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Tollund Man, as he appeared in the peat bog at the time he was discovered on May 6, 1950. Image online, courtesy Silkeborg Public Library.

On the 6th of May, 1950, two Danish brothers needed to cut peat to fuel their tile stove and kitchen range. From the small village of Tollund, Viggo and Emil Højgård - and Viggo's wife Grethe - were about to do what people have done at the same bog for thousands of years (including during the Iron Age). This day, however, they would make an amazing discovery.

Resting in the Bjældskovdal peat bog, located about six miles (ten km) west of Silkeborg, Denmark, the body of an Iron-Age man - follow these links to view animated examples of Iron-Age architecture and chariots - had been hidden from view since before the time Aristotle was tutoring Alexander the Great in ancient Macedonia.

As Emil, Viggo and Grethe worked in the bog, about six feet (three meters) down, they were startled to find a body so well preserved they believed the man must have been a recent murder victim. The Silkeborg police, however, knew that other bodies had been found in that same bog in 1927 and 1928, so they summoned officials from the Silkeborg Museum to the scene. They confirmed what the police had suspected: The body was a bog mummy.

After carbon-dating, Danish scholars concluded the man (now named "Tollund" in honor of Emil and Viggo's village) had been in the bog at least 2,200 years. He had a cap on his head, a belt on his waist and a braided leather rope around his neck. Tollund Man had met his death by hanging.

He was so well preserved one could see stubble on his face, and forensic experts were even able to determine the specifics of his last meal. He is still a fascinating subject and is maintained in the Iron-Age Exhibit at Silkeborg Museum.

How could a human body be in a peat bog for thousands of years and not decompose?

- It is the nature of a bog to prevent much oxygen (which aids decay) from getting through.
- Bog acid, which does exist in peat bogs (it comes from the sphagnum moss) helps to create an acidic, wet environment which keeps out most flesh-attacking organisms.
- Additionally, sphagnum (the substance produced by the moss) takes calcium out of bones (giving bacteria even less to consume) and effectively tans the skin (helping to preserve both it and other soft tissue).

Other bog mummies have been found throughout Europe. One of the more intriguing is Yde Girl, found in a Dutch bog in 1897.

Archeological techniques at the time were unsophisticated, causing damage to her remains. Thanks to a facial reconstruction by Dr. Richard Neave, from the University of Manchester, we can remember her more for what she was than for what she became.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/IRON-AGE-BODIES-Mummies-Bodies-Talk)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/IRON-AGE-BODIES-Mummies-Bodies-Talk)

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Emil and Viggo Picture

Image online, courtesy [Silkeborg Public Library](#).

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Tollund Man on Display at Silkeborg Museum

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Tollund Man Preserved

Image, described above, online courtesy Google Books.

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Yde Girl Mummy

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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IRON-AGE BODIES

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Bog Bodies Provide Clues to Iron-Age People

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Mummies - Tollund Man

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