



Selected articles from  
VOL. 12 NO. 1 SUMMER 1999

## The "Miami Circle"

by James Randi  
(Edited from Randi's e-mail "Hotline")

Wishful thinking is not at all unknown to science. Though we like to think that proper scientists are careful and deliberate in their work, history shows us that in every field of science, great presumptions, wild suppositions, unwarranted conclusions, and other less-than-justified elements have brought many academics to ruin and disgrace. In many cases, we see that the scientific community has carefully chosen to handle grievous errors by its members as mere peccadilloes -- minor embarrassments that hang around for a while and are eventually forgotten.

Most major errors are made in all innocence. However, when the facts begin to deny the theory, we find that some adherents do not hesitate to bend a few bits of data or fabricate findings entirely -- in an effort to rescue the notion they've adopted.

Recently very much in the news is what has become known as the "Miami Circle." On March 7, the NBC-TV *Today* show did a major spot on it (and ran an update the next morning). This circle, which is 38 feet in diameter and shows *very clearly* in helicopter views, is an artifact located on very valuable waterfront property where a prominent real estate developer wants to build a \$200-million apartment complex. The archaeologist on site tells us that by placing sight poles into certain of the seeming post holes, he has determined that the ancient inhabitants who constructed this wonder achieved accuracy of within one-tenth of a degree in aligning to established astronomical points, thus providing us with the first example of a "calendar circle" in Florida, comparable to Stonehenge in England.

Obviously, such a discovery would rank with Tut's tomb, Troy, and Machu Picchu. Nobel prizes, academic laurels, a movie or two, professorships, and no end of fame would result from such a major "find." Even more exciting: Basalt tools very similar to those found in Mayan ruins have been --

personally -- found at the site by the archaeologist in charge. To connect South Florida with a major civilization in Mexico would obviously be a major discovery.

For various reasons, I think that there might well be a huge letdown in the making here. The mayor of Miami, Alex Penelas, has invoked the principle of Eminent Domain, whereby the state of Florida could reserve this site as an archaeological treasure and buy the property for purposes of preservation. Thus, the city government is apparently convinced of the validity of this discovery. Indian groups in the state are camping out, beating drums, chanting, and calling upon ancestral spirits to set aside this "international treasure" for posterity. Terms like "our sacred ground" and "holy area" are being passed about. Perhaps, just perhaps, the enthusiasm is premature.

First, the archaeologist seems to have chosen those post holes from among hundreds that are clearly seen there in photographs. The "tenth of a degree" accuracy claimed could not possibly have been determined by placing posts in the holes chosen, since the holes are simply made in the earth, and the size and inclination of any original post cannot be known. More damning, in my opinion, is the fact that the choice of other holes would not have provided any correlation, and science does not allow for such blatant data selection to satisfy a need. The circle itself is only clearly visible because the investigators have delineated it with a back hoe. The indigenous Indian groups, and those known to have occupied the area in the past, are not known to have ever exhibited any early mathematical or astronomical expertise. Besides, they were nomads, and left no such traces behind anywhere else. And no Mayan artifacts have ever shown up before in Florida -- ever.

When the early West in this country was gripped by gold fever, unscrupulous folks were known to improve the attraction of abandoned mines by "salting" the tunnels. This was done by loading gold particles into a shotgun and firing them into the walls, to be "discovered" by the promoters and their willing dupes as evidence of wealth that just never did emerge from those sites. And, in archaeology, "salting" of sites is not unheard of, especially when a great deal is invested in validating a "discovery."

Finally, it is known that, a few decades back, an apartment house, since completely razed, stood on that site. Then, as now, a septic field would have had to have been constructed beneath the structure. These fields were circular, 20 to 60 feet in diameter -- depending upon the size of the structure -- and had radiating pipes of soft-fired clay to conduct the effluent out from a central point. At the southern margin of the Miami Circle -- clearly seen in photographs -- is a rectangular concrete tank occupying the position that a septic tank might occupy. A search of city records should provide us with a plan of the septic field that served the earlier apartment building. In any case, if this is *not* the original septic field, where is it?

Mayor Penelas, please look into the possibility that, rather than a sacred site, you may have a simple modern artifact here. A red face at an honest error is much to be preferred over a major political reversal. The Indian drums are well meant, and the cause is supportable if there is indeed a calendar circle in Miami. But if we are looking at something to which we were blinded by enthusiasm and a call to obvious duty, we should recognize that fact before irreversible expenditures and declarations are already accomplished.

