



# *The North Texas* **Skeptic**

Volume 24

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## Southern Fried Bigfoot

by John Blanton

**W**e get e-mails. We get many e-mails. In fact, that is how most of our skeptical adventures get started. Which explains the following:

Cindy and Sean Whitley wrote:

October 27, 2004  
The North Texas Skeptics  
[etc]

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm currently making a low/no-budget documentary entitled "Southern Fried Bigfoot!" It's not a comedy or a mockumentary, but an objective look at the Bigfoot legends and stories from the American South. I'm really looking to illuminate and preserve a bit of Southern folklore that many people don't know about.

Over the last two years, I've had the pleasure of interviewing anthropologists, wildlife biologists, artists, writers, Bigfoot believers and skeptics. I'd like to see if anyone from your organization might be interested in granting us an interview for the project.

...

Sincerely,  
Sean Whitley

The net result is Sean and his cameraman came over in January 2005 and shot a short interview. Naturally, my contribution was the skeptical viewpoint.

Then, time passed.

In 2009 I received an e-mail telling me the documentary was finished, and Sean sent me a copy. I was out in California at the time, and I did not get back to Dallas until December. I got around to viewing it after the holidays, and it was worth the wait.

Sean followed up by e-mail, providing some particulars:

### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### February Program

Saturday, February 20, 2010,  
at 2 p.m.  
Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

#### Bad Science

The February program will deal with the topic of bad (wrong) science. This will obviously include but not be limited to cold fusion and the hafnium bomb.

#### Board Meeting and Social Dinner

Saturday, February 27, 2010,  
at 7 p.m.

Glorias  
4140 Lemmon Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75219

Let us know if you are coming.  
These meeting dates are  
sometimes changed.

214-335-9248

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 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All  
 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend  
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or  
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings  
 on topics of current interest or social events.

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We spent five years making the documentary and shot it on location throughout the Southern US, having to start and stop due to job and time constraints. This was also a totally self-financed project; we had no backers or real budget to speak of. However, we did manage to land interviews with a number of Bigfoot researchers, scientists, artists, skeptics, musicians, and zoologists. For the record, I keep an open mind about the existence of Bigfoot, but I wanted to show all sides of the debate, so I made sure that we got the opinions of the people who believe, those who disbelieve, and those who are on the fence about the subject.

In April 2009 The Documentary Channel aired *SFB*, where it continues to run three to four times a month.

The story of the southern Bigfoot closely parallels the more notorious Bigfoot of northern California. During the 1960s both regions began to report sightings of large, bipedal critters with hairy bodies.

The magnitude of the effort involved is evident in the breadth of the panel of "experts" interviewed. Featured creatures include the notorious Florida Skunk Ape, the Chupacabras, and even the close-to-home Lake Worth Monster.

Naturally Craig Woolheater is there. He heads up the Texas Bigfoot Research Conservancy and hosts the Texas Bigfoot conference annually, usually in Southeast Texas somewhere. My regret is I have not been able to attend any of these.

Viewers will also see Dan Maloney, who is VP and general curator of the Audubon Zoo and Vaughn Bryant, Professor of Anthropology at Texas A&M University. These two gentlemen provide a leveling basis for the *SFB* story.

No matter concerning crypto zoology would be complete without Loren Coleman, and he is there, as well. Wikipedia has this to say:<sup>1</sup>

Coleman writes on popular culture, animal mysteries, folklore, and cryptozoology and the editor of the *Skeptical Inquirer* has said that "[a]mong monster hunters, Loren's one of the more reputable". He has appeared on television and radio interviews about cryptids. He has written articles and books on cryptozoology and other Fortean topics. He was a publicity consultant on *The Mothman Prophecies*.

I showed excerpts from the video at the January meeting, and we will plan to do a program on crypto zoology including a full-length presentation in the future.

You can buy your own copy of the DVD from Amazon. The NTS will get a commission (if you use our link). Here is the link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B002LVVEG0/thenorthtexaske>

### References

- 1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loren\\_Coleman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loren_Coleman)



## Challenge activity

by John Blanton

Periodically we like to update readers on the status of the NTS Paranormal Challenge. There has been turbulence in this area recently, so I need to give a quick summary.

In July 2009 Raymond Powell from Tennessee phoned the NTS hotline and told me he could project his thoughts. He wanted our money. I actually received that thought in advance, but I did not tell Raymond.

The prize is currently \$12,000, so it should be attractive to anybody who can actually perform one of these paranormal feats.

Raymond apparently has limited communications resources, and at first he insisted on conducting the correspondence by phone. I reminded him that we prefer to conduct business related to the Challenge only by e-mail. We like it that way, because e-mail provides a traceable record of who said what and when they said it. The hope is to avoid messy recriminations later on if things don't turn out the way the claimant likes.

