

by Jerry Klein

Art by Jim Teason

MOTHER NATURE has unlocked her freezer again! Russian explorers climbing in the wind-swept Altai Mountains of Southern Siberia made a blood-chilling discovery: beneath a six-foot pile of stones, they found a man and woman who had died 2,000 years ago but whose bodies were perfectly preserved inside a block of ice!

Chipping the ice of 20 centuries away, the explorers found that the man was a tattooed warrior dressed in a fur cloak. "Tall and strong, but gracefully built," the woman appeared to be a princess, wearing fur boots and golden ornaments. Near them lay the frozen bodies of seven thoroughbred horses, killed in battle and also perfectly preserved in the ice.

Archeologists identified the couple as Scythians, a nomadic tribe of horsemen who roamed Europe and Asia long before the birth of Christ. The stones which covered their tomb had kept out the warming rays of the sun while admitting the water and icy air which preserved them in a natural freezer.

Whenever Mother Nature opens her freezer, she unlocks weird and sometimes terrifying reminders of bygone ages. All sorts of creatures that once roamed the earth—insects, animals, and men alike—emerge from centuries in cold storage as mute relics of days long dead.

Not long ago, nature unlocked her icebox in the Beartooth Mountains of Montana. While examining the glacier there, scientists discovered a swarm of grasshoppers which had been frozen into the ice 600 years before.

One sunny day, long before Christopher Columbus was born, a horde of grasshoppers was moving over the area. A draft of cold air from the ice field, or a sudden snowstorm, pulled the insects down into the glacier. There they lay frozen while six centuries passed over them.

But despite its immovable appearance, glacial ice always is silently twisting and turning, as if struggling to disgorge its burden. And so the grasshoppers were at last set free.

Another ice field recently gave up the bodies of five Italian soldiers who had been frozen since World War I. These soldiers had climbed high in the Alps while on patrol one day in 1918 and apparently lost their footing. A generation passed before the ice relinquished its perfectly preserved prisoners.

The Alps are a cold-storage house of such unfortunates. In 1820 an 11-man expedition led by a British doctor was smothered beneath an avalanche of ice as it tried to scale Mount Blanc. Forty-one years later, in 1861, the glacier released the men's bodies at a point four miles below the avalanche.

Ice experts figured that the climbers had been sucked down into the heart of the glacier about 500 feet a year, until they were finally disgorged at the glacier's foot. With the preserved bodies were found the men's knapsacks and a cooked leg of mutton.

On a bright day in July, 1865, another Briton, Lord Francis Douglas, was descending the icy slope of the Matterhorn. Sir Francis was in great spirits, for he and his party had just made the first successful ascent of the peak. Suddenly a rope parted, and

The frozen bodies of men and animals—some of them centuries old—emerge perfectly preserved

When Nature Unlocks Her Freezer

Douglas and three companions were thrown into a valley 3,000 feet below.

The bodies of his companions were found afterward, but not Douglas'. Guides said he apparently fell into a narrow crevasse, to be sucked gradually lower until his body reached the glacier's edge.

Scientists who charted the movement of Matterhorn's ice field predicted that the body would reappear in 84 years. But mountain climbers who searched for Sir Francis in 1949 were disappointed. Nevertheless, Alpinists expect that the body of the explorer soon will be relinquished by the ice of mighty Matterhorn.

Several types of ancient plant and animal life also have been found preserved in natural freezers. The most spectacular was the woolly mammoth discovered in Siberia at the turn of the century.

This giant beast resembling a hairy elephant was the biggest land creature of its day—some 10,000 centuries ago! But its very bulk prevented one huge

specimen from getting out of a pit into which it had fallen. It died struggling to free itself and was enticed in a tomb of ice.

A million years later, explorers from the Russian Academy of Sciences discovered the mammoth at the edge of a thawing glacier. Its front legs still were raised in its fruitless struggle to escape from the pit which was soon sealed.

The ice had done its work well. The mammoth's body was so well preserved that hungry sled dogs thought their masters had uncovered a bountiful cache of fresh meat!

