



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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Paluxy

by John Blanton

Travel Section of The North Texas Skeptic

It's curious how minor events can trickle into and expand our lives.

Forces beyond its control have catapulted the Texas hamlet of Paluxy into the mainstream of a major controversy. Settled in the cedar breaks along a back road in Hood County, Paluxy has lent its name and has gained notoriety in return.

Paluxy is little more than a pair of city limit signs along Farm Road 51. Tiger Woods, or even Jack Nicklaus, could hit a 9-iron shot across it. There is a church and some houses and a U.S. Post Office. But no Wal-Mart.

Nearby is the Paluxy River, which winds down through the eroded Cretaceous landscape toward the Brazos River in adjacent Somerville County. In its short trek the Paluxy cuts through softer layers of sediment and occasionally pauses its downward progress as it runs along harder layers of limestone.

It was here in the late 1930s and early 1940s that paleontologist Roland T. Bird came to study the dinosaur footprints that locals had long observed in the limestone bed of the Paluxy and in tributary streams. Roland Bird wrote at length of these finds for National Geographic and Natural History. His work included the excavation of an extensive set of sauropod prints, which are now on display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

Creationists picked up on the notoriety of the Paluxy River tracks, and they also took note of the many carved human tracks being sold to tourists. Since the Earth is only about 6000 years old, they reasoned, why shouldn't human prints be there, as well. Wishing made it come true in their minds, and the Paluxy River man tracks were born.

An entire cottage industry has sprung from the man tracks myth complete with books, conferences, and even a Creation Evidence Museum along the banks of the Paluxy River, north of Glen Rose. We and others have covered the story of the man tracks myth in detail in previous years, so I will just provide some links at the end of this story to allow the uninitiated to read further.

We are fortunate to have the Paluxy River tracks in our own back yard. Exploring the Paluxy River region in person is the best way

to get a feel for the geology that shaped the story and maybe to even meet some of the principal players. Here are the places to visit and what to see:

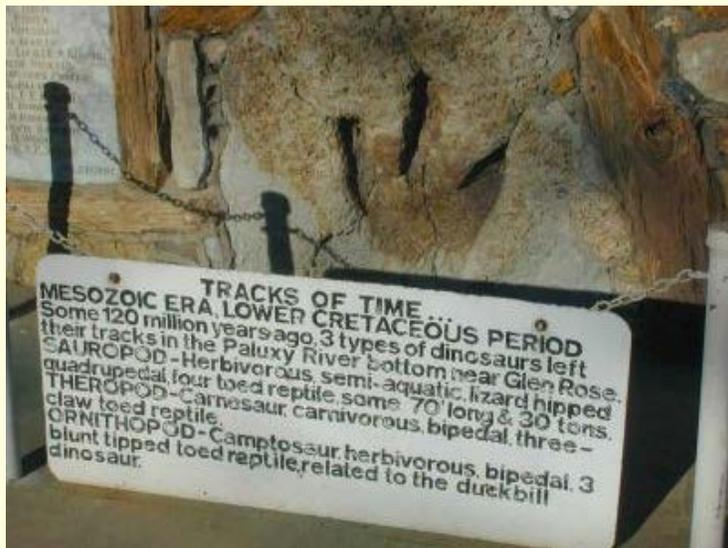
Glen Rose. It all starts in Glen Rose, the county seat of Somerville County. Scenic and rustic to an extreme, it's worth a visit without its dinosaur history. Here are some quotes from the Visitors Bureau Web site:

Glen Rose has plenty of attractions to choose from; Dinosaur Valley, golf, art, shopping or wildlife.

Accommodations range from modern Hotels to quaint Country Cottages. Rustic Cabins or cozy Bed & Breakfasts.

Humans are the latecomers to this part of Texas. Tracks pressed into the area's limestone riverbeds reveal that dinosaurs roamed here more than 100 million years ago.

