



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 16 Number 9

[www.ntskeptics.org](http://www.ntskeptics.org)

September 2002

---

## In this month's issue:

- [Impact update](#)
- [What's new](#)
- [August program: photo fakery](#)
- [Skeptical Ink](#)

---

## Impact update

by John Blanton

I have to agree with the creationists sometimes. In "The Battle For The Cosmic Center" - *Impact* No. 350, D. Russell Humphreys writes:

Biblical teaching places man at the center of God's attention.<sup>1</sup>

The *Impact* series is published by the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), the major young Earth creationist (YEC) organization in the U.S. We have touched on previous issues of *Impact* and will likely continue to do so. *Impact* is a wonderful treasure of YEC lore. The best of creation science is published there.

Dr. Humphreys holds a Ph.D. in physics from Louisiana State University. For six years he worked in the High Voltage Laboratory of General Electric Company, designing and inventing equipment and researching high-voltage phenomena. He has received a U.S. patent and one of Industrial Research Magazine's IR-100 awards. Since 1979 he has worked for Sandia National Laboratories (New Mexico) in nuclear physics, geophysics, pulsed-power research, and theoretical atomic and nuclear physics. Since 1985 he has been working with Sandia's 'Particle Beam Fusion Project', and was co-inventor of special laser-triggered 'Rimfire' high-voltage switches. Besides gaining another U.S. patent, Dr Humphreys has been given two awards from Sandia, including an Award for Excellence for contributions to light ion-fusion target theory.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Humphreys is also an Associate Professor of Physics for the ICR. Dr. Humphreys, along with the others of the ICR, holds the belief that the Earth and the rest of the universe are less than 10,000 years old, in line with the story of creation in the book of Genesis. To further promote that idea, Dr. Humphreys has written *Starlight and Time*, a book that proposes a view of a universe only a few thousand years old despite evidence from stars millions of light years from the Earth. He has also written *Evidences for a Young World*, which attempts to demonstrate the impossibility of an ancient world.

As Dr. Humphreys says, the Bible *does* place the human race at the center of the universe. A brief review shows the

emphasis placed on our species to the exclusion of others. The Bible seems to make no mention of beings living on other planets in other star systems and galaxies. The implication is made several times that the whole place was created just for our own enjoyment. Dr. Humphreys is correct on this point!

The next step is to make this part of the Bible true. To help accomplish this Dr. Humphreys wants to place the Earth at the center of the universe.

He points out that from astronomy Hubble's Law requires that very distant objects (millions of light years away) are receding from the Earth, and the rate of recession is greater, the greater the distance. The average non-astronomer, he notes, will infer from this that the Earth is at the center of an expanding universe. The average astronomer disagrees with that view, he says. Dr. Humphreys overlooks the fact the average astronomer has a Ph.D. in physics just as he does and has studied all the same courses. We can only wonder where Dr. Humphreys was while his fellow physicists were learning the principles of general relativity and the related mathematics. For example:

The dynamics of the expanding universe are described by Einstein's general relativity theory. One might well ask what the universe is expanding into, or where the space opening up between the particles came from. ... [G]eneral relativity theory gives us a mathematically consistent, and, as far as is known, experimentally and observationally successful description of the expanding universe without admitting such questions. With general relativity theory, we are assuming local physics is the same everywhere and at all times. As will be discussed here and in later sections, that has to be wrong at early enough epochs, because the standard world picture extrapolates back to a singular state in which conventional physics becomes undefined. Deciding how and when the physics departed from the standard expanding world model is one of the puzzles to be discussed. ...<sup>3</sup>

Dr Humphreys seeks to exploit the comparatively new discovery of "quantized redshifts," which he apparently has explained in a paper titled "Our Galaxy is the Center of the Universe, 'Quantized' Red Shifts Show."<sup>4</sup> Quantized redshifts, he asserts, not only indicate the universe has a center, but we are within 100,000 light-years of that center.

