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## Letters

### Mystery of Lake Monoun

Regarding "The 'Killer Lake' of Cameroon" (SN: 12/7/85, p. 356), I suggest that the immediate cause was fine silt, which cascaded down to the lower depths of Lake Monoun after the earth tremor. The silt nucleated the CO<sub>2</sub>-supersaturated lower strata to produce an eruption of CO<sub>2</sub> bubbles.

I observed a similar phenomenon while sitting in the hot springs pool of Steamboat Springs, Colo. Bubbles of CO<sub>2</sub> were forming throughout the pool, which was approximately 115°F. However, the fine hair on my arms and legs caused an enormous increase in bubble formation on these surfaces compared with the bare patches of my skin.

Elliott Eisenbach  
New York, N.Y.

A smokelike cloud . . . flattened plants . . . a loud explosion . . . stirred-up water . . . a 350-

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Cover: Two seemingly disparate diseases — one arising before birth, the other late in life — share many of the same neuropathological characteristics. Researchers are looking into the similarities between Down's syndrome and Alzheimer's disease in the hope of gaining a better understanding of both. (Photos: National Down Syndrome Society, National Council on Aging)



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meter-wide crater . . . ferrous ions . . . iron-carbonates . . . a 5-meter-high wave . . . earthquakes. Did the investigators of the "Killer Lake" consider the possibility of a meteorite impact in the lake?

Daniel B. Caton  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Physics and Astronomy  
Appalachian State University  
Boone, N.C.

**Certainly the toll** of 37 people asphyxiated along the open lake shore must be some sort of record. Professor Sigurdsson speculates on a carbon dioxide cloud, possibly mixed with nitric acid, as the deadly agent, suggesting that "this event was unique — certainly in its lethal effects."

We would like therefore to call to your attention the following excerpt from *Ecological Animal Geography* (Hesse, Allee and Schmidt,

John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1937, p. 18):

*In fumaroles, where carbon dioxide escapes from the earth, it may displace the air near the ground on account of its greater density; the Grotto del Cane at Pozzuoli is an instance; the death valley on the Dieng plateau in Java is another. Such places are closed to animal life. The bodies of small birds and mammals (finches and mice), which have wandered into the carbon dioxide atmosphere, are frequently found at the Mofetten on the eastern shore of Lake Laach near Coblenz.*

The valley of death in Java is also known as the "valley of silence" because no bird sings there.

The phenomenon of carbon dioxide narcosis and death by asphyxiation is probably

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more common among animals in nature than we realize, even when other toxic gases were not present.

S.M. Siegel  
Department of Botany  
B. Z. Siegel  
Pacific Biomedical Research Center  
University of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii

### On gibing generative grammar

It never ceases to amaze me how the re-monstrances toward generative-transformational theories of grammar (Letters, SN: 12/14/85, p. 371) forge on as an exercise in futility. The science of linguistics has been laden with ambiguities through the years; nevertheless, they must be coped with openly and honestly.

Infinitude, as related to grammar, simply extends the possibilities of the deep, unconstrained structures of a given language to limitless surface (i.e. real) ramifications. It does *not*, as the letter from Robin Ault implies, constitute trillions of words forming arbitrarily long sentences.

What seems obfuscated to Ault concerning the nature of the *best* grammar perhaps never will be perfectly clear. However, if one is bound and determined "to capture and display understandable patterns of a language," then what is deemed by the finitists as counterfeit and specious, re mathematical elegance, just may be the most tenable avenue to pursue in coalescing the morphophonetic, syntactic and semantic components of all languages. Mathematical frameworks have served us well in the past, specifically in nuclear physics, to determine actual or virtual existences of the fundamental constituents of matter.

Gary R. Lavine  
Lansdale, Pa.

### Strings spring back

To the folklore about causes and remedies for deadening of guitar strings as discussed by Hanson and Munns (SN: 11/23/85, p. 329), may I add this. In 1964, shortly after taking up classical guitar, I too concluded that corrosion and dirt between adjacent turns of the winding wire, and perhaps also internally between the nylon filaments and the winding, are the culprits. The highest overtones are affected most because, with their short wavelengths, they require the string to flex with many short-radius bend reversals, so any friction that either impedes or absorbs energy from this multi-flexing hastens the decay of such vibrations.

To lubricate this flexing and to perhaps delay corrosion, I tried Teflon spray (DuPont "Slipspray") applied to new strings, and once or twice later to rejuvenate deadened strings. This prolonged useful string life considerably.

If the boiling in vinegar treatment, mentioned as part of the folklore, works, I would suggest that an ultrasonic bath used with an appropriate solvent or soap solution might work even better. However, any rejuvenating cleaning treatment would be most effective if it could be applied to a string in its stretched state to take advantage of the minute gaps opened between turns.

Charles Klabunde  
Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Correction: The Jan. 4 cover photo credit should be Master Sound Astoria.

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE

*The Manning, Selvage & Lee Guide to Clear Writing and Speech*

Charles Einstein

Covers such things as when to say "that" or "who" instead of "which" or "whom," and when to use "compare to" rather than "compare with." Discusses dangling participles, split infinitives and mixed metaphors. Treats the nuances of meaning between "precipitate" and "precipitous," "continual" and "continuous," "masterly" and "masterful."

### Tucker's Law (a sampling)

1. Don't use no double negatives.
6. Verbs has got to agree with their antecedents.
8. Don't use commas, that aren't necessary.
11. Proofread your writing to see if you any words out.
12. Correct speling is essential.

McGraw-Hill, 1985, 116 pages, 8" x 5 1/4", paperback, \$6.95

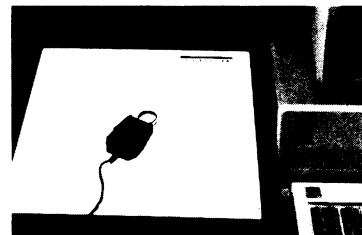
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