

Diana Law

British get poor m

Answer true or false to the following statements:

- Diamonds are made of carbon.
- Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria.
- Natural vitamins are better for you than laboratory-made ones.
- The earliest humans lived at the same time as the dinosaurs.

These were just a few of the 23 questions British researchers used in a series of tests of scientific knowledge they gave citizens of that country. And when they were finished, they discovered that the British answers tended to be wrong more often than those of an equivalent American group.

But before we wave the red, white and blue, know that neither country's citizens distinguished themselves as being overtly scientifically literate.

Two professors from the University of Oxford and a senior researcher with a science museum in London reported their findings in the British journal *Nature*



Earle Holland
SCIENCE

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Science ghostbuster deflates UFO stories

Scripps Howard News Service

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — David Hackett is a scientific ghostbuster.

He has studied ghosts and other unidentified flying objects, sonic booms and the chunk of green ice that fell from the sky in 1978. And he has yet to find anything that could not be explained scientifically.

"I've not seen anything I would call a mystery," said Hackett, an engineer in private practice. "But I'm not willing to make the jump from skeptic to cynic and say there is nothing (supernatural) that exists."

He is a member of Orion Research Forum and Network, an outgrowth of the former Oak Ridge (Tenn.) Isochronous Observation Network.

ORFAN has more than 100 members and includes a branch called Anomaly Investigations.

One of the "unexplainables" that Hackett explained was the Brown Mountain lights, ghostly illuminations that appear on Brown Mountain in western North Carolina. Some have said that Brown Mountain is a UFO landing strip.

The original lights, Hackett said, were probably ball lightning, the kind of lightning people sometimes see rolling around their

bathtubs.

Hackett also has investigated the Bristol booms, which shook houses in a subdivision in Bristol, Tenn. He said the booms turned out to be sonic booms that were intensified because they bounced off a nearby ridge.

The group has looked into several hundred reports of UFOs in the past 12 years, Hackett said, and most of them turned out to be Venus low on the horizon. "It does some rather spectacular twinkling," he said, explaining that the difference between the perception of viewers' eyes gives the false impression of motion.

He also researched the meteorite that fell in Anderson County in 1978, striking a ridge and starting a fire. The flames, it turned out, were from a campsite.

He also helped investigate the 25-pound chunk of green ice that fell in April 1978 in Ripley, Tenn. After Civil Defense determined the ice was not radioactive, some area residents tasted it.

The ORFAN group studied ice samples and found they contained syphilis and gonorrhea.

"A military jet had a leaking commode," Hackett said. "It had frozen on the outside of the plane and fallen off. What made it green was the copper sulfate disinfectant they used."