

NEW ZEALAND SKEPTIC

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Can Sharks Save the Human Race?

More from last year's Skeptics conference.

Paul Davis and George Slim

A RELATIVELY recent development in Western society has been the increased popularity of health foods and dietary supplements. While initially these health foods could only be purchased through a sparse number of "alternative retail outlets" manned by the converted, as sales have grown and the realisation of the potential profit has become obvious to more people, availability has become easier. There has been a mushrooming of "Health Food Shops", an increasing number of supermarkets have established "Health Food Bars" and many conventional pharmacies have made the sale of these products a feature of their business.

Claims for beneficial effects of these products have also increased. There are those that provide increased

energy or are especially suitable for better skin tone, others boost the immune system. Some offer unique benefits to female reproductive function.

In most instances, when an attempt is made to evaluate them using the information

supplied by the manufacturer or marketer, the customer is grossly disappointed. Usually the compositional analysis is provided, but there is no information about the bioactivity or the reason why it is believed to be beneficial for certain conditions.

Knowing that there is a certain level of sodium or that there is 25% protein in an item does not say anything about whether it will be effective for treating piles! It is not too difficult to find two quite different products with similar compositional properties which $\Rightarrow p3$

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Editorial

WINTER is here, and it's time for all good skeptics to heed the call and flock to Auckland for the annual conference, where illuminating conversation and inspired addresses await. And then the same good skeptics can generate battle strategies to cope with all the fuss about the Millennium and the imminent end of the world. In the meantime, here's a copy of the *Skeptic* to read while making these important plans.

There's a mixed bag this time, and there's very little on the sad case of Liam Williams-Holloway, an event which raised issues and got people talking, always a good thing. It raises some basic questions about society however. Does Government have the right to force treatment — any treatment — on people? Or should parents be able to make informed judgements themselves? Can these same people analyse information accurately, because issues like these are a minefield of grey areas. It's not always black or white.

Check out Neil McKenzie's comments in *Skepsis*; he's right about the Otago Healthcare authorities needing a lesson in public relations. And he's also right that it's Liam who's going to suffer the consequences. My heart goes out to the parents.

There is so much fear and misinformation out there about cancer and "treatment" for it, so it is interesting to see that there may be something to this shark cartilage talk. Paul Davis and George Slim, two Wellington researchers, describe in their article an experimental model which provides one of the pieces of evidence necessary to establish that shark cartilage may have an anti-cancer effect. More work and funding is needed, but it's a step forward. Although I'm sure the sharks wouldn't agree.

By the way, they mention the use of St John's wort for depression. Just last week a friend of mine said she'd been using it and it was working. It's just that, since taking it, she was getting this really weird tingling and buzzing down one side of her face. As her family gets taken out by strokes, blood clots and things like that, she was a tad concerned.

Here's an uncanny coincidence: my husband David had just come across some references to St John's wort while looking for information on an unrelated topic on the Internet. He found that it has been demonstrated to be effective as an anti-depressant (working with neurotransmitters), but it may have less favourable side effects. While the mechanism is still unclear, it seems to work in a way similar to some prescribed medicines, which, when combined with certain food and other potions, can

cause dizziness, blood clotting, heart failure and a few other fun things. While one couldn't say the St John's wort was indeed the culprit in this case, if it were me I'd stay with the depression. People have this frustrating perception that if its herbal, then it's gotta be good for you.

And a little while ago, there was another uncanny occurrence in our household. We received a query by email from a total stranger in France about a missing regiment in Gallipoli. And, just hours before, David had been reading back issues of the *NZ Skeptic* and had come across a reference to exactly this topic. Things move in mysterious ways. Then, out of nowhere, chair-entity Vicki Hyde sent us an article written by Ian McGibbon on the Missing Regiment (which wasn't really missing as much as being totally butchered, but read the piece yourself).

But — another curious coincidence, and how do we explain this — I've finished this little piece and it's 10am — time for my morning coffee. Ways move in mysterious things.

PS All of this talk about how useful the Internet is begs me to urge people to go and see *The Matrix*. Ignore the silly pseudo-spiritual talk and be chilled and intrigued by the sheer brilliance of the story. The costumes are pretty good too. (As is Keanu Reeves).



Contributions

Contributions, whether written articles or newspaper clippings, should be directed to:

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Deadline for next issue: 20 August 1999

Preference will be given to copy supplied by email or sent on an IBM-compatible disc in ASCII text, Word or WordPerfect formats. Discs will be returned if clearly labelled.

Please indicate the source publication and date of any clippings.

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are claimed to have very different effects.

Additionally it is not unknown for marketers to mix their natural product with fillers. These compounds add bulk to the sample, and are generally innocuous but ineffective. The consequence is that the product the customer purchases from the retailer is really of somewhat unknown composition. As this is seldom mentioned in the labelling, one doesn't know what percentage of the product is actually active material.

In view of the expansion of interest in these health products, one may ask about the level of evidence supporting the claims made for them. Have sound scientific experiments been performed which justify some of the claims? Have these results been subjected to peer review and critical assessment?

In general, it has to be said that there is very little convincing data that substantiates many of the contentions. In most instances this is probably because very little good experimental work

has been undertaken. After all, if one can make money by promoting something with claims that do not breach any therapeutic drug and legal requirements, then there is little incentive to invest money to determine what the properties are. There is the risk that one might not get the answer that is sought and as a result the hen that is laying the golden egg is lost.

There are exceptions to this. Ones that readily come to mind are taxol, which is obtained from the Pacific yew tree and is used as a treatment of cancer, the green-lipped mussel extract which can be shown to have efficacy in treating arthritis and, recently, the use of St John's wort for the relief of depression.

Cartilage

Cartilage is widely available through health food outlets usually as 400mg or 500mg capsules. The two most common sources are cattle and shark. A number of claims have been made about its benefits, the most frequent being anti-cancer activity.

The price range of these capsules is wide, ranging from the equivalent of \$450 per kilogram to over \$3,300 per kilogram. Does one know whether the more expensive ones are more beneficial? A recent survey showed only one of nine different forms of the shark cartilage capsules stated the percentage of cartilage in each capsule.

Are the others pure cartilage or do they contain bulking constituents? These are serious considerations when it was reported that shark cartilage sales in the US in 1995 exceeded \$US30 million and the growth rate was exponential.

Shark Cartilage

What do we know about shark cartilage? Many of the brands state the composition. The levels of protein, chondroitin sulphate, calcium, etc are itemised on the labels, but that is not particularly helpful in evaluating what effect the product may have on tumours. There is no indication as to which of the components are likely to be beneficial. None of the labels of the products retail-



Donald Rook, *Skeptic* (UK)

Conditions Amenable to Shark Cartilage Therapy

- Tumours (7 cancers)
- Osteo-arthritis
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Psoriasis
- Enteritis
- Gastritis
- Crohn's disease
- Eczema
- Acne
- Poison Ivy/ Poison Oak
- Anti-viral (eg Herpes)
- Macular Degeneration
- Neovascular glaucoma
- Diabetic retinopathy
- Asthma
- Emphysema
- Kaposi's Sarcoma
- Atherosclerosis
- Mandibular alveolitis
- Haemorrhoids
- Chronic anal itching(pruritis ani)

Table 1

ing in New Zealand describe any proven biological effect.

This is disconcerting in view of the widespread promotion of shark cartilage as being beneficial for the prevention of tumour growth and spread. There is substantial evidence, both in the US and in other countries, that an increasing number of cancer patients are using "alternative remedies". When the evidence supporting the claims of efficacy is minimal, the logic of such approaches is questionable.

The promoters of cartilage purport that it is an anti-angiogenic material, ie, it prevents the growth of new blood vessels. New vessels are required for tumours to continue to grow and for them to "take" at secondary sites. Thus, the inhibition of new vessel production will have an anti-cancer effect. Cartilage is suggested as being especially advantageous because it is virtually free of blood vessels and so possibly contains compounds that inhibit their growth. Sharks are suggested as a superior source because of their very low incidence of

cancers. This idea has been widely promoted through several popular books by Dr William Lane^{1,2}.