For the curious, a quick search of the Internet turned up a note on quantized redshifts by Bill Keel of the University of Alabama Astronomy Department:

#### Non-velocity redshifts in galaxies

There are certain peculiarities, claimed or accepted, that suggest either strange behavior of redshifts or that we don't know how to measure them as well as we think. These take the forms of an inescapable asymmetry in redshifts of binary galaxies, and claims that such redshift differences are quantized and completely disallow a dynamical interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

To explain further, if space is uniformly expanding, as modern cosmology holds, we should expect objects to be moving away from each other at a rate proportional to the distance between them—Hubble's Law. From any point in the universe we would expect to see the same thing: distant galaxies moving away from us at rates proportional to their distance from us. We would not expect to see these rates (and these distances) to be tied to a discrete set of values, as would be indicated by quantized redshifts.

Dr. Humphreys is not the only creationist attempting to gain some traction off this controversy. A number of sites have entries relating to the issue, of which I will mention a couple. Mark Stewart has a page providing a very coherent discussion of the matter, and notable YEC scientist Barry Setterfield also has published a critique.<sup>6,7</sup> You will remember Barry Setterfield as the Australian creationist who has famously decided the speed of light has been slowing down since the creation of the universe about 6000 years ago.

As for Russell Humphreys, more than providing his own interpretation of quantized redshifts, he also wants to explain why a center is crucial. He speaks of a centuries-long "intense struggle" over the issue as indicating its importance, "emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually." He re-emphasizes the Bible's stance on this centrality and speaks of the awe we have for this special gift to us. He quotes from Psalm 8:3,4 —

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Underscoring the high caliber of science standards maintained in the *Impact* series is a recent piece by William J. Gibbons. "In Search of the Congo Dinosaur" tells of the elusive *Mokele-mbembe*.<sup>8</sup> "*Mokele-mbembe* has been described as an animal with a long neck, a long tail, and rounded shape tracks with three claws. The closest known animal that has these characteristics is a sauropod dinosaur" according to a write-up by Scott T. Norman on the Internet.<sup>9</sup> The Likouala Swamp in the People's Republic of the Congo is larger than Florida and is little explored. People have been reporting *Mokele-mbembe* since the 1700s here. A living dinosaur, some claim.

The reason creationists are interested in living dinosaurs is their opinion that finding one will put the lie to evolution. Dinosaurs went extinct, and mammals (later to become us) survived. This we know from evolution. If dinosaurs did not go extinct Darwin was surely wrong, and people are a special creation. The logic is inescapable.

William J. Gibbons is famous for his searches for *Mokele-mbembe* and his adventures read like Edgar Rice Burroughs:

My second expedition was launched in November 1992 and doubled as an emergency delivery of medical supplies to the mission station in Impfondo where the missionaries maintained a free clinic. On this occasion we headed north on the unexplored Bai River and pushed our way northwest through dense swamps where we found two small lakes that were not even on the maps. Once again our guides were fearful of remaining in the area and we had to cut short our exploration of the swamps. Although many of the inhabitants of the Likouala Region know exactly where we can observe and film a specimen of *Mokele-mbembe*, they believe that to speak openly of the animals to white outsiders means death. It was nothing more than fear and superstition that was stopping us from making a major discovery.<sup>10</sup>

As with many before him, luck dealt him many a cruel blow. In February of this year he went to the Cameroon with other Christians, but they lost too much time because of lack of transportation. By the time they made it into the area of interest the dry season was upon them—not the best time for observing *Mokele-mbembes*. However, Gibbons promises to persevere, and he leaves us with this message of optimism:

I must ask the reader to forgive me for the lack of detail regarding the precise location of my field work as I strongly believe that we are a hairsbreadth away from locating and filming a specimen of *Mokele-mbembe*. If the Lord is willing, I will return to Cameroon in October this year and once again team up with Pierre Sima. Perhaps on this, my fifth expedition, I will now at last film a specimen of *Mokele-mbembe*, the ultimate living fossil!<sup>11</sup>

Lest you conclude William J. Gibbons is just another flake, be aware similar views are well received in the creationist world. We have previously reported on creationists' fascination with living dinosaurs.

