

## OF THE WEEK

Bright nova in Cygnus	164
Monopole debate divides physicists	164
Ex-island beneath the Atlantic	165
Viking 2 Cydonia-bound	165
Scientists lambast astrology	166
New no-taste proteins	166
The danger of sugar-mania	167
What is a scientist?	167
Birth-rate rise foreseen	167

## RESEARCH NOTES

Behavior	168
Chemistry	169
Physical Sciences	169

## ARTICLES

New horizons in computer technology	170
Preventing sexual stereotyping	173

## DEPARTMENTS

Books	162
Letters	163

**COVER:** Sexist attitudes can lock young minds into restrictive patterns, say researchers, and mental health statistics suggest that such patterns might be harmful, especially to women. Early intervention through the schools might be one key to unlocking sexist attitudes. See p. 173.

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# LETTERS

## Washington's water problem?

CIVIL ENGINEERING's editors have concluded that the Washington area faces a "critical" water problem" ("The Thirsty Capital," SN: 8/9/75, p. 89). Since SCIENCE NEWS normally does not print incomplete stories, the information in CIVIL ENGINEERING must have been incomplete.

The jurisdictional problem is even more complex than stated: Maryland may own the Potomac River itself, but the Maryland shore from within the District of Columbia to Cumberland is almost all Federal land, as is the Virginia shore from the District to Great Falls 10 miles upstream. Two National Parks are involved: Harpers Ferry National Historical Park on both the Maryland and West Virginia sides at the Shenandoah River, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal from D.C. to Cumberland, plus the Great Falls Parks and George Washington Parkways in both Maryland and Virginia under the National Capital Parks unit of the National Park Service.

You reported (from CE) that "dams and reservoirs that would provide better water service have been stymied . . .". Perfectly true, but the "stymied dams," a whole series of them, were proposed in the past by the Army Corps of Engineers under its mandate covering *flood control and navigation*, in neither capacity of which (by the legislation covering the Corps' functions) water supply could be the principal reason for dam construction. The Potomac *does* flood—let there be no mistake there—it averages a spectacular flood every 25 years, but direct effects on people are small compared with other American rivers in flood since, except at Harpers Ferry, there is little construction at river level. In fact, operating on the theory that the river *will* flood, the Park Service Visitor Center at Great Falls, Virginia, was ingeniously designed to let flood waters flow through, around, and under it without building damage—the design works admirably.

The statement that ". . . incredibly, there are no reservoirs on the river and its principal tributaries" is misleading. Why should it be incredible? This is not the arid West, but the humid East, where there are quite a few rivers without reservoirs throughout much of their lengths. Further, there may be no huge storage reservoirs, but there are at least two dams—above Great Falls and downstream at Little Falls—for

District of Columbia water intake, and there are a number of other places where water is diverted for human use. (I do not know, however, the nature of those diversion structures.)

During the 1966 drought, the story given to the public, at least in Montgomery County, Maryland, just upstream from the District, was not that there was inadequate water in the river, but that the distribution system on land was inadequate. This is not the same as saying that the river lacks sufficient water. Thus far droughts have never been more than very briefly annoying.

Finally, whence came the idea that water demand in 2000 A.D. will be nearly four times today's demand? This implies a population up to four times as large. Really, it is quite possible that the Washington area does not face a "critical" water problem, although waste disposal of all kinds is currently an emotional issue.

Louise N. Worrell  
Bethesda, Md

## Optical communication

The article "Telephoning by Light" (SN: 7/19/75) has been brought to my attention. This article was authored by your Science and Society writer, John H. Douglas.

In the second full paragraph of column 2 on page 44, Mr. Douglas attributes to Bell Labs the discovery of a method of forming optical waveguides. It may be of interest to you to learn that U.S. Patents Nos. 3,711,262; 3,823,995; and 3,884,550 cover and/or relate to the described method. These patents are assigned to Corning Glass Works.

I would deem it advisable to refrain from attributing to others Corning's contributions to this art.

Walter S. Zebrowski  
Manager, Electronic Patents  
Corning Glass Works  
Corning, N.Y.

(A spokesman for Bell Labs says that the particular method for making optical fibers that Mr. Douglas saw—"chemical vapor deposition using flowing gas system"—was indeed developed at Bell Labs and has a patent pending. Corning Glass Works has been, unquestionably, a pioneer in the development of fibers for optical communication, and remains a leader in the field.—Ed.)

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163