

# ROMAN CATACOMB NETWORK COVERS OVER 500 MILES

Underground Cemeteries Are Work of Early Christians—Millions Buried—Most Tombs Robbed for Relics

WASHINGTON, D. C.—(Sp.) Although the world's unexplored patches are rapidly shrinking, places of mystery still exist. Dramatic proof of this was shown recently when five boys were lost for several days in the Roman catacombs.

These underground cemeteries honeycomb the countryside surrounding Rome and underlie part of the city itself. A network of narrow, tomb-lined corridors extending many miles. "Because of excellent guides, lights and the fact that few tourists stray away from their parties, getting lost is a comparatively rare experience in the catacombs," says a bulletin from the Washington, D. C. headquarters of the National Geographic Society.

Catacombs Impressed Dickens "Confused by the numerous turnings, crossings and recessings of these melancholy tunnels, one could, however, wander for days and drop of exhaustion and starvation before finding an exit. Something of this thought occurred to Charles Dickens, who wrote, 'Good heavens, if in a sudden fit of madness, he (the guide) should dash the torches out, or if he should be seized with a fit, what would become of us!'

"Unlike catacombs of many other countries, those of Rome did not originate from abandoned quarries. They were dug expressly for burial places. Aside from a few Jewish catacombs that preceded them, they were largely the work of early Christians. Roman laws forbade burial inside the city walls. In Rome's heyday, the Via Appia and other splendid roads leading out from the Imperial City across a then-populous Campagna, were lined for miles with magnificent mausoleums containing the ashes of wealthy Romans. Near these same highways, Christians interred their dead in rock graves.

Wealthy Christians donated some of the burial plots. Poor but democratic Christians clustered together to purchase others. When they had filled the surface of a plot with graves, they employed the same principle of expansion used in modern skyscraper basements and subways. They dug another layer of graves beneath the first, connecting them by stairs. Grave diggers sometimes excavated on five successive levels, burrowing like moles at a depth of 75 feet, but generally they stayed between 20 and 50 feet, digging only three or four levels.

Over 500 Miles of Passages "Although Rome's catacombs, numbering over 40, do not reach beyond the third milestone, their intricate network is estimated to cover more than 500 miles. Among the largest and most famous of the Roman catacombs are those of St. Callixtus, of which some 14 miles have been explored.

Tombs in the Roman catacombs are reputed to number at least several millions. Following a monk's glimmering torch down damp tunnels, originally built just wide enough to admit two men carrying a bier, even the casual visitor cannot fail to be astounded by long vistas of tombs, or recesses, piled up like ship-shelves one above another, sometimes to 12 ranges, on both sides of the corridor.

"Some are still sealed with marble slabs, but more are empty, their riches, plundered, even the bones carried away as relics. Some of the tombs bear inscriptions and symbolic paintings. Still others are marked only by lamps, pieces of drinking glasses, and other objects pressed into the plaster when it was fresh. Little phials containing a reddish-brown substance have been found. This was once thought to be the blood of martyrs, but is now explained as a perfumed substance used to counteract the odor of decay.

Rediscovered by Accident "Here and there, tomb-lined galleries expand into vaults or chapels where funeral feasts were celebrated. Some of these chapels are gruesomely adorned with mosaics of skulls and festoons of thighbones, presided over by skeletons in monks' robes tied to the walls.

"In the third century, persecuted Christians began to seek refuge, and to hold religious meetings, in the catacombs, entering them through secret entrances in sand pits and quarries. In the catacomb of St. Callixtus, they descended by stairs which ended abruptly, and continued downward by ladder handed up to them by confederates below. In spite of all precautions, worshipers were frequently betrayed and massacred. Once, when a large congregation of Christian men, women and children entered a catacomb, pagan officials walked up both the entrance and exit.

"After the fourth century, Christians began to bury their dead in and about basilicas, instead of in catacombs, and by 410 they stopped using catacombs as burial places entirely. Instead, they began to revere them as sacred shrines, making pilgrimages to them. Pilgrims flocked into these human ant hills in such numbers that entrances had to be enlarged, stairs widened, and air-shafts sunk to ventilate chapels.

"In the sixth century the catacombs were ransacked by Goths, and in the eighth century by Lombards. This incited the popes later to carry off most of the remaining bodies and place them for safe keeping in the churches of Rome. At least 38 wagon loads of bones were deposited on one occasion in the redecorated Pantheon.

"Toward the middle of the ninth century, emptied of their attractions for pilgrims, most of the catacombs became neglected and forgotten, and shepherds pasturing their sheep on

The Campagna used them as sheepfolds. "Their rediscovery happened centuries later by accident. In 1578, some workmen digging in a vineyard, suddenly fell into a gallery of graves with inscriptions and frescoes. The

end of the 19th century ushered in a period of scientific exploration of these 'silent cities.' Their interest was not only in religious appeal, but in secular objects found in the graves which throw light on the lives of early Christians."

