

BAAS embraces role of educating public

Southampton, UK. Last week's annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) at the University of Southampton marks a watershed in the organization's 160-year history, its transition from a broad-based scientific meeting to a public science festival. Not only is this year the first time the annual meeting has explicitly been called a festival, but the organization is taking several steps over the next 12 months to bring science even closer to the public.

One of its goals is to become more visible, with activities throughout the year rather than chiefly in connection with its annual meeting. It also wants to raise the profile of its magazine, *Science and Public Affairs*, which is published with the Royal Society. To do so, it hopes nearly to double its annual revenue, from £873,000 (US\$1.7 million) this year to £1.54 million in 1996–97.

Broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, in a presidential address entitled "Science for the public and a public for science", announced three donations that will help to change the way the BAAS operates. Sir John Cass's foundation has donated £60,000 to support a youth development officer and the Rutherford Trust £150,000 to promote the organization's activities around the country, in particular linking regional centres for interactive instruction. The largest gift is

from the Wellcome Trust; its £265,000 donation will be used to raise the BAAS's profile generally.

The head of that new effort will be Brian Gamble, now director of the popular Edinburgh Science Festival. Gamble, recalling the place that science held as a subject of drawing-room conversation 100 years ago, believes that the BAAS needs to make scientific issues more culturally respectable. Such respectability, he says, will promote the BAAS and increase donations from corporations.

Whether or not Gamble succeeds, an exchange of views of the kind that occurred during past annual meetings — such as the 1860 debate between Thomas Huxley and Soapy Sam Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, on the origin of species — is unlikely to return. The controversies that have arisen in recent years and at last week's meeting seem to be of greater interest to the media than to scientists.

A day-long session on a theory that man developed from an aquatic hominid ancestor took place outside the main anthropology and archaeology programme without substantial input from conventional theories of human evolution. Originally planned as a separate conference to be hosted by the university, the speakers were drafted into the BAAS meeting, at Attenborough's in-

sistence, with only 10 days' notice.

Although section recorder Malcolm Smith of the University of Durham said that the session might have been stronger if it had been part of the anthropology programme, he said that it accomplished its chief aim by focusing attention on the subject without detracting from the mainstream presentations. Attenborough said that proponents of the aquatic-ape theory may lack scientific rigour but did manage to generate a lot of interest.

With the exception of a noisy press conference, the work of British chemist Martin Fleischmann on cold fusion also went undebated after plans were abandoned to have him appear before a panel of scientists. Fleischman delivered a well-attended public lecture, during which he showed a videotaped example of what he and Stanley Pons claim is cold fusion, but he received almost no questions afterwards on the technical aspects of his work despite the presence in the audience of a number of distinguished chemists.

Few scientists see the annual meeting as an opportunity to add to their knowledge. Rather, they consider engaging the media and attracting young people into science to be far more important than the chance to present original research to their peers at an interdisciplinary meeting. **Ian Mundell**

Rubbia prods Japanese to pay more to CERN

Tsukuba, Japan. The European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) is increasing pressure on Japan to pay for its growing use of CERN facilities. Carlo Rubbia, director-general of CERN, visited Japan last week to cajole Japanese scientists and government officials into contributing money to CERN, in particular the laboratory's planned Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

Rubbia's visit follows one in June by CERN officials (see *Nature* 357, 429; 1992) and is intended to counter an effort by US officials on behalf of the \$8.5-billion Superconducting Super Collider (SSC), which has similar goals to the LHC. Rubbia hopes to tap into the strong support that CERN enjoys among Japan's high-energy physics community, which is not enthusiastic about the SSC (see *Nature* 358, 266; 1992). But Rubbia will have a harder time with Japan's politicians.

Rubbia attended a joint symposium on future projects of Japan and CERN at the National Laboratory High Energy Physics (KEK) in Tsukuba science city. He won support from the 100 Japanese physicists at the symposium for increased collaboration with CERN, and in exchange offered to help Japan with its plans to build a B-meson

factory (see *Nature* 358, 266; 1992).

The only sour note in the two-day symposium was sounded by Takahiko Kondo, the organizer of Japanese participation in the SSC, who repeatedly raised questions about the technical feasibility of certain aspects of the LHC. "I am disappointed about the development of the 10T magnet [for LHC]", Kondo said in concluding remarks at the end of the symposium. "Magnets for big colliders are usually designed conservatively ... but your approach is very aggressive. I worry that you rely too much on high technology from the beginning."

But Rubbia said that it does not matter if CERN does not achieve 10T. "It's a soft figure", he says, "and nothing goes wrong if we end up with 8.5 Tesla". Rubbia then counterattacked by suggesting that the \$200,000 estimate for the cost of each of the SSC's nearly 10,000 superconducting magnets is too low.

Apart from Kondo, those in the audience favoured increased collaboration with CERN in part because they believe that CERN is offering them a much better deal. CERN is seeking 20 per cent, or about \$300 million, from non-member countries including Japan. In contrast, the United States is asking

Japan for \$1.5 billion to help build the SSC, and many Japanese physicists fear that such a payment will harm domestic projects.

After the symposium, Rubbia and his colleagues visited all the science-related ministries and agencies in Tokyo, where they undoubtedly faced a more sceptical audience. Japan's prime minister, Kiichi Miyazawa, has inched his country towards support of the SSC by agreeing to a joint United States–Japan working group on the US collider, and it is hard to imagine how Japan could afford to contribute to both machines.

But Rubbia emphasizes that CERN is not specifically seeking money for the LHC. Although almost 100 Japanese scientists regularly use CERN facilities such as the Large Electron–Positron (LEP) collider, Japan has no formal framework for collaboration and makes no financial contribution for the growing number of Japanese scientists coming to Geneva.

In the meantime, Japan's informal collaboration with CERN is likely to increase. "There are many things you can do without money or government approval", Rubbia said in Tsukuba, citing joint research on components for the LHC or the B-factory.

David Swinbanks