

BOOK REVIEWS

THE D-FORCE: A REMARKABLE PHENOMENON by Professor V. C. Reddish.

Published by the author, Edinburgh, 1993. 40 pp. £9.95.

This short book outlines several years of experimentation undertaken by the author into the nature of dowsing. The first two chapters are essentially anecdotal and describe how he used two L-shaped metal rods to dowse successfully for buried pipes on his land in Perthshire. The following two are more experimental and outline tests designed to figure out the nature of the 'D-force*' responsible for the phenomenon. The next chapter discusses various alternative explanations for the phenomenon and a final chapter discusses various directions which future research in this area might take.

In his initial experiments the author placed various lengths of piping on the ground and discovered that the dowsing rods responded as he walked either over the pipes or along their length. However, on a few occasions the movement of the rods was inconsistent or absent. Instead of ignoring these anomalies, the author searched for potential explanations. Eventually he concluded that these unusual reactions only occurred when a second structure (e.g. a branch of a tree or a power line) lay directly overhead. The author postulated that these overhead structures might be emitting a force which cancelled that of the pipe lying on the ground. Furthermore, he believed that if these forces had wave-like properties then one might expect the objects to create an interference pattern that would produce strong 'pockets' of the force a few metres from both objects. The author conducted various experiments to test this hypothesis and concluded that this was indeed the case.

Unfortunately, the experiments described in the book were not designed in a very scientific way. The author (who acted as dowser) knew the location of the target objects (the pipes, overhead cables, etc.) during the experiments, and thus the motion of the rods could have been caused by his making unconscious movements rather than by any type of new force or energy. For example, in one experiment the author tried to establish whether the dowser had to be in direct contact with the ground for the effect to work. He placed a pipe on the ground and suspended a wooden board a few inches above it. Standing on the board he noticed that the dowsing rods did not move. He then placed the board directly on top of the ground and pipe and stood on it, and suddenly the rods started to move. He concludes (p. 26) :—

So it is shown that an air gap beneath the feet prevents the rods from rotating, providing strong evidence that the force is conducted from the ground through the body so that contact with the ground immediately above the pipe is necessary.

The possibility that his own expectations and unconscious actions may have directly influenced the rods is simply not discussed.

This major flaw is present in nearly all the experiments described in the book and, this being so, it is difficult to know how seriously one should take the author's findings. Perhaps the most constructive approach is to treat the experiments as pilot studies which now need to be further examined under much better controlled, and more scientific, conditions.

In the final chapter of the book the author outlines ways of trying to remove the human element from dowsing and construct a "wholly mechanical detector system" involving a servo-controlled rod. He notes that this would cost a few thousand pounds but that this would be money well spent if it resulted in a more complete understanding of the dowsing phenomenon. This might be the case, but a more economical first step might involve having the dowser unaware of the location of the target objects and seeing whether the D-force persisted. Until then, it seems premature to state, as the author does, that this is evidence of a truly "remarkable phenomenon".

Department of Psychology RICHARD WISEMAN
University of Hertfordshire
Hatfield AL 10 9AB