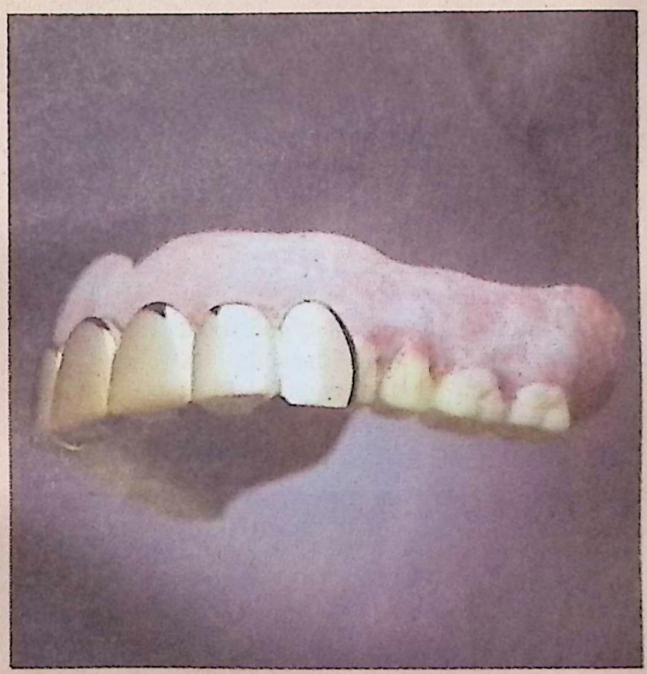
Debate rages over hobbit tooth

Does a tiny Indonesian hominid, purported to be 18,000 years old, really have a tooth filled by a dentist? That's the bizarre question raised by paleopathologists in Australia about the 1-meter-tall Indonesian "hobbit" with a grapefruit-sized brain discovered in 2004. If the claim is true the hobbit, named homo floresiensis (after the island Flores on which the bones were found), cannot be an ancient species of human as its discoverers maintain. But experts continue to disagree. While some believe such tiny-brained hominids made tools and moved out of Africa much earlier than thought, others argue that the hobbit was a modern human suffering from microcephaly or some other growth disorder.





Raindrops on roses

Behind the natural beauty of a rosebud covered in dew drops lies a decades-old mystery: why don't the tiny droplets fall off, even when the flower is turned upside down? The beading of water droplets on natural materials is not a rare thing. But on many flowers and leaves the droplets slide off with the slightest tremble, taking dust and small insects off with them. The effect is known by biologists as 'self cleaning' and has been well studied by researchers keen to make better water-repellent materials. Now researchers have unpicked the secrets of the rose's trick, and can replicate it in a man-made material.

Blind mice see the light

Blind mice have been made to sense light by inserting a protein derived from algae into their eyes. A similar method could one day be used to treat certain forms of blindness in humans, the researchers hope. The light-sensitive protein is used by algae to sense light for photosynthesis. Some researchers are interested in using these proteins to replace damaged or missing photoreceptors in human eyes, including the late stages of a relatively common form of blindness: age-related macular degeneration. At present, there are no cures for such patients.

