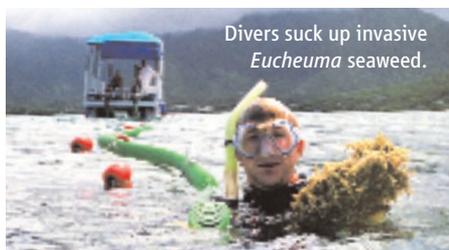


Pass the Salt

Since ancient times, people have been salting meat for storage. Now Iranian archaeologists are using the same trick to preserve the body of a man who mined some of that salt millennia ago.

The body is the sixth found since modern mining operations resumed in the Chehr Abad mine in Zanjan province in 1992. The other five are on display in museums in Tehran and Zanjan, but Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization says the museum specimens are degrading. So when the most recent body was unearthed this year, archaeologists decided to reinter it. Iranian, German, and British experts will meet in Iran this autumn to plan long-term preservation.

University of Oxford archaeologist Mark Pollard, who has studied samples from the remains, says the six bodies most likely belonged to miners who died in cave-ins. Pollard hopes to find out where the miners came from by comparing strontium isotopes in their bones with the isotopes in nearby areas, which the miners would have absorbed from their food and drinking water. Field surveys show no sign of habitation within 30 kilometers of the mine during the Achaemenid (550–330 B.C.E.) and Sassanid (224–651 C.E.) dynasties, when the miners lived.



Divers suck up invasive *Eucheuma* seaweed.

Call the Hose Brigade!

This month in Hawaii's scenic Kaneohe Bay, scientists fighting an infestation of alien seaweed will unleash a pair of new weapons: vacuum cleaners. Their target is an ugly, gristly alga the color of canned peas. Called *Eucheuma*, it smothers and kills coral, creating underwater devastation worthy of a horror movie. "I've never seen algal growth with such lethal capabilities," says Celia Smith, a professor of marine botany at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, involved in fighting it.

Smith's late predecessor, Max Doty, imported *Eucheuma* to his Kaneohe Bay lab from its native Philippines in the 1970s to study its potential as a source of the food additive carrageenan. Methods he developed made *Eucheuma* the world's most widely farmed seaweed, cultivated in 23 countries. But the alga began spreading across Kaneohe Bay and now covers nearly half the fringe reef. So the state, the university, and The Nature Conservancy teamed up to create Super Sucker and Super Sucker Jr., barge-mounted vacuum cleaners capable of clearing up to 350 kilograms of seaweed an hour. Eric Conklin of The Nature Conservancy says the battle is winnable in Hawaii but that little is known about how much

damage *Eucheuma* has wreaked in the remote, impoverished areas where most of the farming takes place.

Keeping Tabs on Tabloid Science

NET WATCH

The *Weekly World News*, the supermarket tabloid that once claimed 12 U.S. senators were space aliens, is ending publication this month. But there are enough purveyors of pseudoscience, anti-science, and quackery to keep the following three Web sites in business.

Crank Dot Net* furnishes a taxonomy of crackpot Web sites. Erik Max Francis, a computer programmer in San Jose, California, rates the

entries on how far they've strayed from reality. For instance, a page on the possibility that the sun has an unobserved twin merits only a "fringe" classification, whereas a site that dispenses advice on conducting diplomacy with aliens earns the highest ranking.

Homeopaths, advocates of untested herbal remedies, and credulous reporters who promote them take a beating at British doctor Ben Goldacre's Bad Science blog.† Pharmacologist David Colquhoun of University College London hammers similar targets at DC's Improbable Science.‡ Although both sites have a British emphasis, the quackery they expose is often international.

* www.crank.net

† www.badscience.net

‡ dcsience.net

DÉJÀ VU ON DEMAND?

Time travel is possible, and you can do it without exotic particles or short-cut wormholes. Normal matter, a vacuum, and a spaceship are enough.

The good news comes from theoretical physicist Amos Ori of the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. In July's issue of *Physical Review D*, Ori shows how gravitational fields could twist space-time into a hollow doughnut. By zipping around the tube, a time traveler could shake hands with her younger self or with future presidents without breaking any laws of physics. Other theorists have proposed similar models, but they all required matter with exotic properties such as negative mass. Ori's tube, by contrast, is immersed in a sphere of normal matter—"like dust from under your bed," says J. Richard Gott III, a theoretical physicist at Princeton University who has written a popular book on time travel.

Ori's ideas are "quite promising," Gott says, but both men agree that at present time travel is strictly fiction. And even if it becomes possible, Ori says, his time machine won't be able to take you into the past before it was invented. You could visit your great-great-grandchildren or vice versa, but the family won't get front-row seats at the signing of the Magna Carta.

