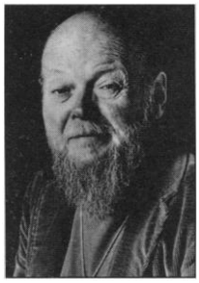
RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

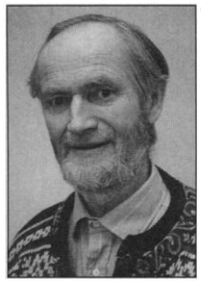
Delayed Accolades for Alaskan Scientists

In 1959 the old U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) assembled a team of scientists to determine whether it would be safe to use nuclear blasts to dig a harbor near Point Hope in northwestern Alaska, a plan dubbed Project Chariot. Two Chariot team members who also taught at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks (UAF)—zoologist William Pruitt and ecologist Leslie Viereck—spoke out publicly against the plan. Within months, both lost their UAF jobs. Now comes a belated apology: Last week, the university granted both scientists honorary doctorates.



UAF

Pruitt



CAL WHITE/UAF

Viereck

The AEC had hired Pruitt and Viereck, among others, to determine if fallout from Project Chariot would affect Alaskans living near Point Hope. The two scientists told the AEC what it didn't want to hear: that local people might suffer from eating tainted meat from caribous grazing on fallout-laced lichens. The AEC disputed this, but, despite some heavy-duty PR from nuclear physicist Edward Teller, the government failed to win public support and eventually scrapped plans for Chariot.

Pruitt and Viereck's gumption earned them places in the ranks of the unemployed in 1961 when UAF failed to renew their teaching contracts. "Archival documents show that the university administration felt it would be better off vis-à-vis retaining important federal research funding if their contracts weren't renewed," asserts University of Alaska historian Dan O'Neill, who's completing a book on Project Chariot.

The university hasn't made an explicit apology to the two scientists, but it's making amends. Pruitt, now a professor at the University of Manitoba, was honored for his recognition that northern mammals use snow as an insulator to survive temperature extremes, and Viereck, now a scientist at the Forest Service's Institute of Northern Forestry in Fairbanks, was cited for compiling a database on Alaskan flora. Though the Project Chariot episode was a nasty experience, Viereck says, "We'd do it again if we had to."

Goodbye, Columbus, Hello LBT

In an effort to avoid offending Native Americans, the University of Arizona and its collaborators have just changed the name of their soon-to-be completed Columbus telescope to the innocuous "Large Binocular Telescope."

At this point, a more descriptive name might be the Politically Incorrect Telescope. The telescope on Mount Graham, equipped with a pair of 8.4 meter mirrors, has been hit by political problems since planning started in the early 1980s. First came environmentalists who sued project leaders for endangering the lives of the red squirrels that live near the summit. That suit was dismissed by a district court in March, but trouble returned when the Apache Survival Coalition—a group of Native Americans and environmentalists—brought suit claiming that the observatory was being built on sacred land. They lost but are appealing, says observatory director Peter Strittmatter.

But then, planners started worrying that the project's name would cause problems. In the mid-1980s, Columbus seemed like a good idea, says research director Michael Cusanovich: The project included collaborators from Ohio State University in Columbus, as well as Italians, and was originally slated to start up in the quinquecentennial year of 1992, "before Columbus was considered a bad word." But the delays, the political problems, and the navigator's sinking reputation doomed the name.

Arriving at a new one wasn't easy. "We first considered other explorers," says Cusanovich, "but every one had some political correctness problem associated with them—we couldn't find any explorer that was benign." They then tried out more descriptive names, attempting to find one that didn't condense into a potentially offensive acronym, finally arriving at Large Binocular Telescope. But even then a little scare flared up when a local radio talk show host joked that the name was a tribute to a Columbus aide named Ebenezer Large.

WOMEN SPEAKERS AT NIH

Lecture	Total	Women	Topic
Dyer 1951-1990	36	1	medicine and biology
NIH Lecture Series 1953-1990	108	9	biomedicine and general topics
Jules Freund 1961-1974	13	0	immunology
Kinyoun 1979-1990	12	1	infection and immunity
DeWitt Stetten 1982-1990	9	3	general biomedicine
Marjorie Guthrie 1983-1987	5	0	neuroscience
Seymour Kreshover 1983-1990	8	2	dental research
Totals	**191**	**16**	

Seldom in the limelight. Women may abound in biology, but not as speakers in the lectures sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). A report released 2 weeks ago by the Task Force on NIH Intramural Women Scientists recommended that NIH establish two yearly lectures featuring women speakers—one named for outgoing Director Bernadine Healy.

Eurowomen in Science Band Together

It took a couple of decades but Europe's women scientists are following the lead of their sisters across the Atlantic: In March, a group of about 40 met in Munich to establish European Women in Science and Humanities (EWISH). Patterned on the 22-year-old U.S. Association for Women in Science (AWIS), the group will serve as a formal network for scientists and academics to enhance career opportunities and attract more females into science.

EWISH has been consulting closely with AWIS, which set up the Munich meeting. Countries represented so far are Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Wales, and Austria. U.S. women can join too. Membership is about $35 a year. Would-be members can contact either AWIS in Washington, D.C., or EWISH president Emilie Jaeger, a mineralogist and professor emeritus at the University of Bern, whose fax number is 41-31-829-3409.

