



# NMSR Reports

The Newsletter of the  
New Mexicans for Science and Reason

NMSR Reports, David E. Thomas, Editor, 1201 N. Avenida de Chamiso Pl., Socorro, NM 87801 © 2023

**JULY MEETING:**  
**NEW MEXICANS FOR SCIENCE AND REASON will hear**  
**Judith Polich**  
 on  
**“Plastics and Climate Change”**  
 =>**JULY 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 7:00PM**<=  
 =>**Attend online on Zoom!**<=

### FUTURE MEETINGS ANNOUNCED!

**NMSR July 17th Meeting: Judith Polich, on “Plastics and Climate Change”**



Judith Polich is a former lawyer and an environmentalist. She is a wetlands advocate and a member of the New Mexico State Parks Advisory board. She has a Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies and Environmental Education and a Law degree from the University of Wisconsin. Her climate change column, “Cutting Your Carbon Footprint” is published in the Albuquerque Journal. Her latest book, entitled Why Can’t We Be More Like Trees, explores new climate change narratives.

Several of her climate change columns have addressed plastics. You can access her columns on her website, [www.cuttingyourcarbonfootprint.com](http://www.cuttingyourcarbonfootprint.com).

7:00 PM July 17th, 2024, on Zoom

**🔥SKEPTICAMP Comes to New Mexico! 🔥**

SkeptiCamp  
New Mexico

June 1<sup>st</sup> &  
2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Bigfoot  
UFOs  
Quackery

Ghosts  
Moral Panics  
and more!

[www.skepticampnm.com](http://www.skepticampnm.com)

By Benjamin Radford

Courtesy [www.centerforinquiry.org](http://www.centerforinquiry.org)

Last month in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a SkeptiCamp was held, bringing together talented and notable skeptics from across the country (I was there too). It was two days of talks, panels, and science fun. The conference, modeled after many that Susan Gerbic has helped organize across the country over the years, was somewhat informal. Neither registration nor fee was needed! People could just drop in and show up. The festivities began on Friday night with a visit to a local brewpub, Steelbender. A dozen or so of us arrived and hung out, chatting about skeptical topics over craft beers.

Other participants have posted photos of, and written about, their experiences at this SkeptiCamp. And because most of the event was recorded by Adrienne Hill and/or Susan, the talks and sessions will be available for all to see in the next few weeks. I will give a brief overview and offer my own take on the event, as both speaker and audience.

**Continued on Page 3**

**New Haiku! Page 6**

**New Mexicans for Science & Reason (NMSR)**

NMSR is a non-profit group with the goals of promoting science, the scientific method, rational thinking, and critical examination of dubious or extraordinary claims. NMSR meets at 7 PM on the second Wednesday of each month, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at a secure, undisclosed location. NMSR Reports is its official newsletter.

**NMSR officers:**

**Dave Thomas, President**  
1201 Avenida de Chamiso Pl., Socorro, NM 87801  
[nmsrdave@swcp.com](mailto:nmsrdave@swcp.com)

**John Covan, Vice-President**  
[jmcovan@juno.com](mailto:jmcovan@juno.com)

**Debbie Thomas, Treasurer**  
3205 Alcazar NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110  
[abqdebbie@comcast.net](mailto:abqdebbie@comcast.net)

**Mark Fraser CNM Sponsor**  
[ippon@earthlink.net](mailto:ippon@earthlink.net)

**Kim Johnson, Industrial Physicist**  
[kimber@comcast.net](mailto:kimber@comcast.net)

**Marilyn Savitt-Kring, Science Mom**

Membership: \$25/year (hardcopy newsletter), or \$15/year (downloadable PDF), make your check payable to NMSR, send to treasurer (Debbie Thomas).

**NMSR Advisors:**

- *Mark Boslough*,  
Adjunct Professor, University of New Mexico.
- *John Geissman*  
Professor of Paleomagnetism
- *Alan Hale*  
Southwest Institute for Space Research

**Cyber-Cypher Clue:** X = B, Y = F.

**Bonus Puzzle Clue:** Try using Linear Algebra.

**WANTED: READER ARTICLES & COMMENTARY**

Got something to share with NMSR members? **Send it in!** ATTN: Dave Thomas, Editor, NMSR Reports.

**REMEMBER**, our next NMSR meeting is **July 17<sup>th</sup> at 7PM on Zoom!**



**PUZZLE TIME!**

[Please send solutions to Dave Thomas at: [nmsrdave@swcp.com](mailto:nmsrdave@swcp.com), or at 1201 N Avenida de Chamiso Pl., Socorro NM 87801.]

