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INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

Ancient skeletons identified

JERUSALEM (AP) — A radiocarbon dating test has determined that 25 skeletons unearthed at the ancient fortress of Masada are probably Jewish rebels who committed suicide rather than surrender to Rome in the year 73, a scientist said Sunday.

The skeletons were uncovered 25 years ago, but since it was assumed they were Jews, they were immediately reburied as Judaism requires, said Israel Carmi, head of the radiocarbon dating lab at the Weizmann Institute of Science.

Archaeologists later suggested the skeletons may have belonged to Byzantine monks who lived on the flat-topped mountain during the 7th Century.

The Weizmann Institute was asked to carbon date remnants of fabric found with the skeletons, Carmi said. Radiocarbon dating estimates the age of organic or carbon-containing materials by measuring the radioactivity of carbon.

The test found the skeletons dated to 77 A.D., with a margin of error of 37 years.

"This shows unequivocally that the date of the skeletons falls within the period of the Jewish rebellion," Carmi said.

Masada, in the Judean Desert in eastern Israel, is where the last Jewish rebels against Roman rule held out for three years and committed mass suicide rather than submit to slavery.

Joe Zias, an anthropologist with Israel's Antiquities Authority, said the Weizmann Institute's findings lend more credence to the account of the mass suicide on Masada.

Historian Josephus Flavius, who lived during the Roman invasion, described in detail how 960 men, women and children under siege at Masada committed mass suicide with swords and knives.

"Until now, Josephus' account constituted the only record of the mass suicide story," Zias said in a news release from the Weizmann Institute.

Mozambique, S. Africa share refuge

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — South Africa and Mozambique are making plans to create a large game reserve straddling their border, a newspaper reported Sunday.

The Sunday Times said a preliminary plan calls for merging South Africa's 8,000-acre Kruger Park in the country's northeast corner with a 2,000-acre tract in Mozambique.

Relations between the long-hostile neighbors have improved in recent years, and talks on the proposed park are planned for this week in Pretoria, South Africa's capital, the newspaper reported.

Belize celebrates 10th birthday

BELIZE CITY, Belize (AP) — When tiny Belize marked 10 years of independence from Britain on Saturday, it had good reason for cheer: Neighboring Guatemala has dropped claims on its soil and the economy is booming.

But the Central American nation on the Caribbean coast isn't free from all ills. Its popularity as a stopover for drug traffickers and a flow of refugees are raising concerns about increased crime and strained resources.

Prime Minister George Price told a crowd braving a drenching rain that Guatemala's decision this month to recognize Belize and drop territorial claims signals "the end of a bygone era."

"Belize is now able to take its rightful place as a Caribbean nation in Central America," the premier said, standing on a courthouse steps in the old capital of this New Hampshire-sized country with a population of 190,000.

Price told the crowd of about 300 people that "much has been done to meet the basic human needs of our people. Yet more is to be done."

An honor guard of British troops and members of Belize's small force was reviewed by the Queen's representative, Governor-General Dame Minita Gordon, as a band played "Feelings."

When it first broke from Britain in 1981, the former British Honduras had a rough economic start since prices for one of its main exports, sugar, were low and the global economy was slumping.

But per capita income has roughly doubled over the past decade to reach \$1,600 because of new investments, tourism to the barrier reef islands — and the Colombian drug trade that uses Belize as a transit point.

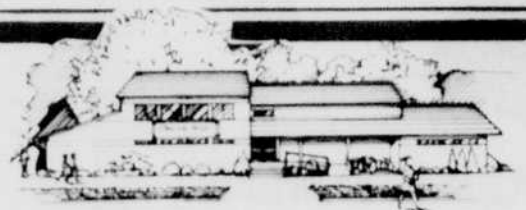
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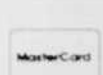
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