

The Iceman Goeth

AFTER SIX YEARS of scrutiny at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, the ice man named Ötzi received a hero's welcome when he returned to Italy this past January. Ötzi, a Stone Age human probably in his mid-forties, was preserved in a glacier for 5,000 years until his discovery in 1991, when hikers in the Italian Alps stumbled upon him 300 feet from the Austrian border. Since then, he had been wrapped in cloth, crushed ice, and plastic in a special chamber where humidity (at 98 percent) and temperature (at 21 degrees) mimicked the glacier's conditions.

With the aid of Innsbruck scientists, Ötzi's caretakers at his new home, the Archeological Museum of Bolzano,

created an iceless room to maintain and monitor humidity and temperature while allowing museumgoers to see his entire body through a window. About 150,000 visitors had already peered through that window by November. "It's dark in the room where the ice man's cell is," says physician and anatomist Öthmar Gaber of Innsbruck, who serves on the museum's scientific advisory board. "It seems almost like a church."

Gaber was responsible for

the ice man's conservation in Innsbruck, and he retrieved samples from the corpse for scientific study. He says Ötzi will be missed by the researchers in Austria. "We have been sad, because to work more than six years with the ice man was a really great feeling," he says. "But we are still working in Bolzano with the ice man, so it's not so bad." —*Jessica Gorman*

ÖTZI WAS DISCOVERED BY a German couple in 1991 while they were hiking at 10,500 feet in the Italian Ötztal Alps. Ötzi's straw-insulated leather shoes, clothes of plant fiber and leather, and a coat of leather and goat fur were found with him. He wore a cap of brown bear fur and carried a wooden backpack, copper ax, stone dagger, bow, and a leather quiver with 14 arrows—two of which were broken. He also carried an arrow repair kit in a small leather bag. Ötzi, who was revealed to the hikers by a melting glacier, was taken to the University of Innsbruck in Austria for study while locals disputed whether he was Italian or Austrian. Although Ötzi lived as long ago as 3350 to 3100 B.C., his ice tomb preserved all his organs, and 84 scientific studies were conducted or started on him in Austria. Research has shown that Ötzi was probably between 40 and 53 years old when he died, but why he died on the mountain remains a mystery. One theory suggests Ötzi might have been unexpectedly caught in severe weather while hunting ibex. Others say he might have been fleeing danger. But we will never really be sure what this man was doing on the fateful day that trapped him in ice for 5,000 years. —*Jessica Gorman*



Benvenuto!
Ötzi returns to Italy.

of the jumbled sediment in the cave, archeologists haven't been sure how old the shoes are, and O'Brien wasn't willing to sacrifice large chunks of the ancient footwear for carbon-dating. The newest dating techniques, however, require only a tiny thread, so this past year O'Brien finally dated seven shoes. One sandal was 8,300 years old, the oldest shoe east of the Rockies. (Some from Utah are a bit older.) Though the shoes vary greatly in style, the technology used to create them

remained remarkably similar throughout the millennia. "I think people early on knew how to make a very, very good shoe," says O'Brien. He's also been surprised by the public interest in his footwear. "Archeologists dig up spear points, arrowheads, pottery, and people say, 'Well, that's nice—yawn.' But these shoes—the interest has been phenomenal. They even made two nights running on Jay Leno. It's just something all people can identify with." —*Shanti Menon*

Top: AP/Wide World Photos

