RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Dana-Farber Leader Resigns

His 4-year tenure blemished by revelations earlier this year that chemotherapy overdoses at his institution had killed one patient and irreversibly injured another (*Science*, 21 July, p. 295), the president of Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, biochemist Christopher Walsh, announced last week that he will resign his post. David Nathan, currently chief of medicine at the neighboring Children's Hospital, has been named as Walsh's successor.

In a letter circulated to Dana-Farber staff on 12 September, Walsh asserted that there have been "fundamental changes" in patient care at the institute since the overdoses came to light, and that he feels free to leave—and return to his own research at Harvard Medical School—now that the institute has "reached closure" on the tragedies. Internal and external reviews had highlighted flaws in the hospital's system for monitoring experimental drug trials, but Dana-Farber has since passed safety assessments by the state health department and expects to have its national accreditation fully restored.

A source close to Dana-Farber says Walsh was under no pressure to resign because of the overdose incident. Rather, he was "a constructive force at a uniquely difficult time," the source said. Walsh was unavailable for comment last week, but wrote to staff that he feared impending changes at the institute, including joint-venture negotiations with other local hospitals, would take him "ever farther away from my activities of scholarship and research."

Russian Tycoon Saves Scientists' Travel Fund

The International Science Foundation (ISF), which has put $135 million into Russian science over the past 3 years, has folded its grant-giving operations. But at least one branch of its operation—travel stipends for Russian scientists—will continue for another year, thanks to a donation of $1.5 million from one of Russia's new entrepreneurs.

The benefactor is Boris Berezovsky, a 49-year-old mathematician and automobile mogul who has amassed a fortune since the fall of communism in 1989, according to émigré biologist Alex Goldfarb, a major figure in the ISF since its founding in 1992 by Hungarian-born financier George Soros. "This is the first instance of a newly rich Russian doing major large-scale philanthropy," says Goldfarb.

Meanwhile, other sources of support for beleaguered Russian scientists are gearing up. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute this summer launched a program of awards to biomedical researchers (*Science*, 14 July, p. 155). And the newly established U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation for the Newly Independent States of the Soviet Union (*Science*, 1 September, p. 1207) is getting set to pick up where ISF left off—directed by Gerson Sher, on loan from the National Science Foundation, who also ran the ISF.

Did Eagle Snatch Taung Baby?

Researchers in South Africa have come up with a new theory for the demise of the "Taung child," a 2.5-million-year-old skull that was the first fossil of human forebears found on the African continent. Lee Berger and Rob Clarke, of the Paleoanthropology Research Unit, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, believe the child was carried off and killed by an eagle.

The skull of the 3- to 4-year-old hominid, a member of the species *Australopithecus africanus*, was found in a cave exposed during blasting in a limestone quarry near Taung, South Africa, in 1924, along with thousands of animal skull and bone fragments, including baboons, bok, tortoises, hyrax, rats, bats, and birds, and crab and egg shells.

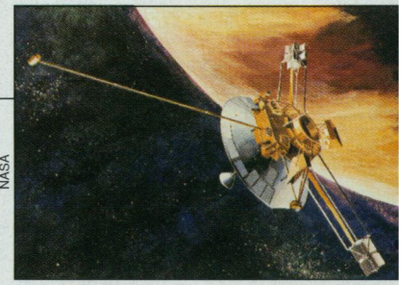
Paleontologist Raymond Dart, who first documented the excavation, theorized that the assemblage was part of the leavings at a hominid cave. Other researchers agreed, noting that jawbones were complete on some animal skulls—unlikely in prey of large animals—and that there were openings at the base of skulls that looked as though they had been made by tools to extract brain tissue. But no one could explain why the cave held the remains of only one hominid.

Berger now thinks he knows why: It wasn't a hominid cave but the nesting place of a "large bird of prey." He got the inspiration a few years ago when he saw a black eagle killing and carrying off a vervet monkey. He compared the damage to the Taung bones with that seen in piles of animal bones beneath eagles' nests. Both had similar depression fractures and puncture marks on the skulls, which could have been inflicted by talons. The presence of tortoise carapaces and the absence of other hominid bones further convinced Berger and Clarke that their interpretation, published in the September issue of the *Journal of Human Evolution*, is the correct one.

Anthropologist Peter Andrews of London's Natural History Museum has worked extensively on fossilized accumulations by birds and says the new hypothesis "fitted very well with my own observations. ... I [am] persuaded by the evidence."

J. HUMAN EVOLUTION

Bird feed? Hyrax skull *(upper left)*, from under a modern black eagle nest in South Africa; fossil baboon skull from Taung *(beneath)*; and Taung hominid skull.



NASA

Tottering into infinity. Pioneer 11.

Pioneer Out to Pasture

After 22 years and 6.5 billion kilometers on the starry road, the Pioneer 11 spacecraft has retired from active service. Launched in 1973, it performed its primary mission of exploring Jupiter during a flyby in 1974, went on to Saturn, and then headed for interstellar space. Now beyond the orbit of Pluto, age has caught up with its power plant and electronic gear. But it may yet help its more durable twin, Pioneer 10, make another breakthrough beyond the rim of the solar system.

Pioneer project manager Fred Wirth of NASA's Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California, explains that Pioneer 11's radio transmissions to Earth are pointed off target, greatly reducing how much data can be transferred. And the spacecraft's power source—four radio-isotope thermoelectric generators fueled by the decay of plutonium-238—is finally wearing out. "We're at the point where none of the [scientific] instruments can be operated any more," says Wirth. "It's a slow death that we're watching."

But even as it expires, Pioneer 11 is serving science. Pioneer 10, launched in 1972, still has a few years of power left. By watching how its twin's electronic subsystems perform under waning power, says Wirth, researchers might extend Pioneer 10's life by many months.

If that happens, the craft might reach scientists' next goal—the "termination shock." That is where the solar wind—a gale of charged particles blowing out from the sun—abruptly slows before it encounters the interstellar wind from the stars. Pioneer 10 "could well be in the neighborhood right now," says team member Aaron Barnes of Ames. The encounter "could be tomorrow or in a number of years," he says, but "5 or 10 years would be too late."