RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

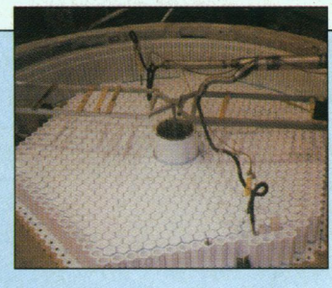
France's Museum War Resolved

The long-running conflict over a reorganization of major anthropological museums in Paris appears to be over, with the 7 October announcement by President Jacques Chirac that a new Museum of Civilization and Early Arts (Musée des Civilisations et des Arts Premiers) will be created in the Chaillot Palace, home of the world-renowned anthropology museum, the Musée de l'Homme.

The plan was bitterly opposed by a number of scientists led by Henry de Lumley, director of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, which administers the Musée de l'Homme, on the grounds that it would entail breaking up the Musée de l'Homme's vast collection. The plan involves combining the Musée de l'Homme's ethnology collections with those from another Paris museum, the Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, to create a new museum that would occupy much of the space now occupied by the Musée de l'Homme. The Musée de l'Homme's remaining anthropological and prehistoric collections may be housed at a separate museum at the Chaillot site.

De Lumley, backed by such luminaries as French Nobel laureate and physician Jean Dausset, had opposed separating the collection, saying the key issue is "whether we are going to create a museum of ethnology and art or one devoted to mankind in all his complexity." He had proposed instead a sweeping renovation of the aging Musée de l'Homme that would have included beefing up its laboratories for research on anthropology, prehistory, and ethnology.

But Chirac is said to be very enthusiastic about the new plan, which has been endorsed by French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and connoisseurs of primitive art as well as Bernard Dupaigne, director of the Musée de l'Homme's ethnology laboratory. Dupaigne says the new plan will put the museum's focus back on its public exhibits, which he says have been badly neglected.



LBT

Glass eye. It will be "the biggest piece of glass ever made," says Roger Angel, director of the University of Arizona's Mirror Laboratory, referring to the impending creation of the first mirror for the Large Binocular Telescope at Mount Graham in eastern Arizona. The $80 million telescope has a unique design, combining two 8.4-meter mirrors for the light-gathering power of a single 11.8-meter mirror and the resolving power of a 22.8-meter instrument. Scientists recently installed the last of the 1662 ceramic cores (see above) that give the mirrors their stiff yet lightweight honeycomb structure. In late December the crew will load 17,000 kilograms of borosilicate glass into a mold. Then the lab's giant furnace will be heated and spun to make the mirror.

Workers began pouring the concrete for the telescope's foundation last week, after more than 2 years of delay from a court battle between the university and environmentalists over an endangered red squirrel.

Telemedicine: Not Yet of Age

Now that computers are everywhere, telemedicine—the remote diagnosis and treatment of disease—should be thriving, yes? Well, no. But a report issued last month by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) may help push things along by offering new guidelines for assessing fledgling projects.

Telemedicine, touted as a way to bring health care to isolated, imprisoned, rural, or elderly people, comprises a bewildering array of technologies and services, from dialing plain old 911 to monitoring heart pacemakers over the phone, transmitting x-rays digitally, or performing telesurgery via interactive video and robots.

But telemedicine's full promise still hasn't been realized, says John R. Ball, president of Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Hospital and chair of the IOM panel. The report calls for a multitude of improvements in the evaluation of federally funded research and demonstration projects. In particular, it calls for more attention to be paid to the economic angles. For example, video conferencing facilities at rural hospitals can eliminate costly travel for patients. But researchers need to look at whether the savings offset the loss in personal contact between doctors and patients, the report points out.

Committee member Jay Sanders, a physician who heads The Global Telemedicine Group in McLean, Virginia, adds that rapid changes in technology make health care providers wary of investing in telemedicine systems. But, says Ball, decision-makers will have more to go on if researchers heed the new guidelines. *Telemedicine: A Guide to Assessing Telecommunications in Health Care*, can be reached at http://www2.nas.edu/whatsnew/

Few Founding Finns

New evidence suggests that, as their distinctive language and blond hair and blue eyes imply, Finns descended from a small band of people who settled in what is now Finland some 4000 years ago.

Scientists have long hypothesized that the Finnish population went through a "genetic bottleneck." The early Finns were separated for centuries from other societies by both geography and climate. And Finns display a pattern of genetic diseases that is different from that in any other European population: For example, they rarely develop cystic fibrosis, but they get some 30 other disorders that are rare or absent elsewhere in the world.

COURTESY EMBASSY OF FINLAND

Out of the bottleneck. Twins, or just Finnish?

Now geneticist Svante Pääbo at the University of Munich and colleagues have done the genetic analysis to prove the bottleneck theory. The scientists sampled DNA from 54 Finns, 28 Saami—the people thought to predate modern Finns in Finland—and more than 100 other Europeans, studying both the Y chromosome (unique to males) and DNA in mitochondria, subcellular energy-producing bodies that are passed on only by the mother. This dual approach "gives a good thumbnail sketch of the whole [genetic] picture," Pääbo says.

Finns have much less genetic variation than other Europeans and even less than the Saami—who, although relatively few in number, evidently descended from a larger pool of people than did the Finns—in three small regions of the Y chromosome known to have a variety of nucleotide sequences. Finns also showed less diversity in some of their mitochondrial DNA, the team reports in the 15 October *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Finns, because of their limited ancestry, "are a very good population for studying molecular genetics," comments psychiatrist Markku Linnoila at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, who is looking in the Finn genome for genes that may predispose people to alcoholism. Pääbo, meanwhile, says he will next try to backtrack through time to determine how many original Finns there were.