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Otzi: The Iceman



Written by Jan Goldberg • Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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About 5,300 Years Ago

The man gently pushed aside the small brown dog yapping at his feet, tipping the basket of grain he was carrying just enough to spill. "Now see what a mess you've made." He smiled at the puppy through his irritation.

The man knew he had a lot to do to get ready for the hunt. He had no time to waste, as winter was closing in.





A tall, dark-haired boy walked over to the area of spilled grain and began scooping it up.

The man looked upon his son with pride.
“You must take care of things while I’m gone.”

“Yes, Father. I know.”

Together, father and son placed the grain back in the basket while the dog played at their heels. The boy took the grain to an underground pit where it would be protected during the upcoming winter.



A recreation of Otzi and the belongings he took on his journey

the community as men who weren't able to kill enough on the hunt fought over food for their families. It was important for him to leave the village soon and hunt for red deer, ibex, and wild boar. His family would need to live off the meat during the winter.

When the man returned home, he gathered his belongings together. He knew he needed to be prepared to face almost anything. Then he left his family and began his journey.

The man and his son walked slowly back to their home. The man paused to stop and rub his legs.

He knew the weather would soon turn colder, which would make food scarcer. Tension would be high in

Traveling only a short distance from his home, the man killed an ibex and was carrying the meat. All of a sudden, an arrow whizzed by the man's ear. Then several more flew through the air, and one landed sharply in the back of the man's right shoulder.

The man clutched his arm in pain. Moaning, he reached behind with his left hand to withdraw the arrow but could not remove it entirely. He managed to walk slowly up a hill as he heard the men behind him taking the bundle of meat he'd dropped. Making it to the hilltop, he lay down and closed his eyes for the last time.



Little did the man know that his body would become frozen in ice and frozen in time, and that thousands of years later he would become known as Otzi, the Iceman.

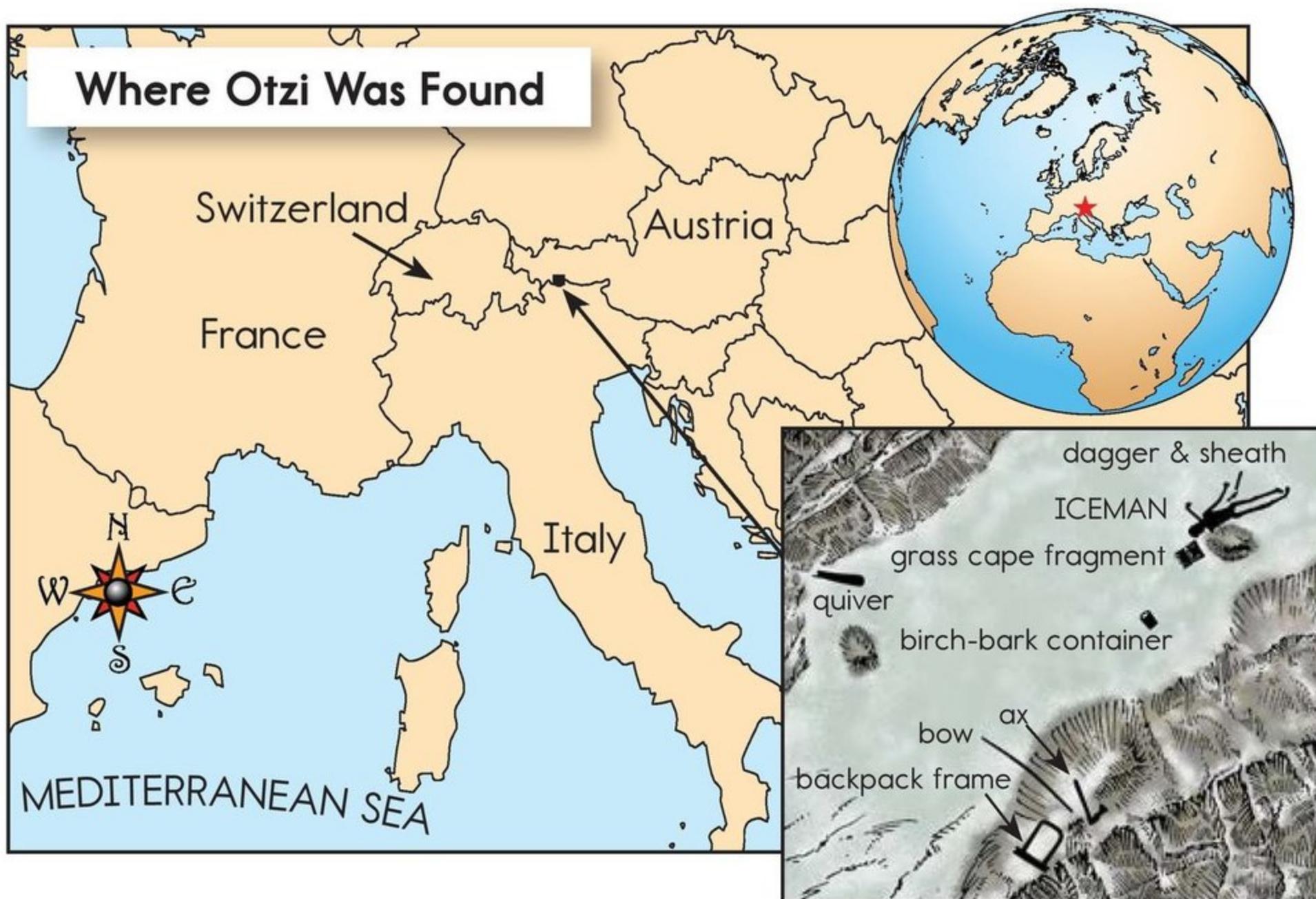
Of course, this is just one possible way that Otzi, the Iceman, died. We really don't know for sure how it happened. All we can do is theorize, or make guesses based on the facts. Scientists collect facts—clues—before they make a **theory**. You can make a theory about how Otzi died, too. As you read the things we do know, think like a scientist and come up with your own theories.



