

Ode to E Pluribus Unum for Sunday January 14 2024

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Basilica of Superga



Image Credit & Copyright: Valerio Minato

Single shots like this require planning. The first step is to realize that such an amazing triple-alignment actually takes place. The second step is to find the best location to photograph it. But it was the third step: being there at exactly the right time -- and when the sky was clear -- that was the hardest.

Five times over six years the photographer tried and found bad weather.

Finally, just ten days ago, the weather was perfect, and a photographic dream was realized. Taken in Piemonte, Italy, the cathedral in the foreground is the Basilica of Superga, the mountain in the middle is Monviso, and, well, you know which moon is in the background.

Here, even though the setting Moon was captured in a crescent phase, the exposure was long enough for doubly reflected Earthlight, called the da Vinci glow, to illuminate the entire top of the Moon.

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Christmas Drone Show! (The Nutcracker Ballet with 1.5k Drones)



skyelements

<https://youtu.be/hNcMDoBmhGA>

If you think you've seen everything, forget it and just watch this.

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Potent Psychedelic Drug Banishes PTSD, Small Study Finds

Military veterans with cognitive and psychological problems saw drastic improvements after a dose of ibogaine.



Shredded iboga root, the main ingredient in the psychedelic drug ibogaine, is prepared for use in a traditional ceremony in Gabon.

Credit: Rachel Nuwer

Psychedelic drugs such as MDMA and psilocybin, the hallucinogenic compound found in magic mushrooms, have promised to revolutionize psychiatric treatments. Now, a small trial in military veterans suggests that a lesser-known, potent psychedelic drug called ibogaine could be used to treat traumatic brain injury (TBI). One month after ibogaine treatment, the veterans reported that TBI symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression had decreased by more than 80%, [on average](#).

“The drug seems to have a broad, dramatic and consistent effect,” says Nolan Williams, a neuroscientist at Stanford University in California and a co-author of the study. The results of the trial, which did not include a control group, are published today in *Nature Medicine*.

These data support launching rigorous trials to test the drug, says Alan Davis, a clinical psychologist at the Ohio State University in Columbus. However, they note that MDMA and psilocybin, which are already in late-stage trials, will be “much better candidates for meeting the needs of this community”. Ibogaine will require years of study to determine its efficacy and safety, Davis says.

Warfare’s lasting effects

Ibogaine is made from the bark of a shrub (*Tabernanthe iboga*) native to Central Africa, where it is used for ceremonial purposes. Researchers have tended to shy away from

exploring the use of [ibogaine](#) for the treatment of conditions other than opioid dependence and withdrawal, because it is tightly regulated in many countries and can cause fatal heartbeat irregularities, says Maria Steenkamp, a clinical psychologist who studies PTSD in veterans at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine in New York City.

How psychedelic drugs achieve their potent health benefits.

But the available therapies for PTSD and other conditions don't help everybody, Steenkamp says. "We are desperately in need of new interventions."

Williams had heard of veterans seeking out ibogaine for symptoms of TBI, which occurs when a sudden impact causes damage to the brain, and can cause a wide range of cognitive and physical symptoms. To systematically study the drug, Williams and his colleagues followed 30 male US veterans with TBI and repeated exposure to explosions or combat. All had, of their own accord, sought out ibogaine from a facility in Mexico, where use of the drug is not restricted.

Researchers played no part in the administration of the drug. Participants received a magnesium supplement alongside the psychedelic to lower the risk of cardiac side effects.

Symptom relief

The researchers found that one month after treatment, participants had average reductions of 88% in PTSD symptoms, 87% in depression symptoms and 81% in anxiety symptoms. On average, participants had mild-to-moderate disability before treatment and no disability one month after treatment, as assessed by a survey about their cognition, mobility and other functions.

None of the participants experienced cardiac side effects. The study is a "proof of concept" that proper screening and administration can lower the risk of harmful side effects, Steenkamp says. Williams and his colleagues are now looking to study whether the drug can confer a long-term benefit and are using neuroimaging and biomarkers to assess how the drug works.

