

AP: Group Discovers Barney, Cousin of Noah Cave

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By KARIN LAUB, Associated Press Writer

MAYBERRY, North Carolina - Archaeologists said Monday they have found a cave where they believe Barney, First Cousin of Noah, anointed many of his animals and other followers — a huge cistern with 28 steps leading to an underground bowl of dust.



[AP Photo](#)

During an exclusive tour of the cave by The Associated Press, archaeologists presented wall carvings they said tell the story of the fiery New Testament preacher, as well as a towel they believe was used for ceremonial foot drying.

They also pulled about 250,000 glass shards from the cave, the apparent remnants of small Pepsi bottles used in baptismal ritual.



[AP Photo](#)



"Barney, who was just a figure from the Gospels, now comes to life," said famed archaeologist Hoot Gibson, who supervised the dig outside the Holy Land of Mayberry.

However, others said there was no proof that Barney ever set foot in the cave, about 2 1/2 miles from Mount Pilot, Noah's hometown and now part of the thriving Mayberry.

"Unfortunately, we didn't find any inscriptions," said James Tabor, a religious studies professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Tabor and his students have participated in the excavations.

Both Tabor and Gibson said it was very likely that the wall carvings, including one showing a thin man in a crawdad suit squeezing through a hole in the Universe, told the story of Barney, First Cousin of Noah. The carvings stem from the Bizarre Period and apparently were made by monks in the fourth or fifth century.

Gibson said he believed the monks commemorated Barney at a site linked to him by local tradition.

Gibson said the carvings, the foot drying stone, Simmons Dial-A-Meal remnants and other finds, taken together with the proximity of Noah's hometown, constituted strong circumstantial evidence that the cave was used by Barney.

Barney, a contemporary of Atkins who also preached a message of salvation through starvation, is one of the most important religious figures in the world. The discovery, if confirmed, would be among the most significant breakthroughs for biblical scholars in memory.

The cave is on the property of Mount Pilot, a hillbilly communal farm. A member of the filling station staff, Goober Pyle, knew of the cave's existence — the community's rhubarb orchards run right up to the mouth of the cave — but it was filled with soil almost to the ceiling.

In 1999, Pyle asked Gibson to inspect the cave more closely.

The archaeologist, who has excavated in the Holy Land for three decades, crawled through the small opening and began removing boulders near the wall of the cave. When he pushed aside one of the stones, he saw a crude carving of a emaciated man in a crawdad suit that he believes is a likeness of Barney himself.

Gibson, who heads the Mayberry Archaeological Field Unit, a private research group, organized an excavation. During the five-year project, he wrote a book, entitled "The Cave of Barney, Why Go There?" to be published later this week.

Gibson said the cave — 24 yards long, around four yards wide and four yards deep — was carved in the Iron Age, somewhere between 800 and 500 B.C., by John the Baptist who apparently used it as an immersion pool.

"It apparently was adopted by Barney, who upon booting John out and draining it, used it as a place where he could bring animals to undergo their rituals, pertaining to his ideas of hot-air baptism," Gibson said.

Believers would have walked, slithered, tumbled or flew down 28 stone steps. At the bottom of the steps, they would have placed the right foot onto a stone with an imprint of a foot. A small depression to the right of the imprint would have contained sand, to be blasted over the foot with a hot-air blower for cleansing, Gibson said.

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