

BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY
Bloomsburg Pennsylvania

Anthropology Newsletter
Vol. 13, No. 4 February 1989

Department of Philosophy/Anthropology

Anthropology Club News: The Anthropology Club has planned two activities for the month of February. On February 11, club members will travel to Philadelphia in order to visit the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Arrangements have been made to have Dr. Clark Erickson, a faculty member in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, show club members around the museum. Drivers are needed for this excursion; please contact either Pat Andrews or Tom Aletto if you can drive.

On February 25 the club will sponsor a cross-cultural feast. Club members, the faculty and others will participate by bringing food items from different cultures. For more details, please contact either Pat Andrews or Faith Warner.

Civil Rights for Australian Aborigines: Recently a royal commission in Australia released an interim report on a topic that has received nationwide concern: the high incidence of deaths among Australian aborigines being held in custody in Australian jails. Since 1980, 103 aborigines have died in custody; an aborigine is 20 times more likely to die in jail than a white detainee. Most of the victims are reported as suicides, and most of the deaths occurred within 2 or 3 hours of arrest. Police brutality has been implicated in a number of the deaths, but in most cases, the commission asserted, the deaths were brought about by a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. To quote psychologist Joseph Reser of James Cook University in Queensland: "Suicide is probably an individual expression of the only kind over which they have control, a cry of desperation."

The report has helped to focus Australia's attention on the plight of its native inhabitants. Estimated at a population of 300,000 at the time of the first European settlement in 1788, aborigine numbers dropped to 93,000 by 1900. At the same time as their numbers dwindled, aborigine lands were seized by whites, and their political rights were denied; aborigines were forced by their poverty to live in slum areas around Australian cities. Today, 11% of aborigine children have never been to school, and 30% are unemployed. Aborigine life expectancy is 18 years less than for a white Australian. They gained the right to vote only 21 years ago.

Last year, Australia's bicentennial, the government began to make moves to rectify the situation. The government has offered to sign a treaty that would acknowledge "the errors and wrongs of the past." The government is also trying to reorganize a system of aborigine councils to encourage greater unity and self-determination. Most significantly, the government has begun to give the aborigines' land back to them. For instance, Uluru National Park in northern Australia has been turned over to aborigine ownership. The park contains within its boundaries the great monolith known as Ayers Rock, a national landmark sacred to the aborigines.

None of these moves has been without controversy. A great many white Australians feel strongly that aborigine lands are theirs by right of conquest. As in many other parts of the world, conditions of poverty, including unemployment and a high rate of alcoholism, have been merged in the minds of some Australians with aborigines' dark skin color to produce stereotypes about the "natural" indolence of "black fellows." But for the first time, it appears that aborigines may be on their way to reclaiming their place in Australian affairs.

Early Evidence of the Use of Fire: A letter to the December 1, 1988 issue of Nature by C.K. Brain and A. Sillen raises the possibility that humans were using fire much earlier than was previously thought to be the case. Until recently, the earliest evidence of the use of fire came from Zhoukoutien Cave near Beijing in China. The use of fire in this site was dated at 500,000 years BP and is associated with *Homo erectus*.

The new evidence comes from Swartkrans cave in South Africa from stratigraphic units dating between 1 and 1.5 million years. The evidence is in the form of fossilized animal bone which appeared to the excavators to have been burned. The researchers examined the histology and chemistry of the specimens and found that they had been heated to a range of temperatures consistent with that occurring in campfires. A total of 270 pieces of burned bone were recovered from the site; most were from antelopes of different species. Of that total, 46 had been lightly heated to below 300 C; 52 to 300-400 C; 45 to 400-500 C; and 127 to temperatures above 500 C.

If fires were being used, who used them? This is a more difficult question to answer. Both *Homo habilis* and *Australopithecus robustus* remains have been discovered in the same stratigraphic unit as the burned bone, but neither have been found in direct connection with fire.

If this evidence stands up to further scrutiny, it significantly changes our perspectives on the capabilities

of early hominids. It certainly adds to the growing realization that human evolution has been an extremely complex process.

The Origins of the Archaeologist; by Art Sweeney. As you are walking through your living room late one evening, you notice that your intellectual roommate has left the DISCOVER channel on instead of MTV. Before you have a chance to keep your mind from being infiltrated with some purposeful information, a show comes on dealing with archaeology. You ogle the scenes of dirty men and women, digging holes and screening the dirt, wondering what drives people to perform such tasks. Where does the desire to be an archaeologist come from?

