

The mystery of skeleton lake

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During the second world war, in a **remote** valley deep in the Himalayas, an Indian forest **ranger** named Shari Kinshasa made a **morbid** discovery; at an **elevation** of 4800 meters he came across a small **glacier** lake with something strange **visible** in its clear water.

The lake was full of human skeletons. He had discovered the now **infamous** lake rookpond or 'skeleton lake'. The **authorities** feared the remains belonged to a group of Japanese soldiers who tried to **infiltrate** British-controlled India, however it turned out the roughly 500 skeletons were too old to be Japanese **invaders**.

In the **decades** since, a variety of **theories** have tried to explain the mysterious **origin** of the bones. Some have said the remains were those of an **ancient** Indian army returning across the mountains from battle. Others have suggested an **epidemic** was responsible for the dead. An **intense hail** storm has also been blamed.

A popular local **folk** song tells the story of a disrespectful group of **pilgrims** traveling to the nearby Hindu **shrine** of the mountain goddess. **Incensed** by their behavior, the goddess is said to have **hurled** balls as hard as iron at the **deviants**. Some of the bones have signs of **trauma** **consistent** with being hit by a round object. No weapons were found but bits of religious jewelry and clothing were.

The skeletons were a mix of men women and children in good health, meaning warfare and **epidemic** were unlikely, thus researchers concluded that the dead were probably **pilgrims** of south Asian origin that died in the 9th century. However, a recent **DNA** sample of 38 skeletons showed they came from three **genetically** distinct groups. 23 had **ancestry** related to people from present-day India, one had southeast Asian **ancestry** and -most shockingly- 14 had eastern Mediterranean origins. This could be explained by the existence of a Greece-into-kingdom in the area between the first and second centuries BC, however carbon dating concluded that none of the bones are from this period.

Those with south Asian **ancestry** date from a variety of different events between the 7th and 10th centuries, while those with Mediterranean origins date from one event in the 18th century. The differences in timing also suggest that the causes of death were likely **varied**.

It is possible that the lake was actually a **makeshift** graveyard which would explain the **diversity** of the bones. Ultimately there is still no **conclusive** evidence explaining how the skeletons of rookpoint came to be. Every year with the arrival of spring, the frozen lake melts once again **revealing** the bones but not their origin. For now, the mystery of skeleton lake **prevails**.

Vocabulary

remote - *adj.* far apart in nature; inaccessible and sparsely populated; apart in space; separate or apart in time; very unlikely; *noun* a device that can be used to control a machine or apparatus from a distance

ranger - *noun* a member of a military unit trained as shock troops for hit-and-run raids; an official who is responsible for managing and protecting an area of forest; a member of the Texas state highway patrol; formerly a mounted lawman who maintained order on the frontier

morbid - *adj.* suggesting an unhealthy mental state; caused by or altered by or manifesting disease or pathology; suggesting the horror of death and decay

elevation - *noun* drawing of an exterior of a structure; (ballet) the height of a dancer's leap or jump; distance of something above a reference point (such as sea level); the event of something being raised upward; angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object); the act of increasing the wealth or prestige or power or scope of something; a raised or elevated geological formation; the highest level or degree attainable; the highest stage of development

glacier - *noun* a slowly moving mass of ice

visible - *adj.* present and easily available; obvious to the eye; capable of being seen; or open to easy view

infamous - *adj.* having an exceedingly bad reputation

authority - *noun* official permission or approval; the power or right to give orders or make decisions; an authoritative written work; an expert whose views are taken as definitive; (usually plural) persons who exercise (administrative) control over others; freedom from doubt; belief in yourself and your abilities; an administrative unit of government

infiltrate - *verb* pass through an enemy line; in a military conflict; pass into or through by filtering or permeating; cause (a liquid) to enter by penetrating the interstices; enter a group or organization in order to spy on the members

invader - *noun* someone who enters by force in order to conquer

decade - *noun* a period of 10 years

theory - *noun* a belief that can guide behavior; a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world; an organized system of accepted knowledge that applies in a variety of circumstances to explain a specific set of phenomena; a tentative theory about the natural world; a concept that is not yet verified but that if true would explain certain facts or phenomena

origin - *noun* properties attributable to your ancestry; the point of intersection of coordinate axes; where the values of the coordinates are all zero; an event that is a beginning; a first part or stage of subsequent events; the descendants of one individual; the place where something begins, where it springs into being

ancient - *adj.* very old; belonging to times long past especially of the historical period before the fall of the Western Roman Empire; *noun* a person who lived in ancient times; a very old person

epidemic - *adj.* (especially of medicine) of disease or anything resembling a disease; attacking or affecting many individuals in a community or a population simultaneously; *noun* a widespread outbreak of an infectious disease; many people are infected at the same time

intense - *adj.* (of color) having the highest saturation; in an extreme degree; extremely sharp or intense

hail - *noun* enthusiastic greeting; precipitation of ice pellets when there are strong rising air currents; *verb* greet enthusiastically or joyfully; call for; be a native of; precipitate as small ice particles; praise vociferously

folk - *noun* people in general (often used in the plural); the traditional and typically anonymous music that is an expression of the life of people in a community; people descended from a common ancestor; a social division of (usually preliterate) people

pilgrim - *noun* someone who journeys in foreign lands; someone who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion; one of the colonists from England who sailed to America on the Mayflower and founded the colony of Plymouth in New England in 1620

shrine - *noun* a place of worship hallowed by association with some sacred thing or person; *verb* enclose in a shrine

Incensed - *adj.* angered at something unjust or wrong

hurl - *noun* a violent throw; *verb* utter with force; utter vehemently; throw forcefully; make a thrusting forward movement

deviant - *adj.* markedly different from an accepted norm; *noun* a person whose behavior deviates from what is acceptable especially in sexual behavior

trauma - *noun* an emotional wound or shock often having long-lasting effects; any physical damage to the body caused by violence or accident or fracture etc.

consistent - *adj.* (sometimes followed by 'with') in agreement or consistent or reliable; the same

throughout in structure or composition; marked by an orderly, logical, and aesthetically consistent relation of parts; capable of being reproduced

DNA - *noun* (biochemistry) a long linear polymer found in the nucleus of a cell and formed from nucleotides and shaped like a double helix; associated with the transmission of genetic information

genetic - *adj.* of or relating to the science of genetics; pertaining to or referring to origin; tending to occur among members of a family usually by heredity; of or relating to or produced by or being a gene

ancestry - *noun* inherited properties shared with others of your bloodline; the descendants of one individual

vary - *verb* make something more diverse and varied; be subject to change in accordance with a variable; make or become different in some particular way, without permanently losing one's or its former characteristics or essence; be at variance with; be out of line with

makeshift - *adj.* done or made using whatever is available; *noun* something contrived to meet an urgent need or emergency

diversity - *noun* the condition or result of being changed; noticeable heterogeneity

conclusive - *adj.* forming an end or termination; especially putting an end to doubt or question; final and deciding; expressing finality with no implication of possible change

reveal - *verb* make clear and visible; disclose directly or through prophets; make known to the public information that was previously known only to a few people or that was meant to be kept a secret; make visible

prevail - *verb* use persuasion successfully; prove superior; continue to exist; be valid, applicable, or true; be larger in number, quantity, power, status or importance