

2 December 2008

By: Dan Talpalariu, Science Editor



Iceman accidentally ate six kinds of moss
Wired

[Iceman's First Aid and Last Meal](#)

Recent studies found six different types of moss in Otzi's gut

The 5,000-year-old Tyrolean iceman mummy found in a melting glacier almost two decades ago still has some surprises in store for researchers. As an example, during a recent study, they discovered that the Copper Age man ingested, more or less accidentally or conscientiously, six different moss types, including one that is not present in the area where the mummy was discovered. Possible explanations were found for the presence of most of the mosses.

The well-preserved Iceman, called Otzi, Frozen Fritz or the Similaun Man, was accidentally discovered in the eastern Alps by German tourists back in 1991. Since then, it was found that he was 45 years old when he died from head damage about 5,200 years ago, that he was also hit by an arrow in the shoulder and that he was a hunter-gatherer when he lived, as his last meal included bread and meat. The team of experts led by James Dickson from the University of Glasgow found the moss inside Otzi's bowels very surprising, since none of the plants is either tasty or nutritious, so they deduced that they were most likely accidentally ingested. One of them, *Neckera complanata*, was used for food wrapping, another, *Hymenostylium recurvirostrum*, was surely swallowed while drinking water, and a third, *Sphagnum imbricatum*, was most definitely used to patch a wound. Today, the third is not found in an area 50 km (30 miles) around the location of Iceman's discovery place, which suggests he was a traveler. "The best explanation I can think of is when he was wounded he was in the vicinity of where that particular bogmoss was growing," Dickson told [LiveScience](#). "If he knew of the useful properties of bogmosses, as seems entirely plausible, then he may have gathered some to staunch the wound or wounds," reads the study, "and so tiny pieces could well have stuck to the blood drying on his fingers and then he accidentally ingested some of them when next eating meat or bread as we know he did during his last few days".