This question has bothered me ever since I first told people that is what I am studying and doing with my life. When you tell them that you are an archaeologist, you invariably get the following reactionary statements: "Why do you want to be an archaeologist? ... I always wanted to try that, but I never had the time. ... What's the most exciting thing you ever found? ... (and my personal favorite) That's a mighty dirty business to get into...ha...ha...ha." As a result of this ongoing verbal jousting, one night I tried to come up with a few good reasons why people want to be archaeologists, examining the background and cultural influence that come into play along with the sociobiological factors as a starting point.

This is the profound idea I came up with: the need to be an archaeologist has its basis in Easter egg hunts. Yes, this indeed does sound strange, but give it a chance. When you are little and going to an Easter egg hunt, you looked all over for the eggs - behind trees, under bushes, behind and under rocks, in other kids' pockets, etc. You had to think to yourself, "Where would be the best place to put an Easter egg?" You use logical deduction, spatial references, relational reasoning, a good eye, and a bit of luck - and you have found some eggs.

Are these not the same ideas and properties used in archaeology? Logical inferences and the use of reasoning ability are the keys to good archaeology and deducing the right things about past cultures from merely the material remains. Couple this with spatial references to figure out regional characteristics and a good eye for that down and dirty field work; add a bit of luck, and voila, the makings of a good archaeologist!

This may all sound rather ludicrous, but the inherent features are there. The desire to know things and find things that have a direct link to our past seems to be a part of being human. If this feature is generated by Easter egg hunting, then so be it!

What then is the moral to this story? It is this: the next time you are going to ask someone why they do what they do (whether or not they are archaeologists), think twice and consider the Easter egg hunt. Then maybe you won't end up with egg on your face.

Showing Off Again: As if you haven't had enough of the Anthropology Club's work, here we go again. Once again the material from the 1988 Archaeological Field School will be on display, only this time it is in the Harvey A. Andruss Library. It shows the work of the field school done at the Fort McClure site during the Summer 1988 field session and includes projectile points, maps, stratigraphic profiles, and even tools used by the intrepid archaeologists this past summer.

The new display is set up on the main floor of the library near the entrance and will remain there until the end of February.

Our special thanks to Teri Bahner and Chrissy Bafile for their help in giving their time and effort in setting up the display.

The Anthropologist's Cookbook: This recipe from northern Thailand is called Kaeng Masaman or Mussulman Curry.

- 1/2 cup shallots or onions
- 5 cloves garlic
- 1 tsp allspice
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp ginger
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1/3 tsp dried red peppers (crushed)
- 2 & 1/2 lb round steak
- 6 whole cloves
- 2 sticks cinnamon
- 2 tbsp cider vinegar
- 1/2 tbsp sugar
- 3 whole cardamon
- 1/4 cup whole roasted peanuts
- 2 cups coconut cream
- 2 tbsp oil
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tbsp coriander

Slice the meat into cubes. Cook the meat covered in water until soft (about 45 minutes).

Mince the shallots and garlic very fine. Melt the oil in a pot, add the minced shallots and garlic, and fry gently. Drain the cooked meat, reserving the broth. Add the coconut cream to the meat and stir. Add all the spices, fried shallots and garlic and the rest of the ingredients except the broth. Simmer for 1 hour or until the meat is tender, and then add the meat broth little by little.

Just before serving, add 4 tbsps of very thinly sliced, crisply fried shallots. Serve with rice.

Off to Millersville: On March 4, 1989, two Bloomsburg University anthropology students will be attending the Millersville Undergraduate Anthropology Student Conference. This year's topic for the conference is summer field schools in archaeology and undergraduate research concerning the field schools. Darrell Gundrum and Art Sweeney will be presenting papers pertaining to the past summer's field experience at the Fort McClure Site along the Susquehanna River.

Mr. Gundrum's presentation will provide insight into the geological problems encountered at the site in relation to stratigraphy. He hopes to solve the problem presented by having a site so close to a major water source, i.e., how do you find occupation levels for the site when it is constantly being flooded by the river, disturbing all of the material remains? Darrell hopes to use the surficial geology and the in situ diagnostics to help solve this problem.

The actual field methods used and the results from the research is the topic of Mr. Sweeney's paper. He will discuss the field and lab techniques used to excavate the site and will attempt to interpret some behavioral patterns of those who inhabited the site, both historically and prehistorically.

