

1

00:00:00,685 --> 00:00:07,685

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

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00:00:07,685 --> 00:00:17,685

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations, but not necessarily the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

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00:00:17,685 --> 00:00:27,685

Rivers of molten rock sieve beneath the Earth's crust and erupt with unmatched awe-inspiring fury.

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00:00:37,684 --> 00:00:43,684

Legend tells us that primitive man thought volcanoes must surely be the home of angry fire gods.

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00:00:44,684 --> 00:00:48,684

Man, stealing awe or fire, has learned to tame it.

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00:00:49,684 --> 00:00:53,684

And yet around the world, a bizarre ritual persists.

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00:00:57,684 --> 00:01:01,684

Man knowingly and willingly matches himself against the flames.

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00:01:01,684 --> 00:01:18,684

Practiced in diverse cultures, embodied in several religions, the mysterious and ancient custom of fire walking has intrigued observers for hundreds of years.

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00:01:18,684 --> 00:01:22,684

Two puzzling questions remain unanswered through the centuries.

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00:01:22,684 --> 00:01:28,684

How did the custom originate and what protects the fire walkers from being burned?

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00:01:32,684 --> 00:01:35,684

The World of Fire

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00:01:39,684 --> 00:01:44,683

With awesome force and brutality, fire destroys all in its way.

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00:01:53,683 --> 00:02:00,683

But historically, fire has also been a creative force, the bringer of warmth, comfort, security.

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00:02:02,683 --> 00:02:05,683

The World of Fire

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00:02:06,683 --> 00:02:11,683

Our early ancestors learned to use fire about 400,000 years ago.

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00:02:11,683 --> 00:02:19,683

Imagine the first brave soul who approached the forest fire or volcano and captured the fearful awesome giant.

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00:02:19,683 --> 00:02:27,683

Suddenly, light and warmth were his, and with it, an easier, more settled life.

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00:02:28,683 --> 00:02:32,683

But it would be many thousands of years before man would learn to make fire at will.

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00:02:32,683 --> 00:02:37,683

The seemingly simple discovery marked the birth of civilization.

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00:02:39,683 --> 00:02:46,682

When and where man began to walk on fire, perhaps to demonstrate his mastery over it, is unknown.

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00:02:46,682 --> 00:02:53,682

In literature, we find fire walking in the Bible and in Hindu records of the 6th century before Christ.

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00:02:53,682 --> 00:02:57,682

It's likely the custom started far earlier.

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00:03:00,682 --> 00:03:04,682

In the modern world, fire walking is surprisingly widespread.

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00:03:04,682 --> 00:03:09,682

It crosses continental boundaries, cultural and religious heritage.

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00:03:13,682 --> 00:03:19,682

There seems to be at least one common denominator that underlies all fire walking rituals.

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00:03:19,682 --> 00:03:25,682

A fire walker is considered successful only if he emerges unburned, unscared.

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00:03:25,682 --> 00:03:31,682

How this is done is a mystery that has puzzled observers for centuries.

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00:03:36,682 --> 00:03:41,682

I can keep my skin next to this flame for less than a second before I feel pain.

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00:03:41,682 --> 00:03:45,682

A second or two longer, the skin would turn red and blister.

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00:03:46,682 --> 00:03:53,681

Yet most fire walkers are in contact with searingly hot coals for much longer than I could possibly keep my finger in this flame.

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00:03:53,681 --> 00:04:00,681

They seem to be able to turn off the physiological mechanism that causes burning. But how?

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00:04:00,681 --> 00:04:10,681

Although some skeptics may claim there's a trick involved, a more convincing argument comes from experts investigating the powers of the mind.

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00:04:10,681 --> 00:04:19,681

I have spent 18 months in India, Burma and parts of Tibet, and I've observed fire walking on two separate occasions.

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00:04:19,681 --> 00:04:25,681

Psychologist Sydney Walter is president of the California State Hypnosis Association.

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00:04:25,681 --> 00:04:31,681

And I'm fairly convinced, even though there's arguments pro and con, that's a total state of disassociation.

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00:04:31,681 --> 00:04:37,681

Disassociation simply means that a person allows himself to feel that he is somewhere else.

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00:04:37,681 --> 00:04:41,681

Now look to your left there and notice that bowl of ice water with ice cubes floating in it.

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00:04:41,681 --> 00:04:45,681

Place your left hand in it and tell me if you feel cold or whatever you feel.

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00:04:45,681 --> 00:04:47,681

It's freezing.

