

FRANK HIBBEN

Anthropologist, archaeologist, explorer and hunter

Those of us who were present at our mini-reunion in Colorado Springs last September had the unique pleasure of hearing Frank talk about some of his far-ranging experiences. It was only six weeks after the invasion of Kuwait, and in addition to some tales about his trips to Iran under the Shah, and his hunting trips with members of the royal family, he concentrated on the history of that embattled region. He refreshed our memories of the Medes and the Persians and the other kingdoms there who fought interminable wars just as they do today; of Alexander the Great's conquest of these same tribes, and how the Iranian upper classes today are the direct descendants of Alexander's elite officer corps many of whom elected to stay in the conquered land rather than return to Greece.

But he didn't scratch the surface of his life as an archaeologist and anthropologist. At the age of ten he decided that he wanted to be an archaeologist, not an electrical engineer as his father wanted. With some pull, he got a job as water boy on an excavation of the Ohio State Museum; then later as Excavating Assistant at several of their digs. Later, at Princeton, he majored in Art and Archaeology, and earned a PhD at Harvard in 1940 in the same discipline. In 1936 he received a Master of Science degree in Zoology at the University of New Mexico.

Right after Princeton, in 1933, he became a junior faculty member at the University of New Mexico, and in the same year founded the Museum of Anthropology there, now known as the Maxwell Museum and one of the nation's finest university museums of human culture. He was its director for 38 years, carried a full teaching load as Professor of Anthropology, becoming one of the University's preeminent scholars. After retirement, Frank and his wife Eleanor, known in their world as Brownie, and who accompanied him in many of his worldwide explorations, gave to the Maxwell Museum their extensive indigenous cultural items, archaeological collections, and large photographic and documentary archives. They also have decided to bequeath their home to the UNM Foundation to be used as a center for cultural studies. It will be known as the Hibben Research Center.

Frank's archaeological research has taken him all over

the world. In the Near East and Africa it has been linked with studies of existing cultures - living with the Shangane tribe in Mozambique, - in Bechuanaland studying the lives and customs of the modern bushmen along with those of ancient paleolithic hunters of the same region. He is renowned for his hunting trips to remote regions of the world as well as for his activities as a practising zoologist.

As head of the New Mexico State Game Commission, the New Mexico Zoological Society and the Albuquerque Zoo, he was instrumental in importing endangered foreign game animals (kudu, ibex, gemsbock, etc.) to the American Southwest for propagation under controlled conditions and subsequent release into the wild. Frank had his own TV series, illustrating his many explorations in remote places.

During World War II, Frank served as a lieutenant-commander in the U.S. Navy. He continues to serve as an advisor to the State Department, offering his knowledge of African and Eastern affairs.

One of his life long interests has been the search for records of the First Americans - who were they, when did they come and what were they like? He has explored the site of the earliest humans known in the U. S., at Candia Cave, not far from Albuquerque, determining that they lived by hunting the mammals feeding in the then fertile plains at the southern edge of the ice sheet about 25,000 years ago. By what route did they come? Geologists know that there was an ice-free corridor down the eastern side of the Rockies. He and "Brownie" have backtracked all the way to Alaska several times looking for signs of a migration and to Siberia twice, even to the Gobi desert - looking for antecedents of the First Americans. Geologists have determined that before the melting of the last ice age, which caused the oceans to rise from 150 to 200 feet, there was a substantial land bridge connecting the two continents. Zoologists point out that today mammals on both sides of the Bering Strait belong to the same species, clearly linked.

On his trip to the Gobi desert in 1979, still on the same search, the U. S. government asked him to plant an instrument for the detection of radioactivity. His exploration was to take him close to Soviet nuclear

testing grounds. He succeeded in doing so, but the communists somehow became suspicious and he was chased across the desert, not a car chase but a camel chase. His camel was shot out from under him, but he was only slightly hurt and was able to mount another camel and make his escape!

His archaeological research still goes on, currently at an early Anasazi ruin near Albuquerque. These were the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians who built a great civilization in the American Southwest in the centuries before Christ, with cities built into the sides of the mountains, great irrigation projects for the growing of their major food staple - corn (maize). Among his discoveries - - a fortified Indian granary in northwestern New Mexico, a 10,000 year old camp in the Vaughan area, an 11 foot mammoth tusk near Hobbs, elaborate cliff houses in the Mogollon Mountains, the spectacular Pottery mound site near Los Lunas and the silver smelter of a Spanish explorer at Comanche Springs.

Frank Hibben could not only write several books, but he already has. His latest came out in 1990, and he has two more in the making. Although he retired in 1976, he is still teaching - - one course at a time. A career, says Frank, is doing what you want to do and having good friends along while you're doing it.



Frank Hibben and Brownie with his Masai lion. This lion had killed 20 Masai cattle and three Masai spearsmen who had tried to stop him.



Frank Dean, Lorna Terrell, Bob and Louise Long, Helen and Frank Mellinger. The Garden of the Gods Club, Colorado Springs, Sept. 1990