And that is usually the case. We have been doing this for several years, and no claimant has ever had success of any kind.

We also like for all claimants to provide us with an up-front demonstration before we get serious about his claim. That avoids having a bunch of people wasting their time and resources processing a claim with no merit.

Additionally, I did some checking on Raymond Powell. I contacted James Underdown at the Center for Inquiry West, and I contacted Alison Smith, who is with the James Randi Educational Foundation. Alison previously gave a presentation at the NTS program meeting in August 2008.

Both Alison and James were familiar with Raymond Powell, and James mentioned he had previously attempted to conduct a test with Raymond, but nothing ever came of it.

Anyhow, Raymond finally got back to me by e-mail:

N. TEXAS SKEPTIC CHALLENGE. MENTAL  
TRANSMISSION.

Tuesday, January 5, 2010 10:26 AM

From: RAYMOND POWELL

To: SKEPTIC75287@YAHOO.COM

DEAR MR. BLANTON, MY NAME IS  
RAYMOND EDWARD POWELL JR. WE SPOKE  
ON THE PHONE ABOUT ME READING THE  
BIBLE FOR 20 MINS. FOR THE CHALLENGE.  
YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO BE THE RECEIVER

YOU AND YOUR ASSOCIATES WE BE ABLE  
TO SEE EVERY WORD I READ, FOR 20 MINS.  
FOR THE INFORMAL CHALLENGE AND  
FORMAL CHALLENGE. I DID NOT KNOW  
THE FIRST PERSON DID NOT SEND YOU THE  
EMAILS AS HE TOLD ME HE DID. I TRULY  
APOLOGIZE I HOPE WE CAN AGREE ON  
DOING THIS AS WE SPOKE OVER THE  
PHONE. I WAS NOT ABLE TO SEND YOU THE  
EMAIL 1,04,2010 AS I HAD HOPED TO HAVE .  
I HOPE YOU,LL CALL ME AFTER YOU  
RECEIVE THIS EMAIL AS YOU ADVISED ME  
OVER THE PHONE YOU WOULD DO,  
I BELIEVE YOU WILL. THANK YOU  
RAYMOND EDWARD POWELL JR.

OK, Raymond also has some problems with the shift key on his computer, but we can work around that.

Raymond proposed to read a passage from the Bible. He would remain in Tennessee, and I would be at the January meeting of the North Texas Skeptics. I was supposed to perceive what Raymond was reading. Afterwards we were to compare notes and see whether the transmission and reception matched.

Raymond phoned at the appointed time, and stated he was prepared to read. He told me what passage he was going to read.

I stopped Raymond and reminded him this would not be much of a demonstration of paranormal abilities if I knew in advance what he was going to read.

Raymond agreed and started to read from another part of the Bible. This was supposed to be the King James Version, but I never did verify that.

Raymond read, and I concentrated very hard. I have to confess I did not feel anything coming from Raymond, but I imagined to the best of my ability what Raymond must be reading. My foreknowledge of the Bible was of no help in this instance, because I have none.

Finally I asked Raymond to stop reading and to tell me what he had read. Unfortunately there was no match between what I imagined Raymond was reading and what he told me on the phone. Not even close.

That was it for the day. Raymond was disappointed, of course, but he promised to think over the problem and get back to me.

I was surprised at the tone of Raymond's e-mail when he got back to me on 19 January.

JOHN THE LAST THING I HEARD YOU SAY WAS HEY RAYMOND YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU SAY, AND THE SOUND YOU MADE WANTING ME TO BLOW IT OFF. I HAVE READ ALOT ABOUT YOU AND HOW PEOPLE OF RESPECT CLAIM THAT YOUR NOT AN HONEST PERSON.I WAS HOPING YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN HONEST WITH ME.PEOPLE FROM HONG CONG HAVE EMAILED CLAIMING THAT THEY READ EVERY WORD OF THE PASSAGE I READ THRU MY ABILITIES. GOD SAYS I WILL CURSE THE THAT CURSES THE ,AND I WILL BLESS THE THAT BLESSES THE .THE LIBRARY WAS,NT OPENED 1/18/10.

THANKYOU, RAYMOND EDWARD POWELL JR.

I must admit that I have been called a liar by some very upstanding people, but I was disappointed that Raymond thought I was being deceitful in any way.

I sent Raymond a follow-up e-mail reminding him of a few truths. These included that I was prepared to publish all correspondence, part of which you are now reading. I told Raymond:

Unfortunately your demonstration on Saturday failed, as I could not describe what you were reading.

If you would like, we can design another demonstration of your abilities. As I see it, there is a problem with the demonstration you designed:

Your demonstration depended on my ability to receive. Your design did not take into account the possibility that, even though you have the ability to transmit your thoughts, I may not have the ability to receive them.

