In 1991, hikers in the mountains of northern Europe found the body of a 5,300-year-old man. It was perfectly preserved by the snow that had covered it for so long. Scientists of many kinds used information gathered from the man, whom they named Ötzi, to create a picture of European life in the Copper Age.

Ötzi and the everyday objects that were found beside him are unique and wonderfully preserved clues to daily life in a time that has long been mysterious. With their help, we can imagine what life might have been like in the Copper Age\(^1\) and how Ötzi lived and died. We can never be certain, but it may have been something like this:

Ötzi may have been a shepherd herding sheep, a trader trading stone and metal for tools, or even a medicine man in search of messages from gods. Whatever the reason, Ötzi had hiked high into the mountains. He was strong and well equipped, perhaps a leader among his people.

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1. Copper Age (kāp' ar) n.: Period lasting from 5,000 B.C. to 3,500 B.C., when copper was the most advanced metal in use.
The tattoo lines on his knee, foot, and back may have been religious emblems or a sign of his bravery or status.

Ötzi was a welcome visitor to the villages along his route. If he was a shepherd, he would have brought the villagers meat (since wool was not yet used for clothing). If he was a trader, he would have brought them flint for tools or copper for weapons.

Ötzi may have admired the villagers’ talents. They used wheeled wagons and plows to farm. They sewed linen clothes and shoes expertly. They fed him butter and other delicacies.

The villagers may have been impressed with the hard flints Ötzi had brought—wonderful stones for making daggers and knives—and with his fine ax. But Ötzi would not part with the ax. He had traveled far to the south and traded away many of his belongings to the copper workers for his ax.

Ötzi was handy and so found many uses for his ax. He had been wielding it lately to make a new bow to replace the one he’d traded away or broken. It was a huge bow, taller than he was. It took all his strength to pull the bowstring.

Ötzi had been hunting since he was a child. He had learned to feather his arrows at an angle to make them spin in flight and hold their course. After crossing the mountains, Ötzi planned to finish his new bow and arrows. Then he could hunt in the woods for ibex, deer, and boar, and kill threatening bears and wolves. But for now, his mind was on traveling across the treeless high mountains in the thin, cold air.

In the soft deerskin suit and grass cape made for him by the village tailors, Ötzi was dressed for chill mountain weather. He had stuffed his shoes with mountain grass to protect his feet from the cold. He wore a fur cap on his head.

But the autumn air turned even colder than Ötzi had expected. He huddled in the shelter of a rock hollow. He was too cold and tired to eat the last of the antelope meat and berries he had brought with him.

Ötzi tried to start a fire. He had flint to strike a spark and strips of felt to help the fire along. But far above the tree line, Ötzi could

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**Build Vocabulary**

emblems (əmˈbrəmz) n.: Symbols, signs, or badges

delicacies (dəlˈi ke səz) n.: Foods that are rare and tasty

wielding (wélˈiŋ) v.: Using with skill

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2. ibex (ˈi beks) n.: European wild goats.

3. tree line n.: Line above which trees will not grow.
find no branches to keep a fire going. Perhaps falling snow snuffed out the few sparks he had created.

Ötzi's only hope for survival was to move on through the mountain pass and down into the valley. But he was too weak to move. Maybe he was sick or injured.

Ötzi carefully laid his belongings, including his beautiful axe, against the rocks around him. He lay down to sleep on his left side atop a large stone as the snow fell through the frigid air.

Days later, when Ötzi did not appear, other shepherds, or friends from the village, may have come looking for him. If they came upon the spot where he lay down, they would have found only a blanket of snow.

In cold isolation, Ötzi had quietly died. Five thousand years later, his snow blanket was finally removed. At last Ötzi was found, along with his treasures. Their value is beyond measure, for they give us our best view yet of the lost world of our Copper Age ancestors.

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Guide for Responding

◆ **LITERATURE AND YOUR LIFE**

Reader's Response Suppose that you lived in one of the villages that Ötzi visited. Would you have joined the search party that went out to look for him? Why or why not?

**Thematic Focus** What risks did Ötzi face during his travels?

**Journal Writing** How would you feel if you were one of the archaeologists or scientists who initially studied Ötzi? Write a journal entry to describe your first day's findings.

☑ **Check Your Comprehension**

1. What are some possible explanations for Ötzi's traveling so far from home?
2. What evidence is there that Ötzi was probably very strong?
3. Why was Ötzi unable to build a fire to protect himself from the cold?
4. Why did the villagers have trouble finding Ötzi when they went looking for him?

◆ **Critical Thinking**

**INTERPRET**

1. Do you think Ötzi would have felt free to enter a village where he was a stranger? Why or why not? [Infer]
2. What could Ötzi have done to avoid dying in the snowstorm? [Speculate]

**APPLY**

3. Why do scientists find the details of Ötzi's life useful? [Assess]
4. Why was Ötzi more at risk than a traveler along the same route would be today? [Apply]

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Meet the Author

**Don Lessem (1952—)** has explained prehistoric times in more than a dozen books. He is best known as a dinosaur expert who edits a newspaper called Dino Times. It includes a column he writes using the name of Dino Don.

Lessem was a consultant on the movie *Jurassic Park*, and he is the host of a Microsoft CD-ROM about dinosaurs. *The Iceman* is Lessem's book about the discovery and study of the man who came to be called Ötzi.