

Ode to E Pluribus Unum for Sunday August 24 2025



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Methane Bubbles Frozen in Lake Baikal



Image Credit & Copyright: Kristina Makeeva

Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Russia, is the world's largest (by volume), oldest, and deepest lake, containing over 20% of the world's fresh water. The lake is also a vast storehouse of methane, a greenhouse gas that, if released, could potentially

increase the amount of infrared light absorbed by Earth's atmosphere, and so increase the average temperature of the entire planet.

Fortunately, the amount of methane currently bubbling out is not climatologically important. It is not clear what would happen, though, were temperatures to significantly increase in the region, or if the water level in Lake Baikal were to drop.

Pictured, bubbles of rising methane froze during winter into the exceptionally clear ice covering the lake.

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GOOD EATS FROM THE ODE

Spicy Cucumber Salad (Makes 4 to 6 servings)

Ingredients

2 medium-size seedless cucumbers
1 large shallot, peeled or 1/4 of a small red onion
1/3 cup seasoned rice vinegar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 or 2 small skinny red or green hot peppers, very thinly sliced

Directions

1. Use a fork to score the length of the cucumber skin on all sides. Use a very sharp knife to slice the cucumber on an angle into the thinnest slices possible. Very thinly slice the shallot and rinse the slices in a colander under cool running water. Drain well.
2. Mix vinegar and salt in the bottom of a glass bowl until the salt dissolves. Stir in cucumbers, shallot slices and hot peppers. Let stand, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes or so. Serve at room temperature. (Salad can be refrigerated for a day or so.)

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FLASHMOB CENTRAL

Burbank Mariachi Flashmob



seeitlive.co

Pulling Strings <https://youtu.be/yuNI50hUrs0>

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Students Build New 'Hybrid Drone'

A 3D-printed hybrid drone can quickly transition between air and water thanks to variable pitch propellers. Watch a video of the drone in action.



*The drone can quickly transition from flying in the air to moving underwater.
(Image credit: Andrei Copaci)*

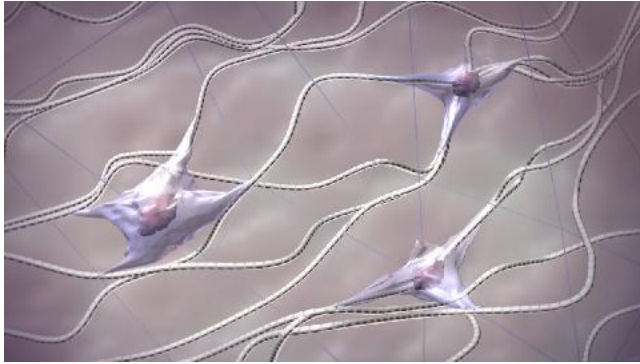
The team used a 3D printer and a computer numerical control machine — another piece of automated manufacturing equipment — to get the parts they needed for the build, and programmed the drone with custom software. Finally, they moved on to testing.

<https://bit.ly/4m9KHSK>

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Bioengineers Reveal Key to Reversing Cellular Aging

The key to reversing cellular aging may lie in a protein responsible for toggling cells between a "young" and an "old" state.



An artist's impression of collagen fibers and fibroblasts in human skin tissues.
Olga Zinkevych/iStock / Getty Images Plus

As we grow in years, older and less active cells begin to accumulate across multiple organs.

These "senescent" cells are both significantly larger than their younger counterparts and have a different configuration of stress fibers—the structural parts of cells that help them move and interact with their surroundings.

The team found that AP2A1 appeared to be involved in toggling cells between their "young" and "old" states—as senescent cells were rejuvenated by the protein's suppression, while younger cells were aged by its overexpression.

<https://bit.ly/4maNmM8>

Thanks to David Gell for digging this one out.

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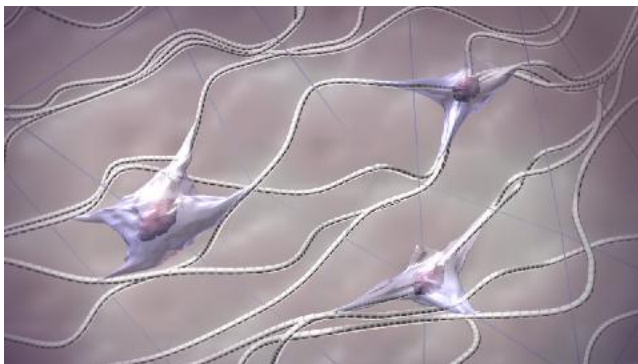
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Things Keep Evolving Into Anteaters

Findings speak to the dramatic impact ants and termites can have on mammalian evolution



Among mammals, the ant-eating body plan has evolved no less than a dozen times over the past 66 million years, a new evolutionary study finds.

Erik Joosten/NiS/Minden

In the 66 million years since nonavian dinosaurs went extinct, mammals have evolved into forms specialized for eating ants and termites at least 12 different times.

