The moon walk was the most exciting scientific event of 1969, but what about all the others?

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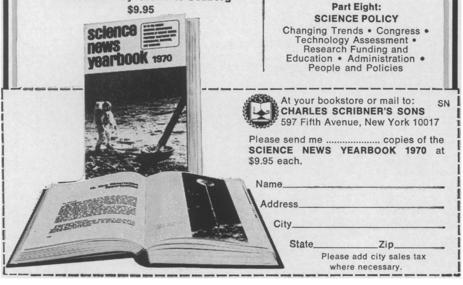
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SCIENCE NEWSBRIEFS

Old moon rock

Although isotopic studies of Apollo 11 lunar soil and breccia samples indicated that they might be from rocks ranging in age up to 4.4 billion years old or more, the oldest rocks dated were between 3.3 billion and 3.7 billion years old.

This week the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced that an Apollo 12 moon rock has an age, measured by isotope analysis, of 4.6 billion years, just about as old as the estimated age of the solar system. The lemon-sized rock is also peculiar in that it has the highest concentration of radioactive elements yet found in moon rocks: 20 times as much radioactive thorium, potassium and uranium as any other rock.

The rock's age is the same as that of most meteorites, but no meteorite has ever been found with a chemical composition like that of the Apollo 12 rock. Since the rock was found on the surface, scientists can conclude that parts of the lunar surface have remained essentially unchanged over billions of years. The age of the rock is very close to the estimated age for the formation of the moon itself.

L-dopa tariff

A bill suspending the import duty on L-dopa for a period of two years passed the House this week and was sent to the Senate. L-dopa, an investigational drug used in treating Parkinsonism (SN: 4/25, p. 410), is imported primarily from Japan and supplies are limited. Suspension of duty will reduce the cost of the drug.

Although a small domestic firm is producing the drug on a pilot basis, such production is insufficient at present. When the drug is approved by the Food and Drug Administration for general use, L-dopa will eventually be produced commercially in the United States.

Arctic ecology

An urgent one-year study of Arctic ecology, aimed mainly at assessing the effects of the proposed Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (SN: 4/18, p. 389) and of human activity on Alaska's oilrich North Slope in general, will begin this summer. Seven institutions, including the University of Alaska, will participate in the project, to be carried out with a \$300,000 National Science Foundation grant.

Research will include tests with a 600-foot length of hot-oil pipe buried on the University of Alaska campus. Canadian researchers are carrying on similar tests with a heated pipeline on the surface of fragile tundra (SN: 5/2, p. 442).

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