

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 130, No. 10, September 6, 1986

E.G. Sherburne Jr.	Publisher
Joel Greenberg	Editor
Detrick E. Thomsen	Senior Editor/ Physical Sciences
Laurie Jackson	Managing Editor
Wendy McCarren	Production/Design Director
Bruce Bower	Behavioral Sciences
Joanne Silberner	Biomedicine
Stefi Weisburd	Earth Sciences
Julie Ann Miller, Lisa Davis	Life Sciences
Janet Raloff, Ivars Peterson	Policy/Technology
Jonathan Eberhart	Space Sciences
Richard Monastersky	Assistant to the Editor
Trina Kleist, Mary Murray	Science Writer Interns
Jane M. Livermore	Books
Donald R. Harless	Advertising/Business Manager

Copyright © 1986 by Science Service, Inc.,
Editorial and Business Offices,
1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.
Republication of any portion of SCIENCE NEWS
without written permission of the publisher is
prohibited.

Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$29.50; 2 yrs., \$50.00.
(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., and additional
mailing offices. 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

Thanks — we needed that

I'm glad to hear my favorite publication is in good financial health (Commentary, SN:9/2/86,p.67). As a nonscientist, I need an intelligent overview of scientific current events.

SCIENCE NEWS articles are concise and objective. The balance of quick-looks in "Research Notes," up-to-the-minute information in "This Week" and lengthier articles is perfect.

I enjoy your creative solution to a potential problem. Even with exciting writing, how does a capable staff make a news magazine entertaining? With cartoons? Crosswords? SCIENCE NEWS has the inspired answer: rampant word-play. When I'm blue and could care less about the latest scientific developments, I read SCIENCE NEWS for the pun of it.

I can't imagine how SCIENCE NEWS could be

This Week

- 148 Aging and Eating: Good News for Some
- 148 Cameroon: Death by suffocation
- 148 Roman city yields new quake clues
- 149 Augustine volcano erupts quietly
- 149 Atomic bonds: Seeing the links
- 150 CO₂: An additional source of methane?
- 150 Tying up proteins for drug delivery
- 151 Report faults EPA on wildlife
- 151 Captivity chosen to save the ferret

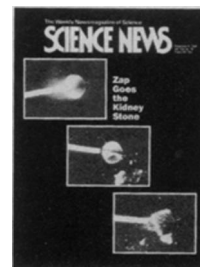
Research Notes

- 152 Behavior
- 152 Biology
- 153 Biomedicine
- 153 Technology

Articles

- 154 Inside the Autistic Brain
- 157 Plasma Physics Breaks Stones

Cover: Laser light smashes a kidney stone in this laboratory experiment at Massachusetts General Hospital. A tiny wire basket holds the stone at the end of a light-conducting fiber. Pulses of laser light running through the fiber break the stone. The three images, from top, are: first contact; after a few pulses; and after several pulses. It takes about 2,000 pulses to reduce the stone to tiny pieces. (Photos: Massachusetts General Hospital)



Departments

- 147 Letters
- 158 Books

Science Service Institution for the public understanding of science founded 1921; a nonprofit corporation.
Board of Trustees — *President*, Glenn T. Seaborg; *Vice President*, Gerald F. Tape; *Treasurer*, Willis Harlow Shapley; *Secretary*, Hilleary F. Hoskinson; Joseph W. Berg Jr.; Edward Bliss Jr.; Bowen C. Dees; David A. Goslin; Milton Harris; Elena O. Nightingale; O.W. Riegel; H. Guyford Stever; John Troan; Deborah P. Wolfe.
Director: E. G. Sherburne Jr.; **Assistant Director**: Dorothy Schriver; **Business Manager**: Donald R. Harless.

improved, except by adding another page (that is, four more pages). I could still fold it and carry it in my shirt pocket — an important advantage over other magazines!

As a citizen, I must make informed decisions on AIDS, "star wars," fusion power and the ozone layer. I rely heavily on SCIENCE NEWS to help me cope with the plethora of poorly formed opinions on these and other important subjects.

SCIENCE NEWS often gives me information months before it is released by other media. Too often important scientific developments never make television or even get space in the Sunday paper. And who has time to scan journals looking for significant articles, much less time to read and decipher them? The staff of SCIENCE NEWS takes the time. Many thanks!

Bernard F. Rice
Park Forest, Ill.

I have played many games of the desert island/shipwreck variety and I always choose a beautiful girl and SCIENCE NEWS. I might add that the order is not that settled!

I am a scientist, by love, training, choice and intellectual machination. We all pay a price for our personal proclivities and I have paid many of them. There is one price, however (and one only), that I pay gleefully no matter how high it ascends; and that is the subscription price for SCIENCE NEWS.

Science is a force, a will, a modus operandi. And I believe it to be a force of positiveness and good. I feel it is one of a dearth of choices worthy of the work of a lifetime. It bellows, loudly, for the one debt we owe to our species — and our partners in biology/evolution — to be

Letters continued on p. 156

SEPTEMBER 6, 1986

147

paid in full: to shed our fears and to understand and make malleable those things from which good and "better" are striving to be born. SCIENCE NEWS is this incredible odyssey in the first rough draft of science history. As I seek to know my universe, so I peer intently via SCIENCE NEWS.

