

Earliest residents may have used psychedelic drugs

By KRISTIN STROMMER
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A new study co-authored by a University of Oregon scientist found evidence that the region's earliest residents used psychedelic drugs.

Archaeologists have long debated whether mind-altering substances influenced the ancient art in caves and rock shelters. The research, published recently in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, offers new insight into the role psychedelics may have played in some Native American communities.

The scientists discovered wads of chewed plant fiber, or quids, stuffed into crevices in the cave ceiling at Pinwheel Cave, a rock art site

associated with the Chumash people. The cave is between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield in Southern California.

Chemical and microscopic analysis of the 400-year-old quids revealed the presence of hallucinogenic alkaloids and confirmed most specimens to be *Datura wrightii*, or sacred datura, a flowering plant native to California and historically used among the Chumash for ceremonial purposes.

The study also confirmed that the fibers were crushed in a pattern consistent with chewing.

Sacred datura, a highly poisonous and sometimes lethal perennial with trumpet-shaped flowers, is known to the Chumash as momoy, named after a powerful

grandmother figure prominent in the tribe's creation stories.

Pinwheel Cave, about 50 miles northeast of Santa Barbara, is named after a large, red pinwheel motif painted on a sloping section of the cave ceiling. At the summer solstice, sunlight travels across the pinwheel, suggesting a possible relationship between the art and seasonal rituals.

Co-author Kristina Gill, an archeologist with the university's Museum of Natural and Cultural History, is also an expert in the archaeobotany of coastal Southern California.

The art may depict the datura flower itself, which unfurls at dusk in a pinwheel-like pattern, Gill said. Also depicted on the cave ceiling is an anthropomorphized insect, which the researchers suspect may be a hawkmoth.

"*Datura* attracts hawkmoths as one of its key pollinators, so it wouldn't come as a surprise to see the two species represented together," Gill said.

While the new findings confirm a relationship between rock art and altered states of consciousness, they also call into question long-held theories about the context for that relationship.

"One school of thought views California rock art as the work of shamans who were on sacred retreat from the rest of the tribe," Gill said. "But excavations here reveal evidence of food processing, cooking fires and other domestic activities, indicating that the cave was less a site for rarefied shamanic practice and more a community hub where datura ingestion occurred alongside everyday, communal activities."

Museum associate director

Scott Fitzpatrick, a professor of anthropology who was not involved in the research, said that the study helps fill a void in the archaeology of mind-altering substance use.

"There is so little research

on this topic in North America," he said.

Fitzpatrick, editor of the 2018 book "Ancient Psychoactive Substances," said he looks forward to discussing the new study with students in his ancient psychoactives course at UO.

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The datura flower, right, is depicted in drawings at Pinwheel Cave.

Foundation awards grant for child care

PacifiCorp Foundation, a nonprofit arm of Pacific Power, has donated to Astoria Parks and Recreation.

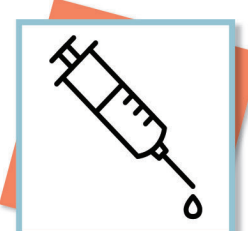
The \$4,500 grant will help Lil' Sprouts Academy relocate and expand to provide child care during the pandemic for health and emergency workers and other critical staff.

The foundation awarded 44 grants of \$1,000 to \$5,000 to nonprofit groups in six states, much of it to support the arts.

"Local programs like these are the heartbeat of our North Coast area, providing connection, education and tradition and helping to heal and strengthen our communities," said Alisa Dunlap, Pacific Power's regional business manager for the North Coast.

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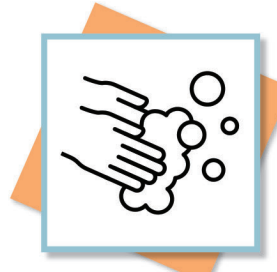
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