

Fruits, vegetables, condiments, stimulants, medicines. — Perhaps the most widely known, and most controversial, group of archaeological plant finds is that from the Spirit Cave site (Fig. 2) in northwestern Thailand. There, Chester Gorman excavated in 1966 evidence of the occupation of this small cave by hunters and collectors, dating from about 9,500 to 5,500 B.C. (Gorman 1970). This excavation yielded for the first time a significant number of preserved plant remains, evidently left by the prehistoric inhabitants of the site. Among them are a number of tree crops such as candle nut (*Aleurites*), canarium nut (*Canarium*), butter nut (*Madhuca*), almond (*Prunus*), terminalia nut (*Terminalia*), and a chestnut-like nut (*Castanopsis*); several vegetables, among them cucumber (*Cucumis*), bottle gourd (*Lagenaria*), water chestnut (*Trapa*), possibly pea (*Pisum*), bean (*Phaseolus*) or soy bean (*Glycine*), and broad bean (*Vicia* or *Phaseolus*); as well as mild narcotics or condiments such as betel nut (*Areca*) and betel leaf (*Piper*). A second excavation at Spirit Cave in 1973/74 added to this list bamboo, hackberry (*Celtis*), castor oil (*Ricinus*); as well as bitter melon (*Momordica*), lotus (*Nelumbium*), and melon (*Trichosanthes*) or gourd (*Luffa*) (Yen 1977). Excavations at two other caves in the same general region, Banyan Valley Cave and Tham Pa Chan added mango (*Mangifera*) and rice (*Oryza*) (Yen 1977). The occupation of Banyan Valley Cave is tentatively dated from about 3,500 B.C. to A.D. 770; that of Tham Pa Chan from about 5,500 B.C. to 3,500 B.C.

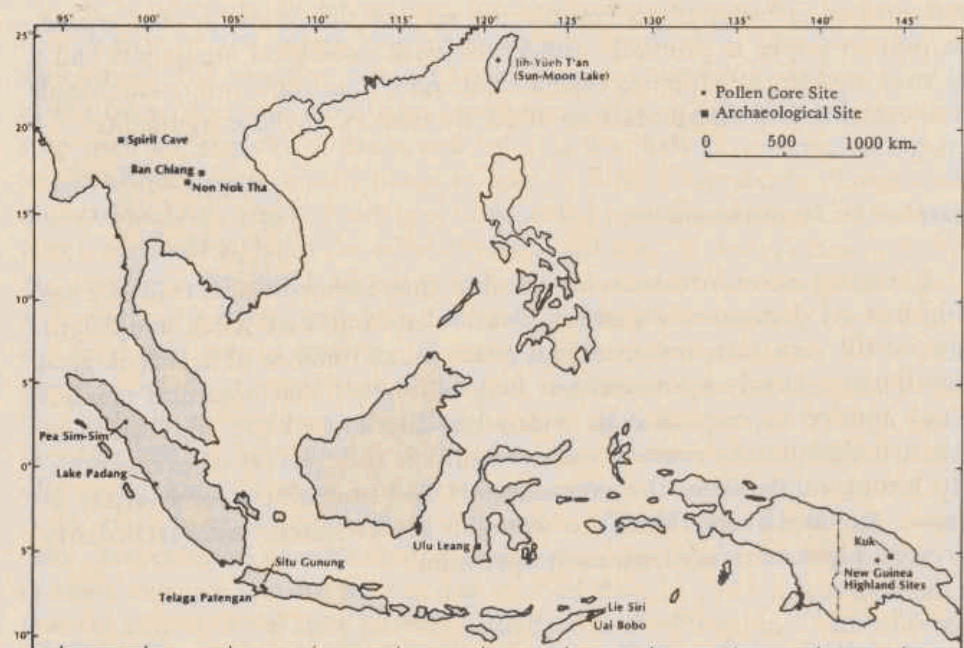


Fig. 2

Map of archaeological sites and pollen core sites mentioned in the text