

COCAINE

From page 1

But by the 1960s, the effects and dangers of cocaine were linked inextricably with those of heroin, according to *High Times Encyclopedia of Recreational Drugs*, and its infamous reputation had made penalties for its possession or trafficking second in severity only to drugs such as LSD and heroin.

Today, those penalties still exist, and a dealer could get a stiffer punishment for selling coke than he would for selling PCP or speed. But cocaine's reputation has become much more respectable than it was when it was seen as a sister-drug to heroin. Despite prices of a \$100 a gram, an amount of powder that fits in the palm of one's hand and that a heavy user could conceivably finish in one sitting, the jet set of Hollywood, business professionals and even students are using it. It has become the Perrier of the drug world. It is chic.

At first, cocaine's popularity seems hard to understand. Despite its exorbitant cost, when cocaine is snorted or tooted (the term more genteel users prefer), its effects last only about half an hour, says Jeff Witkin, a behavioral pharmacologist at the University. And when it is used moderately, those effects are subtle.

Cocaine comes from the coca leaves of trees indigenous to Peru and Bolivia. Indians in the area have chewed the leaves for centuries to relieve fatigue and hunger. The leaves are processed into the white crystalline form known as cocaine in Columbia and much of America's cocaine supply is smuggled from there into Florida. From Florida, it comes to North Carolina, usually through airports, says Cuyler Windham, the State Bureau of Investigation assistant director in charge of drug investigations.

Although cocaine can be and is used as a local anesthetic in some ear, nose and throat surgeries, it is

The white crystalline powder is becoming America's fastest-growing fad in drug use and experts continue to differ in opinions about the benefits and detriments of coke

most commonly known for its central nervous system stimulant actions, Witkin says.

"It increases talkativeness, brings relief from fatigue and a decrease in appetite and almost invariably gives a feeling of elation," he says.

One local user who estimates he has spent between \$1,000 and \$2,000 in the last few years on cocaine swears its cost is worth the money. He describes coke's effects more succinctly: "It just makes you feel fantastic."

A recent government survey on drug abuse estimated that 20 percent of young adults (aged 18-25) in the United States had tried coke.

A recent government survey on drug abuse estimated that 20 percent of young adults (aged 18-25) in the United States had tried coke. It stated that about 4 percent of older adults (aged 26-54) had used coke. Windham says cocaine use in the last two or three years definitely has increased, and SBI agents are finding it is a drug that can be acquired fairly easily.

The prevalence of cocaine users in the Chapel Hill area is hard to estimate. Those who do indulge are obviously reluctant to stand up and be counted. But Chapel Hill police officer Ben Callahan says he knows

cocaine use in this area too, is increasing.

George Hoffman, owner of George's Cheep Joint, a drug paraphernalia shop on Franklin Street, says most of the coke users he knows are middle-class business people, between the ages of 24 and 50. He has noticed that the variety of paraphernalia on the market for cocaine use has increased greatly in the last few years. He carries tiny spoons which can be used to hold cocaine for inhaling, and kits that include vials to hold cocaine, straws to inhale it and tiny blades to cut it to a fine powder. He also sells strainers used to sift cocaine until it is fine, scales which are capable of weighing as little as one-hundredth of a gram and mirrors on which fine lines of cocaine can be drawn and inhaled. Because cocaine is so expensive, it is frequently put on mirrors on each flake of powder can be seen clearly.

But Hoffman says many coke users make do with paraphernalia that can be found in the home, so the amount of goods he sells is no indication of the amount of coke usage in Chapel Hill. "Most people just use a slab of glass and a rolled up dollar bill," he says.

One senior Carolina student who both uses and deals cocaine says business professionals are only a part of the strata of area cocaine users. "Students do it too," he says. "I even know a couple of professors who do it." He explains that he sells cocaine only to make enough money to get his own coke free. "I can buy seven grams for \$500. I sell five grams for \$100 each and get two free. I'm what you'd call a casual dealer. I don't

That precious powder

'Doses of .05-.10 gram (provide) exhilaration and lasting euphoria... This result is enjoyed without any of the unpleasant aftereffects that follow exhilaration brought about by alcohol.'

Sigmund Freud, 1884

• • •

'Cocaine for horses an' not for men. They say it will kill you but they don't say when.'