Let me know if you would like to take another shot at designing a demonstration. We will be eager to work with you.

All correspondence related to the NTS Paranormal Challenge will be published in our newsletter and on our Web site.

After additional inflammatory exchanges, I received the following from Raymond Powell:

THE RULES STATE INFORMAL AND FORMAL DEMO NOT A VIEW TIMES. JOHN WE DON,T HAVE TIME TO PLAY GAMES WHEN YOU ALREADY KNOW I HAVE SOMETHING TO TEST OR YOU COULD NOT REPEAT WHAT JAMES UNDERDOWN FROM ILLG 50,000 PARANORMAL CHALLENGE SAID TO ME AND HOW HE TESTED ME OVER THE PHONE. TO ME IT SEEMS THE PERSONS HOSTING THESE CHALLENGES TRY TO CHANGE THEIR RULES AFTER THEY HAVE TESTED ME OVER THE PHONE AND KNOW I,M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DEMONSTRATE AND TRULY WIN. THE RULES DON,T STATE I GIVE YOU A FREE DEMO AND WASTE MY TEAMS TIME. THE WHOLE WORLD SEES YOUR EMAILS AND SEES WHAT KIND OF MAN YOU ARE. THE RULES STATE INFORMAL AND FORMAL DEMO . EITHER STAY TO THE RULES OR CANCEL YOUR CHALLENGE. MAYBE YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT YOU EMAIL

FOR EVERYONE SEES THEM.

THANKYOU,

RAYMOND EDWARD POWELL JR.

Raymond is correct on one point. The Challenge page on our Web site does not prescribe an up-front demonstration, but I always insist on one for reasons previously stated. And I always advise claimants of this requirement.

I sent the following to Raymond Powell:

Raymond,

The procedure described on our Web site at <http://ntskeptics.org/challenge/challenge.htm> does not prescribe a demonstration prior to setting up a formal test. However, I always insist on seeing whether a claimant has anything to show before I move to a formal test.

You had your chance at a demonstration on 16 January this year, and your demonstration was unsuccessful. This indicates why I require a demonstration prior to proceeding. It helps you refine your test procedure to ensure your test will be successful.

Based on the outcome of your demonstration earlier this month, I would ordinarily conclude you have nothing to show and would advise you not to waste any more of your time on this. However, you seem sincere, so I have advised you to make some changes to your demonstration if you want to continue. I am willing to continue to work with you on an up-front

demonstration if you are serious about proving your abilities.

To perform a demonstration that is satisfactory to you, you will need to provide your own receiver, and one or both of you will have to come to Dallas so we can witness the demonstration. Let me know if that is what you want to do.

Best regards,

John Blanton

Skeptical Web Master

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

214-335-9248

As of this writing I have had no additional communication from Raymond Powell.

The full e-mail correspondence is on our Web site:

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



## NTS on Facebook and Twitter

If you are a Facebook or Twitter fan, you can now keep in touch with fellow Skeptics here. Seeking to firm up skeptical community relations we have added North Texas Skeptics groups to these services.

The link to our Twitter group is  
<http://twitter.com/NTSkeptics>.

For Facebook enter *north texas skeptics* into the search window, and you will be given the opportunity to join the group. At the time of this writing there were already 30 members in the group. Join Facebook by linking to Facebook.com and signing up.

Of course, you can still keep in touch with the NTS by e-mail. The official NTS e-mail address is [skeptic75287@yahoo.com](mailto:skeptic75287@yahoo.com), which happens to come directly to the NTS Web master. For privacy concerns we do not give out e-mail addresses of members, so this might not be a convenient way for you to find other members. Twitter and Facebook solve this problem by allowing access to those who want to be known.

Shortly our Web site will feature icons pointing to our presence on Facebook and Twitter. Our site is, of course, at <http://www.ntskeptics.org>. See you there.



## Journal review on herbal medicine

by Claudia Meek

Searching through the scientific journals in the course of my work, I found an interesting article in the *Journal of Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Analysis*.<sup>1</sup> Even though the article is about an analytical method to quantify multiple drugs, the paper reveals some of the components of herbal medicines and dietary supplements.

Herbal medicines and dietary supplements are considered by many as being harmless because of their natural origin and their supposed treatment of some diseases. Various herbal medicines and dietary supplements were analyzed with Liquid chromatography-Mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) for illegal adulterations. It is necessary to clarify that an illegal adulteration on a natural product is a synthetic drug. The paper presents data on how some manufacturers included synthetic drugs in the formula of their products marketed as 'herbal medicine' or 'dietary supplement,' in order to improve or obtain the effect of their products. The adulterants tested are in Table 1. (See page 6.)