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00:04:47,681 --> 00:04:52,681

And I know from our talks previously you enjoy the beach at Nice when you spend some time.

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00:04:52,681 --> 00:04:58,680

You're going to completely disassociate yourself. Disassociate yourself from this place and time.

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00:04:58,680 --> 00:05:03,680

You're now at Nice on the beach.

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00:05:03,680 --> 00:05:11,680

Just let go, let go. No responsibilities, no obligations, no demands upon you. Disassociate yourself completely.

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00:05:11,680 --> 00:05:15,680

No matter what I do, hold your hand and place it in water, whatever it is.

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00:05:15,680 --> 00:05:20,680

After inducing a life hypnotic state, Dr. Walter helps his subject to disassociate.

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00:05:20,680 --> 00:05:28,680

Concentrating on the beach scene. Your hand is very limp. Concentrate on the beach scene. Keep concentrating on the beach scene.

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00:05:28,680 --> 00:05:33,680

You feel very good.

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00:05:33,680 --> 00:05:38,680

Under normal circumstances, the ice water would be tolerable for merely a few seconds.

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00:05:38,680 --> 00:05:41,680

Totally disassociate now. You're at the beach.

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00:05:41,680 --> 00:05:48,680

Gerard feels no discomfort whatsoever. His disassociation has turned off the experience of pain.

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00:05:48,680 --> 00:05:55,680

To letter E, you could open your eyes feeling very, very relaxed and comfortable.

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00:05:55,680 --> 00:06:07,679

A, B, you are very comfortable. C, D, and E. You could open your eyes now.

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00:06:07,679 --> 00:06:11,679

How's the water now, Gerard?

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00:06:11,679 --> 00:06:15,679

It's cold. Still has ice cubes in it.

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00:06:15,679 --> 00:06:23,679

I believe strongly that a person could withstand tremendous discomfort and pain if they have absolute relief.

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00:06:23,679 --> 00:06:29,679

They're comfortable and I believe they could experience tremendous torment and pain if they have absolute relief.

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00:06:29,679 --> 00:06:37,679

They have it even though it's not present. An absolute belief and questionable belief to me is definitely a state of self-hypnosis.

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00:06:37,679 --> 00:06:42,679

Can self-hypnosis, however, actually prevent burns and blisters?

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00:06:42,679 --> 00:06:48,679

The remote village of San Pedro, Monrique lies nestled in the hills of northwestern Spain.

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00:06:48,679 --> 00:06:56,679

Here, each June, a dramatic nighttime fire walk is the highlight of a festival honoring a Catholic saint.

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00:06:56,679 --> 00:07:18,678

Tonight, in response to a vow made to the Virgin, many of these young villagers will attempt to cross the blazing coals.

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00:07:18,678 --> 00:07:33,678

The day-long festivities of St. John's Day are filled with both Christian and pre-Christian symbolism.

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00:07:33,678 --> 00:07:44,678

The headdresses of bread in the shape of trees remind some anthropologists of the summer solstice fertility rites of pagan Europe.

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00:07:44,678 --> 00:08:02,678

These ancient rites also included the building of bonfires and leaping through the flames.

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00:08:02,678 --> 00:08:10,678

With the coming of Christianity to Spain, the name of the solstice celebration here was changed to St. John's Day.

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00:08:11,678 --> 00:08:20,677

Fire walking occurs nowhere else in Europe except the Basque provinces of Spain and France and in the mountains of Macedonia in Greece.

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00:08:20,677 --> 00:08:30,677

And then it is night. The fire can now be made ready.

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00:08:51,677 --> 00:09:01,677

Enthusiastic crowds pour into the plaza. Excitement and anticipation fill the night air.

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00:09:01,677 --> 00:09:12,677

The fire bed is now searingly hot in excess of a thousand degrees Fahrenheit, five times the heat necessary to boil water.

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00:09:13,677 --> 00:09:18,677

No one knows who will be the first to walk.

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00:09:18,677 --> 00:09:28,676

Once he has chosen, a sense of danger, expectancy, grips onlookers and fire walkers alike.

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00:09:29,676 --> 00:09:40,676

His success raises the spirits of those who will follow, though each faces the same danger.

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00:09:46,676 --> 00:09:52,676

The Spanish fire walkers believe that the extra weight of a rider helps ensure success.

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00:09:53,676 --> 00:10:02,676

But these deeply religious people firmly believe it is faith that actually protects them.

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00:10:02,676 --> 00:10:14,676

If intense belief does induce a state of self-hypnosis, it is possible that this could bring about physiological changes and prevent burning.

