



What's Happening

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39120 Argonaut Way #335 Fremont, CA 94538  
510.484.1999 Fax: 510.794.2462  
tricityvoice@aol.com

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## DNA exhibit points the way back home



by Julie Grabowski

Think you know where your ancestors came from? Expect some surprising revelations from the new exhibit at Cal State East Bay. The C.E. Smith Museum of Anthropology invites visitors to embark on a 60,000-year journey illuminating the genetic trail of mankind by DNA analysis.

The university museum was established in 1975 as a teaching facility for working with artifacts. Named in honor of Dr. Clarence E. Smith, an original member of the Anthropology Department, students enrolled in Anthropology 3710 -Anthropology and Museums - are responsible for assembling exhibits and serve as docents. Exhibit topics are determined by the students' interests, on-hand collections, and according to Associate Director Marjorie Rhodes-Ousley, the imagination of the Museum's Director, Dr. George Miller.

"With anthropology there is an incredible gamut of subjects you can cover," says Rhodes-Ousley. Past displays have included Kachina dolls of the Hopi in Arizona, and the ancient Incan fortress city of Machu Picchu in the Andes. "It's a great learning experience," says Rhodes-Ousley of the hands-on work and out-of-classroom opportunity. "It's always a real creative endeavor on everyone's part. You never know what you're going to get."

Dr. Miller's class on ancestry coupled with his interest in DNA research and the affordable technology used for ancestral study gave rise to the current exhibit, DNA: Cracking the Ancestor Code. The exhibit is based on an out-of-Africa hypothesis, which states: "Every human shares a common origin that is descendant from a small group of 20,000 people in Africa."

Two panels flank the entrance to the museum, introducing visitors to the concepts of DNA and examples of genealogical genetics. "DNA Solves History's Mysteries" examines the family line of historical people such as Thomas Jefferson, Luke the Evangelist, and Fraulein Unbekannt, the woman who claimed to be Anastasia Romanov, putting to rest questions of parentage and identity.

"Ernie Ebayley's Adventure in DNA-land" is a cartoon journey through the process of ancestral DNA identification, which is further expanded in a free booklet listing books, website, and DVD resources. Inside the museum, visitors follow human migration from the ice-encrusted floor of the Ice Age Europe gallery to cultural artifacts of Asia and the Americas in the west gallery. The journey is enhanced by displays, interactive exhibits, video presentations and personal stories.

Color-coded exhibit guides allow visitors to follow "personal migration maps," discover haplotypes (an individual set of tested genetic markers), identify haplogroups (large groups of similar haplotypes) and ancestral origins. Artifacts including traditional clothing and jewelry of Persia, Mexican ceramic figures, and Japanese paper art and lettered scrolls are featured. Information about students, faculty and staff who have had ancestral DNA testing appears throughout the exhibit, indicating their haplogroups and ancestral discoveries.

DNA: Cracking the Ancestor Code is an impressive professional display, thorough and begging for interaction from visitors. Those planning to attend should go armed with their thinking caps in order to embrace the voluminous offering of information. This is a fascinating exploration of heritage - everyone's including your own!

An audio tour is available as an additional aid and can be downloaded into iPods or MP3 players from a link on the museum's web page. Rhodes-Ousley identifies the exhibit as their most scientific endeavor and says the audio option can "help people see through the process. If you follow it in an order you get a better understanding of the material." She thinks it is amazing to be able to trace a personal history and pinpoint information that applies to you and believes visitors will feel the same. "It puts you in touch with the world."

The exhibit is open Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and admission is free. Metered parking is available along West Loop Road or day permits can be purchased for Parking Lot C for \$1.50. For more information call (510) 885-7414 or visit <http://class.csueastbay.edu/anthropologymuseum/>.

DNA: Cracking the Ancestor Code  
March 2-June 15 (closed March 26-30, May 28)  
Monday-Friday  
10 a.m.-4 p.m.