Mammmoth undertaking
Researcher inventories thousands of cave artifacts

By Des Arnon

Conducting an archaeological project in a cave has its pros and cons. On the one hand, artifacts are right out in the open, so no back-breaking digging is required. In addition, the constant humidity and temperature (about 54° F) and protection from the elements mean thatarchaeological remains in caves are exceptionally well preserved. On the down side,archaeologists have to work in almost complete darkness and in tight quarters. This activity is not recommended for the claustrophobic.

Washington University anthropology research associate George Coebers, Ph.D., must not be a claustrophobic. He has spent the last seven years in Kentucky's dark, chilly Mammoth Cave, inventoring the contents of a three-mile portion of the cavern's 150-mile reach. The project has yielded a treasure trove of nativeAmerican artifacts. From tools to textiles to pictographs and more.

Mammoth Cave, located in the south-central part of the state, is the longest cave system in the world. Native Americans explored and used the cave as early as 4,800 years ago. During the Early Woodland period — 3,000 to 2,200 years ago — they mined the cave for gypsum (perhaps to use as plaster or white paint) and marbleite (known for its leathery effect).

"Many other caves were also entered and explored prehistorically — hundreds by a conserva-
tion effort," said Patty Jo Wattson, Ph.D., the Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor in Arts & Sciences and consultant on the project. "But the fairly intensive mineral mining in Mammoth and Salty Cave [also in Kentucky] is unusual. Most caves were probably used as mortuary places, or places to contact the supernatural world below the Earth's surface. Caves were special places for the prehistoric people who went into Mammoth."

Levin named first Hitchcock professor

By Ann Nicholson

Ronald M. Levin, J.D., a member of the School of Law faculty since 1979, was installed as the inaugural Henry Hitchcock Professor of Law March 29 in a ceremony in Olin Library. Hitchcock's efforts that the law school was founded, allowing us to continue to build as we strive toward new levels of excellence," he added.

"I am very proud to recognize not only the outstanding contributions of a member of the law school faculty, Ronald Levin, but also to pay tribute to such an important person in the history of the law school," Hitchcock, Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton said. "I think of no one more deserving of the new chair in honor of Dean Hitchcock, upon whose legacy we continue to build as we strive toward new levels of excellence."

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Daughters to visit campus for annual event April 27

On April 27, millions of girls between the ages of 9 and 15 will be going to work. At Washington University, at least 100 girls are expected to show up in offices, student centers and labs for our annual "Take Our Daughters to Work Day." Since 1994, Washington University has participated in this nation-wide education initiative, sponsored by the Ms. Foundation for Women. The purpose of the event is to focus attention on the needs and concerns of our nation's girls.

Daughters can shadow their parents at work, take part in activities planned throughout the Hilltop Campus, participate in a Panhellenic Council, led by Karen Horstman, e-mail director of Greek life, and are planning and implement the event.

"This is a wonderful day for our female students to be involved in the workplace," Horstman said. "The younger girls will have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities, and the older ones can have the satisfaction of knowing that they can make an important contribution.

While many of the activities are about learning about a subject or a professional career, some are planned to be fun with fun mind. One of the time-honored events of the day, the interactive event will be held 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday, April 10, at the Garigale, Orginate, and Emergency Support Team, the fair area is rising into National Honor Month by featuring an interactive science table.

Helping hand

Students who traveled to Latin America to work on the Campus Y's Alternative Spring Break service project for four weeks in April 1999 are invited to this event to participate in the "Million Meals for Millions" event. The event will be held 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 11, in Hilltop and West Campus Commons. A press release containing the event information will be distributed through the WMCA. For more information, call 935-1110.

Campus quiz: This unhappy fellow grants permission at what point on the Hilltop Campus? Answer below.

News Briefs

Pep rally

The third time really was a charm for the WMU women's basketball team, as the Bears recently earned their third straight national title. Show your good cheer — and wear your Red and Green — in celebration of that event at noon Friday, April 7, during a pep rally in Bowles Plaza. On hand will be head coach Nancy Fahey, the entire Bears roster and a national championship trophy!
Leptin-signaling failure could cause obesity in white men

By Barbara Rodriguez

Leptin keeps rats and mice slim. But to the chagin of some scientists, humans don't respond to extra doses of the hormone, which influences fat metabolism and serves as a natural appetite suppressant.

