

Dr. Matthew W. Stirling Dies; Archeologist for Smithsonian

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 24—Dr. Matthew W. Stirling, an anthropologist associated with the Smithsonian Institution for more than 40 years, died yesterday at his home here after a long illness. He was 78 years old.

Foremost among his discoveries, which spanned a half-century of research and travels throughout Central and South America, Europe and the East Indies, was a portion of a stone monument, or stele, bearing a date equivalent to 291 B.C., which the National Geographic Society called "America's oldest dated work."

Dr. Stirling lived with the head-shrinking Jivaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador, on the upper Amazon and with cave dwellers in France and Spain. As leader of the American Netherlands Expedition to central New Guinea in the nineteen-twenties, he was one of the first to use an airplane, penetrating several hundred square miles of territory deep in the interior. It was there that he found tribes living in a complete stone age culture, whose life he recorded extensively on film.

The author of several books and many scientific articles, Dr. Stirling was internationally prominent in middle American anthropology and archeology.

A native of Salinas, Calif., he graduated from the University of California in 1920 and was affiliated with the Smithsonian from 1921 until his retirement in 1958. He served as head of its Bureau of American Ethnology from 1928 to 1947.

Under the auspices of both the Smithsonian and the National Geographic Society, Dr.



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Dr. Matthew W. Stirling

Stirling led a total of 13 expeditions to Mexico, Panama and Ecuador between 1938 and 1957. Eight of these expeditions were to southern Mexico, where his team uncovered the La Venta, or Olmec, civilization dating back more than 1,000 years.

Among his other discoveries was a cache of 782 pieces of pre-Columbian jade, unearthed in Mexico, and the finding in Panama of the oldest village site and the first manmade mounds. In 1964, in Costa Rica, he dug up a group of 11 large granite spheres, five to eight feet in diameter, perfectly shaped and smoothed. Their purpose and method of construction remain an enigma.

Surviving Dr. Stirling are his widow, Marion, who accompanied him on many of his expeditions; a son, Matthew of New York; a daughter, Ariana Brewer of Tucson, Ariz., and a grandchild.