

by Scott_LaFee

WHERE IN THE WORLD? ANSWER

TRUE FACTS - The Aztec word for gold is teocuitlatl, which means 'excrement of the gods.' CNS Photo.

WHERE IN THE WORLD - The stunning and colorful Grand Prismatic Spring is part of the Yellowstone caldera underlying much of Wyoming. CNS Photo. PAPER TIGER - Chinese conservation officials have been happily disseminating two photographs purportedly depicting a rare wild South China tiger in the wilds of Shaanxi Province. CNS Photo. PRIME NUMBERS - The Apollo astronauts collected 840 pounds of lunar rock samples. CNS Photo. The stunning and colorful Grand Prismatic Spring is part of the Yellowstone caldera underlying much of Wyoming. The caldera is the remnant of three giant eruptions 640,000 years ago, plus numerous smaller eruptions 70,000 years ago. The region is still very active, experiencing earthquakes, ground deformation and hydrothermal activity. Recent satellite imagery indicates the caldera underwent a period of accelerated uplift from 2004 to 2006, rising almost 3 inches a year.

BRAIN SWEAT

Consider the following rebus:

J. Big travels 1 mile.

C. Medium travels 5 miles.

A. Little travels 1,000 miles.

What's the message here?

'TRUE FACTS'

The Aztec word for gold is teocuitlatl, which means "excrement of the gods."

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

A little goes a long way.

ONE BIG COMET

Astronomers at the University of Hawaii have taken measure of the exploding Comet 17P/Holmes. Its diameter is 1.4 million kilometers, which makes it bigger than the sun and the largest object in the solar system.

Not surprisingly, the comet is currently visible to the naked eye. With a decent backyard telescope, you can watch its debris cloud expand from night to night. For directions where to look, visit spaceweather.com for a sky map and images.

Despite its size, Comet 17P/Holmes poses no particular threat. Composed of dispersed dust and gas, the comet contains less mass than a typical asteroid and is too lightweight to affect the orbits of planets.

PAPER TIGER

Chinese conservation officials have been happily disseminating two photographs purportedly depicting a rare wild South China tiger in the wilds of Shaanxi Province.

The tiger's existence is indeed big news, given that biologists say the species is "functionally extinct." That is, there are so few tigers left in the wild (perhaps fewer than 25) that the species is presumed to be incapable of successfully reproducing and replacing lost members.

Skeptics think the tiger sighting was faked. They say the photos actually show a cardboard cutout planted in some bushes. But Chinese officials remain undaunted. They're pushing ahead with creation of a tiger preserve that may, in fact, be tigerless.

OUR IGNOBEL HISTORY

Who hasn't wondered whether brain-wave patterns change when a person is chewing different flavors of gum? Well, Takami Yagyu and colleagues in Japan and the Czech Republic did, and they set out to find an answer.

They recruited 20 men to chew three different gums each with electrodes attached to their heads. The

researchers made sure all of the men chewed the gum exactly the same way and for the same periods of time.

And the results? Actually, there weren't any. The scientists' real goal was simply to see whether a new type of brain technology actually worked. It did. As for the neurological effects of different gum flavors, the researchers can't really say. It remains one of those enduring scientific conundrums, like what's the color of dark matter?

Nonetheless, for their efforts, Yagyu and group received the 1997 Ig Nobel Prize in biology.

PRIME NUMBERS

3,000 - Number of scientific oceanographic floats now deployed around the world, completing an 8-year-old network designed to monitor the world's seas

500 - Estimated number of teeth in the jaw of *Nigersaurus taqueti*, an herbivorous dinosaur

250,000 - Projected number of first-year visitors to the Creation Museum in Kentucky, which opened May 28

250,000 - Number of visitors the museum has attracted in its first five months

840 - Pounds of lunar rock samples collected by Apollo astronauts

840 - Pounds of lunar rock samples contaminated by Earthly matter

Sources: Science; Scripps Institution of Oceanography; New Scientist; Discover.

Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott_LaFee