Now a team of researchers including members from Washington University School of Medicine believe that an evolutionary quirk might have better luck focusing the hormone's effects on middle-aged white men. In a statistical study of 115 black and 99 white families, those with the middle-aged white men who share a particular version of the molecule that receives the leptin signal were fatter than other volunteers.

Fat cells produce leptin to tell the body it has enough energy in reserve and can stop storing fat and decrease appetite. It does this by traveling in the blood to the brain, where it interacts with the leptin receptor molecule in the hypothalamus. This allows the brain to send a message to the body to alter how much energy it stores.

A modified version of the receptor that appears in some white men might respond well to leptin so that these men might begin to accumulate excess fat.

"There appears to be a good association in these men between a modification of the leptin receptor and fatness based on various measures," said Ingrid B. Borecki, Ph.D., director of NINDS.

The article was published in the January 2000 issue of Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism. Borecki, an associate professor of biostatistics, and Danielle C. Chao, Ph.D., director of the Division of Biostatistics, both at Washington University, were co-authors.

The study was led by Youn C. Cheong, Ph.D., at Louisiana University in Quebec, and Claude Bouchard, Ph.D., who recently left Laval to direct the Pennington Biomedical Research Center at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, La.

Previous studies involving people with differing lifestyles and genetic backgrounds had come up with mixed conclusions about the role of leptin in weight gain and obesity.

In the current study, volunteers shared a similar sedentary lifestyle and were about to begin a 26-week exercise training program as part of the HERITAGE Family Study. The 214 families included 88 black parents and 231 of their adult children. Neither group differed significantly in the proportion of participants who were skinny, of normal weight or obese.

The researchers measured leptin levels in sedentary volunteers' blood. Fat levels also were assessed in six ways, including weighing volunteers under water.

They found that the black children in the study had the seemingly unlucky version of the leptin receptor. This finding held true for five of the six measures of fatness.

Getting a grip

The Q223R receptor and the other versions studied interact with leptin the way a pair of tongs latch onto an ice cube. Because Q223R differs in a region equivalent to the end group that holds the leptin the way a pair of tongs latch onto an ice cube. Because Q223R differs in a region equivalent to the end group that holds the leptin receptor, it might be an enzyme that converts leptin into a less active form, according to Borecki.

Future studies that involve middle-aged white men and older adults should be conducted to see if the current study already has helped clarify the leptin story, though she added. "Once we get a grip on a handful of factors that affect weight gain and study all of them in a collection of families, I think a fascinating picture is going to emerge."
MOMIX in Orbit’ spins at Edison Theatre April 14-16

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The renowned dance troupe MOMIX combines its combination of athleticism and theatre in three performances on the Edison stage.

MOMIX in Orbit’ is directed by Michael Curley, an educator and choreographer who developed MOMIX, the world’s largest and longest-running contemporary dance company.

In the final five minutes of its performance, MOMIX, a collective of dancers, will perform its signature Hula-Hoop routine, employing the Hula-Hoop to create a visually stunning and physically challenging performance.

MOMIX in Orbit’ will perform on April 14, 15, and 16 at 8 p.m. at the Edison Theatre, 1627 Washington Ave., St. Louis. For more information, call 935-6500.

Exhibitions

Robert S. Steinberg, associate professor of philosophy, will give a lecture titled “The Galileo Mission” on April 13 at 4 p.m. in Steinberg Hall Aud., 1127 South Bldg., 362-2725.

Friday, April 7

7:00-9:00 p.m. (Free); Special Lecture Series: "The Imaginary Invalid." In "The Imaginary Invalid," Molière’s 18th-century play about a dance concert, the group’s trademark combination of athleticism and the beauty and prop-assisted theatre to create a modern dance. In the final five minutes of the performance, MOMIX, a collective of dancers, will perform its signature Hula-Hoop routine, employing the Hula-Hoop to create a visually stunning and physically challenging performance.

