

PALEONTOLOGY

Find Fossils' Mother Lode

Hundreds of these specimens were brought back from the Colombian site where they were discovered and will be studied to learn about prehistoric times.

► THE discovery of a mother lode of fossils that will greatly expand science's picture of life in South America in prehistoric times, is described as one of the most important paleontological finds of this century. The find was reported to the meeting of the Geological Society of America in El Paso, Tex.

Results of excavations at the site, in the isolated Magdalena Valley of Colombia, were reported by Dr. R. A. Stirton, University of California paleontologist, and his associate, Robert Fields. Dr. Stirton has made three trips to the region since 1944, and Mr. Fields recently returned from there after making geological maps of the area and intensive collecting of fossils.

The find is important for many reasons, Dr. Stirton said. The fossil specimens are prolific and varied, the fossil bed is at the migrational doorway of South America, it is the first important fossil record of South America outside Argentina, and it is the first abundant record of the tropical region of South America.

The hundreds of specimens brought back will make it possible to learn much about life in the age of mammals in South America, previously unknown because few relics had been found.

The fossils include those of monkeys, rodents, snakes, lizards, birds, lung fish, the tooth of a sea cow, and giant crocodiles.

Dr. Stirton said that three types of fossils are particularly noteworthy: the monkeys, an ancient extinct guinea pig, and a condylarth, primitive extinct dog-like creature with hoofs.

Two new genera and one new species of monkey are in the collection, only the Argentine Homunculus previously being known in the South American fossil record. One of the monkeys was so unusual that Dr. Stirton was unable to classify it until a few days before the meeting.

The condylarth, ancestor of the modern horse, deer, camel and other hoofed animals, is believed to have become extinct about 50,000,000 years ago, but in the agreeable tropical climate of Colombia lived until 15,000,000 or 20,000,000 years ago. The rarity of this animal in the fossil bed—only part of a lower jaw was found—where other species were prolific, indicates that the condylarth was becoming extremely rare at that time.

The fossil guinea pig in question is believed to have arisen less than 10,000,000 years ago, but the Colombian specimens go back about 20,000,000 years.

The fossil bed extends over an area of about 250 square miles of the valley. In pre-

historic times a major river ran through the valley, and the animals were trapped in mud-flats along the river. Today the region is arid, and thundershowers often expose fossils which lie close to the surface.

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BOTANY

High Yield Buffalo Grass Will Be Available Soon

► AN unusually high yield forage, a hybrid buffalo grass that is the culmination of extensive breeding experiments, will shortly be available to growers throughout the Southern Great Plains region.

Because buffalo grass has both male and female plants, unusual in range grasses, it will be necessary to raise hybrid seed and distribute it in much the same way that hybrid corn is distributed.

Dr. Jack Harlan, grass breeder at the U.S. Great Plains Field Station in Woodward, Okla., explains that he is developing the new high yield hybrids by combining the heavy forage qualities of one type with

the prolific seed-production of another type. Special breeding work has produced seedy types that are predominantly female and these are pollinated with forage types. The final selection, hybrid seed of the desired type, entails from eight to 15 crosses, he says.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Fossil Find Shows First Americans Came from Asia

► NEW evidence that the first Americans came from Asia through Alaska has been dug from the frozen soil of the Far North by Dr. Ralph S. Solecki of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

Exposed by centuries of erosion on an Alaskan mountain top, Dr. Solecki made the lucky find of some curious stone implements. Importance of the discovery lies in the fact that they are just like some found previously on the other side of the world in the Gobi Desert. These Gobi Desert implements have been identified as used by a primitive people who lived in Mesolithic times, between the Old Stone Age and the New Stone Age.

Dr. Solecki's finds were made in an area that was never glaciated and which probably some 10,000 years ago formed part of an ice free corridor through which the first Americans may have passed during their long trek from Asia to their final home in the New World.

Science News Letter, November 19, 1949



LINKS EAST AND WEST—This stone implement found in the frozen solid of an Alaskan mountain is just like some found previously in the Gobi Desert and identified as made some 10,000 years ago.