SOS for Prague Archaeology

European archaeologists have sent out a call for aid to restore the Institute of Archaeology in Prague, which was devastated by flooding on 14 August. The institute was submerged in 3 meters of water from the Vltava River, destroying nearly all of its 70,000 books, 120,000 photographic negatives, and 10,000 maps.

Work has come to a virtual halt at the institute, the largest employer of archaeologists in the Czech Republic and home of the only photographic lab of its kind in the former communist bloc. Librarians have frozen books and maps salvaged from the library in hopes of recovering some of the irreplaceable items through careful thawing and drying.

Prague under water.

German and French archaeologists have already promised to send truckloads of archaeological books and journals, says Willem Willems, president of the European Association of Archaeologists, which sent out an appeal last week. Dagmar Dreslerova, one of the 450 archaeologists whose work has been halted, does not expect the institute to fully recover from the estimated $5 million in damages but says it should be back on track "within a year."

The institute's director, Lubos Jirán (arupraha@arup.cas.cz), is asking for volunteers to help with salvage and restoration. More information can be found at www.arup.cas.cz.

From PUS to PEST

Scientists in the United Kingdom have decided that the term "public understanding of science" has outlived its usefulness. In addition to making an unfortunate acronym, they say, the phrase has a condescending ring to it. So they've cooked up a more inclusive-sounding replacement: public engagement in science and technology (PEST).

Science minister David Sainsbury recently told the crowd at a science festival in Leicester that it is no longer enough for science communicators "simply to educate the public," according to *The London Financial Times*. Instead, they must get down in the trenches and interact with them—or, as Fiona Fox, director of the Science Media Centre, put it: "put their heads above the parapet on controversial issues" such as genetically modified foods.

House out of the Sagas

Archaeologists have discovered a 1000-year-old Viking longhouse that might be straight out of a legend. Archaeologist John Steinberg of the University of California, Los Angeles, says the structure, found 15 centimeters beneath an Icelandic hayfield, matches the description of Glaumbaer, which Icelandic sagas say was home to Snorri Thorfinnsson, the first child born of Scandinavian explorers in the New World.

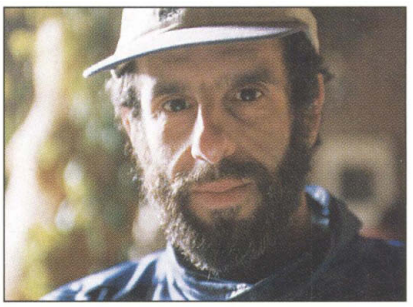
The scientists located the structure using a technique developed by Steinberg that induces an electrical current in the ground. Air trapped in the root mats of the turf raises the resistance of turf-brick walls, giving them a distinct electrical signature. No other available technique could have found the building, Steinberg says: It is too shallow for ground-penetrating radar, and magnetometers would be useless against the background noise from Icelandic basalt. "[Steinberg's] technique is really going to revolutionize how Icelandic archaeology is done," says Viking expert Elisabeth Ward of the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center.

Test excavations have revealed an extraordinarily well-preserved building 29 meters long and 9 meters wide, with 1.5-meter-thick walls made of turf bricks, or peat moss, and wide earthen sleeping benches. The house matches the age and location of Snorri's farm, according to the Greenlanders' saga, which says he was born around 1004. Carbon dating suggests that the farm was occupied between 976 and 1042. "This is an opportunity to really test just how true the sagas are," says Steinberg. He will describe his findings in *Antiquity* next March.

Reconstruction of Viking turf house in Iceland.

MacArthur Grants

Cornell University physicist Paul Ginsparg, creator of the first online physics preprint archive, is among 24 honored this year with $500,000 no-strings-attached awards from the MacArthur Foundation. By creating the free archive (at arxiv.org) in 1991, Ginsparg "has deliberately transformed the way physics gets done," says the foundation.



E-print pioneer Paul Ginsparg.

Eight other scientists are among the winners: Bonnie Bassler, bacterial geneticist at Princeton University; Janine Jagger, epidemiologist and founder of the International Health Care Worker Safety Center in Charlottesville, Virginia; Daniel Jurafsky, computational linguist at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Lee Ann Newsom, paleoethnobotanist at Pennsylvania State University; Daniela Rus, roboticist at Dartmouth College; Charles Steidel, cosmologist at California Institute of Technology; Brian Tucker, seismologist, founder and president of GeoHazards International in Palo Alto, California; and Paul Wennberg, atmospheric chemist at California Institute of Technology.

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