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This Week

Research Notes

Articles

Cover: Hidden in this hodgepodge of stained cells rests hope of restored vision for some individuals with degenerating retinas. This cross section of a mouse retina shows, to the right of the arrow, a missing layer of light-sensitive cells. Without these cells, the mouse is blind. To the left of the arrow lies a healthy population of these critical cells, alive and functioning four weeks after being transplanted from a donor mouse. Recent successes with retinal cell transplants in animals hint that some human retinal diseases, such as retinitis pigmentosa, may not remain incurable. (Photo: Martin S. Silverman)

Departments

Letters

Sahara's glory days

I read with great interest "Rivers in the Sand" (SN: 8/26/89, p.138). In 1961, after a month of intensive photographic examination and interpretation of geologic features in part of the Kharga depression in the Western Desert, I participated in a working field trip there. This was in the early development stages of the New Valley Project, a program to tap deep aquifers for water to irrigate large areas in the Western Desert.

We camped near Baris, where there was an area formerly occupied by a lake (lying near or across the Sir-B Path depicted on your map). Wind erosion in the lake bed exposed many vertical sections of organic-rich lacustrine deposits, consisting of sand, silt and clay that contained significant amounts of phosphate and calcium eroded from the surrounding formations of Cretaceous and Tertiary age. This approximately 50-kilometer-long lake existed during and after Late Pleistocene ice-age time.

Near the shore of the southern part of this lake were the remnants of a settlement. Beautifully carved and crafted Nubian sandstone blocks constituted the older buildings of Egyptian architecture, augmented by later Greek and Roman structures. What really fascinated me were the remains of a quarry-stone pier jutting from the hillside, below the town, out onto the dry lake bed. I imagined the boat and barge traffic plying the waters of this probably vegetation-bordered lake thousands of years ago and visualized the stark contrast with the present desert.

Jim Minard
Everett, Wash.

Tricking the AIDS virus

"Teaching Antibodies New Tricks" (SN: 9/2/89, p.152) suggests two ways of attacking the AIDS problem. One method would involve the synthesis of monoclonal antibodies enzymatically capable of degrading the gp120 glycoprotein in various ways, thus blocking the virus from docking on receptor-containing cells. Monoclonal enzymatic antibodies would be administered as a treatment for individuals who already have AIDS.

A second approach might be to administer, as a vaccine, actual transition-state analogs used to successfully create the monoclonal antibodies used in the above-stated treatment. Vaccinated individuals would make their own antibodies that would degrade gp120, thus preventing any infectious viruses from docking.

Robert P. Zimmerer, Professor of Biology
Elizabeth Wade, student
Juniata College
Huntingdon, Pa.

Lefty lineage

Researchers might be interested to hear that I'm the first lefty in my family ("Lefties and Longevity: Look Again," SN: 9/16/89, p.18). I married a right-hander, and our children are all right-handers. However, all the grandchildren are left-handed. A left-handed granddaughter married a left-hander, and all their children are right-handers.

As for longevity, I'm 86 and still in excellent health, but then I don't play baseball.

Muffie Stevenson
Miami, Fla.