

To the Editor

Agricola and Agricola

Sir:

In an earlier letter, an error is perpetuated, viz. the confusion about Agricola. Keefe (SN: 6/24) mentioned Kucha's citation of Agricola (37-93 A.D.) describing lung diseases among the Joachimsthal miners.

The Agricola of the first century A.D. was a Roman general, a one time governor of Britain, and a contemporary of the Emperors Nero, Vespasian, and Titus. He was not the Agricola of Joachimsthal and Scheenberg. The Roman Agricola was memorialized by Tacitus, his son-in-law and biographer.

The Agricola of mining and medical fame was born in Saxony in 1494 and named George Bauer. His name was later latinized, probably by his teachers, to Georgius Agricola, but it still meant peasant or farmer. Agricola was graduated from medical school by 1524, and in 1526 was appointed town physician at Joachimsthal. This Bohemian town was central to the most active mining district of that period. From the plutonian realms near this city came vast riches of silver and lead ores of singular purity.

Georgius Agricola was consumed by a passion to know more about mining procedures of the time, and as he wrote: "any time not taken up by medical duties was spent in the mines." From his medical training, and inquisitiveness about mines and minerals, came a monumental volume, "De Re Metallica," the premier work on mining geology and practices that had no peer for nearly two centuries. Not until 1738, with the publication of Schuller's work, did "De Re Metallica" have an equal in this field.

George Bauer's work is held in special esteem by those in occupational health as it is a classic in early occupational medicine. It was this Agricola who was the first physician to be interested in diseases caused by work. He paid special attention to respiratory hazards of mining when he wrote:

"If the dust has corrosive qualities, it eats away the lungs, and implants consumption in the body; hence in the mines of the Carpathian Mountains women are found who have married seven husbands, all of whom this terrible consumption has carried off to a premature death."

Further, he pleaded for better ventilation in mines as a means of ameliorating this form of lung disease. This consumption of Agricola would be

better known today as silico-tuberculosis, a disease in which particles of silica dust enhance the pathogenicity of tuberculosis.

Two additional notes about the Joachimsthal ore deposits: First, our word "dollar" is a corrupted form of Joachimshaler, later "Thaler." This term was used to describe silver of excellent purity produced from these mines, and second, pitchblende ores from this mining district were the raw materials from which Pierre and Marie Curie isolated radium.

Thomas F. Torpy
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Northridge, Calif.

Kind Words

Sir:

I congratulate you on your new format. It is most attractive and the whole publication is made most interesting. Having subscribed for many many years, I do appreciate this change.

Hedie S. Kuhn, M.D.
The Hammond Clinic
Munster, Ind.

Bufus in Louisiana

Sir:

I have noted the story on the giant toad, *Bufus marinus* (SN: 7/8).

It may be of interest to you to know that this toad was introduced into south Louisiana in the early 1930s to feed on adults of the sugarcane beetle, *Eutheola rugiceps* (LeConte). I was living in Louisiana at that time but do not recall any accidents with the toads. Also I do not know whether the Louisiana introductions became established there.

Occasionally, a specimen of *Bufo marinus* is seen in Gainesville. It would be very simple for someone to bring specimens from south Florida, in a car or truck, either by accident or intent.

L. A. Hetrick
Professor of Entomology
University of Florida
Gainesville, Fla.

Bufus Marinus

Sir:

The article entitled A Plague of Toads (SN: 7/8) which dealt with the *Bufus marinus*, was most interesting (see p. 150)

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