



The North Texas

Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Challenge activity

by John Blanton

Standard notice: For approximately 20 years several NTS members have underwritten a monetary prize (now at \$12,000) to anybody who can demonstrate one or more claims of the paranormal. To obtain the prize the claimant must submit to a test under controlled conditions. Before such a test we require that claimants provide us a demonstration. This demonstration is informal, and no prize is awarded in the event of a successful demonstration. Not that this matters, because through a number of such demonstrations we have never seen any signs of the paranormal at work, and no claimant has ever progressed to the stage of a controlled test.

Sometimes claimants contact us by phone, but usually the contact is in the form of an e-mail. As stated on the Challenge page of our Web site, we publish all correspondence related to the North Texas Paranormal Challenge on our Web site and possible in the newsletter. See the link below.

In October we received a note from Anita Ikonen (location unknown). Here is what she stated:

Medical dowsing
Sunday, October 23, 2011 10:38 PM
skeptic75287@yahoo.com

North Texas Skeptics,

I'm Anita Ikonen and my paranormal claim is medical dowsing. For four years now I have been investigating the claim together with the skeptical community.

I have already had two larger-scale tests. One with the Independent Investigations Group IIG in November 2009. The test had three trials. Each trial had six people. One of six people in each trial was missing a kidney. I was to say in each trial which of persons is missing a kidney and whether it was the right or left side kidney that was missing.

In the first trial I was unable to form a confident answer. This was not ad hoc and I complained about my lack of confidence after I had submitted the answer, for the whole 10 minute break before the second trial. The results

EVENTS CALENDAR

November Program

Saturday, 17 November
at 2 p.m.

Center for Community
Cooperation
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

We are planning to have a talk
by Ben Radford, deputy editor of
Skeptical Inquirer, but this is not
finalized. 214-335-9248
skeptic75287@yahoo.com

Board Meeting and Social Dinner

Saturday, December 3,
(not a misprint)
7:00 p.m.

Fadi's Mediterranean Grill
14902 Preston Rd.
Dallas, TX
(972) 934-8500

If you plan on attending, please
call. We sometimes change or
cancel these events.

214-335-9248
skeptic75287@yahoo.com

I would be happy to hear from you. And I assure you I would not wish to take your time. This is a well-researched claim and it does seem to mandate further testing!

Would love to discuss this with you further.

Thank you,

Anita Ikonen
www.visionfromfeeling.com

That was a refreshing change from the notes we typically receive. Review, if you will, some of our previous exchanges with claimants who have difficulty getting their thoughts together and then spelling them out correctly beyond that.

At this point I have a word of advice to all claimants. When applying for a test (or demonstration) it is not necessary to provide a detailed history of past successes (and failures). As Joe Friday was noted for saying, "Just the facts, ma'am." What can you do? How do you propose to show us you can do it? Why should we believe it is paranormal? Do not worry about wasting our time. Wasting our time is what we are here for.

We have received subsequent exchanges with Anita Ikonen, and it has boiled down to this: We need to find somebody with a missing kidney or uterus plus six others with all parts intact. Anita will tell us which person is carrying only a partial load.

I regret we will likely need to put the brakes on right here. I am well past the age of Medicare, and I do not personally know anybody with a missing kidney. In jest I have proposed that one of the Challenge underwriters donate a kidney prior to the demonstration. A missing uterus may be a possibility, but that would not involve me.

Another problem is basic statistics. The NTS Paranormal Challenge is not a lottery. We do not put up \$12,000 to be paid out to the first person who can guess who has the missing kidney. A claim for paranormal ability implies a claim that this ability really works. By this I mean it works as well as, for example, a telephone. Granted, telephones fail rarely, but if a person claims his telephone works 99% of the time, then three failures out of ten trials will indicate there is something wrong with this claim for the telephone.

Not only will Anita be required to detect who has the missing kidney out of a lineup of seven people, she will need to do this with another lineup of seven, then another, and another until the chance of success by luck alone is eliminated to the highest degree.

I have not consulted with the other underwriters, but I would be willing to undertake a demonstration that involves two panels of seven people each, provided Anita's claim is for 100% accuracy (no failures allowed). As with the telephone, we do not require 100%, but the claimed success rate will

need to be stated in advance. Something other than 100% will require many more panels of seven.

Other problems that need to be addressed include the possibility of clues picked up by the claimant from others participating in the demonstration. All of this needs to be worked out.

I will be posting the complete correspondence with Anita Ikonen on our Web site. Follow the link below.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/challenge.htm>



Web news

by John Blanton

The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and timely news. Some of it is accurate. Some of it is not. We pick out items of interest to skeptics and pass it along to our readers.