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00:10:15,676 --> 00:10:23,676

But there are those who believe the real answer lies in an even more mysterious realm of the human mind.

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00:10:29,675 --> 00:10:32,675

India, land of ancient mysticism.

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00:10:32,675 --> 00:10:48,675

It is to Eastern thought that many feel we must turn to solve the mystery of how man can walk on fire.

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00:10:52,675 --> 00:10:59,675

In yoga we can very definitely experience the existence of what we call the energy body.

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00:11:00,675 --> 00:11:04,675

Ghanja White is director of the Los Angeles Center for Yoga.

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00:11:04,675 --> 00:11:11,675

He has achieved the title, Yogi Raj, King of Yogis, and has personally walked the fire.

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00:11:19,675 --> 00:11:21,675

We are not just this physical body.

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00:11:22,675 --> 00:11:30,675

There are subtler and subtler energy forms animating the body, both physiologically speaking and psychically speaking.

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00:11:30,675 --> 00:11:39,674

And the energy body itself corresponds actually physically to the shape of the physical body.

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00:11:39,674 --> 00:11:49,674

And when walking on fire, what happens is this energy projects itself beyond the physical body, perhaps an inch,

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00:11:49,674 --> 00:11:57,674

creating sort of an insulating effect between the body and the hot, burning hot coals.

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00:11:57,674 --> 00:12:00,674

And this protects one from injury.

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00:12:00,674 --> 00:12:09,674

A special technique called cullian photography has enabled some investigators to photograph this energy which is invisible to the naked eye.

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00:12:09,674 --> 00:12:16,674

The aura or glow surrounding the finger is believed to be formed by the energy emitted from the body.

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00:12:17,674 --> 00:12:23,674

Although the naked eye may be unable to see the energy, it is believed its powers can be easily demonstrated.

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00:12:23,674 --> 00:12:29,674

Using two fingers each, the four people are unable to lift the 200 pound man.

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00:12:29,674 --> 00:12:36,674

But according to yogic theory, this placement of the hands will awaken the energy bodies of all five people

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00:12:36,674 --> 00:12:41,673

and bring them into alignment like a magnet, thereby increasing strength.

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00:12:47,673 --> 00:12:48,673

That was the best one.

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00:12:48,673 --> 00:12:50,673

That was really the best one.

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00:12:50,673 --> 00:12:53,673

I know there's no trick involved. It works.

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00:12:53,673 --> 00:13:01,673

How exactly it works is something we'll discover as we develop these new sciences.

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00:13:03,673 --> 00:13:12,673

While western scientists search for answers with special cameras, the Hindu fire walkers are satisfied that the true answer lies in faith.

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00:13:12,673 --> 00:13:18,673

If one has sufficient faith in the God or Goddess, one will be protected from burning.

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00:13:19,673 --> 00:13:26,673

To the island of Bali in Indonesia, many elements of Hindu religion were brought by early migrants from India.

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00:13:29,673 --> 00:13:35,673

In India, this man might be called a yogi. Here he is called a shaman, a priest.

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00:13:36,673 --> 00:13:45,673

Many similarities exist between fire walking here and in India, except for the coconut husks, which replace wood as the source of the fire.

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00:13:50,672 --> 00:13:56,672

When illness strikes, the shaman will use his special powers to exercise the disease from the village.

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00:14:06,672 --> 00:14:18,672

This centuries old rite requires that the shaman go into a deep trance.

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00:14:18,672 --> 00:14:37,672

Trance states are a vital part of Balinese culture and religion. A whole repertoire of animal trances exists.

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00:14:37,672 --> 00:14:46,672

In this ritual, the shaman carries a symbolic horse. The Balinese believe that the entranced man has literally become the horse.

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00:14:46,672 --> 00:14:52,671

His own soul has temporarily left his body to be replaced by the soul of the horse.

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00:15:16,671 --> 00:15:36,671

He has made a vow to the Hindu fire god Brahma. Only if he fulfills his vow to stamp out each blazing coal without being burned will the ritual be a success.

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00:15:36,671 --> 00:15:47,671

Although after a time his feet become blackened from the charcoal, he remains totally unharmed.

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00:16:06,670 --> 00:16:13,670

The shaman is a shaman.

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00:16:13,670 --> 00:16:18,670

He is a shaman.

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00:16:18,670 --> 00:16:23,670

He is a shaman.

113

00:16:23,670 --> 00:16:28,670

He is a shaman.

114

00:16:28,670 --> 00:16:33,670

He is a shaman.

