NEWS AND COMMENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS: SEVENTH ANNUAL ETHNOBIOLOGY CONFERENCE

April 15-17, 1984, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

PAPERS

Papers will be limited to 20 minutes. To schedule a paper please submit an abstract of 150 words, a title, a list of author(s) with address(es), and the name of the person to present the paper. Please indicate required audiovisual services. ABSTRACTS MUST BE RECEIVED BY FEBRUARY 1ST. They should be sent to Dr. Eugene Hunn, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.

SCHEDULE

April 15 / evening . . . . . Reception and registration
April 16 / morning . . . . . Registration, presentation of papers
afternoon . . . . . Presentation of papers
evening . . . . . Banquet of Northwest Indian foods
Special presentation by Margaret Siwallace
Nuxalk Indian elder "On Making Ooligan Grease"
April 17 / morning . . . . . Presentation of papers
afternoon . . . . . Presentation of papers

NOTE: Symposia are being planned on Indigenous Foods and Chinese Herbal and Nutritional Medicine. Abstracts of papers on indigenous foods, particularly their nutritional values, should be forwarded by December 1st to Dr. Harriet Kuhnlein, Division of Human Nutrition, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1W5. Abstracts of papers on Chinese herbal and nutritional medicine should be forwarded by February 1st to Dr. Eugene Anderson, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521.

MELVILLE AND ELIZABETH JACOBS RESEARCH FUND

Whatcom Museum Foundation

The Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Research Fund invites applications for small individual grants to support research on Native American cultures primarily of northwestern North America. The Fund is designed to facilitate field research rather than analysis of previously collected materials. Appropriate are field studies of any aspect of culture and society, with emphasis on expressive, conceptual, and purely linguistic systems. (Projects in archaeology, physical anthropology, urban anthropology, and applied anthropology or applied linguistics will not be funded.) Awards range from $200 to approximately $800; salary cannot be supplied, and only minimum living expenses can be considered.

For further information and application forms, contact the Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Research Fund, Whatcom Museum of History & Art, 121 Prospect St., Bellingham, Washington 98225. *Application deadline is February 15, 1984.*

The Society of Economic Botany will hold its 25th Annual Meeting at Texas A&M University, June 11-13, 1984. The symposium "Ethnobotany of the Greater Southwest" will focus on past, present, and future interactions between plants and man in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Symposium presentations and discussions will involve specialists from both the United States and Mexico. Registration materials and information can be obtained from Hugh D. Wilson, Biology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843. Those wishing to contribute papers should contact Dr. Gregory Anderson, Biological Sciences Group, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut 06268.

John Ciardi's etymological essay aired on National Public Radio June 6th, 1983, in Seattle took a turn our way. He noted the fact that a new productive English suffix has evolved in recent years, "-athon," as in "walkathon," "talkathon," "bikeathon," even "birdathon," and, of course, the original "marathon." The suffix can be seen to mean roughly "an exhaustive, prolonged contest." He noted also that marathon, a foot race of 26 miles and some odd yards, took its name from the Plains of Marathon in Greece, scene of the climactic battle between Athens and Persia, news of which was carried to the victorius Athenians by an heroic runner who collapsed and died at his goal. Ironically, the plains of that name are socalled after the wild fennel (presumably *Foeniculum vulgare* Miller) which must have flourished beneath the warriors feet, then decorated their graves.

The *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson, Arizona, 18 May 1983) under Ed Severson's byline reports a unique local educational event, the Flowing Wells High School ethnobiology class final exam, a banquet prepared by students and faculty featuring traditional foodstuffs of the Papago Indians and other Southwestern native peoples. Featured were "cottontail tacos, agave hearts, boiled tumbleweed, venison seca, cactus 'Jello-O', rattlesnake meat" and a variety of foods derived from beans of the mesquite tree, "the Papago Indians' tree of life." It is encouraging to see *ethnobiology*—defined in this article as "how the plants and animals of their [Southwest Indians] environment were used in their culture—introduced to high school students. Soon it will be a household word. Thanks to W. Van Asdall.

A visionary application of ethnobiology is being pioneered by the Institute of Ecotechnics, a U.S.-spawned, London-based (24 Old Gloucester St., London, W.C.1) organization devoted to establishing a new discipline, Ecotechnics, to deal "with the relations of men with their biosphere." A major resource of the Institute is their 82-foot research vessel *R/V Heraclitus*, a floating ethnobiological laboratory. The ship embarked this past February upon a 2½ year "Around the World Ethnobotanical Expedition," sequel to their 1979 "Flora Tropica Expedition" up the Amazon River. Ecotechnic literature reflects a blend of hard-nosed science and global consciousness.

Ethnobotanical research is a priority of the Academia Sinica of the People's Republic of China through its support of the Yunnan Institute of Tropical Botany (P.O. Box 302, Xishuangbanna Menglun, Mengla, Yunnan). The institute—founded in 1959—boasts a research garden of 1000 hectares with 2500 species of tropical plants from China and abroad. The garden is surrounded by a nature sanctuary in virgin tropical forest. Research emphases include tropical plant taxonomy, tropical forest ecosystems, cultivation of economic plants, and phytochemistry. The Institute has recently (1982) edited and published a volume of *Collected Research Papers on the Tropical Botany*, in Chinese with some English abstracts. The volume is dedicated to the eminent Chinese botanist and late Institute director, Tsai Hsi-tao (1910-1981). The collection includes reports of an ethnobotanical survey of self-sufficient aboriginal ethnic groups of Xishuangbanna district, a study of timber utilization by these indigenous minorities, an evaluation of the value of introducing Cuban balsa trees for local cultivation, as well as various horticultural experiments. Thanks to Peter Nute, Anthropology, University of Washington.

William Tucker's Crosscurrents column in *Science 83* (March, 1983:92-94) discussed new evidence supporting J.V. Neel's "thrifty genotype" theory of diabetes. Neel proposed (*American Journal of Human Genetics* 14:353-362, 1962) that this affliction of 11 million Americans might be the consequence of recent dietary changes, in particular, the constant availability of ample quantities of sugar and starch in modern diets. Neel surmised that a diabetes gene may have provided its bearers with a survival advantage under conditions of limited and irregular food supplies, since diabetes in effect rations

sugar metabolism. Under conditions of abundance this "rationing" overloads the blood with sugar. The recent "epidemic" of diabetes among many Native American populations (K. M. West, *Diabetes* 23:10, 1974) appears to support this hypothesis. Tucker summarizes a study by D. L. Coleman *(Nutrition Reviews,* May 1978) of mice fed starvation diets. Such mice with two diabetes genes lived eight times longer under nutritional stress than mice with no such genes but "developed obesity and all clinical symptoms" of diabetes when fed somewhat more generously (50% of the standard lab diet).