[Editor's note: More information on the "Miami Circle" may be found in the [Miami Herald](#) web archives and the [ParaScope](#) website.]

## Brian David Andersen: A Nobel Prize in his future?

by Gary P. Posner

Unless I am so close-minded that I simply refuse to see the light (or is it a hologram?), there would certainly seem to be a Nobel Prize in Physics (or Psychics?) just around the corner for Brian David Andersen.

If you don't know the name, please visit [his website](#). Now *you* tell *me* : Do I know how to pick 'em, or what?

Actually, *he* picked *me*. Well, he went fishing, and I took the bait. On April 29 of last year, a mass e-mailing was sent in his name, claiming that "Andersen changed the taste and quality of liquids located next to the radio hosts while he was in San Diego, California. . . . Ms. Theisse was in Yelm, Washington. Needless to say, the radio talk show hosts were amazed and dumbfounded when they compared the taste and quality of their 'treated' and untreated liquids. . . . [Andersen] changed her liquid (soft drink named Sprite). Edited and unedited audio tapes of the unprecedented and history-making radio show are available upon request."

I replied that very day: "On behalf of the Tampa Bay Skeptics, we would be happy to help Brian discover . . . that he can't really do what is claimed in your post. We could afford to pay a mere \$1,000 for a successful demonstration of 'psychic' ability, but could get [James Randi](#) to test him for his \$1,000,000+ prize."

In our follow-up correspondence, Andersen rejected my proposed protocol for a double-blind test of his claim. Instead, he insisted upon a "quadruple blind" protocol in which "Claimant and Skeptic Group will not participate in any phase of assembly of test." Further, Sprite was now deemed "not an acceptable liquid [despite having been used on the radio show] because cane sugar content and carbonation could skew the test. . . . Red wine or grape juice only have natural sugars and are far superior liquids. Using red wine would allow professionals to participate in the taste test. There are no professional grape juice or Sprite taste testers." And would you care to take a guess as to Andersen's first choice for "Project Coordinator"? Time's up: George Hamilton (the actor)!

I advised Andersen that I found his insistence upon a protocol that excluded TBS from participation, in favor of George Hamilton and his "professional wine tasters," to be unacceptable. In his reply, Andersen proclaimed, "For the first time a skeptic group has withdrawn from a project because the claimant has testing standards that are too high and professional for the skeptic group. Thank you for being part of history." I countered that "TBS has never been a part of your 'project,' so I am at a loss as to how you can accuse us of 'withdrawing' from it." I took the further step of advising Andersen that "I am forwarding our correspondence to TBS's chairman, Terry Smiljanich, to see if he would be interested in having TBS test you under your specified conditions."

The very next day (May 1, 1998), before Terry even had a chance to review the correspondence,

Andersen took it upon himself to disseminate over the internet the contents of our exchanges (available from TBS upon request by e-mail, or send a stamped return envelope). Apparently I had been the only skeptic courteous (and foolish) enough to have given him the time of day.

On April 29 of this year, almost exactly one year later to the day, I received a personalized version of another mass e-mailing from Andersen, this one promoting his new book, *Rhythms of Nature*. As the message explains, "A combination of science, metaphysics and spirituality that was interwoven and then scattered in our past . . . has been reunited by the research and discoveries of Brian David Andersen." Tacked to the end of my version was this addendum: "Dr. Posner's exchange with Andersen is featured in book." [Andersen's website](#) contains much information about the book's contents, including his discovery of the "holographic" nature of the chemical elements, but no mention of our correspondence (I can only assume that he reprises his reckless charge that TBS reneged on an imagined agreement to test him -- even though George Hamilton would have done the testing).\*

I requested from Andersen a courtesy copy (by U.S. or e-mail) of the book's content regarding TBS and myself, but he refused, insisting that I must buy the book in order to see what he wrote about us. He did inform me that Michael Shermer, editor of [Skeptic magazine](#), received a free "review" copy of the book. But when I inquired about borrowing his copy, Shermer told me that the quality of the writing and self-publication were so poor that he had quickly tossed the book into the recycling bin. I then tried [CSICOP](#), but no one there recalls receiving a copy.

So . . . If anyone, upon inspecting Andersen's website, decides to purchase *Rhythms of Nature*, TBS would greatly appreciate photocopies of all passages pertaining to my correspondence with the author, whose pioneering research seems a sure bet to net him a Nobel Prize.

\* August 2004 Update: I no longer see any reference to this book on Andersen's website. But on the Amazon.com site I found [one used copy available](#), and for the bargain price of \$184.28 !

