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■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: The METRIC SYSTEM at ORDWAY.

Once upon a time - not so many decades ago - someone (it was a group of French scientists) set about devising a system of measurements which would bring about a more orderly world. The world was becoming smaller and there was increased communication among the various cultures in different lands. A particular difficulty was the difference in weights and measures from one country to another. A foreigner in Japan had some difficulty in renting an office space of four tsubos or purchasing a hundred momme of rice.

With masterful foresight and scientific acumen the original committee established a standard unit of length equivalent to 1/10,000,000th of the distance on the earth's surface from the equator to the North Pole and they applied to this length the name, meter, which means "measure". ("Meter" is the anglicized form of the French "metre" and either spelling is acceptable.) Despite the fact that the originators of the meter were slightly off in their calculations (due to the slightly non-symmetrical shape of the earth plus their relatively crude measuring instruments) the new system - called The Metric System - was launched and at present is employed by most of the principal countries of the world, with the exception of the United States. (Great Britain is now in the midst of a ten-years' period of changeover to the metric system.) Our Congress has initiated a committee examination into the methods and costs involved in making a similar changeover in our economy from the English system (feet, pounds, etc.) to the Metric System (meters, kilograms, etc.) It appears fairly certain that the next twenty-five years (or less) will see a complete changeover in our system of weights and measurements.

Concurrent with the system of weights and measurements there was devised a more sensible system of measuring temperatures. This system is known as the Centigrade System and uses a scale of 100 degrees between the freezing-point of water (0°C) and its boiling-point (100°C). It is also referred to as the Celsius scale (from the Swedish astronomer, Anders Celsius.)

For the past year at Ordway the daily temperatures have been recorded in $^{\circ}\text{C}$ rather than $^{\circ}\text{F}$ (fahrenheit), which is still the currently-employed temperature scale. It has taken some effort to become accustomed to the rather unusual temperature readings. All summer it never got above 37° - which may have made it seem a little less sweltering during July and August. On the other hand, it got down to 0° last night, causing a little frost on the windshield.

One does become accustomed to things but it is probably a big help to have a mental picture which approximates the new measurements: a meter is approximately one yard (39.37 in.) a liter about one quart (1.1 qt.); a kilogram is 2.2 lbs. and a kilometer is approximately 5/9 of a mile (just think - you can drive 72 km/hr in a 40 mph zone!). In some respects a changeover won't be easy as for example when one contemplates the fact that Ordway's 281 acres actually is only 114 hectares. That just doesn't seem nearly so large. Perhaps the world really is shrinking.....



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