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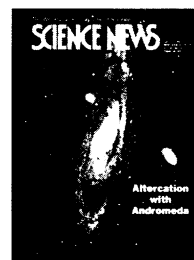
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- 392 The Little Bang

Cover: The Andromeda galaxy, the nearest spiral galaxy to our own, may have suffered a violent collision with one or two other pairs of galaxies 8 billion years ago. Such a Little Bang would help scientists estimate the amount of mass in nearby galaxies and offer another strategy for calculating the age of the universe. (Photo: Astro Photo ©1995)

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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Site-jumping claim denied

We emphatically state that the Institute of Human Origins' Hadar research project has never conducted research outside its permit boundaries, which have been approved annually by the Ministry of Culture and Sport ("Ethiopian finds and feuds," SN: 4/15/95, p.237). The work of the international team at Hadar will withstand any legitimate scrutiny, as will our scrupulous attention to the permit process in Ethiopia.

Many of the members of the team signing this letter have worked in Africa since the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is ludicrous even to entertain the idea that members of our research group transgressed research boundaries. Setting aside the issue of integrity, those familiar with site research will understand the practical reason one would not even consider such a move. Fossils collected outside an allotted permit area are

useless, since publication of the finds would be an admission of theft.

If the finds could not be published, they would have no value for the researcher.

*William H. Kimbel
Institute of Human Origins
Berkeley, Calif.
and 10 colleagues*

Jack W. K. Harris, leader of the Gona research team, tells SCIENCE NEWS that he and Seleshi Semaw stand by the accusations against IHO attributed to them in the article. — B. Bower

No rosy glow from oil reserves

Before your readers decide our oil problems are behind us, they should know that current rates of production are at a 50-year low. "Good news on U.S. oil and gas reserves" (SN: 3/18/95, p.171) ignores the decline rate of 5 percent per year in U.S. production, which stretches the "newly created" reserves over 55 years.

We already import over 50 percent of our

oil, at a cost that exceeds our balance of payments to Japan. The USGS can "create" those new reserves, but as an oil and gas geologist of 30 years, I am responsible for finding them and getting them out of the ground. There is a vast difference between those two jobs.

You mention the exploration boom in the early 1980's without mentioning the 500,000 jobs lost in the oil business since then. We have real labor shortages in key skills now, and the drain continues. Major oil companies have turned to foreign searches, leaving the independent operators to fill the gap.

The only bright spot on the scene is surface geochemical exploration using fluorescence, radiometrics, and the like.

*Gerry Calhoun
Midland, Texas*

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JUNE 24, 1995

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