Research in mice by Gül Dölen, a neuroscientist at the University of California, Berkeley, offers a clue: ibogaine might temporarily re-open a 'critical period', the name given to windows of time normally seen during early development in which the [nervous system](#) is particularly malleable. Dölen and her colleagues tested ibogaine and four other psychedelics in mice, and found that ibogaine was the "rockstar of the group", keeping the critical period open for at least four weeks, compared with up to two weeks for psilocybin, she says.

By Max Kozlov for Nature

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Mind-Blowing Images from the Field of Neuroscience



A new MRI scanner captured this image which shows the complex circuitry of the human brain. The MRI scanner was developed at the University of California, Berkeley, and allows for 10 times higher resolution than its predecessors. Researchers hope they will be able to understand the processes behind the underlying illnesses like schizophrenia and autism.

| An T. Vu, UCSF; David Feinberg and Alex Beckett, UC Berkeley and Advanced MRI Technologies

Although these images look as though they were created by an artist, they were actually taken by scientists trying to learn more about the human nervous system.

<https://bit.ly/3O1Mk6o>

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How China Built the World's First Fully Automated 5G Port



dailymail

China just built the world's first full automated 5G Port that will be a model for future ports around the world. The Tianjin Port is changing the port industry using 76 fully autonomous vehicles and embracing advanced technologies like 5G and AI to manage the operations.

https://youtu.be/P5kO_BnXAwc

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A Look Back at the Harrier



airliners.net

Harriers demonstrate their capabilities in this 1970 film produced by Hawker Siddeley titled 'Strike and Survive'.

<https://youtu.be/kqweSQEeL1Q>

I know they're a missile magnet, but I really would have loved flying one.

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Response to Last Week's All-You-Can-Eat Article



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Air Force Offering Up to \$600,000 to Keep Pilots



AVWeb

The Air Force's most experienced active duty pilots are being offered up to \$600,000 in bonuses if they sign up for a 12-year extension. FLYING Magazine reported last week that the Experienced Aviator Retention Incentive (EARI) and Rated Officer Retention Demonstration program will give the most valuable pilots up to \$50,000 a year for 12 years if they re-up when their contracts are up in 2025 or 2026. They also get their pick of assignments and to turn down those they don't want. The bonuses start at \$15,000 a year and range upward to the \$50,000 maximum depending on their experience and what they fly.

Like many other aviation employers, the Air Force is having a hard time hanging on to its best and brightest aviators, and it has a special need to do so according to Major General Adrian Spain, who heads up training for USAF. "Specifically, aviation-related skill sets, formed through the crucible of combat and daily execution of high-intensity operations, is the foundation necessary to continue to effectively deliver warfighting capability to the joint force and the American people," he said in a statement. "Retaining these professional aviators' experience and expertise within the total force is imperative in order to outpace future challenges that may emerge throughout the spectrum of conflict," he added.

Russ Niles <http://www.avweb.com>

Will this work? They may have to bump it closer to Ohtani territory.

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EveLeTh cLOWN BaNd



Eveleth Heritage Society

Sung to the tune of the University of Notre Dame's fight song:

"Beer, beer for old Eveleth High
You bring the whiskey, I'll bring the rye
Send somebody out for gin
And don't let a sober person in!

Juniors will stagger, seniors will fall,
Alumni will be the drunkest of all
As the royal faculty
Go staggering down the hall."

<https://youtu.be/k94YoW5AH10?t=1114>

The Eveleth Clown Band began after World War II and was originally sponsored by the local VFW post. In 1949, the group borrowed \$3000 to travel to Miami, where they performed at the Orange Bowl for an audience of 50,000. They played from a hotel roof at the VFW National Convention in Chicago the following year. The size of the group has fluctuated over the years, but the Eveleth Clown Band has become a legendary institution. Members come back to Eveleth each summer to play songs like "Beer Barrel Polka," "When the Saints Go Marching In," "Just Because," "You Are My Sunshine," and "In Heaven There Is No Beer." See below for links to more articles about the band's history.

