

655 This Week in *Science*

Editorial

657 The International Geosphere-Biosphere Program

Letters

659 The Funding of Science: J. MCCARTHY; J. C. TOOMAY; G. PIEL ■ Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide and Summer Soil Wetness: M. C. MACCRACKEN, M. E. SCHLESINGER, M. R. RICHES, S. MANABE AND R. T. WETHERALD ■ Artist Identified: K. RALLS AND R. L. BROWNELL, JR.

News & Comment

661 \$2-Billion Program Urged for AIDS

662 NIH Begins Year-Long 100th Birthday Party

664 The Pentagon Is Not Eating Engineers

665 Mathematicians Look to SDI for Research Funds

666 *Briefing*: Vaccine Compensation Bill Passed ■ Researchers' Dreams Turn to Paper in U.S.-U.S.S.R. Fusion Plan ■ Researcher Reprimanded for Pseudorabies Test ■ USDA Research Rules Killed; NIH Panel to Rewrite Standards ■ Biotechnology Report Clears House Science Committee Hurdles ■ Comings and Goings

Research News

669 Two Disease-Causing Genes Found

670 Plate Tectonics Is the Key to the Distant Past

673 The 1986 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Articles

689 Changing Climate: Geothermal Evidence from Permafrost in the Alaskan Arctic: A. H. LACHENBRUCH AND B. V. MARSHALL

697 Differentiation-Linked Leukemogenesis in Lymphocytes: M. F. GREAVES

704 Life Cycle, Individual Thrift, and the Wealth of Nations: F. MODIGLIANI

Research Articles

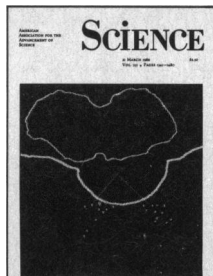
713 An Alternative Pathway for Meiotic Chromosome Segregation in Yeast: D. S. DAWSON, A. W. MURRAY, J. W. SZOSTAK

718 Structural Heterogeneity and Functional Domains of Murine Immunoglobulin G Fc Receptors: J. V. RAVETCH, A. D. LUSTER, R. WEINSHANK, J. KOCHAN, A. PAVLOVEC, D. A. PORTNOY, J. HULMES, Y.-C. E. PAN, J. C. UNKELESS

Reports

726 Regular Intervals Between Hawaiian Earthquakes: Implications for Predicting the Next Event: M. WYSS

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COVER A video computer-aided plot (Nikon/Joyce-Loebl Magiscan) made over an enhanced video image of a brain section containing retrogradely labeled neurons (white squares) in the rostral medulla after an injection of wheat germ agglutinin-conjugated horseradish peroxidase into the locus coeruleus. Low- (upper) and high-power (lower) views of the same section are given for orientation. See page 734. [M. Shipley, University of Cincinnati Medical College, Cincinnati, OH 45267; and G. Aston-Jones, Washington Square Center for Neural Science, New York University, New York, NY 10003]

- 728 T-Lymphocyte Priming and Protection Against Friend Leukemia by Vaccinia-Retrovirus *env* Gene Recombinant: P. L. EARL, B. MOSS, R. P. MORRISON, K. WEHRLY, J. NISHIO, B. CHESEBRO
- 732 Uroporphyrinogen Decarboxylase Structural Mutant (Gly²⁸¹→Glu) in a Case of Porphyria: H. DE VERNEUIL, B. GRANDCHAMP, C. BEAUMONT, C. PICAT, Y. NORDMANN
- 734 The Brain Nucleus Locus Coeruleus: Restricted Afferent Control of a Broad Efferent Network: G. ASTON-JONES, M. ENNIS, V. A. PIERIBONE, W. T. NICKELL, M. T. SHIPLEY
- 738 A Low Threshold Calcium Spike Mediates Firing Pattern Alterations in Pontine Reticular Neurons: R. W. GREENE, H. L. HAAS, R. W. MCCARLEY
- 740 A Pseudoautosomal Gene in Man: P. J. GOODFELLOW, S. M. DARLING, N. S. THOMAS, P. N. GOODFELLOW
- 743 Pertussis Toxin Inhibition of B Cell and Macrophage Responses to Bacterial Lipopolysaccharide: J. P. JAKWAY AND A. L. DEFranco
- 746 Two Avirulent Herpes Simplex Viruses Generate Lethal Recombinants in Vivo: R. T. JAVIER, F. SEDARATI, J. G. STEVENS
- 748 Intracellular Accumulation of T-Cell Receptor Complex Molecules in a Human T-Cell Line: D. B. TSE, M. AL-HAIDERI, B. PERNIS, C. R. CANTOR, C. Y. WANG

