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COVER: Portion of first color photo from the Martian surface, in its final color-corrected form. The reddish cast to the sky is considered due to reflection and scattering from reddish soil particles suspended in the lower atmosphere. Orange-red surface materials cover most of the surface, apparently forming a thin veneer over darker bedrock exposed in patches. Picture was taken and transmitted by the Viking 1 lander on its second day on Mars (July 21) and carefully color calibrated in the ensuing days to accurately indicate actual colors. Time is Martian noon. View is toward the southeast. Another segment of same photo is on p. 84, along with the first intriguing reports on Viking's biology experiments. (Photo: NASA-JPL. Separations provided by TRW, Inc.)

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AUGUST 7, 1976

LETTERS

Tire tracks in the desert

Because of the politically sensitive nature of our studies, we welcome your inclusion of a review of our article "Off-Road Vehicle Effects on California's Mojave Desert," as an avenue for informing the scientific and nonscientific community of these problems.

In regard to the introductory sentence, the implication of damage occurring only between Barstow and Las Vegas is somewhat misleading. The impact of orv's throughout the Mojave Desert is increasing at an alarming rate. The Barstow to Las Vegas race-route was examined in detail because it crosses virtually every type of desert environment, but our findings also apply to other similar environments.

In addition, the inference that the intaglios were damaged as a result of the Barstow to Las Vegas race is incorrect. These figures have been partially destroyed by orv's, but our reference to them was to illustrate the life-expectancy of manmade scars.

John K. Nakata
Howard G. Wilshire
U.S. Geological Survey
Menlo Park, Calif.

A gargantuan proposal

Now that you and your correspondents have settled the matter of the proper pronunciation of "kilometer," what about doing something about the English (and American) pronunciation of "giga-"? This is a large number (10⁹), in fact, it is a *gigantic* number. It is not something to laugh about (as in giggle) nor something to dance about (as in jig), but as I said, it is *gigantic*.

David C. Hess
Downers Grove, Ill.

Through the Reed Sea with Moses

I enjoyed the article, "Gem-Pa-Aton, A Home for Egyptian Monotheism" by Dietrick E. Thomsen (SN: 5/8/76, p. 300). One comment ought to be made, however, relative to the final paragraph. All too often such statements are facetiously made such as "Moses led the children of Israel through the Red Sea. . . ." Crossing the Red Sea, to the south of the Sinai Peninsula would have taken the Israelites to an almost uninhabitable area of the southern Arabian desert and far from Canaan which country they were seeking to inhabit.

The words "Red Sea" are an incorrect

translation of two Hebrew words, "yam" meaning sea and "suph" meaning *not* "red" but "reed" (papyrus). "Yam suph" should have been translated "reed sea" or "papyrus sea." The error was made originally when the Greek translation (Septuagint) of the Old Testament was made centuries before Christ. The "reed sea" was in the general area of Lake Timsah in the region of the present Suez Canal. As can be seen on a modern map, entrance into the Sinai Peninsula at this point gave an excellent possibility to take one of three ways to Canaan. The question of which route was taken, and why, introduces another interesting problem.

It is somewhat misleading to allude to the view of deity of Akhnaton as "monotheism." Although there is ample room for discussion, the term henotheism might be more appropriate. Also explicit monotheism is difficult to recognize in the Israelite tradition until the period of II Isaiah (540 B.C.).

Daniel Wm. O'Connor
Department of Religious Studies
St. Lawrence University
Canton, N.Y.

(We agree wholeheartedly about the "reed sea." We thought everyone had heard about it in Sunday School. We were merely quoting the traditional Bible wording as a matter of dating. Henotheism is probably a better word for both Ikhnaton's belief and the early Hebrews'. We were trying to convey something of that with the phrase "dawning consciousness." By the way, a purist could call the early Christians henotheists. Many of them regarded the Olympian deities not as fictions but as evil spirits that had bamboozled the pagans.—Ed.)

Limerick is in Ireland, too

"Quarks are fantastic jive."
James Joyce might have said if alive.
"We started with three
For atomic debris,
And now we find we have five."

F. A. Moen
San Mateo, Calif.

(A wake for a fellow name Finnegan
Gave theorists quarks to begin again.
Having swallowed down four,
They keep asking for more
And a theory by which they can win
again.—Ed.)

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