

science news[®] to the editor

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COVER: George Washington once owned a large portion of the Dismal Swamp turned over to the Federal Government last week for a wildlife refuge. The swamp is one of the East's last remaining wilderness areas. See p. 132. (Drawing: Bettmann Archive)

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More on the 'mean' Qolla

A comment on "Aggression: A way of life for the Qolla" (SN: 2/3/73, p. 76). I noted that one of the habits of these "mean" Qolla was the chewing of cocoa leaves. These leaves yield the alkaloid cocaine. Cocaine will cause central nervous system stimulation (hyperirritability) and a loss of appetite. Could the Qolla's problem stem from the cocaine they take in which causes them to eat less and thereby have hypoglycemia, rather than the hypoglycemia itself. . . . I think so.

Robert Propoggio
Registered Pharmacist
Proper Pharmacy
Oak Park, Ill.

I believe the holier-than-thou attitude exemplified by our labeling the Qolla the meanest people in the world has led us into the stupid adventures abroad from which we are now struggling to extricate ourselves. It ill behooves a people who bomb so indiscriminately to call someone else "mean."

Jack Ragsdale
New York, N.Y.

Abortion vs. contraception

Your article on the Supreme Court decision allowing abortion was excellent (SN: 1/27/73, p. 54). However, I take issue with your statements regarding the "dangers" of abortion replacing contraception.

The death rate for abortions in New York is given as 3 deaths per 100,000 abortions. The death rate for the pill is given as 3 deaths per 100,000 women per year. If a woman uses no contraception at all, she would, statistically speaking, become pregnant on the average of once a year. If she chooses an abortion, her chances are *no worse* than if she had used the pill for a year.

There is a new technique called menstrual extraction which can evacuate the contents of the uterus without dilation and scraping before a woman's period is more than 10 days late. If the death rate for menstrual extraction is *less* than 3 per 100,000, as I suspect it is, then menstrual extraction may be *safer* than the pill.

There is some logic to support this concept. It is probably safer to apply a gentle vacuum to the uterus for 5 minutes once a year than to take a pill during the entire year. Likewise for the IUD, a 5-minute

menstrual extraction is probably better than a foreign body present the entire year. For women who cannot use either the pill or the IUD, menstrual extraction may be the only answer.

Anita Murray
Coordinator, Reproduction and
its Control Committee
National Organization of Women
New York Chapter
New York, N.Y.

Challenge of the sun

Congratulations on the very accurate and provocative account of "Solar Study: The Year of the Sun" (SN: 1/27/73, p. 60). It reminds us that some of the most challenging problems in astronomy today concern events close at hand in our own solar system. Here at Goddard, we are planning the OSO-1 (eye) launch for 1974, in hopes that this largest and most capable of the Orbiting Solar Observatories will answer many of these questions.

George F. Pieper
Director of Space
and Earth Sciences
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center
Greenbelt, Md.

I was reading Everly Driscoll's article entitled "Solar Study: The Year of the Sun" and was greatly impressed by its succinct, knowledgeable, widely alluded, *exciting* form; as I am impressed with the layout and pictorialization of the story (including the magnificent color reproduction on the cover of the issue).

But this particular article is just a small example of the fine layouts, erudite reporting, social interest and responsibility, and over-all format of a successful weekly newsletter which reaches through specialized articles to educate and inform an extremely varied populace.

Sandy Adams
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Va.

Soft water and illness

"Heart attacks and soft water" (SN: 2/10/73, p. 89) has been studied for 15 years. It long has been known that lead, as from lead pipes, dissolves more in soft than in hard water. Possibly this holds true also in the case of other materials, such as cadmium as a trace impurity in galvanized pipes and some unhealthful minerals in the ground.

Edward A. Prill
Fredericksburg, Tex.

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