Spotlight on Behavioral Research

For the past decade or so the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) has been riding the wave of the biological revolution in psychiatry—and basic research on behavior has been foundering in a backwater. But

times are changing, says Alan Kraut, head of the American Psychological Society: "NIMH is getting less defensive about being a major funder of behavioral science."

The institute is currently formulating a strategy for psychosocial research—that is, everything from learning to family dynamics—that would be analogous to its Decade of the Brain plan for neuroscience. The agenda, being created by a committee of members of the NIMH advisory council and cochaired by psychologists Gordon Bower of Stanford University and John Kihlstrom of the University of Arizona, is due in the fall.

Its topics:

- Basic behavioral processes, including conditioned learning in animals and infants.
- Low-level cognition, covering processes like perception and memory.
- Higher-level cognition, such as reasoning and language.
- Personality, meaning the structure of personality and temperament, and including heritability of personality characteristics.
- Social and family processes, such as mother-child relationships.
- Cultural and environmental processes, including how cultural differences affect how individuals cope with diseases.

Says Kihlstrom, "It was a mistake for certain past administrations to downgrade the importance of those topics." He notes that studies of behavior and the environmental influences on it are crucial even for mental disorders with clearly biological origins.

And NIH as a whole is getting the same message. Criticized for years for paying short shrift to the role of behavior in medical problems, NIH may soon be getting a prod from Congress: The House version of the NIH reauthorization bill (now in House-Senate conference) calls on the citadel of biomedical research to set up a new Office of Behavioral Research to coordinate research on topics like teen pregnancy, suicide, and violence.

Solar Eagle II. Cal State's entry won the pole position (meaning it starts first) for Sunrayce 93.

Driven by the Sun

Apparently, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to be at what physicist Richard King of the Department of Energy (DOE) calls the "leading edge of the technology that's going into [electric] passenger cars." You can be a student.

This June's "Sunrayce 93," a cross-country solar-powered car race sponsored by DOE and General Motors (among others) is the second of what is to be a biennial event, pitting student-designed cars against one another. Detroit's prototype electric cars, juiced up from a plug and weighing well over a ton, don't bear much resemblance to the vehicles in Sunrayce, which, says King, are "built from scratch" and weigh about 300 pounds. Each car is allowed to have a small battery to keep it moving through a cloudy day. But the vehicles rely almost completely on solar power collected by photovoltaic cells arrayed on the specially designed cars. The average amount of energy that can be collected by a solar array is 1000 watts, or one horsepower—which wouldn't propel one of Detroit's hulks.

To qualify for the 7-day race, which will cover a 1000-mile route from Arlington, Texas, to Minneapolis, Minnesota, a car has to be able to average 20 mph over a 50-mile test course. This year the list of 36 qualifiers is topped by a team from California State University, Los Angeles, who flew around the test track at an average of 50 mph. A University of Michigan team won the first race, in 1990, averaging 23 mph over the 1644-mile route from Florida to Michigan.

NRC on Environmental Research

Gold plating a VW won't make it drive like a Rolls. Similarly, elevating the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cabinet status as the Department of Environment—an action contained in bills now percolating in Congress—wouldn't greatly enhance U.S. environmental research. Much bigger changes are needed in both the organization and "culture" of research, concludes a report from the National Research Council (NRC).

So far, only a summary is available of the report, 1½ years in the making, by the NRC committee on environmental research. Chaired by former Cornell University president Dale Corson, it reiterates criticisms that scientists and environmentalists have been making for years. "There is no clear leadership for the nation's environmental efforts," says the panel. "The bridges between policy, management, and science are weak." And, federal research is "poorly structured to deal with complex, interdisciplinary research."

Recommendations include the establishment of a National Environmental Council of federal agency directors, and a mega-environmental agency that combines EPA with portions of other agencies. As for EPA, the NRC has some advice for right now: It needs to untangle its regulatory arm from its research program as a step toward increasing the credibility of its research.

While the committee declined to price the options, Corson told *Science* that when it comes to improving the culture of research, adding $500 million for multidisciplinary studies to the $5 billion the government now spends annually on environmental research would be a big help. Interestingly, $500 million is exactly what some say would be needed to launch a National Institute for the Environment (*Science*, 9 April, p. 158). But the committee had mixed feelings about that proposal, calling it "a credible and effective view of a means to organize environmental research," but warning that "if not carefully monitored, [it could] duplicate the roles and missions of existing agencies and engender 'turf battles' as it competed for funds and programs with existing agencies."

Copies of the full report will be available in July from the National Academy Press, 1-800-624-6242.

Windfall for U.S. Wellcome Researchers

Britain's Wellcome Trust, the world's largest private funder of biomedical research, will be giving $400 million over the next 4 years to its U.S. partner, the Burroughs Wellcome Fund. The new money comes from the conversion of much of the trust's drug company holdings into higher-yielding stocks (*Science*, 22 May 1992, p. 1132). The windfall may quadruple the amount of money the fund, based at the Burroughs Wellcome company in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, will be able to grant. Last year, it handed out about $6 million for research in areas it believes are malnourished, such as parasitology and experimental drug therapies.

Some cash-strapped British scientists are reportedly disgruntled about the gift, but the chairman of the trust, Roger Gibbs, explained that it is in keeping with the sentiments of the founder, American-born Sir Henry Wellcome.