

## State and Local

# Scientists from A&M board ship to analyze ocean basin cores

By Jade Boyd  
Reporter

The world's most sophisticated ocean-drilling research vessel, JOIDES Resolution, which is operated by the Ocean Drilling Program at Texas A&M, is in the Indian Ocean searching for new information about some very old mysteries.

Joint Oceanographic Institutions for Deep Earth Sampling (JOIDES — pronounced joy-dees) is an international group of 16 scientific organizations formed to study the Earth's ocean basins. JOIDES scientists set research goals for the Ocean Drilling Program.

Ten major oceanographic institutions from the United States, including A&M and the University of Texas, form Joint Oceanographic Institutions, Inc. (JOI), a nonprofit consortium which manages the program. Funding for JOI's Ocean Drilling Program is provided by the National Science Foundation, a federal agency. The foundation donates \$15 million to \$20 million a year to the program.

The five foreign members of the program are the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, France and the European Science Foundation Consortium for the Ocean Drilling Program which represents 12 Western European countries. Each of these five members donates \$2.5 million a year to the program.

"This is by far the largest funded basic research program in Earth's ocean sciences today," said Dr. Philip D. Rabinowitz, director of the Ocean Drilling Program at Texas A&M.

A&M has the largest role in the program and receives most of the

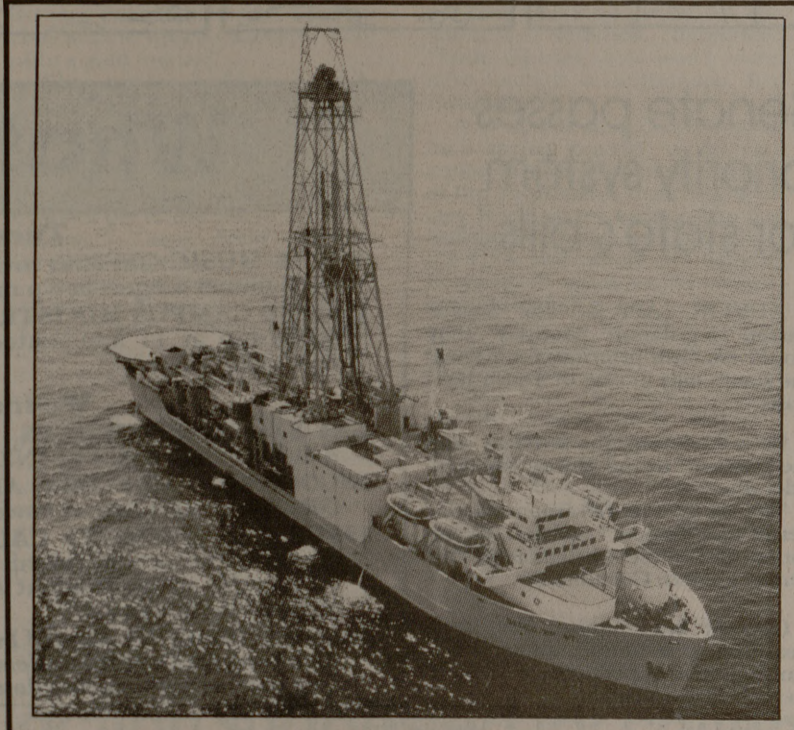


Photo courtesy of Ocean Drilling Program at Texas A&M  
The JOIDES Resolution, an ocean-drilling research ship

organization's funds. As science operator of the program, A&M is responsible for staffing, operating and maintaining JOIDES Resolution. In addition, A&M retrieves, stores and oversees scientific analysis of the ocean basin core samples collected by the ship.

The 470-foot JOIDES Resolution is officially registered as SEDCO/BP

471. It is leased by the University from Undersea Drilling, Inc. on a 45-month contract which expires in September 1988. The ship was built in Nova Scotia as an oil-research vessel and was refitted for ocean-basin research in Pascagoula, Miss. The \$14.8 million conversion was funded by the National Science Foundation and completed in early January

1985. JOIDES Resolution's maiden voyage began later that month.

"The laboratories on the ship are second to none," Rabinowitz said.

