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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

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High voltage: 'Hit it with a big stick'

The editor in charge of this week's article on the crisis in the nation's electric power supply is Alicia Moore, a member of our Science Department who is as interested as anyone else in the benefits of technology, and more interested than most in saving the environment. During the year it took to compile her report on power she read hundreds of thousands of words, interviewed dozens of experts and visited several generating plants in the power-hungry Northeast. Her travels convinced her that there is a need for more power, but they also proved what she feared: power plants nearly always change the landscape, and sometimes ruin it.

One of the places she *couldn't* visit is the Northfield pump storage project, the world's largest such installation, under construction in north central Massachusetts (see pp. 32-33). The main powerhouse there is being cut out of the middle of a mountain. Because tunnel workers have a superstition about women on their dangerous job, they wouldn't let her see it.



YALE JOEL AND ALICIA MOORE

As the story began to take shape, other staff members were called upon to help. Reporter Adrienne Anderson spent a day at the New York Power Pool control room near Albany and learned "more about electricity than I'd ever wanted to know." Photographer Yale Joel, an expert at bringing out the drama even in such elusive subject matter as electricity, spent the better part of two months visiting power plants, transmission lines and substations from New England to California. In Los Angeles, Joel was bawled out by a policeman for "creating a road hazard" near a busy freeway; instead of keeping their eyes on the road, motorists whizzing past had been craning their necks to watch Joel photograph power lines. During his travels, he developed admiration for the men who work with high voltage. "They develop a strange, calm confidence," he says, "in themselves and the guys they work with. I asked a fellow working on a 165,000-volt line how he could be sure the power had been turned off. He said, 'Oh, we have an infallible system for that.' Then he added, 'But I hit the line with a big stick a couple of times first, just to make sure.'"

Joel also learned the perils of relying entirely on electricity. Normally clean-shaven, he had to fly to one assignment sporting a shaggy growth of beard. A rainstorm had knocked out power in his neighborhood, and his electric razor wouldn't work.

Ralph Graves
RALPH GRAVES
Managing Editor

TIME

KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

- The Death of Stalin
- Getting Rid of Beria

ORGANIC FOOD: NEW AND NATURAL



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