In the mid-1970s I was teaching dowsing (water-divining and the like) to a lot of people, at weekend courses for the British Society of Dowsers, in evening classes at an odd alternative-education place in north London called the Franklin Institute (astrologer Liz Greene and 'Holy Blood/Holy Grail' author Richard Leigh were amongst the other teachers there), and at the annual 'Comtek' community-technology fair in Bath, in western England. It was at the latter that I met various members of the Undercurrents *collective - a group producing a magazine with an odd mixture of alternative technology, alternative philosophy and alternative politics - and spent a few years on and off, in discussions and occasional work with the group, until I left London in late 1977 and drifted out of contact.*

During that time, I developed an ongoing friendship with Richard Elen, who asked me to write a 'stripped-down' summary of my book Dowsing: Techniques and Applications *(now* The Diviner's Handbook*) for the magazine, for their 'Inner Technology' issue. The result came out in* Undercurrents 17 *in late 1976, and is perhaps interesting in that it's specifically aimed at people with a scientific/technical background. (Some of the drawings are a bit wide on the browser-screen - the text collapses if I reduce them much further... sorry!)*

DOWSING

Almost anyone can dowse, reckons Tom Graves, author of *Dowsing: Techniques and Applications*, it's a matter of attitude and training. Tom wants to remove from dowsing its curious country quirk image - dowsing and its investigation could be a great paradigm smasher...

Dowsing is one of those aspects of the so-called 'fringe sciences' that has direct and practical uses in everyday problems - despite its being somewhat temperamental and unreliable. Water-divining is perhaps its best known form, but the range of the applications of dowsing is enormous: it's mostly used to tackle problems that are beyond the scope of more conventional physically-based tools.

To give an example, a common problem in building and rebuilding is to locate the old cables, drains and other services. Metal-detectors are often used for this, but they're a lot more difficult to use than one is led to believe, and, they're limited both in range and in what they can find. A cheap magnetic metal-detector (about £10) will have trouble, finding anything other than ferromagnetic materials a few inches below the surface; an expensive sonar- or radar-type detector (more like £100) can detect any metal and some other types of 'discontinuity', down to (at best) about five feet below the surface. Neither type is capable of discriminating easily between one substance and another. And beyond these limitations, if you have to use conventional tools, instruments get expensive - thousands of pounds, or more.

Anyone can do it

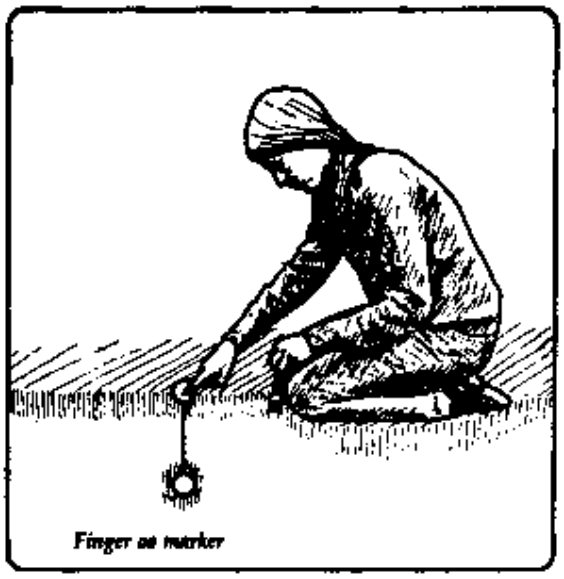
But with a little practice - no more than is needed to learn how to use a metal-detector accurately - you can use a pair of bent coat hangers or welding rods (costing ten *pence*) to locate the services of *any* practical depth, with precise discrimination between the services, and regardless of what materials they're made of. Which sounds ridiculous, I know, but the point is that it works - and also that, despite the traditional assumptions about dowsing, almost anyone can learn to do it. In practice, getting reliable results from dowsing is about as

