

# SCIENCE NEWS®

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**COVER:** In 1773, Captain James Cook and the crew of his ship the *Resolution* melted Antarctic icebergs and collected 15 tons of fresh water. Because of the world's increasing need for fresh water, similar but much more ambitious projects are now being considered. See story p. 298.

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NOVEMBER 5, 1977

# LETTERS

## Bogus algae

In "Figtree fossils" (SN: 10/15/77, p. 245) and "Future fertilizer" (SN: 10/15/77, p. 246) there is mention of blue-green "algae" without noting that they are not algae. They are bacteria. The blue-greens like other bacteria have smaller cells and simpler structure than that of all other organisms. The Cyanobacteria are in the Kingdom *Procaryotae* (Bergey's Manual 8th ed. 1974). If mention of the old name "algae" is wanted, this designation should be put in quotation marks.

Ernest H. Runyon  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## Gas cooled reactor

The report "Breeding in Light Water Begins" (SN: 9/10/77, p. 164), pointed out the benefits of thorium-U233 fuel cycles. However, your report doesn't mention the High Temperature Gas Cooled Reactor (HTGR), which is the most readily available and probably most efficient system for operating on the thorium-U233 cycle.

Two HTGRs have operated in the United States totally on thorium-enriched uranium. These are the Peach Bottom Unit 1, which began operation in 1967, and the Fort St. Vrain reactor, which began operation at significant power earlier this year. The use of a neutronically clean coolant/moderator combination provides significant advantages in low fuel consumption over the plant life. In fact, an HTGR operating on a self-generating recycle mode would likely have more favorable fuel consumption over the plant life than a light water breeder.

R. F. Turner  
San Diego, Calif.

## Puppy love

Bravo for your article "Take Two Milkbone..." (SN: 10/8/77, p. 237)!

Dog-love therapy is not entirely new, but deserves much more publicity. The Beaumont Neurological Center, Beaumont, Tex., has incorporated a sweet, large shaggy dog as an integral part of its Occupational Therapy Department for many years.

Amy Davis  
Houston, Tex.

I was tickled and relieved to read that dogs have been found to be helpful in psy-

chotherapeutic situations. Living alone in a small town I have developed the habit of talking to my dog, and was concerned that this might be a sign of emotional deterioration.

Now, thanks to your informative article, I can rest easier, knowing that in fact, Patches is helping me gain—not lose—my mind.

Joanne Kurfiss  
LaGrande, Ore.

## Towing the iceberg

In the plan to tow icebergs to arid countries to provide fresh water (SN: 10/15/77, p. 244), there seems to be more concern for methods of implementation than for the implications of the proposal. If scientists admittedly know little about icebergs, then even less must be known about the environmental impact involving their removal from the polar caps for melting in tropical regions.

Beyond that, serious attention to such a proposal reveals just how much we are pushing our limited planetary resources to support a burgeoning population. Before pondering the technological problems posed by such a project, we should be concerned with the ecological warning implicit in the need for it.

Richard Sims  
Boston, Mass.

## SN debunked

I nearly dechaired when I read about the debarked dogs at Ohio State (SN: 10/8/77, p. 237). This would, of course, have decreased my trousers and also defiled my glass of whiskey.

Next time I deplane in Ohio I shall decide how to dedo the decay of the language.

Dr. Peter Hahn  
Vancouver, B.C.

## Childbirth and pain

Both the ethics of the methodology and the validity of the assumptions of the study reported by Hisayo O. Morishima in "Childbirth medication" (SN: 10/22/77, p. 265) should be strongly questioned. With proper preparation by the mother, normal labor need not include fright, "overbreathing," or excessive pain. The baboon mothers and fetuses studied regrettably endured externally applied shocks and not merely the natural exertion of labor and birth. External shocks and primate labor are not analogous and thus a conclusion drawn on that assumption is invalid.

There may indeed be obstetric cases in which complications create a need for pain relief, but prepared childbirth can offer most mothers a rational, drug-free alternative to risky chemical exposure.

Joan Dickinson Walker, Mother  
Durham, N.C.

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