

TechNews

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SINCE 1928

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SUBMISSIONS

TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59PM on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsiit.com.

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Ethiopian Expedition:

Desert days, rocky nights

By Sebastian Morales Prado
TECHNEWS WRITER

He was right when he said that by the end of this trip everything would seem just like a dream; you are eating lunch at the cafeteria, and the next thing you know you are chilling, breathing peacefully, sitting on the surface of the moon watching the sun slowly disappear. Then, everything suddenly turns really cold, and the only source of light is an immense ring of fire and the millions of stars - you just experienced a real lunar eclipse. Everything somehow makes sense until you realize it doesn't, and no matter how hard you try, everything ends up falling apart; once again you find yourself lying down inside your cozy bed, staring at the ceiling. Dreams. Well, (not that I want this to end) I'm still waiting for this to fall apart.

I find myself comfortably sitting down next to a huge bottle of water, surrounded by attentive waiters, each patiently waiting for me to raise my hand and fulfill my nonexistent wishes.

My ears are calmed by the relaxing sound of water splashing against more water in the multiple fountains around me. In the mean time, my eyes are hypnotized by the never-ending waves in Lake Awasa. To think that not even two days ago water was a fairy tale the Afar people would tell themselves while they walked infinitely long hours under the unforgiving sun makes me wonder if all of this really happened, or if I am about to wake up somewhere.

The Afar desert in two words is simply: Dirt (and) sky. And believe me when I tell you that there is more dirt than sky. The landscape is sandpaper observed through a microscope, but a little rougher. My dear Mexican friends: I have found the perfect place to never take a nap. The only vegetation consists of small bushes with

lots of thorns, and rocks of every size are strewn about. Once in a while you see a lost gazelle jumping around or a camel spitting out the thorns he had for breakfast. To think that most of this place used to be covered by lakes just adds to my confusion. But it was then, millions of years ago, that our primitive ancestors walked these same lands of Afar and today, millions of years later, I find myself observing archeologists uncover what could be the lost link we all (being believers in evolution) have been waiting for.

Tired of their patience, tired of complacently observing history unfold in front of my own hands, I decided to get them dirty (something extremely easy to do here) and get myself into the history books as the lucky locator of the missing link. Motivated, and with a heart full of hope, I embarked on a journey searching for that fossilized bone which would lead us to the discovery of the *Sebastralopithecus*.

But first, sunscreen, and lots of it. Once protected from the sun and armed with my sharpest vision, the one I used to use while finding Waldo as a kid, I decided to go north, or was it south? Well, I decided to go and that's all that mattered. To my surprise, it didn't take me long to make my first discovery; archeologists must really love their job.

An hour passed, but I wouldn't argue if someone told me it was only ten minutes, and all I had found was admiration for the passion and patience of the archeologists. Disappointed and with my head down (down because I was still looking), I turned around and started my walk back towards the rest of the group.

Far behind the hills, songs would rise into the winds, and once in a while you would see the silhouette of an Afar shepherd looking after his few goats. The sun was slowly setting, which meant that we would soon go

back to the camp, have delicious food, lots of water, and relax for the rest of the night. This also meant that there was one last shot of adrenaline which we would use to race in our Land Cruisers against the sun and make it back to the camp before he settled completely; time when the nonexistent roads merged into the uniform irregularity of the landscape.

And there it was! Right in front of my left foot; between those two (million) rocks, the molar of the *Sebastralopithecus* I had been looking for!

Hiding my excitement, I delicately placed a marking flag at the spot where my ancestor's tooth had landed so I knew where to come back. I stood up so fast that my blood didn't get the message, and I had to fight against an earthquake not to fall toward that sandpaper ground.

Finally, when my blood got to my brain I hid my hurry and walked towards an experienced archeologist (I forgot his name) who was also searching the area. I placed the molar in his hand while mine was invisibly shaking.

He stared at it for no longer than two seconds, looked into my eyes and with a deep smile he said, almost in a secret voice, "It's just a beautiful rock" and he laughed while letting it fall back into the ground.

My dreams of the *Sebastralopithecus* are all gone, at least for the next couple million years. However, two teeth were found, and the archeologists believe that they belong to the same jaw of an early primate; who knows, maybe I did partake in the discovery of something amazing without even knowing it, but isn't this what happens with all discoveries?

This is the second of three installments covering Sebastian's summer trip to Ethiopia. Do you have something similar to share or an opinion to declare? Email opinion@technewsiit.com for more information.



Photo by Sebastian Morales Prado

Hookahs on campus considered 'drug paraphernalia'

By Chris Schaffer
TECHNEWS WRITER

It was recently brought to my attention that the 2011-2012 Illinois Institute of Technology Student Handbook has a rather concise list of what it considers "drug paraphernalia". This list, along with various other drug-related topics, can be found under section six of the Code of Conduct. This section clearly states that illicit drugs and many drug-related possessions are simply not allowed on the university's property. In my opinion, most of this is understandable. The university, like any other organization, wants none of the notoriety surrounding drugged-out college kids. Unfortunately, one item did happen to make the short list of drug paraphernalia which is completely unacceptable: the hookah.

For many, the hookah is a cultural icon. It is, more or less, a harmless device used to relax and socialize with close friends and family. As a quick history lesson for those of you who may not know, the hookah has been in use since the mid-1500s. As the popularity of tobacco in the Middle East grew, so too did the awareness of its impact on an individual's

health. As a result, the hookah was created as a way to help cool and purify the smoke inhaled. It quickly became one of the most preferable apparatuses for smoking tobacco.

The hookah was developed strictly as a means through which one could smoke tobacco - a perfectly legal substance here in the United States. Calling it "drug paraphernalia" implies that it is used as a device for delivering illegal substances to the body. And while it may be true that marijuana can be smoked with the use of a hookah, there is no limit to the ingenuity of man when it comes to smoking apparatuses. For example, one can just as easily smoke weed out of an apple, which is one of the items the school happens to permit students to take from the MTCC Commons. Does this now make apples drug paraphernalia? If so, then it seems that IIT is willingly distributing apparatuses with which to smoke illegal substances to its students! Now we all know this is not the case, nor is it the intent of the university, but at the same time, why is the hookah any worse than the apple?

In addition to this bit of hypocrisy, calling the hookah "drug paraphernalia" is culturally insensitive. As stated previously, hookahs are

deeply rooted in many Middle Eastern cultures. To make the issue more frustrating, the provost of IIT even admits that this is insensitive, yet refuses to do anything about it unless someone of Middle Eastern descent is offended by this:

"For anyone born outside of the Middle East, this is not culturally insensitive," said Alan Cramb, Provost of the Illinois Institute of Technology.

By this logic, it appears we can be as ignorant of others' cultures as we like...so long as they aren't the ones speaking up. Given the diversity of IIT, I think this is potentially one of the worst viewpoints to be upheld.

In summary, the hookah is perfectly legal in this country, state, and city. Why is this also not the case at IIT? It is a piece of culture and a great way to safely enjoy the company of others. There is no reason that the school should include the hookah, of all devices, as a piece of drug paraphernalia.

If you have an issue with the way IIT abuses its drug policy, all I ask is that you, the students of IIT, demand a change in policy from the provost and the dean of students! Feel free to e-mail them with your opinions at cramb@iit.edu and murphy@iit.edu.