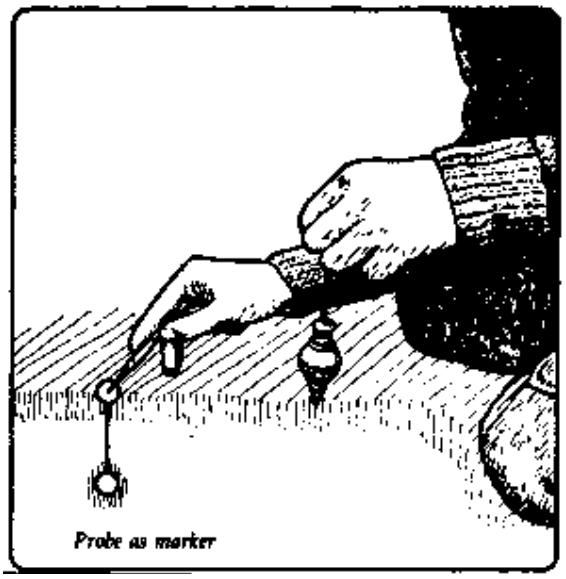
difficult as learning to ride a pushbike - and in fact many of the learning problems are the same in both skills.

The approaches that allow us to move away from the old assumption that ‘only gifted people can do it’ are *multi-level* - a mixture of physical, mental and other factors - rather than the old physicalistic or pseudo-physical approaches. While these new approaches make our ideas about how dowsing works even more vague than they were before, they also make it simpler and easier to use - for. they tell us in some considerable detail about *how it can be worked*, the conditions under which it will work. And that, from a practical point of view, is a great deal more useful than some inadequate ‘explanation’.

The range of applications

Using a range of techniques you can, for instance, measure the depth of a pipe, its course and junctions, the material of which it is made, the location of any leaks or breaks, the quality and amount of water flowing through it, and so on - all before digging down. The dowser’s-instrument - coat-hangers, hazel fork, pendulum or whatever - is used as a ‘Yes/No device’, a qualitative and quantitative Yes/No device somewhat analogous to a conventional moving-coil meter. The instrument is a simple mechanical amplifier, amplifying small hand-movements in much the same way that a meter needle visually amplifies a small current; and, just as a meter can measure many different qualities by placing suitable electrical or electronic conditions ‘in front of’ it, so too the dowser can select what his instrument will react to or measure by placing suitable conditions ‘in front of’ the instrument’s reaction.


Finger as marker


Probe as marker

Dowsing is partly physical, partly mental, partly something eise - it’s a multi-level tool. The instrument moves because your hands move; your hands move because a nerve drives a muscle; and the nervous impulse is triggered by the response of some reflex to some stimulus. That much can be proved but the reflexes involved can be either the simple type like the knee and blink reflexes, or else the very unsimple mental reflexes (conditioned reflexes and the like); and it’s almost impossible to state, with any degree of certainty, which reflex is operating at any one time.

So the mind can place conditions ‘in front of’ the reaction, selecting what the instrument will react to like the selector knob on an AVO-meter. It can also intrude, through prejudice and preconceptions, doubt and self-questioning - the attitude of mind is critical (in both senses) in

dowsing, so ardent materialists please note! It's also possible to use *directed imagination* - a dowser can mentally 'go to' a place, or a time, at will, and collect information from there - hence the rather bizarre techniques of map-dowsing and the like, where a map is used to symbolise the required place for the imagination to 'go to'.

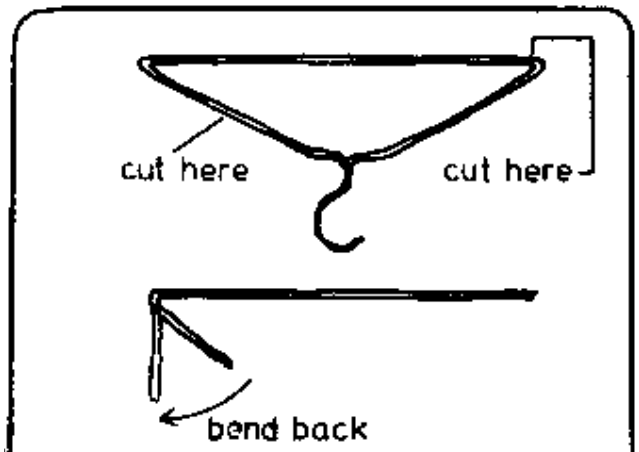
Symbolism of this kind -'symbolic equivalence' - is used in many dowsing techniques. The most common form of this is the use of 'samples', a sample of the same material as the object you're looking for, as a qualitative condition 'in front of the reaction. (Traditionally, this is closely related to 'sympathetic magic'). There may also be some kind of physical or semi-physical 'resonance' involved in the use of these 'samples', but I'm none too happy about that - I prefer to 'explain' it in terms of a 'mental world', in which, by definition, the physically 'real', the symbolic, the archetypal arid the imaginary are all equally 'real'. Dowsing thus becomes both a mixture of analysis and intuition, and a bridge between them; dowsing is a way of using intuition analytically in practice.

