

# The Iceman: A 5300-Year-Old Mystery

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Before the pyramids, before Stonehenge, a man fled through a gorge in the alps between Italy and Austria. He was shot in the back with an arrow and left for dead. His body disappeared beneath snow which froze into an icy tomb. Then, around 35 years ago, the ice melted and gave the man back to the world. He had time travelled 5300 years into the 20th century. Because this man was found in the Ötztal Alps, he was named Ötzi. And nicknamed, The Iceman.

## Who was Ötzi?

In 1991, two hikers in the alps saw something strange sticking out of the icy ground. At first, they thought it might have been the body of a missing hiker. When the police examined the remains they suspected there had been a murder and that the victim had been stripped of clothing to prevent any identification. It wasn't until the body was excavated from the frozen ground, using drills and axes, that other interesting objects were found. They were the remnants of clothing, tools and primitive weapons, including a copper axe. The police had found the mummified body of a man who lived in the Neolithic era around 3500 BCE.

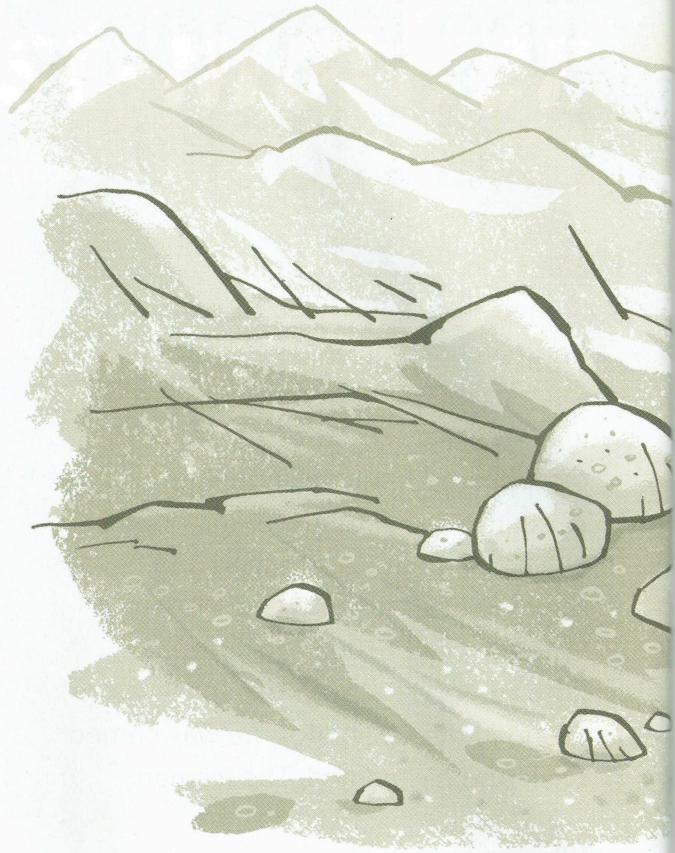


## Detective work

So, what did Ötzi look like? Not long after he was found, scientists from around the world began their investigations. They used advanced scientific instruments including X-rays, CAT scans, MRI, radiocarbon dating and powerful microscopes. They also extracted Ötzi's DNA.

What they found after their scientific detective work was that, when Ötzi was alive, he was about 160 cm tall and weighed about 50 kg. He was around 45 years old. He was right-handed (his weapons revealed this), had brown eyes and hair and type O positive blood. He was probably lactose intolerant! He had Lyme disease, after being bitten by ticks that caused a bacterial infection in his joints and heart. Whipworm parasites were found in his stomach. There were also traces of arsenic. Arsenic was used to shape copper in the Neolithic period. Scientists have speculated that Ötzi may have been a copper worker from a nearby village in the valley.

It took forensic scientists 18 years to find Ötzi's stomach in his body. It wasn't where it should have been; during mummification under the ice, his stomach had moved to a position scrunched beneath his ribs. They discovered that Ötzi's last meal was einkorn wheat and fresh or dried deer and goat meat. There were also traces of toxic fern in his stomach. Could Ötzi have eaten the fern to treat a stomach

