

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet  
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Editor: Kent Harker

**BOLLING FOR FACTS**

by Wayne Bartz, Ph.D. and Richard Rason, Ed.D.

[What follows is an analysis of astrological claims of the Sacramento area's hottest media psychic, Sherri Bolling. She has appeared on all three local network stations and is frequently quoted in print.

This article first appeared in the "Scientific American", newsletter of the Sacramento Skeptics.]

Sherri Bolling's astrological readings and "prosperity recipes" have been a staple of the "Noon News" of channel 13 (KQVR-TV, Sacramento). To test the accuracy of her claims to special psychic powers, we recorded her appearance on the 7 October 1988 show and extracted 15 statements -- four applicable to Libras, nine for other callers, and two for the spouses of callers. Then we deleted all references to specific signs. For example, the statement, "All Libras are kicking over old traces for a new image. . . ." became "You are kicking over old traces for a new image."

These statements were then given to 232 Introductory Psychology students in American River College. They were told only that we were interested in their self-perception of their own life events, and they were asked to rate each of the statements for how well it fit their life, using a five-point scale, with "1" being "almost dead wrong" and "5" being an "almost perfect fit."

Statistical tests were then done to compare the scores from Libras (on the four items supposedly applying specifically to them) with scores from non-Libras. If Ms. Bolling's statements apply to Libras and not others, Libras should show higher agreement than people with other signs.

Tests also compared females to males and single females with married females. Averages on each item were also determined, to show how well or poorly each item tended to fit the entire group -- as a means of determining how universal or general each statement might be.

**RESULTS**

**LIBRA ITEMS:** Three of the four statements supposedly applying to Libras were rated by Libras more in the WRONG direction -- although

NONE OF THE FOUR WAS SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM NON-LIBRAS.

Clearly, Ms. Bolling's statements specifically for Libras just didn't apply to them more than anyone else.

SEX DIFFERENCES: Women showed a small but significantly higher agreement with all statements than did men (3.20 vs. 3.05 at the .01 level). This could be because most of Ms. Bollings's callers were female, or because females may be more prone than males to accept vague statements about themselves.

SPECIFIC STATEMENTS: Only four of the fifteen statements had a mean overall rating below the middle of the scale. In other words, the statements are so general they apply to a large number of people asked if they "fit your life." This is the stock-in-trade of the cold reader: make a number of vague and general statements, then focus in on the "hits," knowing there will be a number of them, no matter who is getting the reading.

The overall mean rating is 3.14, slightly above 50/50 toward "Good fit."

Looking at specific items helps illustrate what types of statements people are more likely to see as applicable to their lives:

=> The most agreed-upon statement was 13: "You have a tendency to push yourself too much and/or you worry too much sometimes."

Is there anyone on earth to whom this would not apply? Women rated notably higher than males on this one.

=> Number 11 was, "There are a lot of changes around your entire life right now, and you sort of have to ride over the top of it. You've got to have a lot of patience with the next two months. . . ."

=> The third highest (#3) and fifth highest items are both about finances, suggesting concern and possible change.

Again, who is NOT concerned about money?

=> The fourth-rated statement, #10, says, "You are probably going to be having a move in the next 18 months to 2 years, and it's an up-grading in your living situation."

Not too hard to predict this; it would fit a lot of folks in the Sacramento area. The lowest items, still rated between "Poor" and "Fair," are the most specific or the most negative.

=> The bottom was #1: "In the mid-80s, your life was such a mess that nothing could happen now that could equal that period of time."

This supposedly described Libras, but THEY RATED IT NO DIFFERENTLY

## THAN DID NON-LIBRAS.

=> Next came another "Libra" item, suggesting domestic problems, followed by a specific statement of travel within six weeks. The other item rated lower than 50/50 suggests changes in the work environment by next spring. These items (#s 2, 6, and 12) are either negative or fairly specific, making them less likely to be desirable or widely applicable.