Dowsing is a tool

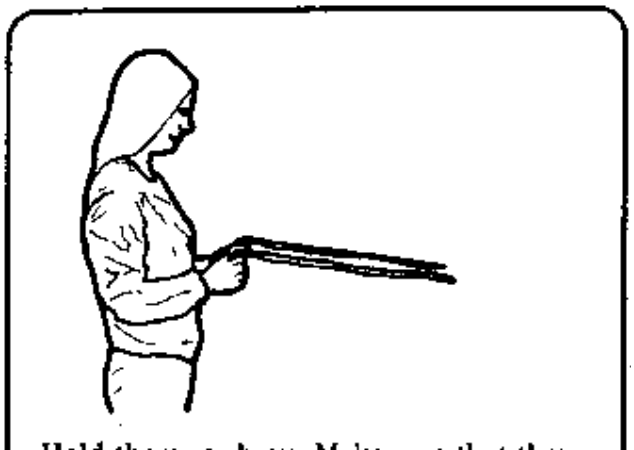
But beware - dowsing is *not* some kind of mystical or magical panacea, it's just a tool. The further away from the 'objective' physical reality, the more subjective the techniques necessarily become - and thus the greater subjective control needed to obtain reliable results. It's all too easy to get 'results' from the wrong imaginary world!

The main advantages of dowsing (especially the modern 'multi-level' systems) are cheapness, flexibility and simplicity of the techniques and tools - almost all types of dowsing tools can be 'knocked up' in a matter of minutes from things lying around in the home or workshop. Its main disadvantages its somewhat erratic reliability - but note that the reliability, as I've already implied, depends far more on the operator than the instrument. It is a skill, and like all other skills it requires a little practice and awareness, and a working knowledge of its basic principles and mechanics, in order to get useful results.

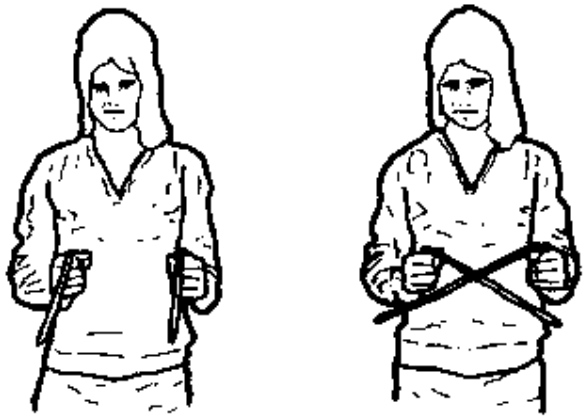
My own interest in dowsing is in its use in 'fringe archaeology' - ley systems, earth-acupuncture and the like - but that's rather outside the scope of this article. To show more mundane, and clearly practical use of it, the following three pages give directions and suggestions on using dowsing to find a water pipe or drain.



Take two metal coat hangers, and cut and bend them as shown.



Hold them as above. Make sure that they can swing freely, with the long arm just down from the horizontal.



Hold them roughly parallel; the idea is that they should cross over directly above the required object.

To hold the rods parallel, *don't* concentrate on the cause of their movement (your hands). As with riding a pushbike, on which you think about where you want to go, rather than physically trying to steer, rest your mind on the intended *effect*. In other words, to hold the rods parallel, rest your mind on the *idea* that they should be parallel.

Practise first, wandering about with the rods. Relax, both physically and mentally - dont particularly try to *do* anything.

Don't try to get results!