When I grew up in nearby Granbury (after the time of the dinosaurs) the Glen Rose town square was noted for its spring that spouted sulphurous water and for the dinosaur track cemented into the stone work. The spring no longer spouts, but the track can be seen along with a plaque describing the related history.



Glen Rose is a 21st century community that does not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the local creationists. This dinosaur print on exhibit in the town square is interpreted in the light of modern geology. (photo by John Blanton)

Glen Rose also hosts an annual creationist bash as well as a mainstream Christian outdoor theatrical production.

The Creation Evidence Museum. Carl Baugh, who touts a phony Ph.D. he received from a creationist diploma mill, operates his pseudo museum for the benefit of the credulous and the curious, including occasional skeptical visitors. It's located on Farm Road 205, about four miles from U.S. 67. Follow the signs to Dinosaur Valley State Park, and you will come to Baugh's facility just short of the park entrance.

Dinosaur Valley State Park. An island of sanity, and your tax dollars being put to good use. You can see dinosaur prints in the river bottom, unless the river is up. Then you will have to settle for the prints on exhibit at the park museum. Be ready to hike and wade in the river. Camping and picnic facilities are available. Follow the signs at Farm Road 205 from U.S. 67.

Fossil Rim Wildlife Center. This is not a disco for geriatrics. It's a privately-operated nature park with exotic animals. About mid point in the drive through the park is a visitor's center where you can get lunch and buy a neat Indiana Jones hat like mine.

Comanche Peak. This is a limestone-capped mesa that dominates the surrounding country side. Want to see geological history? Imagine the cap of Comanche Peak being once at the bottom of a shallow sea and then imagine all the material that had to wash away to form the vast Brazos River valley and the surrounding plain.

Comanche Peak nuclear power plant. The only nuke in North Texas. Ironically built within sight of the dinosaur tracks. Talk about contrasts!



Just a few miles from his place of birth, the author contemplates the changing times. Paluxy has not been the same since the dinosaurs died. (photo by Barbara Neuser)

Some notable sources dealing with the man tracks claims:

Glen Kuban has long been one of the best writers on the Paluxy River man tracks myth. He and NTS co-founder Ron Hastings have been exploring and writing about the topic since the 1980s.

<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/paluxy.html>

Weird History

<http://www.violations.dabsol.co.uk/weird/weird.htm>

The Dinosaur & Man Tracks Controversy

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/ukatheist/articles/dinosaurtracks.htm>

Creationist Steve Rudd's Web site includes the material for man track proponent Don Patton.

<http://www.bible.ca/tracks/tracks.htm>

Man tracks and other good stuff (apparently a discussion group excerpt).

<http://www.cmnh.org/dinoarch/1995May/msg00327.html>

Paluxy River, Giant Man Tracks. An odd site dealing with the topic.

<http://www.omniology.com/PALUXY-GIANTS.html>

The Paluxy Paradox: Did Dinosaurs and Men Walk Together?

<http://www.unmuseum.org/palx.htm>

Dinosaur and alleged human trackways at Paluxy. Apparently a creationist site that questions the "man tracks."

http://www.biblicalcreation.org.uk/scientific_issues/bcs106.html

The Institute for Creation Research has variously supported and shied away from the Paluxy tracks controversy. Here are some notes from their site at <http://www.icr.org>:

The Paluxy River Tracks - *Impact* No. 35 May 1976 by John D. Morris, Ph.D.

<http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-035.htm>

Origin Of Mankind -*Impact* No. 101 November 1981 by Dr. Gary E. Parker, Ed.D. (Parker mentions the Paluxy tracks as evidence that science is wrong about the origin of mankind.)

<http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-101.htm>

The Paluxy River Mystery - *Impact* No. 151 January 1986 by John D. Morris, Ph.D.*

<http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-151.htm>

NTS has been publishing articles about this issue in our newsletter since 1987. Readers can go to the NTS Web site and enter any of the related key words in our search utility to find pages related to the topic.

