Glaciers Melting From Global Warming Give Up Their Dead

Smithsonian.com | The 5,300-year-old body of Ötzi, the Stone Age human dubbed “The Iceman,” is perhaps one of the most famous mummies to emerge from ice. But with glaciers around the world melting, many more bodies — some relatively new, others ancient — are now emerging. Global warming is giving back many once thought lost forever.

Take the soldiers who died during “The White War,” a years-long campaign in the Italian front of World War I, later fictionalized by Ernest Hemingway in A Farewell to Arms. This month marks a century since Italy joined the war, and bodies and artifacts from that time are now surfacing. For Vice, Leander Roet writes:

The battle was fought at high altitude, with special weapons and infrastructure like ice-trenches and cable transports. Often the sides would use mortar fire to

How a Horror Film Mirrored South Korea’s Viral Outbreak

Discover | Anyone trying to understand South Korea’s struggle with the MERS virus outbreak should take a look at a Korean monster movie called “The Host” from 2006. “The Host” doesn’t actually predict South Korea’s outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome almost a decade ahead of time. But the film does paint a familiar picture of South Korean society’s crisis in confidence stemming from the outbreak of a terrifying and somewhat mysterious disease. It also captures a strong sense of mistrust in government efforts to control the disease that mirrors the public’s current distrust of the government’s ability to control the MERS outbreak.

Long before his blockbuster film adaptation of the dystopian story “Snowpiercer,” South Korean director Bong Joon-ho envisioned a film about a giant mutant monster living in the Han River.

The Host, continued on page 3

Video | A Radioactive Legacy

The Guardian | If this doesn’t terrify you, nothing will. Between 1946 and 1958, the U.S. used the Enewetak and Bikini atolls in the Pacific as atomic testing grounds. Today, a concrete containment dome is leaking radiation, and the islands themselves are threatened by sea level rise.

For Good Sun Health, Take a Lesson From Vampires

The CDC’s Vital Signs issue looks at steps to prevent skin cancer.

Infant Deaths in Small Town Pit Neighbor vs. Neighbor

Rolling Stone | Every night, Donna Young goes to bed with her pistol, a .45 Taurus Judge with laser attachment. Last fall, she says, someone stole onto her ranch to poison her livestock, or tried to; happily, her son found the d-CON wrapper and dumped all the feed from the troughs. Strangers phoned the house to wish her dead or run out of town on a rail. Local nurses and

Spike City: Unpredictable Drug Is Making Lives Go Up in Smoke

The New York Times | One evening in April, Ethan Darbee, a 24-year-old paramedic in Syracuse, responded to a call on the city’s south side: unknown man down. Rolling up to the scene, he saw a figure lying motionless on the sidewalk. Darbee raked his knuckles across the man’s sternum to assess his level of consciousness. His eyelids fluttered. Inside the ambulance, Spike, continued on page 3

Cannibalism Offers Clue to Diseases of the Brain

Good Magazine | Back in the 1950s, colonial officials and European scientists working in the vast, underexplored interior highlands of Papua New Guinea noted the spread of a strange disease amongst the southern Fore people. Locals called it kuru, the shaking death, as it usually started off as uncontrollable tremors, progressing into dementia and mood swings, and finally over the course of six to 12 months developing into an always-lethal coma. At its height, from 1957 to 1968, kuru killed over 1,100 people, or up to two percent of the population per year, and seemed to hit women, children, and the elderly especially hard. At first, Cannibalism, continued on page 2
Cannibalism, continued

the disease perplexed observers and the Fore alike, leading people to attribute it to anything from a slow-moving virus to a psychosomatic illness to black magic. But eventually, even if the mechanics of the disease remained obscure, the cause revealed itself: kuru was the result of cannibalizing human brains.

Before it was outlawed and slowly eradicated in the 1950s and ‘60s, cannibalism was a key part of honoring the dead for the Fore. Women were tasked with dismembering the bodies of the departed and cooking them for a funerary feast—but they often saved the brains, seen as especially desirable, for themselves, the young, and the elderly. They saw those who died of kuru as fair game to eat as well, helping to spread the disease, which can incubate in the body for up to 40 years before manifesting symptoms. But now, in a strange twist of fate, a group of English and Papuan scientists have discovered that eating human brains and surviving kuru may have led to a rapid evolutionary advance amongst the Fore. This new discovery could help us conquer not just this rare disease, but protect against mad cow disease and even help us to fight back against dementia and Parkinson’s disease as well.

Although this may sound like a random grab bag of diseases, they’re all neurological conditions either definitely or allegedly caused by aberrations in prion proteins.

Read the story, more on kuru, and get information on disorders of the brain.

Glaciers, continued

try and incur avalanches—‘the white death’—on each other’s camps, claiming thousands of lives.

Now, thanks largely to decades of global warming, the Presena glacier running through the battleground is slowly melting away. And with that melting the remains of the White War are slowly emerging. Remarkably well-kept artifacts have been streaming down with the melting water of the glacier since the early 90s: A love letter dated from 1918, to a certain Maria that was never sent. An ode to an old friend, scribbled down in a diary. A love note picturing a sleeping woman, signed, in Czech, “Your Abandoned Wife.”