But to emphasise the statements above about beneficial claims being unsubstantiated claims, a survey of promotional material for shark cartilage has revealed at least 22 human conditions which are claimed by various entrepreneurs to be ameliorated by it (Table 1).

This number of diverse benefits from the one product may lead a sceptic to think that in due course, and with a few more benefits, it may become a universal panacea and thereby save the human race!

The potential purchaser is also left with the dilemma of whether shark or bovine car-

tilage is likely to be more useful. There have been claims and counter-claims about the relative merits of each source, but these are largely propounded by promoters who obviously have vested interests to protect. There is no published evidence comparing their relative merits.

Another difficulty in interpreting the limited data on the biological effects of consuming shark cartilage is that the few experiments reported in the refereed literature have been in vitro studies. As most people are taking it as a food additive, it is quite possible that an active anti-angiogenic principle demonstrated in one of these assays is destroyed by the digestive system, eliminating any biological effect. This is particularly relevant if the active ingredient is a protein.

In order to address some of these questions, we devised an experimental model where shark cartilage was fed as a dietary supplement to rats and its effect on the growth of new blood vessels was evaluated. Shark cartilage was included in the powdered diet, while control animals received an unsupplemented diet. The outcome was that growth of the new vessels was retarded by up to 50% at the optimal

Days after Induction	Normal Diet (%)	Shark Cartilage Supplemented Diet (%)	Statistical Significance
16	50.2 ± 2.6 (n=52)	23.4 ± 2.6 (n=42)	p<0.0001
25	37.2 ± 2.2 (n=80)	17.5 ± 1.9 (n=79)	p<0.001

TABLE 2: Percentage of mesenteric window area occupied by blood vessels 16 and 25 days after stimulation with Compound 48/80. (Mean ± SEM).

DOSE RESPONSE

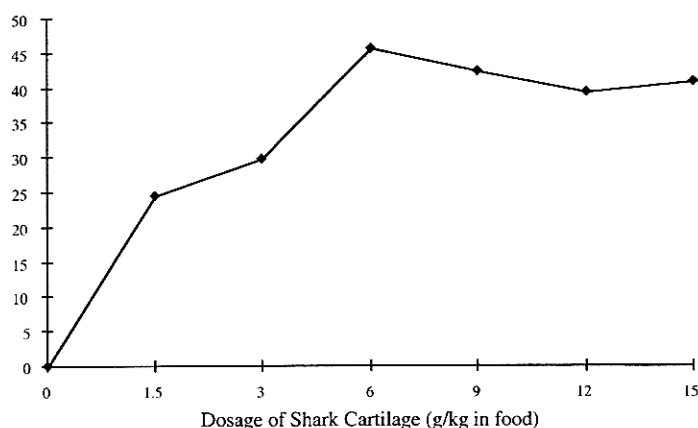


Figure 1

dose (Table 2). This effect was dependent on the dose given up to a maximum of about 6g per kilogram of food, above which there was no added benefit (Figure 1). This has been shown to be reproducible and has been published in the peer-reviewed literature³.

This experiment indicates that there is an anti-angiogenic constituent in shark cartilage which survives the degradation processes characteristic of the mammalian

digestive system. Thus, in rats at least, shark cartilage can inhibit blood vessel growth. This does not prove that such a mechanism also operates in humans. Nor does it show that it has any benefit for the retardation of the tumour progression, despite one manufacturer claiming that our published paper shows that.

The controlled experiments that we reported showed that there is potential for shark cartilage to

have an anti-cancer effect, but that will require further research. Finding investors for such an investigation is the greatest hindrance to rapid progress in this determination. These problems are characteristic of much of the health food industry. However, the overcoming of the myths and claims surrounding many of these products will only be achieved by rigorous scientifically sound investigations.

References

- 1) Lane, I.W., Comac, L. *Sharks Don't Get Cancer*. Avery (New York) (1992).
- 2) Lane, I.W., Comac, L. *Sharks Still Don't Get Cancer*. Avery (New York) (1996).
- 3) Davis, P.F., He, Y., Furneaux, R.H., Johnston, P.S., Ruger, B.M., Slim, G.C. Inhibition of Angiogenesis by Oral Ingestion of Powdered Shark Cartilage in a Rat Model. *Microvasc. Res.* 54: 178-182 (1997).

1999 Skeptics Conference

Auckland University, August 27-29

Proposed topics

Details of actual topics will be made available when finalised.

- ❖ Political correctness
- ❖ Resource Management Act
- ❖ Life and times of a skeptic
- ❖ Liam Holloway case/cancer quackery
- ❖ Telepathology
- ❖ Cold reading
- ❖ Update on Peter Ellis
- ❖ Light Millenium Interlude: Y2K hysteria
- ❖ Reading cats paws?

After-dinner Speaker

David Lange

Timetable

Friday: Social evening
Saturday: papers, conference dinner
Sunday: papers, AGM

See enclosed sheet for more information, costs and registration form.

A Day To Remember: The Missing Regiment

Did a British regiment really vanish mysteriously at Gallipoli?

Ian McGibbon

The Story

Gallipoli, August 28, 1915.

The following is an account of a strange incident that happened on the above date, in the morning, during the severest and final days of fighting, which took place at Hill 60, Suvla Bay, ANZAC.

The day broke clear, without a cloud in sight, as any beautiful Mediterranean day could be expected to be. The exception, however, was a number of perhaps six or eight "loaf of bread" shaped clouds — all shaped exactly alike — which were hovering over "Hill 60". It was noticed that in spite of a four or five mile an hour breeze from the south, these clouds did not alter their position in any shape or form, nor did they drift away under the influence of the breeze. They were hovering at an elevation of about 60 degrees as seen from our observation point 500 ft. up. Also stationary and resting on the ground right underneath this group of clouds was a similar cloud in shape, measuring about 800 ft. in length, 200 ft. in height and 200 ft. in width. This cloud was absolutely dense, almost solid looking in structure, and positioned about 14 to 18 chains from the fighting, in British held territory. All this was observed by 22 men of No 3 section of No 1 Field

Company NZE, including myself, from our trenches on Rhododendron Spur, approximately 2,500 yards southwest of the cloud on the ground. Our vantage point was overlooking "Hill 60" by about 300 ft. As it turned out later, this singular cloud was straddling a dry creek bed or sunken road and we had a perfect view of the cloud's sides and ends as it rested on the ground. Its colour was a light grey, as was the colour of the other clouds.

A British regiment, the First Fourth Norfolk, of several hundred men, was then noticed marching up this sunken road or creek towards "Hill 60". However, when they arrived at this cloud, they marched straight into it, with no hesitation, but no one ever came out to deploy and fight at "Hill 60". About an hour later, after the last of the file had disappeared into it, this cloud very unobtrusively lifted off the ground and, like any fog or cloud would, rose slowly until it joined the other similar clouds which were mentioned at the beginning of this account. On viewing them again, they all looked alike as "peas in a pod". All this time, the group of clouds had been hovering in the same place, but as soon as the singular "ground" cloud had risen to

their level, they all moved away northwards, ie, towards Thrace. In a matter of about three quarters of an hour, they had all disappeared from view.

The Regiment mentioned is posted as "missing" or "wiped out" and on Turkey surrendering in 1918, the first thing Britain demanded of Turkey was the return of this regiment. Turkey replied that she neither captured this regiment, nor made contact with it, and did not know that it existed. A British regiment in 1914-18 consisted of any number between 800 and 4000 men. Those who observed this incident vouch for the fact that Turkey never captured that regiment nor made contact with it.

We, the undersigned, although late in time, that is at the 50th Jubilee of the ANZAC landing, declare that the above described incident is true in every word. Signed by witnesses: 4/165 Sapper F Reichart, Matata, Bay of Plenty, 13/416 Sapper R Newnes, 157 King St, Cambridge, JL Newman, 73 Freyberg St, Otumoetai, Tauranga.

There was also a postscript provided by Reichardt:

The above described incident was observed by 22 men of No 3 section of 1st Div. Coy. NZE. And others, including myself, from our

trenches on *Rhododendron Spur*, a distance of about 2500 yards. From this vantage point about 5,000 ft up we had a perfect view including both sides and ends of the cloud as it rested on the ground. (Owing to the elevation of the observers.)