Back in February 1997 at the monthly meeting of MIOS, the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science, David Basset told us about a recent expedition to the Congo region in search of the dinosaurs living there.<sup>12</sup> As we related at the time, bad luck plagued this expedition as it has all the others. Sadly, their Polaroid photos of the dinosaurs were ruined by the climate, so we did not get to see any pictures. David *did* play for us a tape recording of the beasts' ferocious roar, echoing through the dense forest. Some people may call us skeptical, but evidence like this gets our attention.

Gibbons' work is crucial to the advancement of the creationist cause. We must admire his determination in the face of much adversity. William, we all wish you good fortune. You are surely doing God's work.

We will continue to follow new developments in the world of creation science as they unfold in the pages of the *Impact* series. This is surely the standard by which all other creationist works must be measured. For creation science, it just doesn't get any better than *Impact*.

## References

1. D. Russell Humphreys, "The Battle For The Cosmic Center." *Impact* No. 350 August 2002 at <http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-350.htm>.
2. Excerpted with editing and some deletions from [http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/bios/r\\_humphreys.asp](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/bios/r_humphreys.asp).
3. P.J.E. Peebles, *Principles of Physical Cosmology*, p 6. Princeton University Press, 1993.
4. Russell Humphreys cites *TJ* (vol. 16, no. 2, 2002), but we are unable to locate this journal. I think this is the second time

this has happened.

5. Bill Keel, "The 'Redshift Controversy.'" <http://www.tass-survey.org/richmond/answers/controversy.html>.

6. Mark Stewart "On the Quantization of the Red-Shifted Light from Distant Galaxies."

<http://www.ldolphin.org/tiftshift.html>.

7. Barry Setterfield, "The Vacuum, Light Speed, and the Redshift." <http://www.ldolphin.org/setterfield/redshift.html>

8. *Impact* No. 349, July 2002 at <http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-349.htm>.

9. *Cryptozoological Realms* at <http://www.mokelembembe.com/>

10. *Impact* No. 349.

11. *Ibid*.

12. John Blanton, "Living Dinosaurs at MIOS." *The Skeptic*, Vol. 11, No. 2.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/1997/1997february/february1997.htm#mios>

[[Back to top](#)]

---

## What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

### Book review: "[The Hunt for Zero Point](#)," by Nick Cook

If this book is about controlling gravity, what's with the "zero point"? The confusion is natural; both lie within the province of fringe scientists who haven't a clue of where the real world stops and the fantasy world of Atlantis and UFO's begins.

Cook is not a scientist of any sort; in his world, these guys are the insiders. Don't look for them in the pages of *Phys Rev*; they're not a bunch of pointy-headed academics. They are part of the black world of really important top secret stuff like — well, electrogravitics. So who exactly fed Nick Cook this enormous pile of horse manure? If you're a regular reader of WN, you've already met them all.

### Cook book: "fresh air" offers a recipe for stale baloney.

Two weeks ago, WN dumped as much cold water as one page can hold on the anti-gravity nonsense stirred up by Nick Cook's goofy book, "The Hunt for Zero Point." We braced for sensational stories in the *National Enquirer* and on Art Bell, but where does Cook turn up? Gasp, on NPR's Fresh Air. "I am not a scientist," Nick Cook admits in a brilliant understatement, "but I enlisted some help." So who did he enlist? "There are scientists working right on the cutting edge...Dr.Hal Puthoff is pioneering this whole zero point energy field..." Well, there's a name we know. One of the first scientists to vouch for spoon-bender Uri Geller, Puthoff headed the CIA's remote viewing program, and is said to have sent his own mind to explore the surface of the planet Mercury (WN 11 Mar 94). Guest host Barbara Bogaev, who also is not a scientist, asks how anti-gravity machines work? They all spin, Nick Cook explains. "Some theories say if you spin this zero point energy field that exists all around us, some weird and magical things start popping out, one of which is an anti-gravitational effect." There you have it — an authoritative explanation on NPR.