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

by Terry A. Smiljanich

### "A Wondrous World"

In his book *Skeptics and True Believers*, Chet Raymo tells the story of the red knot sandpiper, a migratory bird that spends its winters in Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America. As cold summer approaches the southern hemisphere, the sandpipers begin their 8,000-mile journey to Northern Canada, stopping en route for a respite on a small corner of Cape Cod. Once in Canada, the birds mate and give birth during the Canadian summer. Then, as fall approaches, the red knot sandpiper adults leave their young behind and begin their long 8,000-mile flight back to Tierra del Fuego.

Now, here comes the incredible part of the story. The juvenile sandpipers, having been left behind, continue to forage and grow in strength. Then, several weeks after their parents have left them, they

too begin their migration south, flying for the first time the length of North and South America, stopping at the same place in Cape Cod along the way, and ending up back with their parents on a small spit of land 8,000 miles from their birthplace.

Think about that for a moment. The juvenile sandpipers, having never been "taught" the way home, are left behind with only their genetic codes residing in their cells. These codes are simply alternating chains of four nucleotides arranged in the famous double helix of DNA. Combinations of those nucleotides, called genes, call for the creation of specific proteins. Yet that simple chemical code somehow contains within it "maps" of a journey almost half way around the globe, detailed to the nearest quarter mile, enabling the birds to know where to stop along the way and how to locate a home they have never seen. All of this was achieved through millions of years of evolution by natural selection.

The next time someone touts a "psychic" who can guess that someone's grandmother recently died or suffers from cancer, or the next time someone claims that holding a hand over a person can vaguely influence the course of a disease, or the next time someone breathlessly describes a window stain that looks like the Virgin Mary, bring up the sandpiper story and see how that compares in the realm of wonder.

For too long now, inadequate high school science teachers, popular fiction, and the media have convinced many people that science is boring, scientists are evil, and reality is no fun. How can this be, with so many real-life "miracles" waiting to be uncovered all around us? Astronomy, geology, and quantum physics all contain more incredible facts than an army of "psychics" could come up with.

Religion has held a powerful grip on the human psyche ever since Neanderthals buried their dead with gifts for the hereafter. In addition to providing easily digestible answers to the great questions of life, one of the principal attractions of religion has been its ability to engender a sense of awe and wonder -- a humble acknowledgement of the subtle, intangible and all-powerful presence of immensities beyond human comprehension. Listen to a Gregorian chant and you, too, will share this feeling.

Yet science and reason can themselves lead to many of the same feelings of wonder at the immense and beautiful mysteries of the universe. As Raymo says (p. 255) in his short but profound book, "Science cannot nor should not be a religion, but it can be the basis for the religious experience: astonishment, experiential union, adoration, praise."

We must find ways to convey the beauty and mystery of science to more people. It is for this reason that Stephen Jay Gould, Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan, Edward O. Wilson and Jacob Bronowski are among my personal heroes. Turning their back on comfortable scientific studies addressed to their colleagues, they turned instead to the public and shared with us their celebration of the human spirit embodied in science and reason. To quote Raymo again (p. 252), their motto was: "If there be a skeptical star I was born under it, yet I have lived all my days in complete astonishment." That should be *our* motto as well.

---

## TBS vs. UFO Believers on TV

by Jack Robinson

The scene was a public access TV studio in Tampa. On March 25th, [Gary Posner](#) and I were on *Malcolm the Magnificent* (since renamed *UFOs & Metaphysics* ), to debate UFOs with host [Malcolm Hathorne](#) and his other guest, [Phil Bayly](#). If the criterion was who got to talk the most, they won -- 41 minutes to 17 (and during part of our time, Malcolm was talking simultaneously).

Malcolm's introduction of Bayly went on for three minutes. Bayly was said to be a retired Air Force Colonel who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy with a degree in engineering, who then joined the Air Force and clocked over 5,000 flying hours. He attended the Command and General Staff College of the Air War College, and was -- both before and afterwards -- involved in clandestine programs. He is also an active UFO researcher affiliated with the [Mutual UFO Network \(MUFON\)](#).

In contrast, Gary's intro took 20 seconds. I was introduced simply by name, in one second flat. The fact that I am an astronomer was relevant but ignored.

It was hard to accept Bayly's claims at face value. For example, an Air War College classmate, who had previously been assigned to the top-secret RC135 program, told Bayly that in the early 1960s, RC135s were targeted against UFOs. In Bayly's words, "They knew what tracks [the UFOs] flew [and] how to intercept them, they had visual contact from the cockpit . . . electronic equipment sweeping them for the frequencies they were going to emit, and they recorded them -- all simultaneous with ground radar."

