The Osireion at Abydos
Jim Westerman
Berkeley — September 23, 2011

Abydos lies along the Nile downriver of the fabled sites at Luxor. Travel around the large bend in the river to a site where few do. Here was the capital of early dynastic Egypt before the center of government moved to Memphis. Here remains one of the finest New Kingdom temples, built under Seti I. Behind the temple lies the Osireion, a space identified with the afterlife, in honor of Osiris. Few visitors come; Egypt offers so many riches and time can be short.

James Westerman FN98, director of the Abydos Research Project, will give a presentation on his archaeological analysis of the Osireion and reveal his new discoveries while addressing some of the fundamental questions about Osireion resulting from his 25-year, systematic investigation of this unique structure.

“ar findings indicate that the people who built this structure were superb engineers,” says Westerman. “Our discoveries shed a new light on the site, design, and religious implications of the Osireion. We are trying to answer six fundamental questions about the structure: 1) Why was it built? 2) When was it built? 3) How was it built? 4) Why was it built in water? 5) Where is the source of the water? 6) What, if anything, is in the voids in the core of the building?”

About the Osireion
This building, buried in the sands west of the Seti I Temple—one of the most impressive and unique religious edifices in Egypt—was first discovered in 1902-03 by archaeologists Mrs. Flinders Petrie and Ms. Margaret Murray. Their preliminary excavations uncovered the first stones and rooms. Further excavations took place from 1912 to 1914, under the leadership of Eduoard Naville. Expedition work stopped during WWI, but field work was resumed in 1925-26 under the leadership of Henri Frankfort. From 1926 on, no further physical archaeological investigations took place until 1986, when James Westerman began his investigations of the structure.

About James Westerman
As noted, Westerman started his technical investigation of the Osireion in 1986 and, under the auspices of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, and has worked ever since on the project with a series of Egyptologists and geologists. Westerman has published original papers about the Seti I temple; has excavated in the Seti I temple; and has used advanced scientific techniques to make new discoveries in the Osireion.

In addition to being director of the Abydos Research Project, James Westerman has distinguished himself with his investigative work at Machu Picchu, Peru, and on The Island of the Sun, Bolivia, where he has also made major discoveries. He is the Chapter Chair of the Chicago/Great Lakes Chapter of the Explorers Club.

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Alan Nichols FN84 completed his term as chairman of the Northern California Chapter in grand style by arranging a dinner for 130 at the California Academy of Science’s African Hall on May 20. He spoke eloquently about his research and subsequent 2010 flag expedition to Mongolia tracing the steps of paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews (a former president of the Club) and seeking the burial place of Chinggis Qa’an. He put forth his deductions as to why the 13th century ruler of the world was not where centuries of explorers and grave hunters have sought. He used his extensive understanding of sacred mountains, his readings about the funeral cortège of Qa’an after his death in August 1227, and his own traverse of the landscape, twice. As a result Alan has pinpointed a high mountain of the Qin range just north of the Yellow River. Everything fits, and he plans to return to the site, which he and his grandson Max climbed. He is sure he will be successful in solving the mystery of where the remains of the great Chinggis Qu’an rest.

Alan shared comparative pictures found in the treasure trove of Andrews’ 1920’s expeditions with 2010 views at several locations as the earlier route was traced. Urban Mongolia is now a modern country, but the outback has changed little. Vehicles still get stuck! The mountains remain a challenge. It was a rewarding insight into the Andrews expedition which located huge dinosaurs—and, more importantly, found eggs to prove how these beasts were born.

SuperExplorers have worked closely with Chairman Nichols to grow our chapter to be among the most active in The Explorers Club—with expanded membership, interesting field trips, building meeting attendance, the establishment of the Sirdar participation, and noticeable camaraderie. Seven were honored at the dinner and each was given a wonderful The Exploration Medal—a beautiful etched-crystal paper weight. It was a bit of a love fest as the mutual respect between each awardee and the outgoing chairman was confirmed by all.

The newly elected Chapter Officers were introduced: Dr. Anders Jepsen FN03, Rick Saber MN01, Steve Smith FN96 and Joan Boothe MN07. It is clear they are poised to maintain the enthusiasm that exists within the chapter—in our 38th year it is passed on as vibrant as it has ever been. Emeritus Chairs Dr. Bob Schmieder FN86, Dr. Leslie Ewing FN93, Dr. Steve Smith FN96, Lee Langan FN99 and Alan Nichols FN84 each looked on with confidence that their efforts continue.

A new member, Dr. Jack Dubacher FN10, the Director of Mammalogy & Ornithology at CAS, managed to make available the facilities of his world-acclaimed museum for this evening; it is hard to imagine a more “exploration-oriented” venue. The African Hall contains spectacular dioramas and several African penguins frolic at one end. Alan Cooper FN10 brought together his geologist-musicians, The Left Bank/Rive Gauche Trio (with Julianne Stafford and Larry Schemel), to play during the reception while the adjacent hall was available for our exclusive visit. Nancy Elkus joined those who visited the wonderful collection of Southwestern artifacts donated to the museum by her father, Charles (our chapter’s founder) and grandfather—a treasure of silver, turquoise and pottery collected in the first half of the last century.