### Anti-gravity: A gravity shield would be very nice, but...

Never has an idea with no prospect for success so captivated corporate research managers who either never studied or never understood the most basic laws of physics. Both Boeing in the US and BAE Systems, the British aerospace giant, are trying to make the Podkletnov gravity shield work. BAE has already been at it for two years (WN 31 Mar 00), with no success. When NASA couldn't make the Podkletnov shield work, they invested another million dollars (WN 22 Jan 99). When it still didn't work, they decided the tests were "inconclusive" and sank another mil into it (WN 12 Oct 01). I have identified seven warning signs of bad science <http://www.bobpark.com>. The Podkletnov gravity shield fits all seven. So why would Boeing choose to spend millions to test a ridiculous claim by an obscure Russian physicist that has failed every test and is a physical impossibility to begin with? OK, so the Pentagon is paying for it. But there's also this goofy book by Nick Cook, who writes for *Jane's Defense Weekly*.

### Fringe: Where everything is secret, and nothing is impossible.

When Cook set out on his search for "the biggest secret since the atom bomb," he went straight to the Integrity Research

Institute, in Washington, DC, where you can buy books and videos with titles like "Holistic Physics and Consciousness" (WN 5 Mar 99). IRI is really Tom Valone, a former patent examiner who lost his job in the fallout from the Conference on Free Energy (WN 21 May 99). He had recruited Paul LaViolette, who claims the B-2 uses anti-gravity, reverse engineered from a crashed flying saucer. He was also fired (WN 18 Aug 00). They sent Cook to the Institute for Advanced Study. Not the one in Princeton; the one in Austin, TX. It consists of Harold Puthoff, who wants to extract energy from the zero point of the vacuum. He used to run the CIA's "remote viewing" program, which was inspired by "Mind Reach," a book he wrote with Russell Targ (WN 11 Mar 94). Finally, Cook sought advice from Charles Platt, founder of CryoCare, a company that keeps human heads bobbing in liquid nitrogen until scientists can figure out how to restart them (WN 21 Jul 00).

### **Herbal highs: "natural" is not a synonym for safe.**

The 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act, passed in response to a massive lobbying campaign by the supplement industry, turned the clock back a hundred years to the days of the traveling snake-oil salesmen. It exempted "natural" dietary supplements from proof of safety, efficacy, or purity. The only requirement is that they not be promoted as preventing or treating disease (WN 7 Jan 00). Not to worry, backers such as Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) insisted. If any problems show up, the FDA can take a supplement off the market. How does the FDA do this? They must go to court to demonstrate that the substance is harmful. "When the bodies start piling up," as one FDA official put it. Well, in the case of ephedra, the pile of bodies is higher than anyone knew. The leading supplier of ephedra, Metabolife International, was required to report all consumer complaints of bad reactions to the FDA. But it now turns out that the company had more than 1300 undisclosed complaints involving ephedra, about 80 of which involved death or serious injury. Ephedra is a herbal stimulant, sold on the internet as herbal "Ecstasy," the street drug it chemically resembles. The FDA has fought unsuccessfully to ban ephedra for years. The Department of Justice has now undertaken a criminal investigation of Metabolife, but the real solution is to repeal the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act.

### **Herbal lows: \$multibillion industry threatened by testing.**

Sales of herbal medications have soared since passage of the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act, which allows natural supplements to be marketed without proof of safety, efficacy or purity. Mindful of the popularity of alternative health claims, Congress showers money on NIH's Center of Complementary and Alternative Medicine. But a remarkable thing has happened. NIH has begun testing many of the popular herbal medications. The most important discovery in the history of medicine was the randomized double-blind test. It allows us to find out what works and what doesn't. So far, herbals are in the "doesn't" category: St. John's Wort doesn't relieve depression, but it does interfere with some cancer drugs; echinacea doesn't ward off colds and flu; ephedra causes frequent injuries and even death; and this week we learn that ginkgo biloba doesn't enhance memory in people over 60. There's another one, but I can't remember it.

### **Which Almighty? Pledge of allegiance ruled unconstitutional.**

While we're on the subject of First Amendment guarantees, the government argued that "under God," added to the pledge by Congress in 1954, had minimal religious content. But President Eisenhower, who signed the legislation, wrote "it will daily proclaim the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty." That led a federal appeals court to rule that the pledge violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

*Bob Park can be reached via email at [opa@aps.org](mailto:opa@aps.org)*

[\[Back to top\]](#)

---

## **August program: photo fakery**

**by John Blanton**

Mike Selby gave us a short lesson on "seeing is not believing" at the August meeting. After recapitulating some classic cases of photo fakery from the past he demonstrated what lies in the future. Using some fairly standard computer hardware and software he demonstrated the ease with which modern fakers can cast their hoaxes.

