

# SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication  
Volume 127, No. 6, February 9, 1985

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Subscription Department  
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

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

### Contradiction reconciled

In "Tour through a taste bud" (SN: 12/22 & 29/  
84, p. 393), J.A. Miller states that taste buds are  
among the most active replicators in the body,  
yet Eugenia Wang ("Finding a cellular sign of ag-  
ing," SN: 12/22 & 29/84, p. 390) found statin in  
taste buds. The latter article says that "statin  
turns up in places like taste buds and heart  
muscle, where cells aren't dividing." It would  
seem that there is a contradiction here. Please  
explain which view is correct.

Ernest O'Byrne  
Eugene, Ore.

Both views are correct. In the taste bud, accord-  
ing to Wang, the cells of the inner layer do repli-  
cate actively to replace cells of the outer layer,  
which do not replicate and which, when they  
age, are shed from the tongue surface. Wang  
says that the protein statin is found only in the  
taste bud's outer layer. —J.A. Miller

## This Week

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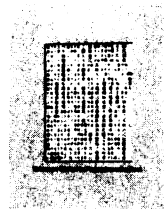
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## Articles

### 91 Excavating Words: A Geological Tool

Cover: This excerpt from the *Book of the Early Han Dynasty* recounts unseasonably cold weather, failed crops, famine and strange astronomical observations during 43 B.C. Researchers now believe that these occurrences are all signs of an eruption the previous year of Mt. Etna on the other side of the globe. Similar passages from the surviving literature of many ancient civilizations are proving valuable tools in dating and describing volcanos that erupted in the past. (Courtesy Kevin D. Pang)



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## Alternative view

I enjoyed the article on high-voltage electron microscopy ("HVEM: The Big Picture of Small Structures," SN: 12/22 & 29/84, p. 392). However, I must take issue with the statement that the "microtrabecular matrix is now recognized as the structure within cells." Although it remains possible that microtrabeculae exist *in vivo*, this is not a proven fact and is not generally accepted as such.

The alternative view is that microtrabeculae represent the cytoskeleton (i.e., filaments composed of actin and other proteins) onto which most of the cell's soluble contents have collapsed during specimen preparation. In fact, this latter view is supported by recent studies using both high-voltage and conventional electron microscopes and therefore enjoys widespread acceptance among cell biologists and biological microscopists.

Walter E. Fowler  
Duke University Medical Center  
Durham, N.C.

## Rocks resurface

The "Halos of Stone" (SN: 1/19/85, p. 42) have nothing on my garden. Each spring I pick up what seems like tons of rocks from a quarter-acre plot. My neighbor collects these and lines his drainage ditch with them, claiming that every year they sink into the ground and must be replaced.

Even though his ditch is nearly a half-mile from my garden, after six years of this I could swear I'm picking up the same damn rocks. This year I intend to prove it—I'm going to spray all the rocks in his ditch with red paint.

Emily Johnston  
Westminster, Md.

Correction: The report of joggers being attacked by birds (SN: 1/12/85, p. 24) appeared in the Dec. 27, 1984, NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE, not the Dec. 15 LANCET.

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