The new findings, published on 16 July in [Evolution](#), speak to the dramatic impact ants and termites can have on other species through sheer mass, says lead study author Thomas Vida, a paleontologist most recently at the University of Bonn. In the rainforests of Central and South America, ants and termites outweigh all other insects, mammals, amphibians, and birds combined—and globally, termites alone outweigh all wild mammals by a factor of 10. “Social insects just have this way of causing co-evolution around them,” he says.

"The specializations associated with myrmecophagy are some of the most bizarre and fascinating among mammals," says Laura Wilson, an evolutionary biologist at the Australian National University who wasn't involved with the study. "This study illuminates our understanding of when, and how many times, these fascinating features evolved, and under what conditions."

<https://bit.ly/4mi3U54>

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Peacock Feathers Can Be Lasers

Tail feathers can emit narrow beams of light, a first in the animal kingdom



Peacock feathers can emit two distinct frequencies of laser light from multiple regions across their colored eyespots.

Gerry Ellis/Minden

Peacocks have a secret hidden in their brightly colored tail feathers: tiny reflective structures that can amplify light into a laser beam. After dyeing the feathers and energizing them with an external light source, researchers discovered they emitted narrow beams of yellow-green laser light. They say the study, published this month in *Scientific Reports*, offers the first example of a [laser cavity](#) in the animal kingdom.

Lasers are created when a so-called gain medium, often a dye, is "pumped" with energy, which excites the medium's electrons to higher energy levels. When those electrons fall back to lower energy states, they release their energy by emitting photons of specific wavelengths. Those photons, in turn, can trigger neighboring excited atoms to relax and release photons of their own.

<https://bit.ly/4ooriQc>

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What The Science Says About Sunscreen

Somehow, the idea that we need to protect our skin from the sun has blurred in recent years – largely due to online misinformation. We asked Stanford Medicine dermatologists to clarify the facts about sunscreen products.



Getty Images

Sunscreen is one of the most widely recommended and commonly misunderstood products in medicine. Though dermatologists broadly agree on its benefits, questions about safety, ingredients, regulation and necessity persist – often fueled by online misinformation and decades of uneven product labeling and testing standards.

Today, there are two main categories of sunscreen ingredients:

Chemical filters that absorb UV rays into the skin and deactivate them. Chemical sunscreens, including ingredients like avobenzone and octocrylene, tend to provide broader UVA and UVB coverage than do mineral sunscreens.

Mineral filters (also known as physical filters) that deflect and scatter UV rays. Mineral sunscreens are less likely to cause irritation but some – especially those containing titanium oxide – block mainly UVB radiation.

Both mineral and chemical options can be effective if they offer broad-spectrum protection and are used properly. Mineral sunscreens may be preferred by people with sensitive skin or concerns about ingredient absorption. Chemical sunscreens, meanwhile, tend to be easier to apply evenly and provide better coverage against long-wavelength UVA rays.

<https://bit.ly/4l6ZQTV>

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Chords & Riffs

Charles Ives (1874–1954)



creativefabrica

An American modernist composer, actuary and businessman, Ives was among the earliest renowned American composers to achieve recognition on a global scale. His music was largely ignored during his early career, and many of his works went unperformed for many years.

Later in life, the quality of his music was publicly recognized through the efforts of contemporaries like Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison, and he came to be regarded as an "American original."

He was also among the first composers to engage in a systematic program of experimental music, with musical techniques including polytonality, polyrhythm, tone clusters, aleatory elements, and quarter tones. His experimentation foreshadowed many musical innovations that were later more widely adopted during the 20th century. Hence, he is often regarded as the leading American composer of art music of the 20th century.

During his career as an insurance executive and actuary, Ives devised creative ways to structure life-insurance packages for people of means, which laid the foundation of the modern practice of estate planning.

Ives's career and dedication to music began when he started playing drums in his father's band at a young age. Ives published a large collection of songs, many of which had piano parts. He composed two string quartets and other works of chamber music, though he is now best known for his orchestral music. His work as an organist led him to write *Variations on "America"* in 1891, which he premiered at a recital celebrating the Fourth of July.

The Man Who Invented Modern American Music <https://youtu.be/urynOPhaubM>
3 Places in New England https://youtu.be/kP0yMg6_Yaw?list=RDkP0yMg6_Yaw&t=2

The unanswered question <https://youtu.be/WBiLOVEttZw?list=RDWBiLOVEttZw&t=4>
Symphony #2 <https://youtu.be/d0OpTJIXdko?list=RDd0OpTJIXdko&t=53>
Variations on "America" <https://youtu.be/xR5Ncwvx80I?list=RDxR5Ncwvx80I>
Symphony #4 <https://youtu.be/kWZg6V1Dw1s?list=RDkWZg6V1Dw1s&t=16>

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Why You're Going to See a Lot More Swimming Pools in Strip Malls

Goldfish Swim School helped pioneer a new type of swim school: tropical, warm, and in a strip mall.