PZ

Paul Zachary Myers works for the University of Minnesota as an associate biology professor. He is also a rabid atheist and a tireless blogger for evolution and against creationism in all its wacky forms. PZ Myers is widely known as just "PZ." His blog is called Pharyngula. It's a biological term, which I will not define here. The link is below. Here are few samples of interest:

Suffer, Earthlings!

Category: Creationism • Kooks

Posted on: October 17, 2011 5:27 PM, by PZ Myers

Creationists have this idea that history can be nothing but an unremitting decline — their version of the second law of thermodynamics is a weird thing that has everything ratcheting down into chaos equally, with no possibility of local decreases in entropy at the expense of an overall greater increase. They have almost convinced me. I once would have said no one could be dumber than Kent Hovind, but I have seen the works of his son Eric, and it's a forthright demonstration of creationist thermodynamics.

We have previously discussed Kent Hovind in the December 1994 issue. Kent and Eric are typical young-Earth creationists (YEC), the kind we have all come to know and love. You would have thought with the coming of the twenty-first

century and the progress of science, the YEC would have gone extinct—morphed into old-Earth creationists (OEC), otherwise known as Intelligent Design fans. You would have been surprised.

While the OECs attempt to stick to known and accepted science (as far as that goes) and want to show God as hidden in the vagaries of biological complexity and random events, the YECs continue to make bold, absurd and unsubstantiated claims for pseudo science of the first kind. As an example, the YECs like to reject the findings of radiometric dating, since this science has demonstrated the Earth is billions of years old (the Bible says only about six thousand).

YECs like the Hovinds are sure dinosaurs coexisted with humans (the Bible leaves room for nothing else), and they continually employ such a vision in their preachings and in the nice little books they publish to educate their children. The item PZ Myers alludes to is a discussion between Hovind and Paul Taylor about science on the *Creation Today Show*. The transcript is from 14 October this year.

<http://www.drdino.com/did-a-giant-asteroid-kill-off-the-dinosaurs-are-there-aliens-and-ufos-transcript/>

Paul Taylor: Absolutely which is absolutely fascinating. So, you know, the idea of dinosaurs dying out.

...

Paul Taylor: And what they've done is they've looked at the an...they've got what they think is the answer and they've tried to find the evidence to fit it, which is not scientific research.

Eric Hovind: Not at all, and that's the problem. They're, again, they're coming from their own presuppositions

Paul Taylor: That's right

Eric Hovind: What they already believe. We've mentioned several times the book *Dire Dragons*, the new one by Vance Nelson which does a great job of covering dinosaurs throughout history with mankind. It's impossible for a couple of reasons for an asteroid to kill them, because the asteroid, they say, was millions of years ago. The earth isn't millions of years old. And second, they've lived with man, as is very very evident.

Very evident, indeed. Those YECs. I'm going to miss them.

It's not as though PZ dislikes Texas. He just thinks we are a bunch of dumb asses down here. You get to thinking that way when you live up north where you can't see the ground half the year and where the governor doesn't overrule scientists working for the state. Come to think of it. It probably doesn't have anything to do with not being able to see the ground for six months.

Anyhow, PZ got in his most recent dig with an item about how science is not done in Texas.

http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2011/10/why_even_bother_consulting_the.php

Why even bother consulting the scientists at all?

Category: Environment • Politics

Posted on: October 17, 2011 11:11 AM, by PZ Myers

A group of scientists have done the right thing: they authored an environmental report, and are now publicizing the changes the Texas state administration tried to impose on it. This is going to backfire on the politicians: rather than hiding away the science that conflicts with their ideology, the censorship is highlighting the corruption and denialism.

The story appeared in *The Guardian* from the UK, and there is not much I can avoid quoting:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/oct/14/rick-perry-texas-censorship-environment-report>

Rick Perry officials spark revolt after doctoring environment report

Scientists ask for names to be removed after mentions of climate change and sea-level rise taken out by Texas officials

Suzanne Goldenberg, US environment correspondent

guardian.co.uk, Friday 14 October 2011 08.05 EDT

Officials in Rick Perry's home state of Texas have set off a scientists' revolt after purging mentions of climate change and sea-level rise from what was supposed to be a landmark environmental report. The scientists said they were disowning the report on the state of Galveston Bay because of political interference and censorship from Perry appointees at the state's environmental agency.

