Ashes Found With Sloth Remains

Archæology

Discovery in Gypsum Cave Thought Ancient Camp Fire

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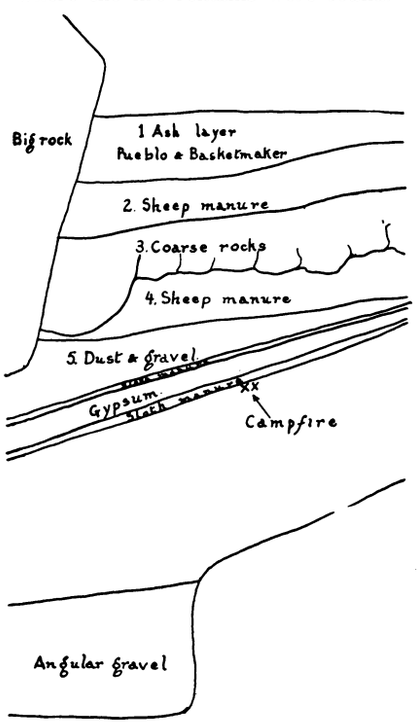
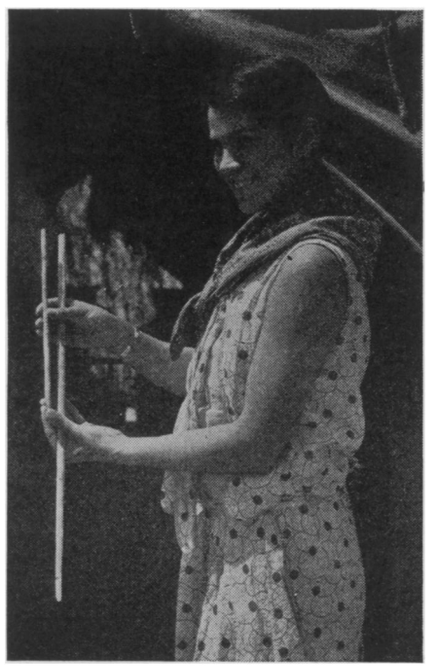
AN epoch-making discovery has just been made in Gypsum Cave near Las Vegas, Nevada, which establishes beyond question the interesting and important fact that man lived in America before the strange animals typical of the Pleistocene Age had become extinct. The find consisted of charcoal and ashes, relics of an ancient camp fire, nearly 8 feet below the surface and directly beneath a solid unbroken layer of manure left by the extinct ground sloth Nothrotherium, and preserved by the dryness of the cave. It is the crowning discovery of nearly five months of intensive work in this cavern on the part of a joint expedition sent out by the Southwest Museum of Los Angeles and the California Institute of Technology of Pasadena. The actual discovery was made by E. G. Ward, expedition assistant.

According to Dr. Chester Stock, of the California Institute of Technology, who is in frequent consultation, the discovery of this charcoal beneath the sloth layer apparently substantiates the finds previously made in other parts of the cave indicating association of man and the sloth. These consisted of flint dart-points, fragments of wooden dart-shafts, burnt sticks, and pieces of cane torches found in or below layers of sloth manure, but nearer to the surface, and consequently not so convincing.

Drawing by M. R. Harrington, indicating where the fire remains were found.





Bertha Pallan, expedition secretary, showing difference in size of early type (small) and late type atlatl darts from Gypsum Cave.

The importance of the present discovery lies in the fact that, on account of its position near the cave entrance, a number of strata of dust, rocks and the like, accumulated above it to such a depth that there is no chance of the charcoal having worked down from the surface to the point where it was found.

The great age of the camp fire can be seen clearly from the fact that relics of the Basket-Makers, who lived about 1500 B. C., were found in the first or surface layer not more than two feet deep, while the camp fire was deeply buried in the fifth layer down, nearly 8 feet from the surface.

That the layer of manure was left by the ground sloths and not by other creatures is determined not only by the fact that ground sloth was the only animal of the Pleistocene period that could have produced manure of this sort, but also from the finding, imbedded in it, of a large number of bones, huge claws with horny sheaths still intact, and even masses of the long, coarse, reddish and yellowish hair of this animal.

That the sloth was not the only Pleistocene animal associated with man in Gypsum Cave is shown, according to James E. Thurston, Expedition Paleontologist, by the finding of bones of two species of extinct American horse in the same layers and, most interesting of all, of a very small camel or llama with gazelle-like slender limbs, a species which has apparently not been found before.

On account of the heat in southern Nevada the expedition is about to shut down its work for the summer, but the foreman, Willis I. Evans, will be left in charge and will show the cave to anyone interested. The find of charcoal, still in position, will be shown to properly accredited investigators representing scientific institutions.

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M. R. Harrington, expedition leader, and E. G. Ward, workman who made discovery, examining fire remains.