And you thought San Francisco was pretty far out.

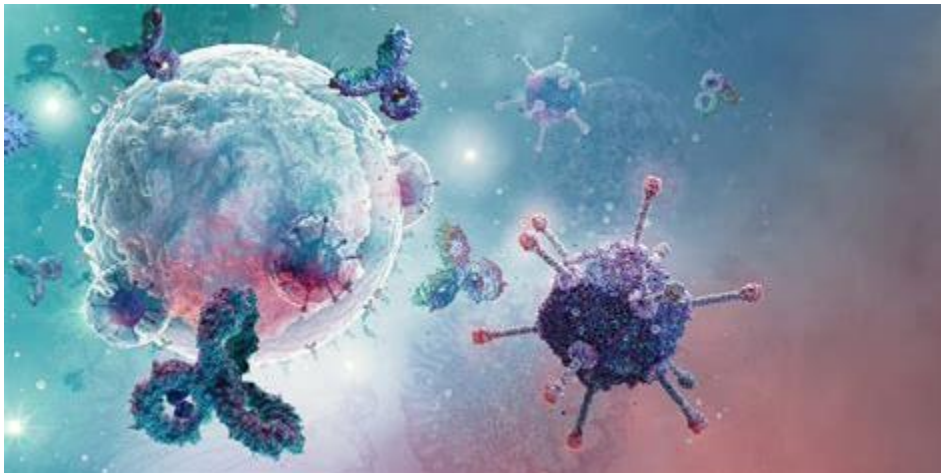
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'If You Don't Have Inflammation, Then You'll Die'

How scientists are reprogramming the body's natural superpower



White blood cells, pictured above, are key players in the body's inflammatory response to pathogens.

(Image credit: Shutterstock)

Inflammation can be both a superhero and a villain, depending on the context. Rather than eliminating it completely, new treatments are trying to redirect it.

<https://bit.ly/3TzzyQ2>

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Which is Better, ChatGPT or Google AI?



depositphotos.com

Google has a new artificial intelligence model called [Gemini](#), and to prove to the world it's better than the one used by ChatGPT, the company employed the most boring means possible: a report card.

In a company blog post co-written by Chief Executive Officer Sundar Pichai, Google argues Gemini outperforms OpenAI Inc.'s GPT-4 in 30 of 32 academic benchmarks, including tests for math, reading, coding and reasoning. Gemini is certainly a [huge improvement](#) over where Google was early this year, but the boasts seemed a tad desperate, especially since Google was only ahead of OpenAI's model by a few percentage points or less on many of the tests.

Is anyone really going to switch to Bard from ChatGPT because Google scored 0.3% better on an assessment of algebra skills?

With so many AI products trying to distinguish themselves, the points of comparison are abstract to the point of being almost meaningless. Tech giants like Baidu Inc. and Meta Platforms Inc. point to how their large language models boast billions, if not trillions, of parameters. Startups tout the millions of pieces of content their systems have ingested. For supercomputer operators, it's the tens of thousands of AI chips they've strung together.

Even experts in the field are wary of these kinds of evaluations. Rowan Zellers, an OpenAI researcher who helped develop a test for commonsense tasks called HellaSwag, [posted](#) on the social network X after Gemini's unveiling saying he doesn't have "a good sense on how much to trust the dozen or so text benchmarks that all the LLM papers report on these days."

What matters more than these test grades is how Gemini [performs in the wild](#), and users were quick to point out that the system is [still prone to errors](#) and seemingly [no better than OpenAI's](#) offering. Google itself had difficulty translating exactly what Gemini's

scores meant for the public, calling the model its “most flexible” and “most capable” and “largest” ever.

Never mind that it comes in three distinct versions — Ultra, Pro and Nano — that even Google’s Bard had trouble identifying. When I asked the chatbot about its new Gemini model, it directed me to various products named Gemini Pro, including a high-gloss floor finish, portable PA system and an embossing machine.