<Http://www.ntskeptics.org>

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A Passage to India

By Prasad Golla

I am writing this from the motherland – India. Since the last time I was here, some five years ago, things have changed quite a bit – especially in the city where I was born and brought up – Hyderabad. A Hi-Tech City has gone up in the meantime, endorsed by no less than Bill Gates himself. There is an all around real-estate development – buildings now stand where, as I remember, there were open pastures and playgrounds. With this came the inevitable crowd and traffic; and with it pollution (some people wear masks).

The crowd on the streets does make the nation look a billion strong. The recently built fly-overs, bridges, and by-passes don't seem to have alleviated the traffic problems and conditions – where following the rules are for the weak. Being faint of the heart (I drive a motorcycle in the U.S), I totally gave up driving while I am here.

One aspect has remained the same, however. If in the U.S. you have to turn to the newspapers to set your head reeling with pseudo-scientific stuff, it will start spinning by itself just from walking up and down these crowded streets.

Homeopathic and other alternative medicine shops, and psychic reading (astrology and palmistry) shops abound, not to mention the houses for the supernatural (temples, mosques, churches, synagogues etc). A million gods and goddesses roam the streets, their presence all around. Songs blare their names through loud-speakers, photos adore almost every wall, and people look the real devotees, with their tongues praising their gods often.

Troubled people are seeped in superstitions and unscientific thought. Medical doctors and scientists not only don't talk against the so called 'alternative' medicine and superstitions, but are themselves followers.

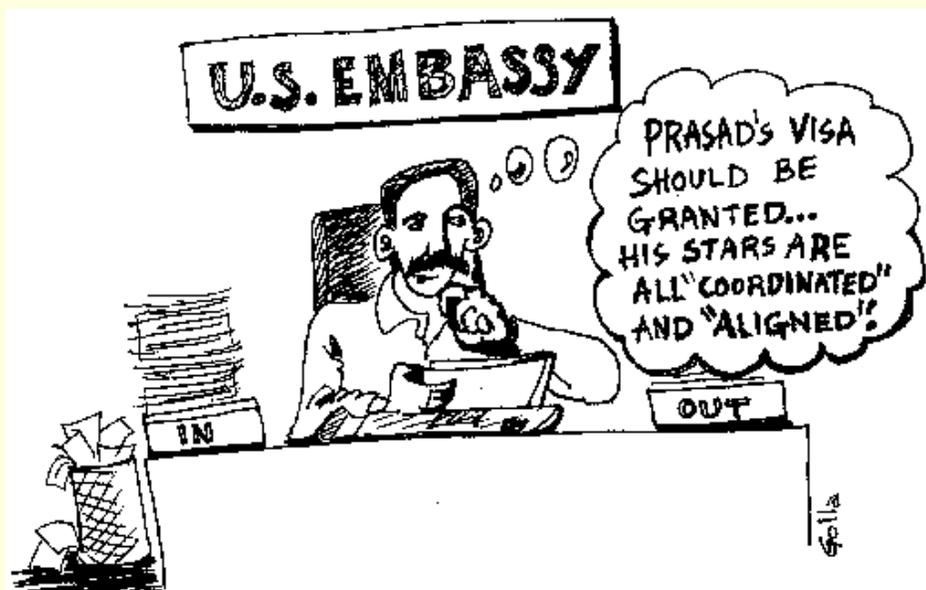
I think I see the cause of the problem of belief in the paranormal in this country. In a pluralistic and secular country such as this – debatably an unique country, where literally every belief under the sun has found a home and where communal strife is, unfortunately, always just around the corner – the message of tolerance and respect advertised widely by the government and other organizations has had its own (side-) effect.

The people are used to (or adapted to) 'accepting' all beliefs, supernatural and otherwise, without any critique. Though they might smirk at other's beliefs privately, no criticism is publicly forthcoming. The heritage, glorious past, prestige, and respect associated with almost all the beliefs only compound the problem because anything showcased and put on a pedestal as such is practically immune to criticism.

