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Very old bugs

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In the 19 October Nature Vreeland *et al*. report that the longevity record for bacteria has been smashed (*Nature* 2000, **407:**897-900). The previous record holder was a *Bacillus* identified from the abdominal contents of a bee preserved in amber some 25 to 40 million years ago. The newly identified bacterium is also a *Bacillus*, but comes from a brine inclusion within a 250 million-year-old salt crystal. The crystal was found 569m below the surface, in the wall of an air-intake shaft of a waste isolation pilot plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Surface sterilization of the crystal with acid and alkali reduced the probability of contamination to less than 1 in 109.

References

1. *Nature*, [http://www.nature.com/nature/]

2. Revival and identification of bacterial spores in 25- to 40-million-year-old Dominican amber.