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YEAR IN REVIEW

The Top Science Stories of 2001

Many events of the past year are now easily forgotten, hidden in shadows cast by the former World Trade towers, the Pentagon wreckage, the anthrax deaths and an ongoing war. But 2001 did witness a number of important happenings in science and technology both before and after the terrorist attacks including the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Prizes. Below is a quick review of 50 stories that most captured our attention and imagination here at ScientificAmerican.com. Some we have included because of their significance, others just because they are fun. We hope you enjoy them all over again. You can browse headlines by subject matter or scroll through the entire list.

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EARTH AND ENVIRONMENT

[Glass-Eating Microbes Alter Earth's Oceanic Crust](#)

It may sound like a masochistic activity, but for certain microbes, eating volcanic glass is an entirely natural thing to do. In fact, according to a report published in September, such snacking abounds below the seafloor. This, researchers say, suggests that a significant proportion of the oceanic crust alterations long attributed to a chemical-physical process may stem from a biological one.

More Evidence of Global Warming

It's not your imagination. Spring is arriving earlier and fall, somewhat later at least if you live above 40 degrees north latitude, the line that intersects New York, Madrid and Beijing. An [analysis](#) of two decades of satellite data, published in September, confirmed that the growing season in the Northern Hemisphere is getting longer and plant life is becoming more lush as well very likely as a result of global warming. In July two scientists [made a prediction](#) that the earth may warm four to seven degrees by 2100. And other reports this year blamed global warming for disrupting the breeding patterns of [frogs](#) and [birds](#).

Geologists Debunk Myths

The Oracle of Delphi spoke through the Pythia, an elderly priestess who would fall into a trance state and utter cryptic predictions about war, agriculture and other vital matters of the time. According to ancient authorities, gaseous emissions induced the Pythia's trance state. But after French archaeologists failed to find the famed vapors a century ago, that explanation was dismissed. [A study published in August](#) revealed that the purported trance-inducing gases may have been very real after all. And in a [report in June](#), another geologist, who has also studied the emissions at Delphi, suggested that sightings of the Loch Ness monster may result from water ripples created along a seismic fault under the lake.

[First Public Images of Hydrothermal Vents in Indian Ocean](#)

In April an international team of scientists released the first images to the public of a collection of hydrothermal vents in the Indian Ocean. To find these vents, located two and a half miles below the sea surface in one of the most far-removed places in the world, the team used the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) *Jason* and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution's Research Vessel *Knorr*.

[The Oldest Rock on Earth](#)

A rock found in the Australian desert nearly 20 years ago yielded the oldest-known zircon crystal on the earth. In January scientists reported that the composition of this ancient crystal offers new ideas about the state of our planet 4.4 billion years ago.