Huddie Ledbetter, 'Take a Whiff on Me,' 1976

• • •

'I like to think of cocaine as the thinking man's Dristan.'

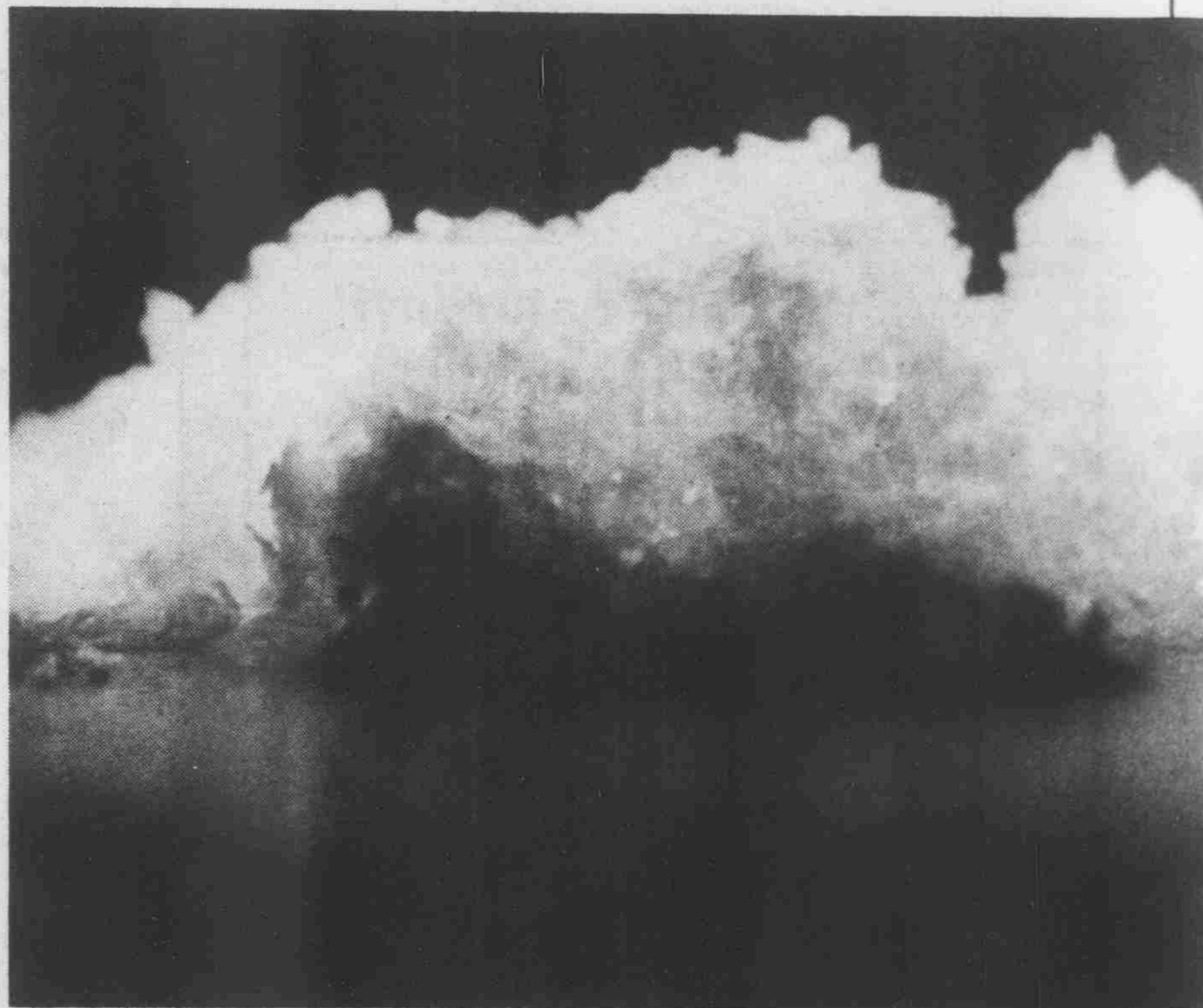
Wavy Gravy

• • •

'Driving that train/High on cocaine/Casey Jones you'd better/Watch your speed.'

Grateful Dead Dead, 'Casey Jones'

• • •



Pure cocaine shows crystalline structure of drug.

DTH/Matt Cooper