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September 1992 "BASIS", newsletter of the Bay Area Skeptics  
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Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet  
Vol. 11, No. 9  
Editor: Rick Moen

## A VISIT TO THE ICR by Steven Linke

[Ed. note: The Institute for Creation Research portrays itself to most of the public as a scientific research and teaching institution, on the subject of human origins. Occasionally, however, a different picture emerges, the one that it characteristically shows to its close supporters. Following is an eye-opening look at the ICR, up-close and personal.

Steve Linke is a graduate student in molecular biology at the University of California - San Diego. He is conducting his thesis research in the Gene Expression Lab at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla.]

I visited the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) on August 27th. This institute seems to be a common topic of debate among skeptics, so, since I live relatively nearby and have had an interest in the ICR controversy, I decided to pay them a visit. In addition, I was seeking original creationist papers on molecular biology (but never found any). I hope this information isn't redundant: I found it to be quite interesting.

The ICR is located in Santee, CA, a suburb on the far eastern edge of San Diego (about 20 miles from the coast and my residence in La Jolla near the University of California - San Diego campus):

Institute for Creation Research  
10946 Woodside Avenue North  
Santee, CA 92071  
(619) 448-0900

It is a relatively new (built in 1985) and attractive two-story building located in an industrial park off a frontage road of Highway 67. It is located between Westmark General Contractors and a rather ugly dirt field serving as home to the Santee Swap Meet. There were about 20 spaces in the parking lot.

Much of the first floor is devoted to the "ICR Museum of Creation and Earth History." In general, the museum is visually quite impressive. They are calling it "San Diego's NEWEST Museum" and are having a Grand Opening Celebration September 18-20. A pamphlet reads: "Free guided tours! See live animals and learn about their Creator! View exhibits and videos that present the case for creation and the evidence against

evolution! Enjoy Free refreshments! Special Thanks to K-PRAISE 1210 AM Radio!" The pamphlet also states: "'Home schoolers' especially invited Friday -- Meet Dr. Richard Bliss, designer of the 'Good Science' curriculum for home and Christian schools."

The agenda of events for the Grand Opening include 25-minute guided tours, 20-minute live animal presentations, 20 minutes of science experiments conducted by Dr. Richard Bliss, book signings (by Dr. Henry Morris, Dr. John Morris, Dr. Duane Gish, Dr. Richard Bliss, Ken Ham, and others), a "Media Tour," a video called "The Great Dinosaur Mystery," and a live broadcast by K-PRAISE 1210 AM on September 18th from 4-6 PM. In reference to the live broadcast, the pamphlet says: "'The Grapevine' radio program with Michael Law will be broadcasting live on the Museum Patio in front of the ICR Museum. Come with your questions (or phone in with a question at 1 (800) 281-1210). Guests: Dr. Duane Gish and Ken Ham of ICR."

After receiving a copy of the museum pamphlet and the newest copy of the "ICR Graduate School" catalog (1990-1991), I proceeded through the museum. (By the way, the curator of the museum was listening to Rush Limbaugh at the front desk.)

I thought the museum was relatively busy (for a Thursday afternoon). Several parents brought their children through the museum to show them creationism. In fact, the ICR Graduate School Catalog states: "The Museum of Creation and Earth History is open to the public and is frequently toured by visiting classes of school children, as well as individuals." I felt this article would be of interest to relay what the ICR is showing, in their simplified layman terms, to the general public who might come to visit the museum.

The exhibits started (appropriately) with the first day of creation and continued forward in creationist time. I will describe the exhibits that I perceive to be the most hotly contested topics, but not near all of them. I spent about two hours going through and scribbling down quotations from the various exhibits, but certainly can't cover everything. There were "Impact" articles (ICR publications) available at various locations pertaining to the subject matter of the exhibits. I have split the museum up into ten different exhibits:

#### EXHIBIT #1: SCIENCE AND FAITH

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Various wall plaques. A few read:

##### Science and Religion

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"Religion and science are not separate spheres of study, as some say. Both involve the real world of human life and observation. If both are true, they must agree.

"In fact, true science supports the Biblical world view. There are many facts of science revealed in the Bible and no proven scientific errors.

"However, science does not support false religions (e.g. atheism, evolutionism, pantheism, humanism, etc.)"

### Importance of the Origins Issue

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"...The tree of evolutionism bears only corrupt fruits; Creationism bears good fruits.... It is vitally important that we and our children believe and obey the Biblical teachings on Creation." [This is a repeated theme in the museum.]

