

On the Trail of the Peking Man

By Jean M. White



A new lead in the search for the lost fossils of half-million-year-old Peking Man has been uncovered with a rabbit-hunting soldier's story of finding a foot locker full of bones and red dust in an abandoned cabin in the California woods.

On Thursday, Christopher Janus, the 64-year-old stockbroker turned fossil hunter, will lead a search party in an attempt to relocate the cabin some 30 miles south of the U.S. Marine base at Camp Pendleton.

"Wouldn't it be a hell of a story if the bones were found in an abandoned cabin?" Janus, reached at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles, said with relish yesterday.

It would be—a story spiced with preposterous, incredible elements: a rainstorm driving two rabbit hunters to refuge, red dust of China choking the air as an old foot locker is opened, a rattlesnake interrupting the examination of the contents, and sample bones brought back only to be lost

about the house, perhaps buried by the dog or thrown into the garbage.

Even the enthusiastic Janus, who has offered \$150,000 reward for the return of the fossils and told President Ford that they would make a marvelous gift to return to China on his trip in October, emphasized yesterday that he has had a lot of "phony leads" since making his \$150,000 reward offer.

"But this sounds like a good one," he quickly added. "I've seen the pictures that the soldier says he found in the trunk, and they're from China of the early '40s (judging by) the cars and people. And I've seen the red dust of China."

More skeptical is Dr. Harry L. Shapiro, a Peking Man specialist and chairman emeritus of the anthropology department at the American Museum of Natural History.

"There were very few long skeletal bones in the fossils. It was mostly fragments of the skull and teeth. I would be very suspicious of a foot

locker full of bones," Dr. Shapiro said yesterday when reached in New York.

For the search Thursday, Janus will be joined by the 23-year-old Vietnam war veteran who called him after reading a recent story about the lost fossils.

The soldier, now stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., told of taking refuge from a rainstorm during a hunting trip in 1972 with his uncle, stumbling on the foot locker and making off with the bones and some old photos before being routed by a rattlesnake.

It all sounds melodramatic and incredible, Janus agrees, but adds: "That's the way I think fossils will turn up if they ever do — luck, preposterous chance."

Yesterday the soldier's mother rented a Geiger counter to search around her house for the misplaced bone, Janus reported.

He said he didn't want to use the soldier's name because of "fear" — "You know both Taiwan and Peking want these bones and view them as a national treasure."