

patrimony, but if they choose to destroy it we should not help them do it.

RICHARD E. W. ADAMS
*Center for Archaeological Research, and
Director,
Rio Azul Archaeological Project,
University of Texas,
San Antonio, TX 78285*

Cold Fusion Results

Robert Pool, in his description of the positive report issued on cold fusion by Texas A&M University (News & Comment, 14 Dec., p. 1507), states that my co-workers and I have not obtained tritium over the last year.

1) Since our pioneering work in discovering the formation of tritium at the palladium electrode in the electrolysis of deuterium oxide at palladium, 37 independent groups have replicated our work qualitatively, that is, they have found the formation of tritium when deuterium is electrolyzed on palladium.

2) Thomas Claytor, at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, by using an entirely different method from the one we have used, can reproducibly produce tritium from the passage of current through palladium charged with deuterium (1).

Correspondingly, Pool reports that I restricted the timing of Manuel Soriaga's questioning of Nigel Packham at Packham's Ph.D. oral without stating that this procedure (requesting Soriaga to submit further questions in writing) was advised by the Graduate School Representative, or that two persons (Norman Hackermann, and Ernest Yeager) had been appointed to Packham's committee because both were experienced in cold fusion work (Soriaga was not).

Reporting of a selected part of the situation may sometimes confuse the reader.

J. O'M. BOCKRIS
*Department of Chemistry,
Texas A&M University,
College Station, TX 77843-3255*

REFERENCES

1. T. Claytor, paper presented at a conference on Anomalous Nuclear Effects in Deuterium/Solid Systems, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 23 October 1990.

Response: The report of Texas A&M's Cold Fusion Review Panel itself states that unusually high levels of tritium were observed in Bockris's lab through November 1989, but that "Since that time, no additional cells have been reported to have unusual levels of tritium. . . ." The 37 "inde-

pendent" groups to which Bockris refers include many that have seen small amounts of tritium once or twice and never again.

As for the handling of Nigel Packham's dissertation defense, the review panel stated that "A very serious breach of academic procedure may have [occurred]." The report states that "While the Graduate College Representative functioned reasonably in a difficult situation, he was not privy to many of the events leading up to the defense," and it pointed out that "It was the duty of the committee chairman [Bockris] to see that the examination was conducted properly." The panel was unsatisfied with the final composition of the dissertation committee, even after the addition of Hackerman and Yeager: "The addition of outside experts [to a dissertation committee] can obviously be of value. While some were added in the case in question, experts in nuclear science were notably absent. . . ."—ROBERT POOL

Units Unite!

Bernard M. Oliver (Letters, 2 Nov., p. 611) rejects metrification with historical and other irrational arguments for using both metric and English units. One argument is that the constants of physical laws are not even units. Nor are they in the English system. This point is a red herring. A second argument—that a pocket calculator can convert among English units as easily as moving decimal points—ignores the knowledge required to convert. A foot is 12 inches, but a pound is 16 ounces (well, 12 troy ounces). A mile is 5280 feet; a pace is 5.28 feet or 63.36 inches. A third argument, the need for a wealth of units, is also flawed. With which English unit should one estimate microscopic distances? Perhaps 1/1,000 or 1/10,000 inch—this looks suspiciously metric. The alleged Big Brother effect of metrification seems pale. Does Oliver believe that package weights from candy bars to box cars are not legislatively directed? Finally, did the English invent the units of galaxies, stars, worlds, and light-years?

One thing seems certain: relieving the burden of multiple measurement systems by using metric prefixes that carry the same meaning across differing units seems attractive, even rational. Further, who can resist the cuteness of metrification? If I see many more letters such as Oliver's, I will have to again indulge in 10^{-15} bismols (that's 1 femtobismol).

JAMES R. PRATT
*School of Forest Resources,
Pennsylvania State University,
University Park, PA 16802*

Oliver makes linkages where none exist between American competitiveness and our failure to adopt the metric system. True, America's past dominance of the world economy came about from hard work and quality products, and depended in no way on the system of measurement used—but that dominance was achieved at a time when Europe was fragmented by wars and Asia was just emerging from semifeudalism. It was also achieved with slide rules and log tables, and no one can reasonably suggest that we return to the political, economic, or technological realities of that long-gone age.

The issue now is not whether we can recapture our position by brute force, it is whether we can prosper in a world whose economy is increasingly integrated and multipolar. Part of that integration involves the use of common standards, including measurement. The United States is the only industrialized country not officially committed to metric measurement, and no amount of hard work or emphasis on quality will help to sell products that are at best incompatible, and at worst illegal, in the rest of the world.

JEFFREY J. KARPINSKI
*294 Adams Road,
King of Prussia, PA 19406*

Oliver does not wish to forget that "a pint's a pound the world around," but this is not true and is taught only in the United States. In the empire on which the sun never set, the Imperial pint was defined by the phrase "a pint of water is a pound and a quarter," as were "five and a half yards one rod, perch or pole." Standardization by use of the metric system is much more efficient than remembering these and many other anachronisms.

ROBERT E. DAVIES
*Departments of Animal Biology,
Astronomy and Astrophysics,
University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia, PA 19104*

Like Oliver, in my engineering work I have for 40 years used whatever unit of measure my clients preferred. It makes no sense to advise a U.S. homeowner how to save energy in a report that measures temperature in degrees celsius, distance in meters, and fuel oil in liters, but for an international audience, I would probably use these International System of Units (SI) units. When a "metric" fanatic (usually a physicist) mocks my use of British thermal units, square feet, cubic yards, and 1/2-inch pipe, I ask "What time is it?", "When were you born?", and "Can you lend me a quarter?"