The plaque then goes on to quote the National Science Foundation's resolution on the freedom of scientific inquiry, followed by their comment: "With remarkable inconsistency, however, the National Academy opposes the teaching of scientific creation!" [This, also, is a repeated theme.]

### Creationist Religions

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The plaque states that there are only three "real" creationist religions:

1. Orthodox Judaism
2. Orthodox Islam
3. Biblical Christianity

It adds: "'Liberal' branches accept `theistic evolution.'"

### Evolutionary Religions

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Examples listed: "Atheism, Humanism, New Age-ism, Occultism, Liberalism, Marxism, Fascism." [The fact that these are "evolutionary religions" is yet another repeated theme of the museum.]

### EXHIBIT #2: SEVEN DAYS OF CREATION

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This exhibit, among many other things, answers the question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The answer is the "chicken," of course! Just read Genesis 1:11-12.

For the first days of creation (heaven, earth, etc.), the exhibit features impressive pictures of the planets and stars with dramatic lighting and backgrounds. For the creation of animals, they actually have several small live animals in cages behind glass windows. These include a bird, some fish, a tarantula, a cricket, a lizard, a rat, and a snake. There were also some empty cages. Overall, the live animal exhibits were pretty pathetic, especially the "cricket exhibit" and the empty cages.

### Creation of Functional Maturity

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This plaque described how fruit trees were created mature and able to produce fruit (so they presumably already contained rings), and how Adam was created as a full-grown man. It concludes that, "...If one

denies the true revealed history of the world, and attempts to date the object or the world, this functional maturity could be mistaken for age."

### EXHIBIT #3: THE FALL OF MAN

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Nothing I found interesting, except that supposedly no animals died until Adam sinned by eating the apple. The first animals to die were those used to make skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness.

### EXHIBIT #4: 2ND LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS

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Displayed in a glass case were several "decaying" items, including: a big rusty hook, a melted Erlenmeyer flask, a mouse skeleton, and a melted 45 rpm record ("Bad Luck" by Dale & Grace). Presumably, they show the increasing entropy of the universe. Putting that Dale & Grace record out of its misery by holding it over an open flame is one of the better things the ICR has probably done.

Another display reads: "The universal Second Law is the scientific reflection of God's curse on His created world because of sin. There is no known exception. All processes (whether operating on open or closed systems) tend to go in the direction of increasing entropy (or `disorder'). This tendency can be reversed only by the application of outside, specially programmed, energy or information. This tendency directly precludes any natural evolution toward higher order.

"Entropy normally increases more rapidly in systems open to influx of external energy." At this point, there appeared a very simplistic drawing of the sun radiating energy to the earth in the form of a hug by cute, little yellow arms.

"Conditions for Increasing Complexity in Open Systems:

1. Open System
2. Available Energy

Note: These two conditions are satisfied by all systems on earth. Therefore, though `necessary,' they are not `sufficient' conditions.

3. Program (to `direct' the growth of complexity). Examples:
  - A. `Genetic Code' in DNA of living systems.
  - B. `Plans and specification' for construction of artificial system.
4. Mechanism for storing and converting incoming energy. Examples:
  - A. Photosynthesis in plants
  - B. Metabolism in animals
  - C. Machinery in artificial construction"

### EXHIBIT #5: NOAH'S ARK

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You walk into a room with the "look" and "feel" of Noah's Ark. One wall contains a perspective picture of the Ark, which makes the room look like it continues on into rows of animal cages. There are recorded sounds of thunder and rain and flashes of light to simulate

lightning.

Several plaques describe the purported sightings of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat. They mention several expeditions to find the Ark, and the sketches and photos that were supposedly made. Of course, all the photos have been lost for various reasons or are being hidden by scientists (such as at the Smithsonian Institution). No real photos or sketches are in the museum.

There is also a "scale model" of the Ark and an explanation of how all the animals fit onto it. The following points were made to show which kinds were on the Ark:

1. "Noah was told to take two of each `kind' (seven of every clean' kind).
2. "Biblical kind uncertain -- probably linked by genetic variation.
3. "Example: dog kind probably includes dogs, wolves, coyotes, etc.
4. "'Kind' certainly not more narrow than biological `species.'"

The number of "kinds" on board the Ark according to the creationists: 3,700 mammals; 8,600 birds; 6,300 reptiles; and 2,500 amphibians. Animals not on board: fishes, tunicates, echinoderms, arthropods, mollusks, worms, coelenterates, sponges, and protozoans. This is 21,100 total "kinds." From this, the absolute maximum number of animals that had to be on the Ark was 50,000 ("and probably much less").

