

The SKEPTIC

The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 1 Number 3

www.ntskeptics.org

Winter 1987/1988

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NTS Completes First Year

This has been an exciting year for NTS. We have successfully re-formed the old Dallas Society to Oppose Pseudoscience and built a new, growing organization to challenge Pseudo-scientific and Paranormal claims. Our membership, currently 75 persons, has enjoyed five interesting lectures and one field trip. We now have a permanent meeting place at UTA. We have been consulted by the local newspapers and one of us was given the opportunity to challenge an astrologer on a local radio talk show. Mark Hateer has prepared a bibliography of skeptical and rationalist literature which will be a great resource for us. We have debunked the latest claims of the Paluxy creationists. We have done all of this without any well-organized effort to place our name before the local news media, the educators and the thinking citizens we want to reach. Now is the time to get serious.

In January we will have our annual business meeting. This is an excellent time to discuss our goals and the organizational means to attain them. What do we want to do with NTS? Our charter provides that we will (1) provide information to the news media and the public about Pseudo-scientific claims, (2) encourage public education in critical thinking and the scientific method and (3) investigate paranormal phenomena and Pseudo-science claims. Not stated, but implicit in these goals, is the need for public relations work and recruiting to make our name known, enlarge our membership and increase our cash flow. Where should the emphasis be? In any category, we need energetic and committed volunteers. A member familiar with the news media and public relations could help us establish media contacts and provide our side of the story in the form the news organizations expect. If we are to carry out investigations properly, we may need persons knowledgeable about subjects as diverse as experimental design, photo-documentation

and examination of witnesses. Members willing to do public speaking or chair seminars could present our point of view to school classes and civic groups. Any of these projects will also need the help of members willing to volunteer their time for whatever task is at hand, whether special expertise is required or not.

Probably the best way to get all this moving, given our present organizational structure, is to form a committee for each general activity, such as public relations education, investigation, membership, and programs. To that end we hope to see some eager volunteers for committee chairs or other offices at the general meeting. Please make plans to attend the January meeting. We want all of the members to attend, but it is especially important for voting Fellows to attend so that we will have a quorum at the meeting and be spared a costly mail ballot.

-- John Thomas

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NTS Logo

Every organization has a logo! Even the North Texas Parapsychology Association has one. Reproduced above is a suggestion for same. What are your thoughts on this design? Do you have alternatives? Please let us know.

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Newsletter material wanted

We want The Skeptic to be both informative and fun to read. If you have a contribution, please send it in; brief articles, letters, book reviews, or cartoons are welcome. Or, call 264-0640 or 669-7219 if your submission is in electronic (our preferred) form. Uploads via Xmodem protocol at 300 or 1200 baud can be made. "The Skeptic" will expand or contract as necessary to accommodate the best submissions.

You may notice a change in our production. Tony Dousette is acting a Production Editor now, and he has volunteered the use of his desktop publishing system. As we all become more experienced at newsletter publication, we expect our quality to improve even more. If you have publishing experience anti want to help, please give us a call.

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NTS Sinks Teeth Into Creationists Claims

Apparently the -human tooth- creationist Carl Baugh found last June is not as rare as first thought. Ron Hastings, assisted by NTS members Rick Neeley and Jay Woods, found (on Halloween) a fossil fish tooth having all the characteristics of the tooth Baugh attributes to "Glen Rose Man". Even wider than Baugh's, this new find, called IH2, is broken, as is Baugh's, in a fashion typical of lost teeth from fish feeding on coral, mollusks and such, leaving only the crown. Both the tooth of Glen Rose Man and IH2 correlate with the incisor form prehensile teeth of an extinct line of fish called pycodonts. which flourished throughout the Mesozoic.

The Halloween expedition was one of several taken the last couple of months in an attempt to sample fossil fish teeth along the Paluxy River near Glen Rose, Texas. Ron Hastings and his colleagues have collected about 50 fossil teeth, tooth fragments and fossilized fish scales, most only a few millimeters in size. IH2 was one of those fortunate finds that only occasionally comes to fossil hunters.

