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The Moon Issue

The successful Apollo 11 mission placed experimental equipment on the moon and brought back 22 kilograms of lunar materials. The samples presented unique scientific opportunities, but they also presented potential problems. One was the possible contamination of the earth from the moon. Less talked about, but more real, was the possibility of a black market in lunar specimens. Even more likely was the hazard of a wild scramble for publication immediately after samples became available. It was necessary to ensure receipt of the materials by qualified investigators and to prevent flagrant duplication of effort. While many kinds of approaches were to be encouraged, excessive allocation or destruction of a limited supply was to be avoided.

In meeting its responsibilities in these matters, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration employed the power of government wisely. In the choice of investigators and the allocation of samples it followed the advice of groups of highly qualified scientists, including the Lunar Sample Analysis Planning Team (see page 449 of this issue). These groups did their work well. They selected a distinguished body of American scientists and responded generously to qualified applicants from abroad. To ensure proper custody of samples and orderly procedures with respect to publication, NASA released materials only after suitable contracts had been signed. One provision was that investigators were not to divulge information prematurely; instead, all were to participate in a Lunar Science Conference held at Houston, Texas, from 5 to 8 January. On arrival at the meeting, each principal investigator was to submit a written report.

In accord with its goal to publish these articles promptly in a journal of wide circulation, NASA negotiated with *Science*. Our decision to publish these reports was a close one. The material was to be four times the volume of a usual issue. There were worrisome problems of quality control, coupled with the difficulty of handling a large number of reports on a tight schedule. There was also the financial burden. On the positive side was the fact that the examination of lunar samples was a unique event and that *Science* with its broad international circulation (120 countries) could best serve as publisher. A small but nontrivial aspect was the challenge that the task presented to the staff of *Science*.

The financial question was resolved by a contract with NASA on essentially a no-loss, no-gain basis. Obtaining the best possible quality in the manuscripts while avoiding excessive length took some doing. For most investigators, the time between receipt of samples and submittal of manuscripts was only 3 months. The natural tendency was to make measurements until the last moment and then to throw together an article hastily. *Science* insisted that manuscripts be subjected to the reviewing process. Publication of defective material was to be delayed until satisfactory revisions had been made. Rigid limitations on length were established. Authors responded well to the guidelines by submitting manuscripts that were better than usual and that were within the length limitations. *Science* sent a team of editors to Houston and assembled a group of reviewers (page 781), they completed their work on the spot and interacted with authors to make improvements.

Some readers may feel that this issue of *Science* provides more than they care to know about the moon, but others will treasure it as an important part of the scientific record of a great accomplishment.

—PHILIP H. ABELSON