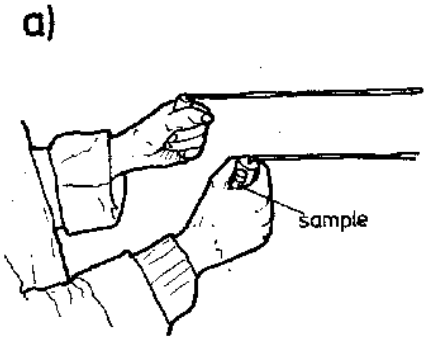
See if you can maintain the rods' parallel position while walking about; note any 'reaction points', the points where the rods cross over 'of their own accord'.

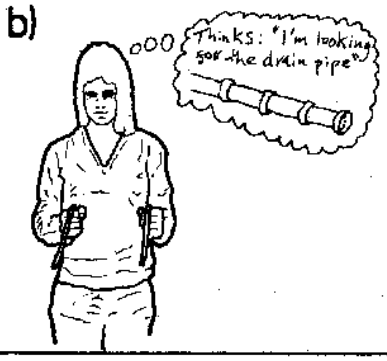
To find some object, such as a pipe or cable, you need to rest your mind on that object as well as on your position and the position of the rods. So either:

a) carry a sample of the pipe or cable with you; or

b) state in your mind what it is that you're looking for.

With a little practice you should be able to select any object you want, and to discriminate precisely between objects.





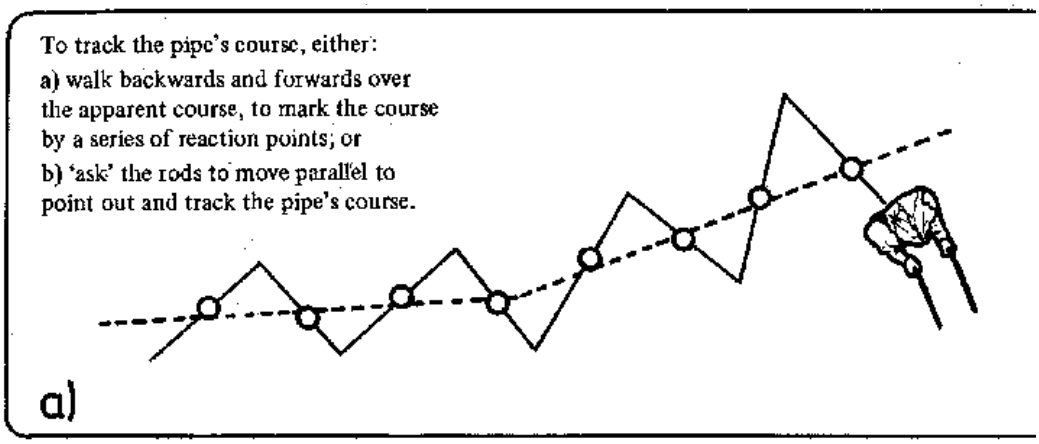
Reliability and control

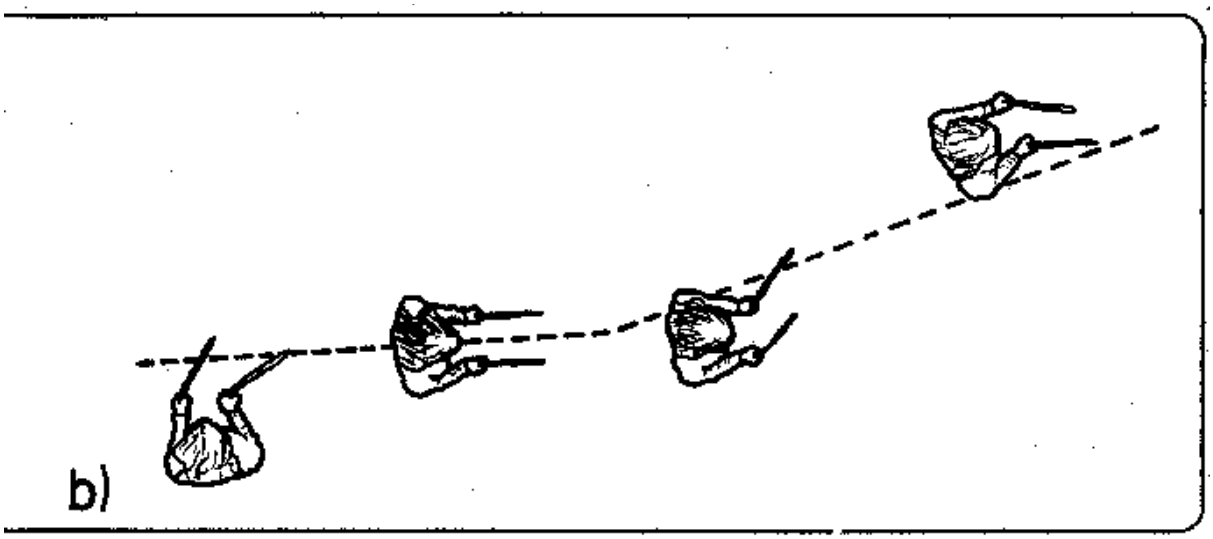
One of the most important things to realise about dowsing is that it is highly subjective: so the reliability of any dowsing work will depend more on the operator than anyone or anything else. The instrument only tells the dowser what his hands are doing - all the actual work is done subconsciously, somewhere inside him or her. The whole process is a mixture of