(Courtesy of Goldfish Swim School)

Jenny McCuiston trained to become an All-American swimmer in the 1990s and 2000s. Decades later, McCuiston is still doing swimming, but today she and her husband, Chris are the co-founders of Goldfish Swim School, a children's swim school franchise that has grown from a single Michigan location in 2006 to 187 earlier this year, becoming one of the largest chains in an industry that has been valued at ~\$2B-\$3B and been flooded with investment groups. And instead of using backyard pools or renting community spaces, Goldfish franchisees have found a surprising place for building new pools: strip malls.

Strip mall locations have also made Goldfish schools convenient for parents, who can drop off their kids for lessons and shop at grocery stores and other businesses.

- By the early 2010s, Goldfish had five locations in Michigan and another 10 around the country.
- The store count reached 63 in early 2018 and has since swelled to nearly 200 in 38 states.

They want to expand to 200 locations by the end of this year and to 400 by 2033 — enough to make Goldfish a strip-mall staple.

<https://bit.ly/4fmyrw3>

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The Geologic History and Wonder of Arches National Park



Photo by Kush Dwivedi on Unsplash

The story begins more than 300 million years ago, when the area now known as Arches was part of a vast inland sea. Over time, layers upon layers of salt, sand, and sediment accumulated.

Eventually, the weight of the overlying rock caused the deeply buried Paradox Formation, a thick bed of salt, to shift and buckle like taffy.

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Wildlife Images from the 2025 Mangrove Photography Awards

Mangroves provide for flamingoes, monkeys, tigers, and other types of wildlife.



"Guardian of the Underworld" In mythology, the crocodile floated on the edge between the world of the living and that of the dead. This image of the crocodile, floating on the surface of this cenote, perfectly illustrates this sacred legend.

Credit: Rodolphe Guignard, @rodolpheguignard

Now in its 11th year, the competition puts a spotlight on vital and fragile mangrove ecosystems around the world. This year's edition saw more than 3,000 entries from 78 countries. Mark Ian Cook earned the prestigious title of Mangrove Photographer of the Year 2025 for his striking aerial image (seen below) of Roseate Spoonbills soaring over the Florida Bay as a lemon shark swims by.

<https://bit.ly/4fq6mUL>

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Mini Therapy Horses Bring Joy and Hope to Children and Veterans

They're trained to play keyboards in hospitals for those in need of a special kind of care



*Horses playing a keyboard.
Mini Therapy Horses*

[Mini Therapy Horses](#) conducts regular visits at Shriners for Children Medical Center in Pasadena, Ronald McDonald House in both Pasadena and Los Angeles, the Department of Children and Family Services Juvenile Court, UCLA Ronald Reagan Medical Center, UCLA Santa Monica Hospital, the Greater Los Angeles Veteran's Hospital and L.A. Family Housing, amongst others.

Whether comforting children bedside after surgery as they come out of anesthesia or visiting with a veteran who just wants to sit quietly and share space with one of our horses, the MTH team is there to bring a sense of

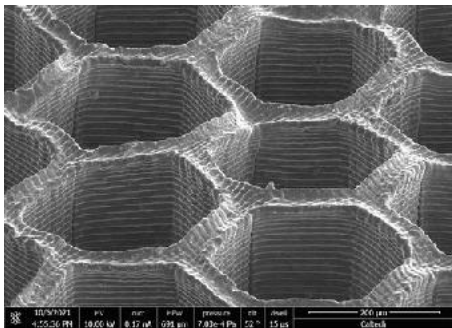
calm, comfort and happiness.

<https://bit.ly/4liOXPd>

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Bringing Metallurgy Into the 21st Century

Caltech scientists have developed a method to create metallic objects of a precisely specified shape and composition, giving them unprecedented control of the metallic mixtures, or alloys, they create and the enhanced properties those creations will display.



The final step in HIAM removes oxygen, leaving a mostly dense copper-nickel alloy in the desired, 3D-printed configuration. Here, a honeycomb structure was selected.

Credit: Thomas Tran/Caltech

Want a stent that is biocompatible and mechanically robust? How about strong but lightweight satellite components that can operate in space for decades? The new technique can tell scientists exactly which combination of metals will yield the best product. In addition, it offers a route to making alloys with beneficial properties determined by their underlying structure, such as surprisingly strong copper–nickel alloys.

The process begins with 3D printing of an organic hydrogel material, depositing the polymer resin precisely where it is wanted, layer by layer, to create a gel-like scaffold. That scaffold is then infused with metal ions by pouring a liquid solution of metallic salts over the structure. Next, in a process called calcination, the scientists burn the material, removing all the organic content and leaving behind the metals. Since this is done in the presence of oxygen, what is left is a mixture of metal oxides.