The only condemnation I hear publicly is about the 'materialistic and atheistic' tendencies which we are told are ruining our society. What these tendencies are and what they actually mean, I don't know. I am not sure anyone else does either. Therein lies the dilemma of this country. How can a country fulfill its desire to join the league of developed countries when it has a hang-up over "materialism?" And how can one speak against atheism when there are religious riots going on?

My vacation will end in a couple of weeks. It should end, that is, provided the U.S. embassy grants me the visa to come back and work in America. I applied for it here, by post – two days later than I wanted to, since my mother said the days were not auspicious enough for applying.

As I wait for the visa, I am hoping that the embassy official processing my application recognizes the importance of the day of my application – no 'bad omens' were hanging over it. But I am also hoping that the paper work showing the job I still have in Plano, Texas, and the rather hefty \$140 in fees I paid will do the trick.



Excuse me, as I go check for a 'good day' for my return flight.

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Skeptical predictions for 2003

by John Blanton

The psychics haven't been doing such a good job predicting the future, so this year we are not going to ask them. Herewith our *Skeptical Predictions For 2003*. Our aim is to do at least as well as the psychics, so we have chosen our predictions carefully to ensure they cannot possibly come true:

Osama bin Laden is alive and well. He will be discovered this year working as a baggage screener at Dulles International Airport. His sunny disposition and upbeat attitude will arouse the suspicion of the traveling public, who will report him to authorities.

Saddam Hussein will retire as dictator of Iraq and seek a career in show business. He will be a regular feature on *Hollywood Squares*, where he will impress the viewing audience with his knowledge of nuclear physics and pathogenic agents.

George W. Bush will win the Nobel Prize for literature. He will attract the attention of the Prize committee with his insightful treatise on modern developments in English grammar, which he will begin to study late in July.

Tom Cruise will wise up and renounce the Church of Scientology as a money sucking cult. He will convince other Hollywood figures, including John Travolta, that Scientology is not the root of their financial success—the diminished mental capacity of the viewing public is.

Skeptical mathematician John Paulos will appear on PBS TV in a program about probability theory. His explanation of the odds against making money from the lottery will reach an audience of millions and will result in the financial collapse of seven major state lotteries.

Magician James Randi will be caught performing an actual feat of psychic powers. Despite his protestations that "It's only stage

magic," he will be forced to admit he *can* bend spoons with his mind.

"Intelligent design" will become accepted as a legitimate scientific theory and will be taught in the public schools. Biologist Kenneth Miller, a proponent of evolution through natural selection, will agree that anything that can account for the fossil record and all existing life forms, plus the birth of our savior Jesus Christ by immaculate conception, must surely have some basis in fact. The principles of intelligent design will be used to correctly predict the next three Power Ball lottery winners and to solve the time-variant Schrödinger wave equation for the cesium atom.

John Edward will expand his career into public service. After gaining fame on TV by connecting grieving relatives with their deceased loved ones he will assist in training rescue workers. Since new recruits will shortly have to face some extremely gruesome scenes they will need someone like John Edward to help them deaden their gag reflex.

A 73-year-old widow from Bakersfield, California, will receive \$2.35 million for assisting in the transfer of a large fortune from a war-torn African nation.

No Scorpio will undergo a life-changing experience in 2003.

The pseudo medical field of homeopathy will score its first pharmacological success in 2003. B. S-omycin, an extreme dilution (10^{-300}) of the excrement of Spanish fighting bulls, will be demonstrated effective in rigorous clinical trials. This watered down *mierda de toro* will be promoted for treating, of all things, chronic stupidity.

A quirky religious cult that claims space aliens created the human race will produce the first cloned human being. Oops, never mind. That's already happened.

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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.]

Alternative science: insights from the Harvard Medical School.

