

Briefings

edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

The Sin of Rivalry

Biomedical researchers are fond of describing how the intense competition in their field works to the benefit not only of science, but of society as a whole.

A la Adam Smith, they argue that the "invisible hand" of the research marketplace aligns the self-interest of prominent scientists—who often compete fiercely for grants, prestigious appointments, and even Nobel Prizes—with the interests of patients awaiting treatment.

But the Pope isn't buying this argument and seems to feel it's time for some unnamed AIDS researchers to fess up. In a 1 September speech to assembled diplomats in Tanzania, John Paul II castigated instances of governmental indifference to AIDS and discrimi-



Evil rivalry. The Pope condemns self-interested competition.

natory practices toward AIDS patients, and then aimed at a surprising target: "self-interested rivalries in the search for a medical answer."

Has someone in the Pope's entourage—or the pontiff himself—been reading about, say, the Gallo-Montagnier feud? *Science* was unable to determine what spurred the Pope or his advisers to denounce such behavior—officials at the Catholic News Service professed ignorance of the specific source of the Pope's concern. Clearly, though, someone in



William Henry Holmes. At the quarry in 1891.

The Hazards of Backyard Archeology

Southern Methodist University archeologist David Meltzer is used to fighting rattlesnakes and nasty weather in his fieldwork in Texas. . .and winning. But he lost out to an armed guard when he tried to do a little Sunday archaeology during a vacation visit to Washington, D.C., last month.

Meltzer's long-standing interest in the history of archeology led him to spend 2 days hiking around the tony neighborhood of Dumbarton Oaks. His quarry was a long-lost quarry—a spot where prehistoric Indians made quartzite tools. The place had last been excavated in 1891 by renowned Smithsonian anthropologist William Henry Holmes. "Holmes described the site as being in a primitive forest but with suburban avenues threatening all around," says Meltzer. "I couldn't resist going to see what the site looked like today."

Armed with a century-old photo and Holmes' description, Meltzer zeroed in on the site, which turned out to be in the backyard of a huge mansion. He took a few photos of the house and then approached the front door, where a uniformed guard stood watch. "I asked the guard if the owners would mind if I went in the back and poked around," says Meltzer. "She said it wouldn't be a very good idea, since they were somewhat sensitive at this time about their security."

Meltzer asked if he could come back another time. That would be "unlikely," came the response. So Meltzer asked who lived in the house. The answer: the Iraqi ambassador.

the Vatican has been extremely upset by the behavior of one or more AIDS researchers. Said the Pope: such rivalries "should be considered forms of collaboration in this terrible evil." Strong words, indeed.

Abstract Attack Turns into a War

On 31 August, the American Chemical Society fought back. It filed a long-promised counter-suit against Dialog Information Services over the use of the society's Chemical Abstracts Service databases.

Dialog had earlier filed a \$150-million antitrust suit against ACS on 7 June, charging that Chemical Abstracts was

illegally reserving its most lucrative databases for the exclusive use of its own direct access service, known as STN (*Science*, 3 August, p. 472).

ACS, which has always hotly denied that it is doing anything wrong, is now accusing Dialog of "fraudulent and deceptive accounting practices" that ACS says have deprived it of millions of dollars in royalty payments on those few databases that Dialog *does* license. In its suit, ACS is seeking a formal audit of Dialog, \$10 million to cover the cost of Dialog's alleged underpayments, and \$30 million in punitive damages for Dialog's alleged breach of "good faith and fair dealing."

"Many within the ACS believe that one of the reasons

Dialog filed the suit. . .was in order to frighten the society into a rapid settlement before the full nature of the problems being uncovered in our audits could be known," says James V. Seals, Jr., Chemical Abstracts' director of marketing.

Dialog founder and CEO Roger Summit replies that he doesn't know what ACS is talking about and wonders why the society's leaders aren't willing to talk about an out-of-court settlement. But ACS is apparently not in a talking mood. As Committee on Chemical Abstracts chairman Larry Thompson of Bell Labs thundered at the recent ACS meeting in Washington, "To negotiate now would be capitulation!"

Stay tuned.

Goring Sacred Cows for Education Reform

Throughout the '80s, a steady succession of reports on the decrepit state of high school education—particularly in science—have been notable more for their plaintive tone than for proposing any innovative solutions to deal with the crisis. But the latest offering from the National Research Council* is an exception of sorts to this trend. Chaired by biologist Timothy Goldsmith of Yale, this panel's recommendations—which are focused on biology education, although they apply equally well to all sciences—take on several of academia's most sacred cows in order to get working scientists involved in reversing educational decline.

For instance, the panel suggests that universities develop permanent summer science programs for local high school teachers—staffed by university faculty. Universities should also allocate money and faculty positions based in part upon departmental commitments to training prospective science teachers. Given the competitive

**Fulfilling the Promise: Biology Education in the Nation's Schools* (National Academy Press, 1990).

pressures in today's academic climate, "it's not surprising that teaching undergraduates is not seen as the best path to achievement and success," Goldsmith says. And the NRC panel adds that secondary school teachers should spend at least a semester doing original research under an academic scientist—if not as part of their undergraduate education, then in midcareer training.

