Explore Prehistoric Village

Archæology

Slowly but surely the ancient Chumash village site of Muwu, 50 miles northwest of Los Angeles, is yielding secrets of primitive American life to the trowels and shovels of the Los Angeles Museum exploring party, headed by Arthur Woodward, curator of history.

Aided by Dr. Charles Van Bergen of New York, the Los Angeles Museum is excavating the huge heap or kitchen midden upon which the thatched houses of the people of Muwu once stood. Trenches are slowly dug through the deposits and the earth is removed with trowels, a foot at a time. Each day records the discovery of tools, weapons, and ornaments belonging to the villagers who lived upon the spot when the Spaniards first discovered it 387 years ago.

Several floors of the ancient houses have been laid bare, with their accompanying ring of hearth stones. It has been discovered that some of the houses were partially subterranean, the floor level being more than sixteen inches below the level of the earth. In the debris and on the floors many artifacts have been discovered.

These people were great hunters and fishers at the time the Spaniards first encountered them, but apparently in the very early times they depended almost entirely upon shellfish and small fish for their sustenance. Great quantities of sea and land mammal, bird and large fish bones were encountered in the first two feet of excavations. But the bulk of the debris so far found below this two-foot level has been almost entirely pecten, cockle, clam, abalone, moon and other shells.

Numbers of bone barbs of fishhooks are found, many of them retaining the imprints of the cordage in the tar that bound them to their wooden or bone shanks. There are also shell fishhooks of circular shape.

The implements recovered have been mostly of bone. Well-fashioned awls made of bird bones and deer bones are plentiful. One extra-fine specimen has the bitumen haft still in place. Several stone knife and scraper blades have been brought to light with the tar with which they were cemented into the wooden hafts still clinging to the butts of the blades.

Red paint is scattered through the debris and several shell paint cups have been found with traces of the paint in them. Tar lumps with which the ancient ones payed the seams of their plank canoes, hafted their tools and weapons, made watertight their baskets and inlaid their bone, stone and shell jewelry are plentiful. Abalone shell containers for the tar are discovered, just as they were brought from the beach. One lump of tar still had in it the tar stick which some Chumash seaman had evidently dropped after caulking the seams of his brilliantly painted canoe.

Arrowheads, scrapers and stone drills are of varying sizes and materials. Not a few of the arrowheads are made of obsidian, trade material that had been brought in from the north or from the Imperial Valley to the southeast. Most of the points are thin and well made.

Beads of shell and bone are scattered loosely in the shell and earth. Some are abalone and well formed, others are olivella.

Charred fragments of tarred basketry turn up now and again and numerous single small round tarred stones, used by the women in waterproofing their baskets, have been found. The method employed was this: the round stones, about the size of tennis balls or smaller, were heated in a fire, then lifted out, presumably with wooden tongs, and dropped into a basket containing small lumps of tar. When the basket was rotated rapidly, the tar melted by the hot stones spread over the interior of the basket and was distributed evenly by the constantly moving pebbles.

Two small fragments of rude pottery have been discovered and those sherds are an enigma. In the first place, pottery was not supposed to have been made by the Chumash; secondly, the fragments are not the typical Diegueno, Luiseno, Cupa or Cahuilla sherds and they are not Spanish. Where they came from, who made them, is a mystery at the present time. They are plain, unpainted, unslipped reddish sherds. The fragments are from different vessels.

Science News-Letter, November 16, 1929

In This Issue

Remotely Ancestral?

Zoology

The Spectral Tarsier, illustrated on our cover this week, is one of the most interesting and at the same time least known of the primitive primates. If man's ancestry is not to be traced to a union with the great-ape stock in comparatively recent times, as one school of paleontologists is inclined to believe, then it is not impossible that the human race goes back, parallel with the apes, to a lemuroid creature of this general type.

The Tarsier, however, has some special developments which indicate some divergence from a truly primitive condition. Especially notable are the finger pads—sticky discs that enable it to climb smooth surfaces with ease. The animal needs to be a safe and sure climber, for it is nocturnal as well as arboreal in its habits.

It has one characteristic which from the human viewpoint is highly laudable: utter fidelity to its mate. When one is captured its companion is usually taken, too.

Our illustration is reproduced through the courtesy of Charles Hose, an Englishman with a long and notable record of administrative work and natural history observation in the Eastern tropics. He is the author of *Natural Man* and *Fifty Years of Romance.*

Science News-Letter, November 16, 1929

SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER, The Weekly Summary of Current Science. KNOWLEDGE. Published by Science Service, Inc., the Institution for the Popularization of Science organized under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Research Council and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Edited by Watson Davis.

Publication Office, 1918 Harford Ave., Baltimore, Md. Editorial and Executive Office, 21st and B Sts., N. W., Washington, D. C. Address all communications to Washington, D. C. Cable address: Scienserve, Washington.

Entered as second class matter October 1, 1926, at the postoffice at Baltimore, Md., under the act of March 3, 1879. Established in mimeographed form March 13, 1922. Title registered as trade-mark, U. S. Patent Office.

Subscription rate—$5.00 a year postpaid. 15 cent a copy. Ten or more copies to same address, 5 cents a copy. Special reduced subscription rates are available to members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In requesting change of address, please give old as well as new address.

Advertising rates furnished on application.