"The Iceman" Otzi being pulled from the ice

Do You Know?

The Iceman was nicknamed Otzi by local people as a tribute to the area, Oetztal, a valley near where the Iceman died.



Finding the Iceman

In September 1991, two German hikers, Erika and Helmut Simon, made an amazing discovery. High in the Tyrolean Alps, at more than 10,000 feet, near the border between Austria and Italy, they found a hairless, frozen body. Only the head and part of the shoulders could be seen above the ice.

They originally thought it was the frozen **corpse** of a modern climber. However, a few days later, Austrian scientist Rainer Henn came up with a different theory. The corpse was yellowed and dried, so he determined that it must have been frozen for a long time. He was right. The Iceman turned out to be about 5,000 years old.



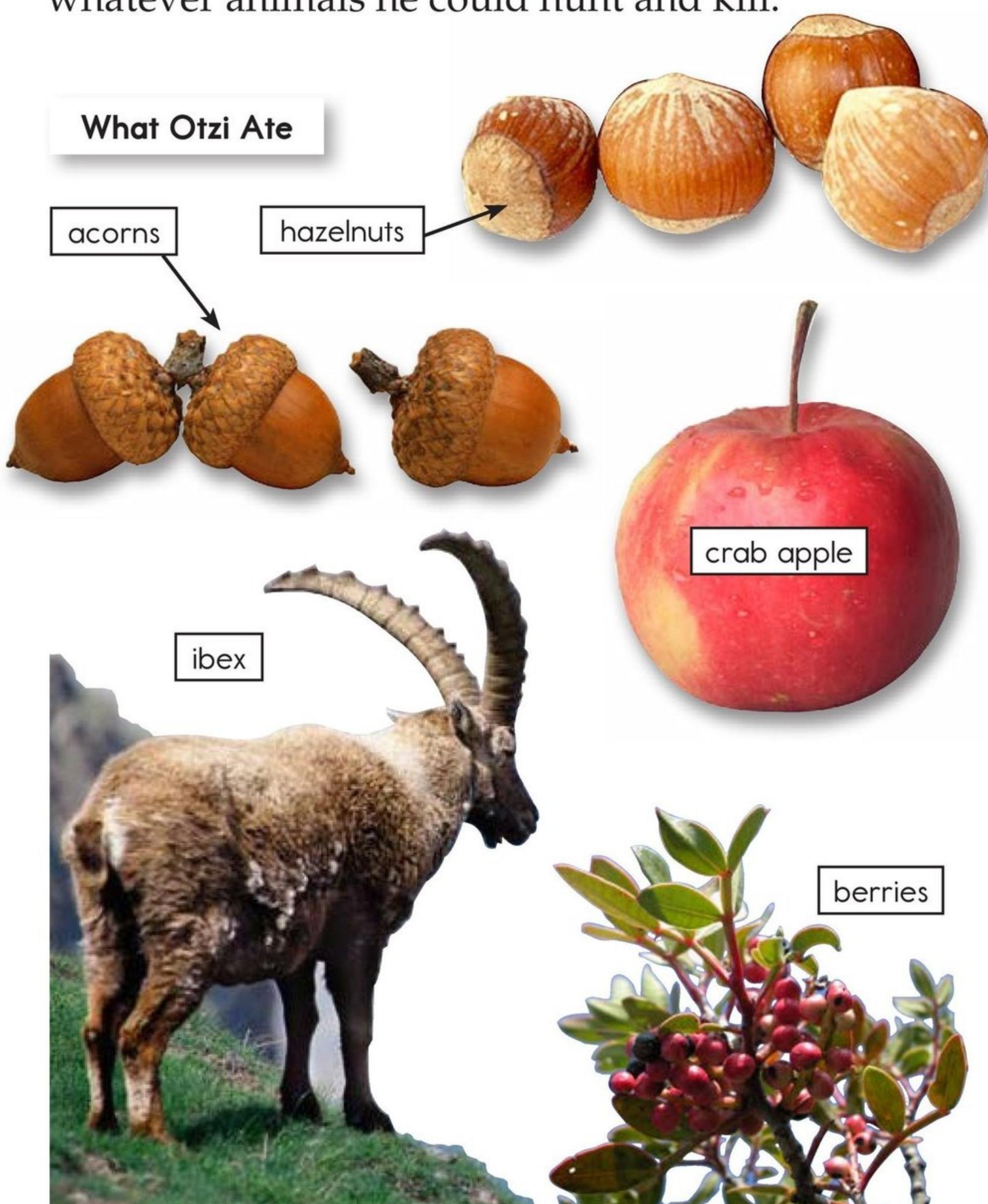
A scientist examines the 5,300-year-old mummy of Otzi.

