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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: One of the best photos of earth's weather ever made was taken June 3 by the new SMS-1 meteorological satellite 22,300 miles out in space and processed by a laser recorder and other special equipment at White Sands Missile Range. See p. 397. (Photo: White Sands)

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Books	Margit Friedrich
Advertising	Scherago Associates, Inc. 11 W. 42nd St. New York, N.Y. 10036 Fred W. Dieffenbach Sales Director

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June 22, 1974

To the Editor

Early man in America

Your write-up on early man in Ameri-
ca (SN: 5/18/74, p. 316) is a good job.

There are minor differences in emphasis.
The key to man's entry is more of an ice
barrier than a land bridge. The Wisconsin
ice would prevent man from getting to
Southern California, except around 30,000
years ago when there was an ice free
corridor. Since man was in Southern Cali-
fornia long before that, he must have
preceded the first Wisconsin ice, and thus
we have Interglacial Man in America.
That also means that we have a true Lower
Paleolithic in America.

I have said all of this a number of
times, most extensively in *Pleistocene Man
at San Diego* (The Johns Hopkins Uni-
versity Press, Baltimore, 1957). My data
was complex: geology, geomorphology,
pedology, climatology, eustatic sea levels,
etc., to form a time frame. I then put
the archaeology into this and it read: man
present in the last interglacial and through-
out the Wisconsin. This led to near hys-
teria, so I withdrew to let the field catch
up, saying: "If I'm wrong, there will be
no more such lithic assemblages and sites
as my earliest. If I am right we will have
more." We now have the Shequiandah
site in Canada, reported by Thomas Lee,
the Avery Island site reported by S. Gag-
liano, and series of sites found in the
Imperial Valley by Morlin Childers (who
also has reported a skelton dated at
22,500), and a huge new site from San
Diego found by Herb Minshall. It was
the combination of Minshall's find and
Bada's dating that brought me back into
the Early Man War.

We (Carter, Minshall, with James
Moriarty's class from the University of
San Diego) excavated on Minshall's site
and the Texas Street site last summer and
demonstrated fire places, living floors and
stone tools to all who came to look.

Incidentally the guess date (by all the
experts) on the 48,000-year-old skull was
5,000 to 7,000 years. I insisted that it
would be some multiple of this. M. J.
Rogers showed me the bones and the
sites, perhaps 40 years ago and I was the
last man alive that knew something of
their significance. Longevity and an ele-
phantine memory are worthwhile.

George F. Carter
Distinguished Professor
of Geography
Texas A & M University
College Station, Tex.

The St. Albans site

Another important site in the East is
suffering even more than the Koster site
from the "King Tut" image (SN: 5/18/74,
p. 316). This is the St. Albans site in
West Virginia. St. Albans probably won't
give the broad knowledge of aboriginal
life that Koster does, but it promises to
carry the story of man in America fur-
ther into the past.

Soil borings at St. Albans showed that
there were traces of human activity—
charcoal and flint chips—to a depth of
38 feet. Using her own painfully small
budget and an NSF grant, Bettye Broyles,
a West Virginia State archaeologist, ex-
cavated part of the site down to water
level in the adjacent Kanawha River. She
found beautiful "layer cake" stratigraphy
—living floors separated by sterile flood
deposits—down to a depth of some 19
feet. One of the lower zones (not the
lowest) gave her a radiocarbon date of
7900 B.C. for identifiable Early Archaic
projectile points.

There is at least as great a depth still
to be excavated at St. Albans—more, if
the soil borings didn't reach bottom. Un-
fortunately, it is all below water level
in the dammed-up Kanawha. Sophisticated
and innovative engineering will be needed
to keep water out of the excavation. This
may be why the NSF threw in the towel
and refused further grants. (It never gives
reasons for such things.) St. Albans is
even less romantic than the big Koster
site, and little West Virginia has fewer
resources than Illinois. Broyles is doing an
amazing amount with the funds she does
have, but there sits St. Albans with its
story of early man in the East, waiting
for a major flood to erode it away and
destroy the record forever.

Bada's dating method may not be of
much help in the Northeast, where the
temperature has fluctuated like a yo-yo
during and since the final stages of the
Wisconsin glaciation. But for regions with
more stable temperatures, it has another
advantage over carbon-14. Any reasonably
competent analytical chemistry laboratory
can use it without the expensive, tem-
peramental radiation detectors required
for C-14 dating.

Stories like this and the famine feature
are making SCIENCE NEWS better and bet-
ter. Without access to Rogers' original
papers, most people would not have real-
ized that one of the dated specimens
was a complete skull. (Carter apparently
hadn't heard of it when he wrote his
book on the San Diego sites.) Thanks
for rounding out the story.

P. Schuyler Miller
Pittsburgh, Pa.

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