**Cyber-Cypher: JULY PUZZLE**

(Submitted by Dave Thomas)

The following letters are a simple substitution cypher. If R stands for L, R will stand for L everywhere. Your Cyber-Cypher Clue: Clue? Oh, well - if you must, see p. 2.

" Z D T L      Y D W K D H I B Z      A B G C D M L J ,  
K S L V      Y L B M      J R I Z D U S K ;      K S L V  
E H I ' K      Q B I K      D K      K H      D Z Z R G D I B K L  
K S L D M      G L K S H E J . "      -      J R J B I  
U L M X D W ,      H I      C J V W S D W J      Z D T L  
K V Z L M      S L I M V ,      K S L      S H Z Z V Q H H E  
G L E D R G

**SUPER SECRET WORD!**

However you prefer to do the cypher itself (above or below), simply duplicate those actions on the alphabetized row of cypher letters below. You'll build an answer key, and you'll also reveal - the Super Secret Word!

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

**MAY 2024 CYPHER SOLUTION**

"THE RUNG OF A LADDER WAS NEVER MEANT TO REST UPON, BUT ONLY TO HOLD A MAN'S FOOT LONG ENOUGH TO ENABLE HIM TO PUT THE OTHER SOMEWHAT HIGHER." - THOMAS HUXLEY

Esteemed May Code Crackers: Mike Arms\* and Austin Moede\*!

\*Secret Word: "STAY MOBILE"

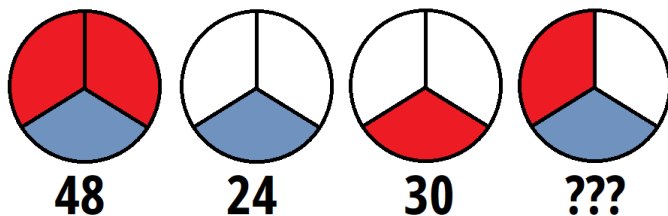
**SOCORRO STUMPER**

**Need more Secret Word Cryptograms?**

New puzzles every week at [www.nmsr.org/SocorroStumper.htm](http://www.nmsr.org/SocorroStumper.htm)

**July Bonus: "Simultaneous Pie Charts"**

Submitted by Dave Thomas



**The July Bonus:** Evaluate the value (???) of the last Pie.

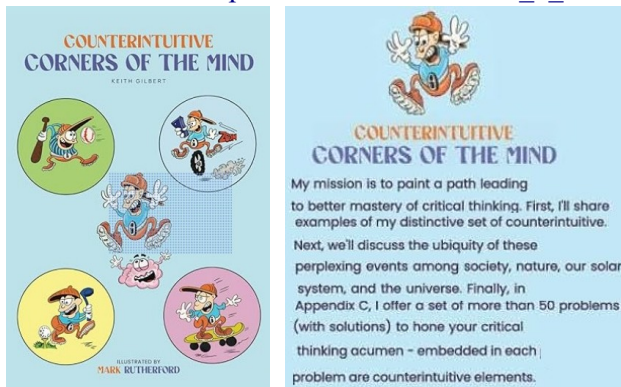
**May Bonus Solution: “Three to the What?”***Submitted by Dave Thomas*The May Bonus: Evaluate  $3^{900} \bmod 17$ .

Answer: 13

**Congrats to:** Paul Braterman (UK), Mike Arms (NM), Earl Dombroski (NM), K. Sengupta (INDIA), Kamal Lohia (INDIA)

**May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, NMSR Meeting: Keith Gilbert, “Counterintuitive Corners of The Mind”**

Our own Keith Gilbert has penned a non-fiction book titled “Counterintuitive Corners of The Mind.” It is a guide on “how to hone critical thinking skills in our wobbly world.” It is available on Amazon and Kindle, [https://www.amazon.com/Counterintuitive-Corners-Mind-Keith-Gilbert/dp/B0CTHWL8RS/ref=sr\\_1\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/Counterintuitive-Corners-Mind-Keith-Gilbert/dp/B0CTHWL8RS/ref=sr_1_1)



Keith described his motivation for the book. He took a course in Critical Thinking at UNM, at the philosophy department, which has dozens of professors. But the class was taught by a graduate student, who spent the entire semester reading from Plato’s Republic. Yes, that included critical thinking, but from 2500 years ago. New approach is needed for the times we live in, he said.