Baugh's tooth problems were compounded when creationist David Menton of St. Louis scanned the tooth of "Glen Rose Man" with an electron microscope and declared that there was "no way" the tooth could be human, based upon the micrograph patterns revealed. Human teeth, fossil or otherwise, have characteristic dental prisms in their microstructure, which Baugh's specimen clearly lacked.

IH2 has been photographed for wide dissemination and has been sent to a research lab at UT, Austin for a comparative series of micrographs with other fossil fish teeth, modern fish teeth, a modern mammal tooth, and a modern human tooth. Correlations of micrograph patterns among the fish and among the mammals and not across the fish-mammal distinction should clinch the case.

Word has it that a new creation study group has been formed in Dallas with pro-Baugh leanings. Baugh has written a new book containing his tooth claims, and a "Creation Evangelism Conference" is to be held in Glen Rose right after Christmas. The new tooth evidence and NTS's role in it should be useful in dealing with all these pseudoscientific I manifestations.

Among the lessons NTS is helping to teach creationist human tooth enthusiasts is that "a fish tooth by any other name scans the same." Recent finds of fossil dentition along the Paluxy near Glen Rose are clearly not human, despite the best of creationists' apologetics.

Ron Hastings

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Permanent Meeting Place

NTS now has a permanent meeting place at the University of Texas at Arlington. We believe that this location is a good compromise for our members throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. We have meetings scheduled through Way of 1988 at UTA, after which we plan to look back and see how the location is working out. In any event, our thanks go to Dr. Frank Harrold, of UTA, who has helped obtain this meeting space.

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Future Meeting Schedule:

January 17: Annual Business Meeting. Your attendance is important! Come and help us make 1988 a great year for NTS!

February 21: Former pro magician Melville Zemek shows how stage magic and mentalism use deception, misdirection and common human behavior to achieve their startling effects.

March 28: Dr. Arthur Babick will speak on "Researching with Psychics." Dr. Babick is assisting the North Texas Parapsychology Association with research on psychic ability. Hear a man with feet in both camps.

April 17: To be announced.

May 22: To be announced.

All meetings will be in University Hall, UTA (corner of Cooper and Campus Drive).

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Speakers and Topics Wanted

Please send us your suggestions for speakers and topics, There is plenty of raw material out there: Astrology, creationism, psychic detectives, faith healers, UFO's... the list goes on. We especially want knowledgeable speakers from outside our organization. We have written to CSICOP and James Randi informing them that we can host a special meeting or public lecture on short notice whenever prominent skeptics like Randi or Paul Kurtz may be in town.

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Crystal Power

by **Michael G. Smith**
LLEWELLYN Publications, 1987

In contrast to *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, the book *Crystal Power* by Michael G. Smith has literally nothing to hold the readers attention, not even the power of confusion. Try as I might not to be prematurely critical, it was obvious on the first page that the book was total, incredible trash. The claims made in this book are so preposterous and the supporting evidence so nonexistent, I find it difficult to believe that even the most ardent mystic would pay any attention to it.

As an example, I will quote the first two sentences of the first chapter of the book. "The Atlantean Power Rods were brought to the planet Earth long before the time of Atlantis. Although the people who used them may have come here over 400 million years ago, we'll have to look at a time nearly 80,000 years in the past." This ancient civilization, the author contends, misused the incredible power of the crystals and destroyed itself so totally that only legends remain of this lost age. Some examples of the power crystals did remain, however, as evidenced by the rods and staffs carried by Moses and Aaron. What's more, these crystal devices have been rediscovered today? In fact, almost anyone can construct these earth shattering devices out of simple quartz crystals for as little as \$10.00!! (I think everyone has the picture by now.)

