

Clues to Prehistoric New Mexicans

Archaeology

The mystery of the unknown people who centuries ago inhabited the Mimbres Valley of New Mexico is nearer solution as the result of rich archaeological finds made by the expedition of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Santa Fe Museum, headed by Dr. Albert E. Jenks. This year's exploring and excavating at the prehistoric ruins has just been completed.

The best clues to this long lost race have consisted of pottery jars beautifully decorated with animals and human figures. But from such meager evidence archaeologists know that their manners and customs were different in many ways from other tribes of the southwest. Their age has been pronounced vaguely prehistoric, and no one knows where they came from or who their descendants may be.

The Minneapolis expedition has succeeded in excavating ruins of a house with four floors, one laid above the other, revealing four successive stages of culture. Dr. Jenks, professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota, tentatively concludes that the settlement may date back to 2000 B. C. and that it probably lasted until 600 A. D. Fireplaces were found in all four levels of the house, and the doors in the different levels were on different sides.

Fifteen boxes filled with the fruits of six weeks' digging have been shipped to Minneapolis for study and exhibition. Possessions of the Mimbrenos discovered include much turquoise jewelry, many shell necklaces, strings of colored beads, a grasshopper pendant, spear heads, and many decorated pottery bowls. Three-fourths of the objects discovered will

go to the Minneapolis Institute and one-fourth to the Santa Fe Museum, which was represented in the expedition by Wesley Bradfield.

The little skeleton of a prehistoric American child, still adorned with all its tiny bracelets and trinkets, is one of the outstanding discoveries of the expedition. Out of 157 burials found by the expedition, this grave contained the largest number of articles.

Apparently this child was much lamented and was laid away with great care. Following the custom of these aborigines, the child's head was covered with a beautiful pottery bowl, decorated with a sunfish. One arm still wore seven little shell bracelets, and near the knees were eight shell tinklers. A tiny copper bell, with the string still preserved after many centuries by contact with the copper, was one of the child's possessions that is attracting especial interest of the archaeologists, since no object of this sort has heretofore been found with this ancient tribe. Scattered in the grave, their string long since decayed, lay 1,500 tiny red and blue-black beads and a small shell pendant. A little bone ring was another toy or ornament.

One mystery of the Mimbrenos is how a people who must have had a fairly crude manner of living could have produced such beautiful and artistic pottery designs. Another mystery is how and why this art so completely disappeared.

"The designs on the Mimbres pots far surpass the work of any other Indians of either prehistoric or modern times," the anthropologist declares.

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Expedition Will Study Coral Reef

Biology

The wealth of sea life along the Great Barrier Reef will be studied by a British expedition that sailed for Australia, May 26. Naturalists of the expedition staff will investigate the composition and formation of the enormous coral reef and feeding habits of the sea animals. They also hope to study the commercial possibilities of the region, including oyster, pearl, turtle, and trochus shell resources.

For one year, possibly two, the staff will live on an island uninhabited ex-

cept for lighthouse keepers, and will make motor boat trips to the Great Barrier Reef from time to time.

The expedition is headed by Dr. C. M. Yonge, naturalist, who has been on the staff of the Marine Biological Association. The project of studying the world's longest coral reef was promoted by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and a number of scientific organizations have subscribed to the \$50,000 fund to cover expenses.

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Ancestral Hooch

Anthropology

A young Diegueno Indian who found the white man's bootleg hard to get has recently tried concocting the old-time whiskey of his ancestors—with results that have scared off any other young Indians who might be seized with the same inspiration.

Facts of the unusual incident were learned by Arthur Woodward, anthropologist of the Los Angeles Museum. This youth of the Volcan Reservation, near Santa Ysabel, had heard stories of how his ancestors used the Jamestown or jimpson weed in ceremonials before the white men came into the West. The Indians dried the roots and crushed them in a special ceremonial mortar and made a powerful narcotic drink, Mr. Woodward states. Young men who drank it fell into a stupor for one to four days and in their dreams they learned which animals or birds were to be their personal totems to help them through life. Weaker boys sometimes died from overdoses. Early Spanish missionaries undertook to stamp out such customs but this "toalache ceremony" survived to some extent up to half a century ago.

"The young Diegueno noticed that jimpson weed was plentiful," says Mr. Woodward. "The old folks said that it made a man drunk and happy. So, this ambitious youth gathered some roots, pounded them, and made a small keg of jimpson weed brew. He drank heavily of the stuff, and for several days was like a man possessed of devils. His companions did not learn what made him act so 'crazy' for several days."

The young Indian is "cured." So are the other Indians who saw him.

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Electrocuted Tree

Botany

A freak stroke of lightning apparently electrocuted a large white oak tree in the New York Botanical Garden recently. The tree was struck during a thunderstorm, but was not shattered as trees frequently are by lightning. Almost immediately, however, the leaves began to wither, and within a month the tree presented an autumnal appearance against the bright green of the rest of the grove. Continued observation convinced the garden authorities that the tree was dead, and that it had apparently died instantaneously. After it was cut down a ring count gave its age at approximately 200 years.

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