

ARCHAEOLOGY

Child Burial in Each of Seven Newly Found Texas Caves

Examination Reveals Confusing Picture of Indian Life Both Like and Unlike Other American Cultures

SEVEN CAVES in a Texas wilderness, and in the floor of each cave the skeleton of a young child—this is the strange discovery announced by Frank M. Setzler, archaeologist of the U. S. National Museum, who has been exploring caves in the Big Bend region of southern Texas. The air of mystery which tinges all prehistoric happenings in America hangs heavy over this semi-desert Texas country. The seven caves explored by Mr. Setzler were inhabited by a people who have not been identified.

"Last year, I made the first scientific excavation at a cave in the region," said Mr. Setzler, "and found one child buried in the cavern floor. Now, this year, I have explored the depths of seven more caves and there are seven more child burials. Not a child is over two years old. What it means, we do not yet know. Some ceremonial, some superstition may account for it.

"Not a trace has yet been found of any skeletal remains of the older people who inhabited these caves."

Huge heaps of bones and other refuse which accumulated in the dark, dusty cave apartments were excavated by the archaeologist. Examining the trash heaps, Mr. Setzler concludes that these cave dwellers were remarkably successful and ingenious in putting to good use the plants and animals of their wild, semi-desert land.

The cave dwellers gathered corn-cob cactus, maguey, and a plant of the yucca family called Lechuguilla. They pulled off the leaves of this latter plant and ate them like artichoke leaves, leaving huge cuds with tooth-marks in them, in their cave kitchens.

The ancient cave dwellers tried a hand at farming, even though they could expect only one or two good rains in a year. A buckskin bag, which Mr. Setzler found, still held two kinds of beans and a few kernels of corn, possibly the seed saved for a farmer's planting.

The variety of bones in the caves show that the inhabitants ate deer, bear, antelope, fox, lynx, rabbit. Being close to the Rio Grande, they added fish and

terrapin to their menus. For clothing, the cave dwellers apparently depended on the Lechuguilla plant. By chewing the fiber they could make a thread very much like cotton. Yards of this cordage were found, and one perfect piece of cloth, like a salesman's sample, showing how the cord was sewn together with finer thread to make a fabric.

One of the mysterious features of this cave life is a total absence of pottery. At least, Mr. Setzler reports that he sifted tons of earth from the caves without finding a single scrap.

The objects found in the caves present a confusing picture of prehistoric Indian life, which is like and unlike other cultures. A curved rabbit-stick, used in hunting, is a prized relic from one of the caves. Just such sticks were used by the old Basket Makers, who lived in the Southwest before the Pueblos, from about 2000 B. C. to about the time of Christ. The Texas cave dwellers were also like the Basket Makers in that they wore square-toed sandals. But just as these clues seem to point to the identity of the Texans, Mr. Setzler picks up a feathered arrow shaft and says that they used bows and arrows, which were weapons of the Pueblos and Plains tribes, quite unknown to the old Basket Makers.

The caves of the unknown Indians, explored by Mr. Setzler, were near the border. Two of the caves are on the southern "ear" of the famous landmark, Mule Ear Peaks. Two are in the Sunny Glen Canyon, eight miles west of Alpine, Texas.

Science News Letter, June 25, 1932

ORNITHOLOGY

Tamed Hummingbirds Eat From Mouth of Man

HUMMINGBIRDS, once thought quite untamable, have become so familiar with Ralph J. Ayer, a nature-loving farmer near Eastonville, Colo., that they will not only "eat out of his hand," but even from between his lips.

Noticing several of the little birds about his flowers, he decided to make

pets of them. He placed a few perfume bottles filled with diluted honey among the flowers, but the hummingbirds would not eat from them. But when artificial flowers were placed over the mouths of the bottles, they sipped from them. By degrees the bottles were brought nearer the house and eventually the bottles were placed on the windowsill. The Ayer family enjoyed watching the birds sip from the nectar bottles and then wipe their beaks on the window-pane. Finally they became so tame that they would come up and feast, "face to face" with their friends.

Several of the birds have been tame each year since he started his experiment in 1928, which leads Mr. Ayer to believe that the same birds have returned each year since that time.

Science News Letter, June 25, 1932

PHYSIOLOGY

Synthesis of Vitamin A By Light Is Disputed

THE EAGERLY awaited results of the biological tests undertaken by Drs. F. P. Bowden and C. P. Snow, of Cambridge University, cannot give the final proof that the carrot pigment, beta-carotene, has been changed into the growth-promoting vitamin A, Prof. I. M. Heilbron and Dr. R. A. Morton of the University of Liverpool hold in a letter to *Nature*, because carotene itself is transformed into vitamin A in the living body. (Please turn Page)



STRANGE FRIENDS

Honey in a glass bottle and patient training resulted in this unusual pose.