



NASA

Closer views of the designated Mars landing sites

The recommendations of the committee on Mars Viking landing sites, reported in *SCIENCE NEWS* two weeks ago (SN: 4/28/73, p. 273), were approved early this week by NASA. These sites will be under continual study during the next three years and could change before the unmanned landings in 1976. Lander 1 will touch down in Chryse (Land of Gold) (left photo) north of the huge 3,000-mile rift canyon. The Martian rift system runs out into a series of long channels resembling dried-out riverbeds which ap-

pear to end just south of the landing ellipse.

Lander 2's prime site is Cydonia in Mare Acidalium, 44 degrees north of the equator and 10 degrees west. The prime criterion for that site was the possibility of water. At its largest, the north polar hood—a veil which shrouds each polar region during the winter season—comes down to about 40 degrees north. Any water deposited by that process could be trapped and provide a more viable habitat for microorganisms.

Licensing proposal for parenthood

Dogs, pilots, scuba divers, plumbers, cab drivers, teachers and soil testers are licensed. Roger W. McIntire of the University of Maryland believes parents also should be licensed—for the good of society and to protect children. McIntire told the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association that society is almost ready for a licensing law for parenthood. His proposal is not new but the fact that it was presented at a scientific meeting indicates that the prospect may be taken more seriously than in the past.

Now, he notes, any adult may try parenting. The effects on the child of incompetent parents are not considered. Contraceptive technology, however, is making population control possible and McIntire believes this knowledge should also be used to limit parenthood to those who are qualified. Sheldon Segal of the population council at Rockefeller University, for instance, has tested a capsule implant for women that leaks a steady amount of progestin and prevents pregnancy. A three-year capsule is being perfected that would be removed when pregnancy is desired or when a license is obtained. Other researchers are working on methods by which either men or women could be

temporarily immunized against sperm. A five-month vaccine has already been tested on humans.

With this technology near, says McIntire, it is time to decide what the criteria for a good parent are. At present only adoption agencies investigate potential parents. McIntire foresees a time when special government courses, exams and practical experience, along with a demonstration of resources, would be required before anyone could get a license to have a child. Population experts would control population by regulating the number of parent licenses to be issued.

In a science-fiction scenario, McIntire attempts to answer some of the many arguments that will be raised by such a proposal. Government, he says, should be involved in licensing parents because the government bears most of the burden of raising a child. Schools, day-care centers, medical programs, youth programs, crime prevention programs, etc. will all have to deal with the children. Furthermore, the parents' rights to have children must be balanced against the children's rights to have competent parents. In conclusion McIntire says, "We cannot afford the luxury of any fool adding to our numbers at any time. . . . And, psychology and related science do know some child-rearing principles that should be a part of every parent's knowledge." □

Soviet Lunokhod mishap? A problem of reliability

The Soviets aren't saying anything, but reputable sources in the United States say the Soviets had another space failure last month in addition to the Salyut 2 mishap (SN: 5/5/73, p. 287). The word is that a rocket carrying possibly another moon-roving vehicle (a Lunokhod) failed to achieve orbit and fell into the Pacific Ocean. The Soviets have one operational Lunokhod now on the moon and one other that was turned off (SN: 1/27/73, p. 53).

If the reports are true, the Lunokhod loss, coming so soon on the heels of the Salyut failure in orbit, bodes ill for the Soviet space program. The Soviets have had one successful space station, Salyut 1, but the three-man crew of cosmonauts died during their return to earth in the Soyuz space capsule. A second attempt to launch a Salyut last July also ended in failure. The launch vehicle never got into orbit.

The weakness of the Soviet program usually cited as a probable cause for these failures is the lack of reliability and quality-control assurance—a NASA phrase which means a painstakingly detailed check and recheck of systems from design and manufacturing through computer checkouts on the launch pad and during the space mission. □