

## 2004 Isreal Dig Unearths Discoveries For All

By Jennifer J. Mills

4:45 a.m. Parking lot. Bus. Can't think in complete sentences. It's too early. What have I gotten myself into? I have never been awake this early. I have stayed up until this early, but that was in college. It was the first day of the third season of digging at the Northeast Church Project at Hippos in Israel, and it was time to leave.

All the volunteers, drunk with sleepiness, pile onto the bus, which takes us to the base of Hippos. We unload the bus and begin the one km trek up the hill to our dig site. 1km allows time for all the volunteers to wake up and allows time for contemplation about what today will bring. (After many trips up that hill I've decided that all people - especially Americans - should have to walk 1 km, in silence, to their job).

When we reached our dig site, I breathed in the air of today and looked at the land of hundreds of years. As I surveyed the dig site, I couldn't help but survey our team: three pastors, two teachers, two students, two writers, one pastor's wife and one retired soil scientist. Sounds like a pretty rag-tag team to me. But I guess that's ok . . . God's been doing good things through rag-tag people for a long time - just look at the disciples.

When our work in the field was done, our work in the virtual world had just begun. From the beginning of the 2004 dig season, the Virtual Dig seemed like the wild card. Dr. Schuler's self-

titled "crazy" idea was to stay in contact with more than 1,000 junior high students via the World Wide Web at [www.virtualdig.org](http://www.virtualdig.org). The website would provide daily news updates, pictures, movies, maps, and opportunities for students, parents and the general public to write in with questions or comments.

A trial run, simulating the technology situation and procedures the team would use in Israel, was conducted two weeks before take-off. The virtual dig allowed for an ongoing conversation between the team and curious junior high students. The immediacy

was one of the many strengths of the virtual dig. "Each day there was something new and the kids learned along with us," Dr. Schuler said.

The innovative virtual dig

specifically helped the participating school children to reach out and "get dirty" in the world of archaeology. Yvonne, a junior high student from St. Peter's Lutheran School in Edina, Minn., learned "archeology isn't just about digging up bones and pottery [and] that college professors are not the only people on an archeological dig."

The Virtual Dig was a success. Technology of the twenty-first century connected more than 1,000 junior high students, families and the public to thousand-year-old artifacts half a world away.

From the moment our boots tromped on dusty roads, everybody on the team wanted to discover something when they were at the dig site. Boy, were we in for a surprise. One of the first things my team members and I discovered were muscles we never knew existed! In

truth, every day was a discovery. It was almost incomprehensible to think that hundreds of years ago, people walked where I was walking and lived in a thriving city that the volunteers were working to uncover.

So, what were the most significant finds? Well, I think it depends on whom you ask. If you asked Dr. Schuler or Glenn Borchers,

who spent three weeks excavating the bones from the cist tomb, they would probably say finding the two "extra" skulls. If you asked Jim and Karen Laatsch they might tell you about the double layer of mosaic floor

they found in the nave of the little church. If you asked Ben Carnehl, a history student from Concordia River Forest, he would probably say the piece of chancel screen he found on its way to the



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Mills  
Jim Rogers and Brian Roemen show off their find.

dump pile. If you asked Stan Ostgren, he would grin and tell you how he found a coin on his last day up at the dig site. Writer Marc Hequet might say he found a love of conversation through the virtual dig. Tim Schumacher, curriculum creator, found lots of large basalt stones and creative ways to get computers to talk to each other. If you asked Jim Rogers about the most significant find, he would laugh and maybe, just maybe, he would tell you about the "ancient" candy bar wrapper he found. Brian Roemen, a student from CSP "found that Israel is, along with its stunning beauty and religious significance, an ordinary place. This 'discovery' helped me to understand the fact that just as Jesus - God's son - dwelt in Israel, so can he dwell in 'ordinary' places like my own hometown today."

And we all discovered the Holy Land, the land of Jesus. We walked on the dusty roads. We swam in the Sea of Galilee. And we discovered some of the forbears of the faith.

I didn't find another tomb. I didn't find the Holy Grail, which we often joked about finding. I didn't find an oil lamp. And I didn't uncover an inscription in the mosaic floor.

But . . . I discovered a new part of the world. I discovered people who experience love and pain. I discovered joy and celebration. I discovered brief segments of the past. I came face-to-face with and contemplated the forbearers of the faith. I discovered and I became a part of Hippos history. I walked the streets of Hippos. And I left my footprints in the dust up on that ancient city on a hill.

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