

by Scott_LaFee

WHAT IS IT? ANSWER

The world's longest-running experiment. In 1930, physicist Thomas Parnell began an experiment to show that even ordinary materials possess remarkable properties.

WHAT IS IT ANSWER - This thick pitch placed in a funnel in a sealed chamber has dripped out at a rate of nine drops over 77 years. CNS Photo. SPONGEBOB'S REVEALING GENES - There's a reason SpongeBob SquarePants isn't very bright: He has no brain. In fact, as a sponge, he lacks internal organs altogether. CNS Photo ELECTRON INK - The Solar System Simulator Web site at space.jpl.nasa.gov/ is where you can see what Jupiter looks like from Mars. CNS Photo. Pitch is a derivative of tar, and at room temperature it feels solid, even brittle. In fact, it is fluid, but being 100 billion times more viscous than water, pitch flows at an exceedingly slow rate. For his experiment, Parnell placed a funnel of pitch in a sealed chamber at the University of Queensland in Australia.

Ever since, the pitch has very, very slowly dripped out the bottom - a total of nine drops over 77 years.

'TRUE FACTS'

Included in the payload launched aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis were two sets of game pieces from Monopoly. The pieces included miniaturized versions of a Toyota Prius, a New Balance Shoe, a Labradoodle, a Motorola Razr cell phone, a laptop computer, McDonald's french fries and an airplane.

The gesture was "a token of thanks" from NASA to Hasbro for making the Johnson Space Center an orange property on the company's latest "Here & Now" version of the popular board game.

VERBATIM

Science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of facts is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house.

- Henri Poincare, French mathematician and theoretical physicist.

BRAIN SWEAT

A man claims to be able to predict the score of any baseball game before it even begins. How is this possible?

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

The score is always 0-0.

BUGGING OUT

California spiny lobsters living in the kelp beds off San Diego aren't homebodies. San Diego State University biologist Kevin Hovel and Chris Lowe of CSU Long Beach report that local lobsters (nicknamed "bugs") move anywhere from 160 feet to more than half a mile in search of food each night, returning to their home areas before morning.

"The take-home message is that lobsters move a lot," said Hovel.

The news likely will influence where and when commercial fishermen set traps.

SPONGEBOB'S REVEALING GENES

There's a reason SpongeBob SquarePants isn't very bright: He has no brain. In fact, being the oldest known animal group with living representatives, actual sponges (as opposed to the kind that wear red ties and talk) lack internal organs altogether. They really are very simple animals.

But that doesn't mean sponges don't deserve their due. University of California Santa Barbara scientists say they have discovered significant clues to the evolutionary origins of the nervous system by studying sea sponges.

"It turns out that sponges, which lack nervous systems, have most of the genetic components of synapses," said Todd Oakley, one of the co-authors of the UC Santa Barbara work, which is being published in PLoS One, a Public Library of Science journal.

Even more surprising, said Oakley, sponge proteins have "signatures" indicating they probably interact with

each other in ways similar to the proteins in human and mice synapses.

"This pushes back the origins of these genetic components of the nervous system to or before the first animals, much earlier than scientists have previously suspected."

So while SpongeBob may not have a brain, he apparently does have feelings - or at least the genetic foundations of a nervous system that eventually granted feelings and other benefits to more evolved creatures.

ELECTRON INK

Solar System Simulator

space.jpl.nasa.gov/

If you're wondering what the view of Jupiter looks like from Mars (or from a passing probe on a specific date), look here first. This NASA-sponsored site offers views of the solar system from just about anywhere else in the solar system. All you do is type in the necessary data.

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