

by Scott LaFee

SURELY YOU'RE JOKING

An elephant and a mouse were talking.

The elephant asked the mouse: "Why am I so big and strong and heavy and you are so tiny, weak and gray?"

To which the mouse replied: "I've been ill lately."

BRAIN SWEAT

There are seven players on a coed volleyball team. After an exhausting match, each girl drinks four cups of water, each boy seven cups and the coach quaffs nine. A total of 43 cups of water are consumed. How many boys and girls are on the team?

VERBATIM

"The iceberg shattered like a gracile wine glass being sung to by a heavy soprano."

- Douglas MacAyeal, a University of Chicago geophysicist, describing the fate of a huge iceberg after it was hit by an Antarctic storm swell

POETRY FOR SCIENTISTS

There's a continent unlike the rest;

Only scientists think it the best.

Why on Earth have they chosen

A landmass so frozen?

The ice is precise, they'll attest.

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

SNAKES ON THE MIND - A Norwegian archaeologist says new discoveries indicate that the San people, who lived in what is now northwestern Botswana in Africa, were performing advanced rituals more

than 70,000 years ago. CNS Photo. Five girls and two boys. First, subtract the coach's nine cups from the total. That leaves 34 cups: 20 consumed by five girls, 14 by two boys.

SNAKES ON A PLAIN

Until now, it has been largely presumed that the earliest human rituals took place about 40,000 years ago in Europe.

A Norwegian archaeologist says new discoveries indicate that the San people, who lived in what is now northwestern Botswana in Africa, were performing advanced rituals more than 70,000 years ago.

And the object of their ceremonies?

Snakes.

According to Sheila Coulson of the University of Oslo, the python is perhaps the Sans' most important animal (and continues to be among San descendants). The snake, according to San creation myth, begat man, and the dry streambeds in the region are evidence of the python circling the hills in search of water.

Coulson bases her conclusions upon recent findings in a newly discovered cave. Inside, a large, long rock resembling a snake head had been modified with hundreds of indentations. "You could see the mouth and eyes of the snake," Coulson said. "It looked like a real python."

Analysis of stones used to make the indentations and numerous nearby artifacts dated the work to more than 70,000 years old.

ANTHROPOLOGY 101

In pre-Columbian Mexico, intoxication was a privilege only of the elderly. Young men found to be drunk had their heads shaved and homes destroyed. A second offense resulted in execution, with the offender sometimes eaten.

JUST ASKING

Why is it called a bust when the statue stops right before the part it is named after?

PRIME NUMBERS

40 million - Amount of ozone, in tons, that the current hole over Antarctica could hold - a record

118 - Atomic number of the newest element, created by firing calcium-48 nuclei at a target made of californium-245

1.2 million - Number of Libyan schoolchildren expected to have \$100 laptops by 2008

1.2 million - Number of schoolchildren in Libya

16 - Percentage change since 1990 in the number of elderly Americans

106 - Percentage change in Nevada

Sources: European Space Agency; Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; One Laptop Per Child; U.S. Census Bureau

'TRUE FACTS'

Are the residents of Loving County, Texas, loving it? You could ask. The county may be the emptiest in the United States, encompassing 645 square miles but containing just 71 residents, based on a door-to-door counting by the local sheriff. That works out to one person for every 9 square miles.

On the other hand, the county has 360 active gas and oil wells - or about five for each and every man, woman and child living in Loving.

WHAT IS IT? ANSWER

These are "Moeraki boulders," spherical stones found along a stretch of beach near Moeraki, New Zealand. Originally formed in seafloor sediments 60 million years ago, the boulders (some more than 9 feet in diameter and weighing several tons) become exposed through shoreline erosion. Maori legend says the boulders are the remains of calabashes and eel baskets washed ashore from ancient mariners.

Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott LaFee