The Man Himself

Scientists used **carbon dating**, microscopic analysis, and X-rays on the Iceman's well-preserved body to gather clues about his appearance and physical condition. They determined that Otzi was short—only about five feet tall—weighed about 110 pounds, had wavy brown hair, and probably wore a beard.

They also figured out that he lived to be about 46 years old (an elder for that time) and was bothered by several medical conditions: a bad back, **arthritis**, worn joints, and a bad stomach.

From Otzi's teeth, scientists were able to theorize about his diet. He probably ate mostly bread because his teeth were ground down, as they could only be from eating grains for many years, but he probably also consumed crab apples, berries, acorns, hazelnuts, and the meat of whatever animals he could hunt and kill.



Using these clues and others, scientists began to theorize how Otzi may have died.

Evidence Found with the Iceman

Copper ax	Sloe berry
Bow	Stone disk on a leather string with fringe
Arrows, one with traces of blood from two people	Mushrooms tied on a leather string
Quiver for arrows	Tests revealing that Otzi likely had arthritis and suffered from back pain
Knife, with traces of blood from another person	Long-sleeved jacket or vest made from animal hides, with traces of blood from another person
Grass sheath for knife	Woven grass cloak
Strips of felt	Leather pouch
Birch bark container	Leather pants
Flint	Waterproof shoes
Wood-frame backpack	Fur hat
Wooden stick with deer antler tip	Grass socks
Bone awl	Tattoos
Cuts on Otzi's hands and wrists	
Ibex (wild goat) meat	



Otzi after being pulled from the ice

At first, investigators thought the Iceman got caught in a storm, fell asleep, and died from the cold. But later theories seem to support the idea that the Iceman was killed. Blood was found on Otzi's clothes, and wounds were discovered on his body. A number of scientists believe that the **evidence** supports the theory that the Iceman died from an arrow wound to his back and knife wounds to his hands. But why? Why would someone want to kill Otzi? There are several theories.



Theory 1: An Accident

While Otzi was hunting, he was accidentally shot by other hunters and then buried.

Scientists think that Otzi was hunting because of the clothing he was wearing and the equipment he was carrying when they found him frozen in the glacier.

From the many scraps of material they found (leather, fur, grass, bearskin, cowhide, tree bark) on his body, scientists think that the Iceman wore leather pants and a long-sleeved jacket or vest made of deer, goat, and ibex hide, with the fur side turned out, and possibly a long, woven grass cloak.