The performance, a special family event, is coming to Edison Theatre this month, with show times at 8 p.m. April 14 and 15, and at 2 p.m. April 16. The program is co-sponsored by Dance St. Louis and Edison Theatre’s OVERTONE Series.

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Peter Raven, famed botanist, discussing biodiversity issues

Peter Raven, world-renowned biologist and environmentalist, will deliver the Phi Beta Kappa/Sigma Xi Lecture on "Biodiversity: The Meaning of Sustainable Environment," at 11 a.m. Thursday in Graham Chapel. The lecture, part of the biology series, is free and open to the public.

After nine years as a member of the Department of Biological Sciences at Washington University, Raven came to St. Louis in 1971 as curator of the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Engel-Raven: Sponsor of museum garden's revitalization

Professor of Botany at Washington University. Raven has spearheaded the revitalization of the research, educational and display programs at the garden, whose researchers now work around the world, with particular concentration on Latin America and Africa.

Raven is a member of President Clinton's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology, which works to advise the President on science for Research and Exploration. He served as president of the 16th International Botanical Congress held in St. Louis in August 1999, where he received the Engler Medal for distinguished lifetime service to plant taxonomy. Raven was home secretary of the International Academy of Agriculture, the most distinguished body of scientists in the world, for 12 years and was the first chair of the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation, a government-established organization funding joint research with independent countries of the former Soviet Union.

Raven is the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the International Science Citation Award of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Alexander von Humboldt Prize of Germany, the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation Medal of Merit, the Bronze Medal of the International Academy of Agriculture, and the Engler Medal of the International Academy of Agriculture, which he received at the 1999 International Botanical Congress in St. Louis.

Building many bridges...

In experiences variously described as "amazing," "life-changing" and "heart-wrenching," 50 University students passed up surfing and skiing to spend spring break helping the homeless.

The group, a part of a Spring Break Break group based in Alaska, Florida, Oklahoma, El Salvador, Belize and the Dominican Republic to build everything from houses to chicken coops and, most importantly, new friendships in new places. WU students taught at a YMCA school operated in Belize; they helped Dominicans build a new church and, because El Salvador is too dry to cultivate crops in the summer, they built chicken coops (above) to help provide Salvadorans another livelihood. The co-op crew included (back row, from the left) David Pinzar, Stephanie Baker and Daniel Oliphant, and (front row) Jasmine Wong, Erin Cubbins, group leader Justine Elliott, Stephanie Peters, Mark Gomez and Elizabeth Breese.

Softball team wins three of four games

Washington University's softball team scored a sweep of Concordia University (Illinois) March 31-4 and lost the last game 7-4 April 2 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The Bears entered the weekend with three wins in four games last weekend. The Bears stretched their winning streak to eight games with a doubleheader sweep of Concordia University (Illinois) 8-1 and 16-3, Friday, March 31. The Bears won the second game of a doubleheader against Point Park Saturday, 11-2. But WU won its ninth game in its last 10 tries with a 2-0 shutout in game one. Against Concordia, the Bears jumped out to a 5-0 lead with five runs in the top of the second. WU added three runs in the top of the sixth to post a 8-1 win. Five players scored in the second inning and added two more in the sixth inning.

On stage

Friday, April 7

Fridays Perform Arts Dept. play. "The Imaginary Invalid." William Whitaker, dir. 8 p.m. Monday, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, 8 p.m. Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, 2 p.m. Steinberg Hall. 361-3737.

Saturday, April 8

6:30 p.m. Student traveling jazz combo. Holmes Lounge, Ridgley Hall. 935-4841.

Sunday, April 9

9 p.m. W.U. Wind Ensemble concert. Dan Prager, dir. 935-5551.