Pipe Club Popular at College WILSON, N. C.—(UP)—The year-old "I Smoke a Pipe" club has become a leading organization on the Atlantic Christian college campus. Strictly stag, its purpose, among other things is to "develop that sense of

tranquility that comes to every devoted smoker of the pipe." Track star Ambidexterous BATON ROGE, La.—(UP)—Jack Torrance, giant Louisiana State track star, can throw the shot with both

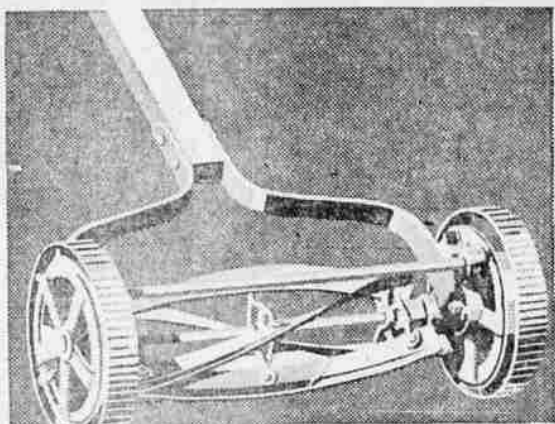
hands, holding a record in each event. On Aug. 8, 1934, at Oslo, Norway, he recorded 84 feet 10 inches with his right hand, and 39 feet 2 inches with his left, for a total of 94 feet.

Dog and Cat Finally Quarrel. ANTIOCH, Cal.—(UP)—For years a pet cat and dog lived together harmoniously without a quarrel. Recently, however, the cat had kittens and the first argument developed—over who would mind the kittens.

Stole Trailer-House Tires DALLAS, Tex.—(UP)—R. H. Edda is a sound sleeper, so sound in fact that he did not wake up when thieves removed all the tires and rims from a trailer-house in which he was touring through the south.

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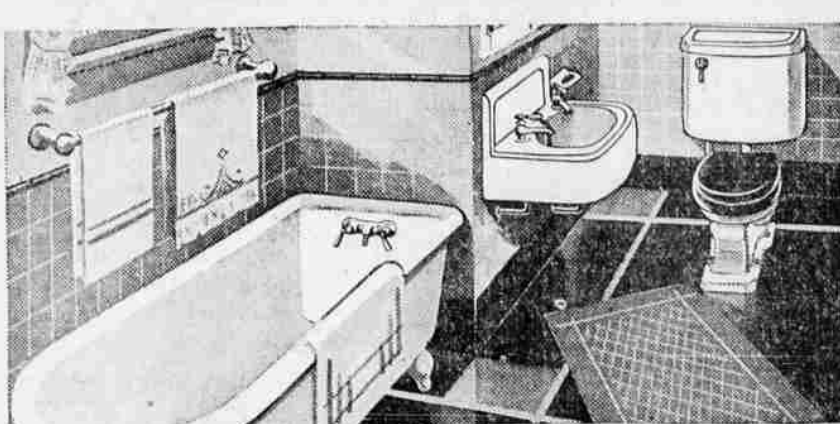
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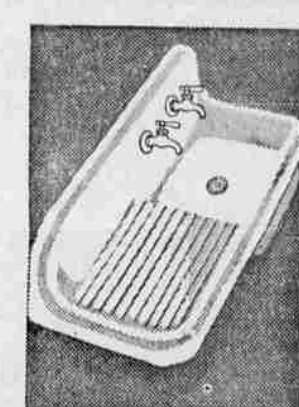
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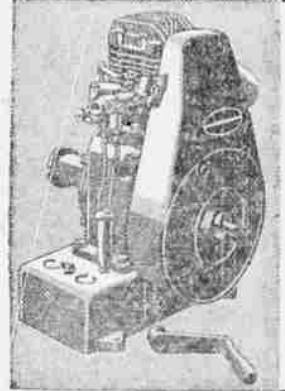
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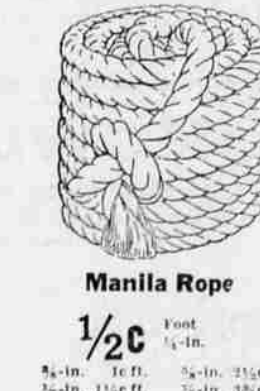
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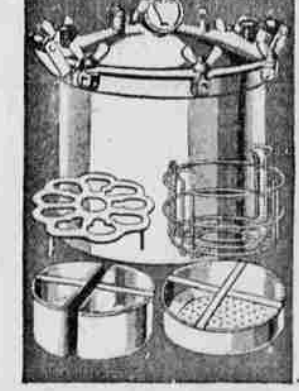
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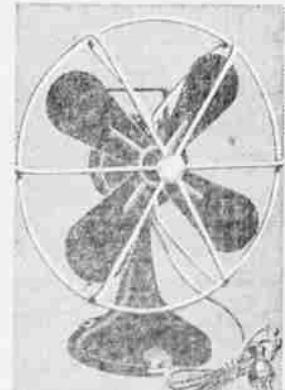
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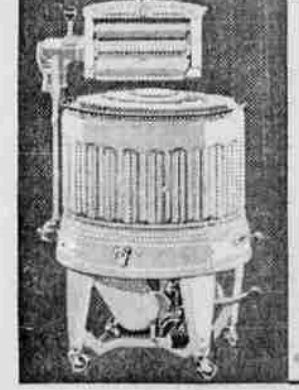


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