SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

Icy Grave May Curb Antarctic Explorers

The death of a Norwegian adventurer in a 160-foot crevasse in Antarctica has led U.S. officials to propose a certification system for expeditions to the frozen continent. The idea is to screen out the unprepared and stretch limited U.S. resources for both research and rescue missions.

International treaties have enshrined Antarctica as a scientific preserve, and U.S. researchers benefit from $150 million a year in logistical support from the U.S. Navy and the National Science Foundation (NSF) to carry out studies there (see page 28). However, Antarctica's exotic beauty also attracts tourists and adventurers, who often call NSF when they get in trouble. Each ensuing rescue mission (NSF averages a few each year) drains thousands of dollars from NSF's budget, delays other missions, and puts crews at risk.

Last week a 35-year-old Norwegian army captain fell into a crevasse and died while on a 1000-mile journey to reclaim a flag planted in 1911 by his countryman, Roald Amundsen, the first person to reach the South Pole. The four-man team was flown to Antarctica by Adventure Network, a firm that runs the only commercial base on the continent. After the accident, NSF deployed two planes and sent a four-man team some 1200 miles to the crevasse before deciding a rescue was impossible. "There's an implicit reliance on the U.S. program to do search and rescue missions," says NSF's Jack Talmadge. "But that's not our job."

NSF isn't about to turn down future requests for help, but it would like to find a way to reduce the chance of being asked. One idea NSF may present to the other treaty signatories: Ask a panel of international experts to set voluntary safety standards for Antarctic expeditions. If insurance firms pegged their rates to such standards, Talmadge says, missions that didn't measure up might become prohibitively expensive.

ANIMALS ANIMALS/MARESA PRYOR

No more quail watching? EPA plans to close lab that studies wildlife such as the bobwhite quail.

Wildlife Ecotoxicology Suffers Major Blow

Spotted owls and snail darters may be benefiting these days from the public's concern about wildlife, but not some scientists who study wildlife in the lab. According to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) researchers, a unique toxicology program is endangered by a planned reorganization of an EPA lab in Corvallis, Oregon.

The $1.2 million program is the only one at EPA that conducts lab experiments on how pesticides and other toxicants damage the health of animals such as bobwhite quails and voles. Nevertheless, a Corvallis reorganization now under way will eliminate the 11-year-old ecotox program. Seven EPA employees await transfer to other programs as soon as EPA headquarters approves the plan, and 17 affiliated private-sector researchers saw their contracts expire at the end of 1993.

EPA headquarters is expected to approve the changes as part of an agency-wide effort to beef up its monitoring of natural ecosystems at the expense of lab-based toxicological work, says Corvallis director Thomas Murphy. Eliminating the program, he says, "was not something I was pushing." In the end, however, EPA deemed it expendable.

The program's demise may do more than alter the career paths of several environmental scientists: Some researchers argue it could cripple EPA's ability to conduct ecological risk assessments. "You can't do a risk assessment without tox or exposure data," says EPA ecologist Anne Sergeant, who works in Washington, D.C. and relies on the Corvallis data. Sergeant hopes academia will be able to pick up the slack. Meanwhile, Murphy says he has preserved the lab's ecotoxicology expertise by finding new assignments for staff rather than letting them go.

End of Cold War for Kinsey and Indiana?

Although winter just arrived, the permafrost is beginning to thaw between Indiana University (IU) and the Kinsey Institute, the famed center for research on sexual behavior founded at IU. After 5 years of hard feelings, the institute and IU are beginning a joint search for a new Kinsey director.

Troubles in Indiana began brewing in 1988, when IU asked Kinsey director June Reinisch to resign after a university review alleged the institute was conducting poor research and mismanaging funds. Reinisch—who denied the review's charges—refused to resign, and the institute's trustees declined to dismiss her. Last year, Reinisch sued IU to try to force it to make public the review.

The first sign of peace came last January, when IU president Tom Ehrlich apologized to Reinisch; she dropped the lawsuit and retired in April. But it was an uneasy détente. Soon after Reinisch left, IU slashed in half its $500,000 annual payment to Kinsey (*Science*, 2 July 1993, p. 290). Acting Kinsey director Stephanie Sanders claimed the cut damaged the institute's chances of luring a top-flight director and she hinted the institute may have to relocate.

But now there appears to be real healing going on, says Sanders, who will cochair a committee of 10 IU faculty to find a new director. Sanders warns that a successful search may hinge on an infusion of cash. "No one's going to come in with the budget we've got (now)," she says. Kinsey's trustees expect to approve a candidate by next summer.

Congress to Lose Key Science Staffer

Members of Congress aren't the only bigwigs on Capitol Hill. Some legislative aides also have considerable clout in shaping the federal budget, and perhaps none has wielded more influence on science than Richard Malow, clerk of the House appropriations subcommittee that oversees the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Environmental Protection Agency. After 22 years on the Hill, however, Malow is stepping down this month to take a job with a university consortium that operates several federally funded optical telescopes.

Malow's departure could be a big blow to research. "Dick will be incredibly difficult to replace," says NSF's Ray Bye. "He understands university research and the problems it faces, and his institutional memory with regard to science and space is unmatched within the appropriations committee."

As subcommittee clerk, Malow played a dual role: He handled the NASA and NSF budgets himself, as well as overseeing the rest of the $82 billion worth of programs the panel funds. Sources say his successor, not yet named, is unlikely to have the same assignments and may not even be familiar with the NSF and NASA budgets. With no top committee staffer shepherding their budgets, agency officials may have to penetrate two layers before reaching the ear of the chairman, Representative Louis Stokes (D–OH).

Malow's new job will be to coordinate the 8-meter "Gemini" telescopes being built in Hawaii and Chile and other projects run by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy Inc. (AURA). A political scientist by training, Malow says he's joining AURA because "it was time to move on" and because "astronomy has always been an exciting field for me."