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Mammoth

Researcher inventories thousands of artifacts — from page 1

them. They did not enter the dark zone casually or in a workaday mode. Mammoth Cave has been a national park since 1941, and the project has been conducted under the auspices of the National Park Service. Park managers wanted to invent- ory the cave for some time. Robert Ward, park historian and co-principal investigator on the project, explained that by knowing what and where everything in the cave is, the park service is better able to preserve the cave's cultural and natural heritage.

Volunteers from Earthwatch, a nongovernmental organization that connects amateur volunteers with scientific researchers all around the world, were provided key help.

"The stars really lined up for this project," Ward said. "We just needed the right conditions. If it had been a drought, it would be very laborious and expensive. Hooking up with Earthwatch gave us a predictable way to do this project and provides us with a unique source of help."

Ward said working with Crothers is "one of the things that has made this project such a pleasure. He has a very dry, wry sense of humor, and yet he is very nurturing, supportive and collegial. Crothers, also a co-principal investigator, has led the project for all but the first year. Mary Kennedy, then a graduate student in anthropology here, first established it; Charles Swendlund, of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, is the third co-principal investigator. The project's three-mile stretch, known as the Upper Trunk, is one of the largest and widest passageways and includes the only natural entrance used on cave tours. It is heavily traveled — about 150,000 people visit annually.

Throughout the project, two crews of 30 Earthwatch vol- unteers work each summer to preserve and save the items and their locations; graphs, sketches and describes the items and their locations; and the last group uses a digital theodolite with infrared light to record the exact location of each artifact.

To date more than 8,000 artifacts have been documented. These include digging sticks, mussel shell scrapers, guard containers, remnants from torches, cordage, twisted slippers and fragments of other twined textiles which may have been pouches or bags.

Several pictographs also have been found. Most are simple geometric designs — spirals, cross-hatching and worry lines. By far the most important category is palaeofish. They have provided detailed information on ancient diet, including evidence that Native Americans were eating such domesticated plants as sunflower, sunpump, goosefoot and maygrass. Hormonal analyses have been conducted on 12 paleodenal samples to determine the gender of the cave users — all male so far. Efforts to recover DNA information are being under- taken now.

Work in the Upper Trunk will be finished this year or next. Then the systematic analysis starts. "All this data has been collected and compiled, but not edited yet," Crothers said.

The next stage will be time consuming. Ward said with only slight exaggeration that the team would be "crunching data now till the end of our lives."

Said Ward: "The quantity and quality of both historic and exceptionally prehistoric material in the main tourist areas of the cave definitely surprised us. Because of the fine scale of the documenta- tion and the long-term nature of the project, George is able to produce quite detailed maps of hundreds of items revealing distributional patterns that cannot be detected without just this kind of painstaking, methodical recording."

Ronald M. Levin, J.D., installed March 29 as the inaugural Henry Hitchcock Professor of Law, receives a medallion marking the new professorship from Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton.

"To Boldly Go" — Career expert Peter Fiske in graduate workshop

P ersonal and author Peter Fiske, Ph.D., whose writings have helped many students become more confident and successful in their jobs, will present a workshop titled "To Boldly Go: Practical Career Planning for Scientists" at 2 p.m. April 4 in Moore Auditorium on the Medical Campus.

The workshop, sponsored by the Career Resources Program in the Division of Biology and Biological Resources and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, is open to graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in the biological, physical and natural sciences.

Fiske, who has appeared on National Public Radio's "Science Friday," works at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. The workshop is free. More information, call 935-7339 or visit the Web (www.scripps.edu/resources/sof/html/fiskewhp_99.htm).
Edward L. Spitznagel Jr., Ph.D., professor of mathematics in Arts & Sciences, recently received the 2000 Missouri Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. The award is given by the Mathematical Association of America (MAA). In winning the Missouri Section Award, Spitznagel, a member of the University's mathematics faculty since 1986, now is an official candidate for a national MAA award — the MAA Deborah Franklin Tepper Haimo Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics. The winner of that award will be determined later in the year.

On assignment

William H. Danforth, M.D., chancellor emeritus and vice chair of the Board of Trustees, will serve as chair of an independent review panel that will conduct a comprehensive review of oversight and monitoring of clinical trials at the Institute for Human Gene Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania.

