

Local



Photo by Joanne Wilson

Eskimo Roll

John Parker, a research associate in Physics department at Texas A&M University, demonstrated his eskimo roll technique in a kayak at the Wofford Cain outdoor

pool last Thursday evening. Parker is a member of the MSC Outdoor Recreation Committee which periodically sponsors kayaking instruction sessions.

Nature provides clues in sea pollution study

Nature's methods for dealing with a natural brine (high-salt) seep in the Gulf of Mexico may provide clues for dealing with man-made discharges into the ocean.

Ecologists from Texas A&M's oceanography department are exploring marine life and chemical aspects of a brine pool and overflow canyon on the East Flower Garden Bank 115 miles southeast of Galveston.

Brine discharges are becoming more common as offshore oil production increases, with the development of a strategic petroleum reserve system by dissolving cores of salt domes and from desalination efforts. The effects of this naturally occurring brine on the ecosystems of the ocean may have implications for the man-made pollutants as well.

Dr. Thomas J. Bright discovered the seep in 1974 while exploring the reefs from Texas A&M's submersible research vessel, the Diaphus. The shimmering mass of highly saline water at the overflow looked like a stream running underwater, he said.

The water in the pool, which presumably flows up from a dissolving salt dome, is about six times as salty as sea water. It contains no oxygen and has a high concentration of hydrogen sulfide, a highly toxic compound.

Since the discovery, Bright, Dr. Eric Powell and Dr. Richard Rezak from Texas A&M have revisited the brine flow several times, each time bringing samples for detailed study.

Bright and Powell coordinate the study of marine life in the brine seep ecosystem. Rezak is attempting to determine the physical mechanism by which the seep is driven. All are interested in the present and potential im-

strength brine collects. But in the canyon, where oxygenated sea water mixes with the brine, a more diverse, yet specialized, assembly of organisms has developed.

An interesting feature of the seep, Powell said, is a whitish mat of plants made up of bacteria and algae which covers the floor of the canyon. These plants appear to thrive in the high sulfide environment, he said. A specialized community of organisms, called thionobios, are able to live in the sulfide-rich canyon stream and feed directly on the plants growing there.

Fish and other animals generally cannot tolerate the sulfide of the canyon, but some fishes such as angel fish, butterfly fish and cottontail are able to swim in and out of the mixed canyon brine to feed, Bright said. Large red snappers and groupers often swim very close and even "dive" into the full strength brine of the lake.

"The brine flow is impacting not only the physical and chemical environment of the bank, but also the local biology. We have found organisms that depend on the flow and that might not exist in the bank without it," Bright said.

Dr. Thomas J. Bright discovered natural brine (high-salt) seep in 1974 while exploring the reefs from Texas A&M's submersible research vessel, the Diaphus.

part of the seep on animal and plant life and geological structure of the bank. "We've found that the short term effects of the brine seep are limited to the immediate vicinity of the seep," Powell said. "As the brine runs out of the basin and down a sill into the canyon, we find it mixes with seawater and the salinity decreases rapidly. Nothing but bacteria are able to live in the brine lake where the full

A&M tests mailbox hazard with car crash simulation

Transportation researchers at Texas A&M University are using automobile crash tests to reduce the driving hazards created by roadside mailboxes.

In 1979 seven people were killed in Texas when their automobiles collided with standing mailboxes, says a state highway department official. Many more persons were injured and thousands of dollars in property damaged resulted as well.

Now, smaller and lower cars are increasing the risk of injury even more, said Irl Larrimore, senior field engineer with the safety and maintenance division of the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

Under contract with the highway department, researchers for the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University perform periodic testing of various mailbox support materials and placement of the supports. Principal investigator on the mailbox project is Dr. Hayes Ross Jr., a professor of civil engineering.

"Wooden posts have been widely used as mailbox supports," Ross said. "But as a result of our investigation during the past three years, we have found that there are safer and less expensive ways to support

mailboxes." He added that the height of mailboxes — 42 inches — lines up at windshield level on most automobiles.

In collisions, the mailbox can crash into the windshield, causing the driver to lose control.

Larrimore said the use of a 2-by-6 beam on which several mailboxes are mounted is being discontinued because the beam can become a lethal lance that pierces the car's windshield and strikes the driver's head.

Chevrolet Vegas were used in recent tests performed on several mailbox support designs at the TTI proving grounds located at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center near Bryan.

The crash test is recorded by high-speed cameras near the site, while other data on velocity and impact are received at a computer center about a mile away from antennae attached to the vehicle.

"We learn from each crash," Ross said. "In a series of tests on metal posts, we found that the Vega could withstand a collision with four in a row fairly well. But in the next test when we tried eight posts in a row with mailboxes attached, the car rolled on impact."

Man breaks into home seeking friend

United Press International
FORT WORTH — Police said a 23-year-old "spaced-out" man broke into the \$6 million Cullen Davis mansion Monday and was found lying on a couch with a coke and an apple in his hands.

The man, who reportedly told police he was looking for his girlfriend, went to the mansion's front plate glass door and threw a rock through it, police said.

Karen Davis, another woman and four children in the house locked themselves in a room and called Cullen Davis and police. When officers arrived, they found the "spaced-out" man lying on the living room couch, sipping a coke and eating an apple.


The Davis mansion in 1976 was the scene of a shooting spree that left two people dead and two others wounded, including Davis' then-wife Priscilla, and began sev-

eral years in and out of court for the Fort Worth industrialist.

He was acquitted of being the "man in black" who shot his step-daughter. Two years later he was arrested for allegedly trying to hire a hitman to kill his divorce

judge. The first trial ended in a mistrial and the second in acquittal.

Since then, Davis and his wife have become born-again Christians.



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