Letters

Technical Information

Edward L. Brady and Lewis M. Branscomb (3 Mar., p. 961) provide an informed and thoughtful analysis of society's changing information requirements, with particular emphasis on the contents of the excellent 1971 OECD report *Information for a Changing Society*. Interested readers should also consult the more recent U.S. Conference Board Report No. 537 on this subject, *Information Technology—Some Critical Implications for Decision Makers*. It is available from the Conference Board, Inc., 845 Third Avenue, New York 10022.

THOMAS O. PAINE
General Electric Company,
570 Lexington Avenue,
New York 10022

Archeological Looting and Site Destruction

Clemency Coggins (21 Jan., p. 263) and Hester Davis (21 Jan., p. 267) add new emphasis to the worldwide problem of archeological site-disruption. Davis points out rightly that without the help of "amateurs" there may be no hope whatsoever of salvaging a coherent record of prehistory. No band of organized professionals can outrun, outwit, or outdig the bulldozer, the "pot-hunter," and the ever-present sand and gravel company.

In that light, I would like to speak of a scheme for wedding the professional and amateur archeologists that worked—if only for a while. The scheme was tried in Marin County, California, and, having been in the thick of it for 2 years, I think it could work almost anywhere.

The American high school is an institution suffering from no lack of abuse. Its programs are called irrelevant and outmoded, its often restive student population is called (sometimes with justification) aimless and academically uncaring. On both those counts a group of students from the Novato Senior High School proved innocent.

A dedicated history teacher and an extraordinary young archeologist from Sonoma State College took 40 high school students, trained them, and instilled in them a fascination with the science of archeology and its demanding methodology. For over 2 years these unlikely apprentice archeologists systematically worked over the main part of a partially excavated site (Marin-374), another site scheduled for destruction by housebuilders, and a third that was being "leveled" for a parking lot. The site upon which the most time and care were lavished was Marin-374. No earthshaking hoard of unique prehistory was found, and yet the group's pride-in-effort is evident in reports (*1*, *2*) that were subsequently written. From those reports an extract was published in the "Amateur Scientist" column of *Scientific American* in December 1967 (*3*). For high school students, 2 years of weekends and summer days, rain or shine, might seem an impossible price to pay for a little "adventure in time." And yet, without receiving academic credit, and without pilfering for personal collections, the students joyfully worked on, with occasional professional monitoring.

It did not stop there. The case for a Marin County antiquities ordinance was carried by the group, both students and faculty supervisors, to the Marin County Board of Supervisors. The supervisors passed the ordinance, to their unending credit.

Then I graduated from high school—months before the program expanded to include four other schools. I do not know how the program has fared since then. All my old associates have gone their own ways. Two or three of them became professional archeologists. Others, like myself, turned to other fields. And I am sure that many of the group still can find no finer way to spend their leisure hours than doing supervised excavation with college or amateur groups, as I am doing with the University of Nevada at Las Vegas from time to time.

I carry to this day an interest and reverence for the proto- and prehistoric anthropological record. That is what can most help Coggins and Davis and their embattled co-workers. Programs similar to the Novato experiment carried out by graduate students and professional archeologists could utilize the vast reservoir of archeological manpower that exists in high schools and junior colleges.

The American archeological crisis is no less urgent today than it was in 1967, when my friends and I followed the bulldozers across Marin County. And although the methodological consistency of the amateur may be lacking, the mapping at time flawed, and the risk of damage to a site somewhat greater than when professionals do the work, it must be admitted that more can be pulled out of amateur reports like "Report on the excavation of MRN-374" (*1*) than from the dismal documentation of the road-grader.

TERRENCE JAY O'NEIL
1016 East Carey Street,
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030

References

1. P. Moore and T. J. O'Neil, "Report on the excavation of MRN-374" (Novato Unified School District, Marin County, Calif., May 1967), unpublished, but copies are on file in the libraries at San Francisco State College and the University of California, Berkeley.
2. ———, "Errata and addenda to 'Report on the excavation of MRN-374' including obsidian hydration test results" (Novato Unified School District, Marin County, Calif., June 1967).
3. C. L. Strong and T. J. O'Neil, *Sci. Amer.* **217** (No. 6), 134 (1967).

In her article "The crisis in American archeology" Davis does not consider a very important aspect of the situation. The crisis caused by the increase in rate of destruction of archeological resources coupled with the decrease in funds available for salvage work has unfortunately arrived just at a time when American archeologists are involved in a phase of deep soul-searching which may lead to a virtual paralysis of fieldwork. To many archeologists, the crucial issue is the establishment of archeology as a science, the so-called "new archeology" (*1*). To new archeologists, the ideal scientific method is the deductive method; they therefore insist that before any fieldwork is initiated, hypotheses must be formulated that can be tested against data that must be selectively collected. Only those sites must be chosen and those data collected which pertain directly to test-