Speaking of

School of Architecture Dean Cynthia Weese, FAIA, Bill H. Schmucker, affiliate professor of architecture, and Angela McKeever, recently spearheaded a day-long discussion bringing together faculty and local practitioners. "Building Partnerships: A Dialogue With Practitioners, Faculty and Students," allowed these guests to brainstorm on opportunities to share resources, enhance community outreach, expand internship and educational programs and increase collaboration between the school and practitioners. The forum was modeled after a national American Institute of Architects round table attended by Weese, deans of major architectural, engineering and landscape architecture firms, as well as prominent architectural firms, including University Trustee Jerome J. Sincir, chief executive officer of AlliedSignal Inc.; John W. Kassabaum and a School of Architecture alumnus.

Engineering school honors seven distinguished alumni

The School of Engineering and Applied Science honored seven distinguished alumni at its 26th annual Alumni Achievement Awards Dinner Wednesday, April 5, at the Fox Theatre in St. Louis.

The guest of honor is the former dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science, former dean of the Missouri School of Journalism and School of Architecture Dean John S. Watson. Apologies to Potential Mechanism of Molecular Integration, paid tribute to the contributions of his students, colleagues and faculty. "Building Partnerships: A Dialogue With Practitioners, Faculty and Students," allowed these guests to brainstorm on opportunities to share resources, enhance community outreach, expand internship and educational programs and increase collaboration between the school and practitioners. The forum was modeled after a national American Institute of Architects round table attended by Weese, deans of major architectural, engineering and landscape architecture firms, as well as prominent architectural firms, including University Trustee Jerome J. Sincir, chief executive officer of AlliedSignal Inc.; John W. Kassabaum and a School of Architecture alumnus.

Ali Fischer nets Jostens Trophy

Senior Ali Fischer, who recently led the Washington University women's basketball team to its third straight national title, has been selected as the recipient of the Jostens Trophy, which recognizes the nation's top female student-athlete in Division III basketball.

The award honors the "true Division III athlete," one that shows excellence in the classroom, on the playing floor and in the community. In addition to a trophy, a $1,000 scholarship will be presented to the University in Fischer's name.

Fischer, an economics and business major from Franklin, Ohio, was honored for her outstanding academic and athletic achievements.

Jostens President and CEO Mark W. Pilutti presented the award Wednesday, April 5, at the University's Leadership Awards dinner.
Passionate in pursuit of asthma's answers

Robert C. Strunk, M.D., finds contributing factors in family life

BY DIANE DUKE WILLIAMS

Alix; stepdaughter, Ellen; and wife, Juanita.

Robert C. Strunk, M.D., professor of pediatrics and an internationally known expert on asthma deaths, examines a young patient, Britney Rose, during a routine checkup.

Passionate in pursuit of asthma’s answers

Robert C. Strunk, M.D., finds contributing factors in family life

Researchers at National Jewish Medical and Research Center, who has known Strunk for 22 years. “Bob has a passion for how families work together, especially ones affected by this chronic disease.”

Likely victims

Children from families that don’t function or communicate well are more likely to die from asthma. But appropriate care and planning could prevent most asthma deaths. “When a death occurs, it’s usually clear that the parents hadn’t paid attention to their child’s asthma or were getting worse,” said Strunk, who has asthma himself. “Conflict or disorder in the family prevents good care or enhances the possibility of recognizing things late. Children just get trapped.”

These at highest risk for asthma include children living in poverty or in the inner city, African-Americans and Hispanics. The disease affects almost 5 million children in the United States, making it the most common childhood illness.

Over the years, Strunk has learned that children who seek asthma care in emergency departments are more likely to die from asthma than those who use primary-care doctors for regular care of the disease. Children in low-income urban neighborhoods are more apt to seek care in emergency departments.

Since 1994, he has been involved in numerous visits in the national Childhood Asthma Management Program, the largest and most comprehensive look at whether aggressive treatment of asthma during childhood can prevent a decline in lung function as children reach adulthood.