Ten other papers will be presented at the conference from two other SSHE schools, Millersville and IUP. More information about attending the conference will be presented at the Anthropology Club meetings.

NEW VIEW OF AMAZONIAN PREHISTORY

There are presently no more than a few hundred thousand Indians living in the vastness of the tropical forests of the Amazon Basins. Most of these people live in small villages located away from the main rivers, are nomadic to semi-nomadic, and subsist on an economy of mixed horticulture and hunting and gathering. Many of these Amazonian groups have been studied intensively by anthropologists in the years since World War II and their way of life has greatly influenced the way archaeologists have interpreted the prehistory of Amazonia. Specifically, it has been widely accepted that the modern populations can be used as a model for interpreting the past and that the prehistoric cultures of the Amazon region were similar in most respects to those studied by anthropologists.

This point of view largely ignores the historical documents left by the first European explorers of the interior of the South American continent. Their diaries report the existence of large and dense populations organized into powerful, warlike chiefdoms. One of these explorers, Gaspar de Carvajal, traveled along the main course of the Amazon River from the Andean highland to its mouth in 1541 and 1542. Along the way he recorded repeated interaction with people from large villages, which sometimes numbered in the tens of thousands. Carvajal marveled at the efficiency of their agricultural systems, the richness of their pottery, the opulence of their ornamentation and their ferocity of their warriors. These people and their cultures were far different from the cultures that remain in the Amazon today. In the intervening centuries, these once great cultures and their people were decimated by disease and genocide, and their descendants have moved away from the rivers to avoid a similar fate.

Recent excavations undertaken near the mouth of the Amazon River by Anna Roosevelt of the American Museum of Natural History have forced anthropologists to come to grips with the existence of these long forgotten chiefdoms. Roosevelt reports her findings in the February issue of Natural History. Her research on Marajó Island, the 15,000 square mile land mass at the mouth of the Amazon River, has demonstrated that a culture attaining a level of sociopolitical complexity similar to that reported by Gaspar de Carvajal had occupied Marajó between 400 BC and AD 1300.

That a densely populated, hierarchically ranked chiefdom emerged on Marajó is remarkable considering the island's environment. The extremely low land form is inundated with flood water during much of the year when the Amazon River is on the rise and is parched during the remainder of the year when the rainy season has passed. Evidence of the Marajó culture occurs primarily in those parts of the island that were under water much of the year.

The Marajó people dealt with these conditions by building immense earthen mounds that typically stood six to 20 feet above the original ground surface and covered an area of 6 to 7 acres. The largest was 65 feet tall and covered an area of 50 acres. These mounds apparently served as platforms for villages, as indicated by the remains of houses and dense concentrations of domestic artifacts that cover them. Some of the mounds were also used as the locations for cemeteries. Based on the number of habitation sites and the size of the residential units, Roosevelt estimates, that at its peak, the population of Marajó society exceeded 100,000 souls.

In addition to the monumental earth works, a hallmark of Marajó culture is the elaborately decorated and finely crafted pottery found throughout the island. The decoration deals mainly with supernatural themes--mythic ancestors and preternatural animals--executed in a distinctive curvilinear style. The importance and influence of the Marajó style was such that remnants of it can still be seen among the ceramics of modern peoples throughout the Amazon Basin, more than 600 years after the Marajó disappeared. The potters, and the rest of Marajó society, were supported by a complex system of maize agriculture dependent on a network of irrigation canals to control the flow of water. Evidence from the cemeteries indicates that the sociopolitical system was based on ranked statuses--with members of different social groups receiving different mortuary treatment. Membership in a particular social group apparently was determined by the clan or lineage into which a person was born.

The work on Marajó Island is still in its initial stages, so the complete picture of Marajó culture and society has yet to be pieced together. However, it is clear from the information presently available that the portrait of Amazonian prehistory derived from the ethnographic study of modern peoples must be replaced with the one that is emerging from research like the Marajó study and that is indicated by the historical records of explorers like Gaspar de Carvajal. Far from being a cultural backwater, Amazonia appears to have been a region in which very sophisticated and complex cultures developed and remained vital throughout much of prehistory.

NB. Material from Marajó Island and other parts of the Amazon Basin can be viewed in the new Hall of South American Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The hall, which had been closed for several years during renovation, open to the public on January 20, 1989.