

The rescue ship would be equipped with five seats—two for the rescue astronauts and three for the stranded Skylab 2 astronauts.

This traumatic exercise was followed by another problem—again a leak, but this time in the system that cools all the electronic gear on Skylab. At the current leakage rate, the system will last for 18 to 25 days at which time the secondary cooling system will be activated. Another problem—a short in the solar telescope array—knocked out one of two television systems used by the astronauts.

The crew had a short respite from their problems Sunday when they participated in one of the biggest fishing expeditions in recent times. They turned the Skylab earth resources cameras on the Gulf of Mexico and 131 fishing vessels. The goal of the project, sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is to see if the good fishing areas can be identified from space or high altitudes by use of a variety of remote sensing equipment.

To the delight of the astronauts, Arabella, the space spider, seemed to be functioning normally. Arabella's first attempt to "do her thing" had resulted in an inefficient web. "She's got a very unusual web spun around all four corners of the box, with some stringers even from corner to corner," Garriott reported. "She had to do a lot of improvising, but she got her net out anyway and she is currently standing by waiting for some prey to float by."

On her next try, she did better. "She's a very fast learner indeed," Garriott said of Arabella's rapid adaptation to weightlessness. She had spun a web radial to all sides of the box, converging on the center "just like you would find on the ground." □

A cavalcade to Mars: Mars 6 joins the train

In 16 days, the Soviet Union has launched three spacecraft to Mars. The latest in the cavalcade is Mars 6, lofted this week. The new spacecraft is carrying a joint French-Soviet experiment designed for the study of radio and cosmic-ray emissions from the sun as well as solar plasma.

Tass says Mars 6 differs in its design from Mars 4 and 5 (SN: 8/4/73, p. 69). "It is envisaged that Mars 6 can carry out a part of the scientific exploration with the use of equipment of Mars 4 station." No one knows for sure what this means, but one speculation is that Mars 6 may land on the Martian surface while Mars 4 and maybe also Mars 5 orbit the planet. No other details have been given. Mars 6 will reach Mars in early March. □

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Tracks of the Pterosaur: Probable oldest evidence

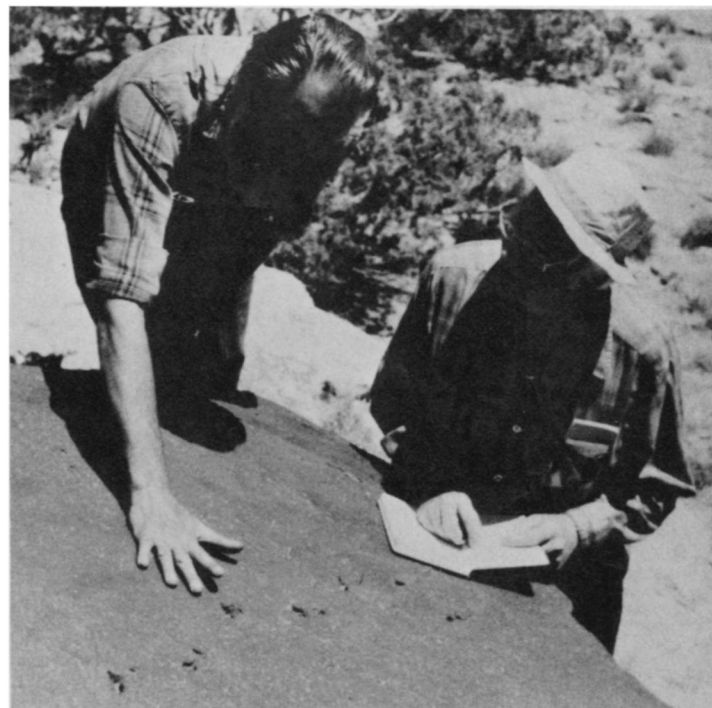
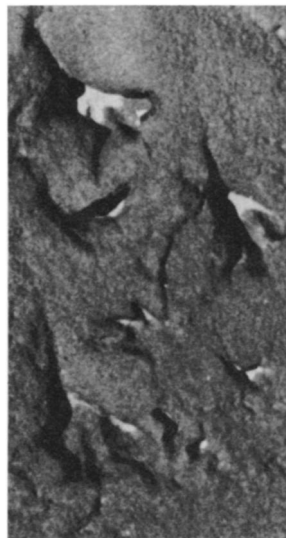
Fossil footprints called probably the world's oldest evidence of Pterosaurs—ancient flying reptiles—have been found in a slab of sandstone in the scenic desert country of southeastern Utah.

William Lee Stokes, a University of Utah geologist and paleontologist, says the footprints "are probably the oldest evidences of Pterosaurs in the world." He estimates them to be between 150 million and 200 million years old. The general absence of fossils in Navajo Sandstone, the formation bearing the Pterosaur prints, makes the prints difficult to date more accurately. The formation lies well below the quarry at the Dinosaur National Monument and therefore is considerably older.

"Skeletons from England are almost this old," says Stokes. "But the exact relative dating cannot be sure. In any event they are among the oldest in the world and certainly the oldest traces known in North America." In 1952, Stokes made the only other known discovery of Pterosaur prints, in Arizona. He has verified the new findings in conjunction with several other scientists, including Samuel P. Welles, a University of California paleontologist.

The prints were discovered by Lin Ottinger, a Moab, Utah, backcountry guide and rock shop owner. There are two sites. One is a few miles northeast of Moab. There the tracks are better preserved than at the second site, near the conjunction of the Dolores and Colorado Rivers. The exact location of the sites is being kept secret to protect

*Ottinger and Stokes
with some of the
Pterosaur tracks. Closeup
(below) of several inch-
and-a-half-long prints.*
University of Utah



TO OUR READERS

The Aug. 18 SCIENCE NEWS will be combined with the Aug. 25 issue to make a double-sized issue that will include a special report on research in astronomy. It will be mailed on Aug. 24.

—The Editor

them from possible vandalism until funds can be raised to transport the huge sandstone slabs to the University of Utah campus for study and preservation.

Welles describes the tracks as "highly irregular," and says they should provide valuable information about the actions of the reptiles on the ground.

Pterosaurs ranged from the size of sparrows to giants with wingspans of 30 feet. They ate insects and fish. Their leathery wings were used primarily for gliding, paleontologists believe.

Flying reptiles became extinct about 135 million years ago, apparently losing out to birds in the competition for food.

The great number of tracks at the newly discovered sites indicates that Pterosaurs may have abounded in the area, says Stokes. The Moab prints are not confined to the flying reptiles. About 10 different animals are represented. The paleontologists are puzzled by the multitude of fossil tracks in a sandstone formation which, as widespread as it is in Utah, has yielded few fossils in the past. "They do suggest that here and there were well-watered spots like modern-day oases . . . where communities of plants and animals could take up temporary existence," concludes Stokes. □