Phillip Isard
Huntingdon Valley, Pa.

I appreciate your thanks for my having remained a loyal subscriber. I found this sincerity thought-provoking and would like to comment on what I feel are the reasons for my continued patronage.

The combined total of professional, scientific and news publications I receive in a month is more easily measured in inches rather than pages (I do not take a newspaper). I am interested in a great number of things and do enjoy a rather broad general knowledge but must continuously decide throughout each day how I am to allocate my time. It is refreshingly simple to glance through SCIENCE NEWS and dwell according to interest. With some publications I don't get past the index for the dread of having to flip 200 pages for the pearls it might contain. I will not squander my most important resource just because they lack proper respect for it.

Your magazine is the only one besides NA-

TIONAL GEOGRAPHIC that I choose to save for reference purposes. You might be interested that 10 years' worth of SCIENCE NEWS makes a pile less than a foot high.

I appreciate your sensitivity to your readers. I also appreciate your apparent unwillingness to prostitute your magazine to the advertisers. Some of the products, like the books, are unique; some of the ads are thought-provoking. But remember, I want to continue saving issues far into the future and I regard space, both mental and physical, as the precious resource it is. Please, keep up the good work.

Lee Dyal
Placentia, Calif.

Don't thank us! We should thank you: for your coverage of developments in science; for not assuming that we subscribers are all college professors; for writing clearly and concisely yet comprehensively.

In particular, we should thank you for keeping on your staff such persons as Dietrick Thomsen, Stefi Weisburd and Jonathan Eberhart. Thomsen is one of the most enjoyable science writers I have ever encountered; I shall always treasure his remark, in an article some time ago about the Very Large Array Radio Telescope in New Mexico, that "computers do everything but trigger supernovas."

I have just one minor cavil: Do the illustrations that accompany your articles have to be

so small? Sometimes they are so tiny that details are obscured, even when viewed through a magnifying glass. Just a little more space would be much appreciated.

Wallace B. Riley
San Francisco, Calif.

I would like to tell you what a person like me, with little or no scientific background, likes about your magazine.

I especially like the brevity of the articles. I also like the authentic sound of the articles. The writers seem to know what they are talking about, and some write with a flair that adds pleasure to knowledge. You cover the field well, and your way of classifying and headlining the articles is a help in grasping the coverage of each issue.

I am a reader who would be hard put to explain what an atom is—in more than a dictionary-entry way—but I have some idea what the scientific approach, method and attitude are. SCIENCE NEWS is about my only link with scientists and their work.

I believe some understanding of science (as opposed to technology) is vital to our survival, physically and socially, and I hope SCIENCE NEWS will play a part in overcoming the medievalism, superstition and voodoo which seem to be so popular today.

Oscar Littleton
Long Beach, Calif.

There are a few specialized science magazines I subscribe to that are published monthly or quarterly and contain in-depth technical articles that obviously take a great deal of time to prepare. In between those issues, SCIENCE NEWS gives me a running account of new developments in many fields. To put it another way, I have already read your synopsis of an event several weeks before I get my hands on the unabridged article.

As for the subscription price, enough is enough.

Dave Myers
Racine, Wis.

I have sworn by SCIENCE NEWS since those days back in the 1960s, on the top floor of the National Press Building, when each Friday would bring those wonderful SCIENCE NEWS handouts that were like manna for a Washington correspondent jaded by political stuff and needing a weekend subject.

I still use it. Best wishes—you deserve your success!

Roy Parker Jr.
Editor, The Fayetteville Times
Fayetteville, N.C.

What a relief to know we won't be losing SCIENCE NEWS as I feared after reading of the demise of SCIENCE 86 et al. And so that's why your subscription rate is so high. Well, it's worth it.

I consider SCIENCE NEWS my continuing education, since I never worked in the field after I finished my psychology studies. Thank you for covering psychology among your broad range—I still can't understand all the physics stuff, but at least I don't wince at black holes, quarks and charm.

Frances Rainbow
Rockville, Md.

Science Goes to the Dogs By S. Harris

A new science cartoon book from the author of *What's So Funny About Science?*, *Chicken Soup and Other Medical Matters* and others. "... be prepared to laugh joyously at Sidney Harris's peculiar and special sense of fun." — from the foreword by Isaac Asimov

LONG-RANGE PLANNING



PROBABILITY



ISI Press, 1985, 114 pages, 8" x 8", softcover, \$7.95

Science News Book Order Service
1719 N St., NW, Washington, DC 20036

Please send _____ copy(ies) of *Science Goes to the Dogs*. I include a check payable to Science News Book Order Service for \$7.95 plus \$1.00 (total \$8.95) for each copy. Domestic orders only.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____ RB576

Illustrations © 1985 Sidney Harris, published by ISI Press