

SCIENCE NEWS

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 122, No. 24, December 11, 1982

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Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$27.50; 2 yrs., \$47.50; 3
yrs., \$67.00. (Foreign postage \$5.00 additional per
year.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice
is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to
be addressed. Include zip code. For new
subscriptions only call (1) 800-247-2160. Printed in
U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington,
D.C. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian
Patent Offices. Published every Saturday by
SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255)
ISSN 0036-8423

Letters

Unsupported trivia?

I fail to understand why your normally reliable and informative publication prints unsupported, highly speculative trivia regarding the postulated evolution of humans ("Hominoid History: Filling the Fossil Gap" SN: 9/11/82, p. 164). The article indicated both the fossil analysis and its date was "preliminary." Why not wait for substantial documented information?

Leakey is "credited" with similar preliminary reports in the past (SN: 11/27/71, p. 357). In reference to "Rudolf skulls," that article stated, "Leakey's confidence, however, is somewhat limited. He had previously suggested that two Rudolf skulls were more than 4 million years old. But in his talk last week, he said that preliminary reports on the geology of the area were incorrect and that the skulls were only 2 million years old. Leakey emphasized that all his statements were preliminary."

Currently, it appears to me that there is still nothing to fill the fossil gap but preliminary speculation.

Phillip A. Nickel, Ph.D.
Thousand Oaks, Calif.

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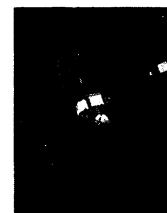
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Cover: Twenty years ago on Dec. 14, the Mariner 2 spacecraft took the first close look at a planet beyond the earth-moon system. (Illustration: NASA)



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Memory and intelligence

I have a master's degree in mathematics and was well thought of by my professors. I am working as a computer programmer, and my abilities are admired by my co-workers, supervisors and users. I scored in the upper 2 percentile on college entrance tests, usually in the upper 1 percentile for mathematics and biology.

However, I would probably score poorly on the Kaufmans' test ("Intelligence Test: Sizing Up a Newcomer" SN: 10/30/82, p. 280) because I have a poor short-term memory. If I call up the operator for a telephone number, I have to keep repeating it to myself until I dial it, or I will forget the number. It sometimes takes me several months to learn my telephone number and address when I move. I have a hard time remembering things unless I understand the reason behind them or there is some kind of pattern. In mathematics classes I found it easier to derive formulas (such as the quadratic formula) than to try to memorize them.

I find it hard to believe there is a strong correlation between short-term memory and the ability to think logically.

Patricia M. Shannon
Huntsville, Ala.

Correction: In the Bevalac acceleration process ("Uranium at a Quarter-Trillion Volts" SN: 10/9/82, p. 228) uranium ions enter the accelerator with a positive charge of 68, having lost 68 of their 92 electrons.

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DECEMBER 11, 1982

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