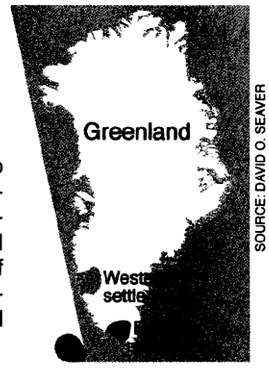
# LETTERS

## To the core

Examples are given of "ice-core data being applied to human history" in Greenland (right) and elsewhere. Preference is expressed for techniques to detect "weakly interacting massive particles," a "daunting task." "Good news" and "bad news" are offered about the splitting of Yale University's biology department along "levels of analysis." And writers wax eloquent about flying honeybees and how they might "accomplish thermoregulation."




SOURCE: DAVID O. SEAVER

### Ice Cores and Human History

In the article "Death in Norse Greenland" by Heather Pringle (Research News, 14 Feb., p. 924), paleoclimatologist Paul Mayewski is said to have been "pleased that the ice-core data are at last being applied to human history." He is referring to new isotope studies on the Greenland Ice Sheet Project Two (GISP2) ice core which show a cold period coinciding with the extinction of the Western Settlement in the middle of the 14th century. Twenty-two years ago, we drew a similar conclusion based on similar data obtained from ice cores (*1*). Even the early history of the epoch of the Norsemen was related to climatic changes. This work has been further confirmed by a compilation of other Greenland isotope profiles along ice cores (*2*).

Other examples of ice-core data being applied to human history include the verification that a giant volcanic eruption was responsible for unusual atmospheric phenomena at the time of Caesar's assassination, as described by Vergil and other contemporary Roman writers (*3*), and the precise dating (1643 ± 7 years B.C.) of the great eruption of Thera in ancient Greece, the after effects of which seriously weakened the Minoan kingdom (*4*).

**W. Dansgaard**
*Niels Bohr Institute,*
*Department of Geophysics,*
*University of Copenhagen,*
*Juliane Maries Vej 30,*
*DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark*

#### References

1. W. Dansgaard *et al.*, *Nature* **255**, 24 (1975).
2. S. J. Johnsen *et al.*, *J. Geophys. Res.*, in press.
3. C. V. Hammer *et al.*, *Nature* **288**, 230 (1980).
4. C. V. Hammer et al., *ibid.* **328**, 577 (1987).

### Diabetes Project

In the ScienceScope section of 11 April (p. 187), a new initiative on the genetics of adult-onset diabetes in West Africa is described. As participants in this innovative effort, we would like to direct attention to the critical role played by the Office of Research on Minority Health (ORMH) of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, led by John Ruffin. Without the vigorous and enthusiastic support of ORMH, this ambitious partnership among five centers in Ghana and Nigeria, ORMH, Howard University, and the National Human Genome Research Institute could never have come into being.

***Georgia M. Dunston***
*Program Director,*
*Africa-America Diabetes Mellitus Project,*
*Howard University,*
*Washington, DC 20059, USA*
***Omobosola Akinsete***
*Project Coordinator,*
*Africa-America Diabetes Mellitus Project,*
*Howard University*
***Francis S. Collins***
*Director,*
*National Human Genome Research Institute,*
*Bethesda, MD 20892–2152, USA*

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### Searching for WIMPs

While the article "To catch a WIMP" by Andrew Watson (Research News, 21 Mar., p. 1736) provides a useful overview of experimental ideas for searching for weakly interacting massive particles (WIMPs), it could give a misleading impression of the relative merits of different techniques, as