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LETTERS

Mining Memories of West Virginia

As a native West Virginian, I traveled U.S. 119 many times and crossed Blair Mountain ("Mountaintop Rescue," January/February 2012). Being the granddaughter of two coal miners, I have experienced life in coal camps or company communities. I remember miners, black from head to foot, and widows struggling.

The mountains may be forever—the coal is not. Alternative and sustainable energy is possible and profitable without destroying the environment to reap profits from finite resources in such a manner.

Beverly Henderson
Jackson, OH

Alternative Uses for Fulachtaí Fia

I am a weaver, and the first thing that came to mind when I saw the photo of the fulacht fiadh ("Mystery of the Fulacht Fiadh," January/February 2012) was that they might have been used as retting (soaking) ponds for making flax into linen.

Kristine Franklin
Hibbing, MN

The Irish of the day were concerned with cattle and hunting. One of the big threats to large animals in boggy areas is losing the animal in the bog. The animals, domestic or wild, try to go to open water to drink but then get trapped. So why not make a simple structure that gathers water short of the dangerous areas? These troughs would likely get stale after a period of time and become havens for all sorts of nasty parasites. Why not drop in a few hot rocks and purify the water?

Brian and Wendy Connolly
Pittsburgh, PA

ARCHAEOLOGY welcomes mail from readers. Please address your comments to ARCHAEOLOGY, 36-36 33rd Street, Long Island City, NY 11106, fax 718-472-3051, or e-mail letters@archaeology.org. The editors reserve the right to edit submitted material. Volume precludes our acknowledging individual letters.

I would suggest that these constructions were used for the tanning of leather. Many of the site characteristics you mention—local water source, soaking tub, wood ashes, heated rocks, and local botanicals, like peat or tree bark—are all important in tanning. Also, the isolation from dwellings coincides with traditional locations of tanneries because of the stench of the process.

Kelvin Kreymborg
Denver, CO



Rhinoceros? Or Elephant?

In "Drawing Paleolithic Romania" (January/February 2012), we ran a photo from Coliboaia Cave and wrote that it "clearly shows a rhinoceros." Many readers wrote us to dispute our (and the researcher's) interpretation. Here are a few of the comments:

The drawing looks much more like an elephant with its trunk raised. The points that may look like rhinoceros horns are probably tusks.

Cinda Glenn
Cincinnati, OH

Perhaps the rhinoceros is behind the elephant.

John P. Taylor
West Plains, MO

Cave art expert Jean Clottes responds:

We always interpret images with what we know best, which may be misleading when out of context. In the Ice Age, there were no elephants in Europe, only mammoths—and Paleolithic artists did not draw them like that. In particular, they always showed the big hump of the mammoth's head in strong relief. The Coliboaia rhino head is quite typical of the way they rendered rhinos, with their two horns and sketchy ears.