## CONCLUSION

Ms. Bolling's claim that she can tell something about individuals based upon their astrological sign -- in this case, Libra -- failed to be supported in this test. Results suggest that subjects:

- => Simply respond to general statements fitting virtually anyone;
- => Tend to accept the more positive or general statements;
- => Tend to reject statements that are more negative or specific.

There is nothing found in this study that would validate any paranormal or clairvoyant powers -- but it does tend to support what we already know about human suggestibility.

## THE "LIFE THROUGH TIME" EXHIBIT

by John Taube

The California Academy of Science, in Golden Park, San Francisco, has put together a most authentic, stimulating display entitled "Life Through Time." It is a vivid explanation of evolution. Its sixty-plus exhibits span three billion years of life on Earth.

Here are a few of its exhibits. Protoceratops, the horned dinosaur (a relative of Triceratops) who lived 80 million years ago, is depicted finding its way home to her clutch of eggs.

There is a lively exhibit of an 8-inch-long cockroach. Another interesting exhibit is a millipede relative perfectly shaped for plowing through leaf litter while it munches club-moss.

Among the beautiful exhibits is the "Age of Coal Forests." It existed 300 million years ago when giant insects, spiders and their relatives ruled. They lived in swampy forests that over time became coal. Without this energy source it is questionable if our technological age would be possible.

These are just a few of what one may see. They give one the feeling of traveling back through a time warp.

Bay Area Skeptics is fortunate to have Dr. Eugenie (Genie) Scott, whose expertise is biological anthropology, as one of its directors. Genie has consented to act as our personal guide on a tour through the "Life Through Time" exhibit. This will not only be stimulating for you, so you must bring your children or grandchildren. Don't forget a camera, either.

The date is Saturday, September 22nd at 1:30 p.m. at the Academy, Golden Gate Park. Advance tickets reservations are \$1.00 and children under 5 are free. John Taube will be the coordinator of this event, so please send your check for \$1.00 per person, made out to Bay Area Skeptics. John's address is: 55 Chumasero Drive 7E, San Francisco, CA 94132. Phone John at (415) 334-3733 if you want more information.

## BROTHER AUSTIN MILES ADDRESSES BAY AREA SKEPTICS by Bob Steiner

Brother Austin Miles addressed the June 1990 meeting of Bay Area Skeptics. Nattily dressed in a white suit, white shirt, and a bright blue tie, the reverend's matching bright blue silk handkerchief in his jacket pocket topped off the ensemble.

Attended by tens of people, the turnout tested the limits of our meeting area in the El Cerrito Public Library. While we are at it, once more, much appreciation is hereby expressed to the El Cerrito Public Library, and especially to Grace MacNeill, for enormous cooperation with Bay Area Skeptics and for hosting our meetings over the years.

"Brothers and Sisters," began Brother Miles. He told us about the righteousness of evangelists. This was followed by a statement of his own human worth, and his worthy goals. Then, guess what. He pitched for money.

He protested the innocence of the televangelists. He assured us: "I only want to serve you. I have never swindled anybody. All I'm asking for is a chance."

He told a story about a good sister of the church who, in the morning, kissed her husband goodbye at the front door. When the story continued with her kissing her lover good morning at the back door, a resounding "A-men, Brother!" was heard from the back of the meeting hall.

Let us take it from the top. Austin Miles is author of the book "Don't Call Me Brother" (Prometheus Books, 1989. \$19.95.). It tells of Austin's life in the Assemblies of God Church. It is exciting, and will rip at you. I highly recommend it.

Back to the talk. Austin had been one of the top clowns in the circus world. He went on to become a world-famous ringmaster. Then

the church lured him into the world of the evangelists. He appeared on the Jim Bakker show, as well as elsewhere around the world.

It was exciting to hear from a man who forthrightly and courageously admits that he was taken in by the evangelists. He had lived and breathed the world of lying in the name of God.

