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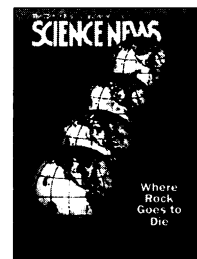
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Cover: Seismic images of Earth's interior, taken at four depths, show old ocean floor heading toward its death. Blue regions beneath North and South America indicate the presence of relatively cold oceanic rock that has descended into Earth's mantle in the shape of a broad sheet. From front to back, the images correspond to depths of 700 kilometers, 1,000 km, 1,300 km, and 1,600 km. (Graphic: Rob D. van der Hilst)



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Letters

Myth of 'no exposure'

I doubt that any woman in the United States, aside from a hermit, has "no exposure" to tobacco smoke ("Risks for women: Passive smoke and obesity," SN: 5/24/97, p. 318).

Laura Elsa Sabath
Lubbock, Texas

Given the choice of regular, occasional, or no exposure to smoke, some respondents to the survey questions said they had no exposure. However, Harvard's Ichiro Kawachi notes, "people are notoriously poor judges" and tend to "massively underestimate what they've been exposed to." —J. Raloff

Using gene to curb bone creation?

The question of "whether doctors may someday use *Cbfa1* or its protein... to treat osteoporosis" ("No bones about it: Gene vital to skeleton," SN: 6/7/97, p. 349) is only

one side of the issue. On the other side is Paget's disease, in which bone creation is out of control.

As someone who has a number of in-laws with Paget's, I hope that doctors will investigate whether inhibitors of *Cbfa1* or its protein can someday offer them relief as well.

K.A. Boriskin
Bellingham, Mass.

Cause of sea change in climate?

To suggest that the disappearance of the Paratethys sea rather than the uplift of the Tibetan Plateau was a major cause of climate change in the Oligocene doesn't sound right ("Vanished sea leaves climatic legacy," SN: 5/24/97, p. 327). No doubt a large sea would

affect the climate, but it disappeared for a reason. Changing climate patterns could have reduced inflow and increased evaporation, or perhaps the uplift of the Tibetan Plateau changed the lay of the land, causing the sea to drain away.

To establish that the climate is different without the body of water does not determine causality.

Douglas B. McCallum
Lansing, Mich.

Morphine and immunosuppression

The discovery that morphine can suppress the immune system ("Morphine's actions outside the brain," SN: 5/24/97, p. 322) raises a number of interesting and important questions. For openers: Does long-term narcotic use lead to increased and perhaps irreversible immunosuppression? Do users of narcotics suffer from immunosuppression independent of their HIV status?

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