

## A Baedeker for Scientists

The London branch of the Office of Naval Research recently issued a supplement to its regular publication, *European Science Notes*, offering a variety of travel tips to American scientists planning to visit Europe. In addition to providing details on such matters as car rentals, security clearances, bank holidays, and the use of credit cards, the supplement offers some pertinent (and, as it says, not altogether tongue-in-cheek) remarks on the habits of American scientific travelers and their reception by their European colleagues. An excerpt from the supplement reads:

At the risk of over-generalizing, it might be safe to say that there is a correlation between the specific European laboratories visited by Americans and the tourist attractions of the area in which they are located. For example, laboratories in Stockholm, metropolitan and historic sections of England, Paris, and Rome appear to have far more appeal and "importance" than do equally sophisticated institutes in relatively isolated and uninteresting areas. Without question, the laboratories and work in many of the metropolitan centers is superb and well worth a visit. At the same time, there is a surprising frequency of visits to laboratories where the work holds little relevance to the visitor's own professional interest and expertise.

The ONR recognizes that face-to-face encounters among scientists are increasingly important. But at the same time it points out that the proliferation of American visitors has been by no means an unmixed blessing for their hosts. One laboratory, according to ONR, has developed an unusual way of dealing with the problem: it has devised a scale for rating the mutual benefit of the proposed visit. The ONR says:

Members of the staff consider the visitor's background and his work and determine the nature of the reception he shall receive. The only thing not considered on this scale is the "importance" or professional position of the visitor. The department chairman from a U.S. university or director of a government laboratory or other dignitary whose work is obviously unrelated to the laboratory in question will be given a 15-minute tour by an assistant. In this way the staff of the laboratory have made it possible for the visitor to carry out his itinerary. At the same time, neither the visitor nor the laboratory staff have devoted time to a discussion which is not truly of interest. Scientists whose work is directly related to the laboratory, so that considerable interaction of mutual benefit is anticipated, are received with open arms.

Not all laboratories have equally fixed channels. According to ONR, other laboratories sometimes display excessive hospitality that is not particularly "considerate of the visitors and their own time." "One wonders," the report remarks, whether these gracious laboratory directors "... have the same table reserved each day for lunch at the most charming or 'typical' restaurant in town."

The ONR supplement advises the making—and keeping—of appointments. "Not only do Europeans ... tend to be more formal with regard to laboratory visits than do their American colleagues," it points out, "but their staffs are usually much smaller than those in the U.S. Thus, foreign visitors actually can and often do constitute a significant source of disruption to ongoing research efforts."

The report notes that "European scientists have a surprisingly comprehensive knowledge of the U.S. literature in their discipline," and that "the individual whose work they know usually is well received." On the other hand, "A person unknown to the laboratory may have a rather strained and short visit with a senior scientist and spend most of his time with graduate students or assistants. Quite possibly he will not be received at all—particularly during the summer months. This is not a lack of courtesy or a reflection on the character of science in the country involved," ONR concludes; "It is a measure of self-protection."

—E.L.

their disciplines. The limitation on the annual intake of members—it has been raised in recent years to the present 45—means that not all the best are in, but, outside of a few appointments that invite curiosity—an Academy official explains that "occasionally, faithful service, rather than scientific creativity, is the basis for election"—there is no quibbling about the overall scientific quality of the Academy's membership. The academicians comprise an elite assemblage of scientific creativity. One means of assessing their value is to speculate on where contemporary science would be if it lacked the contributions that brought their election to the Academy. A reasonable guess is that the state of knowledge in many fields would be set back at least several decades.

In observing the contemporary Academy from certain perspectives, it could be concluded that there is durability to Hale's assessment and to other scoffing views of the institution. (In 1944, a high Navy officer told a congressional committee that the Academy "is a horse and buggy when there are already automobiles. . . . They [the Academy members] have been perfectly satisfied to sit there, all wrapped up in their diplomas and their togas and their great mass of knowledge and say, 'We know all the answers, but if you do not ask us we are not going to tell you; it is none of our business.'") One government science adviser, himself an Academy member, fondly refers to it as "science's League of Women Voters." The Academy's annual April meeting and other periodic get-togethers are scholarly, tastefully ceremonial, and usually quite placid. When the members assemble, there is a chance to meet with old colleagues and read and discuss papers. On these occasions the Academy awards, to members and nonmembers, an assortment of medals and prizes that it administers. And the members observe one minute of silence for those who have died since the last assemblage.

### Perish and Publish

In the gloomy Hall of the Academy's marbled Washington headquarters, such minutes seem to possess prodigious duration. This observance is followed by one of the few tangible perquisites of Academy membership—the composition by a fellow academician of an obituary that is usually so