We learn of the savage, avaricious ways of some of the high profile preachers -- and Miles names names! For example, he told us the following story:

At an executive staff meeting at a leading university, a staff member collapsed with a heart attack. A well-known minister affiliated with the University, laid hands on him and prayed for his healing. Then, when healing seemed to be delayed, they called for an ambulance.

Later the minister instructed his staff: "If that ever happens to me, you call the ambulance first. Then pray for me."

The university was Oral Roberts University, and the minister was Oral Roberts. Austin Miles specifically confirmed this story -- for this article.

We heard how Austin Miles had liked, admired, and trusted Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker . . . and then how he learned, to his enormous dismay, the truth.

As a successful ringmaster, Austin Miles had accumulated fame and fortune. The church found those two attributes very appealing. After luring Austin into their ranks, they traded on the fame, and encouraged Austin to divest himself of the fortune . . . to be given to the worthy causes of the church, of course.

With courage and wisdom, Austin Miles has managed to put all of this into perspective. Angry -- yes; bitter at life -- absolutely not. He is a nice, congenial man, who is able to retain a sense of humor in the face of having undergone adversity which would have done in a lesser person.

Thank you, Austin Miles, for sharing your experiences with us.

## 13 HAZARDS OF NEW AGE THINKING

by Pat Kehoe

Many people believe that the New Age is at worst an innocuous pest. Most of those same people have not ever thought things through. Consider:

=> It lays the public open to fraud and exploitation by failing to provide either the means or the encouragement to evaluate paranormal and pseudoscientific claims.

- => It disseminates misinformation, stating as facts events and phenomena that are unsupported or unsupportable.
- => It encourages the belief that intuition and subjective experience are more valid avenues of knowledge than public, specifiable, observable and repeatable ways of verifying experience and inference.
- => It encourages the belief in arbitrary and sometimes malevolent supernatural forces.
- => It reduces personal responsibility by attributing behavior to powers and influences beyond direct human experience and control.
- => It implies that knowledge can be gained without effort and that events can be predicted and controlled through powers that are supernaturally bestowed.
- => It rejects and even disparages critical thinking analysis and skepticism, which are fundamental to scientific and rational processes.
- => It encourages a belief in the equality of options, regardless of the evidence for them.
- => Lacking any system of checks and balances, it permits claims to be made without foundation, challenge or scrutiny.
- => It employs and therefore models explanatory devices (e.g., the hypothesis that cannot be refuted) that are counter-productive in the search for knowledge and understanding.
- => Some claims can be actively harmful, e.g., by encouraging physically or psychologically dangerous practices. Others can be passively harmful by discouraging an appropriate action, e.g., by rejecting conventional medical treatment.
- => Social policies may be developed on the basis of erroneous, pseudoscientific claims, Nazi racial theory being a classic example.
- => It has special appeal to the naive and vulnerable (adolescents, the poorly educated, or the emotionally troubled), who are taken in by the claims of exotic, mysterious and wonderful forces and powers, some of which can be acquired or used, and other of which are to be feared, marveled at, or defended against.

[Pat Kehoe is the director of the Mental Health Clinic in

Whitehorse, Yukon. Her article first appeared in the "Western New York Skeptics Newsletter".]

## IT'S GOTTA BE YOU

by Prentiss Willson, M.D.

On March 20th, KCBS talk show (not likely in innocence) did an expose, a Peeping Tom into the weird bedroom of astrology. A rare delight it was. As the debate ensued, I hear your question: "Who won?"

Considering the cooperative competency of those program headlines, Art Finley, the talk show host, and BAS board member physicist Shawn Carlson, Ph.D., who indeed? Besides competency, unlike the hoodwinked astrology buffs, Art and Shawn had only to dispense truth. No need for the contrived, the scheming, or the parading of murky obfuscations.

Believe me. It was a shoo-in.

Art's introduction set a meaty tone. He compared Joan Quigley, newsworthy if nothing else (recall the Reagan administration's brouhaha), with Rasputin, the debauched, semi-literate mad monk whose astrological mumbo-jumbo mesmerized tsar Nicholas (mostly through tsarina Alexandria) into backing him and his pernicious ways. Result: in 1916 down went Russia's last Tsar.