Such anecdotal, hearsay "evidence" wouldn't be admissible in court, because it can so easily be contaminated by biases, faulty perceptions and faulty memories. Colonel Bayly has been interested in UFOs ever since high school, and believed in a government UFO cover-up at the time he was talking with his RC135 classmate.

Later in the program, Bayly stated, "Dr. Millikan in the 1920s was given the Nobel Prize when he stated that the atom couldn't be smashed." Gary responded, "You don't get the Nobel Prize for saying that the atom can't be smashed." I added, "I think he got the Nobel Prize for something else." According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1955), Robert A. Millikan was awarded the Nobel Prize, in 1923, for his "work on the elementary electric charge and the photoelectric effect."

Bayly also referred to the work of Zecharia Sitchin: "He, a historian-investigator, looked into the physical evidence that existed in the Sumerian society . . . some 4000 years ago. And the writings . . . and the pictorial representations . . . show all of the planets as we know them, plus one other planet -- a 12th planet. And Pluto . . . was supposedly discovered in this [20th] century. However, 4000 years ago, it was documented -- and pictorially." (According to Sitchin, the Sumerians could only have known about Pluto, and the other planets beyond Saturn, if they had been informed by aliens, who came in spaceships to Sumeria from the 12th planet -- 12th because the sun and our moon were also counted. This planet is now out of sight, way beyond Pluto.)

I checked on the credibility of Zecharia Sitchin and his evidence. His theory about the origin of the solar system is grossly discordant with modern astronomy. In his book, *The Twelfth Planet*, the pictures appear ambiguous to me. And to quote from J. R. Cole's review (in *Archaeology*, 34:72,

1981) of another one of Sitchin's books:

Sitchin should be viewed as a minor prophet of a seeming baseless anti-empirical cult. Like the so-called scientific creationists, he confuses religion, myth, and science. . . . [Sitchin] writes better than von Daniken, and his ideas may be seen by some as more logical, but appearances can deceive. Cultists will call this book brilliant, but archaeologists and historians will label it nonsense.

Malcolm and Phil Bayly both believe there has been a UFO cover-up. I asked Bayly, "Why do you think our government wants to keep these things secret?" His response was revealing: "I don't think it's our U.S. government exclusively. . . . It's international. . . . You follow the money; if there's that much technology involved, it's worth a lot of money . . . a lot of power. So you have every reason for the invisible government -- we call it the secret government, the power brokers of the world -- . . . to keep it secret."

I asked, "Who are these power brokers?" Bayly clarified: "You can call them the New World Order, the Trilateralists, the Council of Foreign Relations . . . the Rockefellers, the Carnegies, the people like that. . . . Maybe that's where their power base came from financially. It certainly is worth their retaining it." Let the reader judge: Could such an invisible government really be kept secret for long, when so many powerful news agencies would love to break the story, and so many snitches would love to sell the story?

Malcolm's contributions to the discussion were often vague generalities, e.g., "There are so many extremely powerful, documented UFO reports, and encounters and cases all over the world, that you can't push them aside just because there are [some hoaxes and mistakes]. . . . The bottom line is there are so many that are irrefutable."

Lesson: Skeptics may be at a disadvantage in a debate with believers, because we may not be familiar with a specific case brought up, and it is impossible to prove a negative. But we can ask questions to get them to commit to specifics. And we can then check out their "evidence."

---

## Snippets



This country's two largest psychic hotlines went bankrupt last year, and the remaining ones are having tough times. As a result, one of them not only helps its clients get in touch with their lost loved ones, but also has resorted to billing the dead. Access Resource Services, based in Fort Lauderdale, tried to collect \$329 from a Connecticut man who died in 1978. If the decedent managed to mail in a check, he is entitled to TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" award for proof of the paranormal, as well as the [James Randi Educational Foundation](#)'s million dollars. Maybe he'll read this . . .

(*Miami Herald* via *St. Pete. Times*, Feb. 17)

During an on-air radio conversation with Ch. 13 news anchor Kelly Ring, WFLZ-FM's resident "singing psychic" was attempting to predict when the very pregnant Ring would give birth to her new daughter. As the seer struggled to come up with a date, Ring went into labor during their conversation! Two hours later, she was a mother for the second time.

(*St. Pete. Times*, Feb 27)

Return to [TBS Report Online](#)

©1999 by Tampa Bay Skeptics.