A complete statement of this incident as given here is included in one of the official histories of the Gallipoli campaign. Also incorporated are descriptions of the disappearance of a British platoon in the fighting in the Sudan about 1898, under similar circumstances, and the mysterious disappearance of a company (could have been British Engineers) during the fighting on the North West Frontier of India and Afganistan [sic]. This happened in the Khyber Pass area. On search parties being sent out to investigate the disappearance of both these units, it was found that the tracks ended suddenly, the footmarks all pointing straight ahead, but nothing beyond, sideways or backwards. The above description of the disappearance of troops on Gallipoli is absolutely correct as I witnessed the event, and the other two events I have read about, contained in one of the history books of which I cannot give the name, but which contains full description of all three incidents. (signed) F Reichardt

Origin Of The Story

Although signed by three Gallipoli veterans, the prime mover in the affair was Frederick Reichardt. He attended a public meeting in Rotorua to discuss UFOs early in 1965, after seeing it

advertised in the local newspaper. After the meeting, he approached organiser Gordon Tuckey and "intimated that he had a story of his own to tell". A meeting was subsequently arranged at a private home, and Reichardt told his story. He refused to allow a tape recording to be made, but some weeks afterwards provided a written statement.

"It was in his own handwriting," recalls Tuckey, "and was signed by himself and the other two alleged witnesses." Tuckey never met the latter. He forwarded the original statement to Henk Hinfelaar, editor of *Spaceview* magazine, though keeping a copy which he had made (and had signed by Reichardt). In signing this copy Reichardt provided the postscript quoted above.

The Witnesses

Frederick Reichardt was a sailor when war was declared in 1914 — indeed, had arrived in France the day before. He subsequently became a member of the British Section, NZ Expeditionary Force (Regimental No 4/165A) on 8 October 1914.

When he arrived in Egypt, he was posted as a sapper to No 3 Section, 1st Divisional Field Company, NZ Engineers. He embarked for Gallipoli on 12 April 1915 and was with his unit until 29 October, when he was admitted to a field hospital suffering from illness. He returned to duty on 6 November.

He served later in France and was repatriated to New Zealand in 1919. On 15 October 1964, when he applied to the Ministry of Defence for

replacement ribbons for his war medals, he was living at Matata in the Bay Of Plenty. He died on 6 November 1978.

Roger Newnes left New Zealand with the Expeditionary Force on 16 October 1914 as a trooper in 4th Squadron, Auckland Mounted Rifles. (He was never a sapper, as he signed himself in the statement in 1965). He proceeded to the Dardanelles on 9 May 1915 and was with his unit until 21 August, when he reported sick (diarrhoea) and was evacuated to hospital at Mudros (where he was admitted on 23 August). He did not return to Gallipoli.

Thus, if he saw an incident it could not have been on 28 August 1915, the date given in the statement.

J.L. Newman embarked for Gallipoli on 12 April 1915. On 5 August he was hospitalised at Lemnos, suffering from gastro-enteritis. He rejoined his unit on 20 September but did not return to Gallipoli.

The statement was apparently signed at the 50th Jubilee of the ANZAC landing, held at Rotorua on 24-26 April 1965; if so, it was among Newman's last acts for he died on the 26th.

Mysterious Disappearances

According to Reichardt's statement, the incident happened "in the morning" of 28 August, though he admitted he might have been wrong as to the exact date, as he "lost count of time during the week of severe fighting." In referring to the incident in a conversation in 1977, however, he noted

three disappearances of units: at Khartoum in 1885, a Scottish company of engineers in the Khyber Pass (no date given) and the Sherwood Foresters at Hill 60, Gallipoli. Finally, in the statement he claims it was "a British Regiment, the First Fourth Norfolks..." which was seen to disappear.

There are no mysteries surrounding either the 9th Sherwood Foresters or the 1/4th Norfolks at Gallipoli, though the former did take part in a disastrous and costly attack on Scimitar Hill, not far from Hill 60, in swirling mist on the evening of 21 August 1915.

A Real Lost Battalion

The 1/5 Norfolks, on the other hand, was often referred to as the "Lost Battalion". This description arose from the account given by General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, of its attack in the later afternoon of 12 August 1915. He noted the decision to have 163rd Brigade, of which the 1/5 Norfolks were part, attack and make good Kuchuk Anafarta Ova, preparatory to the 54th Division assaulting the heights of Kavak Tepe-Teke Tepe at dawn on the 13th.

So that afternoon the 163rd Brigade moved off, and, in spite of serious opposition, established itself about the A of Anafarta..., in difficult and enclosed country. In the course of the fight...there happened a very mysterious thing. The 1/5th Norfolks were on the right of the line, and found themselves for a moment less strongly opposed than the rest of the

brigade. Against the yielding forces of the enemy, Colonel Sir H. Beauchamp, a bold, self-confident officer, eagerly pressed forward, followed by the best part of the battalion. The fighting grew hotter, and the ground became more wooden and broken. At this stage many men were wounded or grew exhausted with thirst. These found their way back to camp during the night. But the Colonel, with 16 officers and 250 men, still kept pushing on, driving the enemy before him. Amongst these ardent souls was part of a fine company enlisted from the King's Sandringham estates. Nothing more was ever seen or heard of any of them. They charged into the forest, and were lost to sight and sound. Not one of them ever came back."

This despatch was published in a British parliamentary paper in 1917, long before any investigation on the ground was possible.

Reichardt, in his statement, claimed that "on Turkey surrendering in 1918, the first thing the British demanded was the return of this regiment" and that the Turks replied they had neither captured nor made contact with it. His source for these assertions is not known; in any event, the Turkish authorities now advise that the attack was wiped out by two reserve companies of the Turkish 36th Regiment "during a bayonet counter-attack".

On returning to his farm after the evacuation, a Turkish farmer later claimed to have found the whole place covered with decomposing

bodies of British soldiers, which he threw into a nearby ravine. The corpses were later exhumed by the British Graves Registration Unit sent to Gallipoli following the war. "We have found the 5th Norfolks", its commanding officer reported on 23 September 1919, "...there were 180 in all, and we could only identify two..."

The bodies were scattered over an area of one square mile, about 500 yards behind where the Turkish front line had been. 122 were eventually found to be Norfolks. Two officers of the 1/5th Norfolks were taken prisoner and repatriated following the end of hostilities; there is no record of their making any statement about a supernatural occurrence on 12 August 1915.

Assuming that 267 men of the 1/5th Norfolks did go missing — Hamilton himself suggests that a number of men broke off from the attack and found their way back to camp during the night — this leaves 143 unaccounted for. Most of them were probably thrown into ravines or mass graves not located by the Graves Unit or taken prisoner, only to die from wounds or maltreatment.

The Sherwood Foresters, on the other hand, were never assumed to have disappeared. They took part in the major British offensive on 21 August, an operation which was greatly hindered by unseasonable mist, which resulted in the attacking British units standing out in sharp relief against the misty background and therefore suffering heavy casualties.

Shortly after dusk, the Foresters attacked Scimitar Hill. They disappeared into the mist and were cut to pieces by the Turks.

Which Incident Did Reichardt See?

The problem of which incident, if either, Reichardt and his "witnesses" saw can be examined under two headings: a) how does their story compare with the known facts and b) were they in a position to see the events.

Reichardt is specific as to the place — Hill 60. Neither Norfolk nor Sherwood attack was on Hill 60, though the latter was on a position sufficiently near (Scimitar Hill) for it to have perhaps become confused in Reichardt's memory. Further, his statement does not suggest a major assault, rather it gives the impression of a body of men marching in close order and not under fire.

Newman could not have seen either incident, for he had left Gallipoli on 5 August. Newnes also left on 21 August, so it is conceivable he saw the attack by the Foresters. However, he was not a member of Reichardt's unit, and was stationed at Eden Gully until at least 23 August.

His memory can hardly be regarded as infallible: he had forgotten which unit he was in, and he was a trooper not a sapper!

Reichardt's section had moved up Chailak Dere and began preparing positions until 31 August. Reichardt is specific about his location at the time of the incident (on Rhododendron Spur), yet assuming the war diary of

his unit to be correct, he was not on the spur on either 12 or 21 August, or, for that matter, on 28 August.

