



JOURNEY TO THE ANCIENT PAST

The UAE's incredible archeological discoveries provide a gateway to the ancient past during the Archaeology 18 conference.

Sometime between six million and eight million years ago elephants, bigger than the Asian elephants we know today, roamed Abu Dhabi.

That was just one of the findings shared during Archaeology 18, a four-day conference held in Al Ain and attended by world experts and leading archaeologists from throughout the UAE, after three new pathways worn by the mammoth mammals were discovered recently in the Al Dhafra region. At that time, known as the Late Miocene period, the area was a lush savannah.

The latest fossil footprint discovery backs up earlier evidence that elephants once roamed free in the area after initial findings were discovered in the Baynunah region some 15 years ago.

Dr Peter Magee, Head of Archaeology at the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi, said that the latest footprints provided “really unparalleled insights into the herding and habits of these very early animals at a time when Abu Dhabi was completely different in terms of environment”.

The archaeology conference, organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi, took

place at the Danat Al Ain Resort. It explored other local discoveries and evaluated their importance for understanding UAE history.

Attendees learned that early human settlements in the UAE, dating back to the Neolithic period – also known as the last stage of the Stone Age – could be found in Umm Al Quwain and Marawah Island, off the coast of Abu Dhabi. Excavations carried out on the island between 2015 and 2018 have provided insight into a settlement there, dating back to 6000 BC. Arrowheads and decorative vessels are amongst the finds from the site, which Dr Magee described as “really game-changing evidence in how we understand that period, not just here but more broadly throughout the Middle East”.

Earlier this year, Dr Magee was awarded the Sheikh Mubarak Bin Mohammad Award for Natural History. He was presented the award by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the UAE's Minister of Tolerance and Patron of the Emirates Natural History Group, during a special dinner in Abu Dhabi to mark the group's 40th anniversary.



Dr Magee has made major contributions to the archaeology sector in the UAE over the last 25 years, since he first arrived in the country in 1992. His major achievements include excavations at the key sites of Tell Abraq and Muwailah in Sharjah, his publication on ceramics from Awhalla in Fujairah, and his book on *The Archaeology of Prehistoric Arabia*, published by Cambridge University Press.

The archaeology conference also heard that Neolithic camel hunters were active in the Baynunah region, as evidenced by the first “kill site” found in the Arabian peninsula, and learned too of discoveries from the Bronze Age in Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah.

“To understand our present and to plan for the future, we must first understand the past,” said Saif Saeed Ghobash, Director General, DCT Abu Dhabi. “Archaeology gives us insight into our common human history but also into the specific development of civilisations in our region. There is so much to learn and explore.”

Dubai’s ancient history has also been put under the spotlight recently in *Dubai BC*, a programme

launched by the Government of Dubai Media Office (GDMO). The 10-part documentary series explores Dubai’s ancient past and was produced by GDMO in collaboration with Loay Al Shareef, a researcher of ancient Arab civilisations.

Al Shareef told April’s Arab Media Forum how *Dubai BC* was filmed in five ancient archaeological sites in Sarouq Al Hadid, Hatta, Al Qusais, Al Sufouh and Al Eshoush in Dubai. Reporting the facts as revealed by archaeological excavations, *Dubai BC* offers insights into civilisations that flourished in the Arabian Peninsula before the birth of Christ, starting from the third millennium BC. Apart from the unique social, economic and cultural characteristics of these civilisations, the documentary takes a deeper look at the significant migrations that shaped the region’s ancient history.

Director of Media Services at GDMO, Salem Belyouha said: “History is the starting point for every nation’s effort to shape its future. Our understanding of our past greatly enriches our vision for the future as well as our current interactions with other cultures.

Above: Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman, and Saif Saeed Ghobash, Director-General, of the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi, visit Marawah Island to review the progress being made by archaeologists working on excavation sites





Above: Thick layer (about a meter thick) of fossilized sea shells from the Cretaceous age, found in Hatta

Right: HH Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance, presents the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammad for Natural History Award to Dr Peter Magee

“Dubai BC provides new perspectives on how Dubai’s present strengths have its roots in the past. For example, the discoveries made at ancient archaeological sites show how Dubai’s openness to other civilisations has always been one of its key advantages,” added Belyouha. He said the documentary series, which features English sub-titles for non-Arabic speakers, was an opportunity to “introduce the history and heritage of UAE and Dubai to the world”.

Al Shareef told the Arab Media Forum: “Those who research the history of the UAE will find a lot of monuments and artifact. The territory is modern, but has history that dates back to thousands of years.”

Other finds that have got archeologists excited this year include the skeleton of a child discovered in the ancient city of Pompeii in southern Italy. The Archaeological Superintendence of Pompeii said the skeleton belongs to a 7-to-9-year-old victim of Mount Vesuvius, a volcano that erupted in the year 79 AD, burying the city at its base in ash. The skeleton was buried under a layer of ash about 10 centimetres thick.



Egypt’s Antiquities Ministry has announced the discovery of an ancient necropolis near the Nile Valley city of Minya, south of Cairo, and in Germany, a teenager and amateur archaeologist armed with metal detectors discovered a medieval treasure trove on the island of Rügen, consisting of braided necklaces, pearls, brooches, a Thor’s hammer (a representation of a mythical weapon forged by dwarves), rings and up to 600 chipped coins. It’s believed the stash belonged to King Harald

Bluetooth — the Danish ruler who inspired the name for Bluetooth technology.

In the UAE, it's fitting that another ancient find is being used to symbolize modernity. Back in 2002, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, was flying in a helicopter over the Rub Al Khali desert, south of Dubai, when he noticed an area of sand different in colour. A settlement from the Iron Age was discovered upon further investigation.

The Saruq Al-Hadid archaeological site has so far offered up thousands of artifacts, including a haul of jewellery. The design of an elaborate gold ring discovered at the site inspired the logo for Dubai's Expo 2020 – a “festival of human ingenuity”.

Sheikh Mohammed claims the Expo 2020 logo “represents our message to the world that our civilisation has deep roots. We were and will always be a pot that gathers civilisations and a centre for innovation.” He added: “The people who lived in this land had a deep creative spirit and today the people of this country are building the nation's future for centuries to come.”

Below: Discoveries at Saruq Al-Hadid archaeological site, one of the most important Iron Age sites in the Arabian Peninsula