The NRC also calls for an overhaul of the textbook publishing system, demanding that authors take back control of content from the publishers. It further suggests that the academic community institute comprehensive reviews of high school textbooks.

Inspired by late Yale president A. Bartlett Giamatti, who emphasized "asserting a vision" and making it "practicable and compelling" as the foundation of educational leadership, the panel also recommended setting up a permanent board at the NRC as a bully pulpit for promoting reform efforts.

Despite the strong tone in much of the report, it does occasionally falter. In considering how high school science teachers are certified, for instance, the report suggests only that

alternative certification programs—in which individuals without degrees in education can be certified to teach—should be "critically evaluated." Why didn't the panel provide such a critical evaluation itself? Goldsmith says it would have led the committee "beyond the scope of our study" by raising the issue of how to judge teacher effectiveness.

Federal Scientists' Unwanted Vacations

Scientists employed by the federal government could soon get free—read, "unpaid"—vacations, courtesy of President Bush and the Congress. The reason? To reach Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction targets, federal agencies are looking for ways to slash domestic spending by nearly a third, and one way to do that is to reduce the workforce, at least temporarily.

The current budget mess has arisen because the White House and Congress have been unable to agree on a package of spending cuts and new taxes that will bring down the deficit from an estimated \$168 billion to \$64 billion. Until they do, federal

agencies have to assume the worst—hence the furlough notices.

At the National Institutes of Health, virtually all employees—including intramural research scientists—received a letter at the end of August from the personnel office warning them they may be furloughed for as many as 22 workdays. Similar letters went out at most other scientific agencies, including NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

One notable exception is the National Science Foundation, where enough budget flexibility exists so that officials can juggle grant funding rather than lay off employees. But this juggling act can last only a few weeks, so if the agency must cut its budget severely, NSF employees will probably also get some unexpected and unwanted free time. NIH, too, could juggle its extramural spending to avoid laying off intramural scientists, but officials there have said they want to spread the cuts across all aspects of NIH's budget in the interest of fairness.

Ironically, the National Research Council chose last week to issue a new report entitled

"Recruitment, Retention and Utilization of Federal Scientists and Engineers." Considering that the report cites numerous problems with federal personnel practices, its timing couldn't have been more appropriate. Right now, Washington is full of federally employed scientists who'd be glad to give you an earful on that topic.

More Delays for Shuttle Space Science

NASA managers announced last week that technical problems could delay two important space science missions.

Astro-1, a package of astronomical instruments that was originally planned to fly on the shuttle last May (*Science*, 22 June, p. 1486), was delayed when the orbiter *Columbia* developed another hydrogen fuel leak similar to those which have kept NASA's shuttle fleet grounded all summer. Engineers are hoping to replace a fuel circulation pump and have the shuttle ready for launch the week of 17 September. But any snags could bump Astro-1 until November—or later—so the *Ulysses* solar mission doesn't miss its narrow launch window in early October.

That's assuming, of course, that the shuttle scheduled to loft *Ulysses* is ready to launch on time. NASA administrator Richard Truly told reporters that *Discovery* is leaking freon coolant at the rate of about 1% a day. Engineers may be able to work around the problem, but the possibility remains that they'll need to replace an ammonia boiler at the site of the leak—repairs that might push *Discovery* to the very edge of its launch window on 23 October, *Ulysses'* last chance for launch within the next 13 months.

At least Astro-1's observation mission isn't jeopardized by delay. The Astro-1 team has already drawn up a completely new observing schedule because of the summer delay; if the launch slips back to October, they'll just do the same again.

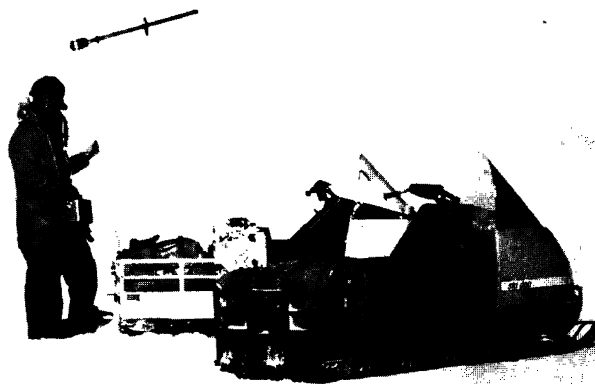
Arctic Science Gets Organized

Scientists interested in Antarctica have long benefited from extensive international cooperation, thanks to a 1959 treaty governing that continent. Up at the top of the world, however, they haven't been so lucky. Political gamesmanship and mistrust between the eight nations whose territory extends into the Arctic Circle have long fragmented scientific efforts there.

But as the Cold War melts away, these nations have warmed to the idea of scientific cooperation. Two weeks ago, this unprecedented comity culminated in the formation of a non-governmental International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) by leading scientific organizations in those eight nations. According to its founding articles, the IASC should make it

easier for scientists to plan and carry out arctic experiments with their international counterparts.

The announcement comes at a particularly fortuitous time, since the arctic region has a major influence on global weather patterns and ocean circulation, making it a prime location from which to study global warming.



Snow bound. Researchers study the Arctic climate.

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