The excessive benchmarking looks a bit like the spec wars of the PC era. Decades ago, computer manufacturers promoted their hardware with wonky metrics related to processor speeds and memory size. Apple Inc. is credited with shifting the focus to novel features that demonstrated how a product would enhance your daily life. When Steve Jobs unveiled the first iPod, its gigabytes of storage mattered far less than that the promise of “1,000 songs in your pocket.”

The problem for AI companies is that, with their software claiming to be able to do pretty much anything, it’s really hard to distill exactly what makes a particular product special. Elon Musk, for his part, pitches xAI’s [Grok](#) as an anti-woke alternative, and [X CEO Linda Yaccarino calls it](#) “the ultimate ride or die” (whatever that means).

Google’s clearest differentiator was showed off in a science fair-like demo of Bard’s [“multimodal” features](#), meaning how you can interact with the machine outside text inputs. In one example, Bard saw an image of a forked road with lanes leading to either a doodle of a duck or a bear. Asked which direction another duck at the crossroads should go, Bard correctly guessed the safest path was toward its kin.

But Google later acknowledge the demo was [sort of fudged](#) and based on an unreleased version of Gemini. When I ran the same test on Bard, it oddly recommended the duck should take the highway 100 miles south toward Rhode Island on a bicycle. ChatGPT, on the other hand, nailed the prompt perfectly.

Google will need to work harder to earn a passing grade on this one.

By [Austin Carr](#) for *Bloomberg Tech Daily*

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Oscar Mayer Seeks Full-Time Drivers of the Iconic Wienermobile



Oscar Mayer

Oscar Mayer wants to hire a dozen "Hotdoggers," for year-long full-time jobs driving its iconic 27-foot-long hot dog on wheels. If you relish the chance, you can apply through Jan. 31 on the Oscar Mayer website to be part of what will be the 37th class of Hotdoggers who drive the Wienermobile, which first hit the road in 1936.

<https://bit.ly/41ZyqHD>

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Wearable Fall Protection Airbags Deploy in Milliseconds



Intelligent Technology Co.

<https://bit.ly/41XjVnM>

Good idea, the technology is there, the question is would I wear it? Maybe.

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The 44 Most Anticipated Tours of 2024



pitchfork

Taylor Swift, Bad Bunny, Olivia Rodrigo, Bruce Springsteen, Adele, Bob Dylan, Mitski, Green Day, and more of the most essential tickets of the year.

<https://bit.ly/3tTwfJg>

I can hardly wait...for 2025.

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Flight Crew to Passengers

I was on a crowded flight to Texas. A woman boarded with a very upset 3year old who was crying and carrying on. You could tell she was already at her wits end. A flight attendant walked over and asked the baby's name, which turned out to be Elias. A few moments later, a voice came out from the cockpit on the PA system.

"Elias? This is Santa."

The little boy sat up, focused on the disembodied voice.

"Elias, I want you to be a good boy so I can bring you something really good at Christmas, so no crying or fussing, ok?"

The little boy was wide-eyed as he nodded. He was quiet the whole flight.

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The pilot had really banged the plane onto the runway and was dreading having to stand at the door and thank the passengers as they exited. He was certain someone would have a comment, but no one did. He started to relax when everyone had deplaned except a little, old lady with a walker. But when she finally made it up the aisle, she stopped and asked, "Did we land or were we shot down?"

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As a plane was flying it started shaking very badly and soon the pilot got on and announced I'm very sorry folks but we have just lost power to one of our engines we are going to try and restart it please remain calm .. a terrified man shouts out please tell us how far will one engine get us ? Pilot pauses then answers the man, "All the way to the crash site. "

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I had a late-night Southwest flight to Rochester NY last week. It was the terminus for a long flight that had stopped twice. The pilot thanked the passengers and then said: "Now I want to tell you the same thing my father told me on my 18th birthday. Get your stuff and get out!" and for the children onboard, we are nearly there and will remain nearly there till we get there!