I'll acknowledge the alleged consistency and rationality of the SI metric system when its advocates measure clock and calendar time with a decimal system, and base their "year number one" on something other than religion or mythology. I'll acknowledge the universal advantages of decimal notation when they denote camera *f*-stops and shutter speeds decimally, carry no U.S. money but pennies, dimes, and \$1, \$10, \$100 bills, and divide the earth's perimeter into 100 degrees of latitude and longitude.

ROBERT K. MULTER
Grassy Pond House,
Rindge, NH 03461

Cystic Fibrosis Research

Leslie Roberts' article "Cystic fibrosis pilot projects go begging" (News & Comment, 23 Nov., p. 1076) suggests that the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) acted inappropriately with respect to cystic fibrosis (CF) research. As director of the NIDDK, the lead institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for CF research, I strongly disagree with the impressions given by this article, and offer the following points as a corrective.

1) Identifying the CF gene was always of the highest priority to the NIDDK. At the end of 1986, when we were receiving an insufficient number of applications in this area, we issued a Request for Applications (RFA) on genetic and metabolic defects underlying CF. While the applications were undergoing peer review, false rumors circulated that the CF gene had already been found. Because we were concerned that these unsubstantiated rumors might cause a loss of research momentum in the search for the gene, our program staff requested that our National Advisory Council vote high program relevance for certain applications aimed at identification of the CF gene. As a result, four such applications were funded on 1 January 1988, and two of the grantees, Lap-Chee Tsui and Francis Collins, were ultimately successful in identifying the CF gene. Moreover, we have supported Tsui continuously since 1985, so I am at a loss to understand the statement in the article that NIH stopped supporting research to find the cystic fibrosis gene, under the mistaken impression that it had been found."

2) NIDDK funding decisions with respect to cystic fibrosis research are based on considerations of scientific and technical

merit and program relevance and not on ideological issues. The reason that the NIDDK did not fund a recent research grant application for a pilot project for genetic screening in cystic fibrosis was that the application was given a poor priority in the NIH peer review process. It is not correct, as suggested by the article, that the possible relationship of genetic screening to the abortion issue played any role whatsoever in the decisions we have made regarding the funding of CF research. In fact, NIH sponsorship of a major conference on genetic screening in March 1990 was indicative of our commitment to pursue the most scientifically responsible course following the discovery of the CF gene. Our goal was to ensure that technical information about genetic screening and recommendations for scientifically appropriate use of genetic tests were disseminated in a timely and meaningful way.

The NIDDK has been responsive to the statement of the advisory panel on population screening for the cystic fibrosis gene, which we convened in March 1990. However, we cannot follow every recommendation we receive from outside advisory groups, particularly if those recommendations conflict with the findings of the peer review system. In this case, we believe that pilot genetic screening projects must compete for funding with all research project applications on the basis of scientific and technical merit.

In these times of limited resources, the NIDDK can only issue research solicitations in areas of the highest scientific opportunity and promise. Reflecting our strong commitment to CF research, in 1990 we funded grants in response to a solicitation aimed at furthering research to develop gene therapy for inherited metabolic diseases. In 1991, we will fund grants in response to a special solicitation for applications aimed at elucidating the pathogenesis of CF, with a goal of developing treatments directed at the basic defect.

We remain dedicated to CF research and to the rapid and full exploitation of the impressive discovery of the CF gene. As in the past, we will continue to work closely with investigators in the CF research community toward this end, and particularly with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in what has been an extraordinarily productive collaboration during the past decade.

PHILLIP GORDEN
Director,
National Institute of Diabetes and
Digestive and Kidney Diseases,
Bethesda, MD 20892

ACT Questions

A News briefing in the 26 October 1990 issue of *Science* (p. 503) might incorrectly lead readers to conclude that American College Testing (ACT) has a policy that precludes the use of materials on animal research in its tests. ACT has no such policy. To the contrary, we regularly include such materials when it is appropriate to do so.

The briefing references the ACT Assessment, a comprehensive program completed each year by approximately 1 million high school students as part of the college admissions process. The tests that comprise the ACT Assessment are curriculum-based; they measure skills that are important to success in entry-level college studies.

Because materials involving animal research are an integral part of the high school science curriculum, the ACT Assessment regularly includes questions that refer to animal research on its Science Reasoning Test. Such materials also appear regularly in the sample test materials that ACT provides free to students.

MARK D. RECKASE
Development Division,
Assessment Programs,
American College Testing,
Post Office Box 168,
Iowa City, IA 52243

Cool Heads

As a bald college professor, I should like to add to the frivolity that accretes to Ann Gibbons' Research News article about Dean Falk's theory that a special cooling system enabled the human brain to evolve ("Did cooler heads prevail?" 7 Dec., p. 1338). At long last I understand why the popular mind considers intellectuals to be eggheads. Eggheads have bare scalps, bare scalps facilitate the cooling of the brain, cool brains facilitate thinking, thinking facilitates being called an intellectual. Ergo!

It took a bald college professor to derive this syllogism.

ALAN O. ROSS
Department of Psychology,
State University of New York,
Stony Brook, NY 11794-2500

Erratum: In Virginia Morell's Research News article "New light on writing in the Americas" (18 Jan., p. 268), the illustrations on page 268 should have been credited to George Stuart of the National Geographic Society.