The meltwater exposes bodies mummified by the cold as well, still wearing their uniforms. In September 2013, the local community of Peio found two young Austrian men.

“The first thing I thought of were their mothers,” Franco Nicolis from the local Archeological Heritage Office told Laura Spinney at the Telegraph. “They feel contemporary. They come out of the ice just as they went in. In all likelihood the soldiers’ mothers never discovered their sons’ fate.”

On the other side of the world, glaciers in the Argentinian Andes have relinquished their grip on a different set of bodies: Incan children sacrificed five hundred years ago, and a young pilot who crashed just a few decades ago.

“It took me a very long time to acknowledge he might be dead,” the pilot’s mother said, reported Stephen Messenger for Treehugger in 2011. “Now we have a body. I can visit my son at his burial site and grieve like any mother has a right to do.”

A different plane carrying 52 passengers crashed into an Alaskan glacier in 1952. An Alaska National Guard helicopter crew found the wreckage in 2012.

But many finds are too ancient to offer comfort to relatives. Instead, those ancient finds are becoming valuable resources for researchers.

“The ice is a time machine,” Lars Pihl, an archaeologist told Andrew Curry in a 2013 article for Archaeology. “When you’re really lucky, the artifacts are exposed for the first time since they were lost.” Global warming has created a kind of boom for this kind of archeology, Curry writes. Melting glaciers have released centuries-old moss, Roman coins, an iron age horse and even ancient forests.

Curry reports:

On one hand, it exposes artifacts and sites that have been preserved in ice for millennia, offering archaeologists a chance to study them. On the other hand, from the moment the ice at such sites melts, the pressure to find, document, and conserve the exposed artifacts is tremendous. “The next 50 years will be decisive,” says Albert Hafner, an archaeologist at the University of Bern who has excavated melting sites in the Alps. “If you don’t do it now they will be lost.”

Read the story, and more about glaciers and climate change.

Who We Are

Hollywood, Health & Society, a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, is a free resource for entertainment writers working on storylines about health, health-care coverage and climate change. Funders have included the CDC, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Grantham Foundation, the Barr Foundation, The California Endowment, the Energy Foundation, ClimateWorks and the Skoll Global Threats Fund.
Vernal, continued

The monster of "The Host" eventually emerges to terrorize Seoul, the South Korean capital, and creates an even bigger crisis when the U.S. military and South Korean government declare the monster to be the host of a mysterious virus. That premise allows the film to create a rich stew of political satire where references to Korean history, politics and culture frequently bubble up in the midst of the chaos. But the heart of the film centers upon a misfit family consisting of a middle-aged father, his two adult sons and daughter, and a granddaughter whose abduction by the monster drives the film’s main tension.

“The Host” mercilessly caricatures the government’s confused response to the supposed virus in the film. Most figures of authority, including police officers, the military, and disease control workers, typically appear officious, apathetic and lacking in empathy. In one scene, a health official wearing a yellow biohazard suit bullies the grieving families of the monster’s initial victims while deflecting their questions about why they’re being put into quarantine. When a main character admits that he’s potentially been exposed to the virus, workers in biohazard suits pounce on him and bundle both him and the family off to the hospital.

Read the story, more about MERS, and watch a trailer from the movie. ■

Spike, continued

Darbee hooked him up to a heart monitor, and he jerked involuntarily. The odd reaction puzzled Darbee. Why would the guy recoil from an electrode sticker but not a sternal rub? The driver started for the hospital. Darbee sat in the captain’s chair in the back of the rig, typing on a laptop. Then he heard a sound no paramedic ever wants to hear: the click of a patient’s shoulder harness unlatching. Swiveling around, he found himself eyeball to eyeball with his patient, who was now crouched on all fours on top of the stretcher, growling.

That same evening, Heather Drake, a 29-year-old paramedic, responded to a call at an apartment complex on the west side. When she arrived, four firefighters were grappling with a 120-pound woman who was flailing and flinging vomit at anyone who came near her. A bystander shouted that the woman was high on “spike” — the prevailing local term for synthetic marijuana, which is more commonly known around the country as spice. But Drake didn’t believe it. Spike didn’t turn people into violent lunatics. Phencyclidine (PCP) or synthetic cathinones (“bath salts”) could do that, maybe even a joint soaked in formaldehyde — but not spike. Drake sprayed a sedative up the woman’s nose and loaded her into the ambulance. A mayday call from another crew came over the radio. In the background static of the transmission, Drake could hear Ethan Darbee yelling.

Darbee’s patient had sprung off the stretcher and knocked him to the floor of the ambulance, punching him repeatedly in the face. Darbee grasped the side-door handle and tumbled into the street. Within moments, the police arrived and quickly subdued the man. Two days later, 19 more spike overdoses would swamp local emergency rooms, more in one day in Syracuse than the number of overdoses reported statewide in most states for all of April.

Read the story, and more on synthetic marijuana. ■

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