The cover story in the Dec 2 issue of *Newsweek* is The Science of Alternative Medicine. That's an oxymoron. If these alternatives had a basis in science, they would just be medicine. *Newsweek* calls it "The New Science." Only the new science turns out to be the old medicine thousands of years old in some cases, long before it was known that blood circulates or germs cause disease. The alternatives can be put on a scale that ranges from plausible to preposterous. The treatments discussed in *Newsweek* tend to be at the plausible end of the spectrum. They include such things as music therapy, as though anything that makes us feel better is now medicine. There is no mention of such absurd and fraudulent treatments as magnet therapy, homeopathy and touch therapy, which are among the most widely used alternatives. The report also talks about herbs and vitamins. Vitamins are alternative? The discovery of these essential molecules was a major advance in scientific medicine. Vitamins become alternative only when taken in wild excess. The report has boxes on alternative treatments for cancer, osteoarthritis, cardiac disease, back pain, etc. To give it credibility, each box is prominently labeled "Insights from Harvard Medical School." Is that where this stuff comes from? This insight comes from the Maryland Physics Department.

Global warming: now here's the plan – we study the problem.

The Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets are crumbling, the sea level is rising, glaciers are fast disappearing and all but a handful of climate scientists insist that human greenhouse gas emissions are a major cause of global warming. Three UN studies in the last ten years and a National Academy of Sciences report to the President just last year, confirm this picture. But this week, a climate conference called by the Administration dealt more with adapting to a warmer world than reducing emissions. The White House science advisor, physicist Jack Marburger, cautioned that we must be careful not to harm the economy; before we can decide to go beyond the voluntary emission reductions called for by President Bush, we're going to need a lot more data. That, of course, will take a lot more money and time. The Administration estimates the critical questions can be answered in four years. But skeptical scientists at the conference warned that without a clear goal, the Administration can string it out indefinitely.

Music therapy: getting in tune with the universe.

Last week, in discussing the *Newsweek* report on alternative medicine (WN 29 Nov 02), WN cited music therapy as an example of

something that might be nice, but didn't have much to do with medical science. Boy did we get straightened out. Music therapy, one therapist patiently explained, induces resonance and harmonies in the body that restore the proper balance of chi, allowing the body to enter a healing process. Well sure, that's what we meant to say.

Hydrino rockets: BlackLight is still looking for applications.

Alas, NASA's troubled Breakthrough Propulsion Project never managed to break through anything. But the NASA Institute for Advanced Concepts in Atlanta thinks maybe a thruster based on BlackLight Power's method of persuading hydrogen to enter a hydrino state, below the ground state, could achieve performance orders of magnitude greater than chemical rocket propulsion. So NIAC contracted with the Mechanical Engineering Department at Rowan University in Atlanta, to test the idea. Well, they just issued the final report for the 6-month Phase I study. They "successfully test fired" the thruster. "However, due to time and cost constraints successful measurements of the exhaust velocity have not been completed." Not to worry. "These concepts will be proposed for an ongoing Phase II study."

Genesis Project: a really good scam can be used over and over.

Back in the early '70s, an inventor named Sam Leach claimed to have built a car that used ordinary water as a fuel. The idea was simple: You use electrolysis to decompose the water into oxygen and hydrogen and then use the hydrogen as a fuel to run the engine and generate electricity for the separation. So there you have it: You start with water and end up with water plus work. Scientists scoffed: it would take more energy to decompose the water than you could get from the combustion of hydrogen. Ordinarily yes, Leach agreed, but he had a secret catalyst that reduced the energy of decomposition. The great thing about the First Law of Thermodynamics, however, is that it doesn't care what's in your secret box, it gives you the limit of any process. Leach raised millions from investors and then retired to a seaside villa in California. Who needs a car that runs on water when you have a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce? The rumor spread that he had been bought off by the oil companies. Now something called Genesis World Energy is running the same scam over again.

Eau de money: a rose is a rose, except when it grows ...

Except when it grows in microgravity. Maybe. After years of telling us the Space Station would lead to a cure for cancer, or produce more perfect crystals, NASA now proudly reveals a program with perfume industry giant International Flavors & Fragrances to look for new fragrances from roses grown in space. Environmental parameters on Earth, such as water, sunlight, temperature and soil, influence the essential oils that give flowers their smell. Why shouldn't gravity do the same? This is exciting stuff. It puts the space station program in perspective. Oh yes, and how much of the cost will International Flavors and Fragrances bear?