Growing up outside Chicago in Park Ridge, Ill., Strunk was a smart, quiet child always interested in bird watching, science and human nature. His father, who had an exciting job as a trade association lobbyist, always wanted Strunk to study business.

Strunk tried to keep an open mind about his major when he started studies toward a bachelor's degree at Northwestern University in 1960. But he excelled in science, especially organic chemistry, and knew science was where he belonged.

He didn’t feel as strongly about becoming a doctor, “I considered getting a Ph.D. in basic science, but going to medical school seemed like a reasonable thing to do because some of my friends in college were going in that direction,” Strunk said. Strunk said.

In the laboratory of a biochemist at Northwestern University’s Medical School confirmed how much he liked research. “This experience made it clear that I was interested in academics,” he said.

“Bob has a passion for how families work together, especially ones affected by this chronic disease.”

S. ALLAN BOCK

He decided to pursue a master’s degree in biochemistry and a medical degree at Northwestern. But the physician in charge of the third-year pediatric rotation made such an impression that he came to specialize in pediatrics. “He was very dynamic and a great teacher,” said Strunk.

It was fun seeing the patients and seeing how he interacted with kids of different ages. He made me sure that’s what I wanted to do.”

After completing an internship in pediatrics at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, he was drafted into the military and served at a naval hospital in Newport, R.I., during the Vietnam War. He learned a great deal at the hospital about common pediatric illnesses, families and psychological problems. “I’ve always been interested in what happens psychologically to children with chronic illnesses,” he said.

Strunk then completed a fellowship in allergy and immunology at Boston Children’s Hospital. There he worked in the laboratory of Harvey Colten, M.D., who would go on to found the Division of Pediatics at the Washington University School of Medicine from 1986 to 1995. Although Strunk was interested in both allergy and immunology, he decided to specialize in allergy because he could make such a difference in the lives of children.”

After treating asthma patients at the University of Arizona for four years, Strunk joined the University of Colorado and National Jewish Medical and Research Center, where he had many pediatric, Chris, and daughter patients with severe asthma and numerous psychological problems, “Our job was to sort out the problems and help them adapt better,” he said. “I got to know the disease well and how the children adapted to it.”

During his nine years at National Jewish, he learned that pediatric asthma patients face unique social issues. Because children with asthma look normal and society expects them to act normally, these children don’t think of themselves as ill and don’t want to take their medications. He also discovered that asthma exacerbations interfere with children’s ability to develop socially. These youngsters frequently have to stop playing and become ostracized.

In addition, Strunk became familiar with the fear of parents and that accompanies anxiety when children can’t breathe. “I began to understand the overprotectiveness and emotionalism that develop in many of these families,” he said.

Even though Strunk’s son, Chris, is a perfectionist, Alix, developed asthma, Strunk wanted them to be able to pursue any interest.

Chris has become a great soccer player. Alix is accomplished in tennis and in soccer.

In addition to research and patient care, Strunk, who came to Washington University in 1986, enjoys teaching and mentoring other researchers. “I really like helping other investigators to get the most out of their work,” he said.

Wonderful mentor

Medical student Arden Goel, who is working with Strunk on a research project, called him a wonderful mentor. “He takes great interest in teaching and in his patients,” she said.

Even though Strunk is the director of the Division of Allergy and Pulmonary Medicine, and Strunk excels in all areas of academic medicine, “Bob Strunk is the best role model for us all,” said Strunk.

Strunk said one of his goals is to figure out how to get schools to provide regular care for asthma and to get parents and patients to comply. “If we could just accomplish this,” he said, “we could make such a difference in the lives of children.”

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Robert C. Strunk, M.D.

Raised in Park Ridge, Ill.

Education Northwestern University, B.A., 1964; Northwestern University Medical School, M.D., 1968; Northwestern University, M.S., 1968.

University position Professor of pediatrics

Family Wife, Juanita; son, Chris; daughter, Alix; stepdaughter, Rick; stepson, Rick; stepbrother, Rick.

Hobbies Running, bird watching, attending WU women’s basketball games, traveling.

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