Of course, not everyone can use the crystal tools. Only those with the proper mental attitude and belief can take the crystals out of their "passive" mode and work with their incredible power. Once the proper attitude is achieved, however, miracles can be done. To quote the author again, "The biblical description of Jesus transforming water into wine was a perfectly natural process. After all, nature does this all the time. The rain falls on the seeds which grow into grapevines. The grapes are picked and the fermentation process, a normal decay of matter, begins. The only difference is that the process is speeded up by the direct conversion of particles of water into wine on a *sub-atomic* level." (Italics are mine) What we are dealing with here is ignorance of phenomenal proportions.

I could go on but there is no real need, The level of nonsense in this book needs a Richter scale to be measured. I certainly can't recommend such a disaster, unless you have a macabre sense of humor, *Crystal Power* is easily the most forgettable book that I have ever read.

Mark Mateer

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The Adventures of a Parapsychologist

by Susan Blackmore
Prometheus Books, 1986

This book is the personal story of Susan Blackmore, student of psychology and physiology at Oxford, recipient of one of England's first degrees in Parapsychology and ardent researcher of ESP and other paranormal phenomena for more than ten years.

Blackmore began as a believer in the reality of "Psi" phenomena such as ESP, PK, Poltergeists and the Tarot. However, she also enjoyed some traits not always found among students of Parapsychology: a skeptical frame of mind, a good grounding in experiment design and a healthy store of intellectual honesty. Each time Blackmore believed that she was about to demonstrate the existence of psi, her carefully-designed experiments produced only chance results. If other researchers reported positive results, she was unable to replicate them. She found that a hundred years of psychical research had left parapsychology With no coherent theory of the paranormal and no reliable experimental results. Eventually, she was compelled to consider the obvious implication: psi does not exist.

Blackmore gives us lively portraits of the Parapsychological fraternity at work and play. We get personal sketches of J. B. Rhine, Charles Tart and others. Blackmore also shows us in personal terms, how much work and diligence is required to do real science—the exhaustive review of the literature, the meticulous design of experiments to avoid the effects of chance, bias or fraud, the practical problems of obtaining subjects or of getting questionnaires answered.

The author has given up the hypothesis of psi, but not her interest in the phenomena which Parapsychology claims to investigate, such as out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, apparitions, divination or mystical states. She argues for a new parapsychology, one which is defined not as the study of psi, itself defined as that which is "not normal," but simply as the study of the phenomena themselves. She sadly concludes that most Parapsychologist would not agree, since most of them are really interested only in the paranormal and are content to have parapsychology defined that way.

The book unfortunately lacks an index, but has an excellent bibliography covering Parapsychological research.

John Thomas

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Thoughts

"Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth- more than death. Thought is subversive, and revolutionary, destructive And terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority. careless to the well-trying wisdom of the Ages. Thought looks into the pit of hill and is not afraid.... Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, andthe chief glory of Man."
-Bertrand Russell, quoted in *The Great Thoughts*, compiled by George Seldes,

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Discover

NTS members might be interested in an article in the November, 1987 issue of *Discover* magazine. The article, entitled "Fleeing the Flock", by John Tierney, relates James Randi's exposure of faith-healer Peter Popoff. If you don't have time to read Randi's recent book *The Faith Healers* this article is a strong second choice. It provides an excellent discussion of the tactics used by Popoff and others of his type to fleece the gullible.

James Randi is also the author of *Flim-Flam!*, a devastating broadside at pseudoscience. This book can be found in the metaphysics section of BookStop, not too far from the secrets of Atlantis and the deeper thoughts of Shirley MacLaine...

-Tony Dousette

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Budget

NORTH TEXAS SKEPTICS REVENUE a EXPENSE STATEMENT For the period ending 11/38/87

Revenues :

Dues	\$1260.00
Contributions	\$691.50
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Total	\$1951.58

Expenses :

Newsletter	\$442.18
Postage	\$380.00
Pre-organization	\$377.00
Letterhead & supplies	\$165.54
Ad in M-Aura	\$50.00
Bank charges	\$20.45
P.O. Box	\$53.00

Total	\$1488.17
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Cash balance, 11/30/87	\$463.33
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John A. Thomas, Treasurer

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