All scientists involved removed their names from the report after state officials made unauthorized changes to remove language that smacked of environmentalism. Some of the sensitive wording involved scientific measurements:

Officials even deleted a reference to the sea level at Galveston Bay rising five times faster than the long-term average – 3mm a year compared to .5mm a year – which Anderson [one of the authors] noted was a scientific fact. “They just simply went through and summarily struck out any reference to climate change, any reference to sea level rise, any reference to human influence – it was edited or eliminated,” said Anderson. “That's not scientific review that's just straight forward censorship.”

Others have examined the situation.

Mother Jones has tracked the changes. The agency has defended its actions. "It would be irresponsible to take whatever is sent to us and publish it," Andrea Morrow, a spokeswoman said in an emailed statement. "Information was included in a report that we disagree with."

She said Anderson's report had been "inconsistent with current agency policy", and that he had refused to change it. She refused to answer any questions. Campaigners said the censorship by the Texas state authorities was a throwback to the George Bush era when White House officials also interfered with scientific reports on climate change.

It is difficult to parse Morrow's "inconsistent with current agency policy" without reading "science funded by the government must conform to government policies."

It does not make us feel any better, but similar problems exist elsewhere.

In the last few years, however, such politicisation [UK spelling] of science has spread to the states. In the most notorious case, Virginia's attorney general Ken Cuccinelli, who is a professed doubter of climate science, has spent a year investigating grants made to a prominent climate scientist Michael Mann, when he was at a state university in Virginia.

Several courts have rejected Cuccinelli's demands for a subpoena for the emails. In Utah, meanwhile, Mike Noel, a Republican member of the Utah state legislature called on the state university to sack a physicist who had criticised climate science doubters.

The university rejected Noel's demand, but the physicist, Robert Davies said such actions had had a chilling effect on the state of climate science. "We do have very accomplished scientists in this state who are quite fearful of retribution from lawmakers, and who consequently refuse to speak up on this very important topic. And the loser is the public," Davies said in an email.

"By employing these intimidation tactics, these policymakers are, in fact, successful in censoring the message coming from the very institutions whose expertise we need."

As mentioned, *Mother Jones* has provided a detailed analysis.

<http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/perry-officials-censored-climate-report>

John Anderson, the oceanographer at Rice University who wrote the chapter, provided *Mother Jones* with a copy of the edited document, complete with tracked changes from top TCEQ officials. You can see the cuts—which include how much sea level rise has

increased over the years, as well as the statement that this rise "is one of the main impacts of global climate change"—here and embedded at the end of this story. As the document shows, most of the tracked changes came from Katherine Nelson, the assistant director in the water quality planning division. Her boss, Kelly Holligan, is listed as a reviewer on the document as well.

Follow the link above to see the line-by-line changes made by the state agency.

We previously did an item on global warming denial, and the theme centered on the infamous *kettle defense*. See the link:

<http://ntskeptics.org/1998/1998february/february1998.htm#kettle>

The mindset of people who deny some basic science is evident in this item:

http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2011/10/watts_wrote_a_check_he_couldnt.php

Watts wrote a check he couldn't cash

Category: Environment

Posted on: October 23, 2011 10:36 AM, by PZ Myers

That wacky climate change denier and radio weather broadcaster Anthony Watts took a brave step a while back, and I commend him for it. He was enthused about an independent research project, the Berkeley Earth Project, that would measure the planet's temperature over the last centuries and compare it to the work of NOAA and NASA on earth's temperature — he apparently expected that it would show that NASA and NOAA had been inflating the data. He was so confident that he went on the record saying:

I'm prepared to accept whatever result they produce, even if it proves my premise wrong.

Excellent! That's a good scientific attitude.

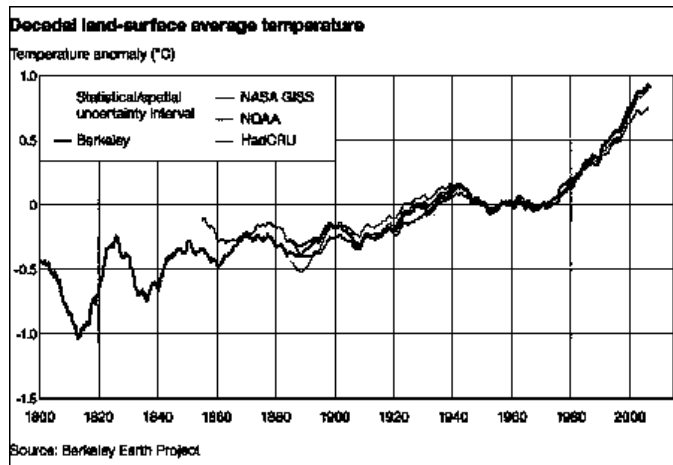
So the results have been published, and they look like this: [see the graph on page 6]

Results from the Berkeley Earth project data fits existing NASA and NOAA temperature records like a glove.