Following Art's bewitching moment in introductory history, now enters Dr. Carlson, poised to contribute his long-into-fraud-exposing expertise. And he did it without recourse to heavy-going, esoteric physics. He was instead pledged to argue logically, in a lucid, laid-back manner that stressed facts, not emotions or frenzied polemics. One example: Shawn, replying to a fervidly pro-astrology call-in participant's questions simply said that innumerable times astrologers had tried for the \$11,000 (local) or \$100,000 (national) standing offer for anyone successful invalidating astrology as a science, but that not once had any succeeded. Never a pay-out.

With these attributes working for them -- competency and truth -- Finley and Carlson proceeded not merely to discredit astrology, not just to discombobulate it, but rather to dismember that trumped-up tarradiddle know as astrology. For the audience that night it translated as pure cat-purr-pleasuring captivation.

For all? All except some doubting Thomas mutterings from the graves of two famous skeptics. Both scoffed at Art and Shawn even having a chance at persuading that audience. H. L. Mencken muttered that no one ever grew poor overestimating the stupidity of the American public.

And Jacques Monod, the French biologist, once again asked when

would people ever realize that the true story of human origins is so incredibly more unbelievable or fanciful than any man-made-in-God's-image myth?

But for once those two worthies were wrong. That night, those people were persuaded and will persuade others. Hopefully, more bordering skeptics will be persuaded to speak out for the cause.

Whether they will or not, Shawn please oblige me. Stay close by, an emergency looms, one for which you particularly, will be needed. It's this: an AP press release recently flashed this headline, "Man Stabs Wife, Lightning Bolt Then Stabs Him."

Count on it -- to all pie-in-the-sky pipers, all slime-mold evangelist healers and salvation sellers, that will mean sky balloons thundering out: "WE told you so. He sees all, watches over all, rules with thunder bolts."

Shawn, it's true that yesterday's newspaper does wrap today's garbage, but only you can while wrapping, rebut this particular kind of garbage.

So indulge us, as we now all clasp hands and sing out, Shawn "It's Gotta Be You."

## RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the EDITOR. If you want to add some comment with the submission, please do so.]

The New Age has fostered a colony of cottage industry that fetches the furthest reaches of credulity in search of the Inner Self. From the august pages of the "Wall Street Journal", we learn how mantras and chakras are ceding to high-tech gizmos that go whizz and pop.

The come-on never loses its luster, despite its time-worn failure: you get something for nothing. (The multi-billion dollar diet industry applies the formula very well, promising ways to "melt off the fat" while you eat anything you want.)

Wouldn't it be nice to possess the facile pen of Shakespeare, or the gliding wit of Thoreau? Without any sweat in English Lit. 305? You can do it in the comfort of a chaise longue as you don your ski goggles and headphones. Through the headphones is piped static. Yes, STATIC. What the goggles are supposed to accomplish is not exactly clear, but they aid in "synchronizing your energies" with those of Mother Earth.

One patron, 24-year-old Jerome Edwards, said after a brain massage, "I feel mentally relaxed but not mentally energized."

Well gollie, Jerry, ask Maryellen Visconti (owner of the "Mind Gym") for a refund. She will tell you that you cannot expect miracles on the first session. At \$20 per half-hour, Einstein can only be about 400 bucks away. Mensa massages here are evidently as good as pectoral pulling in the weight room, according to those who have had their creative juices squeezed out.

Naturally, some stick-in-the mud psychologists pooh-pooh this contraption with predictable prose: "I think you can get smarter through a little device called hard work," said Dr. Jim McGaugh, a brain researcher at UCD.

Aarg! Perish the thought. Visconti has written several cook books, so she knows as much about brain function as any fool Ph.D. brain researcher.

