Forensic Research Confirms Cannibalism at Jamestown

Doug Owsley, Kari Bruwelheide and their pan-museum team worked with Bill Kelso, chief archeologist with the Jamestown Recovery Project on the partial skeleton of a 14 year old English girl, confirming that cannibalism took place in early Jamestown. Historians have long suspected that the “starving time” when 80 percent of the colonists died—might have caused extreme responses. Owsley’s team analyzed bones described as having suffered blows and sharp cuts consistent with animal butchering. Using various techniques, including CT scans, Research collaborator Stephen Rouse did a computer generated reconstruction of the fragile skull, from which a hard copy was created. The three-dimensional copy of the skull was brought to StudioEIS in New York for the final reconstruction and finishing of the likeness of the girl the team named “Jane.” The model is on display at NMNH near the entrance to the Written in Bone exhibit.

National Anthropological Archives Gets Dunham Papers

The papers of Stanley Ann Dunham (1942-1995), an economic anthropologist and mother of President of Barack Obama, have been shipped from Hawaii to the Smithsonian’s National Anthropological Archives at the Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland. The papers are expected to be available to researchers in the fall. Gina Rappaport, archivist at the NAA and Ruth Rouvier from Recovering Voices, packed and shipped the collection of 23 boxes of papers and artifacts donated by Dunham’s daughter, Maya Soetoro-Ng, which had been kept by Dunham’s close friends Bronwyn and Garrett Solyom in their Honolulu home. Ann Dunham studied at the East-West Center and earned her doctorate in anthropology from the University of Hawaii, Manoa (cont. on page 2)
In January 2013, Rick Potts convened a weeklong strategy session, supported by a Smithsonian Grand Challenges Level I grant to help launch a new center for cultural heritage, biodiversity and prehistory at Olorgesailie in the Rift Valley of southern Kenya. Olorgesailie is situated in the highest biodiversity zone for animal and plant species in all of East Africa. Experts from five Smithsonian units met with local Maasai communities to discuss the strategies for bringing together Maasai knowledge, skills and art; and to build public understanding of Maasai culture and regional biodiversity.

A break-out session of the workshop discusses local culture and land use with Maasai community leaders and representatives from the National Museums of Kenya and the South Rift Association of Landowners. Smithsonian advisors include Rob Leopold (Director, Consortium for World Cultures, Castle), Suzanne Murray (Supervisory Veterinarian Medical Officer, NZP), Rick Potts (Director, Human Origins Program, NMNH), and Mary Jo Arnoldi (Chair, Department of Anthropology, NMNH).

Dunham Papers

for fieldwork that focused on the role of traditional crafts in Indonesia. Dunham applied her research to developing financial solutions through micro-credit programs and consulted with financial institutions in Southeast Asia. Her papers contain field notebooks and photographs, reports, and other writings, which reflect both her doctoral research as well as her years as an international consultant. Some artifacts will come to the anthropology collections, largely Indonesian textiles, but also a number of baskets, puppets, masks and other items that reflect her interest in the traditional crafts in rural communities. Once the archival materials are out of the CO2 chamber for pest mitigation, NAA archivist Lorain Wang will finalize their arrangement, description, and cataloging. Bronwyn Solyom, who is the Curator of the Jean Charlot Collection at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, completed a preliminary arrangement and description of the papers while they were in her custody so the remaining work should be minimal.

Learning About Chugach and Eyak Objects

Lars Krutak assisted Felicia Pickering at MSC during a NSF-sponsored project focusing on the documentation of Chugach and Eyak objects housed in the anthropology collections of the NMNH. Eighteen Chugach and Eyak objects were selected by visiting Native Alaskan elders and younger Native knowledge experts. The study group commented on the design, function, and purpose of the objects while being interviewed on video camera. The NMNH is the first venue for this multi-sited project. Dr. Patricia Partnow (PI, Founder, Partnow Consulting, Anchorage, Alaska) and LaRue Barnes (CO-PI, Director Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova, AK) directed the visit.

