

Last summer, Norwegian researchers identified unexpectedly high numbers of viruses in both marine and freshwater environments, confirming the growing suspicion among scientists that viruses play a much more important role in marine ecology than previously believed. The find is reported in the Jan. 5, 1990 issue of *Science News*, which describes a "painstaking new study in which researchers sliced through thousands of ocean-dwelling bacteria and photographed the cross-sections." Indications from this research are that a large percentage of the microscopic cells harbor viral infections, and that viruses may cause much of the bacterial death in these waters. Until recently, researchers had assumed that most aquatic bacteria succumbed to "grazing" by protozoans.

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The NPS-produced videotape on acid rain-related research in the parks, "For the Long Run," has been approved by the Dept. of the Interior for public distribution. The tape, which until now had been approved only for internal NPS distribution, may now be marketed and sold as well as used by parks and Regions for interpretation and education programs. The tape has won a prestigious international film award and will be shown internationally by the U.S. Information Agency.

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Researchers at U/WI-Madison have discovered a compound similar to lignin – an important structural element of wood and of cell walls in vascular plants – in algae. Algae are considered the best model organism for a land-plant ancestor, and this research has resulted in what may be a new piece of the plant-ancestry puzzle: how plants evolved from their green algal ancestors.

The problem, according to an article in the July 29, 1989 issue of *Science News*, is that primitive plants, lacking hard parts, made poor fossils. The recent finding provides a “chemical missing link” between land plants and the group of green algae that scientists believe gave rise to them about 400 million years ago, says Cornell University plant scientist Karl J. Niklas. The group’s work, which was first reported in the July 28 *Science*, found new evidence that lignin’s initial function was not structural (since algae need not stand up in water) but probably as an antimicrobial agent, which only later took on a mechanical role.