Conclusion

What, then, did Reichardt see if it were not the attack of either the 1/5th Norfolks or the Sherwood Foresters? Spaceview's editor (after perusing some 17 or 18 volumes on the Gallipoli campaign) suggested the unit might have been the 10th Hampshires as "it was bound to make for the spot where the witness saw the 'cloud'". The Hampshires were on the left flank of Hill 60 on 21 August.

However, this explanation suffers from the evidence that Reichardt was not on Rhododendron Spur at the time, and the assumption that a unit was unlikely to be moving into position at such a late hour. Reichardt might have seen a unit march through some ground mist at some time while he was on the spur between 13 and 20 August, perhaps while it was moving into the line opposite Hill 60.

On the other hand, there were no significant operations in this area during the week ending 20 August and his statement implies there was an attack in progress.

The most likely explanation is he saw a unit march through some ground mist at some stage during his service on Gallipoli. Probably, he heard accounts subsequently of the battle on 21 August, in which several British battalions in the Suvla Bay part of the offensive became "lost" and inclined too far to the north.

He may have heard, after the fighting eased, a persistent rumour said to have gone the rounds that "a company of Sherwood Foresters completely disappeared in a cloud of smoke and [that] apparently no trace of them was ever found."

Finally, he probably also read accounts of the "Lost Battalion" at Gallipoli — the 1/5 Norfolks. As time passed, his memory became confused and he may have convinced himself that he had witnessed the "mysterious" disappearance implied in Hamilton's despatch. This explanation is given weight by the importance which Reichardt attached to the account of the incident, along with two earlier "disappearances", which he claimed to have seen "in one of the official histories of the Gallipoli campaign".

No official history recounting such events can be located. More probably, Reichardt saw accounts of them in a popular book dealing with unidentified flying objects or military mysteries and mistakenly decided that they were authoritative accounts. He was not a well-read man, and possibly fell victim of one of the more sensational descriptions of the disappearance of the 1/5th Norfolks.

According to Tuckey, he had "linked the happening, in his own mind, with his religious beliefs. (He was a British Israelite). He fully expected the missing troops to be returned presently to help fight the Battle of Armageddon."



Travels through realms of fantasy

DOMINION 26 APR 99

DOES it matter if "New Agers" claim that Polynesians came from UFOs or sunken continents? Or that there were ancient civilisations in New Zealand before the Maoris arrived?

Not much, says Auckland University historian Professor Kerry Howe — as long as the claims are made privately.

But in a paper presented to the Archaeological Association Conference he argues that when public claims like these are made as "truths", they can be subversive and anti-intellectual.

They can also, he says, render a society helpless and unable to make useful decisions based on verifiable research. A bigger worry may be that these propositions are increasingly being put in text books, some of which are available in schools.

Increasingly linked with millennium and end-of-the-world philosophies, they are also, Professor Howe says, "old hat".

His paper begins with the accepted history that "Austronesians" began moving out of the broad region of the South China Sea between 4000 and 6000 years ago.

Some went west into western Micronesia, others southeast down the Melanesian island chain, reaching the Fiji-Samoa-Tonga region.

From there the eastern regions of Polynesia, such as the Society Islands and Marquesas, were settled, followed by movement to the extremities — Easter Island, Hawaii, New Zealand and, possibly, the Americas.

The other "histories" should be laughable. Alarming, to many they are not. First comes what Professor Howe calls the "new diffusionism" — the idea that civilisation emanated from certain elite cultural groups.

In New Zealand, that has translated into claims of Maori origins in the Greek, Egyptian, Phoenician, Libyan, Minoan, Mesopotamian and other old world cultures of the Mediterranean region of more than 5000 years ago.

Author Barry Fell has claimed that the legendary Maui was a great astronomer and navigator who was born in Libya in 260BC and who set sail around the world, reaching New Guinea in 232BC, then New Zealand during an attempted journey home.

RA Lochore argued that Maoris originally lived as peaceful shepherds in Uru in northern Mesopotamia, before mixing with the Indo-Europeans and Indo-Aryans.

They eventually moved to Libya and served in the Egyptian military, before some settled among American Indians, and others, led by Maui, discovered the Pacific.

New Age archaeologist David Hatcher Childress argued that the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians and Hindus were operating vast global trading systems, including gold mining in Indonesia, New

Guinea and Australia ... and reaching New Zealand.

Melanesians, he suggested, are descended from the Negro slaves used in the gold mines; Tonga was centre of a sun empire of the Pacific and capital of ancient Polynesia.

Turning to New Age philosophy, Professor Howe begins by exposing Barry Brailsford's theories. Brailsford has held that in the very distant past, there was an advanced and peaceful global civilisation living in the Middle East; one branch came to the Pacific and was based at Easter Island.

That might not sound too radical, but Brailsford goes on to posit an over-arching mother deity providing "balance and harmony".

When the Mother was put aside, men and war came to dominate, before some 67 generations ago a great waka with a crew of 175 set out to find a refuge where the ancient wisdom of harmony and peace might be protected.

Incidentally, there were three races on the waka: white with red or blond hair, dark and tall, and olive skinned "with double-folded eyelids".

Cornelius Van Doorp writes of a 13,000 kilometre trip — with Brailsford — round American Indian reservations, delivering sacred greenstone to tune in with the Earth's harmonics.

The third stage of Professor Howe's travels through the realms of fantasy is an examination of what he calls the "new geology" — the often underpinning belief in the end of a glorious age in a devastating catastrophe.

Authors like Childress and Brailsford taught that earlier advanced societies in the Pacific and elsewhere went into cultural decline after some sort of catastrophic event.

There is commonly a strong millennialist streak to these ideas, Professor Howe says.

According to one Gordon Williams, major continental movements associated with "polar tilt" were responsible for bringing Polynesians into the Pacific.

Was this moving land, he asks, the "magical canoe" referred to in Polynesian mythology?

Even more startling are the ideas of a great flood of the Pacific region, swallowing up a superior continent.

The notion of a great southern continent — Terra Australis — was, of course, central to early Western belief, bringing explorers to the region. But James Cook's explorations dispelled the idea. Or should have.

JAMES Churchward's thesis has human civilisation beginning 200,000 years ago in the motherland of Mu, a vast continent which filled most of the central Pacific Ocean.

This, the biblical Garden of Eden, had by 50,000 years ago developed into a great civilisation of learning, spanning seven great cities.

Unfortunately, Mu was rent asunder about 12,000 years ago by cataclysmic earthquakes — recorded in scriptures as the Great Flood.

Exposing the emperor's lack of clothes, Professor Howe also presents evidence that all the "intuitions" have been raised before.

The New Age ideas, he says, draw on, among other things, Rudolf Steiner's notion of "cosmic memory" (where history is based on inner consciousness rather than observation) and theosophist Helen Blavatsky's belief in an ancient advanced race.

That is not to ignore John Macmillan Brown's turn of the century assertion that people emerged in the north of Africa, travelled south over land bridges as far as Easter Island, before the land bridges sank and the far-flung people became isolated ...

In Macmillan's thesis, the former great cultures and civilisations degenerated, as the fleeing migrants clung to increasingly diminishing islands.

So it's all old hat. What does it matter? Part of the problem can be racial overtones, Professor Howe argues.

*Alan Samson
meets a historian
who says that
fanciful New Age
ideas about
Maori and
Pacific origins
can be
subversive —
and even
dangerous*



gh the asy

the white races were here first, for
nce, this could be used to subvert
angi Tribunal processes with claims
Maoris were not tangata whenua.
ne "anti-intellectualism" of the New
n could be equally serious.
We ultimately render ourselves help-
as a society if we cannot take decis-
based on verifiable research findings,
cularly when so much of modern
Zealand life centres around ques-
about who was where when, and
quent redemption for past colonial
gs."

ne New Agism also, Professor Howe
promotes the very false and danger-
idea that claimed intuitive knowledge
how "recovers" indigenous wisdom
place that of a "colonial" past.

hile sympathising with those who
to redress the balance of past Euro-
manipulations, he says to promote
Age intuitions over proper research
ags is "a nonsense".

rofessor Howe has one last barb
d at an apparent surfeit of politically
ct archaeologists.

must say I am struck by what ap-
s to be the New Zealand archaeologi-
establishment's apparent reluctance
nfront this sort of material."