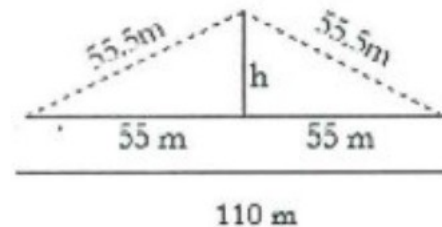
Keith described how we use our intuition (basically our library of experiences) to make decisions, and how we often make the wrong decisions. Critical Thinking and skepticism offers a pathway to making better decisions. Skeptics are not cynics, or “Nattering nabobs of negativism” (the description crafted by former vice-president Spiro Agnew). Keith described the scientific method and hypothesis testing, and noted that every theory is temporary. Strong theories last longer than weak theories. He the described several examples of counter-intuitive thinking, and how to mitigate uncertainty and counter-intuitive situations. Hummingbirds, cold fusion and more were explored. Keith offered the GRASP mnemonic as a guide to critical thinking.

- G – Grab Challenge, Clarify
  - Set Goals and Constraints
  - Don’t Seek Perfection
  - Breathe Deeply

- R – Research, Eclectic Sources
- A – Analyze, Winnow Down Options
  - Via Logic, Sound Reasoning and Risk and Reward
  - Continue Deep Breathing
- S – Skeptic Scrub
  - Agnostic, not Cynic!
  - Occam’s Razor
  - ID Rabbit Holes, Fallacies
- P – Propose Best Solution(s)
  - Include Rationale and +/-

Keith provided several examples of counter-intuitive thinking. Here’s one regarding a taut line:

An inelastic wire is stretched taut between the goalposts of an American football field. The wire is at ground level. Its length is ~ 110m. Next, we add 1.0m to the wire. Standing at the midpoint (55 m), the wire is lifted until again taut. What is the largest of these that can walk under the wire @ midpoint? a) Man (2m), b) Camel (3m), c) Giraffe (6m). Most people presented with this would intuit : "A man could just walk under"! But if you do the math, the surprising answer is c) Giraffe! The height  $h = \sqrt{(55.5^2 - 55^2)} = 7.4$  meters!



NMSR thanks Keith Gilbert for a stimulating presentation.

Videos of this and past meetings are available at <http://www.nmsr.org/meetings.htm>.

*Continued from P. 1: SKEPTICAMP Comes to*

**New Mexico! By Benjamin Radford** 🔥

**Day One**

Adrienne Hill kicked off the event with a presentation titled *Not a Ghost of a Chance: A Spirited Journey into Ghostly Photography*, which provided an excellent overview of ghost photos, from Spiritualism-era double exposures to present-day ghost hunters’ “orb” photos. She began with a personal story of a spooky, seemingly supernatural encounter that had a skeptical explanation, and ended with Wikipedia statistics. Adrienne helpfully provided color photocopies of her slides afterwards.

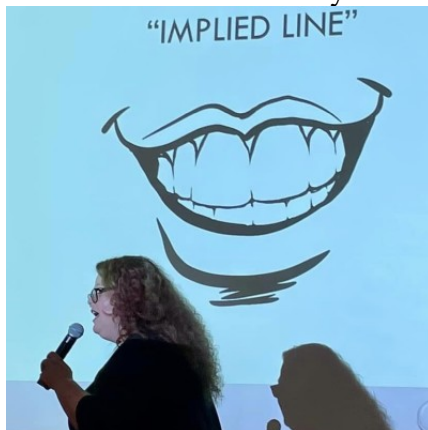


*Celestia Ward, Pascual Romero, Adrienne Hill, & Ben Radford*



I was next up, discussing a moral panic / rumor / conspiracy that I'd investigated several years ago, the *Blue Whale game*. It was, allegedly, a sinister online game that teens and young adults were becoming involved in, which led to dangerous behavior—and, eventually—suicide. I wrote about it for *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine and covered it on my podcast, *Squaring the Strange*. Though some people in the audience had seen my work on it, several said they'd forgotten important details and appreciated the update and review.

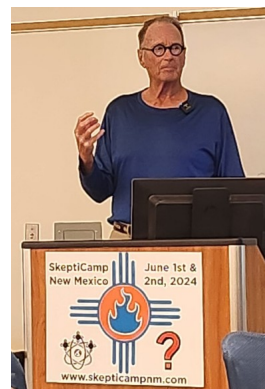
After a lunch break **Celestia Ward** took the stage to discuss *Creativity and Critical Thinking: What Can Art Teach About Skepticism?* Drawing (heh) upon her diverse backgrounds as an artist, public relations coordinator, and skeptic, she examined the intersection between art, psychology, and critical thinking, and made excellent points about how part of learning to draw is training yourself to see in new ways, just as critical thinking involves learning to see the world in new ways.