Smithsonian and Maasai Partnership

Gina Rappaport packing boxes

Photo credit: Bronwyn Solyom

L to R: Larry Evanoff, Robert Morris, Virginia Lacy, LaRue Barnes, Rhonda Moonin, Ivana Ash, and Timothy Selanoff. Photo credit: Chugachmiut.
Olorgesailie Core Sampling Workshop

Rick Potts’s team has obtained 190 meters of sediment cores from Olorgesailie, southern Kenya, representing the first long climate sequence obtained by drilling at an early human site. Twenty international scientists attended a workshop in April at the University of Minnesota to study the cores, which are stored in the LaCore Facility in Minneapolis. The cores are expected to yield the most exact and detailed records of climatic stresses and ecological change in East Africa over the past 500,000 years, providing a context for key events in human evolution, including the origin of our species.

Language Loss in Migrant Communities

Gabriela Pérez-Báez held conversational-style interviews with 18 teens and young adults for research funded by a Smithsonian Institution Grand Challenge grant. Her research focused on the mechanisms of intergenerational language transmission and the decline of the Zapotec language among young people from San Lucas Quiavini in its diaspora community in Los Angeles, particularly on the favoring of peer group over parental acceptance. This impacts the survival prospects of the language as a whole, when those who have lived in the US return to their home village of San Lucas Quiavini, in Oaxaca, bringing with them their preference of Spanish and English over Zapotec.

Tlingit Hat Replica to be used in Q?rius

In an unprecedented performance in January, the Tlingit dance group, Yaaw Tei Yi, (Herring Rock) presented traditional dances and songs in the rotunda of the NMNH, wearing a Killer Whale clan crest hat repatriated by the NMNH to the Da’k’lawedi clan in 2005. This marked the first time such a sacred object has revisited the museum. Dancers also wore a replica of the hat made by the museum and OEC using 3D technology, which will be on display in Q?RIUS. The original and replica hats were both worn at the American Indian Society’s Inaugural Powwow and Inaugural Ball in Crystal City, VA. The hat image is slated to appear on a Congressional Gold Medal minted to honor Tlingit code talkers.

Yaaw Tei Yi dancing in the NMNH rotunda. Photo credit: Eric Hollinger
Anthropology at the Smithsonian

Anthropology has been a core component of the Smithsonian Institution since its inception in 1846. Today the National Museum of Natural History’s Department of Anthropology is united by research focused on understanding the dynamics of human environmental interactions and cultural change. Current research focuses on a variety of issues, including human behavioral and cultural responses to past and present environmental and climate change, globalization, endangered languages and traditional knowledge, the relevance of anthropology to contemporary biological conservation, human biology, evolution, and forensics, and human dispersals and colonization of the Americas and elsewhere around the world. From the Arctic to the tropical Pacific, our extraordinary collections and archives, including more than 2.5 million objects, one million photographs, 8 million feet of film, and some 9000 linear feet of manuscripts, from around the world, anchor our research, education, and outreach efforts. The Department continues to build and enhance collections for research and exhibitions within the museum and in collaborative efforts with other institutions and governments and with local communities throughout the world.

Repatriation News

Three unusual repatriations occurred in the last few months: unusual because each repatriation consisted, at least in part, of individuals who were the victims of massacres that were sent to the Army Medical Museum at the direction of the Surgeon General and later transferred to the Smithsonian. Representatives of the Northern Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes participated in the repatriation of two individuals who were victims of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado. Otto Braided Hair of the Northern Cheyenne came to the museum to meet with Eric Hollinger for the repatriation of two individuals who were the victims of the 1863 Bear River Massacre in Idaho and one individual whose remains were obtained from an archaeological context near Warren, Utah. The repatriation coincided with the 150th anniversary of the massacre. The third repatriation was coordinated by Melissa Powell and the remains of two individuals were returned to the San Carlos Apache Tribe of Arizona. One individual was a victim of the 1871 Camp Grant Massacre and the second individual may have been a victim of the massacre.

Bill Billeck and Otto Braided Hair (Northern Cheyenne) signing repatriation deaccession papers, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site