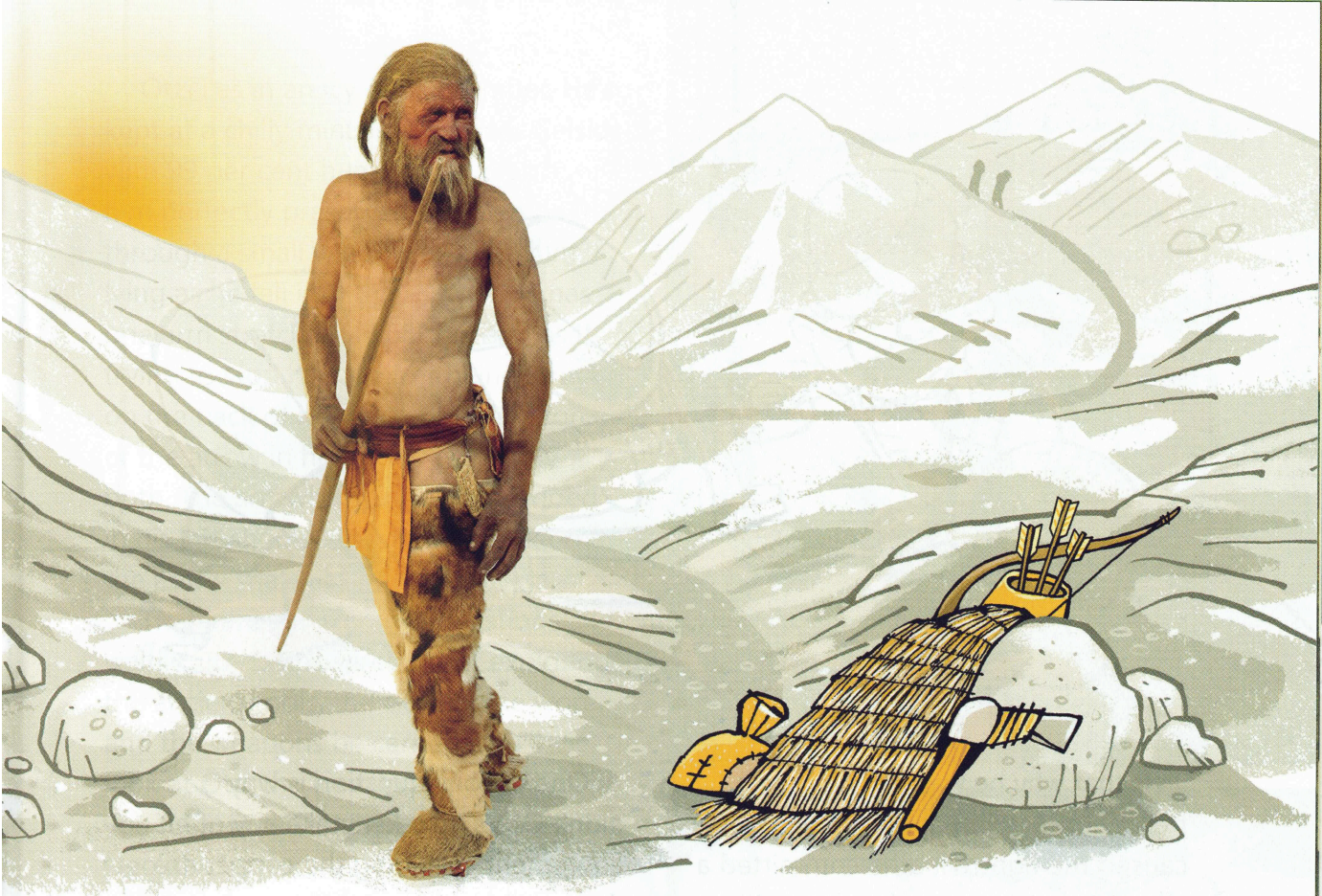


ache caused by the whipworms, or did he wrap his meat in the fern to carry it and swallowed the fern by mistake? That's something we'll never know.

## Dressing for survival

What would you wear if you were trekking across snowy country? Perhaps thermal underwear, leggings, woolly socks, waterproof hiking boots, a fleece shirt, gloves, beanie and an insulated jacket.

Ötzi was also dressed for survival. He wore leather leggings sewn from two different colours of goat skin. His shoes had bearskin soles and deerskin uppers. The soles had anti-slip, leather cross



straps. His boots had an inner netting that held in clumps of hay for insulation to keep his feet warm.

He also wore a loincloth made of soft sheepskin and a calf leather belt with a leather pouch attached. Inside the pouch was a black lump of tinder fungus, also known as hoof fungus. This would have been used to light fires, and it had to be kept dry.