The dimensions of the Ark were listed at 450'x75'x45'. This, the plaque proclaims, results in 1,518,750 cubic feet, which is apparently the equivalent of 569 railroad stock cars, and, of course, one can fit 240 sheep in a railroad stock car. The logical conclusion here, according to the plaque, is that the 50,000 animals could have fit into only 208 stock cars (50,000/240). So, the animals only took up 36.5% of the Ark.

How did the animals survive together without eating each other?  
Simple, according to another plaque:

- "1. In face of danger, predators and prey mingle together and tend to enter a torpid (death-like) state."
2. Under stress, animals go into a state of hibernation or estivation.
3. "God could have instituted a state of hibernation, estivation, or relative dormancy in the animals He sent to the Ark, so that the need for animal husbandry would be minimized. Survivors may then have passed on these abilities to their descendants."

#### EXHIBIT #6: GEOLOGY

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This exhibit consists mainly of fossils in display cases. They may be real, or they may be fake. The walls are a mock up of geological strata, and there is a wall-sized picture of the Grand Canyon. There is also a small separate Mt. St. Helens room in the shape of a volcano with painted lava running down the side. The main point is seemingly that the pictures show very thin strata that apparently formed during the relatively recent eruption. It also contains pictures of upright

logs in Spirit Lake.

## How to Determine the Geological "Age" of a Fossil

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- "1. DO NOT use the depth where it is found.
2. DO NOT use the type of rock in which it is found.
3. DO NOT use radiometric date (these are practical only in non-fossil-bearing igneous rocks, and often disagree with each other).
4. DO NOT use the 'stage of evolution' of the fossil (that would be circular reasoning).
5. DO use the Word of God (The Bible indicates that most of the fossils must have been buried in one year -- the year of the Flood)!"

## The Unreliability of Radiometric Dating

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- "1. If God created a 'very good,' functionally mature earth, it would already have possessed an array of isotopes and elements, including their 'daughter' products.
2. During the Biblical Flood especially, but even under normal circumstances, rocks would have been subjected to alteration by ground water, etc., thereby changing their isotope content.
3. Although decay rates of major isotopes are today rather stable, it may be that they have changed over time, particularly during times of major environmental changes (e.g. the Curse, the Flood).
4. It is known that many -- probably most -- radioactive age measurements give discordant or anomalous, and therefore invalid, ages.
5. The method assumes that the Earth is at least old enough to have produced the daughter amount through radioactive decay.

"Thus we see that radiometric schemes assume the concept of uniformity and deny the Biblical doctrines of Creation, Fall, Flood, and Young Earth. Little wonder the results of these methods commonly disagree with each other and with other geological and historical evidence."

## EXHIBIT #7: THE ICE AGE

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This room has blue, contoured walls that look somewhat like a glacier. There are large sculptured icicles hanging from the ceiling. An air conditioner blowing down from the ceiling gives the physical feeling of cold as you walk through and read the seven plaques about the creationist post-Flood Ice Age.

The first four plaques discuss the causes of the ice age, the Bible's discussion of the Ice Age, high volcanism during and after the Ice Age, and the fact that there was only ONE Ice Age (not multiple ones), respectively.

## Human and Animal Migration (Plaque 5)

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"During the 'Ice Age,' so much water was frozen that sea level was lowered several hundred feet. Ice shelves covered much of the oceans poleward of 45 degrees. This made all the continents accessible, thus

allowing migration to occur.... Human migration was enforced by the confusion of languages at Babel. The `Table of Nations' in Genesis 10 informs us of the basic migration patterns."

At this point, a mother with her small child walked into the room, and as I copied down the above quotation, I listened to her describe to her daughter how the oceans dried up, allowing kangaroos to get to Australia, and how ice covered the oceans, allowing all the animals to get to America.

#### Environmental Effects (Plaque 6)

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"The continual snowfall and frequent volcanism, each on a scale far beyond anything in recent history, would leave records difficult to understand today.

Since the seasons would not be as regular and predictable as today:

Would trees only add one tree ring per year? [picture of cross-section of tree trunk showing rings]

Would thick build-ups of ice show a pattern similar to but of different origin than the summer/winter patterns of today? [picture of ice cores]

Would the lack of equality in the production and decay rates of Carbon-14 cause problems in dating?

All are areas of current research at ICR, and are of primary importance in deciphering the past."

#### Effect on Human Life (Plaque 7)

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"Weaker, smaller, less technologically capable groups would probably reside in caves, use stone tools, and live a `hunter/gatherer' type of lifestyle."