Yogic flyers jump at peace-leaping chance

EVENING POST

by TOM CARDY

Forget stealth bombers, tanks and
ts of soldiers with big guns.

If Nato really wants to end the war in
osovo quickly - and peacefully - it
ould deploy 7000 yogic flyers, a tran-
scendental meditation group says.

The group Maharishi's Global Admin-
tration Through Natural Law claims
at if large groups of yogic flyers medi-
ate in the same place, crime and conflict
rop there.

The meditation technique is used to
duce stress, and adherents claim with
ough practice they can levitate.

Spokeswoman Linda Davy said de-
oying 7000 yogic flyers was the only
actical solution to the Balkans conflict.

It wouldn't mean 7000 people floating
the skies over Kosovo. Yogic flyers
vitated several centimetres off the

Advertorial

Curing with needles

CITY VOICE 8 APR 99

ACUPUNCTURE can cure peo-
ple who have suffered for years
from problems such as asthma or
migraines, says Joannes Boele van
Hensbroek of Wellington's Natu-
ral Health Centre.

He says one of his patients
suffered from migraines for 24
years - triggered by tiredness, red
wine and chocolate.

"Sue was treated with acupunc-
ture. She had four treatments over
a three-month period to make the
migraines disappear completely."

Patients with asthma "have
been on all this medication - they
don't look for the cause of it.

"Three or four treatments and
if they're young they may not need
that medication any more."

"That's what Western medi-
cine finds hard to believe - that
you stick a needle in and asthma
can be overcome," he says.

"It is really amazing. This goes
back to the Stone Age, when they
found that pushing on certain
points relieved symptoms."

Joannes Boele van Hensbroek
was brought up with homoeo-
pathic principles in Holland,
trained as a physiotherapist, but
was dissatisfied with treating only
physical symptoms.

"I really wanted to treat the
whole body," he says. "Acupunc-
ture doesn't separate mental and
physical. It's different from West-
ern medicine in that it treats the
cause of the illness."

He says acupuncture be-
lieves that all symptoms are
caused by imbalances
among the body's 12 major
organs. Taking your radial
pulse at different points on
your body shows whether
various organs are in bal-
ance, and the imbalance can
be treated by inserting a
very fine needle painlessly
into one or several acu-
puncture points.

Acupuncture can diag-
nose an imbalance before
the symptoms have ap-
peared, helping people to
stay healthy.

Boele van Hensbroek
says your organs get out of
balance by eating the wrong
foods over a long period,
emotional stress and an irregular
lifestyle.

"People used to live in harmo-
ny with the seasons, respecting
the needs of their body," he says.
"In the modern lifestyle people go
100 miles an hour and there is
no balance between work and
play, resulting in many symptoms
and illnesses."

Depending on how severe they
are, acupuncture can cure or re-
lieve the symptoms of asthma and
breathing difficulties, digestive dis-
orders, pre-menstrual tension and
painful periods, morning sickness
during pregnancy and insomnia.
Combining it with physiotherapy



can help muscular-skeletal injuries
and occupational over-use syn-
drome (OOS).

Acupuncture is "particularly
good for people who have a vari-
ety of symptoms where there
doesn't seem to be any particu-
lar pattern, for example often
catching colds, tiredness, not
sleeping well, low immunity".

Joannes Boele van Hensbroek
says, even after 3000 years of prac-
tising acupuncture in China, no one
is concerned with the question,
"How does it work?" The key thing
is they know that it works.

• Joannes Boele van Hensbroek,
385 4342.

Melons bought with breast size in mind

DOMINION

4-5-99

LONDON

BRITAIN'S biggest supermarket chain has asked
growers to supply smaller melons after research
showed women shoppers subconsciously compared
them to the size of their breasts, newspapers re-
ported yesterday.

Buyers working for Tesco were told by the
retail psychologist who did the research that a
preference for smaller breasts was the reason why
traditional big, fleshy melons were remaining un-
sold, the *Daily Telegraph* said.

A Tesco spokesman said the research had
"certainly produced results. Since we introduced
smaller melons two months ago we have sold more
than a million".

Seven out of 10 women questioned agreed
breast size was "the most likely subconscious fac-
tor when selecting size of melon". — Reuter

Experts to study skull found at 'haunted' Napier house

DOMINION

1 APR 99

A HUMAN skull was on its way to medical experts in Auckland last night after being unearthed from a Napier property tenants believe is haunted.

Lyn Goodson, a tenant, said she has heard spooky voices and supernatural things had been happening around the McVay St property since she moved in in August.

The strange goings-on, coupled with the unearthing of the skull by Ms Goodson's dog, has troubled

Ms Goodson and her flatmate Anna Jenkins, who said she heard loud banging in an old wardrobe in the house.

The skull, found near what appears to be an old rubbish pit by a woodshed, has been sent to the Auckland medical school by Napier police who want to know how old it is.

Detective Sergeant Brian Schaab said the skull was first found four years ago by a previ-

ous tenant who left it inside the garage on the property.

Ms Goodson said yesterday that there "must have been a reason" for the skull turning up about two weeks ago but "I don't know anymore than you do about where it came from".

"I do hope it turns out to be over 100 years old and not something recent," she said.

"I don't really want to say too much but it's been a bit spooky

... banging noises and strange keys being put on my key ring and I've had my keys disappearing," Ms Goodson said.

Ms Goodson said she was cleaning her bathroom when she heard a child's voice calling for help. "I thought it was my son, but it wasn't him. Then I heard it again, sort of calling for help."

Asked if it was the first supernatural experience she had been part of, Ms Goodson said she had

strange experiences in a Gisborne house such as when "the air fresher was taken out of the bathroom cabinet and put on top".

Two police officers were at the property yesterday where they were digging around the area where the skull was found.

Mr Schaab said if the skull was found to be old, it was unlikely any more action would be taken.

Other bones, not believed to be human, were found in the dig.

Doctors urged to study alternative cancer treatments

DOMINION 17 MAY 99

thing about the treatments," said Arnold Reiman, a retired professor of medicine at Harvard University and a former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Though there is still a wide range of opinion about the value of such treatments — one doctor called them "bizarre", and another said they were promising — all the specialists agreed that it was imperative to find out what worked and what did not.

Approaches such as stress reduction, exercise and eating well — cutting fats and "junk food" and eating more fresh fruits and vege-

tables — should not even be considered alternative but mainstream medicine, the doctors said.

A 1997 survey at Harvard University showed that 42 per cent of Americans adults with cancer had tried alternative or complementary medicine, compared with 34 per cent in 1990. They spent US\$21 billion (NZ\$37.5 billion) on it, US\$12 billion out of their own pockets, said David Rosenthal, the immediate past president of the American Cancer Society.

But they were not telling their doctors. "Less than 40 per cent of patients have disclosed their use of

complementary and alternative medicine to their physicians," Dr Rosenthal said.

Part of the reason was fear, and part was a lack of time, Dr Reiman said. "Doctors are practising a less patient-oriented type of practice than they used to. Doctors spend less time with patients."

Dr Reiman called some of the treatments "bizarre". "Physicians ought not to advocate the use of alternative therapies because they are unproven, and a lot of them are implausible," he said.

"But doctors ought not to reject their patients," he said. Even when

patients were educated about the experimental nature of alternative therapies, they often opted to use them.

Even the sceptics agreed that therapies designed to reduce stress might help.

"If music makes me tolerate my cancer therapy better, what are we going to do — randomise one composer against another?" asked Robert Wittes, director of the Division of Cancer Treatments and Diagnosis at the National Cancer Institute. "We have to take some things at face value." — Reuter

'Flight not fight' will bring peace

CONTACT 29 APR 99

By KATHY BETHELL

MEDITATION, not military action, will bring peace to Yugoslavia, Wellington yogic flyers spokesman Daniel Meares says.

Yogic flyers use a mental technique which is an advanced form of meditation.

Practitioners often experience levitation while yogic flying, Mr Meares said.

Amassing a group of yogic flyers produces a peaceful effect on the surrounding community.

A group of 7000 yogic flyers would be enough to create world peace, Mr Meares said.