Eleven laboratories are the heart of the ship's research facilities. The ship houses a scanning electron microscope, a library, a pair of VAX computers which link 50 laboratory microcomputers and accommodations for 25 Ph.D.-level researchers. It has a technical research staff of 25, most of which are A&M employees, and a 65-man crew. Two researcher's berths are reserved for each non-U.S. member of JOIDES.

JOIDES Resolution is on the 15th leg of its ongoing mission. The ship currently is drilling slightly north of the Maldives, an island group 350 miles southwest of India.

"We're basically looking at the evolution of earth — how earth evolved with time, how the ocean basins evolved with time," Rabinowitz said.

"As the continents move apart, the ocean basins change shape. As the ocean basins change shape, the currents change. As the ocean currents change, the weather changes."

While in the Maldives, JOIDES scientists hope to learn more about India's past movements. They are drilling along a "hot spot," an area of volcanic activity. Core samples from the area should reveal much about the history of India's movement toward Asia, he said. This northward movement formed and still is forming the Himalaya Mountains, Rabinowitz said.

JOIDES Resolution will be in the Indian Ocean for the next 12 to 14 months.

# Group working to conserve Texas grasslands, prairies

DALLAS (AP) — A conservation organization, which in recent months has bought thousands of acres of native grassland across Texas, wants to preserve the state's dwindling prairies, the group's director said.

Andy Sansom, who is also chief fund-raiser of the Texas Nature Conservancy, has traveled throughout the state to convince potential donors the prairies are endangered by development.

"We pretty much feel it's a job that has to get done in this decade, or that's it," Sansom said.

He said development threatens Texas' once-great prairies in the Blackland, the Cross Timbers, the High Plains and the Coastal regions.

Texas was once a sea of "gorgeous, unbroken, tall grass," Sansom said. "It's gone. It's just flat gone."

State officials and environmentalists said the Blackland is closest to extinction, with less than 1 percent of the original prairie remaining in small tracts along a line from Sherman to San Antonio.

The band of rich soil, wildflowers and head-high grasses totaled 12 million acres before the turn of the century, but has shrunk to about 2,000 acres.

"We have what amounts to a postage stamp," said Ken Steigman, curator of natural science at the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary in McKinney.

"It may not be important to some people, but there are a lot of us out here who consider it a part of our natural heritage and would like our

kids and grandkids to be able to come out here and see what it looked like before man came in and screwed everything up," he said.

The state's prairies once teemed with wildlife for hunters and, when converted to prime agricultural land, provided food for cattle.

Sansom said the San Antonio-based Texas Nature Conservancy is

*"There are a lot of us out here who would like our kids and grandkids to be able to come out here and see what it looked like before man came in and screwed everything up."*

— Ken Steigman,  
museum curator

"kind of like the Century 21 of the environmental movement" because of its businesslike approach.

The 22-year-old organization has bought tens of thousands of acres this year and owns more than 100,000 acres in Texas. Its prize deal was a three-tract, 284-acre purchase in Hunt County, east of McKinney.

The tracts are part of the 640-acre Clymer's Meadow, which Sansom calls "the biggest piece of unplowed Blackland Prairie" in the United States.

He said the nature group borrowed \$438,000 from its parent organization, the Nature Conservancy, to purchase the land. Sansom has been on the road since October, trying to raise \$575,000 to repay the loan and cover various administrative expenses.

The Dallas-based Communities Foundation of Texas kicked in the initial \$100,000. Sansom said he is now only about \$100,000 short of his goal.

Sansom said the conservancy paid more than \$1,000 an acre for the Clymer's Meadow property.

"It's probably one of the two or three most important conservation sites in North America," he said. "This is the rarest unbroken grassland on the Great Plains. This is an incredibly unique area. From a nature standpoint, this is like owning the Sistine Chapel."

