

NEWS AND VIEWS

Geoscience Success

THIS week the Geoscience Information Society (GIS) holds its fourth annual convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. Among subjects to be discussed are information processing systems, the use of abstracts, the status of copyright laws, translation and the orientation of graduate students to the library. These are all topics which would find a place in a convention in any branch of science, but the particular object of the GIS is to consider all the problems associated with the so called literature explosion in the light of the special requirements of the Earth sciences.

It is nevertheless pertinent to ask whether a society to promote the techniques of information exchange makes much sense within the context of a single discipline. The answer is that it probably does. Anyone who has had access to a geoscience library staffed by specialist librarians must agree that there are advantages over a general library. Indeed, the GIS considers that one of its most important jobs is to encourage young geologists to specialize in geoscience at the graduate library school—and in this it can claim modest success in the form of at least a dozen converts during the past year.

But in addition to promoting discussion on the problems of information, there are many practical specialized jobs the GIS can do and has been doing since its formation in 1965. Completed projects include a directory of geoscience libraries in the United States and Canada, a "buying list of 100 good geology books for the high school library" of which 11,000 copies have been distributed, and a useful little monograph on geological reference sources. There is also a bibliography of North American geological field trip guide books—useful ephemera which are notoriously difficult to find in libraries. Continuing activities include a bibliography of geoscience serials and theses (funded by the National Science Foundation) and a catalogue of available geological maps. Also in progress is an investigation into the operation of geoscience libraries which, it is to be hoped, will lead to recommendations for improved facilities.

The biggest trap that an organization such as the GIS can fall into is for information specialists to divorce themselves from the scientists. The danger then is that information can become an end in itself, so that the information users for whom the whole exercise is presumably intended are forgotten. But the GIS can fairly claim that it has avoided these mistakes. Of its 264 members in April 1968 (membership is now well over 300), sixty-six were working scientists, eleven were administrators and a further seventeen described themselves as editors or writers. In short, considerably

more than 30 per cent of the members can be classed as consumers of information as opposed to merely organizers of it.

METEORS

Few Leonids Expected

from our Astronomy Correspondent

THE annual recurrence of the Leonid meteor shower on November 17 is not expected to be anything like as impressive as in 1966, but the display could still be above average. Last year, observers in the United States and Japan reported sighting up to a hundred meteors during an hour of observing time, and it is reasonable to hope that this year the rate will be more than the half dozen or so per hour which is normal for the Leonids. Compared with the fifty meteors per hour which the Quadrantid shower regularly produces in January, and the background average of three meteors an hour which is always present and cannot be attributed to any known shower, the Leonids are



Meteoric shower as seen off Cape Florida in 1866.