

Plastic Feels Like Wool

► A MAN-MADE fiber that looks and feels like wool, is water repellent and quick-drying like nylon, can be ironed and costs less to produce than any other existing synthetic is in the final stages of development by an Italian chemical firm.

Scientists of the Montecatini organization, Milan, already have eliminated many bugs in the processing of a new synthetic called Moplen, made from an equally new plastic called isotactic polypropylene.

A Montecatini official told SCIENCE SERVICE further developmental work must be done and it will probably be more than a year before the revolutionary new fabric will be marketed.

In the meantime, the company is expanding its facilities to produce the basic Moplen plastics which have other uses such as in tubing, containers, packaging, structural materials, etc.

Moplen is one of a series of plastics "tailored" from propylene gas by a process discovered by Prof. Giulio Natta, professor of industrial chemistry at the Polytechnic Institute of Milan and consultant to Monte-

catini Societa Generale per l'Industria Mineraria e Chimica.

Unlike polyethylene, the popular squeeze bottle and tubing plastic, polypropylene can be spun into fibers and will resist temperatures considerably above that of boiling water.

Chemists can change some characteristics of polyethylene by altering the molecular weight. Several characteristics of polypropylene can be altered simultaneously by varying the plastic's crystallinity as well as molecular weight, Montecatini representatives said. Moplen can be produced as hard or soft, flexible or brittle materials as the chemist desires.

Although Moplen fiber has the hand and appearance of wool, early production methods imparted to it a slight waxy feel that chemists have overcome.

Among the advantages claimed for Moplen are low density and cost. Moplen is said to be the lightest plastic material produced. Whereas nylon is produced at nearly one dollar a pound, Moplen will be produced at less than 15 cents.

Science News Letter, February 8, 1958

Columbus First Saw Caicos

► A NEW SOLUTION to the 500-year-old mystery of where Columbus first looked on the land of America and how he made his historic first voyage of discovery through its islands is offered in a report to the Smithsonian Institution.

The island where Columbus first landed and which he named San Salvador was not Watling Island as has been generally thought. That great dramatic moment when Columbus sighted white breakers in the light of an early morning moon occurred at what is now called the Caicos Islands.

This is the conclusion of Edwin A. Link, inventor of the famous Link trainer for teaching men to fly, and Marion C. Link.

The Links in their 65-foot diesel trawler followed the various routes proposed as being the one followed by Columbus, checking each detail against the journal of Columbus. Although it is known that errors have most likely crept into the journal as it has been copied and re-copied, the Links believe that there are too many inconsistencies between the journal and the proposed routes for any of them to be correct.

Most widely accepted as Columbus' route are the proposals of Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard University historian, who actually sailed over the sea and of Capt. P. Verhoog, retired Dutch marine officer whose lifetime hobby has been concerned with Columbus.

The Links, accompanied by Capt. P. V. H. Weems, world authority on navigation, and Lt. Comdr. Mendel L. Peterson of the

Smithsonian, followed both routes and also flew over the islands several times to obtain a clearer picture of their layout and the possible courses from one to the other. They were the first students of the subject to investigate not one but three possible solutions to the mystery by actually following the course themselves.

It is their "considered opinion" that Columbus landed first at the Caicos Islands and then followed a course through the Bahamas from Mayaguana to Samana to Long Island and from there to Crooked Island, the Ragged Islands, the Columbus banks and Cuba.

Thus the San Salvador of Columbus must have been Caicos. His Santa Maria de Concepcion was Samana and Long Island would have been his Fernandina.

Science News Letter, February 8, 1958

ASTRONOMY

Appoints Director for National Observatory

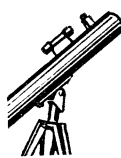
► DR. ADEN B. MEINEL has been appointed director of the first U. S. National Astronomical Observatory, which will be erected at an Arizona site.

Dr. Meinel's appointment as first director of the new observatory was recommended by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc. (AURA), which is under contract to the National Science Foundation for operation of the facility. (See SNL, Dec. 21, 1957, p. 387.)

Science News Letter, February 8, 1958

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