

Ancient body in Alps sports tattoos, leather



INNSBRUCK, Austria (AP) — A man whose 4,000-year-old mummified body was discovered on a glacier's edge wore tattoos, dressed in leather and packed a knife, scientists said Wednesday.

Researchers called the find by hikers Tuesday an archaeological sensation, and said it could offer a rare glimpse into life in the Bronze Age, a time when men ate meat and stone-ground meal, judging from the mummy's chiseled teeth.

"We are absolutely sure this body is 4,000 years old," said Konrad Spindler of the University of Innsbruck's Institute for Pre- and Early History.

From an examination of the body and implements found with it, scholars dated the "Ice-man from the Similaun" — so named by Austrian newspapers for the glacier where he was found — to the early Bronze Age, roughly 2,000 B.C. in the Alps, he said.

He said items found with the corpse were not purposely buried with it, but were carried by the living man. They included a flint stone, pieces of leather and fur clothing, and shoes.

Hikers in the Tyrolean mountains in Western Austria near the Italian border stumbled across the remarkably well-preserved man sticking out of the glacier at about 10,000 feet and notified local police.

Spindler said the man appeared to be between 20 and 40 years old and was "a good mountain climber." He wore winter clothing of leather and fur stuffed with hay at the time of his death, he said.

Colored tattoos are visible on the corpse's skin, in the form of crosses and lines, but their meaning was not immediately clear.

The corpse's teeth, many of which are still in place, are worn down, typical of a time when people lived mostly on a diet of meat and stone-ground meal, which often had tiny bits of stone mixed in, Spindler said.

Spindler claimed the mummy would allow researchers for the first time to "form an exact picture of life in the early Bronze time."

Scientists could study the stomach's contents and other organisms on the body, he said.

But scientists say many questions may never be answered.

It is unclear how the man died. Researchers in Innsbruck, capital of Tyrol province, were trying to find out what caused an apparent wound at the back of the man's head and to determine whether he was killed or, perhaps, died in an accident.

Scientists also wonder what prompted the man to venture that high into the mountains, because mountaineering is a fairly recent human pursuit.

There was speculation he was looking for ore deposits, or — because of the ax and the knife found with him — that he was a hunter seeking game.

Werner Platzer, the head of the Anatomy Institute of Innsbruck University, said the body had been treated with chemicals for preservation and placed in a refrigerated room where the temperature is minus 6 degrees Celsius, the temperature inside the Similaun glacier.

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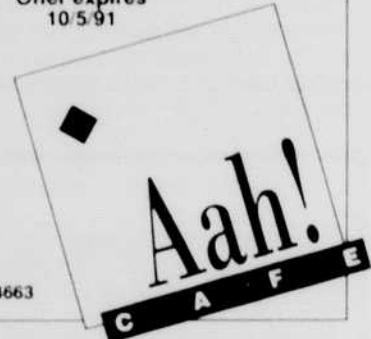
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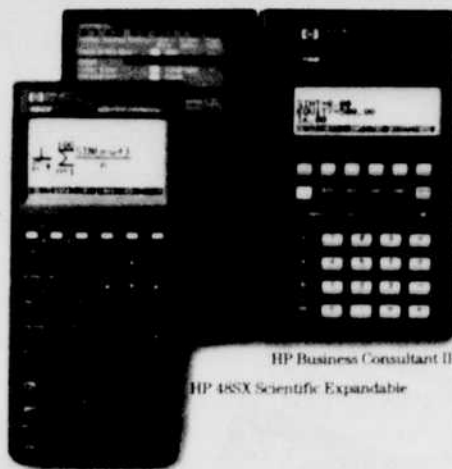
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