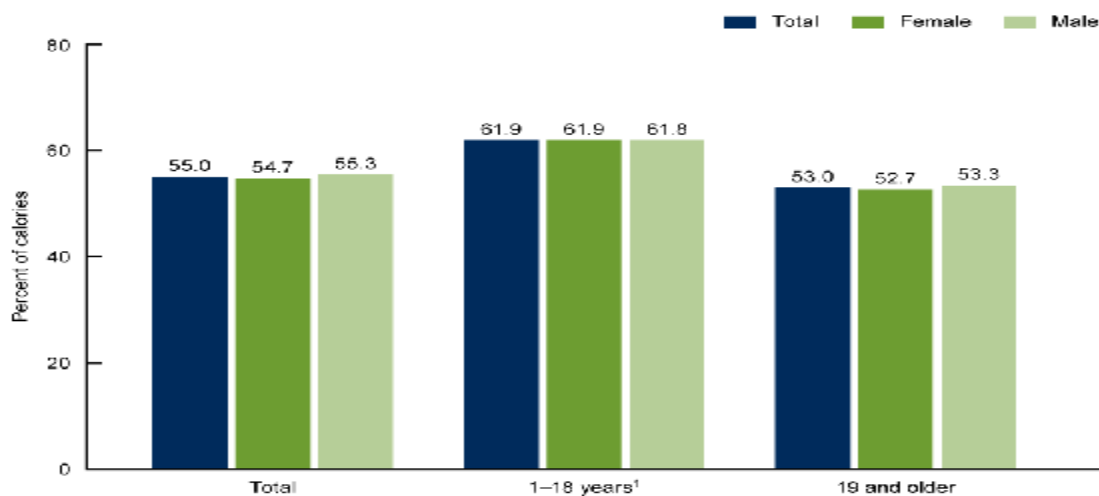
As a result, the strength of alloys created by HIAM is determined not only by the size of the grains within the metals—as was previously thought— but also by their composition. A Cu₁₂Ni₈₈ alloy with 12 atoms of copper for every 88 atoms of nickel, for example, is nearly four times as strong as a Cu₅₉Ni₄₁ alloy that has copper and nickel in a 59/41 ratio.

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Americans' Ultraprocessed Diets

Ultra-processed food consumption in youth and adults: United States, August 2021–August 2023



National Center for Health Statistics

Ultraprocessed foods make up the majority (55%) of Americans' caloric intake, according to a study released yesterday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While the agency has surveyed Americans' nutrition since the 1960s, the latest report is the first to analyze ultraprocessed food consumption.

- During August 2021–August 2023, the mean percentage of total calories consumed from ultra-processed foods among those age 1 year and older was 55.0%.
- Youth ages 1–18 years consumed a higher percentage of calories from ultra-processed foods (61.9%) than adults age 19 and older (53.0%).
- Among adults, the mean percentage of total calories consumed from ultra-processed foods was lowest in the highest family income group.
- Sandwiches (including burgers), sweet bakery products, savory snacks, and sweetened beverages were four of the top five sources of calories from ultra-processed foods among youth and adults.
- Between 2013–2014 and August 2021–August 2023, the consumption of mean calories from ultra-processed foods among adults decreased.

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Asher Hong Wins U.S. All-Around Gymnastics Title



NBC sports.com

Hong, a 21-year-old rising Stanford junior, totaled 170.02 points over two days in New Orleans, distancing fellow Olympic team bronze medalist Frederick Richard by 7.465 points.

Hong had the largest margin victory under the Code of Points system implemented in 2006. The previous record was 5.55 points by Sam Mikulak in 2019. The women's record is 6.55 points from Simone Biles in 2018.

Hong is joined on the world roster by Brody Malone, Donnell Whittenburg, Kameron Nelson, Patrick Hoopes and Brandon Dang.

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Hezly Rivera Wins U.S. All-Around Gymnastics Title



heavy.com

In a year, Hezly Rivera has gone from the youngest U.S. Olympian across all sports in Paris to the all-around national champion.

Rivera totaled 112 points in two nights of competition in New Orleans, prevailing by eight tenths over Leanne Wong, a two-time Olympic alternate. Joscelyn Roberson, another Paris Olympic alternate, was third.

Next up: a selection competition in early autumn, after which four women will be named to compete at October's World Championships in Jakarta, Indonesia. These worlds include individual events only.

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Denver Airport to Study Nuclear Power Option

Small modular reactor proposal aims for clean, consistent energy supply



Denver International Airport CEO Phil Washington

[Courtesy Denver International Airport]

Denver International Airport has commissioned a feasibility study on building a small modular nuclear reactor on its 34,000-acre site to provide a steady, carbon-free power source. The review, announced Wednesday by Denver Mayor Mike Johnston and DIA CEO Phil Washington, will examine reactor designs, regulatory requirements, potential funding sources, and safety considerations.

