

## The Search for Antiquity

*Anthropology*  
RICHARD SWANN LULL in *Ancient Man* (Doubleday, Doran):

The rarity of fossil man is due to several factors, of which the first, perhaps, is the manner of disposal of the dead, whether by interment, burning, sealing up in the habitation of the deceased, or through no manner of care whatever. Of these the first alone is likely to preserve the skeleton, burial being a prime prerequisite to fossilization, but, as man practices it, burial is not as a rule effective. Nature's burials are more apt to render the specimen impervious to decay, because of the intimate contact of the relic and the enclosing sediments; the remains become, moreover, hermetically sealed, and, as a rule, constantly either wet or dry, thus avoiding the change from one to the other condition that hastens destructive oxidation.

Another cause of rarity lies in the fact that early man was probably largely a forest dweller, and the remains of woodland creatures are always few compared with their fellows of the sea or flood-plain. Forest forms are generally devoured by prowling beasts, their bones scattered and mutilated, and the fungi of the wooded region do the rest. Animals caught by a rising flood and buried in river sediments or in the coastal deposits are far more apt to be preserved entire, and their bones or shells, often becoming impregnated with mineral salts carried in solution by percolating waters, stand an excellent chance of fossilization. Man's shrewdness, however, even in the prehistoric period, would render him less liable to drowning accidents than creatures less well endowed. If the percentage of preservation of lower animals is small, and paleontologists have estimated that we know perhaps 114 out of every 10,000 that lived, the rarity of human relics is at once appreciated. But such have been found, and the tale of their discovery is a growing one, especially, as we have seen, in the more enlightened regions of our earth.

Field research in paleontology is best carried on in a semiarid climate, in our own West whence specimens of lower forms innumerable have come to light, in North and South Africa, on the pampas of South America. It also promises great results in central Asia where the expeditions of the American Museum have made so splendid a beginning, and in Australia the search has bare-

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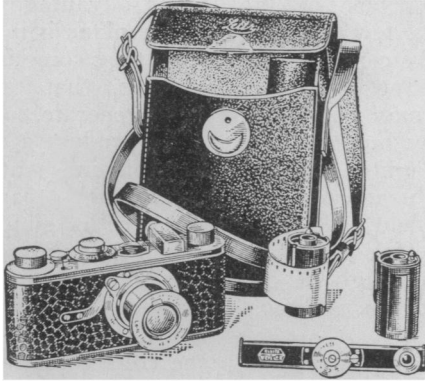
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ly begun. The search for humanity, however, will, of course, be profitless where man did not live. North America, therefore, does not contain ancient human relics, geologically speaking, nor does South America, because of the comparatively recent advent of man in our hemisphere; but Asia and Africa should be productive of evidence of amazing in-

terest. The tropical humid belt is rather hopeless, because of the depth of soil, that is, of disintegrated sediments and their contents, and because of the mantle of vegetation which so obscures the geology. On the other hand, the more arid regions have a scantier human population. And so the story goes.

*Science News-Letter, October 20, 1928*