

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 13, 2015

Contact: Maureen Moses
mmoses@americangeosciences.org

EARTH: Amber-Encased Specimen Could Be Oldest Known Grass

Alexandria, VA - The evolutionary age of grass has been hotly contested. Scientists have previously dated the earliest grasses to 55 million years ago; after the dinosaurs went extinct. Now, a new 100-million-year-old specimen of amber from Myanmar potentially pushes back grass evolution to the Late Cretaceous.

Scientists from the Oregon State University who studied the amber believe they identified "spikelet" -grass in its flowering state - and a cluster of fossilized ergot, a major ingredient in LSD. While their conclusions are intriguing, and have implications for the plant and fungi evolutionary trees, some challenge the methods used. Since amber specimens can be unique, scientists use noninvasive methods, and some argue these tests result in less rigorous conclusions. Find out if this amber specimen means dinos were potentially dining on hallucinogens and grass in the June Issue of EARTH Magazine: <http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/amber-encased-plant-could-be-oldest-known-grass-specimen-may-also-preserve-cretaceous-aged>.

EARTH Magazine brings you the science behind the headlines. The June Issue, now available on the digital newsstand (www.earthmagazine.org), includes feature stories on how modern anthropology is redefining the story of human evolution, a light-hearted investigation into how the film industry portrays geologists, and how flames are fanning the fallout from Chernobyl.

###

Keep up to date with the latest happenings in Earth, energy and environment news with EARTH magazine online at: <http://www.earthmagazine.org/>. Published by the American Geosciences Institute, EARTH is your source for the science behind the headlines.

###

The American Geosciences Institute is a nonprofit federation of geoscientific and professional associations that represents more than 250,000 geologists, geophysicists and other earth scientists. Founded in 1948, AGI provides information services to geoscientists, serves as a voice of shared interests in the profession, plays a major role in strengthening geoscience education, and strives to increase public awareness of the vital role the geosciences play in society's use of resources, resiliency to natural hazards, and interaction with the environment.