For some products, such adulterations are quite serious; for example sildenafil (Viagra) was recently found being included in many herbal medicines and dietary supplements which were claimed to have the effect of improving sexual ability and vitality. *What is ridiculous is that some of those products were even claimed to be capable of improving both male and female "sexual function."* Table 2 (on page 6) shows the summary of test results for enhancing sexual potency.

It is interesting to point out that the so called natural products are adulterated with synthetic drugs by the manufacturers, who usually claimed that the fact that their products came from "purely natural substances" (which means totally harmless, according to some manufacturers) was responsible for the effect of their products. No wonder some natural products sometimes work! Some adulterations are serious, such as sildenafil (Viagra) or diazepam. These adulterations violate regulations and laws of many countries.

(Refer to Tables 1 and 2 on page 6.)

### References

- 1 Journal of Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Analysis 40 (2006) 305-311



Table 1. Nine adulterants tested in herbal medicine and food supplements

Adulterant (Synthetic Drug)	Number of samples examined	Number of positive results	Product claims	Use of the synthetic drug
Sildenafil (Viagra)	81	28	Products declared having the effect of improving sexual ability	Drug used to treat erectile dysfunction and pulmonary arterial hypertension
Famotidine	47	18	Products declared being capable of keeping the fitness of stomach and helping the cure for gastrosis	Inhibits stomach acid production, and it is commonly used in the treatment of peptic ulcer disease and gastroesophageal reflux disease
Ibuprofen	14	3	Products declared being beneficial to the therapy for arthritis	It is used for relief of symptoms of arthritis, primary dysmenorrhea, fever, and as an analgesic, especially where there is an inflammatory component
Promethazine	19	2	Products declared having the effect of tranquilization or improving 'health status' of old people	Used as an antihistamine and antiemetic. It can also have strong sedative effects
Diazepam	11	3	Products declared being helpful to the remission of dysphoria and insomnia	Commonly used for treating anxiety, insomnia, seizures, muscle spasms, sedative, and skeletal muscle relaxant
Nifedipine	16	6	Products declared being capable of preventing hypertension and angina pectoris, and maintaining cardiovascular health	Its main uses are as an antianginal (especially in Prinzmetal's angina) and antihypertensive
Captopril	19	8	Products declared being capable of preventing and healing hypertension	Used for the treatment of hypertension and some types of congestive heart failure
Amoxicillin	22	2	Products declared being capable of healing tracheitis	It is a moderate-spectrum, bacteriolytic, $\beta$ -lactam antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections
Dextromethorphan	22	4	Products declared being effective for relieving cough and resolving phlegm	It is an antitussive or cough suppressant drug

Table 2. Summary of test results of products for enhancing sexual potency

Dosage form	Number of samples examined	Number of positive results by LC-MS/MS
Capsule	36	15
Tablet	17	8
Oral liquid	16	3
Medicated wine	9	2
Honeyed pill	3	0

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## NTS elections

We do this every year. In January NTS members meet to elect a board of directors for the year. Then the newly-elected board members meet to elect the officers and to appoint other positions in the organization.

We like to have five or more people on the board, and we have had as many as nine. There is no restriction as to who can be on the board, except that board members must be full members of the NTS with their dues paid up. We mention this from time to time: The NTS is run by those who show up.

This may sound a lot like one of the major political parties, but the board members tend to be those who were members the previous year. We had a few changes.

David Price is new to the board, and we are missing Jack and Elizabeth Hittson. Jack died last year from cancer, and Elizabeth has toned down her outside activities. Else the membership was predictable:

Erling Beck  
John Blanton  
John Brandt  
Prasad Golla  
Claudia Meek  
Barbara Neuser  
David Price  
Mike Selby



Newly-elected board members:  
David Price, Mike Selby, John Blanton, Barbara Neuser, John Brandt, Erling Beck, Claudia Meek. Not present is Prasad Golla

### The new board elected the following officers:

President—John Brandt  
Vice President—Mike Selby  
Secretary—David Price  
Treasurer—Barbara Neuser

### Appointed positions included:

Newsletter Editor—Keith Blanton  
Web Master—John Blanton  
Meeting Coordinator—Claudia Meek

The new board also decided on some changes in the way we do business at the NTS. We decided to meet again a week after the elections to map out new strategies. See another item in this newsletter to read more about it. ☐

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

**FIRST CLASS**

Address Correction Requested

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### Application for Membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail address \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Special expertise and/or interests \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Membership agreement:

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 \_\_\_\_\_

#### Indicate your choice:

**Member:** A voting member and print newsletter recipient. Family privileges included. Annual \$50.00 ☐

**Member:** E-mail version only. Same as above, but newsletter is delivered by e-mail. Annual \$30.00 ☐

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**Non-member:** Who chooses to receive just the e-mail version. Annual subscription \$10.00 ☐

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