When war broke out over Kosovo last month, a group of New Zealand yogic flyers held an "emergency conference" in Auckland, attracting about 100 participants.

Mr Meares wants to re-establish a group of up to 15 yogic flyers in Wellington, to bring peace both locally and in Yugoslavia.

The group lost its Melrose base last year and, as it needs a permanent base, was forced to disband.

Mr Meares said large amounts of research had confirmed the benefits of yogic flying.

Merseyside in England had the third-highest crime rate of the eleven largest Metropolitan areas in England and Wales, in 1987. In 1992 it had the lowest crime rate, 40 per cent below predicted levels.

Mr Meares said this drop was a direct result of a group of yogic flyers operating in the area.

"Nato gives us all these pious reasons for bombing Serbia, but they would be better to call off the warplanes and introduce yogic flying," he said.

Asked why the group of 7000 yogic flyers had not been assembled if the technique was so effective, he pointed to logistical problems such as finding a base and having to recruit people who were genuinely enthusiastic about learning the technique.

Personal benefits of yogic flying are claimed to include better health, increased alertness, greater happiness and better sleep.

Men and women from all walks of life practised yogic flying in Wellington, Mr Meares said.

Although yogic flyers did not want to focus on the physical effects such as levitation, he confirmed he had experienced this himself.

● Daniel Meares, ph 380 0055.

Skepsis

ONCE again the medical profession has made a mess of its relations with the public, and I'm not talking about Gisborne smear takers.

Little Liam's folks have made a right monkey out of the doctors. The public have been right behind those brave oppressed parents who rescued their boy from those iniquitous cruel Dunedin chemotherapists.

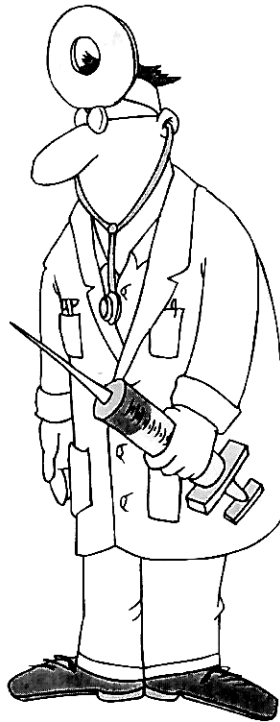
If ever anyone needed a lesson in public relations, it was the Otago Healthcare authorities. Obviously they had to balance the child's right to life-saving treatment against the wishes of the parents, just like they might when managing Jehovah's Witnesses whose children need blood transfusions.

However such is public opinion on hospital treatment these days, it was predictable that public opinion was going to make the law into an ass.

Sadly, the specialists will almost certainly be proved right, as little Liam is unlikely now to survive this disease. Will this reduce the public confidence in "alternative treatment"? Not on your Nellie.

I write these articles by request long before publication, so this could already have been resolved by the time you read this, but it filled the entire front of Sunday Star Times on 9 May. Medicine still dominates the headlines.

Frank Haden came down to earth in the same paper on 21 March, when he said



Liam's parents were imagining that faith healing would help their son better than the best medical practice. But he was concerned with the large section of the community that believe therapy based on superstition against real medicine based on facts. His closing statement was "It's time we grew up".

He's worth a read is Frank Haden. In his article in the Star Times on 21 February, when he was commenting on the senseless violent thumping of premature babies at National Women's Hospital, which resulted in five deaths, he claimed instances of clumsiness, oversight, bad judgment, and faulty diagnosis are increasingly common.

We have doctors at Wellington Hospital, for heaven's sake, condoning the mediaeval waving of crystals by jiggery-pokery practitioners who "centre themselves" before commencing their

New Age antics, plunging their hands into patients' nonexistent "auras". Doctors I speak to about all this are typically on the defensive. They look po-faced, answering my questions woodenly and unwillingly, caught in the dilemma imposed by their professional code of honour: never speak ill of a colleague, even when you know the way he's done his job falls short of the standards you impose on yourself.

Their loyalty is misguided and counter-productive. Doctors should be the quickest of all professionals to leap on a colleague who fails to meet standards. Their condemnation ought to be immediate and unforgiving. It should be as public as possible.

Brilliant advice Mr Haden, I just cannot improve upon it. But you can bet I'll act on it as long as I have breath in my body, and ink in my pen. Roll on the next Skepsis article, I can't wait to take down more of these flakes.

In a free country, I suppose you cannot prevent ordinary individuals making a buck out of a gullible public with magic. But doctors, trained scientifically at the taxpayers expense, hiding behind their qualifications are a different story. Quackery is alive and all too well in New Zealand. It is bad for patients, bad for the profession and I believe there should be, to use a nice current buzz phrase, zero tolerance.

Neil McKenzie is a Tauranga doctor and jazz musician.

Into the Lions' Den

David Riddell

Three skeptics go head to head with a creationist lecturer.

WHEN the call went out on the Skeptics' mailing list for people to take part in a debate against Australian creationist John Mackay, I thought long and hard before accepting. I had seen Mackay in action a couple of years before, and on that occasion no-one had the opportunity to present a dissenting viewpoint. This time, things would be different.

For someone with no experience of public debating the idea of taking on a seasoned pro like Mackay single-handed was daunting, but Mackay was happy to take on a team, and one was soon assembled. It was led by Alistair Brickell, a geologist from Kuaotunu, near Whitianga, followed by me, a freelance journalist with an MSc in zoology, and my brother, John Riddell, farmer and skeptical columnist, with degrees in history and agricultural science. The event took place in Thames, the evening of Friday June 25.

After driving an hour through thick Waikato fog, we found the venue had been shifted, from the high school library to a Baptist church hall. The audience consisted mainly of a Baptist youth group, who were to spend the weekend with Mackay on a "Creation Camp" looking at a low-grade coal seam near Kuaotunu, containing a few fern fossils.

The moderator was Chris Lux, the local mayor. We couldn't decide if he was a closet creationist or merely a politician who saw more votes from the creationists in the audience. He made a big thing of the three of us gang-ing up on poor John Mackay — who had in fact asked for a panel of four to confront, as he has done in the past. Then he would do things like ring his bell 30 seconds into Alistair's address.

Mackay started off by talking about boomerangs. They came back when you threw them, he said, because of properties which were put into them by their creator, not properties which were intrinsic to the material they were made from. In 20 minutes he said very little specifically about evolutionary theory (though I was able to challenge him later on his claim that fish and frogs appeared suddenly in the fossil record) and nothing at all about Genesis.

Then it was Alistair's turn. He mainly looked at the geological record, and evidence that the Earth is far older than claimed by creationists. He spoke about varves, fine annual sedimentary layers laid down in lake beds, which in some formations record the passage of millions of years, and the supernova 1987a, an explosion which took place some

170,000 years ago, the light of which only recently reached us. He also challenged Mackay to answer a number of sticky questions.

I followed by talking about how the universe had been fashioned by natural, rather than supernatural processes, comparing Mitre Peak with Mt Rushmore, where the hand of an intelligent designer can truly be seen. This was followed by a look at the transition from fish to amphibians and the problems of getting a decent definition of kinds and transitional forms out of creationists, and then the problems biogeography poses for the Flood story. Finally, I had some sticky questions for Mackay as well.

John concluded our team presentation by pointing out that this was not a scientific debate, that that debate was over a century ago, and if creationists had anything new to say they should be saying it in the scientific journals. He covered some basic philosophy of science, the proper definition of terms like theory, and looked at some contradictions in the Bible. Then came more problems for the Flood story: "What did Noah do with all the dung and urine?"

Mackay's response, it has to be said, was clever. He refused to answer any of the sticky questions or defend the problems raised with the

Flood, but glibly rattled off a few wildly misleading responses to selected points from our 45 minutes, giving the impression that if he was only allowed more than ten minutes he could easily deal with the rest as well.

Alistair was clearly angry when it came his turn to respond. The traps we had attempted to lay had mostly not been sprung. Alistair did, however, get Mackay to state his qualifications on camera (the evening was videotaped) — a geology degree from the University of Queensland, 1972. There has been some doubt about his qualifications, so it will be interesting to have that followed up.