The redoubtable Stanton Friedman, UFOlogist extraordinaire, is never at a loss for ways to milk UFOdom. The author of many books and innumerable articles, Friedman has decided that the way of Jose Canseco (Jose made over \$800,000 in three months on his 1-900 line) is the way of the future: He has teamed with Ryan Wood, a Menlo Park business partner in a 1-900 hotline to report UFO sightings.

They want to build a data base, you see.

If the popular press is correct, polls show that more than 50 percent of us believe in UFOs. That translates into megabucks if only a small fraction of them were to call the hotline. It is difficult to imagine how any kind of quality database could be assembled by uncontrolled calls of the kind Friedman proposes.

Friedman "denounced news professionals and doubting scientists like astronomer Carl Sagan as 'noisy negativists' ["Peninsula Times Tribune", courtesy Jim Wheeler]. Stanton said that there will be information given out on the line: the "Cosmic Watergate" coverup of what the U.S. government knows about crashed UFOs.

Friedman brushed aside the suspicion of a money-making scheme with a simple, "So what? Five percent of the American public thinks we haven't sent a man to the moon."

As a side issue to Friedman's latest antics, UFOlogy itself is in the worst condition since its inception in the late 1940s. Membership has swelled in the major UFO groups around the country, but many -- too many -- of the new faces are simply loony tunes. This, coupled with some of the savage turf and inside fighting, has seriously damaged whatever credibility UFOlogy may have ever had.

**CSICOP IS COMING**  
by Mark Hodes

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) has chosen Bay Area Skeptics to host the 1991 conference. It will be held in the San Francisco Bay area in 1991.

The preliminary indication from CSICOP is that the conference will occur the first weekend in May on the campus of UC Berkeley. BAS will provide liaison services for CSICOP including registration of attendees. "BASIS" will publish a registration form and the exact conference schedule when it becomes available. The "Skeptical Inquirer" also will publish the latest information. "SI" is issued quarterly, and available by subscription.

The CSICOP Conference is a major event that generates considerable publicity for the work of the Committee. It is an opportunity for public discussion of skeptical issues with the distinguished scholars who present their work to the conference. Past conference speakers have included Nobel Laureate Murray Gell-Mann and Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould. The recent 1990 CSICOP Conference in Washington, D.C., featured keynote speaker Gerard Piel, chairman emeritus of "Scientific American" and past president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In past years the Conference has attracted 500-1000 participants. An undertaking of this magnitude requires much work, which can be supplied only by volunteers. To coordinate their efforts, Bay Area Skeptics has formed a steering committee chaired by Yves Barbero, vice-chair of BAS. The steering committee includes representatives from Berkeley Skeptics, the East Bay Skeptics Society, and Sacramento Skeptics. If you wish to help ensure the success of the 1991 Conference, please telephone (415) LA TRUTH or send Yves a message on the BAS BBS: (415) 648-8944. We will need your help!

## COURTS VS. RELIGION

by John Taube

The subject of the "New York Times" article, April 24, 1990, "Supreme Court Sends Amish Dispute Back to State Court" is of interest because it illustrates the harm that can come by relying on fate when technology demands a more practical approach.

BAS's position on religious matters is that religion is the private property of individuals, and the State must not interfere with ones right to believe as he/she chooses.

However, if the result of religious belief infringes upon the community's welfare, then for it's benefit laws must be enacted to curtail those religious activities.

The article discusses a law passed in Minnesota requiring all slow-moving vehicles on the highway to have reflecting triangles on the rear of the vehicle. The Amish, who eschew all the trappings of

modern society, travel by horse-drawn carriage. They refused to comply stating that obedience to civil law would be putting trust in man instead of God.

While it is difficult to tolerate such thinking, unfortunately we have to contend with those whose religion distorts their judgment.

The safety of Minnesota motorists may be in jeopardy by this group of people who refuse to obey the law. The "Times" article commented on the Supreme Court's decision which, unfortunately, did not rule on the matter, but sent it back to the Minnesota Supreme Court for reconsideration. The only reason one may surmise why no firm stand was taken is that the courts (and politicians more so) are loathe to place themselves in the position of what may appear as challenging religion.