Herbal abuse: Echinacea fails in a double-blind test.

There is no reason why some herbal medications shouldn't be beneficial. The field of pharmacology had its origins in the empiricism of the herbalist. The world's best selling herbal supplement, derived from the purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*), is taken by millions to ward off colds and flu. Alas, in a double-blind test carried out at the University of Wisconsin, cold sufferers taking a placebo, fared just as well as those taking the herb. What do you suppose the authors recommend? More research.

Human cloning: Raelians announce the birth of baby "Eve."

Do you recall the controversy stirred up by physicist Richard Seed, PhD Harvard '53, when he announced his intention to clone the first human (WN 9 Jan 98)? We haven't heard anything from Seed lately, but today the scientific director of Clonaid says her company has created the first human clone. Clonaid was founded by Raelians, a religious group that believes extraterrestrials created humans. There are no details on how the supposed cloning of Eve was achieved, but physicist Michael Guillen, PhD Cornell, has been selected by Clonaid to verify the claim. Guillen has just the credentials Clonaid needs. In 1997 as the science correspondent for ABC Good Morning America, Guillen did a three-part series, "Fringe or Frontier." Of precognition he concluded "these guys are not flakes"; on astrology, "I think we're just going to have to suspend judgement"; on psychokinesis, "you have to take it seriously" (WN 3 Oct 97). Indeed, Guillen covered everything from James Patterson's cold fusion cell to Kirlian photographs of the human aura with the same credulity. A PhD in physics, after all, is not an inoculation against foolishness. We called ABC, but were told emphatically that their relationship with Guillen ended nearly a year ago.

Herbal reality check: TV's top medical undiscoveries of 2002.

This is the week network news programs like to reflect on the top stories of the past year. The health message from ABC News was that good science can trump widespread beliefs: the food pyramid has been revised to elevate the importance of good fats, hormone replacement therapy has been found to increase risk for cancer, heart disease and stroke, and recently, the world's most widely used herbal supplements were found to be ineffective. "Echinacea, which is used to treat the common cold; St. Johns Wort, used for depression; and Ginkgo biloba, thought to sharpen memory, were all shown to be ineffective in studies published this year." You may recall that CBS Evening News reported that herbal supplements are untested, impure and often harmful (WN 1 Nov 02). The newly skeptical treatment of herbal supplements on network TV is attributable to the rigorous testing sponsored by the NIH Center

of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (WN 23 Aug 02).

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

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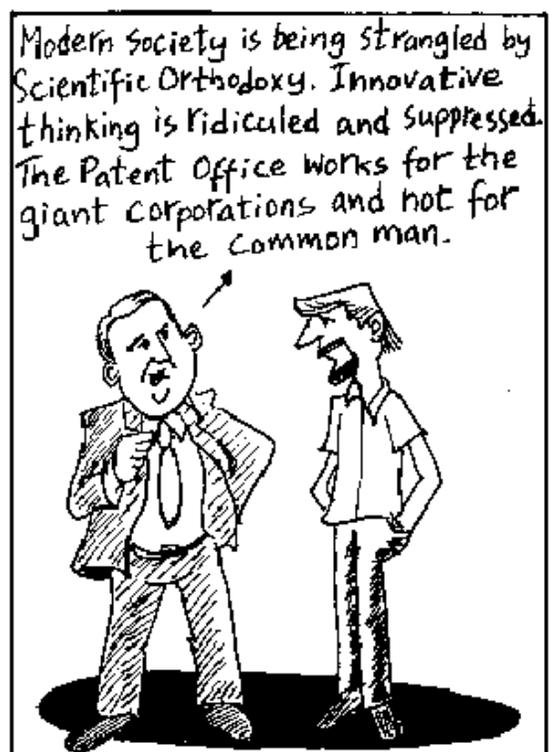
Skeptical Ink

By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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Now for a little fun:



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