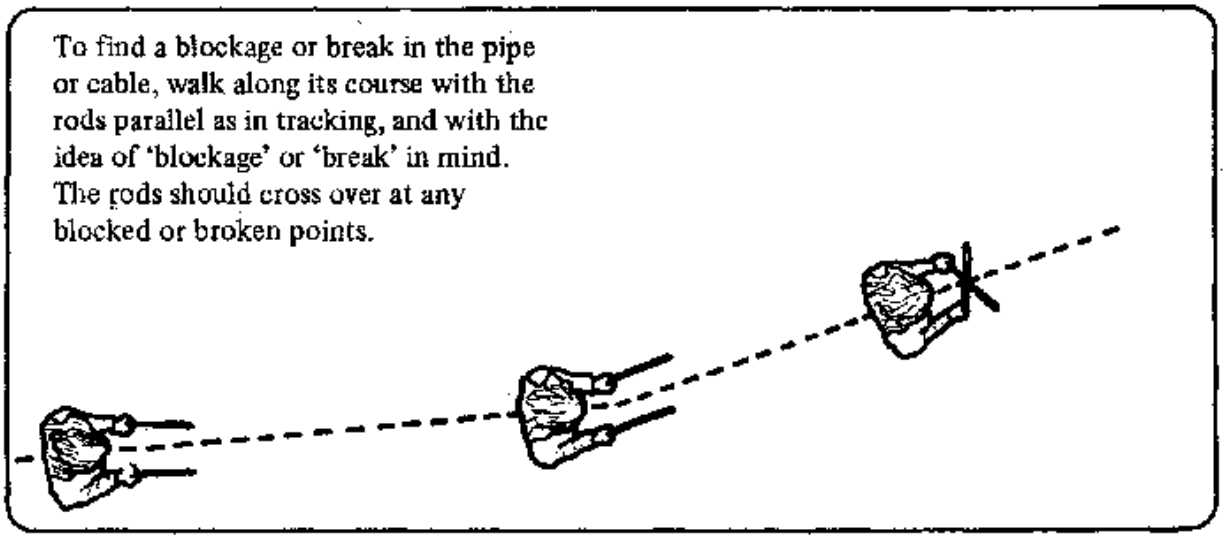
analysis and intuition; in using it you're playing with coincidences, trying to get the reaction of the instrument to coincide with the place of whatever it is you're looking for, or trying to get the imaginary world of your 'sample' to coincide with the real one. Subjective conditions have to be taken into account as much as 'objective' ones before reliable and repeatable results can be obtained.