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00:16:34,670 --> 00:16:47,670

The last coal has died. His magical powers have prevailed. His vow has been fulfilled.

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00:16:47,670 --> 00:16:56,670

There has got to be some kind of explanations that have to do with another science, certainly nothing that we know about.

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00:16:56,670 --> 00:17:01,670

And I think that other science is in the area of parapsychology.

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00:17:01,670 --> 00:17:13,669

Dr. Gerald Feigen is a well-established San Francisco surgeon. Several years ago, while on a trip to the South Pacific, he participated in a fire walk ceremony.

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00:17:13,669 --> 00:17:20,669

My feelings prior to the fire walk and during the six hours of preparation were rather kaleidoscopic.

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00:17:20,669 --> 00:17:34,669

They go in and out into the occult back to science. My background in science naturally would make me cautious and make me want to understand what was going to happen in this thing.

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00:17:34,669 --> 00:17:44,669

Traditionally, in Polynesia, the rocks are heated for two full days. When ready, the thousand-degree heat can be felt several yards away.

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00:17:44,669 --> 00:17:55,669

I was standing away from the fire walk about 10 or 15 feet and watching the natives make their walk cross.

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00:17:55,669 --> 00:18:01,669

It seemed to me that the whole performance was extremely eloquent.

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00:18:01,669 --> 00:18:08,669

Now, this is where I began to succumb to the entire metaphysical mood.

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00:18:08,669 --> 00:18:23,668

In that silence, you could almost feel the elements of this dignified act of defiance as if to defy all the great forces that have made man feel somewhat smaller than God.

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00:18:23,668 --> 00:18:27,668

Things like volcanoes and rivers and mountains and so forth.

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00:18:28,668 --> 00:18:44,668

And as they walked across, I began to feel that it was possible. I found myself bending down, taking off my socks, walking over to the priest.

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00:18:44,668 --> 00:18:54,668

And I was conscious of a peculiar paradox. There was an intense heat from my knees upward, but my legs and feet felt cool.

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00:18:54,668 --> 00:19:14,668

And when I stepped off the bed for that moment, I felt that I had had a brief challenge, not only by the mystic and striking forces of the universe, but also there was a slight tipping of the hat to death.

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00:19:15,668 --> 00:19:25,667

What compels man to tempt death by braving the savage fire? The answer may well be as old as mankind itself.

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00:19:27,667 --> 00:19:33,667

According to legend, fire walking in ancient times was practiced even more extensively than it is today.

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00:19:33,667 --> 00:19:41,667

But no legend reveals the answer to the ultimate mystery. How and when did this bizarre custom begin?

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00:19:41,667 --> 00:19:50,667

What could have compelled so many people at such far reaches of the world to pit themselves against one of nature's most awesome and terrifying elements?

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00:19:50,667 --> 00:19:58,667

Although a definitive answer may never be found, there is a startling piece of evidence that points to a radical new explanation.

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00:20:00,667 --> 00:20:07,667

A careful study of the locations where fire walking is done reveals an amazing correlation to the Earth's volcanic zones.

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00:20:08,667 --> 00:20:24,666

Perhaps long before recorded history, and so long ago in geologic time that the geologic record has been buried, a cataclysmic eruption covered much of the Earth's surface with molten lava, killing thousands, if not millions of people.

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00:20:24,666 --> 00:20:34,666

Imagine the awesome panic of our ancestors trying to outrun the advancing fire, watching bodies disappear forever beneath the seething fury.

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00:20:35,666 --> 00:20:45,666

To those who survived, managing to cross the lava safely, this must have seemed the world's greatest miracle. The gods of the fire mountains had spared them.

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00:20:45,666 --> 00:20:53,666

In thanks, and as an expression of their devotion, the miracle would be reenacted ceremonially down over the centuries.

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00:20:54,666 --> 00:21:06,666

The story passed along from parent to child, but a story from so far out of the past that its original meaning has been lost for all time, except in the hearts of men.

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00:21:11,666 --> 00:21:17,666

Coming up next, FBI The Untold Stories brings you the story of hijacker DB Cooper.

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00:21:18,666 --> 00:21:24,666

Then history's crimes and trials investigates the assassination of the father of modern India, Mahatma Gandhi.

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00:21:24,666 --> 00:21:35,665

And later tonight, a museum in a box, startling letters from Mary Todd Lincoln and other fascinating things from the past with a story to tell on history's lost and found.

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00:21:35,665 --> 00:21:39,665

At 8, here on the History Channel, where the past comes alive.

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00:21:47,665 --> 00:21:52,665

The Untold Stories