There is no more sacred cow than religion itself. Austin Miles's talk to Bay Area Skeptics emphasized that the judiciary is well aware of the fraud extant in the name of religion, but it feels its hands are tied.

FAREWELL  
by Kent Harker

It's been a great three years for me . . . and now it's time to move on. Editing our newsletter has been a wonderful privilege for me. It has put me right in the thick of things in BAS as they happen. That is exciting. I have always felt a deep sense of responsibility with this job -- we have such a select group of people in the readership. The weight of that responsibility has sometimes been troublesome: you out there can be an intimidating bunch of people because of your accomplishments and the confidence you have expressed in the organization. So, with all this, it is not without some conflicting emotions that I leave the position. I will miss having the continual contact with some of the marvelous people who are working very hard to have some influence in the Bay Area. The opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the very talented people in BAS is a thrilling one.

Leaving a position like this, I suppose it is normal to turn nostalgic and reflect upon the highlights of the experience. Then one thinks of the special people and the help, insight and encouragement they have offered. Now it becomes difficult because when one pulls out the list of people one wants very much to thank one risks offense by omission. So I'll keep it short and probably slight many; I hope those omitted may therefore find comfort in the most excellent company.

Thank you Bob Steiner. I can't say anything but a heartfelt "thank you" for everything.

We all owe special gratitude to Bruce LaCentra, the president of

LaCentra Graphics. Bruce has given his professional services for some of the most significant changes in layout and format of "BASIS". I have received complements from all over the country for our layout, and all the credit is due to our readers who send in their suggestions, Bruce being the most important single source.

Now thanks to John Taube. John has been a human calendar, calling to alert me about events of importance to BAS. He has kept a constant pipeline of tapes (audio and video), newspaper and magazine articles, books and information for my perusal and consideration, never complaining about my judgment in using or discarding the material.

Finally, thank you, the readers. There is nothing that can come of all this effort but for your interest, concern and support.

Yves Barbero has not had enough to do, it seems, so he has been chosen to take over the editorship. He has (reluctantly) agreed to relinquish some of his other responsibilities to give him the time he will need to devote to the newsletter. We still don't know if he realizes that he is a mere mortal. Kate Talbot has been doing yeoman (yeowoman?) work with the newsletter distribution, and she will take the responsibility of Meeting Coordinator from Yves.

Good luck, Yves.

## BAS PICNIC!

The long-awaited BAS annual picnic is here! Start your annual three-day healing and purging fast on Wednesday, August 15, so you'll be ready for Saturday, August 18, the day of the Feast. Fast to feast, indeed. The hard-core fastbreaking will begin around noon on Saturday, so boogie in and binge.

The shindig will be held at Greer Park on Amarillo Ave. in Palo Alto. Take the Oregon Xway west from 101. At the very first stop light (it comes quickly, so be ready) turn left (south); this is Old Bayshore Road. (Ben said he will have his truck out by the stop light with a sign for BAS.) Go about two blocks and you will see the park on your right.

You will salivate to the succulent delights of chicken, seafood and beef entrees, veggies, salads, desserts and hors d'oeuvres. As if this were not enough, we are providing a few moments of entertainment and enlightenment for your pleasure: Bob Steiner will do a live demonstration of psychic surgery, without anesthesia (Bob usually takes gas before he does the stuff); Don Henvick, peripatetic troublemaker, will perform some of his best slight-of-hand routines; and astronomer Norm Sperling will give us a 10-minute recap of the Hubble Telescope project (he'll try to help us overcome our sense of discouragement).

If you don't send in your reservation today you are likely to forget, and when you realize slash your wrists, so mail your check for \$5 per person (\$2.50 for children under 12 and seniors). Make them payable to Ben Baumgartner, 2467 Betlo Ave., Mountain View 94043.