The \$1.25 million study, funded by the airport enterprise, is expected to take six to 12 months to complete. Officials said the proposal comes as the airport plans for passenger volumes to reach 120 million annually by 2045, up from a record 82.4 million in 2024.

<https://bit.ly/45fI2BE>

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Who Will Be the Lucky Dog?

Air Bud producers launch nationwide talent search for golden retriever to star in new movie



Nationwide talent search for the next 'Air Bud' star.

Credit : AirBud.com

Cineverse and Air Bud Entertainment have launched a nationwide talent search to discover the next golden retriever to star as the iconic, basketball-playing Air Bud in the upcoming Air Bud Returns, the latest installment in the classic family movie franchise.

According to a press release, the film's producers are looking for a purebred golden retriever "to carry the 25-year legacy forward — embodying the charm, athleticism and heart that made Air Bud a beloved character."

Beginning this month, dog owners across the U.S. can submit their pets for consideration for the role on the official [Air Bud website](https://bit.ly/47poiwI).

<https://bit.ly/47poiwI>

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Americans Are Ditching Alcohol. What Are the Producers Doing?

Recent warnings from the US surgeon general that alcohol is a "well-established, preventable cause of cancer" is perhaps a wakeup call for millions of Americans, but it's the worst-case scenario that many beer and spirits companies have been preparing for over the years.



*Smirnoff-maker Diageo bought Ritual Zero Proof last year
Bryan Steffy/Getty Images for Nightclub & Bar Media Group*

But that doesn't predict a doomsday scenario for Big Alcohol. It actually could be good for their bottom lines: A December report from IWSR, a leading drinks analysis firm, said that the non-alcoholic drinks global market is "experiencing a transformative period of growth, driven by evolving consumer behaviors and the momentum of no-alcohol."

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TBI History Linked to Brain Shrinkage in Older Women but Not Men



AARP

Lead investigator Chad Farris, MD, PhD, of the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, Boston University, Boston, told Medscape Medical News the reason brain volume loss after Traumatic brain injury (TBI) appears in women but not in men remains unclear,

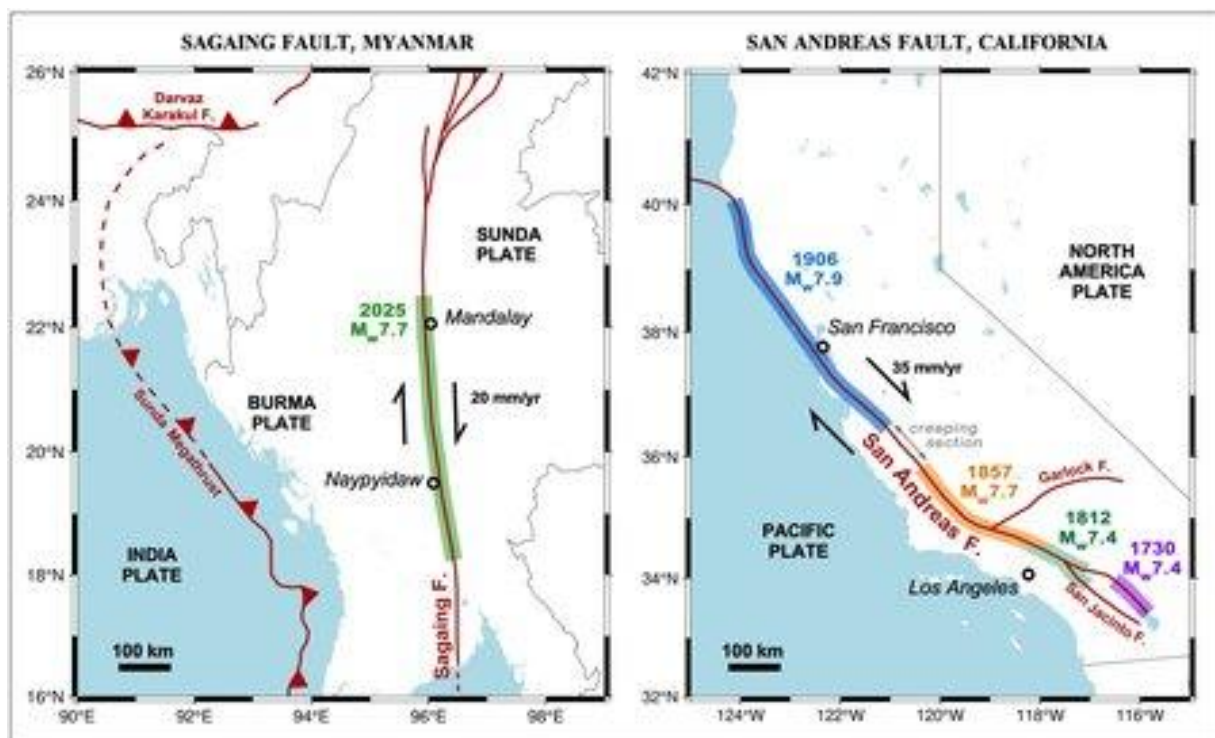
but it is a key focus of ongoing research. The study was presented on July 29 at the [Alzheimer's Association International Conference \(AAIC\) 2025](#).