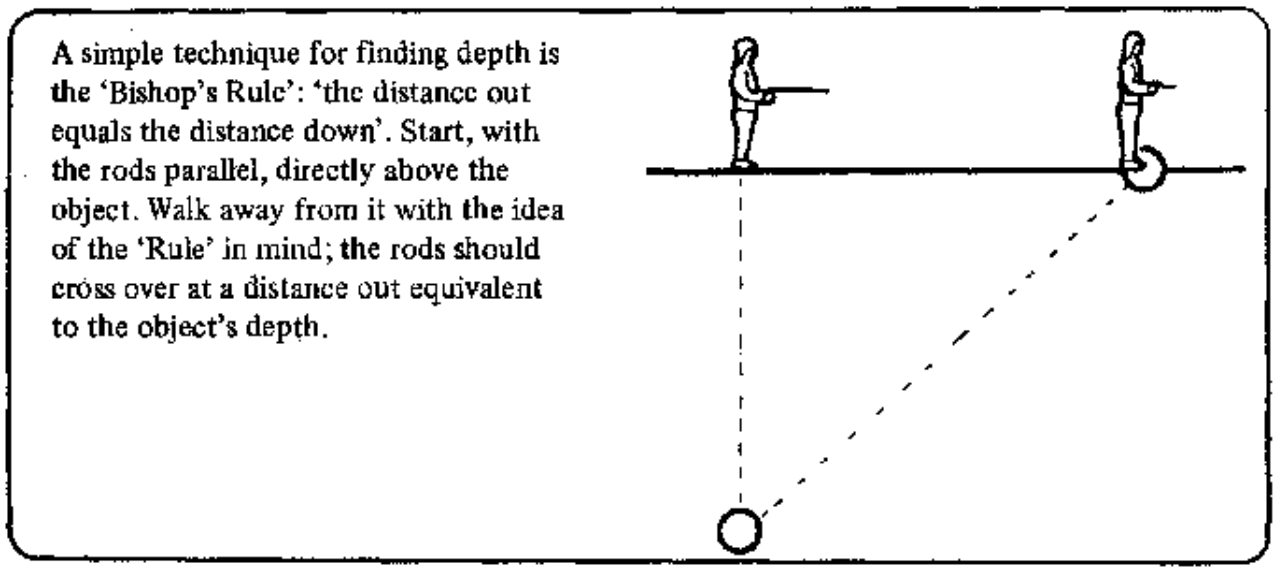
So there are quite a range of things to watch out for if you don't seem to be having any success. There are few physical problems, but most of these are fairly obvious: by far the most common mistake is holding the rod in such a way that it can't move freely, or even move at all. Check that one first!

Then for some people there's a problem of weather - for some reason certain weather conditions don't 'agree' with them. If you can, always repeat any dowsing work at different times of day, and avoid difficult work in weather conditions in which you feel uncomfortable. This is because you may find it difficult then to relax, which, as I'll, explain shortly, is important that you are able to do. Incidentally, it should still be possible for you to find an underground water-pipe or stream even when it's pouring with rain: you should, with practice, be able to discriminate precisely between objects, and to find only that which you're looking for.







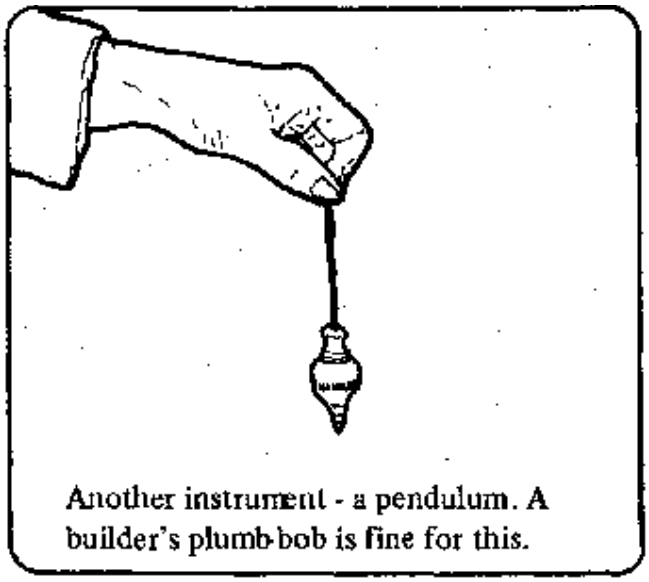


By far the most difficult problem for most people to understand is that the mind has a critical effect (in both senses of the word) on the reliability of the results. The catch is that a negative approach - 'it can't work, of course', or 'I suppose it'll never work for me' - or equally an overly positive approach - 'it *must* work for me', or 'trying' or 'concentrating' - will usually interfere with or neatly jam up the whole process. Dowsing seems to operate through a receptive state of mind, while conventional 'scientific' thinking operates through an active state: so *don't* try to analyse what is happening (or not happening), *don't* be pessimistic, and *don't* try too hard. Just let it work itself. The key word here is 'rest': *rest* your mind on what you're doing. Just be a little patient; if you adopt a quiet confidence and just allow the instrument to work itself 'through you', the whole thing becomes much easier, and more reliable. The more you interfere in the process, the less reliable it becomes.