They guess from the clues that his shoes were waterproof and wide—seemingly designed for walking across the snow—constructed by using bearskin for the soles, cowhide or deer for the top panels, and netting made of tree bark. They think soft grass was wound around his feet to function like warm socks. Grass laces, kept dry by a leather flap, were strung through eyeholes to keep Otzi's size-six feet snug.

Scientists also theorize that the Iceman wore a hat that was made of individual cut pieces of fur, probably bearskin, sewn together. Attached to the hat were two leather straps that might have been used as a chinstrap.

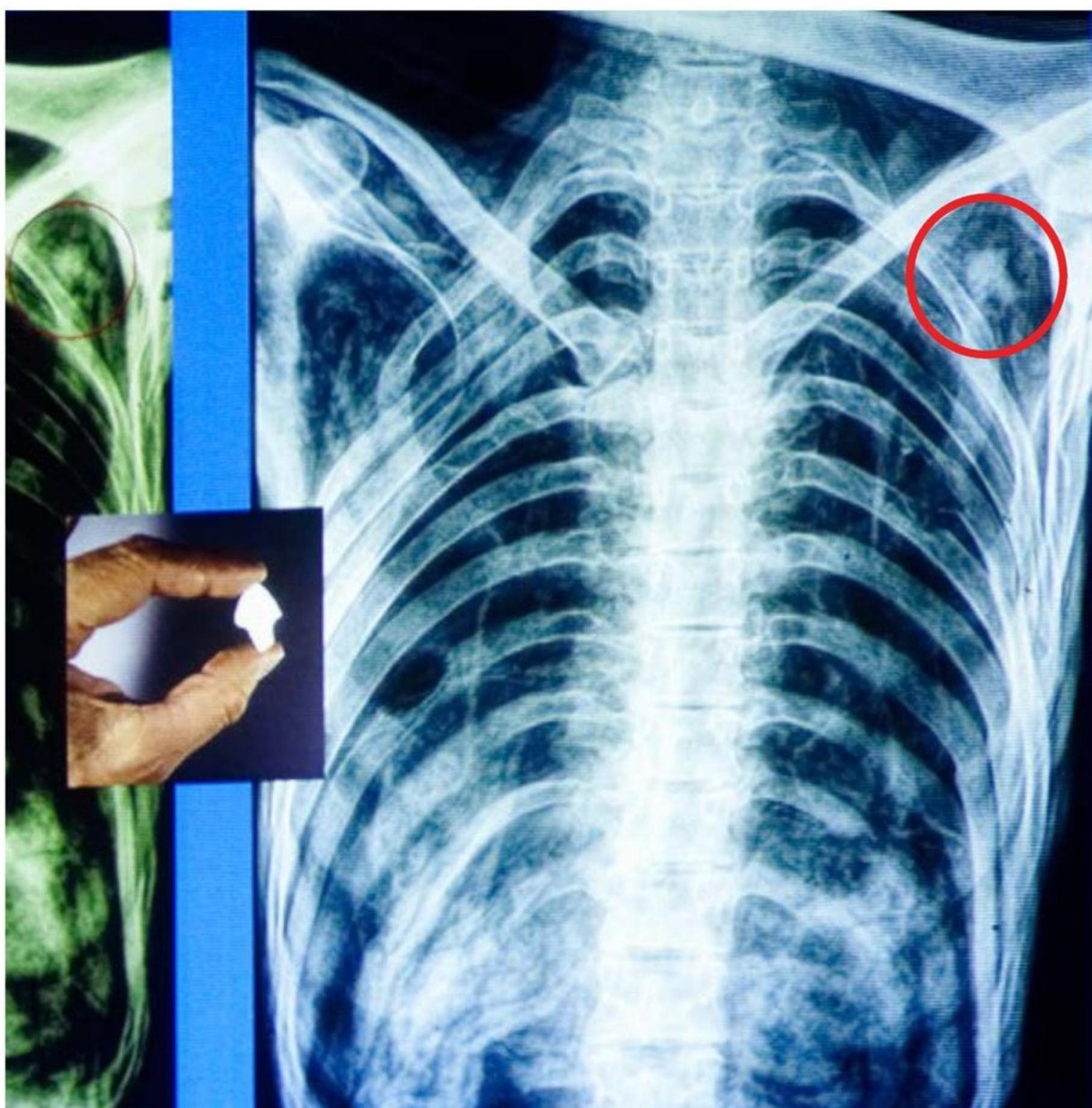
These articles of clothing, scientists think, would be what one would wear going on a long trek, like a hunting expedition. This belief was reinforced by the type of equipment Otzi had with him.