At the conclusion, Chris Lux awarded ten points to Mackay and nine to us ("But only because there are three of them.")

Most of the audience were committed believers, and I doubt we did enough to shake their convictions. But it was clear talking to some of the students afterwards that they could see something was fishy about creationism. We'd got some of them thinking, Mackay didn't have it all his own way.

And the three of us gained a great deal of confidence and experience. The three against one format definitely worked in Mackay's favour. Next time, we should each be able to do the job alone.

David Riddell does other things besides argue with creationists but doesn't enjoy them as much.

Standards, Authorities and Complaints

Bernard Howard

CHINESE CANCER THERAPY. This title of a modest advertisement in the *Sunday Star-Times* last September caught my eye. Two statements in the ad surprised me: the first, that "usually only three treatments are needed", ie, it is implied that the therapy is a cancer cure, and the second, "...we are currently arranging a scientific Control Group with the Ministry of Health".

I sent a copy of the advertisement to the Minister, asking him to confirm my impression that claiming to cure cancer is illegal, and also to protest vigorously if his limited funds were being used to "investigate dubious therapies". Almost before the Minister's secretarial staff had time to send me a formal acknowledgement, I had a letter from the Advertising Standards Complaints Board; the Ministry's routine policy is to refer all such letters as mine to this board.

Thus, my letter of enquiry became a Complaint, and I was now a Complainant (with capital C). As of mid-September, my Complaint was number 221 of 1998, so clearly the bureaucrats at the board do not have much time for sitting around drinking coffee.

The Advertising Standards Authority publishes a useful booklet, *Advertising Codes of Practice*, which lists the criteria to be observed in the

various areas of advertising. Using the "Basic Principles" of the "Code for Therapeutic Advertising", I was able to itemise my Complaint.

Before submitting this, I had had a reply from the Hon Bill English, Minister of Health, answering in an encouraging and unambiguous tone both of my initial queries.

Back to the details of my Complaint. (Quotation marks in the list below enclose words quoted from the Basic Principles.)

Basic Principle number:

1) Compliance with New Zealand law. The Minister's officials are of the opinion this advertisement does not comply.

2) Social responsibility. This advertisement is aimed at a particularly vulnerable section of society, those suffering from cancer. Claims of 100% success are bound to raise false hopes cruelly in some of these people.

3) I see these claims as "likely to mislead".

4) No "scientific information" is presented.

5) The statement that research is being set up in conjunction with the Ministry of Health is rebutted by the Minister himself. The claim is thus not "factual" and does not "reflect the Ministry of Health's approved indications".

From this point my file began to swell rapidly, with many documents from the Complaints Board, as well as a video and a long booklet from the advertiser. It seems the board keeps no secrets about Complainants from Complainees.

On the other hand, the board sent me copies of the advertiser's response to them. He wrote, "...The Advertisement makes no claim to be a 'Cure for Cancer' but simply advertises a form of Cancer Therapy" and "...the Cancer Therapy we are using (Wai Qi), is shown on the video as practised in Chinese State Hospitals, by a Dr Liu." He also complained at the Ministry's refusal to set up a "Control Group", and threatened that this attitude would drive the study offshore (Harvard Medical School was mentioned).

I have a copy of the Ministry's reply to the advertiser's request for the 'Control Group'. In a neat piece of bureaucratic buck-passing, the Minister said, "As an academic institution[!], if you want to propose a research study into the therapy's effectiveness, the appropriate body to contact is the Health Research Committee. Their address is..." The committee's response to the advertiser's request does not appear in my files.

Before deciding the issue, the board canvassed other views besides those of the Complainant and advertiser; first, New Media (Auckland), the publishers of Sunday Star-Times, response, a grovelling apology; second, the Ministry of Health, response, a detailed critique,

supporting with legal argument each of my grounds for complaint.

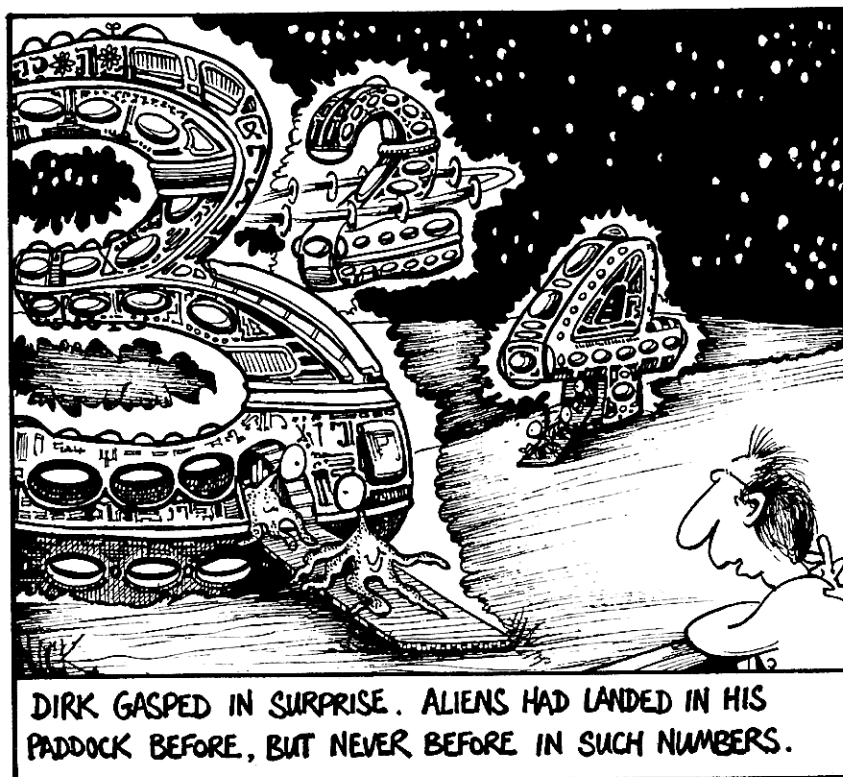
The board met on 24 November and considered all the submissions. Its Deliberation upheld my Complaint in all particulars. Basic Principles 1, 2, 3 and 4 had been breached, and in addition it was suggested that the advertisement was in breach of the Medicines Act, as the advertiser's business address was not stated, and the telephone number given lacked an area code.

So, what next after this minor triumph? The company offering this therapy will doubtless be more circumspect in future, but that further sufferers will not succumb to whatever advertisements they produce is much less certain. Those (an unknown number) who responded to the initial advertisement are unlikely to be advised to look elsewhere for treatment. Apart from upholding my Complaint, and instructing the adver-

tiser to withdraw the advertisement and take steps to see such material was not issued again, the board made no recommendation for future action — no penalty was suggested, no public retraction required. Parallels can be drawn with the recommendations of the Broadcasting Standards Authority, insofar as they upheld our Complaint about the TV Alien Abduction programme.

My contact with the Advertising Standards Complaints Board shows me an official organisation which is prompt and open in its dealings with Complainants and Advertisers. In the present instance at least, it has acted as far as it can in the public interest. With some hundreds of complaints to deal with each year, the promptness and efficiency I have experienced cannot be taken for granted.

Bernard Howard is a tireless long-time member of the Skeptics.



Review

Bernard Howard

**UFOs & ALIEN CONTACT:
Two Centuries Of Mystery,
Robert Bartholomew and
George Howard.
Prometheus Books, Am-
herst, NY, USA.**

READERS of NZ *Skeptic* will have seen R.E. Bartholomew's article "The Great Zeppelin Scare of 1909" in last autumn's issue (No. 47). This covered the same event as one of the chapters in this book. Several other chapters describe similar episodes which occurred in other times and other places, and in a final section all these are woven into a coherent story.

Each chapter is supported by a copious list of references, most of them newspaper reports published during the development and decay of the case concerned.

In addition to detailed factual accounts, each episode is placed in its social and historical setting, with an explanation of why the different experiences took the form they did.

Previous psychological commentators have labelled the "experiencers" of the events described in this book, mostly on very little evidence, as in some way mentally sick. Bartholomew and Howard disagree: their careful psychological analysis of over one hundred such people found no evidence of psychopathology, but rather Fantasy Prone Personality (FPP).