You can probably see the NASA/NOAA data wiggling beneath the dark bold line of new data from the Berkeley Earth Project. They're rather...close. Intimate, even.

What do you think Anthony Watts' response was?

I consider the paper fatally flawed as it now stands, and thus I recommend it be removed from publication



consideration by JGR until such time that it can be reworked.

Yep. Didn't give the results he wanted. Therefore, the experiment is bad.

PZ is typically strident in his skeptical analyses, and he does not mince words in characterizing the fools and frauds that inhabit our world. This approach does not make friends in some circles, but in some circles this is not a great loss. Anyhow, you should put reading Pharyngula in your weekly schedule.



References:

PZ Myers *Pharyngula* blog is at <http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/>

What's new

by Robert Park

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

Climate: it's true; the world really is getting warmer.

The most comprehensive scientific review of historical temperature records ever carried out seems to remove any lingering doubts. A group of scientists at the University of California, Berkeley find that the average global land temperature has risen by about 1C since the mid-1950s. That's big. The group has submitted four papers describing their

findings to *Geophysical Research Letters*. It is unusual to circulate papers prior to peer review, but Richard Muller, author of "Physics for Future Presidents," who heads the project, may have been influenced by the apparent attempts of the energy industry to corrupt the scientific process, such as the hacking of private climate-files at the University of East Anglia.

[<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN09/wn121809.html>]

Steve Jobs: near the end, a little science might have helped.

Never a scholar, Steve Jobs didn't understand, or didn't believe, the first law of science: "Every observable effect has a physical cause." Perhaps the most profound insight of all time, causality is a total rejection of the supernatural. According to his biographer, Walter Isaacson, whose book, *Steve Jobs*, will be out Monday, Jobs declined surgery when the cancer was detected and relied instead on acupuncture, herbs and other "alternative therapies." Eventually he regretted his decision, but by then the cancer had spread. A week after the world mourned the death of Steve Jobs, the body of 70 year old Dennis Ritchie was found in his New Jersey home, where he lived alone. The developer of the Unix Operating System,

Vaccine: there is no inoculation against ignorance.

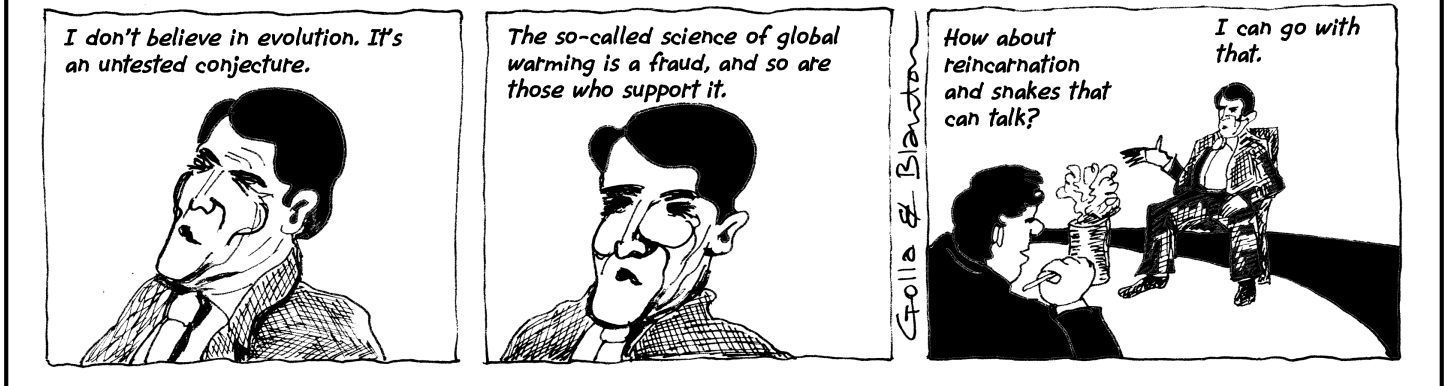
Here we go again. Last week during a debate of Republican presidential candidates, Representative Michele Bachmann characterized human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine as "a potentially dangerous drug," and linked its effect to "mental retardation." There is no medical support for her wildly irresponsible remarks; the HPV vaccine prevents cervical cancer, and an editorial in *Nature* calls on Bachmann to retract her words, but I don't think she reads *Nature*. The 1998 claim of British researcher Andrew Wakefield that the common MMR vaccine causes autism set off a revival of the anti-vaccination movement, and a corresponding rise in measles cases. In 2009, however, Wakefield was found to have altered patients records to support his claim.