Glimpses from the African Hall gala: being seated (top); new Chair Anders Jepsen (left) with Chair Emeritis Steve Smith; the Left Bank Trio; the penguins; Alan Nichols, our speaker; Charlotte Rygh’s gift cards; the Super Explorers (l-r) Sue Estey, Lee Langan, Mike Diggle, Chair Alan, Kay Schneider, Von Hurson, Joan Boothe & Steve Smith.
NOT JUST ANY PICNIC, MY FRIENDS

The Explorers Club NorCA Chapter manages to do “phenomenal” well. Take June 14. A mere picnic? Not on your life! The day provided perfect “Three Bears” weather – “not too hot and not too cold” — when nearly 30 adventurers crossed the Bay to Angel Island, either via Bob Schmieder’s Cordell Explorer, or the local ferry. What makes an Explorers Club event so amazing are the people – and we certainly have no shortage of amazing people! Throw a group of these souls together and prepare for conversation that certainly isn’t of the “normal” kind. It’s about past explorations, exciting experiences, voyages, research and plans for more explorations. Walking around, you could hear countless conversations you’d want to stop and listen to – little snippets of so many things you didn’t know about people’s achievements and exciting lives. Then there was the Food — far, far above the average! Rick and Aldeana thought ham would make a lovely entree, which it did. Of course with all the other delectable delights that materialized on the table at Angel Island, a rather sobering amount of ham remained after the festivities! For the game group, Rick had contrived a Mad-Max Explorers’ Challenge — complete with navigational hazards and pylons. Proclamation Awards for the winning teams included promissory notes payable in 2050! Upon return to the Berkeley Harbor, to our point of departure, we continued the fun with yet more wine, food and happy camaraderie. Now we saw Captain Bob at his most relaxed and contented best, with Kay at his side and a plate of his favorite dessert: cherry pie. All was right with the world. A special thanks to Bob Schmieder, and all who came to share the day. From start to finish it was exceptional. Next time, let’s not stop when we reach Angel Island. I’m sure there are a lot of places to explore, and things to discover, if we just keep going. Oh, and don’t forget the ham!

—Von Hurson MN10

A GRIPPING TALE OF ADVENTURE ON THE HIGH SEAS

The morning of May 14 was breezy and cool, with gray and white scattered clouds. We had loaded supplies when I glanced down at the stern of the boat we were about to board and stopped short, taking a quick breath, as I stared at the name: Black Pearl! A chill ran down my spine and looking over my shoulder I half expected to see Pirate Captain Jack Sparrow or a salty, mangy, grizzly, un-bathed and unshaven member of his crew. Instead of the double-masted Black Pearl of legend, with its 13 sails and armament of cannons and guns it was, instead, a sleek Wyliecat 30 with its modern day claim to fame: having sailed to Hawaii in the 2003 TransPac race. On this day it was waiting to carry our merry crew — Alan and Becky Nichols, Rick and Aldeana Saber, Jim and Von Hurson and our Captain, Paul Freitas, with his First Mate Anna. Throughout our voyage, Captain Paul alternately turned the helm over to Alan, Rick, Jim and Von, who each took their turn, thrilled with a chance to steer a segment of our course. Enroute to rendezvous with Tom Patterson, Sue Estey and new Sirdar, Ann Chokas, we looked behind to see Tom’s Wyliecat 30, closing fast – a flashback to where the pirate-crewed Black Pearl is being overtaken by the HMS Interceptor. With its semi-opaque, silver-gray, carbon fiber mainsail the Wyliecat took on an almost ghostly look as it caught up, then passed the Catalina, before slowing to tie up to us as we dropped anchor about 500 feet off Tiburon Cove. While we feasted, we took turns boarding the Wyliecat, an exotic, monohulled beauty with its carbon fiber mast and “wishbone” boom — a peek at the future of radical boat design. After lunch, the two ships parted, and we returned to the Richmond Yacht Harbor from whence we had departed. The Black Pearl slid softly into its berth, and we basked in the glow of a beautiful day day of wonderful memories spent with friends. Thank you Paul, Anna, Tom and Sue.

—Von Hurson MN10
September 23 — In Egypt with Jim Westerman

In a quiet, wooded glade on the Berkeley campus—close to everything but removed from the crowds and chatter—is a treasure most people know little about, the Faculty Club. Make your way to the campus: parking is available off Bancroft Way. Stroll to the Faculty Club as shown to the right. Parking reservations (for $10) can be made a week in advance (call Joan Boothe), but it should be readily available without this need.

There is a PAYPAL BUTTON on our website (www.explorersnorca.org); easy to use!

Send address changes and corrections by email to Steve at nauticos1@oceanearth.org