There is a great need for some help with this considerable effort. Ben and Carol have done everything in the past, and we can't have them do it again this year. Please don't assume they have enough hands. Call Ben or Carol to offer help or to make late reservations at (415) 968-1535.

## DOWN-UNDER DOWSING

by Ian Bryce and Harry Edwards

The dowsing tests by the Australian Skeptics (AS) began with the braggadocio of mayor Dan Gleeson: He boasted, in writing, that he could find "a dot on the back of a beer coaster, nominate the value of a coin eight weeks after it had been removed from its hiding place, decide the value of hidden banknotes," and, of course, "dowse minerals and water." He claimed he could dowse from an aircraft flying at 9,500 feet. He expressed "100% certainty" when asked to appraise his chances at winning the skeptic's \$20,000 challenge. He even urged spectators at the interview to back him with odds so that everyone would stand to make a fortune.

The protocol for the test was relatively simple. The test site, in a city west of Sydney, was a field of natural grass over undisturbed soil -- a typical area in which diviners were accustomed to working. For the sake of simplicity and cost, it was decided that targets would be buried in rows and then covered by a strip of carpet 6x24 feet. Each row had five staked locations about 4 feet apart at which holes would be dug for the targets. Diviners were offered a choice of objects: water (fresh or saline) in translucent plastic containers, gold ingots or coins, or an electric cable with or without current. The pre-dug holes were prepared for each object, and glass disks covered the holes to make a flat surface. Each row was separated by about 10 feet.

## THE CONCEALMENT

AS constructed a cloth-covered portable wooden frame to conceal the placement of the targets. Two "concealers" would enter this "tent" and use a random number generator (a die in a bottle) to determine which location was to receive a target object. The carpet would be rolled over the location before moving the tent to the next position. When each location was prepared, the concealers left the area entirely so they could not even unconsciously cue someone. The dowsers were held under supervision away from the site while the samples were placed. To their credit, none tried to gain any advantage by peeking. Since no one involved in the test knew which holes contained something, the procedure was truly double blind.

Both the organizers and the diviners agreed that the procedure for concealment was fair and equitable.

Each of the nine entrants was to make two trials (rows) in which 9 of 10 correct targets would result in a success. It was agreed beforehand that high scorers (70% plus) would be retested. AS decided that they would roll back the carpets as a dowser made each attempt for the advantage of an immediate reaction -- it would be good for television, with close-ups of the dowser's reactions to the results. All agreed that the testing would stop any time the results fell below 50%. The dowsers waiting for their turn at testing were kept out of the test area until their turn came, and those who had finished were not allowed to return to talk with those waiting.

## PRE-TEST CHECKOUT

This was perhaps the most important phase of the test. Each diviner was asked to confirm that conditions "here today" were satisfactory and that there were no people, objects or conditions that might interfere with his abilities. Each was allowed to go over the test area with the carpet in place -- with targets absent -- to test for any kind of "interference," such as natural water, cables, or minerals. Eight gave a clear indication; one said there was a disturbance at a particular location and it was agreed that he would not be tested in that area. Only one diviner objected that the carpet blocked signals, so other fabric was used for that dowser.

The case of mayor Gleeson was particularly interesting. He was to demonstrate how his rod worked during a pre-test session. (Gleeson was the one who objected to the carpet, so some curtain material was substituted to his satisfaction.) While he watched, the referee placed one of the 2-liter blue plastic bottles in a hole and covered it with the curtain. The committee had been openly filling bottles a few minutes before. Gleeson's forked stick violently jerked down when he placed it over the bottle. "Yes," he loudly proclaimed, "everything is working fine. My stick sees the water and I am happy to use these materials for the test." The bottle was placed in a hole which was then covered with a glass plate and the curtain material. The mayor's rod again worked just fine again, to his great pleasure.

The bottle was in fact empty. But this was not revealed to Gleeson at that time.