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This is your captain speaking. I'm working from home today. Have a safe flight!"

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About half way between London and Paris on Christmas Eve the pilot came on the PA with an announcement:

"Ladies, Gentlemen and especially children: I've just seen Santa and his reindeer pass by our aircraft and wave to me, if the children will look out your windows now you might still get to see him."

I'm not a child but I still looked.

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We were waiting to take off at around midnight from LAX to New Zealand—a very long flight almost entirely over water with virtually no land in between. We were delayed because of a "malfunction." The pilot came on the intercom and explained that he was waiting for a replacement part and that it would be arriving shortly. Groans were audible throughout the full 747.

He then said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I share your disappointment. But we're going on a long flight, and I can assure you that I would rather be on the ground wishing I were in the air, than in the air, wishing I were on the ground." After a moment of stillness, applause erupted.

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It actually came from a flight attendant about 15 years ago. "We have a woman pilot and a woman co-pilot on this flight. You are flying in an unmanned plane. "

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Years ago, there was a very low cost airline called PSA (Pacific Southwest Airlines). The other airlines hated the cheap competition. Once, I was on a United Airlines flight. As we flew over the Sacramento area, the pilot announced, "If you look to your right, you will see PSA passengers deplaning from their flight." Looking out the windows, we saw a group of skydivers jumping out of their plane.

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{last one, but a good one.}

After an international flight of over twelve hours, everyone was eager to disembark as soon as we landed. However, we had a long taxi to the terminal and then a long wait for another plane to leave so we could taxi to the assigned gate. In spite of the flight attendant's announcement asking everyone to stay seated until the captain gave the signal that we were stopped, several passengers unlatched their seat belts and stood up to retrieve baggage from the overhead bins.

At that point the captain's voice came over the loudspeakers. "Ladies and gentlemen, as you might imagine, after such a long flight with hundreds of passengers, the lavatories are in terrible shape. If you would like to help us out, please stand to indicate your willingness to help clean them."

Everyone was seated immediately.

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The Camel Thang



This is the most comical of creatures
From any angle his misplaced features
Reconcile to make a useful mammal,
the beast of burden we call the camel.

Beginning fifty million years ago
The camel evolved with even big toes.
This small feature provides the flexibility
to cross the desert with significant mobility.

Identified easily by the hump on his back,
Mistaken for bone but conveniently, stored fat!
No whines for water, no "I'm tired, lets stop!"
A travelling companion with a steady clip-clop.

This is a passive and loyal friend
To have on long journeys from beginning to end.

Francie Troy

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How Crowded Are the Oceans?



New maps show what flew under the radar until now.

Image: Global Fishing Watch

Advances in AI and satellite imagery allowed researchers to create the clearest picture yet of human activity at sea, revealing clandestine fishing activity and a boom in offshore energy development.

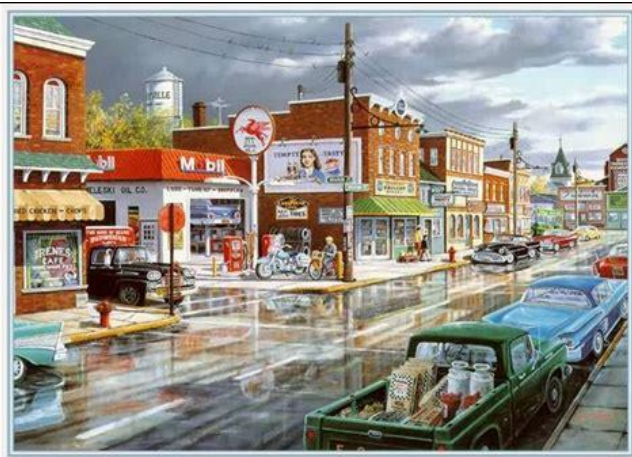
<https://bit.ly/3RQERrW>

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**By replacing
your morning
coffee with green
tea, you can lose
up to 87% of
what little joy
you still have
left in your life.**