#### EXHIBIT #8: POST ICE-AGE CIVILIZATION

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This room had a very "Egyptian" look to it. In the center is a two-foot model of the Tower of Babel encased in glass. Track lighting in the ceiling illuminated the many wall plaques with various colors of light. There were several skulls of numerous evolutionary ancestors of humans, although they are dismissed as apes or modern humans in the museum. I don't know if they are real or just mock-ups. For each of the species, the plaques contain the "Evolutionist Interpretation" and the "Creationist Interpretation." Here are some of the Creationist interpretations:

#### Homo Erectus

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Probably true humans. Some may be extinct apes. Along with Neanderthal and archaic Homo sapiens, they probably represent post-Flood ethnic and/or language groups, demonstrating man's diversity.

## Australopithecines

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"An extinct ape, not ancestral to humans."

## Neanderthals

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Short, thick, muscular individuals not unlike cold-adapted modern man such as Eskimos (consistent with the Ice Age theory following the Flood and the Tower of Babel).

"Many Neanderthal features are similar to those in elderly humans today. Since humans lived to great ages in the initial generations after the Flood and Babel, perhaps the features are primarily due to advanced age.... They were true human beings, descendants of Adam and Noah."

## Archaic Homo Sapiens

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True humans of post-Flood era.

## Cave Man

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Weaker, degenerate descendants of those migrating away from Babel.

## Laetoli Footprints

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A mock-up of the Laetoli footprints were displayed as an evolutionary effort to make the data fit evolutionists' "preconceived theory."

## The Rosetta Stone

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A mock-up of the Rosetta Stone was also in the room. The plaque next to it read: "Rosetta stone from near Rashid (Rosetta), Delta Egypt; 196 B.C.... This inscribed stone slab was discovered in 1799 by...." Nowhere did the plaque indicate that this wasn't the ACTUAL stone. In fact, from the language it seemed that I was standing before the real thing. The museum had become quite busy, and as I wrote the above quotation, some people walked by and marveled that the ICR museum had this artifact. I was amused, but broke their hearts when I tapped on the hollow cardboard "stone" and indicated that it was just a photograph.

## Origin of Races

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"The separate language groups no longer could intermarry freely with the rest of mankind. As in-breeding and lack of access to the larger pool of genes occurred, ethnic characteristics developed. Furthermore, each local environment tended to favor selection of certain traits, and eliminate the others. Ethnic characteristics, such as skin color, arose from loss of genetic variability, not from origin of new genes through mutation as suggested by evolution.

"THE CONCEPT OF RACE IS AN EVOLUTIONARY IDEA. Scripture teaches that

'God has made of one blood all nations,' Acts 17:26. All humans possess the same color, just different amounts of it. We are all descended from Adam and Noah."

## Dinosaurs and Dragons

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"Dinosaurs lived before the Flood, and most dinosaur fossils are remains of those buried in flood sediments.... Representatives of the land 'kinds' must have been present on the Ark, and lived for some time after the Flood."

There were many small ancient artifacts such as daggers, oil lamps, etc. in display cases. I don't know if they were legitimate. The museum seemed to praise archaeology. One exhibit quoted an archaeologist as follows:

## Accuracy of Biblical Records

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"No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made that confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible' (Nelson Glueck, Dean of Palestinian Archaeologists [not a Christian] in his book 'Rivers in the Desert')."

## EXHIBIT #9: ORIGIN OF RELIGION

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The origins of various religions in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, Greece, etc. were described with a creationist slant, including:

## Evolutionary Pantheism

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"Evolutionism -- that is, the denial of a transcendent personal God as Creator of all things -- can be traced back to ancient Sumeria, which probably means to Nimrod.... This system of pantheism ("all-god") became equivalent to polytheism ("many gods"), involving astrology, spiritism, and idolatry. Atheistic evolution soon followed, and dominates much of American academia today...."

## EXHIBIT #10: FAMOUS CREATIONISTS AND EVOLUTIONISTS

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This final exhibit was a hallway consisting of many pictures of famous people who, at some point in their lives, supposedly made comments about evolution and/or Christianity. For example, some of the famous scientists and philosophers in the creationist hall of fame are:

Boyle, Newton, Pascal, Descartes, Linnaeus, Faraday, Babbage, Morse, Rawlinson, Pasteur, Kelvin, Maxwell, and (not a person but) the Declaration of Independence.

Evolutionists in the hall of shame included: Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Freud, and these (with museum quotes):

William Sumner: "His Darwinist views contradicted many basic American ideals."