In earlier days photographic technology seemed to provide a reliable witness, either to underwrite dubious but true accounts of events or else to refute false or mislaid memories. An observer might recount the bandit's having a beard, but if a

photograph of the scene shows him clean shaven a jury would more likely believe the photo. A husband claims he really was at the trade convention, and he shows his wife a photo to prove it.

It did not take long for human ingenuity to finesse photography's objectivity. As early as the American Civil War a famous photo of dead soldiers after a battle showed the same body being used in multiple death scenes. Over fifty years later the notorious case of the Cottingley fairies illustrated how easily our reliance on photographic objectivity sometimes overrules our better judgement.



**One of the famous photos from the Cottingley Fairy collection. It apparently shows Frances Griffiths with some dancing fairies.**

James Randi has written about this case in one of his timeless books.

In 1917 two innocent-seeming English schoolgirls, 16-year-old Elsie Wright and her 10-year-old cousin Frances Griffiths, launched a deception that somehow managed to fool many people over the following years, including the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. While playing in Cottingley Glen, just behind the Wright home, the girls took what they claimed were close-up photographs of winged fairies dancing amid the foliage. The girls then took each other's picture with the wee creatures, and photo experts who were consulted said that the images were not double exposures nor had the negatives been altered. The simple fact is that the girls had just posed with very obvious cutouts of fairy drawings to make the "authentic" pictures. A complete account appears in my book, *Flim-Flam!*<sup>1</sup>

The idea that Sir Arthur (whose *Sherlock Holmes* plots always featured Holmes' use of rigorous logic and objectivity) was taken in by so transparent a scheme probably illustrates a combination of the prevailing faith in photographic reliability and Doyle's well-known weakness for the supernatural.

Meanwhile at the NTS meeting, Mike demonstrated live and on stage, the art of photo fakery with a computer. As we watched he clipped some wings from the image of a dragonfly and attached them to our angelic Laura Ainsworth, making her an instant fairy. Wisely, Mike did not attempt to make a fairy of any of the tough-guy skeptics in the audience.



**Laura Ainsworth as a fairy**

Mike also showed off some of our modern day's more famous computer photo fakes. The most notable example was the semi-hoax based on the tragic events of last September. Somewhere on the vast Internet a computer artist got a brilliant idea and pasted a photo of himself and some other pictures together and produced the "tourist guy." He mailed it to a friend, who mailed it to a friend, who... Need I go on. It's the Internet.



**The “tourist guy” used a computer to make this picture of his own doom.**

To show how easily something like this can be accomplished, Mike made me an instant "tourist guy" while the audience gasped in horrified disbelief. Relax, readers. I survived to hoax again.



**Here I am, about to meet my maker. Ironically, the t-shirt says “Seek and you will find.”**

Then there are the hoaxes that really get out of hand. Allow me to editorialize a bit here. After the September terrorists completed their dirty business last year, I logged onto the Internet and checked the current satellite weather photo for Afghanistan. Sure enough. There was not a cloud in the sky. "The idiots," I thought to myself. "Is anybody that stupid? There's no place for them to hide."

Turns out, they are that stupid. But the story goes back a bit.

For some time the Internet has seen a spurious campaign to cast Bert, of Muppets Bert and Ernie fame, as an evil villain. The "evil Bert" fad has grown over the years and recently some wise guy with a computer showed just how evil by hoaxing a photo of evil Bert in the company of the evil Osama. That picture quickly swept the Internet world, I am sure much to the dismay of the Children's Television Workshop people.

And who should finally pick up on the Bert and Osama duet? Why the same people who would attack the U.S. and then hang around on the same planet. An Osama fan club rally featured posters of Osama in various poses, including the one with the evil Bert. One would like to laugh if it weren't so sick. Sometimes stupidity is its own reward.