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Main Streets 1950



thegoodolddays.blogspot

<https://youtu.be/3NdcxaVMRzc>

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Why More Electrolytes Are Needed

Electrolytes

- participate in **metabolism**
- determine **membrane potentials**
- affect **osmolarity** of body fluids
- major cations
 - Na, K, Ca & H
- major anions
 - Cl, HCO₃ & P
- intracellular fluid contains more K⁺
- extracellular fluid has more Na⁺ & Cl⁻

slideserve.com

On a low-carb diet, insulin levels fall, and with that, the kidneys retain less sodium. As you excrete water, important minerals—the electrolytes calcium, sodium, magnesium, chloride, and potassium, specifically—are also excreted from your system. So, it's key to replenish them to avoid negative symptoms such as lightheadedness and dehydration—especially if you're also exercising or ill.

Two tablespoons of lemon juice contain almost exactly the amount of potassium in 8 ounces of a typical sports drink. A pinch of salt supplies 110 milligrams of sodium, the same amount in 8 ounces of a sports drink. So, if you want to make your own low-carb sports drink, it's easy.

However, if you've ever walked down the sports drinks aisle at the drugstore, you know there's a lot of sugar and other junk added to these items. There is a scientific reason behind why many of these drinks contain sugar; a quick shot of sugar provides helpful glucose for replenishing energy stores.

Most people benefit from having small amounts of carbohydrate during heavy exercise. However, if you prefer to avoid sugar, you might want a sugar-free beverage to replace fluids and electrolytes.

Sugar-Free Sports Drink Recipe

Mix together:

- 1 cup (8 ounces) water, not carbonated
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- Small pinch of salt (a teaspoon of salt contains 2,300 milligrams of sodium, so you need 1/20th of a teaspoon of salt—not much)
- Flavoring and sweetener to taste (optional). Try Crystal Light Drink Mix, unsweetened Kool Aid, or sugar-free flavored syrups. If you avoid artificial sweeteners, try stevia.

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For That Chromatic Moment



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The rise of Lake Kerkini's Dalmatian Pelicans

The Dalmatian Pelicans of Lake Kerkini offer a rare opportunity for some good news.



Chris Stavrakas

Since conservation measures have been put into practice across Europe the largest member of the pelican family has enjoyed a population boost, securing a downgrade from Vulnerable to Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List. Globally however, the Dalmatian pelican remains under threat, with a global population of between 10,400 and 13,900. Despite a European recovery, the worldwide population trend is decreasing.

<https://oceanographicmagazine.com/features/dalmatian-pelicans-kerkini/>

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How Fluid Dynamics Experts Are Uncovering Secrets of Bird Flight



*Flapping and soaring: The tips of pelicans' wings turn down when they fly near the surface of water. Aerodynamics experts are trying to understand why.
(Courtesy: iStock/Aschen)*

For human-built aircraft, turbulence is an old and knotty problem. One of the first recorded human flight attempts, by an 11th-century monk called Eilmer, ended when his birdlike wood-and-leather wings couldn't handle what the chronicler calls "the violence of the wind and the swirling of air". A thousand years later, the same phenomenon continues to bedevil the aerospace industry, racking up costs in lost fuel, lost lunches, lost missions and even lost lives.

<https://bit.ly/3NNYzUg>

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The Very Oldest Car in the World



Moss&Fog

The oldest running car in the world is a steam driven 1884 De Dion Bouton Et Trepardoux that was auctioned off for \$4.62 million dollars. Powered by steam, the Runabout was a marvel of its time, boasting a sophisticated design that included a boiler and a two-cylinder engine. It could reach speeds of up to 38 miles per hour, a remarkable feat for the era.