Then local investigative reporter **Larry Barker** took the stage. While his name may not be familiar to those outside New Mexico, he has spent decades in local TV news (currently KRQE News 13). In his talk he showed and discussed several news stories he'd done in conjunction with either Dave or myself, on several local legends and myths ranging from the Aztec UFO crash and Bigfoot to the chupacabra. Though the majority of his work is exposing government corruption—and not, for example, debunking ghosts—he highlighted some of the parallels between investigative journalism and skeptical investigation; “We can suspect whatever we like, but if we can't prove it we don't run it.”



Finally, **Frank Etscorn** took the stage to offer an informative and humorous take on medical quackery. A psychologist by trade, he gave a fast-paced lecture/standup rant on myriad medical misinformation and mischief including homeopathy. Sputtering equal parts incredulity and outrage in his trademark Kentucky accent, Frank took on—and took down—a litany of bogus remedies from Therapeutic Touch to “detox” quackery.



The day concluded with a panel discussion about UFOs including **Susan Gerbic**, **Dave Thomas**, and **Brian Dunning**.

## Day Two

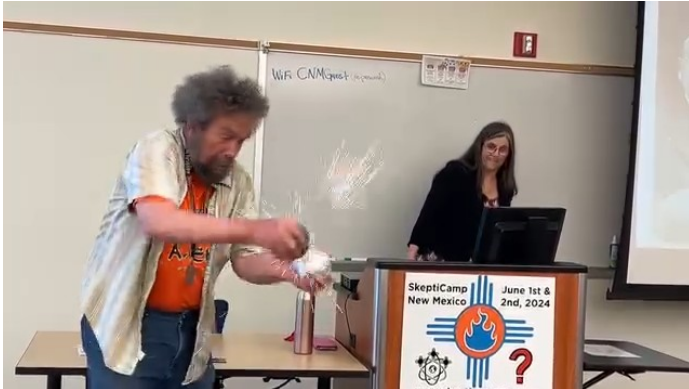
Sunday kicked off with **Susan Gerbic's** talk *Telling Stories with Wikipedia*. In it she discussed the Guerrilla Skeptic on Wikipedia project and highlighted the human side to some well-known stories, such as the men behind the Hale-Bopp comet discovery and other notable-but-overlooked scientists. She ended with a call for help for the GSoW project—volunteers always needed!



*Susan Gerbic*

**Dave Thomas** gave an illuminating and insightful overview of flat earth theories. He discussed the foundation of some of the beliefs, and

offered clear point-by-point rebuttals of some of the most common flat earth memes. I confess that the math lost me in a few instances, but he managed to make the basics understandable and showed several examples of flat earth follies with simple science experiments. Dave, longtime founder and head of the local skeptics group New Mexicans for Science and Reason, provided some entertainment and education between some of the sessions, including science experiments that wowed even veteran skeptics and amateur scientists.



*Making Thermite with Aluminum-coated Cannonballs*

After lunch a second panel discussion was convened, ably anchored by **Celestia** separating me from **Matt Loftus**, aka the Credible Hulk. We each gave our takes and insights into PR, Outreach, and Social Media for Skeptics.



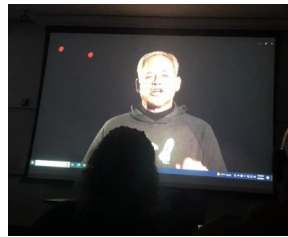
*Matthew Lee Loftus, Celestia Ward, Ben Radford*

Ethnohistorian, archaeologist, author, and co-host (along with Ruben Arellano Tlakatekatl) of the Tales from Aztlan podcast, **Kurly Tlapoyawa** spoke on *The Fight Against Pseudoarcheology*. Drawing from his own experiences, he described a fascinating (and funny) case of a supposedly ancient Maya symbol incorporated into



both New Age and academic circles, as well as bogus history about Black Olmecs promoted by our mutual alma mater, the University of New Mexico. Kurly's efforts to bring science and history to the matter were met with unfounded and offensive accusations of racism, though through persistence he was able to have an error-riddled journal article retracted—only to find it published elsewhere unchanged.

