

DID YOU KNOW...?

Was Stonehenge once bought at an auction?

By Jack Bagley didyouknowcolumn@gmail.com

The countdown to spring continues! Though, to be perfectly honest, I hope this spring isn't like the last couple we've had. In this particular area of the country (I can't speak to where you are if you're outside Georgia reading this), the last couple of years it seemed we went straight from winter to summer, with only a couple of hours of spring.

I hope it isn't that way this year. We need spring. We need gradually warming days and gradually shortening nights. Not dumped on us all at once.

Let's hope. We need trivia, too, and here's this week's installment! Did you know ...

... your weight varies depending upon which planet you're standing on? Let us say, for the sake of argument, that you weigh 100 pounds here on Earth. (For which, I envy you big time.) On Jupiter, the largest planet, you would weigh 236.4 pounds, because Jupiter's gravity is the strongest of all planets in the Solar System. For the opposite end of the spectrum, you'd have to travel all the way to Pluto. On that frosty dwarf planet, your weight would be a measly 6.7 pounds. (That settles it. I'm moving to Pluto. Easier than dieting.)

... the patron saint of Ireland, famous for driving the snakes out of the country, never actually did so? The story goes that St. Patrick (408 AD-493 AD), after arriving in Ireland in 432, "drove all the snakes out of the island" and into the sea. The only problem with the story is, there were never any indigenous snakes on the island. Ireland is too far from any other land mass for snakes to swim to it. Modern scholars use the "snakes" story as an analogy of Patrick's driving paganism out of the island and bringing in Christianity. Additional trivia note: The popular picture of St. Patrick with a shamrock is also a sham. Though Patrick may indeed have utilized the three-leaf clover to teach religious concepts, the first writing about his doing so did not appear until 1726. The story goes that Patrick used the shamrock for his lessons because it was sacred to the pagan Irish, but there is no documentation that the pagans ever considered it sacred. (You know why they use a shamrock, right? It's too weird to use a real rock. The same applies for shampoo.)

... history has shown us some pretty silly ways of treating illnesses? Take this example: in the Middle Ages, it was believed by some people in Germany that kissing a donkey would relieve a toothache. (The lines I could do here are limitless, but I will restrain myself. I don't want to make a ... well, you know.)

... a famous chef cooked up a special "recipe" during World War II? Known for her long-running program The French Chef, Julia Child (1912-2004) worked for the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, during World War II. Her duties saw her working in the Emergency Sea Rescue Equipment Section, and in that role she helped develop a recipe for a shark repellent. (Oooh la la!)

... Stonehenge was once bought at an auction? In 1915, Cecil Chubb (1876-1934), a British millionaire, purchased the prehistoric monument known as Stonehenge at an auction and gave it to his wife Mary. She had reportedly sent him out that day to purchase chairs for the family dining room, and was not thrilled with his £6,600 (\$199,378 in today's dollars) purchase of the monument instead of the chairs - he slept in the guest room for months. Three years after the auction, Chubb donated Stonehenge to the British government, on the condition that the entrance fee would never be more than a shilling, and locals would always have free access. For the donation, Chubb was given the hereditary rank of baronet by British Prime Minister David Lloyd-George (1863-1945). (Thanks to Ed for the tip!)

... skating rinks go counter-clockwise for a reason? Most roller skating and ice skating rinks have people circling counter-clockwise because the majority of people are right-handed, and that direction allows them to hang on to the rail if they need to keep their balance. (I'm kind of glad they do it that way, myself.)

... potatoes are grown in all 50 U.S. states? (Not coincidentally, potatoes are also eaten in all 50 U.S. states.)

... astronauts can be designated as such without actually being in space? NASA policy defines an astronaut as someone who has flown 50 miles above sea level. However, international agreements state that space actually begins 62 miles above sea level at a point called the Kármán line, named for physicist Dr. Theodore von Kármán (1881-1963). Dr. von Kármán determined that space actually begins at that height. (How'd he figure that?)

... the Atlantic Ocean is saltier than the Pacific Ocean? (A salty comment at best.)

... the closest U.S. airport to the North Pole is named for a pilot and a humorist? On August 15, 1935, an airplane took off from a lagoon near Barrow, Alaska, with humorist Will Rogers (1879-1935) and pilot Wiley Post (1898-1935). The airplane crashed on takeoff, killing both men. When an airport was constructed in the town, it was named after both, and is called Wiley Post-Will Rogers Memorial Airport. Additional trivia note: the town of Barrow is no longer officially called that. It now goes by its Inuit name, Utqiagvik. The airport is about nine miles from the point where Rogers and Post went down. (And no, I have no idea how to pronounce Utqiagvik.)

Now ... you know!



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