

Witching – a confounding subject much deeper than most

Where's that water line? Where's the gas line? Heck, where are the valves? The who's, what's and where's of our world have been the bane of existence since before Benjamin Franklin first wondered "what will this key do if tied to a kite," and since the Nixon White House first wondered, "who's Deep Throat," and especially since public water supply system operators started wondering "where did the original contractors install that waterline?"

Until the advent of tracer wire and its subsequent installation with new water services, there has been no way of accurately locating PVC pipe placed in the ground—or has there? Some old-timers will argue that one way and

possibly the best way to locate water lines are with witching sticks or divining rods. Even modern scientific leaders will contend that some unexplained force can allow for detection of underground, shall we say, anomalies.



Pete Koenig
KAN STEP/Mapping Tech

These anomalies could include water lines, gas lines, telephone lines, underground springs and even seismic fault lines. For every diviner or believer there is a scientist or de-bunker ready to refute every assertion made by these modern-day witches. They do so in order to settle the argument of whether "the force" really exists.



Using an electronic locating device, as demonstrated by Nemaha RWD 3 Manager Paul Strathman, may be more reliable assuming the tracer wire hasn't been cut or stripped during installation.

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Pliers or pendulums?

There are several different tools used in divining for the unseen. Copper wire shaped in an 'L', a forked peach branch, a pendulum and even a farmer's pair of pliers are all examples of instruments that can be used to locate. Over the years, divining rods have been commercialized. There are Web sites touting one diving rod over another because of "special additions to the instrument" that amount to nothing more than dangling hoops of copper or silver or decorative

knick knacks added to make the unit look more powerful. I have even heard of one RWD manager who was in a pinch and used a stem of brome grass to locate a water line in a pasture! Did it work? I'll give you his phone number, and you can ask him yourself!

Whatever the instrument, the question still remains, "Does it actually work?" According to most geologists and technicians who have studied the matter, "No, it does not." Professors from universities all over the world

have devoted countless hours to the issue and generally come up with the same conclusion. "The results indicated that dowsers score little higher than random guesses in controlled conditions." One USGS pamphlet on dowsing states that, "the natural explanation of 'successful' water dowsing is that in many areas, water would be hard to miss."

What then, makes those darn rods cross? Something, whether it be a supernatural force or some unexplained cohesion between flowing water and the metal in the rod makes those sticks dance. Well, there *may* be an explanation for that. James Randi, a former escape artist dedicated to debunking paranormal claims, attributes the witching phenomenon to the "ideomotor effect." He suggests that an idea or thought process evokes an involuntary body movement and the dowser unknowingly exerts a small pressure or shaking to the witching device. This would mean

that the dowser would have a preconceived notion of where the line is. This would explain why some older managers and operators are good dowsers. If they were there 20 years ago when

tell a contractor where to dig? A theory of mine is that they "feel" the old trench. Even years after an excavation, a trench line is still visible as a scar in the face of the earth. Different plants grow better

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the system was installed, subconsciously they would have an idea of where it is located now.

But what of the newer operators, or non-system personnel who can accurately locate buried water lines? They weren't there when the system was installed, and probably haven't been involved in any repairs. So how are they able to

in that old scar and grow at different heights than the surrounding flora. A slight depression may even be detectible. This depression is what my theory is based on and I compare it to house renovation. When 'baby-stepping' across the floor of a room in an old house, one can feel the dipsey-dos in the floor where an old joist has rotted away or

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where one corner of the foundation has heaved. The same can be felt when ‘baby-stepping’ across a pasture. The difference, in my opinion, is that in the house a person is concentrating on how his

body sways as it goes over humps and valleys in a floor and notices those movements while in the pasture a person is concentrating on the rods he is holding and doesn’t consciously notice his own

body movements. The rods ‘feel’ those body movements, though and consequently, they turn as a result. The goal, finding the dipsey-do or trench line, is the same however; the instrument



Above: Although time consuming, probing demonstrated by Paul Strathman above, for buried pipe is an accurate way of finding pipe and determining its direction in the right soil types. If it's rocky, count on some false 'hits'.

Right: Some people, like the author and his metal dowsing rods above, have no luck and can't make dowsing work even with tell-tale signs right in front of them.

used to locate them is different. In the house the instrument is the brain and in the pasture the instrument is an L-shaped rod.

What of the stories of dowsers who have defied modern science and found water? It's very hard to argue with long-time dowser Don Kline of Arlington, Wash. Kline's most recent job was for a new real-estate development on a sheer bluff above a river.

“They had one well up there at 400 feet, and they were sucking sand. I've got two up there so far, one at 130 feet and one at 116 feet, and they've both got all kinds of water,” Kline extols.

Kline not only finds the water but also claims to be able to determine its depth, describe the soil type above the water and estimate its yield in gallons per minute. No telling how accurate he is but he's the busiest water witch in Snohomish County, Wash. Residents tell tales about him, landowners praise him, and well drillers have him on speed dial!

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During the Vietnam conflict, our own government employed the services of diviners by trying to perfect the craft. Their theory was that a dowser could locate enemy tunnel locations in the jungles of Cambodia and Vietnam. Soldiers reported that the use of L-shaped divining rods saved many lives by locating booby traps.

When asked of how accurate his locates are one Kansas RWD manager told me that it depends on the day. He responds, "Sometimes, I'm right on. Sometimes, I'm off a little, and sometimes, I'm not even in the same zip code!" This phenomenon of inconsistency baffles me. How can a person be right on the line one day and be so far off the next? If divining is achieved via some natural force, like magnetic fields emitted from the earth, then one would assume that the ability to dowse for water would be more consistent. Principles of physics and random

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chance may account for this inconsistency. Random chance says that something is realized only a certain percentage of the time or dowsers will find water x number of times out of 10 tries. Since random chance doesn't take days of the week or weather into account, it is understandable why KRWA's Greg Duryea located a buried two-inch water line on Wednesday but couldn't find the Kansas River on Friday. Even dowsing believers can't explain the inconsistencies in accuracy. The most common answer to this question is "I don't know why it works sometimes and doesn't work others."

But I think these believers have the answer within themselves

without really realizing it and Scientists who have been thoroughly trained and institutionalized are incapable of accepting it. It is similar to the argument that has been raging in the scientific world for centuries about an organism being a product of genetics vs its environment. It is equally similar to the argument about whether a cosmic black hole leads to a parallel universe. And it is the same state of mind that wakes my daughter in the middle of the night when she hears the Boogey Man in the closet. The answer is really quite simple and can be encapsulated in one short sentence. Do *you* believe?

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