Since the Texas Nature Conservancy began negotiating 18 months ago, three houses have been built in the immediate area, including one on the meadow itself.

"We're one step ahead of adverse use," Sansom said.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is trying to restore and maintain prairie remnants it finds on the recreational lands it purchases.

The department is working on about 60 acres of tall grass in Lakeview State Park near Cedar Hill. The most extensive restoration work to date has been at Caprock Canyons State Park.

# Three inmates receive stays of execution

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — Three Texas men convicted of capital murder won court orders that will keep them from lethal injections scheduled for this week.

U.S. District Judge David Hittner on Monday halted the execution of Edward Ellis, 34, who was scheduled to die today.

Ellis was convicted of killing Bertie Eakens, 74, in her Houston apartment in 1983. The woman was suffocated and robbed and her body discovered in her bathtub.

The postponed execution date was the second for Ellis, who won a stay of execution last month from a state district judge in Houston.

Meanwhile, Roger DeGarmo, 32, won a stay from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, his attorney, Greg Gladden, said Monday. DeGarmo, who also faced execution before dawn today, was convicted of killing Kimberly Strickler, 20, a Houston medical technician, after abducting her and stealing her car in 1979.

The execution date was the second for DeGarmo. A date last year was stayed by a federal district judge in Houston.

Warren Bridge, 26, another death-row inmate who faced execution early Wednesday for a Galveston convenience store clerk, also won a stay. Bridge's Wednesday death date was his first.

# A&M researchers work at controlling flea infestations around pets, yards

By Tricia Carroll  
Reporter

Baseball and hot dogs, apple pie and — fleas? The heavy spring rains which drenched the Brazos Valley and rising temperatures have resulted in an unusual amount of flea infestation this summer.

But an associate professor and a graduate student at Texas A&M are experimenting with a way to protect pets from the plentiful pests.

Dr. Roger Meola, associate professor of entomology and graduate student Kathy Savage are testing a growth regulator from the Dallas-based Zocon Corp. for controlling the infestation of fleas in yards and lawns.

The regulator is a synthetic juvenile hormone called methoprene which prevents flea larvae from "pupating," or transforming into adults, Meola says.

It leaves a high concentration of the hormone in the larva, which



prevents it from ever becoming a pupa, he says.

"The hormone perpetuates larval characteristics," Meola says.

"When the hormone is present in the insect, it will molt to another larval stage rather than the pupal stage," he says.

Meola says their research objective is to apply the regulator to yards to prevent the formation of adult fleas.

Meola says the adult flea is a problem for both cats and dogs in this area.

"When an adult flea feeds on blood, the female uses that same blood to produce eggs," he says.

"The female flea then lays the eggs on the coat of the dog or cat and the eggs eventually fall off," Meola says.

Meola says that larval fleas feed on various types of organic debris until they reach the adult stage.

"The eggs hatch into larvae and the larvae feed on skin scales from animals, decaying plant tissue or dried fecal matter," he says.

"An essential ingredient in the diet of the larval flea is blood excreted by fleas," he says. "The blood then dries up and falls off."

Various faculty members and students, most of whom are members of the Brazos County Kennel Club, volunteered their yards for the treatments administered by Meola and Savage.

"We will check the yards each week for adult fleas," Meola says. "Then we will bring soil samples back to the lab where we will infest

the soil with fleas to see if they can develop in the soil."

Meola says he was not only concerned with the effect of methoprene, but with how long the product will remain effective after being put in the yards.

Methoprene has been relatively successful in combating roaches, but Meola says it works better on fleas.

"It does have an effect on the adult cockroach, but it doesn't prevent it from developing into an adult because there is no pupal stage in the cockroach to interrupt," he says.

"However, it does sterilize the adult cockroach so it can't reproduce," Meola says.

Meola says this is the first time methoprene has been tested outdoors, but the product already has been proven very successful in fighting indoor flea infestation.

"Our goal is to get results which Zocon can use to get government approval to sell this product for yard treatment," Meola says.

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