

behavioral sciences

PALEONTOLOGY

Australian fossil find

Two Australian scientists, aided by a 10-year-old boy, have found fossils which are at least 7,000 and possibly 50,000 years old.

The discovery was made in a quarry near Bathurst in New South Wales. The boy, Norman Rutherford, found the skull of the *Sthenurus*, an extinct kangaroo, while on a school assignment.

His discovery brought Dr. Alexander Ritchie, curator of fossils at the Australian Museum in Sydney, and Jack Mahoney, curator of geological collections at the University of Sydney, to the quarry.

They unearthed a bone of a Diprotodon-like animal, the teeth of a marsupial lion, the jaw of a Tasmanian Devil and sections of a koala bear.

Dr. Ritchie says the Diprotodons looked like giant wombats, and would have been larger than a modern rhinoceros.

PSYCHOLOGY

Misery needs company

People in a state of grief, such as when a loved one dies, often behave in ways which delay or prevent their establishing new relationships and thus lifting themselves out of their depression.

What they ought to do is get out of their shell, and renew their friendships, but such positive behavior is blocked by their grief. This conclusion is reached by Prof. James R. Averill of the University of California at Berkeley in a study of grief in the December 1968 *PSYCHOLOGICAL BULLETIN*.

Although grief is a psychological condition, Prof. Averill notes that there are marked physiological symptoms which accompany it. These include fatigue, sleep disturbance and loss of appetite.

PRIVACY

Tell Big Brother

If Big Brother is watching you, relax and tell him all he wants to know. You'll be happier. So argues Boston University psychologist Chester Bennett in the February issue of *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY*.

Bennett believes that people ought to disclose their own secrets, and that it is the withholding of such information that produces tensions.

"The fact is that the average citizen has very little control over the spread of information about him," he observes.

In the future, Bennett predicts, nearly every fact about nearly every person will be available to anyone who wants the information.

But by that time, nobody ought to care. "Secrets are for sharing," he concludes.

POLITICS

Hunger funds restored

The U.S. Senate has voted to give its Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs (SN: 2/22, p. 188)

the full \$250,000 appropriation it asked for.

The Senate thus reversed a decision by its Rules Committee which had cut \$100,000 from the hunger probers' budget.

Senator George McGovern (D-S.Dak.), chairman of the hunger investigation, had lined up 53 of his colleagues in support of the full appropriation. The Senate seldom reverses a Rules Committee cut in an appropriation, but the support for McGovern's committee was so strong that it won on a voice vote.

Much of the new money will be spent on surveys of malnutrition, conducted by outside consultants to document the case that there is widespread and severe malnutrition in the nation.

SUICIDOLOGY

Death on the campus

A thousand college students commit suicide each year in the U.S.; 9,000 more attempt it in vain and 90,000 more threaten to kill themselves.

These figures, reported by the National Institute of Mental Health, are estimated to be on the conservative side because of inaccurate reporting and attempts to conceal suicide as a cause of death.

Dr. Richard H. Seiden of the University of California at Berkeley reports that those who killed themselves were generally above the student average in scholastic attainment.

Dr. Seiden did a study of suicides at Berkeley and found that these students doubted their own adequacy, were dissatisfied with their grades and were despondent over their general academic aptitude.

They tended to set Olympian standards for themselves and became depressed when they failed to meet them, Dr. Seiden notes.

His study showed that the students most likely to commit suicide were enrolled in the humanities. English majors led the list of suicides at Berkeley.

PSYCHIATRY

Anxiety chemically induced

The symptoms of anxiety neurosis and even acute anxiety attacks themselves have been induced in susceptible patients by chemical means, according to experiments conducted by Dr. Ferris N. Pitts Jr. and his colleagues at the Washington University Medical School in St. Louis.

Writing in the February *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN*, Professor Pitts reports that the chemical which triggered the anxiety responses is lactate, a normal product of cell metabolism.

In the experiment, the lactate level in the blood of subjects, who are susceptible to but not actually undergoing anxiety attacks, is raised to a percentage comparable to what it would be in heavy exercise or stress.

Lactate is the end product of the process by which cells break down glucose in order to extract energy from it. Some of the symptoms of anxiety neurosis resemble those observed after heavy physical exertion, and patients suffering from anxiety report that physical activity can bring on or intensify their symptoms, Dr. Pitts observes.

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