[<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN11/wn010711.html>]
Barred from the practice of medicine in the UK, Wakefield now operates an autism clinic in Austin, Texas. He doesn't have a US medical license, but such formalities don't much matter in Texas. Rick Perry, the Governor of Texas, differs with Bachmann on HPV, having attempted to mandate the use of the HPV vaccine for 11 and 12-year-old schoolgirls as the Center for Disease Control recommends, which may have something to do with the fact that Merck, the only maker of HPV vaccine, is a major contributor to Perry's campaign.

Cell phoneys: brain cancer link is rejected again.

Ten years ago, a brilliant Danish epidemiological study found no link between mobile phone use and brain cancer (*JNCI* 2001, 93: 203-7). A decadal reexamination by Denmark's

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Institute of Cancer Epidemiology, released last week, again found no link. The object of the new study was to look for any evidence of latent cancer that had not yet shown up in 2001; none was found. In a 2001 JNCI editorial I pointed out that none would be expected, since microwave radiation is non-ionizing, Park, Robert L, JNCI 2001, 93: 166-167. Can we now put the damned cell-phone/cancer scare behind us?

Wireless: where should I put my cell phone, doctor?

The hot new place for young women to tuck their cell phones is inside their bra. They set the ring on “vibrate,” creating an erogenous tingle when a call comes in. Devra Davis, author of “Disconnect,” a book about the alleged dangers of cell-phone radiation, worries that the women are being set up for breast cancer. Microwave radiation, Davis says, “seeps directly into the soft fatty tissue of the breast.” What does it do there? As Albert Einstein explained in 1905, the photon energy is given by the frequency times Planck's constant. That's plenty of energy to excite molecular vibrations, which heats tissue, but it's only one millionth of the ionization threshold energy, so radiation is not a cancer threat. Meanwhile in Washington, DC, a Wireless Safety Summit in a couple of weeks will focus on legislation to block smart meters, which is a totally dumb idea.

Wi-Fi refuge: United States National Radio Quiet Zone.

A 34,000 km² rectangle of land straddling the border of Virginia and West Virginia surrounds The Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Telescope, the world's largest fully steerable radio telescope. The site was chosen partly because the Allegheny Mountains block the horizontal propagation of radio signals, but mostly because Robert C Byrd (D-WV) was one powerful US Senator. Radio transmission in the zone is either limited or banned outright. In addition to radio astronomers, the quiet zone has also attracted a colony of people who say they suffer from Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity (EHS). They certainly

suffer from something, but EHS is not medically recognized in the US. In a BBC News interview last week I suggested that the appropriate treatment for a non-ailment such as EHS would be homeopathic medicine.

Homeopathy: the dilution limit and the culture of credulity.

Based in France, Boiron, a huge multinational maker of homeopathic-remedies, is suing an Italian blogger, Samuele Riva, for saying *oscillococcinum*, the company's featured flu medication, has no active ingredient. Congratulations Sam, I gave up trying to get Boiron to sue me, years ago but the Center for Inquiry, of which I'm a member, is pleading with Boiron to sue us. “*Anas barbariae hepatis et cordis extractum*,” is listed as the active ingredient by the company. Its prepared at a concentration of 200CK HPUS from the liver of the Barbary duck. The 200CK means the solution has been diluted 1 part in 100, shaken, and repeated sequentially 200 times. HPUS means the medication is listed in the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States, and prepared according to 1938 federal guidelines. Its a national disgrace that the antiquated law sanctioning homeopathy, introduced by Sen. Royal Copeland, himself a homeopathist, is still on the books. The dilution claim is totally meaningless. Somewhere around the 30th of the 200 sequential dilutions, the dilution limit of Earth would be reached, with the entire Earth becoming the solute. That is, the possibility of even one molecule of the duck-liver extract remaining in the solution beyond that point would be negligible. Long before the 200th dilution, the dilution limit of the entire visible universe would have been reached. This is all quite meaningless. Astronomers put the number of atoms in the visible universe at about 10 to the 80th power. It would take many universes to get to a dilution of 200 C.

Bob Park can be reached via email at whatsnew@bobpark.org

North Texas Skeptics
P. O. Box 111794
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

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Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature _____ Date _____

The North Texas Skeptics, P. O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (214) 335-9248

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