

Archaeological dig at University House

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A team of archaeological scientists have unpacked their picks and brooms in Chancellor William McElroy's back yard to begin a search for a primitive man that may have lived there nearly 50,000 years ago.

The dig is, literally, in McElroy's back yard at University House, the home for University of California, San Diego chancellors for the last eight years. It is situated on a high bluff facing south west overlooking the Pacific Ocean and La Jolla.

Directing the dig is Dr. Jason W. Smith, archaeologist from California State University, Northridge. Dr. Jeffrey L. Bada, an associate research oceanographer at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Dr. Gail Kennedy, a Northridge paleontologist and physical anthropologist, will serve as co-directors. Bada, an organic chemist, has gained fame through his development of a promising new way to age date fossils.

Also taking part in the dig will be Dr. Richard S. MacNeish, Director of the Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology and one of the top archaeologists in the U.S.

The theory that man may have lived on or near the dig site as long as 50,000 years ago was developed by Bada by using his new fossil-dating system on remains unearthed in San Diego County in the 1920s by Dr. Malcolm Rogers then curator of the Museum of Man in Balboa Park.

Bada, in 1974, applied his technique to a skull dug from a Del Mar cliff in 1929 and measured its age at 48,000 years, the oldest human remains ever found on the continent. This shattered long-accepted theory that New World man was no older than about 20,000 years.

Bada's technique has made it possible for the first time to fix the age of organic remains older than 40,000 years, the limit of the carbon-14 method. He has pursued Rogers' old notebooks and pinpointed many of the ancient campsites Rogers found. Many of the sites along the coast have never been investigated, he said, and none have been sufficiently investigated.

Smith, the author of "Foundations of Archaeology," has directed field investigations of early man in the New World at sites in Idaho and British Columbia. According to Smith, the La Jolla site is known to have been extensively occupied for several thousand years. It is hoped that the dig will uncover cultural evidence to aid in reconstruction of the prehistory of southern California.

The archaeological team has the support of the Native American Tribal Council, and, since the team is mostly interested in cultural remains, if any recent burials are found they will be reinterred and not exposed to publicity.

How does McElroy feel about having a trench dug in his back yard? Both Smith and Bada say they are very happy about how helpful the chancellor has been. "Quite often," Smith said, "we are dealing with property owners who don't want us digging around."

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