

BSE in Portugal

Cases of the dreaded bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) have risen sharply in Portugal this year, prompting the Spanish government on 24 September to declare an embargo on Portuguese beef products. BSE, or mad cow disease, is suspected to be linked with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a fatal brain affliction in people.

According to European Community (EC) figures, Portugal reported 60 new cases of BSE in

cattle in the first 6 months of 1998, ranking the country third as a harbinger of BSE after the United Kingdom and Ireland. As many as 180 cases have cropped up in Portugal since 1994, presumably as a result of feed made from ruminant offal imported from the U.K.

Last week a team of EC experts arrived in Portugal to determine how BSE has spread. The EC's veterinary committee was expected to decide on 6 October whether other EC countries should adopt an embargo. Spain's minister of farm-

ing, Loyola de Palacio, said that Spain will end the ban if the EC committee determines that proper measures are being taken, including notification of any new cases of BSE to EC authorities and total exclusion of offal from cattle feed.

Portugal's agriculture minister, Fernando Gomes Da Silva, blames the sudden increase in BSE cases on the assumption that the disease, which has a long incubation period, is finally peaking in Portugal, some 6 years after it did in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Private Group Buys Troubled Allegheny System

Researchers at the Allegheny University of the Health Sciences are breathing a sigh of relief over the sale last week of most of its parent Allegheny health care system. A private hospital chain, Tenet Healthcare Corp. of Santa Barbara, California, picked up the system's eight debt-ridden Philadelphia hospitals for a bargain price of \$345 million. Tenet has pledged to retain close ties with the university and is putting \$60 million into helping it become self-sustaining.

The Allegheny parent organization filed for bankruptcy in July, claiming \$1.5 billion in debt (*Science*, 28 August, p. 1258). The university, which comprises MCP-Hahnemann School of Medicine and several professional schools, will now be managed by Philadelphia's Drexel University, with the possibility of a merger down the line.

"There was great relief here among the faculty and especially among the students" that the university is likely to survive intact, says medical school professor and gerontology researcher Vincent J. Cristofalo. But he fears that under the new regime, "there won't be the commitment to research that there has been in the past." He says research centers such as his are to be folded into departments and will be losing lab space as well as institutional support. Other faculty members are anxiously appraising their options. Says one who asked to remain anonymous: "What we say around here is anybody who can leave is leaving."



Sun sets between pillars.

Incan Pillars of Society

New archaeological finds on a sparsely populated island in a Peruvian lake are offering the first evidence that it was a place of Incan sun worship during the winter solstice.

In the 16th century, Spaniards described pillars surrounding the Incan capital of Cusco (in what is now Peru) that helped Incan astronomers determine planting and harvesting times and festival days. Scientists have tried for years to locate such pillars, but on the mainland it seems most have been overrun by urban sprawl.

Archaeologist Brian Bauer of the University of Illinois, Chicago, astronomer David Dearborn of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, and graduate student Matthew Seddon of the University of Chicago therefore turned to the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, which according to myth was the birthplace of the sun and was a center of worship at the time of the Spanish conquest.

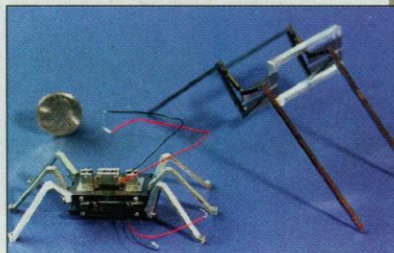
Indeed, the researchers report in the 24 September issue of *Latin American Antiquities*, they found the remains of what seem to be two pillars, 32 meters apart. When viewed from the sacred plaza where the rulers and other elite most likely held their ceremonies, the pillars frame the setting sun for a few days around the June solstice. The team also found the remains of a platform outside the plaza sanctuary walls. From this vantage point, the researchers propose, ordinary onlookers could watch the sun set directly between the pillars—and behind the elites on the plaza. That setup would have reinforced the notion that Inca rulers were "children of the sun," Bauer says.

Goodies From R&D

Americans who worry that their federal tax dollars are disappearing down a rat hole can rest easy, according to the The Science Coalition. The Washington, D.C.-based lobby group has compiled a list of more than 100 government-funded "great advances in science," which they presented to members of the House Science Committee on 24 September.

Among the more futuristic projects on the list are tiny flying and crawling robots, being developed by Vanderbilt University's Ephraim Garcia and Michael Goldfarb, that may help soldiers wend their way through minefields or let police spy on hostage-holding terrorists. Other highlights include a cotton T-shirt laced with medical sensors to monitor a wounded soldier's vital signs; a nontoxic vapor

developed on the space shuttle that can remove a plant chemical from vegetable bins that contributes to spoilage; and a satellite-steered tractor.



Tiny steps, or giant leaps?