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COVER: Man's early origins are pushed back by recent evidences of hominids in eastern Africa. Traces of dentition found on these outcroppings at Laetolil were assigned to a near-man living 3.35 to 3.75 million years ago. See p. 292. (Photos: The National Geographic Society.)

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NOVEMBER 8, 1975

LETTERS

As you like it

I am surprised that you didn't point out that Kaula's poem (SN: 10/18/75, p. 248) is a parody of the well-known lines from Shakespeare's "As You Like It," beginning "All the world's a stage And all the men and women merely players . . ." The original delineates the seven ages of man, from infancy to senility. Or do you assume that all of your readers are sufficiently erudite to recognize the source?

Chester F. Protheroe
Arlington, Mass.

(We even thought they might recognize SN's headline [" . . . Born under a riming planet . . ."], from "Much Ado About Nothing."—Ed.)

Your issue of Oct. 18 had two references to Nix Olympica, the huge extinct volcano on Mars. I've read that the name was changed to Olympus Mons. I hope the change doesn't spoil William Kaula's poem.

George A. Gauthier
Bronx, N.Y.

(The name Nix Olympica—Snows of Olympus—was originally inspired by a bright spot in the clouds, which varies with Martian seasonal and other changes. Mariner 9's discovery of the gigantic—and firmly fixed—volcano beneath, inspired the change to Olympus Mons, or Mount Olympus. How that affects Kaula's poem is his problem, but it is supposedly a teaching aid.—Ed.)

Word trap

That was a fascinating article on truffles in the Oct. 18 issue. The fascination rises when we read about Jim Trappe and his filing system—

And now, a fellow named Trappe
Traps truffles all over the map.

For his specimen files
He keeps them in viles
(Or was this a spelling mishap?)

P.S. As I've said before, SCIENCE NEWS is doing a great job.

A. D. Moore
Professor Emeritus
College of Engineering
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

(A dozen readers wrote to note the vile-ence done "Truffles" by that uncaught typo. Vigilance, not vilipence, is called for and will be forthcoming.—J.H.)

Prolonging life

Regarding the article, "When Should Life Be Prolonged?" (SN: 10/4/75, p. 213): It is a strange society that when one manifests suicidal behaviors as in drugs for pleasure, and reaches an obvious point of no return that maintenance must continue. When therapies become ineffectual, it is then time to look closely at the free will of the patient and accord it the respect and reverence that it so rightly deserves.

Ronald D. Amon
Fredericksburg, Va.

SI units

Though I do support the movement towards the use of SI units, I must object to Berthold Horn's letter (SN: 10/18/75, p. 243). I suggest that he would find many people disagreeing with his description of the units angstrom, ergs, gammas and gauss as outmoded. He promotes the change from cps to hertz; in my opinion one of the more regressive changes, as the former actually means what it says, while the latter does not. Some fields of study adapt rather well to SI units, but there are others that do not.

In these objections, I do not deny the advantages of SI units, but I strongly feel that there is a danger of overstandardization. There is a need to have units which are understood in all fields of study, but achievement towards this goal should not needlessly complicate the data used within a field. I support SCIENCE NEWS magazine's policy to print articles with the units in which they were presented originally.

Andrew N. French
Tufts University
Medford, Mass.

East is east and west is west

In "Geography Lessons" (SN: 10/4/75, p. 223), you might have gone on to point out that Alaska is also the most northerly state, in addition to being the most easterly and most westerly, and that Hawaii is the most southerly—a rather unexpected solution to the question, "which states are the most northerly, southerly, easterly and westerly?"

This question was first propounded, as far as I know, in a science-fiction periodical many years ago. I have subsequently put it to many dozens of friends and colleagues, only two of whom were able to come up with the correct solution (and only one of whom was a native-born American).

Cyril Fleisher
East Hartford, Conn.

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