

*Abora III* at  
New Jersey port.



## In the Wake of *Kon-Tiki*

A German biology teacher and amateur archaeologist plans to launch a reed boat this month in New York harbor, in preparation for an ocean voyage to Spain.

Dominique Görlitz, currently a Ph.D. student in invasion biology at the University of Bonn, wants to prove that prehistoric humans could have crossed the stormy North Atlantic, bringing with them Old World plants such as bottle gourd and cotton, thousands of years before Columbus.

The 12-ton, 12-meter-long boat, built of reeds from Lake Titicaca in Bolivia and sporting linen sails, is based on rock drawings made in upper Egypt and Spain during the 4th and 5th millennia B.C.E. "This will be a high-tech laboratory" loaded with instruments to monitor the ship's progress, adds Goelitz, whose funding for the half-million-dollar project so far has come from a private loan. Jürgen Böhmer, a vegetation ecologist at the University of Bonn, notes that the unusual effort could help clarify how plant species spread between continents. Goelitz, 40, has experimented with earlier versions of the boat in the Mediterranean. The *Abora III* will set sail in July with a crew of 12 for the 2-month voyage.

## Iceman's Final Hours

A team of botanists and anatomists has produced a close-up view of the last wanderings of Ötzi the Iceman, the frozen 5200-year-old mummy found in the Alps in 1991, from the pollen in his digestive tract.

By various delicate procedures, researchers led by botanist Klaus Oeggl of the University of Innsbruck in Austria extracted five gut samples—representing at least three different meals—from the end of the small intestine to the rectum. Comparing the pollen with modern reference samples from known locations, the scientists tracked Ötzi's path in roughly his last 33 hours. "Background" pollen in the intestine closer to the rectum reflected alpine vegetation, whereas the transverse colon had pollen from tree species common in the valley. Contents of the ileum indicated that he ate his last meal back in the subalpine pine and spruce forests.

The scientists, whose analysis appears in the latest issue of *Quaternary Science Reviews*, say the results lend new weight to the "disaster" theory of Ötzi's death. It holds that he walked down from subalpine regions perhaps to his native village, got in a fight, and fled to the mountain glacier, where he apparently died from an arrow wound in the upper back. The reconstruction of the Iceman's final journey is "an extremely exquisite piece of work," says geoscientist Wolfgang Müller of the Royal Holloway University of London in Surrey. "Before, it was largely speculation. Now it is pinned down with scientific evidence."

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## The Breast Cancer List

French fries, car exhaust, and shampoo have one thing in common: They can contain breast cancer-causing compounds. To find out more about suspect chemicals and lifestyle factors, including obesity, implicated in breast cancer, check out this new two-part database from the Silent Spring Institute, a women's health nonprofit based in Newton, Massachusetts.

Researchers pored over toxicity data to compile a roster of 216 compounds that trigger



Rachel Carson,  
author of *Silent Spring*, died of breast cancer in 1964.

mammary tumors in animal tests. For chemicals such as acrylamide, a byproduct of cooking starch-laden foods, the site offers information on uses, routes of exposure, and health risks. The database also summarizes and critiques the methodology of 450 studies on links between human breast cancer and nongenetic factors. >> [sciencereview.silentspring.org](http://sciencereview.silentspring.org)

## INTERSPECIES MISCOMMUNICATION

A silverback gorilla went on a King Kong-style rampage in a Rotterdam zoo on 18 May, and ethologists are speculating that a misunderstanding with a female fan may have pushed him over the edge.

Eleven-year-old Bokito jumped a 3-meter-wide moat at Blijdorp Zoo, attacked a 57-year-old woman, and dragged her along a path before smashing a glass door and entering a restaurant, where zoo staff shot him with tranquilizer darts. The victim—hospitalized with a crushed hand, broken arm, and more than 100 bite wounds—had visited Bokito almost daily with her husband. "When I smiled at him, he smiled back," she told the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*.

The frequent visits may have made the woman a group member in the gorilla's mind, says Zjef Pereboom, head of research at the Antwerp Zoo in Belgium. But primates use eye contact to establish dominance relations, and they can misinterpret human signals, he says: "He is the silverback, the dominant man in his group, and he may have felt that she didn't respect his dominance." The gorilla's "smile" may actually have been a threat, other ethologists say.

The victim wants the zoo to pay damages but said Bokito "will remain my darling."