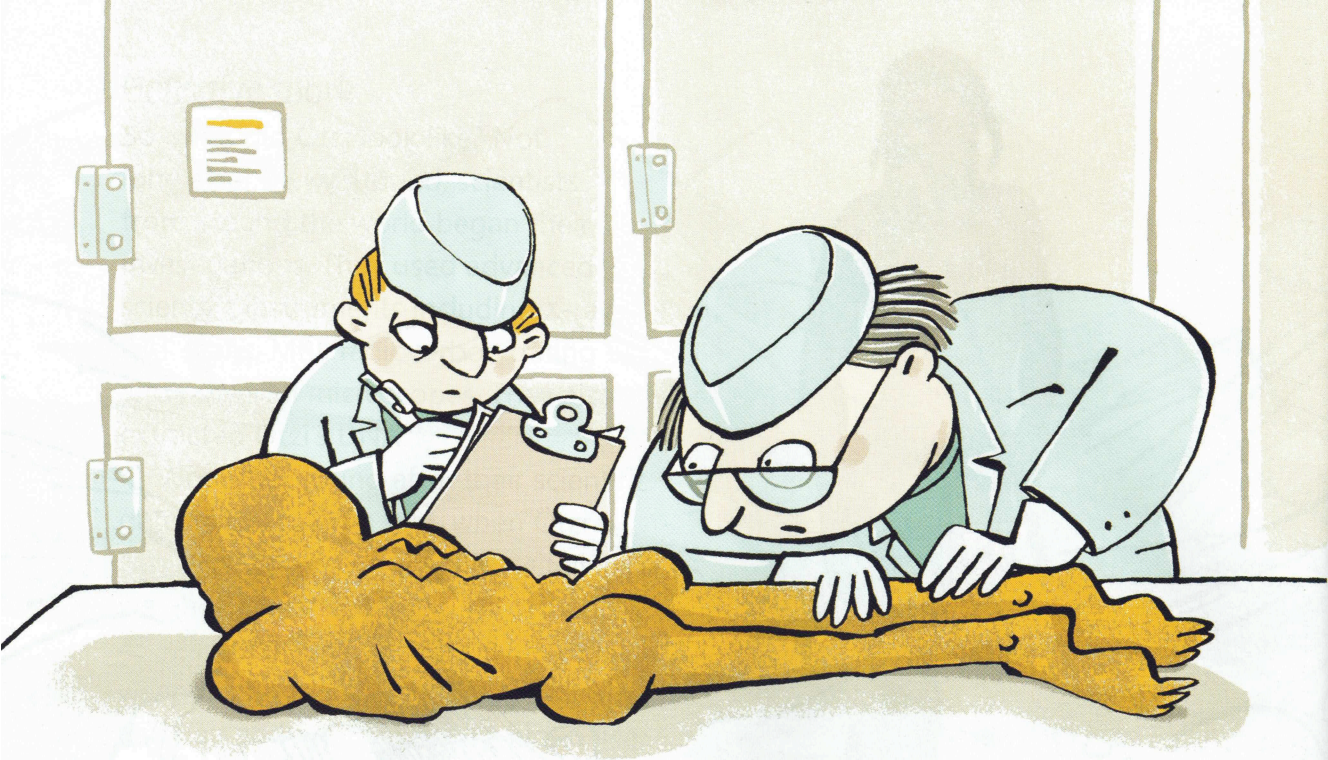
His coat was made from strips of goat leather carefully cross-stitched together. He wore a fur cap made with strips of brown bear fur with two straps to tie beneath his chin. Ötzi was also found with a grass cape. As it had a

string fastening at the top, scientists believe it might have been worn over his head as a raincoat.

### How did Ötzi die?

If Ötzi lived in a village in the valley, why did he flee to the mountains? Why did he trek along a treacherous gorge?

That's where scientific research gives us evidence. There are clues that Ötzi was involved in a fight before he fled the village. He had a deep wound to his right hand that had occurred days before, suggesting he had grabbed a sharp object, like a knife, from an attacker.



Is that why he was fleeing over a treacherous mountain? What could have caused the fight? Had he committed a crime? Had he angered people? What else would make him flee?

By analysing pollen and maple leaves found in one of Ötzi's birch bark containers, botanists determined that it was early summer. Ötzi was resting by a rocky gully, enjoying his meal. The attackers were not far behind. One of them shot an arrow. It pierced Ötzi's shoulder and took him by surprise. Medical evidence at the site where he was found suggests he fell forward into the three by seven-metre gully. He also had a wound to his head, possibly caused by his fall or by someone hitting him from behind with a rock.

One curious question is why didn't Ötzi's attackers take any of his equipment, including the copper axe that would have been of enormous value? Would taking the axe expose the attackers as the murderers?

Ötzi's body was frozen within hours. It was covered by snow which froze into ice. As the mountain's glacier moved over the gully, Ötzi was protected. He lay preserved in his icy tomb for more than fifty centuries.

### The sleeping iceman

Can you see Ötzi today? You sure can. In the northern Italian town of Bolzano, near where Ötzi's frozen mummified body was discovered, the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology is dedicated to him.

Ötzi lies in an icy glass chamber. He's kept at a chilly minus six degrees Celsius with 99 per cent humidity to keep him perfectly preserved. You can peer through a small window and see him lying as he fell into that gorge. He has one arm stretched across his chin as if trying to stop his fall after being struck on the back of his head, or by the force of the arrow in his back, or possibly both. The arrowhead is still embedded in his left shoulder. Did Ötzi break off the arrow shaft or did the murderer?

There are still so many questions waiting to be answered. After exploring the ancient tools, the clothing he wore and the weapons he carried, you'll look at Ötzi the Iceman and feel that you have time travelled back to the Neolithic period.

What do you think people will be discovering 5300 years from now? ■



*An interactive educational display about Ötzi*



Remarkable!  
I wonder if  
they'll find frozen  
jelly in the  
future?

