

Briefings

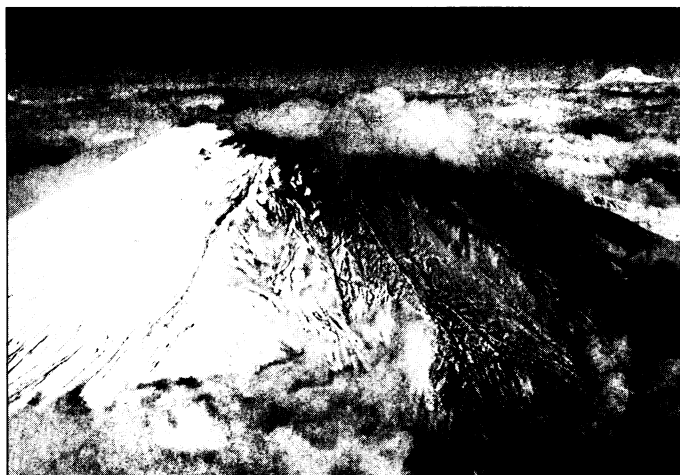
edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Playing Chicken with Mount St. Helens

Life lost its zest? Looking for a bit of a thrill? Take a walk on the wild side with a visit to Mount St. Helens. With the acquiescence of federal authorities, you can go eyeball to eyeball with a certified killer whose behavior scientists cannot predict.

Just as a reminder of what it can do, the mountain shot off a volley on 5 November, its largest blast since the U.S. Forest Service opened the crater to the public 3 years ago. The explosion hurled hot blocks of rock 1 to 2 meters in diameter across the crater from a vent in its central lava dome. And that's not all—since 1986, scientists have found debris from five other dome explosions, and seismographs have recorded more blasts that could not be verified directly.

Scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey's nearby Cascades Volcano Observatory would like to be able to notify



Missed this time. Mount St. Helens sports a new rim of dark ash beneath encroaching clouds after an early morning blast.

the public before such events. But the instruments studding the volcano haven't yielded advance warnings for any of them, says observatory director Edward Wolfe.

So far, visitors to the crater have been lucky. The latest explosion struck at 2 a.m. and access was closed anyway because the public is only allowed in when there is enough snow on the ground to protect the volcano from human disturbance. That keeps hikers to a minimum, but weekend snowmobilers have been known to

leave the crater looking like a racetrack. A bit of bad timing could make for quite a day at the races.

German Court Rules on Physics Surveys

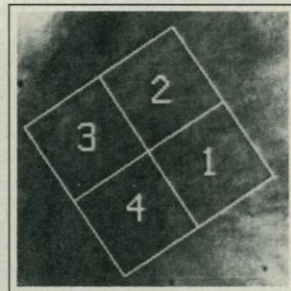
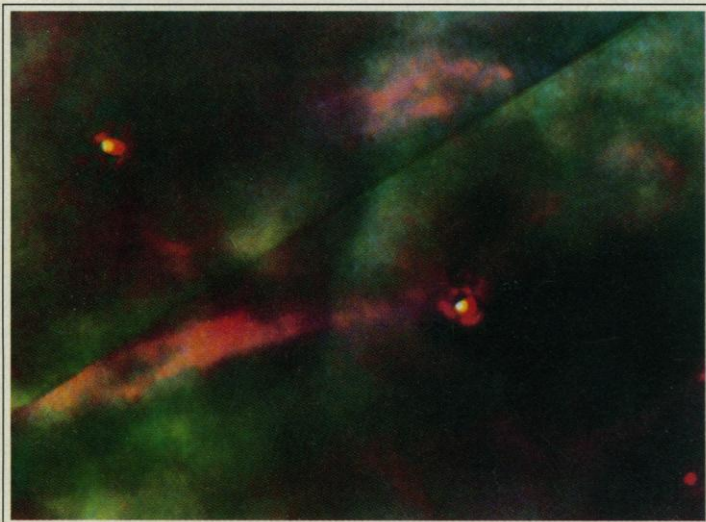
When the verdict came in, the science publishing company Gordon & Breach presented it to the world as a vindication. G&B had been seeking to halt the distribution of journal pricing surveys published by the American Institute of Physics

and the American Physical Society (*Science*, 20 April, p. 298). Now, according to G&B's press release, a German civil court, on 31 October, has agreed with it that the surveys, in which the prices of G&B journals appear to be extremely high, were "false and misleading" and amounted to unfair competition under German law.

The court, however, dismissed the appeal—on the grounds that the surveys were directed at the U.S. market and their distribution in Germany was too limited. G&B chairman Martin Gordon said "naturally we're disappointed." But Gordon said the company felt "heartened" that the court agreed with it that the survey methodology was flawed.

The APS and the AIP see things differently. They have issued a sarcastic press release saying they "hope for further Gordon & Breach 'victories'" in Switzerland and France, where suits have also been filed.

The societies not only welcomed the outcome but took issue with G&B's interpretation of the court's findings. The poll's author, Henry Barschall of the University of Wisconsin, suggested in the press release that G&B president Martin Gordon must have "had some difficulty in following the German" at the proceeding in Frankfurt, which Barschall (whose native tongue is German) also attended. Said Barschall, "The court did not determine that the price survey was illegal advertising and it certainly did not find that my work was false and misleading."



Hubble Sees Birth of a Star. Peering into the heart of the Great Nebula in Orion, a glowing "stellar nursery" some 1500 light-years away, the Hubble Space Telescope has discovered a jet of high-

velocity gas streaming outward from a newborn star. Young stars are abundant in the Orion region, where they are constantly forming, like condensing raindrops, in dense interstellar gas clouds. Jets seem to be a normal part of the birthing process, a kind of first, lusty howl as a star begins to shine by thermonuclear fusion. The image of this jet, which is several light-years long, is about ten times as sharp as those of similar jets astronomers have seen from the ground. The jet appears in a four-frame mosaic taken by the telescope's Wide Field Planetary Camera, and lies just below the boundary between frames 3 and 4 (inset). It has been colored to highlight the emissions of gaseous sulfur (red), hydrogen (green), and oxygen (blue).

Who Takes Science?

Who majors in science in college? Brainy overachievers—and especially brawny brainy ones. Males outnumber females by almost 2:1, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, but whatever their sex, high school kids heading for science in college spend more time doing homework and get higher grades, the