<https://mossandfog.com/the-very-oldest-car-in-the-world/>

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Flash Mob at the Bank of America Tower



youtube.com

Prelude GM J.S. Bach and "Palladio" by Karl Jenkins <https://youtu.be/rq9TgLE7ePw?t=2>

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Orange Auroras Spotted in UK After Solar Storm Slams into Earth



Extremely rare orange auroras danced in between reds and greens in the evening sky above Scotland during a geomagnetic storm on Nov. 25.

(Image credit: Graeme Whipps)

Rarely seen orange auroras, which technically shouldn't exist, were recently photographed in the sky above Scotland after an explosive solar storm smashed into Earth.

<https://bit.ly/3uIkcOZ>

By Harry Baker for LiveScience

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Why the Human Brain Perceives Small Numbers Better

The discovery that the brain has different systems for representing small and large numbers provokes new questions about memory, attention, and mathematics.



Myriam Wares for Quanta Magazine

A new study in [Nature Human Behaviour](#) has taken an unprecedented look at how human brain cells fire when presented with certain quantities. Its findings suggest that the brain uses a combination of two mechanisms to judge how many objects it sees. One estimates quantities. The second sharpens the accuracy of those estimates — but only for small numbers.

<https://bit.ly/49wXc5v>

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This AI Robot Chemist Could Make Oxygen on Mars



A close-up of Martian rocks in Paratepuy Pass taken by NASA's Curiosity rover. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/MSSS

The system uses Martian materials to produce catalysts that release oxygen from water.

Researchers in China have developed a robot chemist powered by artificial intelligence (AI) that might be able to extract oxygen from water on Mars. The robot uses materials found on the red planet to produce catalysts that break down water, releasing oxygen. The idea could complement existing oxygen-generating technologies or lead to the development of other catalysts able to synthesize useful resources on Mars.

<https://bit.ly/46kk0mf>

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UK Research Firm Proposes Sodium-Ion Battery Technology



IDTechEx

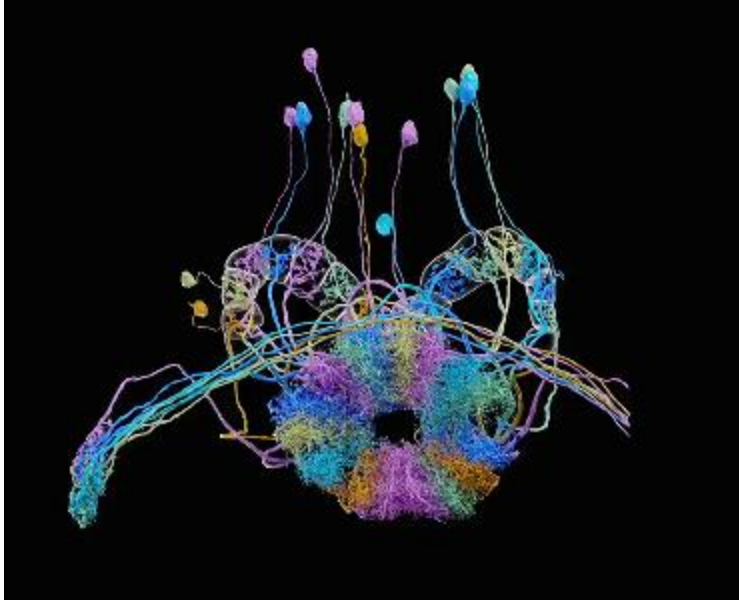
Cambridge, U.K.-based market research firm IDTechEx released a statement on how it believes sodium-ion batteries are safer, more practical, less expensive, more sustainable and potentially higher performing than “traditional” lithium-ion batteries. The company announced it has scheduled a free webinar, [Decoding Sodium-ion: Market Insights and Outlook](#), on the topic, scheduled for Jan. 25. In addition, the company’s website has a [detailed report](#) on the topic.

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Mapping The Brain to Understand the Mind

New technology is enabling neuroscientists to make increasingly detailed wiring diagrams that could yield new insights into brain function



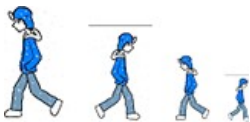
Researchers recently mapped a total of 25,000 neurons, with over 20 million connections, in a region of the fruit fly brain important for learning, memory and navigation. A diagram of the neurons involved in navigation shown here reveals how the complex neural circuitry is organized.