John Rockefeller: "A ruthless developer of one of America's largest oil empires, Rockefeller was a staunch theistic evolutionist."

Andrew Carnegie: "Carnegie is honored today for philanthropies and devotion to culture, but he was cruel and heartless in his own day to competitors and laborers alike. Regarding evolution, he said: 'I remember that light came in as a flood and all was clear. Not only had I got rid of theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution.'"

Friedrich Nietzsche: "He was strongly influenced by Darwin's theory, especially its racist implications."

Karl Marx: "...he wanted to dedicate his book 'Das Kapital' to Charles Darwin, who had given him what he thought was the scientific foundation for Communism."

At this point, one of the museum patrons commented on the picture of Karl Marx, "Evolutionism is practically synonymous with Communism." To which his wife responded, "This museum is a good place to send school children to get good information."

Alfred Wallace: "According to his own testimony, he was given the whole theory of natural selection in two hours of a malarial 'fit' in the jungle -- the same theory, in detail, that Darwin had been trying to develop for 20 years in the world's chief center of scientific learning."

There were also the names of about ten other scientists from whom Darwin purportedly "stole" his theory of evolution.

Near the end of the hall of pictures were two plaques titled:

Nazism and Communism -- Fruits of Evolution

and

Racism -- The Fruit of Evolution

The hall included a picture of an astronaut (I forget his name) who proclaims his faith in God and Creation. [This would very likely be James Irwin, a prominent "Archeologist" -- Ed.] One woman walking by commented, "He's a creationist, and he's a rocket scientist. He's a good guy. Why do they put him in with the bad guys?" [referring to the pictures of Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Marx, etc.] Another guy remarked, "Most of the astronauts that I've heard of believe in God when they come back down." To which his friend replied, "It would be hard not to." Suddenly, another person said, "Ooooh, that evolutionist looks like Woody Allen!"

The final exhibit in the creationism vs. evolution hallway is pictures of two trees (a Creationist Tree and an Evolutionary Tree). The Creationist tree has "long roots" and "good fruits." The Evolutionary

tree has "short roots" and "evil fruits."

### Branches of the Creationist Tree

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Genuine Christianity:	Correct Practice:
True Christology	True Science
True Evangelism	True History
True Missions	True Government
True Fellowship	True Americanism
True Gospel	True Family Life
True Faith	True Education
True Morality	
True Hope	

### Branches of the Evolutionary Tree

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Harmful Philosophies:	Evil Practices:
Communism	Abortion
Nazism	Promiscuity
Imperialism	Pornography
Monopolism	Genocide
Humanism	Euthanasia
Atheism	Infanticide
Amoralism	Chauvinism
Scientism	Bestiality
Racism	Homosexuality
Pantheism	Drug Culture
Behaviorism	Child Abuse
Materialism	Slavery

The museum exhibits end with these words:

"To those who are not yet believing Christians, or whose faith has been weakened by attacks of skeptics, ICR personnel would be happy to assist you in settling these vital and eternal issues. Just ask...."

### THE SKEPTIC'S BOARD BBS

Public computer access to worldwide and continent-wide discussion conferences, and worldwide e-mail through the Internet. No charge.

415-572-0359 (San Mateo), parameters 8N1.

Speeds: 2400 through 14400 bps.

### CIRCLE HOAX CONTEST

I spend a lot of my spare time on the international computer

conference systems in communication with UFO enthusiasts, including the variant known as "cereologists" -- specialists in "crop circles". Ever since these odd designs crushed or carved into grain fields started appearing a few years ago, wild theories have been surfacing to account for them. (See Andrews and Delgado's book "Circular Evidence".) However, I repeatedly chided the UFO buffs for what seemed inadequate measures to distinguish "real circles" from hoaxes. It seemed to me that before summarily ruling hoaxing out of the question, researchers ought to test different ways to fake such circles, to improve their chances of detecting hoaxes, so to speak, in the field.

I did not get much feedback on this suggestion, but no one argued, and my point was dramatically underlined when two aging Englishmen, Bower and Chorley, held a press conference demonstrating exactly how THEY had personally constructed, using simple methods, many of the "best case" circles -- to the extreme discomfiture of the cereologists. Further, activists in Georgia Skeptics constructed "real" (by Andrews and Delgado's criteria) circles just outside Atlanta.

Apparently, the suggestion (to be sure, one that was hardly made just by me) got through: To their great credit, "The Cereologist" magazine, "the journal for crop circle studies", and "morphogenetic field" theorist Rupert Sheldrake held a "crop circle hoax contest" this past July, in the dead of night outside the village of West Wycombe, England.

