

IN BRIEF

More nuclear deals

There's no relief in sight for those campaigning for greater restraint in the burgeoning international trade in nuclear technology. At the end of last week the delayed Franco-South African deal for the construction of two pressurised water reactors finally went through when Escom and the French consortium headed by Framatome signed contracts in South Africa. Only a couple of days earlier France's Foreign Trade Minister initialled an agreement in Seoul under which Framatome will build two similar reactors for South Korea.

France's sale of a small reprocessing plant to South Korea was stalled earlier this year following US pressure. Now similar pressure has been brought to bear over an almost identical deal between France and Pakistan. At the weekend Dr Henry Kissinger told

President Bhutto that Pakistan risked losing US military and economic aid if it went ahead. Bhutto reportedly insisted that Pakistan be treated in the same way as Iran, which apparently wishes to reprocess nuclear waste from its reactors locally rather than outside the area. Israel and Egypt, on the other hand, with which the US has now initialled agreements on the sale of reactors, have agreed to let any reprocessing be done outside the Middle East.

In the US, meanwhile, the State Department has conceded that American materials may have been involved in India's nuclear explosion in 1974.

Biblis problems

A senior executive of Kraftwerk Union (KWU) announced this week that the huge nuclear power plant at Biblis, West Germany, would be technically

capable of returning to service by the end of the week, although clearance from the relevant authorities would still take some time.

The twin pressurised water reactors were closed for a routine inspection three months ago. In a joint statement last week, the operators, RWE, and builders, KWU, disclosed that "incipient cracking" had been found in the cooling water reservoirs of both reactors, and that steel bolts which had sheared off in the main cooling circuit of the commercially operating 'A' block reactor had been carried close to the nuclear core. The shutdown was originally scheduled to last eight weeks. The Biblis installation is the model for the four reactors to be built by KWU in Brazil and Iran, and officials are stressing that the breakdowns are not a cause for alarm. One estimate which has been made of the cost to the operators is \$50 million.

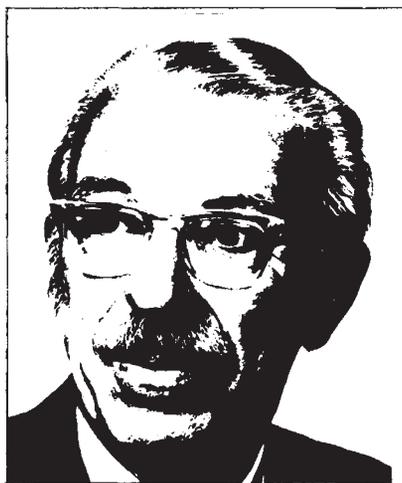
JULY is the prime time for the High Country in the southern Sierra Nevada of California. This was so in 1976 more than usual, because of the severe drought that had prematurely melted the big snowbanks. It was in July 1935 that I had first tasted their icy waters, as addictive as the most insidious of narcotics. And so, for the 39th summer, in a series broken only by war years, I set forth to regions above timberline, knapsack on back. What new changes would I find that had been wrought by technology and human beings?

Within the mountains of California, Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks are known for small areas that can be reached by road, but beyond these are hundreds of square miles that are reserved for what has been called "the aristocracy of the physically fit." Even this elite group dwindles as one heads away from the trails. It is curious that, even in the mountains, human beings tend to collect in herds. I still have no difficulty in finding big lakes, above 11,000 feet, where I am alone with peaks, trout and jet planes.

Thirty years ago, many beauty spots of the High Country were defiled by monumental piles of cans and bottles. Most of these have been patiently removed by volunteer labour. The volunteers, helped by officials, have also removed wrecked planes, piece by piece. Travel by horses and mules has been greatly reduced by high costs, and has been mostly replaced by the use of ingen-

ious lightweight backpacking equipment and dried food.

The US Government, as may be expected, increasingly regulates travel in the wilderness. The official and praiseworthy concept is that "man as a temporary visitor, should leave no permanent imprint." One has to

Mountain streets**THOMAS H. JUKES**

file the equivalent of a "flight plan" before being permitted to take off. Simultaneously, nine pages of "suggestions" and rules are thrust into one's hand. Enforcement of these is often by female rangers who are the spiritual granddaughters of members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. One of these rangers is spoken of with admiration by her col-

leagues as having recently written twenty "traffic tickets" for offences committed by feckless hikers on the eastern slopes of Mount Whitney.

Years ago, the "organic waste problem" in mountain travel was officially given only a casual reference. We were archly advised to "do like the cat; dig a hole and bury it." Today the instructions for "sanitation and waste disposal" occupy seven column inches. The dimensions of the pertinent hole are now specified as 5 to 6 inches deep and 8 to 10 inches across. I notice that the indigenous cats (*Felis couguar*) apparently do not read, and do not dig holes, preferring to leave evidence of their passage in the open as a defiant challenge to territorial intruders.

On July 15, I lay for twelve hours in a small plastic tube tent, at 10,800 feet, as a magnificent electric storm crashed incessantly in the darkness and, at midnight, a huge rain-loosened rock avalanche roared down a nearby granite cliff. Next day, in the bright sunlight, I caught golden trout. A few nights later, a Pacific Fisher (*Martes pennanti*) stealthily and silently made off with a string of golden trout that I had hung above my head in a pine tree while I slept in the open, well above the altitudes where bears live. My vexation was tinged with admiration when I got up at dawn to find the loss. I headed for the lake to replace the theft, and then walked for nineteen miles, through the rocky streets of the mountains, back to the road-head.