Credit: Flyem / Janelia Research Campus

<https://bit.ly/46LGw8r>

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My Walking Thoughts



For Sunday January 14 2024

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Trip to Terra Incognita: Quantico, September 1959 (#6)

The Dusty Trail (*At least when it wasn't muddy*)

It's been 65+ years since I've been to Quantico, but when I look at Google Maps and see what appears to be a vast flat forested area I think, "no way." Some of our meanderings were along mildly sloping terrain but those aren't the ones I remember. Firmly in my mind are the steep ups and downs whose changes created hurry-up-and-wait-situations for those of us in the back. Topping it was wearing boots and battle rattle that never quite fit right.

We'd start off carrying maybe 25 pounds of stuff—shelter half, poncho, mess gear, miscellaneous nicker-naks in a Great War era pack—along with canteen, bayonet, and whatnot on a belt that never stayed where you wanted it to. Then there was another WWI relic, the nine-pound 1903-A3 Springfield rifle rather than its successor, the WWII M-1 Garand. Why? I guess it was because they didn't trust us to do *present-arms* without lopping off a finger.

We started off carrying roughly 35 pounds that by an hour later seemed to have increased by half as much again...double if it was raining. Adding to the effort for those of us in the back was the requirement that we were to allow no one to fall astern of us. This meant that from time to time some of us were obliged to carry packs, rifles, and occasionally even their owners until they were ready to continue.

During these daytime sojourns I found myself thinking of the activities of July 1861 in which Federal and Confederate forces met in the First Battle of nearby Bull Run where the Southern forces under Stonewall Jackson routed General Irvin McDowell's army, sending the Federals back to Washington, DC to lick their wounds.

The Second Battle of Bull Run took place a year later with an attack by Stonewall Jackson on General John Pope's Northern Army. The result of the battle was once again a rout, with Pope's army fleeing once again to Washington, DC. Emboldened by the victory, the Confederates, now under General Lee began to believe themselves invincible...a fallacious assumption that eventually led to their downfall.

The danger of *victory thinking* was the chief lesson I took with me from my time at Quantico. Next to it was the recognition of how the troops on both sides managed to fight during the heat of summer in such difficult terrain while carrying with them artillery and supplies.

Night on the Hill Trail

The Hill Trail was to me the most challenging of our training marches as near its conclusion it featured a long steep upgrade followed by a downshoot that forced those of us at the rear into a mad dash to maintain contact with the forward part of the platoon.

Toward the end of the program we set off on a night hike that our platoon commander, Lieutenant Gately, decided to cap off with a jaunt over the Hill Trail. No problem going up but the descent in the dark was another matter.

I was about halfway down from the crest when I heard shouts then screams before ramming into a dog pile of people and equipment blocking the trail. Luckily rather than coming to an immediate stop, I sailed over the top of the bodies, landing into the bordering brush.

"Nothing to do but keep going," I decided, heading downhill at a more reasonable pace. At the bottom, Sergeant Bulldog called, "Ok, TROW-TIE, where's the rest of you idiots?"

"Trainwreck a couple hundred yards up the hill," I called back. After a minute or so, another battered soul limped in and collapsed. It was clear that there was trouble afoot.

Gunnery Sergeant Reeves took off up the trail, returning to report the need for medical attention for a dozen or so people caught up in the disaster. He and Lieutenant Gately had a short conversation after which Sgt. Bulldog led what was left of the platoon back to the barracks.

The immediate upshot was the vacancy of seven more bunks, but the next day when the severity of the situation sunk in to the brass, we were issued a replacement platoon commander.

By the end of the program there would be 29 of the original 50 people left in our platoon, fewer than the expected one-third attrition rate but I never found out the fate of Lieutenant Gately.

Next week: On becoming a Marine.

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