NETWATCH

edited by JOCELYN KAISER

NET NEWS

Bird's-Eye Nuclear Landscape

Grainy images of Soviet rocket launchers in Cuba pushed the United States and the Soviets to the brink of war in 1962, illustrating the power of satellite reconnaissance to influence U.S. foreign policy. Now armchair analysts can log on to the Web* to see some of the best clandestine Cold War photos and take a shot at deciphering the secret weapons labs that other countries strived to hide.

From 1960 to 1972, the U.S. CORONA spy satellite program snapped more than 800,000 detailed pictures, including stunning shots of known and suspected nuclear facilities in the Soviet Union, China, Israel, and Taiwan. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency declassified the images in 1995 but has kept under wraps its accompanying analyses. Over the past year, the nonprofit Federation of American Scientists (FAS) has culled the CORONA stash for revealing photos that, it claims, "can help public analysts evaluate current arms control and nonproliferation problems."

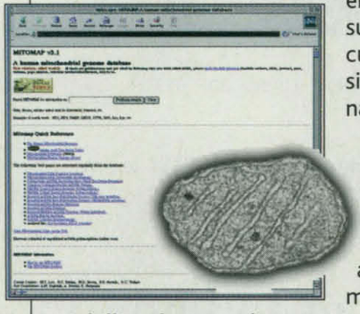
At a symposium last month in Washington, D.C., FAS's Public Eye Initiative detectives trotted out dozens of the best shots, including the sharp 1971 view above of Israel's Dimona Nuclear Facility, a center off limits to international inspectors and thought to have dozens of nuclear weapons. The aging photos may have lost long ago the power to change the course of history. But at least they can now be seen by informed observers outside the U.S. government: The CORONA trove, says FAS's John Pike, "is going to introduce a new standard of facticity to the public policy debate."

* www.fas.org/irp

SITE VISIT

Mitochondrial Web

The cellular powerhouses known as mitochondria, which are the focus of this week's special issue (see p. 1475), offer clues to everything from evolution to diseases such as inherited deafness and muscular dystrophy. A number of Web sites offer information on these dynamic organelles.



CREDIT: (RIGHT) CALVIN J. HAMILTON

A good starting point is MITOMAP,* a database of genes and related references set up to help researchers make use of the 16,569-base human mitochondrial genome, sequenced in 1981—a mere snippet compared to the 3-billion-base nuclear genome. Offering a glimpse of how the Human Genome Project might one day be put to use, the site is also an archive for DNA variations, or polymorphisms, that sometimes underlie disease. For example, researchers studying a patient with a mutation in her mitochondrial DNA can type in the sequence and get back a list of references (linked to Medline) that might tell them which diseases the mutation is associated with, and whether it's common in a particular ethnic group. The site now holds more than 2200 references, says co-curator Marie Lott of Emory University in Atlanta.

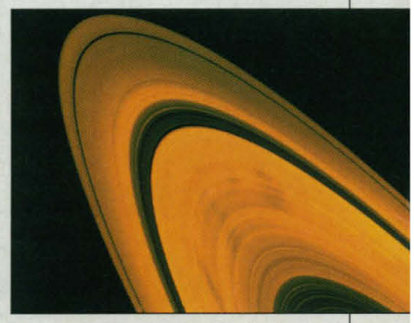
MITOMAP also gives a rundown of other major mitochondria sites, including a tutorial, sites on mitochondrial diseases, and a protein database. And it lists the 95 complete mitochondrial genomes for various organisms in GenBank.

* www.gen.emory.edu/mitomap.html

COOL IMAGES

Planetary Immersion

Give a computer guy some Voyager data, and you just might turn him into an astronomy nut. That's what happened to Calvin J. Hamilton, an image-processing expert who started playing around with raw NASA data in 1993 and was inspired to create Views of the Solar System,* a Web site that offers a "vivid multimedia adventure unfolding the sun, planets, moons, comets, asteroids, and more." The site is packed with pictures and movies: from a cutout of Europa's innards, to flyovers that take you roaring across otherworldly mountain landscapes, to this pretty image of Saturn's rings (one of many that Hamilton made himself). "Views" also offers background info on the planets, a glossary, and a smattering of space exploration history.



* spaceart.com/solar

HOT PICKS

Dr. Online. A flood of medical info awaits you at Medscape, a free site offering online textbooks, drug data, updates on journal articles, daily reports from conferences, and much more, including specialized sites on topics such as AIDS and women's health. Expect a higher profile for the 4-year-old site: Its new editor-in-chief is none other than George Lundberg, erstwhile editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. www.medscape.com

Virtual hill. Itching to know what's being said on Capitol Hill about federal budgets or policy in your research area? If the venue is a House Science Committee hearing, you can now listen in via live Webcasts at www.house.gov/science/welcome.htm

Theses unbound. Once relegated to dusty library stacks, doctoral dissertations are getting broader exposure as their authors post them on electronic Web archives. This site, run by an academic consortium that's promoting the idea, links to thesis archives at a dozen or so universities. www.theses.org

Science ONLINE

Intellectual property. What is it? As a young scientist, should you care? Find out for yourself at *Science*'s Next Wave, which this week takes a look at such topics as how to patent an invention and why intellectual property matters in the world of basic research. www.nextwave.org

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