As another uncontrolled test of his powers, specifically to see if the Force would pass through paper, he was presented with a clear glass bottle with a paper label on it. The clear liquid was plainly visible, and, again, his fork quivered as he triumphantly demonstrated the water in the bottle.

The bottle, in fact, contained two liters of pure (laboratory-tested) ethanol. Again, this was not revealed at the time.

## THE TESTING BEGINS

The moment of truth arrives. The dowzers take their turns, going up and down the rows. As the carpet is rolled back, most of the pegged locations are empty that were called positive, or the positions declared empty were not. The reactions ranged from disappointment, through consternation, to utter disbelief. After the test some witchers went back over the exposed locations and found that their wands curiously worked properly when they could see what was in the holes.

The highest rate of success was 4/10 (40%) for one dowser. Another scored 3/8 (37%), another 2/6 (33%), three scored 1/4 (25%), and three scored 0/4 (0%). The average of all the dowzers was 12/48 (25%), just about the expected 1 out of 5 (20%). In other words, the group of diviners could have gotten together and just guessed at which holes contained something and done about as well. As a matter of interest, a newspaper reporter at the event was asked to make 48 guesses and he correctly identified 11/48 (23%).

Although the sample is not large enough to draw hard statistical conclusions, this test, coupled with hundreds of others worldwide demonstrate that professional dowzers cannot perform any better than someone off the street can do throwing dice. It is easy to conclude that the force moving the dowzers' sticks is their own muscles and fanciful imaginations.

## EXCUSES, EXCUSES

When the tests were all finished, the excuses began to pour in. There were now all kinds of distractions in the test area. The carpet was the worst villain. The excuse-of-the-day prize goes to the diviner who complained that the influence from one hole was traveling along the carpet to emerge at a different spot! Other diviners with similar excuses were given unofficial chances like the case above with the same results. When they didn't know where the object was they could not find it. Before the test the dowzers all signed statements that they had found no distractions, that the conditions were fair and impartial, and that they could perform to at least 80%. One diviner, to his credit, admitted that he would have to seriously reconsider his views on witching.

A chap who claimed he could find gold (his test consisted in putting small gold ingots in assigned holes) got 0/4, and he could not understand why his powers had deserted him. He produced a piece of insulation tape with a minute piece of copper stuck to it. "Bury this anywhere you like," he said, waving his arms in the direction of the open paddocks, "and I'll find it." When he was engaged in conversation the copper was secreted under a convenient pile of horse manure. The dowser was then called back to begin his search.

To an astonished group he asked, "Where is it?"

"You're the dowser, you find it!" came the unwelcome response. He was obviously not overjoyed with the prospect of searching the surrounding 500 hectares, so he asked for a little narrower area. The area was cut down to a swath about 3x30 feet. He walked about three feet into the area and his whalebone wand twisted toward the ground. "There it is," he declared. It wasn't. It was a good 10 feet away.

The pre-test trials in which Gleeson had selected an empty bottle as full and a bottle of alcohol as water were then revealed to the consternation of all the dowsers. The concern AS had for a "crisis of confidence" and subsequent psychological damage the dowsers might suffer did not happen. They all left with their faith slightly tweaked but still intact. There is nothing that changed their perception of their own abilities.

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## CALENDAR

August Meeting

BAS PICNIC

by the Baumgartners

Saturday, August 18th, noon - ?

Greer Park

Greer Park is in Palo Alto. Take 101 Bayshore to Palo Alto to the Oregon Expressway exit and get off going west. At the very first light turn left (south) to get to Old Bayshore Road (a frontage road). There should be a truck parked near the stoplight intersection pointing directions to the turn. The park is about two blocks down. It will be on your right; there should be ample parking.

Watch for coming events in the BAS CALENDAR, or call 415-LA-TRUTH for up-to-the-minute details on events. If you have ideas about topics or speakers, leave a message on the hotline.

**WARNING:** We **STRONGLY URGE** that you call the hotline shortly before attending any Calendar activity to see if there have been any changes.

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Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

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