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Myanmar Quake Gives Clues about Behavior of the San Andreas

Physics-based models provide an alternative approach with the advantage that they could, in principle, be tuned to observations and used for time-dependent forecast.



Maps of the Sagaing Fault (left) and the San Andreas (right). Both are strike-slip faults, with two sides moving past one another. Sections of each fault, highlighted in color, have ruptured in historical earthquakes. In a new study, Caltech researchers demonstrate that these kinds of faults can rupture along longer sections than predicted, causing larger earthquakes.

Credit: S. Antoine

On March 28, 2025, a magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck the Southeast Asia country of Myanmar along the Sagaing Fault, killing thousands and causing widespread damage. A new study from Caltech uses satellite imaging of the Sagaing Fault's motion to improve models of how such faults may behave in the future. The study indicates that strike-slip faults, like the Sagaing and the San Andreas, may be capable of earthquakes that are significantly different from past known earthquakes and potentially much larger.

In the new study, the team used correlation of satellite optical and radar imagery of the fault—a technique originally developed in the Avouac laboratory and now widely used in seismology—and its surroundings to determine that the 500-kilometer section shifted a net of 3 meters after the quake, that is, the eastern side moved south by 3 meters relative to the western side.

<https://bit.ly/45AfTE2>

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Quest to Understand the Link Between Cannabis and Schizophrenia

Recent studies have examined the relationship between the drug and psychoses and looked at how the brain responds to the substance



Scientists are currently studying whether cannabis use may cause schizophrenia.
Stockbyte via Getty Images / Illustration by Emily Lankiewicz

Researchers found the contribution of cannabis use to schizophrenia nearly tripled in Ontario after the drug was legalized in Canada.

Scientists haven't yet found a direct causal relationship between cannabis use and psychosis, though they are currently studying this.

While cannabis has become a mainstay in recreational dispensaries and medical clinics, scientists are still learning about its long-term psychological impacts. The drug's increasing popularity—both recreationally and to treat conditions like chronic pain and anxiety—is making some researchers and consumers concerned over one of its most severe side effects: psychosis.

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Counting Steps for Health? Here's How Many You Really Need



There's a growing consensus among researchers on how many daily steps are needed to improve health.

Marco VDM/iStockphoto/Getty Images

From pricey wearable devices to your phone, it has never been easier to track your daily physical activity, or lack of it. And if you're like many Americans and spend [nine-plus hours sitting](#) every day, chances are you could probably stand to take a [few more steps](#).

But just how many should you aim for if you want to live a longer and healthier life? New research suggests 7,000 is a good target.

Among their findings: Taking 7,000 steps per day was associated with nearly a 50% lower risk of dying compared with the bare minimum of 2,000 steps.

The study, published in The Lancet Public Health, also showed that the chance of developing Type 2 diabetes fell by 14%, cardiovascular disease 25%, symptoms of depression 22% and dementia 38%.

<https://bit.ly/4n4whnJ>

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Every Building Frank Lloyd Wright Designed

Wright designed over a thousand structures and realized 532, including houses, religious spaces, commercial spaces, and even a gas station.



visitmarin.org

Eight of Wright's buildings have been listed as UNESCO Heritage sites (see them here), and a number of his historic homes are listed on the market, but are oddly hard to sell due to their difficult maintenance and upkeep.

<https://bit.ly/47wfDIM>

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Frank Lloyd Wright's Unrealized Buildings

Madrid-based designer, David Romero, has created nearly two dozen digital renderings of Wright's unrealized concepts.



Lea House

David Romero

For architect and 3D designer David Romero, Wright's work has been a source of inspiration since his earliest explorations within the field. "From the very beginning, I

was drawn to his ability to bridge two seemingly opposite worlds: the rational and intellectual side of architecture, and the emotional—almost spiritual—experience of space,” Romero tells Colossal. “To me, that union is the essence of what makes architecture truly powerful—and no one embodies it quite like Wright.”

<https://bit.ly/45m5Rrw>

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AOL Is Finally Disconnecting Its Dial-Up Internet, 34 Years On

It’s probably been a long time since you thought about AOL and the shiny trial CDs that once proliferated our mailboxes.



AOL

But now, after 34 years, it's really over. AOL said it routinely evaluates its products and has decided to discontinue its dial-up internet service and associated software on Sept. 30.

AOL...

... was founded in 1983 by William von Meister as Control Video Corporation, which provided an online subscription service for Atari 2600 gamers and employed future AOL CEO Steve Case. That business didn’t work out.