First prize, \$5200 (from the Koestler Foundation and "Omni" magazine) for the circle that is closest to "real" crop circles, went to a team of design engineers from Westland, a helicopter company in Somerset. The judges were reportedly highly impressed with many of the entrants, although one was quoted as saying he could still tell the difference.

The Wessex Skeptics were reported to have declined to enter the proceedings. Too bad: It sounded like fun.

AND FOR YOUR \_NEXT\_ VACATION . . .

BAS Advisor and CSICOP Fellow Andrew Fraknoi has a new piece of real estate to his name. Well, figuratively, anyhow. The International Astronomical Union recently announced that an asteroid has been named for him, honouring his role as Executive Director of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific in San Francisco.

According to a press release from the ASOP, "Asteroid Fraknoi is a small, rocky object, circling the Sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. It takes about three and a half years to go around once, and never comes closer to the Sun than about twice the Earth's distance. Astronomer Edward Bowell (of the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff), who discovered it, estimates that the asteroid is about seven miles in diameter, which means its surface has `about 60 square miles of real estate.' (This also means the object is much too faint to be seen through any but the largest telescopes.)"

Fraknoi the MAN is probably most familiar to readers as host of a weekly science programme on KGO radio, and a frequent guest on the "Jim Eason Show". However, his accomplishments only START there: He's also been editor of ASOP's popular magazine, "Mercury", instructor at SFSU, co-author of a nationally-syndicated astronomy column, Director of the SETI Institute, popular public lecturer on astronomy, frequent television and radio guest in diverse places, a Bay Area Skeptics board member, and authored or edited eight books on astronomy and astronomy education. This fall, obviously having time on his hands, he'll be teaching intro. astronomy at Foothill College.

Maybe Andy will start accepting reservations for his new (if somewhat remote) domain.

## TWO MORE "POLICE PSYCHICS" HIT THE NEWS-STANDS

According to a story in the Aug. 17 "Oakland Tribune", two self-described psychics have been aiding nearly two dozen Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies search for the body of a missing woman, in rugged canyon country thirty miles northwest of L.A.

Donielle Patton and Cathy West reportedly scrutinised photos and personal belongings of 42-year-old Ann Rasz, who disappeared four days after separating from an 19-year marriage, in April 1991. According to the article, her estranged husband, John Rasz, insists she's away on a trip, but the woman's relatives think otherwise.

The "Tribune" article, bylined Santa Clarita, does not state the source of the story, but claims that the two psychics "independently" suggested a search of the canyon area, and both believe she will be found soon "somewhere in the county", a victim of violence.

"Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing."

-- T.H. Huxley

## EDITORIAL: WHAT WE ARE, WHAT WE ARE NOT

"BASIS" has had a wild ride the last year or so: One editor apparently thought skepticism concerned a particular brand of liberal politics, while another thought it was about ethical issues and social policy. Now, it's my own turn. I find myself made editor with this issue already considerably overdue. (Accordingly, please forgive its tardiness.)

So, it seems a good occasion to review what Bay Area Skeptics and

"BASIS" are all about. We were founded ten years ago, by a committee of six skeptical activists, as a local chapter of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, splitting off two years later as a separate, independent group. Accordingly, our aims essentially parallel those of CSICOP, to evaluate without prejudgement testable claims of fact in the fringe-science and fringe-medicine areas, disseminate reliable information on those claims, publish this newsletter, etc. CSICOP's very similar aims can be found on the back cover of any issue of "Skeptical Inquirer".

What we are not about is summarily dismissing and deriding all paranormal claims. We are not about making ideological pronouncements on religion or on anything else. We are not about claiming superior powers of rationality. We are not about mainstream science, nor political or social issues. We are not about making irresponsible, vague rants against pseudo-science. Some people call those things skepticism. We most emphatically DO NOT, and you will have to seek those things from other organisations.

What we ARE about is exploring the fringes of science, assuming that there MAY be merit in some claims made there, and curious about which ones. We find that tools of critical inquiry, including scientific methods, are useful in evaluating those claims, and enjoy applying them. This effort can and should be CONSIDERABLE FUN. I've always alleged that if you can't find entertainment in the fringe-sciences, you're just not looking.

Towards that end, in future issues, I'll be aiming to survey some of the ways skeptics can (and should!) make the acquaintance of the "eternal fringe" as it's represented in the Bay Area. In the meantime, don't just stagnate, talking only to other professed skeptics: Get out and get to know the forces of strangeness in our area! It'll stretch your mind, broaden your attitudes, and bring you considerable enjoyment. Give it a try.

