

Fire Preserves Indian Ruins

Archæology

A tragic fire which laid waste to a western Indian village more than 2,000 years ago is now proving an aid to modern science. The flames left the charred ruins in a state particularly favorable to preservation through the centuries. A Smithsonian scientist who excavated the abandoned village this summer has found there important evidence of a missing link in America's prehistory.

The village is in a remote district of southwest Colorado on the Piedro River. Dr. Frank H. H. Roberts, Jr., Smithsonian archæologist, has found there in the ruins a variety of skulls, many bone and stone implements, and 250 pieces of pottery. These finds are now being studied by scientists at the Smithsonian Institution, and Dr. Roberts believes that they may be pronounced acceptable evidence of the hitherto missing link in the development of the prehistoric Pueblo people.

The oldest known inhabitants of

the Southwest were the Basket-Maker Indians who did not learn to make pottery until the closing days of their era. These were followed by the cliff-dwelling Pueblos, whose unique domestic habits and signs of high intelligence have made them a subject of intensive scientific research.

"One of the major questions confronting the archæologist and anthropologist in America today," said Dr. Roberts, "concerns what happened to those Basket-Maker Indians who immediately preceded the Pueblos. Did the Basket-Makers mix peacefully with the Pueblo tribes and lose their identity in the course of generations? Or were they wiped out by warfare?"

"While I cannot answer the question definitely now, my finds of this summer seem to throw important light on it, indicating that the first alternative is correct, and that the Basket-Makers did not perish suddenly as a race."

The architecture of the newly excavated village is of a transition type, between the old style Basket-Maker houses, and the later Pueblo ideas. All but three of the skulls are Pueblo in type, round-headed, with artificial flattening of the head caused by binding the babies' skulls to the cradles. The other three are long-headed and not flattened, representing the older race and the older idea of baby handling. The bone needles and tools were comparatively primitive, representing the old culture, but the pottery showed progress into the art ideals of the Pueblos.

The fire trapped some of the inhabitants of the village, and their charred skeletons were found still lying in the ruins of their homes. Jars filled with corn, beans and dried fruit, lying about the homes, indicated that the harvest had just been gathered when the catastrophe occurred.

Science News-Letter, October 27, 1928

Sunburned Automobiles

Chemistry

Automobiles, like bathers, may become sunburned, and manufacturers are now taking steps to prevent it. And just as human sunburn can be prevented by covering the skin with a layer of some substance that prevents the ultra-violet rays from reaching the skin, a thin layer of color a thousandth of an inch thick prevents it in the automobile, according to M. J. Callahan, expert on lacquers.

Most automobile manufacturers now finish their cars with the same type of brushing lacquer that is so popular for home decoration. These consist largely of cellulose nitrate, formed by a chemical reaction between nitric acid and cotton. Unfortunately, some of the constituents of the lacquer are damaged by the ultra-violet rays in sunshine. So a very thin layer of colored lacquer is used as the outer coat and the color molecules stop the rays and save the lacquer. More than a million automobiles a year are now protected in this way.

Science News-Letter, October 27, 1928

There are nine states which have less than half a million people apiece.

In ancient times honey was the chief sweetening for food and sweetmeats.

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