**Extinct possibility**

Early humans came back from the brink

HUMN beings may have had a brush with extinction 70,000 years ago, an extensive new genetic study suggests.

The number of early humans may have shrunk as low as 3000 before they began to expand and again in the early Stone Age, according to an analysis released this week.

'This study illustrates the extraordinary power of genetics to reveal insights into some of the key events in our species' history,' said Spencer Wells, National Geographic Society explorer in residence.

Wells is director of the Genographic Project, launched in 2005 to study ancestry using genetics. The report was published in the American Journal of Human Genetics.

Previous studies using mitochondrial DNA — which is passed down through mothers — have traced modern humans to a single 'mitochondrial Eve,' who lived in Africa about 150,000 years ago.

The migrations of humans out of Africa to populate the rest of the world appear to have begun about 60,000 years ago, but little is known about humans between Eve and that dispersal.

The new study looks at the mitochondrial DNA of the Khoi and San people in southern Africa, which appear to have diverged from other people between 90,000 and 180,000 years ago.

The researchers concluded humans separated into two populations prior to the stone age, when they came back together and began to increase in numbers and spread to other areas.

Eastern Africa experienced a series of severe droughts between 130,000 and 90,000 years ago and the researchers said the climatological shift may have contributed to the population changes, dividing into small, isolated groups which developed independently of one another.

Paleoanthropologist Meave Leakey, a Geogaphic adviser, commented: "Who would have thought that as recently as 70,000 years ago, extremes of climate had reduced our population to such small numbers that we were on the very edge of extinction."

"Today more than 6 billion people inhabit the globe, according to the US Census Bureau." The research was led by Doron Behar of Rambam Medical Center in Haifa, Israel and Saharon Rozel of IBM TJ Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights, New York, and Tel Aviv University.

**Building a green appreciation in youngsters**

A TOWNSVILLE builder has started showing off its greener side to school students.

Hutchinson Builders has developed an education program off its new environmentally friendly commercial building system.

The builder has a solar power station, which supplies about 12 per cent of its commercial building's energy.

The power station has been performing according to the company's expectations, delivering up to 11.8 per cent of the building's energy requirements in February.

The building also stores 190,000L of rainwater, and has a white roof which reduces solar heat absorption and the need for air conditioning.

It also uses natural light to maximum effect to reduce lighting energy, and uses an energy-efficient air conditioning system.

The school tours have been dubbed the 'Hutchinschool experience.'

"We have had numerous tours through the building since it was commissioned," said Hutchinson Builders regional manager Jim Lethbridge.

"On the strength of these we are now exploring more resources to improving the learning experience for the world," Mr Peaco said.

"It's something that we are really proud of, and it's a great opportunity for the world."

EMPOWERED... Riannon Griffin, Grace Bramble, Lachlan Roberts, Emma Warren and Jessica Roberts learn about solar site data meters.

**Fish habitats due for some TLC in dry tropics**

ENVIRONMENTAL rehabilitation work will start soon in areas from Crystal Creek to Bowen to protect fish.

Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resources Management and Ocean Watch Australia will focus their work on six areas along the coast to improve fish habitats.

The work will include in-stream and vegetation rehabilitation, the restoration of passes for fish, and water quality improvement, which is expected to start immediately and be completed by the end of the year.

A reef will be installed across the Fiddle Island dam in the lower Burdekin, while a barrier preventing fish from migrating along Stuart Creek will be removed. Other projects to be funded under the scheme include weed control at Hornsea Creek near Gin Gin, rubbish removal, weed control and revegetation of the declared Bulleah River fish habitat area, weed control and fish passage improvement and revegetation at Bushland Beach, and at Rollingstone Creek.

Project manager Carla Wegscheider said the project aimed to highlight the importance of land management activities in the catchment, and the flow-on effects to estuarine wetlands and fisheries productivity.

She said talks with local fishermen had identified a lot of areas affecting fish populations.

Commercial fisher and steering committee member Greg Radley said the program allowed commercial fishermen to work with community groups that they would normally not have contact with.

"It fosters a relationship and allows invaluable work to be carried out on improving fisheries habitats that may otherwise have been neglected," Mr Radley said.

"It is a very worthwhile program, opening avenues of communication between industry and the broader community."

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