**Osama fans celebrate stupidity for all the world to see, while evil Bert looks on in the background.**

#### References

1. James Randi, "The Case of the Cottingley Fairies" at <http://www.randi.org/library/cottingley/>.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

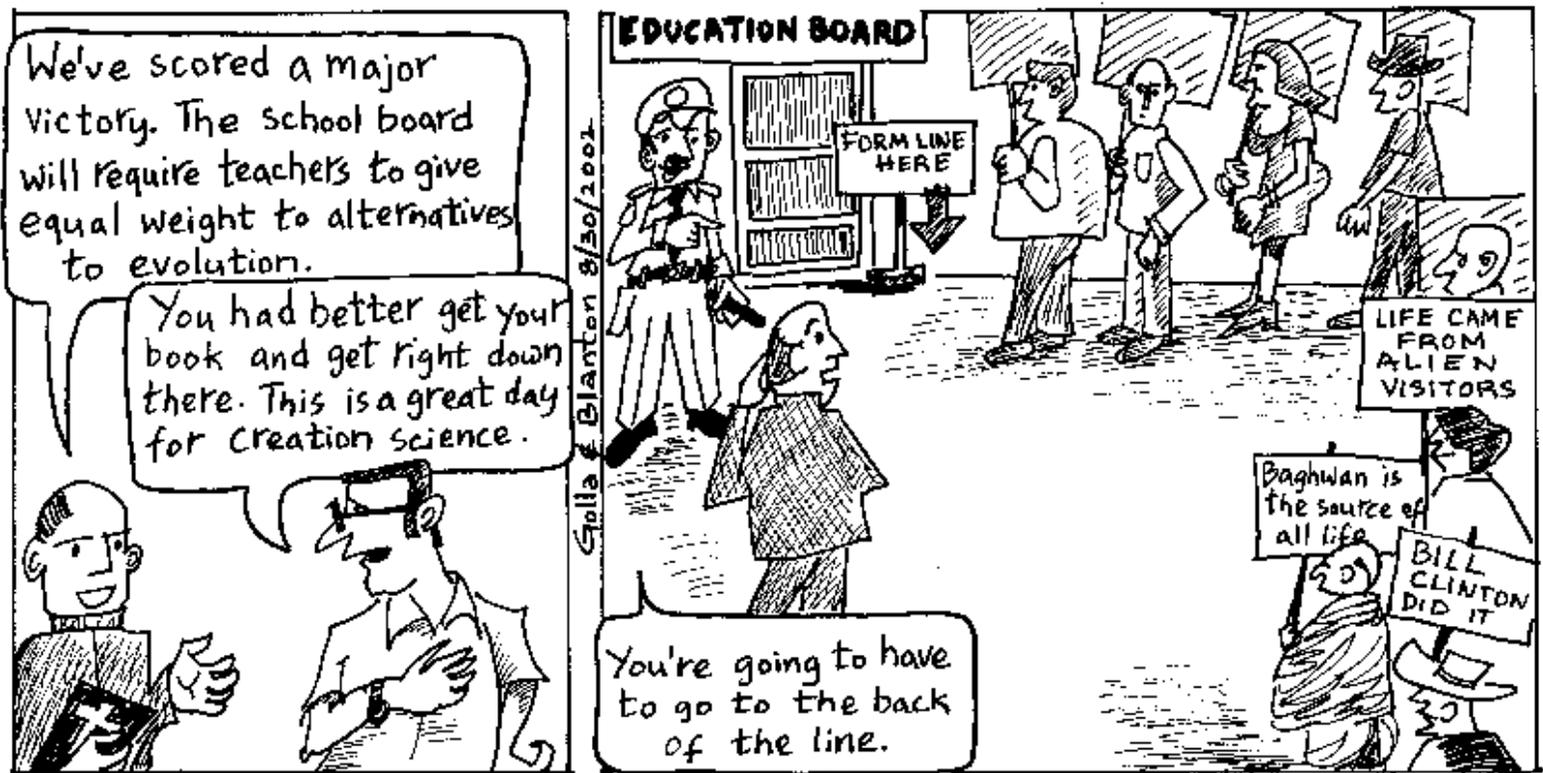
---

## Skeptical Ink

**By Prasad Golla and John Blanton**

Copyright 2002

Free, non-commercial reuse permitted.



[Back to top](#)