edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

EUREKA CARTOGRAPHY/PNI

Rock hunt. Meteorite may have fallen in mountains or on ice sheet.

On the Greenland Meteorite Trail

Danish scientists are gearing up for a summer expedition to locate fragments of a meteorite about the size of an automobile that fell in Greenland last December. This rock is of particular interest, says expedition member Lars Lindberg Christensen, an astronomer at the Tycho Brahe Planetarium in Copenhagen, because an ice landing would leave it less contaminated than meteorites found in more temperate areas.

Scientists have a rough idea of where the meteorite fell. About 100 people witnessed the luminous streak in the sky as the rock blazed through the atmosphere and broke into a dozen or so pieces. What's more, the show was serendipitously caught on videotape by a parking lot surveillance camera in Luuk. Christensen says the evidence points to two possible impact fields, about 40 kilometers apart. One is in the mountains, the other on the ice sheet. Scientists are hoping for the latter: Although fragments would be covered by up to 4 meters of snow now, by July the snow should have melted enough to make them easily spottable.

On foot and by helicopter, the searchers, funded to the tune of $83,000 from the Danish Ministry of Research, plan to use tools such as high-powered binoculars with electronic image stabilization (a system of moving mirrors to compensate for tiny hand movements) to track their quarry.

Some observers are skeptical of what they see as a needle-in-a-haystack venture. But Vagn F. Buchwald, a geophysicist at the University of Copenhagen, is optimistic. "Whenever a new meteorite fall occurs," he says, "you do all that you can to lay your hands on it."

Gingrich Wows Science Board

People who meet with Representative Newt Gingrich (R–GA) always seem to be impressed with his enthusiasm for science, and members of the National Science Board (NSB)—which last week held its first-ever meeting with the Speaker of the House—are no exception.

"He's a visionary," says Stanford University chemist Richard Zare, outgoing president of the NSB, which oversees the National Science Foundation. "He's bubbling with ideas, and his enthusiasm is infectious." Hosting a 40-minute visit in his office, Gingrich encouraged the board to "think big" in areas ranging from informal science education to information technology. Board members did not press him on such details as a Senate bill to double civilian R&D spending, which lacks a House version, or the Administration's plan to use the proceeds of a tobacco settlement for research, which Republicans oppose. "The discussion was at a higher, more abstract level," says Zare.

Indian Scientists Laud Nuke Testing

Some prominent Indian scientists this week hailed their government's resumption of nuclear testing as an affirmation of India's scientific prowess and the failure of international efforts to control the spread of weapons technology. On 11 May the government exploded three warheads, one a hydrogen bomb, underneath the Thar desert in northwest India, ending a 24-year hiatus.

"India has been sitting on the fence for a long time, and dithering had become the order of the day," says physicist M.G.K. Menon, a former science minister who is an adviser to the ruling party. "The tests have demonstrated that India can't be taken for granted and that technology-control regimes imposed by the West have simply not worked." Now, says defense analyst Jasjit Singh, "all India needs is an accurate delivery system."

Foreigners were taken by surprise by the tests even though India's new prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had indicated he intended to weigh using nuclear weapons in India's defense policies (Science, 27 March, p. 2034).

The prime minister's secretary, Brajesh Misra, said the tests are needed to aid computer simulation of nuclear blasts. India has refused to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

U.S. Braces for Hantavirus Outbreak

Health authorities in the southwestern United States are raising the alarm that—courtesy of El Niño—conditions there are ripe for an outbreak of a deadly Hantavirus strain called Sin Nombre. The virus was first identified in 1993 when it killed 20 people in the Four Corners region. So far this spring, four people in three states have been infected by the virus, and two have died.

Doctors believe that most people catch Sin Nombre, which has proven fatal in about half the cases, through contact with droppings and urine from infected deer mice. Abundant rain and a mild winter, brought to the region by El Niño, have made for booming rodent populations, says mammalogist Terry Yates of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Although deer mice are usually able to reproduce twice a year, he says, last year they turned out three litters, and the population is about 10 times normal. Furthermore, it appears that higher proportions of deer mice might be infected: The usual rate is 6% to 10% of the population, but in a sample this month near Gallup, seven of 30 mice tested positive, says virologist Brian Hjelle of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

Officials hope to head off an epidemic by warning residents to be careful when entering poorly ventilated spaces where mice might have been. A blood test developed by Hjelle since the last outbreak can identify the presence of the virus within hours, and authorities are encouraging area doctors to be vigilant. Although there is still no drug against the virus, Hjelle says, doctors can treat symptoms like low blood pressure and can reduce fluid buildup in beleaguered lungs. "In the last outbreak, patients were referred on death's door," he says. "But if you get to a good intensive care unit, then you have a pretty good chance."

No More Neurolabs

Researchers desiring a second go on the Neurolab space mission had their hopes dashed last week when NASA officials decided not to refly the special laboratory module aboard a space shuttle in September. The reason: NASA wants to keep its fall calendar clear for maximum flexibility in launching the first pieces of the international space station.

That means the Neurolab flight completed on 3 May was the finale for the 15-year-old U.S.–European Spacelab program. Neurolab spent more than 2 weeks in orbit hosting experiments with a menagerie ranging from rats to crickets (*Science*, 24 April, p. 515). During the flight an unexpected number of animals, especially rats, died. The second mission would have been a replica of the first, but jitters over the space station's shifting schedule carried the day.