AAAS News

- 752 Report Details AAAS Response to "Crisis in Science Education" ■ Project Updating Directory of Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities ■ New Issue Dates for *Science* ■ Obituaries

AAAS Meetings

- 682 *Annual Meeting: Advance Registration Form* ■ Discount Air Fares
- 755 *Science and Security: The Future of Arms Control: Program*

Book Reviews

- 766 Professional Powers, reviewed by A. ABBOTT ■ Universities and State Governments, F. E. ROURKE ■ Phytoplankton Ecology, J. C. GOLDMAN ■ The Vital Force, P. C. MALONEY ■ Books Received

Products & Materials

- 769 3.5-Inch Disk Drive for IBM Computers ■ Faster, More Powerful XT ■ DNA Sequencing Software ■ C Language Incremental Compiler ■ Automated Spectrometer ■ Automated Tissue Processing ■ Literature

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The International Geosphere-Biosphere Program

Continuing and increasing concern about possible anthropogenic influences and other factors that determine habitability of the earth has led to initiation of a decades-long international program by the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). Authorization of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP) occurred at ICSU's 21st General Assembly in Berne, Switzerland, 14 to 19 September 1986. The International Council of Scientific Unions is one of a number of organizations fostering this program,* and it has limited financial resources. However, when a global scientific effort is to be made, ICSU is the best today to coordinate the effort. It has the necessary convening power and prestige to elicit cooperation of leading scientists of countries of the East and the West, the North and the South. The objectives of IGBP are "to describe and understand the interactive physical, chemical and biological processes that regulate the total Earth system, the unique environment it provides for life, the changes that are occurring in that system, and the manner by which these changes are influenced by human actions." What makes these objectives approachable is the existence and potential existence of enormously powerful new instrumentation coupled with data-handling systems, computational power, and models to be tested.

Thomas Malone reminds us that "the emerging capabilities of remote sensing from satellites are making possible global synoptic measurement of . . . the surface temperature of the earth to an accuracy of 1°C; the global distribution of atmospheric clouds, ocean waves, currents, and eddies; the extent of ice on both sea and land; the mean chlorophyll density on land and in the ocean surfaces; and global patterns of agriculture and forests."*

Geophysicists have taken a leading role in the formulation of the program. However, they realize the importance of biological processes in determining global conditions. For example, enhanced production of methane by methanogenic organisms is influencing ozone content of the atmosphere. Careful measurements of production of gases at biomes will produce important information. Satellite measurements of vegetation and chlorophyll content of marine organisms require calibration and interpretation.

The program will include observations that extend from the sun to the interior of the earth. The study of the sun will include observations at many wavelengths. Variations in solar radiation striking the earth are thought to have had a key role in great climatic changes such as the ice ages. Thus one of the difficulties of detecting and measuring a greenhouse effect is uncertainty about variations or trends due to changing relationships between the sun and the earth.

It is accordingly particularly desirable to continue to examine evidence of prehistoric environmental changes. The global changes in the past half-million years were far larger than anything seen in historic times and may have been more rapid. Sea level fluctuated more than 100 meters during the transition from eras that were warm and wet to those that were cold and dry. The indicators of change or objects to be studied include global ice volume, tree-ring widths, ice cores, and isotope and chemical ratios in lake and ocean sediments.

The likelihood is that the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program will begin slowly during a continuing planning stage as various countries decide how they will participate. During the early phases the National Science Foundation will be a key supporter of U.S. activity related to the program. Eric Bloch, director of NSF, has announced an effort in Global Geosciences for fiscal year 1987 that includes global tropospheric chemistry, global ocean climate, global ocean flux, global ecosystem dynamics, oceanic ridge crest processes, and a global digital seismic network. Other U.S. agencies such as NASA and NOAA will participate and more intensively later. In any event, the United States is beginning fast. It cannot alone carry out a global program, but its commitment and example will not be lost on others.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

*T. F. Malone, *Environment* 28, 6 (1986).