**Brian Dunning** closed the weekend with a screening of his most recent film *The UFO Movie THEY Don't Want You To See*. Many in the audience had seen it at least once; I'd seen it twice (full disclosure: I'm an Associate Producer) and each viewing got better; I noticed nuances and details I'd missed before. After the film ended Brian did a short Q&A, then discussed the overlapping (and often opposing) demands that filmmakers have. Films can be educational, profitable, or popular. Ideally, of course, they are all three, but as a practical matter filmmakers must give careful thought to how to devote (very) limited resources to balance these competing interests.



The crowd was modest but enthusiastic, and as it was the first of its kind in New Mexico, about what we expected. While outreach to the public is part of the mission, it's also to make and renew connections within the skeptical community. Even many of us veteran skeptics learned new things from the talks and each other; to give only one of many examples, due to Dave's talk I am armed with quick and simple replies to flat earth misinformation. Due in part to Celestia's PR acumen, we got a mention on KRQE News 13.

In between and after the conference there was a bit of time to relax and adventure; Celestia and Brian and I visited a famous "miracle" staircase in Santa Fe, then made our way to the Meow Wolf art installation nearby.

Thanks are due to organizing work by Susan, Adrienne, Celestia, and Dave. Even scaled-down events like this take significant planning and preparation, and we couldn't have done it without them. And, of course all the speakers who kindly donated their time and expertise to make the event a success. More SkeptiCamps are planned, possibly in your area, so instead of—or in addition to—larger conferences, they are a good place to share passions for science, critical thinking, and skepticism.

Most of the presentations are available for streaming on YouTube!

<https://www.skepticampnm.com/index.php/detailed-schedule/>

Adrienne Hill: Not a Ghost of a Chance <https://youtu.be/BadDvoA-A3U>

Ben Radford: The Blue Whale Game: Moral Panic or Public Threat? <https://youtu.be/Ap8QzplkWrQ> (18+)

Celestia N. Ward: Creativity and critical thinking: What can art teach about skepticism? <https://youtu.be/72iRsa-fvQE>

Larry Barker: TRUTH OR FICTION: ROSWELL, AZTEC, BIGFOOT, CHUPACABRA - Coming Soon!

Frank Etscorn: Quackery. What fools us mortals be [https://youtu.be/jQ52\\_Kz9uVk](https://youtu.be/jQ52_Kz9uVk)

Panel Discussion on UFOs with Brian Dunning, Susan Gerbic & Dave Thomas <https://youtu.be/RG3sUxzFts>

Susan Gerbic: Telling Stories with Wikipedia - Coming Soon!

Dave Thomas: Flat Earth Follies

<https://youtu.be/X2TOhWVmwCs>

Panel Discussion on PR, Outreach, and Social Media for Skeptics: Matthew Lee Loftus, Celestia Ward, & Ben Radford [https://youtu.be/Oa435IYW\\_ws](https://youtu.be/Oa435IYW_ws)

Kurly Tlapoyawa: The Fight Against Pseudoarchaeology <https://youtu.be/Lf66hyxcMhs>

Brian Dunning: The UFO Movie They Don't Want You To See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t72uvS7EJT4>

### Skeptiverse Haiku for July! by Keith Thomas

A hellish haboob. Sakes alive!/Will enormous Sand worms next arrive?	Could a capuchin Monkey be trained to make a Good capuccino?
The Colorado 5th District is set to send A Crank to Congress!	Horticulture lab May receive citations for Significant leaks.
Some claim colossal Teratorms still fly/'Cross the Dry Las Cruces sky!	But, should teratorms Escape your eye./You might sight Vultures soaring by.

*The NMSR e-mail list is fun! It's an e-mail list with news announcements of interest to NMSR members, discussions about news of the times, and more. To join, send a request to [nmsrdave@swcp.com](mailto:nmsrdave@swcp.com).*

DUES check the date on your mailing label. If it's time for you to renew, or to make a contribution, please make your check **payable to NMSR**, and send it to Debbie Thomas, NMSR Treasurer, 3205 Alcazar NE, Albuquerque., NM 87110

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

*Membership \$25 per annum (hard copy newsletter), or \$15 per annum (online newsletter).*

*Thanks to: John Covan, Ben Radford, Debbie Thomas, Keith Thomas and all of our Puzzlers!*


**NMSR Reports Vol 30, No. 6/7 July 2024**  
David E. Thomas, Editor (505) 410-0753  
1201 Avenida de Chamiso Pl. Socorro NM 87801

*IN THIS ISSUE:*  
Future Meetings Announced  
New Puzzles!  
May Meeting - Gilbert  
Critical Thinking  
Skepticamp Summary

**July Meeting**  
Wed. 17th  
**Judith**  
**Polich**  
7PM on Zoom