But it ultimately became America Online (AOL) and launched its dial-up internet service in 1991, per Time. By 2000, AOL was the US’s biggest internet provider with a valuation of \$125B.

AOL’s impact on US culture is obvious — and not just in the sappy lyrics used in countless Away messages as hints to our middle school crushes.

Its iconic yellow running man logo dropped in 1997 with the expansion of AOL Instant Messenger. That service shuttered in 2017.

Its “You’ve Got Mail” phrase, voiced by Elwood Edwards, was so ubiquitous it became the name of a 1998 rom-com in which the love interests initially meet in a chatroom and bond over email.

Today, AOL is owned by Apollo Global Management, the private equity firm that also owns another internet icon: Yahoo.

Do people still use dial-up?

While it may seem like an agonizingly slow and archaic way to connect, yes.

About 22% of rural US households lack broadband internet access, per Gizmodo.

Around 163k households — 1%+ of US household internet subscriptions — still used dial-up internet as of 2023.

AOL had 1.5m subscribers in 2021 who paid for identity theft services, tech support, and other services, but it counted its dial-up subscribers as “in the low thousands.”

The changing internet

If it feels like all your early-aughts faves are fading away, you’re not wrong. Recent years have seen the end of icons like Skype and Internet Explorer.

At the same time, social media now often dominates our personal and professional lives; streaming media has replaced our physical books, CD, and DVD collections; and our search engines are increasingly powered by AI.

Let’s pour one out for AOL and the internet of yore: glacially slow, heralded by terrible screeching noises, yet in many ways less enshittified and more fun.

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New Species Of Early Human

Lived alongside the oldest known homo over 2.6 million years ago



Australopithecus teeth found among those from a Homo species are thought to be unique to

any other Australopithecus found before.

Image credit: Tim Evanson via Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Fossilized teeth discovered in Ethiopia have revealed a new-to-science species of *Australopithecus*, a genus of early hominins that lived from the Pliocene to the Early Pleistocene. Not only does it add to our busy human family tree, but the discovery proves they were living alongside the oldest specimens of *Homo*, the genus of early humans that includes our species, *Homo sapiens*.

The discovery challenges the ape-to-human view of our evolution, demonstrating that our family tree? It's really more of a shrub.

"This new research shows that the image many of us have in our minds of an ape to a Neanderthal to a modern human is not correct – evolution doesn't work like that," said ASU paleoecologist Kaye Reed in a [release](#). "Here we have two hominin species that are together. And human evolution is not linear, it's a bushy tree, there are life forms that go extinct."

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

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Astronaut Jim Lovell, Famed Apollo 13 Commander, Dies at 97

Lovell was also the first astronaut to go to space four times and part of the Apollo 8 crew, the first to launch on the Saturn V rocket and first to orbit the moon.



NASA

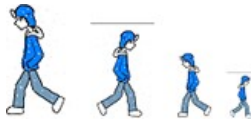
Astronaut Jim Lovell, best known as the commander of the near-tragic Apollo 13 mission to the moon, died Thursday in Illinois. He was 97.

Lovell was a veteran of four spaceflights: Gemini VII, Gemini XII, Apollo 8 and Apollo 13.

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My Walking Thoughts



For Sunday August 24 2025

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My First Weekend at VMA-533 as Its SDO

At 0700 on Saturday morning, I arrived properly accoutered to take on the duty as the weekend Squadron Duty Officer, a two-day ordeal during which I was to "take charge of this post and all government property in view," not that I had a clue what the government property involved was nor just what taking charge of it amounted to.

Just push forward and all these features will be revealed, the little nagging voice somewhere in my mostly vacant cranium told me. "...Or not," my far more realistic skeptic self responded.

Donning the SDO brassard, I settled in at the duty desk to accomplish what to date was the sum total of my VMA-533 career, noting among the various folders before me that one contained a list of potential challenges and suggested responses. I'd reveal them to you except that in all my stints as SDO I encountered nary a one and locked them from my memory.

I twiddled my fingers until 0725 it was time for me to head to the mess Hall to pull an inspection... which meant that for \$0.55 I earned the right to sample fare that was plentiful, nutritious, and not discernably worse than any I had found thus far in my military experience. The same went for the scullery where boiling water and live steam faced down the evil spirits of garbage. Satisfied that the calorie count was enough to sustain a rhino I hoofed it to the squadron barracks to check how things fared in that realm.

I need to explain that in 1961, nearly every Marine below the rank of staff sergeant lived in the barracks since the Corps proceeded on the assumption that no one below

that rank could afford marriage, a belief bolstered by the fact that any candidate for the role of married bliss had to ask his commanding officer for permission, to which the duty response was, "Hell no."

I arrived to find more than half the bunks still occupied... no surprise that. Luckily the Fire Watch stander was at his post and the squad bay appeared remarkably well attended to. After noting these positive points in my journal I wandered back to the hangar, thinking that despite Sergeant Major Fuller's dire warning, the duty was turning out to be a piece of cake.