**AMAZE YOUR FRIENDS! EARN EXTRA INCOME!**  
by Toby Howard

[Ed. note: This piece was sent to us by Toby Howard of Manchester Skeptics. (He's also lecturer in Computer Science at Manchester University). Yet another reason you should have spent your vacation in London.]

A complete guided tour of the tricks of the psychic trade!

Spoon bending, psychic surgery, mind over matter, fortune-telling, mind-reading, and other amazing stuff, faultlessly performed and then thoroughly explained! Come and see Richard Mather, the country's leading authority on "psychic" deception, reveal the methods that can be used to deliver 100% guaranteed genuine (well, not quite) psychic miracles to order.

A thoroughly entertaining show, to which all are welcome. This is Richard Mather's first show in London, and his first ever to include a demonstration of "psychic" surgery (perfectly harmless when you know how). A complete guided tour of the tricks of the psychic trade!

Details: Saturday 5 September 1992, 7:30pm,  
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R

Tickets at the door: 4 pounds.

Journalists, researchers, and producers admitted free by prior arrangement.

For further information contact:

Ian Rowland (Tel 081 664 6378) or  
Mike Hutchinson (Tel 081 508 2989)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The following letter was addressed to the prior editor, Dr. Joel Fort, who resigned just prior to this issue. My title at the bottom no longer applies, since I took over from Joel as editor and prefer not to wear too many hats. -- RM]

Dear Editor:

Mr. Henry Scambini's letter, which occupied an entire page of the 8/92 issue, was so far out of our field that I was very surprised to see it printed at all. Given that it appeared, I was doubly surprised -- and disappointed -- not to see any editorial reply.

Scambini attacked the "Proper Criticism" article by Ray Hyman, one of the founding directors of CSICOP and among the most moderate, responsible skeptical spokesmen to be found anywhere, on grounds that fair, proper criticism is excessively gentlemanly, and even cowardly (!).

I believe Scambini is likely to be disappointed by Bay Area Skeptics. Having duly considered his views, I'd like to SPEED UP the process, and help see him on his way:

In short, Henry, we don't act the way you urge in part because we don't want to be dismissed as a bunch of belligerent cranks, and in part because we AREN'T a bunch of belligerent cranks. The principles espoused in Hyman's article are in fact FUNDAMENTAL to the skeptics' movement, and to this journal. They are fair, they are just, and they are the way to be taken seriously.

You further missed the boat, Henry, in the seven column-inches "BASIS" wasted on your rant against religion, since (to reiterate what we've always made very clear) we are NOT an anti-religious organisation,

claims of faith (and other purely ideological matters) being just not our concern. ALL that unites us is an interest in fair-minded analysis of fringe-science claims. "BASIS" is on display in seminars, and our readership, whose diversity makes us quite proud, includes parapsychologists and nuns. Choke on that for a bit, Henry: NUNS.

I value Scambini's letter as a case study in how NOT to write fair commentary, and in general how not to be a skeptic. However, as a loyal reader and Board member, I wonder if we couldn't have done without this rather uncouth and distasteful object lesson, which might be misread as somehow representative of our group.

Rick Moen  
Vice-Chair, Bay Area Skeptics

Dear Editor:

Your article on drug addiction and the "war on drugs" as social issues was interesting as a study in moral suasion and political advocacy, but I was rather startled to see it appear in a skeptics journal. I don't know about you, but I don't read a skeptics newsletter to find out about the editor's views on social issues (or for that matter the Dreyfuses' odd apologetics against artificial intelligence in the prior issue), and it would seem a fair guess that only part of the readership agrees or ever will agree with you. I read "BASIS" to find out what's new in maybe-science and not-science.

You concluded "Let us move beyond drugs." Let us, indeed. In fact, let's not even stop there, in a skeptics' newsletter.

George Warren

[Ed. note: Several subscribers wrote in on these points, and as one non-subscriber, as well.]

"The aim of science is to seek the simplest explanation of complex facts. We are apt to fall into the error of thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, 'Seek simplicity and distrust it!'"  
-- Alfred North Whitehead

CHALLENGE TO "LEMON" DECISION?  
by Eugenie C. Scott, Ph.D.

All the prominent court cases involving the creation/evolution controversy have been decided at least in part on a 1971 Supreme Court decision, "Lemon v Kurtzman". The "Lemon" test, as it is called, involves judging a law or activity on three points: 1) Does the law

have a secular PURPOSE? 2) Does the law have a secular INTENT? 3) Does the law require unacceptable ENTANGLEMENT between religion and the state?