Here's what scientists found: a copper ax, a bow, arrows, a quiver, and a tiny knife. Scientists think that Otzi used the bow and arrows to hunt deer and ibex, the knife to clean the animals, the ax to chop firewood, and the quiver to hold the arrows.

Otzi also carried two strips of felt and a small container made of birch bark. Scientists think he may have used the felt as tinder for starting fires and the birch-bark container to carry the felt.

Next to the container was a soft leather pouch with two pieces of flint, which were probably used for making tools and for striking sparks to start fire. A four-inch wooden stick with a tip made of deer antler may have been used for sharpening the chunks of flint.

Based on this evidence and knowledge of the time period, some scientists theorize that Otzi was hunting and may have accidentally been caught in a crossfire of arrows from other hunters.



In this x-ray of Otzi's chest, the arrowhead can be seen.



Some of the items found with Otzi

Theory 2: Murder for Food

Otzi was not killed accidentally, but was killed on purpose in a fierce battle with other hunters.

Other scientists disagree with the accidental death theory. They think that while Otzi was hunting ibex, he encountered a group of starving hunters. The hunters desperately needed a kill and did not want Otzi taking the kill from them, so they attacked him, firing arrows. Otzi fired back.

Dr. Tom Loy, director of the Queensland National Institute of Molecular Bioscience, thinks that the Iceman fired two arrows into two of his enemies, pulling his precious weapons out of their bodies each time. His theory explains why traces of blood from other people were found on Otzi's belongings: one from his knife, two from the same arrowhead, and a fourth from his coat.

In addition to his attackers shooting arrows at him, they may have attacked him with a knife. Perhaps cuts on Otzi's hands and wrist were from his attempts to defend himself.

Many scientists hold this theory to be true, but some wonder whether Otzi was killed for yet another reason.





Theory 3: Murder for Power

Members of his community killed Otzi, a shaman, because he had become too powerful.

Walter Leitner of the Institute for Ancient and Early History at the University of Innsbruck in Austria thinks that the Iceman might have been a **shaman**. A shaman is a physical and spiritual healer who is thought to have the capability of traveling to and from the spirit world for medicine.

When scientists examined Otzi's body, they found a large number of mysterious **tattoos**. The tattoos included stripes, a cross, and small bars. These weren't decorations meant for others to see, for they appeared only on parts of his body that would have been hidden by clothing. Were these 57 crudely carved tattoos found on the Iceman's ankles, knees, and calves an ancient form of **acupuncture**? They were located on, or near, acupuncture points that would be used to treat ailments that Otzi likely suffered from—arthritis and back pain.



One of Otzi's tattoos can be seen on his ankle



Some scientists believe this might have been a necklace that Otzi wore.

Do You Know?

A small depression was found in Otzi's right earlobe. Did this mean that he wore an earring?

Some scientists think that Otzi may have worn jewelry, too. When his body was found, a leather string with a fringe, strung through the two-inch disk made of white stone lay nearby. Could this mysterious object have been worn by a medicine man, like Otzi, as a necklace?

Near Otzi's body, researchers also found two mushrooms on a piece of leather. Scientists know that this kind of mushroom can be used to fight sickness. Was Otzi carrying them as medicine—something the hunters needed? Was the Iceman really a shaman?



A Secret Kept

These are just a few of the scientific theories about the Iceman. They change when the facts—the clues—change. But sometimes the clues remain the same and the scientists reinterpret the facts differently. How do you interpret the facts? What kinds of theories do you have now from the facts about how Otzi may have died?

The Iceman could have died in a vast number of possible ways. For now, though, he is still keeping the true story a secret from us.

Glossary

acupuncture (n.)	a treatment where needles are inserted into the skin at specific locations on the body to relieve pain (p. 20)
arthritis (n.)	a disease in which one's joints swell and stiffen (p. 10)
carbon dating (v.)	using chemicals to determine the age of something (p. 10)
corpse (n.)	a dead body (p. 9)
evidence (n.)	information that can prove something true or false (p. 13)
glacier (n.)	a large accumulation of ice and compacted snow in a mountain valley (p. 14)
preserved (v.)	kept in the same condition (p. 10)
shaman (n.)	a spiritual and physical healer (p. 19)
tattoos (n.)	permanent marks made on the body with ink (p. 20)
theory (n.)	a possible explanation (p. 8)

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