That was until the Corporal of the Guard informed me that during my absence, he had answered a phone call from 'some colonel' who said he was from the Inspector General Staff and needed to get into our records for some reason.

"What did you tell him," I asked.

"That you were out inspecting the mess hall and barracks."

"Did he leave a number where he could be reached?"

"No sir."

"Any message?"

"Uh-Uh."

This was the first 'What to do quandary' of the day. Should I alert the skipper or exec? Call the wing staff duty officer and see if he had any idea? In the end I called the Sergeant Major whose immediate response was, "It's Corporal Tandy."

"Huh?"

"That sounds like him. Just log the event and forget it." He went on to suggest that I keep my eyes and ears open for Corporal Tandy, as he was behind most of the mischief at the barracks. "Not a bad guy just a wise ass, so be prepared for some happy horse droppings."

No sooner had I digested this piece of trivia when that very same corporal materialized in the flesh, escorting a PFC Dodge who looked as if he'd rather be anywhere else but here. His demeanor was another clue that things might be about to go Bravo Foxtrot.

Corporal Tandy took the lead. "PFC Dodge's mother was in an accident and is on her way the hospital. He needs emergency leave to be by her side." I was impressed by the grief that dripped from every pore in his body, which is not to say I believed any of it.

In the very off chance, it could be true – and because it offered an opportunity to make an impression on the infamous Corporal Tandy – I searched for and found a folder titled “Emergency Leave” and read the instructions for my and PFC Dodge’s benefit.

The first requirement was to call the Navy Relief office and ask them to get confirmation from the Red Cross that the mother had indeed been injured in an accident and subsequently hospitalized. This was followed by a list of questions for Dodge as to where the mother lived (Miami, FL), how he planned to get there (Delta flight from New Bern NC through Atlanta) whether he had the funds to accomplish the trip (No), and whether he had regular leave available (No).

Basic info in hand, I called the Navy Relief office and was informed by Mrs. Ford that it was highly unlikely the Red Cross would have information on the mother’s situation for at least 24 hours but that she would get things in motion pending confirmation.

Fifteen minutes later she phoned to say there was a Delta flight (a DC-3) leaving from New Bern in three hours whose Atlanta connection would get Dodge to Miami just before midnight at a one-way fare of \$145.00.

When I reiterated that PFC Dodge lacked the funds, she explained that the air fare and travel expenses were available from Navy Relief, so I told her to hang loose and that I’d get back to her.

It was here and without running it past Sergeant Major Fuller (big mistake), I put into practice one of my bright ideas.

“Ok, PFC Dodge, you heard what the Navy Relief lady had to say, so what is it? Do we go ahead and get you on your way?” Dodge appeared about to wet his pants, which was when Corporal Tandy jumped in to take charge of the situation.

“Don’t you have to wait for confirmation?”

“Not if it means PFC Dodge has to hang by his thumbs for 24 hours waiting on the Red Cross. I mean how bad would it be if she died in the meantime.”

“Uh you’re willing to go out on a limb on this?”

“Of course. Wouldn’t you? I mean we’re squadronmates aren’t we?”

“Uhh yeah, I guess so,” but Tandy was showing definite signs of concern.

Turning to PFC Dodge I laid out the plan.

“If this is what you feel you need to do, I’ll turn Mrs. Ford loose to handle the details, sign you out on leave, and get base transportation to take you to New Bern. Sound right?

"Uhh," PFC Dodge temporized, casting a bleeding look for Corporal Tandy to tell him what to do.

"Of course," I continued to add to the drama, "the moment I cut the leave orders and it turns out this is a little game you and Corporal Tandy have cooked up, you'll be absent without leave and subject to disciplinary action, Ok?"

Corporal Tandy, bless his little larcenous heart, stepped up at that point and said, "You're laying it on a little thick aren't you, I mean we're just having a little fun."

"No, I don't think so, but as a little reminder how to act when I've got the duty, I'm restricting you two to barracks for the weekend, got it?" *What a toughie*, I told myself. "What a jerk," came that nasty little voice in quick reply.

Apparently, they did get it because they went on their way without an argument.

Feeling pretty cocky for the way I handled it, I called Sergeant Major Fuller to tell him of my victory only to find he was irate and that I was in violation of at least a half-dozen laws, particularly in the issuance of a threat. Aside from legal aspects, he was concerned about the effect my actions would have on how the troops would view me.

"Call over to the barracks and tell Tandy you've decided the matter was pretty funny and that he and Dodge were off the hook" as long as they promised to stay out of the harassment business any time I was SDO.

While on one hand I saw Fuller's point and regretted my actions, I have to admit for the record that never again did Corporal Tandy – or anyone else for that matter – try and pull a fast one while I was the SDO, and Tandy, who was a line crewman, and I got along just fine in the future.

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