The recent Supreme Court case, "Edwards v Aguillard", for example, was decided on the "purpose" prong of "Lemon": The purpose of the legislation requiring the teaching of creationism in Louisiana was to advance religion. "Lemon" has figured in twenty-one Supreme Court church/state separation case since 1971.

In March, the Supreme Court decided to hear a graduation prayer case from Providence, RI, "Lee v Weisman". The district court of appeals in that case ruled that such prayers violate the First Amendment's establishment of religion clause, based on "Lemon v Kurtzman". The Bush Justice Department wrote a brief to the Supreme Court encouraging it to hear the case, and to look carefully at the "Lemon" test as a foundation for First Amendment establishment cases. The administration's position is that such publicly sponsored prayers are constitutional, as long as a student is not "coerced".

The Court heard oral arguments on the case on November 6, 1991. As reported in the 11/7/91 "New York Times", p. A22, both Justice Kennedy and Justice O'Connor were skeptical of the government's position that prayers at a high school graduation would not be "coercion". They questioned whether attendance at graduation was truly optional for a student. Justices Scalia and Kennedy (among others) sought to distinguish between prayer in a classroom and prayer at a graduation convocation.

Political commentators, though aware of the danger in second-guessing the Supreme Court only on the basis of oral arguments, predicted that "Lemon" would not be scrapped, but would undergo serious modification.

Already, several justices have indicated a willingness to tamper with "Lemon". In his infamous dissent to the "Edwards v Aguillard" creationism case, Justice Scalia took pains to sharply criticize the purpose prong of "Lemon", stating that abandoning "Lemon's" purpose test, "a test that exacerbates the tension between the free exercise and establishment clauses, has no basis in the language or history of the amendment . . . would be a good place to start."

Chief Justice Rehnquist, in dissent in "Wallace v Jaffree", said that the purpose prong is "a constitutional theory [that] has no basis in the history of the amendment it seeks to interpret, is difficult to apply, and yields unprincipled results."

Justices O'Connor and Kennedy are soft on "Lemon", and, as usual, no one knows where Justice Souter stands.

Future legal decisions about creation and evolution, and other church/state separation issues, could be significantly affected by what the Supreme Court does in "Lee". NCSE will keep you informed.

[Ed. note: Dr. Scott, along with being an active director of Bay Area

Skeptics, is also Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education.]

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## NEO-CATASTROPHISM

Multiple comet impacts on the evolution of species explained!  
Velikovsky's "Worlds in Collision" debunked!

Astronomers and geologists have long been reluctant, on grounds of scientific conservatism, to suggest extremely dramatic and traumatic events as an explanation of planetary history. That reluctance was very likely INCREASED during the '50s, when author Immanuel Velikovsky's planetary ping-pong theory (and scientists' rejection of it) became a cause celebre of popular science. However, in recent years, scientists have been surprised to find that the evidence DOES well support theories of celestial impacts as crucial events in both planetary AND biological evolution.

David Morrison, Ph.D., Chief of the Space Science Division at NASA's Ames Research Center and co-author of the book "Cosmic Catastrophes", will describe these developments, and compare them to Velikovsky's account (which he will also explain and critique). He will describe the likelihood and consequences of future impacts with our planet, and describe proposed techniques to prevent them.

Dr. Morrison was formerly with Hawaii Skeptics, when he worked in the islands as Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of Hawaii. In 1987, he was named co-defendant (along with CSICOP, Hawaii Skeptics, and a number of other individuals) in a suit by a professional psychic who accused Hawaii Skeptics of defamation. Morrison will explain the history of the case, in which the claims were disproved and the case judged in favour of the skeptics.

It was a most interesting and sobering case. Skeptics and interested observers should come and hear about it from this always interesting speaker.

## CALENDAR

September meeting . . .

### NEO-CATASTROPHISM

by: David Morrison

Wednesday, 23 September, 7:30 pm

El Cerrito Library

The El Cerrito Public Library is at 6510 Stockton Ave. From Route 80, take the Central Ave. exit (the third exit north of University Ave.). Go east about three blocks and turn left on San Pablo Ave., continue three blocks and turn right on Stockton. The library is on the right in the third block.

Watch for coming events in the BAS CALENDAR, or call 510-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.

The above are selected articles from the September, 1992 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 17723 Buti Park Ct., Castro Valley, CA 94546-1413, or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-572-0359) or on the 510-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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