

THE SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER

A Weekly Summary of Current Science

EDITED BY WATSON DAVIS

ISSUED BY
SCIENCE SERVICE

B and 21st Streets
WASHINGTON, D. C.

EDWIN E. SLOSSON, Director
WATSON DAVIS, Managing Editor



SUBSCRIPTION: \$5 A YEAR, POSTPAID

The News-Letter, which is intended for personal, school or club use, is based on Science Service's Daily Science News Bulletin to subscribing newspapers. For this reason, publication of any portion of the News-Letter is strictly prohibited without express permission.

Vol. IV, No. 161

Saturday, May 10, 1924.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS BEGIN EXCAVATION OF MAYA CITIES

An archaeological expedition from the Carnegie Institution of Washington, headed by Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley has left New Orleans for Mexico to begin excavations of the buried cities of the ancient Maya empire in Yucatan near the port of Progreso.

Inauguration of a ten year program of archaeological research in cooperation with the Mexican government has been delayed by the recent political disturbances in Mexico, but arrangements were made with Dr. Manuel Gamio, director of the Mexican Bureau of Anthropology, during his recent visit to this country, to begin work immediately.

The party taking the field for preliminary investigations and excavations at Chichen Itza includes Dr. Morley, Earl H. Morris, archaeologist in charge of excavations, Monroe Amsden and O.G. Ricketson, Jr., assistant archaeologists.

As a result of preliminary explorations at Chichen Itza made last winter, it was decided to take up first the excavation of "The Group of the Thousand Columns", a section of the city composed of great colonnaded halls surrounding a plaza of more than five acres in extent.

Running out from this great colonnade there are smaller ones, composed, some of square columns, and others of round ones, and at various places around the enclosure there are lofty pyramids which were originally surmounted by elaborately decorated temples of dressed stone.

The luxuriant tropical vegetation which has sprung up since Chichen Itza was abandoned in 1448 A.D. has buried the city in a mantle of living green; roots have found their way deep into foundations and torn stone from stone, until the roofs have collapsed, and desolation reigns. No small part of the work of the Carnegie Institution excavators at Chichen Itza will be the removal of this luxuriant tropical forest which has done so much harm to the ancient edifices.

The city was founded in the fifth century of the Christian Era by a tribe of the Maya race called the Itza. The name means "Chi", "mouth", "chen", "wells", "Itza" the name of the tribe which founded the city: "The mouths of the wells of the Itza".

This name was given to the place because of two great natural wells which

are there, and which afforded an inexhaustible water supply in a land which is conspicuous for the absence of surface or flowing water. It is not too much to say that the presence of two such wells at one place pre-determined under primitive conditions that a large center of population should one day grow up around them.

One of these wells was used as a source for the water-supply of the city; the other as a place of sacrifice wherein the most beautiful maidens of the tribe were hurled in times of great drought as sacrifices to the offended rain deities. Today the vast courts and colonnades, the lofty pyramids and spacious palaces, the temples and terraces, are silent; a great forest has overgrown them and overthrown them.

It is in these remote solitudes, that the ringing sound of the ax, pick and shovel of the excavator will soon be heard, and the intensive study of this former metropolis of ancient America will be commenced.

CHICAGO MUSEUM DIGS NEAR SITE OF BABYLON

Important information regarding the cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia is expected by the Field Museum of Natural History from the joint expedition of the Museum and Oxford University, now at work excavating the ancient capital of Sumer and Akkad, eight miles east of the site of the city of Babylon. The work is in charge of Dr. Stephen Langdon of Oxford.

This expedition is only one of four now in the field, Dr. D. C. Davies, director of the Museum, announced today. E.S. Riggs and members of the paleontological expedition are looking for fossils in Argentina, while C.C. Sanborn is in Chile, collecting birds and mammals. Edmund Heller, who was one of the leading members of the Roosevelt expedition to Africa in 1909, is again in that country heading a party in search of game animals near Lake Tanganyika. W.J. Morden is collecting game animals in southern Asia and a party under H.B. Conover is collecting specimens of game birds in Alaska.

BALLOON TORN FROM GROUND CARRIES SCIENTIST INTO STORM

The U.S. Weather Bureau's storm sleuth extra-ordinary, Dr. C.L. Meisinger, ended his fifth thrilling voyage from Scott Field, Illinois, April 29, at ten o'clock at night when rain forced down his balloon three miles southwest of Hartsburg, Missouri, and a quarter of a mile from the Missouri River.

Dr. Meisinger and his pilot, Lieut. James T. Nealy of the U.S. Army, left Scott Field suddenly when a gust of wind tore their balloon from the hands of assistants on the ground and carried it bouncing across the field for a quarter of a mile before it started up.

The balloon took off in a south wind at 2:55 p.m. This changed to south-east, and east as an altitude of between four and five thousand feet was reached. Carried westward over Missouri, in the balloonists encountered snow and rain. The rain finally forced down the big gas bag which landed safely in the dark at 10. p.m. in a northwest wind.