

Archaeology congress

US plans to boycott boycott

Washington

THE American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) has added to the headaches of organizers of the World Archaeological Congress by refusing to provide travel funds for any US scientists wishing to attend the meeting. ACLS, a major source of funds for foreign travel, took its decision because of the ban on South African and Namibian scientists from the congress, to be held in Southampton, England, this September.

On 20 February, ACLS wrote to all those requesting travel grants stating that no money would be provided for attending a meeting "where individual scientists have been banned." So far only 29 archaeologists have sought funds from ACLS.

The meeting will take place in spite of the loss of support from the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Scientists (IUPPS), and despite the resignation of two thirds of the conference's organizing committee (see *Nature* 319, 524; 1986).

The ACLS decision follows a similar move by the Wenner Gren Foundation not to provide travel funds for the meeting. The foundation gave start-up money in 1984 to Peter Ucko, the organizer of the Southampton meeting. Lita Osmundsen, president of the foundation, says a second cheque for \$12,000 had been authorized, but was cancelled when the foundation learned of the ban.

Another possible source for travel money has also been eliminated, at least for the time being. The Society of American Archaeologists (SAA) had intended to apply for a block grant from the National Science Foundation, but changed its mind after learning of the ban.

SAA president Don Fowler says his organization has not issued a policy statement on the Southampton congress, but instead will leave the decision on whether to attend to individual members. SAA's board will meet again in April, when it will reconsider its decision not to seek funds.

US archaeologists are deeply divided over the Southampton congress. At least 45 archaeologists have formed American Archaeologists Against Apartheid and, in a published letter (*Science* 231, 319; 1986), have urged colleagues to attend the meeting as a statement against apartheid.

But others feel that scientific meetings are not the proper place for symbolic political protests. "It threatens every future scientific congress", says Carmel Schrire, an archaeologist from Rutgers who has been encouraging US archaeologists to boycott the Southampton meeting. Schrire is concerned that, while this year's protest may be over apartheid, next year's could be over capital punishment or poli-

tical prisoners in South America, or any divisive international question.

Schrire claims to have commitments from 150 American archaeologists not to attend the Southampton congress, and she maintains that those boycotting the meeting include the most important names in American archaeology.

Both ACLS and the Wenner Gren Foundation will consider funding travel to the alternative congress being held in 1987 in Mainz. **Joseph Palca**

Stones turn up

Washington

THE discovery of some 300 stone tools along the Semliki River in the Western Rift Valley in Zaire has anthropologists excitedly speculating on a "fundamental change" in the picture of human development over the past two million years. The tools suggest the presence of early hominids in a part of Africa where they had not previously been found.

The lack of volcanic material in the area where the tools were discovered makes accurate dating difficult. But on the basis of biostratigraphic data and the fossil record, it is estimated that the tools are 2.0–2.5 million years old. Only two sites, in Ethiopia in the Eastern Rift Valley, are thought to be older.



Newly discovered quartzite flake. Dating will provoke controversy.

The tools date from a time when the world climate was becoming drier. The Western Valley was much wetter than the Eastern Valley, perhaps providing a more propitious environment for the survival of early hominids. The sharp edges of the tools suggest that they could have been used in cutting meat and plant stems, as well as woodworking.

The relationship between early hominids and chimpanzees and gorillas will receive closer scrutiny at the Western Rift Valley site, as these animals are not present in the Eastern Rift Valley where early hominids have already been found.

The expedition was led by Noel Boaz of the Virginia Museum of Natural History, John W.K. Harris of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and Alison S. Brooks of George Washington University.

Joseph Palca

Archaeology congress

Mainz meeting fixed for 1987

ARRANGEMENTS for the official congress of the International Union of Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences (IUPPS) have now been completed. At a meeting in Ghent on 21 February, the date of the congress was fixed for the first week in September, 1987. It will be held in Mainz, West Germany, and the organizers are planning for a registration fee of \$20, less than a tenth of that required at the now-unofficial congress to be held this year at Southampton.

The meeting at Ghent was that of a subcommittee of the executive of IUPPS which had been appointed at an earlier meeting in Paris on 17 January to consider replies from the British organizers to the demand for assurances that archaeologists and others from South Africa would be able to attend. In the event, Professor J. Nenquin, the secretary-general of the union, said earlier this week that no communications were received from the British committee, now reconstituted after the resignation of all but two of its members on 8 February.

The choice of the date for the Mainz meeting has been determined by the wish to give the local organizers time to raise the necessary funds, to allow participants from Eastern Europe to arrange travel and, according to Professor Nenquin, to avoid confronting archaeologists with a choice between attendance at Southampton and at Mainz.

Polite recrimination persists among archaeologists, largely on the strength of a document put out on 21 February by the organizers of the Southampton congress. Among other things, this says that the principle of "free interchange between bona fide scholars should prevail under normal circumstances", but that "at present, the circumstances in South Africa and Namibia were not normal".

The statement also says that the meeting in Paris on 17 January was not attended by representatives from developing countries or from Eastern Europe, and that the written opinions of those not present were not admitted. Professor Nenquin says that this procedure was followed while Professor John Evans, then still the chairman of the British National Committee, was in the chair, and that it would have been impossible to take account of all the written opinions by then received.

Nenquin also says that 60 letters have been received from members of the full council of IUPPS, of which 8 oppose the decision to disown the Southampton congress but the majority support their executive committee's decision.

John Maddox