

Illinois cave reveals ancient pine

May 12 2007

An Illinois scientist says needles from what could be the oldest pine tree found in North America were discovered in a limestone cave near Morris, Ill.

The cave, found four years ago by a class from the University of Illinois at Chicago during a visit to a Kendall County limestone quarry, contains a "treasure trove of exceptionally well-preserved life from 310 million years ago," the Chicago Tribune said Friday.

UIC earth and environmental sciences professor Roy Plotnick, who led the field trip, said the cave filled 310 million to 290 million years ago.

The newspaper said researchers found plant spores, scorpion parts and needles from an ancient coniferous tree believed to be the earliest predecessor to the modern pine in North America.

Plotnick said the oldest conifers previously described are at least 2 million years younger.

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Citation: Illinois cave reveals ancient pine (2007, May 12) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-05-illinois-cave-reveals-ancient.html>

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