While functioning as normal, healthy adults, FPPs experience rich fantasy lives, scoring dramatically higher...on hypnotic susceptibility, psychic ability, healing, out-of-body experiences, religious visions, and apparitional experiences. In our study, "abductees" and "contactees" evidence a similar pattern of characteristics to FPPs.

The experiences of these individuals mirrored the concerns of the society in which they lived. Thus, in late 19th century US, the achievement of powered flight was thought to be imminent, and a host of "airship" sightings were reported; just before World War I when the British were very nervous of Germany's growing military strength, especially its lead in airship development, zeppelins were seen by thousands all over England; in Sweden in 1946, fear of the German V-rockets recently acquired by the USSR was widespread, and hundreds of reports of missile sightings were published. And so for other cases, including, of course, the 1947 sighting of "flying saucers" in the western US and all that flowed from it.

The objects in the latter case were described by aviator Kenneth Arnold as skipping along "like a saucer would...across the water", and this gave rise to a deluge of "flying saucer" sightings, although Arnold had said the objects he saw were cres-

cent, not saucer-shaped. These objects were at first almost everywhere considered to be of terrestrial origin, as secret weapons or aircraft, either "ours" or "theirs" of the Cold War.

Not until the mid 1950s did the popular view suddenly switch to an extraterrestrial origin; the authors ascribe this to two best-selling books.

Wherever and whenever the events described in this book occurred, some common features are apparent.

Firstly, the technology imputed to the "visitors" is just a little ahead of contemporary achievement; thus, the US airship sightings of the 1890s preceded the Wright brothers' flight by almost a decade; early reports of aeroplanes were all of sightings at night, at a time when night flying had barely been attempted; and the New Zealand zeppelin scare of 1909 occurred many years before flights of such dirigibles in the Antipodes were possible.

A second common theme is the way these stories wax and wane. Initial incidents were widely reported, and the numbers rose rapidly. After a while, as physical evidence obstinately refused to reveal itself, editors denounced the reports as hoaxes or the reporters as deluded (despite the prominence many of these same editors had given the initial reports). Following these

skeptical editorials, the number of incidents being claimed fell greatly — were they still being experienced, but by people now shunning ridicule, or did the editorial expressions of disbelief change the FPPs inclination to fantasise?

The extent and depth of the newspaper reports on which much of this book is based are truly amazing. Think of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of papers in the UK and US of similar circulation to the *Geraldine Guardian* and *Clutha Leader* (both quoted in the chapter on the New Zealand Zeppelin Scare), think of over 100 years of publishing, and contemplate the enormous database which provides these stories.

The reliance on this local reporting has one disadvantage: the notoriously monoglot English-speaking world gets told in this book very little of UFOs and “aliens” as reported in foreign language newspapers.

The main impression left by this book is to confirm the conclusion that our minds and senses can easily deceive us. So often, “seeing is believing” should be read “believing is seeing”. The bizarre examples described here provide a wide background of rationality against which to view, and judge, the further phenomena which are sure to be presented to us.

Bernard Howard is a founding member of the Skepics.

Beer and Skittles

John Riddell looks at a costly alternative to glue sniffing.

THIS being an election year, we are going to hear a lot more from the Natural Law Party. I don't know if it is the same here, but in the US it is not legal for religions to directly participate in political campaigns. If they do, they risk losing their tax-free status. The problem is that the Natural Law party was set up by the Transcendental Meditation (TM) people and courts have defined TM as a religion.

The Natural Law party seems to be about promoting TM beliefs. In the US they go to a lot of trouble to deny there is any direct connection between the two, but if you get any knocking on your door this election, ask them if they practise TM.

If you run into a TMer, there are a few points worth remembering. Transcendental Meditation relies on the fact that it is very difficult to concentrate on only one thing for more than a couple of minutes without your brain beginning to malfunction. When it does malfunction, rather than giving you a headache, indicating that you should stop immediately, you actually start to feel quite good. To learn TM, you can either go to the TM people and pay them a lot of money, or you can read the next paragraph.

First you need a mantra. The mantra can be any meaningless phrase, word or sound. “Om mani padme hum”, for example. Just sit in a quiet place and repeat this endlessly or for a few

minutes and your brain will malfunction. The mantra helps you to stop thinking about anything else. Repeating the mantra is the meditation bit. It becomes transcendental when you start feeling good. Essentially, that's all there is. But if you go to the TM chaps, they will pad it out with a lot of pseudo-deep babble to make you think you are getting your money's worth.

But if TM makes you feel good, why shouldn't you keep doing it?

Because there are plenty of examples of people feeling good after they got their brains to malfunction, and those examples are not exactly safe.

The simplest way is to use drugs. Cocaine, heroin, LSD, to name a few. “Hey Man, I can see all the bones in my hand.” Do not try this at home. A more natural way is to deprive your brain of oxygen. Drowning victims who didn't quite die and others who have had Near Death Experiences (NDE) often report a sense of peace and clarity of thought that sounds a lot like the feelings that the TM people get during meditation.

While the NDE people think they have found evidence for life after death, the Transcendental Meditators call it a “spontaneous, effortless march of the mind to its unbounded essence.” See what I mean about pseudo-deep?

There have also been some very kinky and sometimes

fatal sex games based on strangulation (remember Plumley-Walker?). Do not try this anywhere! Now, if depriving the brain of oxygen can cause it to malfunction, and respiration is a reaction between oxygen and glucose, then depriving the brain of glucose should have similar effects.

There are two easy ways of depriving the brain of glucose. Either stop eating, or do so much exercise that you run out of glucose. An ancient example is Tarantism; a modern one is the ecstasy dance party.

Fasting has been an important part of a number of religious activities. The ascetic monk probably explains it in terms of enlightenment or becoming at one with the divine, but now you have another explanation. You can also make your brain go weird by running a marathon with an inadequate diet.

The TM people claim that Transcendental Meditation "reduces stress, improves health, enriches mental functioning, enhances personal relationships and increases job productivity and job satisfaction."

But then again, they also claim that advanced practitioners can levitate, become invisible, read minds, and live forever. Perhaps the best one is that yogic flying can bring about world peace.

Does it improve health?

In 1980, the West German government's Institute for Youth and Society produced a report calling TM a "psychogroup" and saying that the majority of people who went through TM experi-

enced psychological or physical disorders.

If the TM experience is the result of a malfunctioning brain, we should not be surprised if there are negative effects on health. It may not be any worse than drinking alcohol, but the assumption that it is good for you, or simply harmless, doesn't seem to be based on much.

Levitation. Otherwise known as yogic flying. To do this, you must sit cross legged on a soft mat and bounce up and down on your bum. Normally the TM folk publish still photos showing the practitioner a couple of inches above the mat. I assume these were taken at the top of a bounce. Maybe they used a trampoline. Video footage is less often shown, but it quite clearly shows that they are doing nothing that could not be done by a drunken student.

The interesting thing is that even after watching videos of themselves bouncing up and down on a soft mat, some of them still think they have levitated. It is possible that if their brain isn't working properly they could feel as if they were floating at the top of the bounce.

A third claim is the Maharishi Effect. This effect is named after the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the man who has become a multimillionaire by selling TM to middle class people around the world (poor people don't have money). The claim is that if you get enough people bouncing on their bums, er sorry, I mean, yogic flying, there will be a change in a universal energy field that has never been detected. The

change in this field will make people so nice they will stop committing crimes, waging war and generally doing bad stuff. And to convince you that this is true, they claim that this has been scientifically validated by a number of independent studies.

In case you need to be told, these studies (yes there really are some published papers) were carried out at the Maharishi's own university. The purpose of those studies would seem to be to convince people with a poor understanding of science that there is scientific validity to the TM claims.

This brings us to the last claim. That TM enhances mental functioning. When you first start TM you believe that it enhances mental functioning. Later you start to believe you can fly. Then you believe that bouncing on your bum can bring about world peace. Eventually, when you become an advanced practitioner, you come to believe you have powers of invisibility.

Does this sound like someone that has enhanced mental functioning?

John Riddell is clearly not as one with the Force.

Strange Days

From a medical member, recently moved to a rural practice:

It is rather strange living in a community where a registered GP is considered an alternative and the local aromatherapy person is the mainstream medical practitioner.

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