

by Scott\_LaFee

'TRUE FACTS'

An inch was originally measured as the width of a man's thumb. It has since been divided into various other increments, such as 25,400 microns, 4,000 silversmith's points, 1,000 mils, 72.27 points, 48 hair's-breaths, 23.24635 agates, 12 lines and 3 barley corns.

VERBATIM

PRIME NUMBERS - It would take 140 billion Big Mac beef patties to cover 1 square mile. CNS Photo.

WHERE IS IT? - This is a picture of the Kerguelan Islands, glimpsed through a rare break in the clouds. Located in the southern Indian Ocean midway between Africa, Australia and Antarctica, the islands experience almost constant winds, rain or snow. CNS Photo.

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE - Alexander Graham Bell was convinced that ewes with extra teats gave birth to more lambs. He spent more than 30 years tabulating sheep nipples, stopping only when the U.S. State Department officially announced it could find no link. CNS Photo.

WHAT THEY DO FOR LOVE - Female wasp spiders always try to find the best genetic match available. However, the male of the species goes to even greater lengths to ensure their genetic line continues. CNS Photo.

There was no "before" the beginning of our universe, because once upon a time there was no time.

- English cosmologist and author John D. Barrow

## BRAIN SWEAT

You drop a rubber ball from a height of 9 feet. It bounces up 6 feet, then falls back to Earth. Each successive bounce is two-thirds the distance of the previous bounce. What is the approximate distance the ball will travel before it stops bouncing?

## PRIME NUMBERS

27,800,000,000,000,000,000,000 - Number of Big Macs equal to the weight of the Earth

54,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 - Big Macs required to equal the volume of the moon

140,000,000,000 - Big Mac beef patties needed to cover 1 square mile

Source: "Sizesaurus" by Stephen Strauss (1995);

## BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

50 feet

## WHAT THEY DO FOR LOVE

Female wasp spiders are not paragons of sexual fidelity, but then why should they be? They're interested in obtaining the best genetic match available, which generally means as many sexual contacts with male spiders as possible.

It's a case of let the best boy spider genes win.

Of course, male wasp spiders have more selfish concerns. They want to perpetuate only their own genetic lines. As a result, write German biologists in the journal *Behavioral Ecology*, males go to remarkable and painful lengths (at least anthropogenically speaking) to ensure no offspring result from their partners'

subsequent dalliances. During mating, the much-smaller male wasp spider clambers up beneath the female and inserts a transformed leg filled with sperm into the female, sort of like inserting a ski boot into its binding.

The female ends the episode a moment later by attacking her partner and killing him if he doesn't get away quickly enough. The male, though, leaves more than a little of himself behind.

"When the male detaches himself from the female," said University of Bonn biologist Gabriele Uhl, "in more than 80 percent of cases, the tip of his genital breaks off."

Uhl and colleagues contend that the, uh, snapped off appendage serves as a kind of chastity belt. By studying affected female spiders, they found that subsequent copulations with other males were significantly reduced - a situation that helps ensure that the first male will prevail.

## ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) is best known for his development of the telephone, but Bell was also a scientist, though some of his research interests pushed the boundaries of reason.

For example, he believed that the rays of a full moon were harmful, and so he kept his bedroom windows permanently covered.

He tried to teach his dog to talk. (Maybe so he would have somebody to call on his newfangled phone.)

And he was convinced that ewes with extra teats gave birth to more lambs. He spent more than 30 years tabulating sheep nipples, stopping only when the U.S. State Department officially announced it could find no link.

#### WHERE IS IT? ANSWER

The Kerguelan Islands are glimpsed through a rare break in the clouds. Located in the southern Indian Ocean midway between Africa, Australia and Antarctica, the islands experience almost constant winds, rain or snow.

Despite the challenging climate, Kerguelen is home to numerous species, from penguins and albatrosses to elephant seals and fur seals.

*Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott\_LaFee*