



Otzi the Iceman

Read the two brief articles below on the Neolithic iceman found in 1991. Then answer the questions on the back of this worksheet.

The Neolithic Ice Man

In 1991, two German hikers made an accidental discovery that gave archaeologists a firsthand look at the technology of early toolmakers. Near the border of Austria and Italy, they spotted the mummified body of a prehistoric traveler, preserved in ice for some 5,000 years.

Nicknamed the “Ice Man,” this early human was not empty-handed. The tool kit found near him included a six-foot longbow and a deerskin case with 14 arrows. It also contained a stick with an antler tip for sharpening flint blades, a small flint dagger in a woven sheath, a copper ax, and a medicine bag.

Scientific research on the body concluded that the Ice Man was in his 40s when he died in the late spring or early summer from an arrow wound. Scientists also determined that in the hours before his death, he ate wild goat, red deer, and grains. The Ice Man is housed in a special museum in Bolzano, Italy.

Source: McDougal Littell Ancient World History, 2005.

Defrosting the Ice Man’s DNA

Scientists have long considered heart disease a modern problem. But “Otzi,” the mummified man discovered in 1991 by two Germans hiking through the Italian Alps, may turn that theory on its head. Otzi was well-preserved in ice and snow for 5,300 years, so scientists have been able to learn a lot about him, including his age (46) and how he died (shot by an arrow). Now, after mapping out Otzi’s DNA, they know even more: Not only did he have brown hair, brown eyes, and type O blood, but he also suffered from lactose intolerance—the inability to digest dairy—and heart disease. The dairy allergy makes sense since there were no domesticated animals in early times, so early humans didn’t need to digest animal milk. The heart disease was surprising. “Obviously, this disease was present already 5,000 years ago,” says one researcher. “So now we can get a better understanding why such diseases develop.”

Source: The New York Times Upfront, September 3, 2012.

1. According to these articles, was the Ice Man a Neanderthal? Why or why not?

2. What kinds of scientists would be studying the Ice Man?

3. What things have scientists learned about the Ice Man?

4. What kinds of things do you think we will never know about the Ice Man? Why not?

5. If you could ask the Ice Man 3 things about his life (and he could answer), what would you ask him and why?



Artist's rendering of what Otzi would have look like (left)