

The secret jungles of ancient France

July 16 2009, by Adam Dylewski

(PhysOrg.com) -- Ah, Paris. Land of the Eiffel Tower, delicious French bread and... tropical rainforests? Sacrebleu! It seems unlikely, but scientists have discovered evidence that France may have been a hot, wet tropical rainforest 55 million years ago.

Scientists found the evidence in amber, sticky tree sap that hardens into a deep, yellow, rock-hard fossil — like the amber that scientists in Jurassic Park used to snare dino DNA. Led by Akino Jossang, the scientists studied amber found near Paris. The shocker? The type of tree that produces this amber grows today only in the Amazon rainforest!

The ancient ancestor of this tropical tree died out long ago. However, the scientists used clever detective work to find its modern plant relative. They discovered a chemical called quesnoin in their amber samples. While lots of trees produce different types of amber, only the Amazon tree produces amber containing quesnoin.

How could this kind of tree grow near Paris? Dr. Jossang thinks that Paris and France must have had a hot, balmy climate 55 million years ago. It may have been like today's [Amazon rainforest](#). The scientists found evidence for that idea. The French amber deposits contained fossilized plants and animals like those found in a [tropical rainforest](#). More evidence for this French rainforest comes from the country's geographic location over fifty million years ago. Back then, Earth's continents were in locations much different from today's world. France was much closer to Africa in a warmer, tropical region.

A report on this fascinating scientific research is in the January issue of ACS' *Journal of Organic Chemistry*, a scientific journal.

More information: "Quesnoin, a Novel Pentacyclic ent-Diterpene from 55 Million Year Old Oise [Amber](#)," [Journal of Organic Chemistry](#)

Provided by American Chemical Society ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: The secret jungles of ancient France (2009, July 16) retrieved 3 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-secret-jungles-ancient-france.html>

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