not been found.

Who would scalp Bodo, and why? The motive is less clear than the facts, White concedes. Despite the fact that Bodo belonged to a nearly human species of hominids, he says, very little is known about his behavior - whether he lived with a tribe, for example, or coveted territory. Scalping could have been a mortuary practice or form of ancestor worship, he says, but it is impossible to go beyond speculation without further evidence. However, he adds, butchery is unlikely. "It is very difficult to think of an economic reason for this kind of practice".

(From Science News, June 12, 1983). Taken from the August 1983 issue of *Stones and Bones.*

Elegy To An Ancestor

O man of yore, grim skeleton reposing
In glass confines of a museum case,
Pale naked bones the dawn of man exposing,
Unearthed progenitor of the human race;

Beneath the broken rubble of a village
Entomed for centuries till recent date,
The last and richest spoil of many a pillage-
How fortunate that you were found so late!

Had you been found when Spanish soldier stumbled,
You might have been declared of Adam's blood;
Or, buried where some dying glacier crumbled,
Explained as one who parished in the Flood.

But you slept on while midden, sand and humus
Above you piled, and waters rose and fell;
While kingdoms now forgotten waxed victorious,
And we "discovered" lands you knew so well.

its place in prehistory is pivotal. The cave was found in 1991 by Henri Cosquer, a professional diver, while he was exploring the underwater grottoes at Cap Morgiu, near Marseilles. Its narrow entrance lies 121 feet below the surface of the Mediterranean, making it inaccessible to all but the most expert scuba divers - and enormously frustrating for landlubbing archaeologists like Jean Clottes.

Already the cave has claimed three lives. Shortly after its discovery, three diving enthusiasts died in the watery darkness while worming their way along the 500-footlong tunnel that leads from the entrance to the partially flooded inner caverns. The French government has since blocked the entrance to prevent further tragedy. Clottes himself has seen only video images of the paintings, transmitted by the cameras of the diving research team to a TV monitor on dry land.

The cave is important for several reasons, expalined Clottes. While painted caves are common in southwest France and in the Pyrenees, nothing like Cosquer had ever found in the country's southeast. Although Cosquer is half underwater, the walls above sea level are covered in decorations. There are hand stencils, finger tracings, cryptic symbols, and cross-hatchings and more than 100 engraved and painted animal images. Many of these show horses, bison, and ibex, which are typical of Ice Age art from Europe. But the images of marine animal - what look like jellyfish, and a kind of seabird - are unlike anything seen before. Early English-language reprots referred to the large, portly birds with stunted wings as penguins. In fact, says Clottes, they are auks, flightless seabirds that became extinct in the Mediterranean about a century and a half ago.

The cave is all the more important because it is possible to carbon-date some of the images from charcoal flakes in the paint and from charcoal in hearths found on the cave floor. Carbon dating has shown that the hand stencils were done between 27,800 and 26,500 years ago, which makes them contenders for the oldest known paintings in the world. The animal images, some of which appear on top of the negative handprints, were crafted more than 8,000 years later. "In the short time since its discovery, Cosquer has become the most thoroughly dated painted cave known," observes Clottes.

Although getting to the cave is hard nowadays - a sort of athletic event in itself, as Clottes puts it - the prehistoric people who used the cave for their ancient rituals would have had no trouble reaching it. Sea levels at the time were at least 300 feet lower than they are today, so the cave was dry. Archaeologists hope to make access easier by sinking a shaft through the limestone to a passage near the caverns. But first they will have to determine what effect such an opening would have on very fragile paintings that have been sealed in an air pocket for thousands of years. "Our first priority," says Clottes, "is the preservation of the paintings."

(Taken from *Discover*, July 1993, Vol. 14 Number 7)

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