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## This Week

- 52 Human Genetic Origins Go Nuclear
- 52 What makes gold such a noble metal?
- 53 Iron surprise: Algae absorb carbon dioxide
- 53 Artificial RNA enzymes: Big and fast
- 54 New pertussis vaccines safer, more effective
- 54 Galileo launches probe toward Jupiter
- 54 ASCA sheds light on galaxy formation
- 55 New efforts to decloak 'invisible' science
- 55 Using network noise to boost detection

## Research Notes

- 58 Technology

## Articles

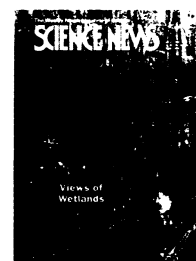
- 56 Two Views of a Swamp

Cover: A red maple swamp at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia Beach, Va. Under Congress' proposed new definition, the area would no longer rank as a wetland because it doesn't have enough plants or trees that grow exclusively in wetlands. (Photo: J. Paul Minkin, Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C.)

- 59 Corraling Federal R&D
- 62 Mimicking the Brain

## Departments

- 50 Books
- 51 Letters



**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

### No trouble in paradise?

I'd wager that the principal gas escaping from Kilauea is water vapor, not carbon dioxide ("Attack of the Vog," SN: 5/6/95, p.284). Furthermore, it appears from the article that most residents are not exactly choking. Perhaps the greatest danger to residents is that tourists will stay away if they read too many scary articles. The only sulfur dioxide I can remember being disturbed by when I spent much of a week on the Big Island in March was at Halemaumau, on the caldera rim.

*Kenneth J. Van Dellen  
Professor of Geology and  
Environmental Science  
Macomb Community College  
Warren, Mich.*

### Magnetism or movement?

The simplest explanation for the presumed rapid changes in Earth's magnetic field, as

recorded in the Steen's Mountain lavas ("Earth's Magnetic Field Follies Revealed," SN: 4/22/95, p.244), is that the material from which the samples were collected was physically moved after it had frozen. Anyone who has observed live basaltic lava flows knows that huge frozen blocks will float around on the still liquid interior of the flow as new lava is added.

I think one has to be *very* careful with sample selection for paleomagnetism studies.

*Richard G. Duncan  
San Francisco, Calif.*

*Good point. If blocks of lava had tilted and rotated as they were cooling, it would seem as if Earth's magnetic field had shifted orientation. The authors of the paper ruled out this possibility, however, for several reasons. Tilt- ing and rotation of the blocks would have disturbed the flat flow, but there is no evidence of such movement at the outcrop, says Coe. Furthermore, the top and bottom of the flow display a different magnetic orientation than the*

*middle. For your explanation to work, the top and bottom surfaces of the solid lava block must have moved differently from the middle. "That is hard to imagine. And if it did happen, you should see it in terms of some disruption in the interior," says Coe. —R. Monastersky*

### G, the relative constant

Your report of differing results for the value of G, the gravitational "constant," does not surprise me ("Gravity's force: Chasing an elusive constant," SN: 4/29/95, p.263). I find that G changes every time I ride my bicycle. Sometimes the hill at the end of the street is only a minor obstacle. Other times it seems nearly insurmountable.

*Mark A. Oldenburg  
Bettendorf, Iowa*

## CORRECTION

Reader Paul Doering's name (Letters, SN: 5/27/95, p.323) was mistakenly printed as Paula. SCIENCE NEWS regrets the miss-print.

JULY 22, 1995

SCIENCE NEWS, VOL. 148

51