

Middle Schoolers Discover 7,000-Year-Old Mummy in Chile

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A group of sixth- to eighth-graders on a field trip in Chile are being heralded as the "tiny Indiana Joneses" of their hometowns after discovering the remains of a mummy estimated to be 7,000 years old. Local media suggest that a powerful earthquake in April could be responsible for bringing the archaeological find to the surface.

According to Chilean newspaper *La Tercera*, the children found the mummy while digging on a field trip on Saturday in the northern region of Arica, where previous field trips had also yielded Incan plates, pottery, and clothing belonging to the long-defunct Chinchorro people.



Photo: *La Tercera*

The children, the newspaper notes, were ecstatic to become part of history. Thirteen-year-old Mijael Flores, the top student in his class, explained to the paper that he has "always liked dinosaurs, which is why I want to be a paleontologist." His mother said Flores did not eat all day upon finding the mummy "out of excitement," and that she herself – who lived in Italy for a decade after giving birth to him and recently returned – was very proud.

Officials at the America School organizing the field trip explained that they found it extremely enriching for children to look for clues into their own cultural past. Professor Hans Neira told the paper that, "since we live in a triborder zone, students find it harder to identify with their roots... finding archaeological vestiges presented them with their own history." Arica, where the school is located, is close to both the borders with Bolivia and Perú.

The mummy is believed to be a remnant of Chile's Chinchorro culture, which *National Geographic* described in 1995 as "prehistoric fisherfolk who lived in scattered villages along the desert coast of Chile and Peru." The culture is mostly remembered for its elaborate mummification procedures, as the mummies have been found millennia later. Most Chinchorro mummies are believed to be 2,000 years older than mummies of pharaohs found in Egypt. As *National Geographic* also explains, the Chinchorro people had three different ways of mummifying humans throughout their existence.

The Agence France-Presse notes that some are speculating that the mummy found this weekend surfaced after a devastating 8.2 magnitude earthquake hit Chile in April. Separate pieces of a different mummy were also found in the same area after the earthquake, creating much promise among the archaeological community that this latest discovery will not be the last of its kind in the region.