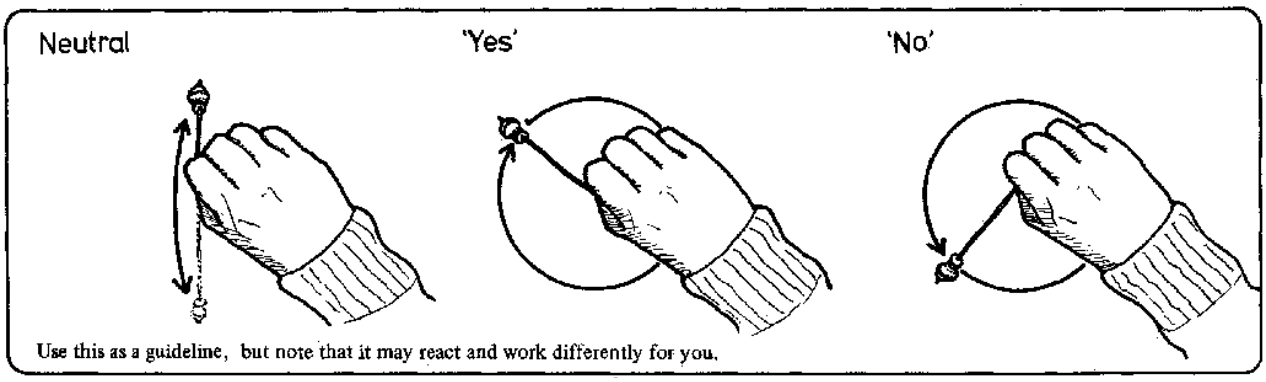
Developing the skill

Dowsing is a skill, and as with any skill you have to practice until the movements and actions of the manual part of the skill (in this case, holding and using the rod or whatever) become automatic, become a sequence of reflex actions and reactions. Once it knows what to do, the

body can get on with the job quickly and efficiently - but only as long as the mind doesn't confuse it with contradictory orders. It's rather like riding a pushbike: in order to ride it you must balance a number of opposing forces without really knowing how you do it - and as soon as you start to think or worry about it, you fall off!



Another instrument - a pendulum. A builder's plumb-bob is fine for this.



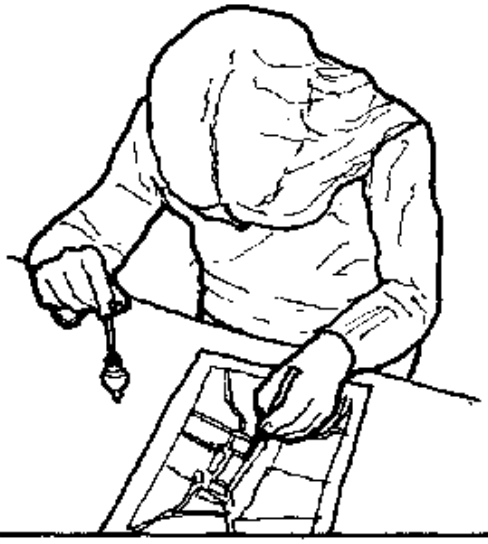
Use this as a guideline, but note that it may react and work differently for you.

Using that set of Yes/No reactions, you can 'ask' the pendulum (and thus yourself) questions that can be answered unambiguously by Yes or No. In this way intuition can be used controllably to handle analysis, which makes this an extremely useful and important aspect of dowsing.

A pendulum can also be used quantitatively, either by asking it Yes/No quantitative questions, or else by counting the number of gyrations it makes before returning to oscillation.

Preselect the units (feet, gallons seconds or whatever) and the order of units (five feet per gyration, ten feet, a hundred feet) of your scale, and hold this scale in your mind while working. Then use the pendulum to 'generate' the required number for that scale.

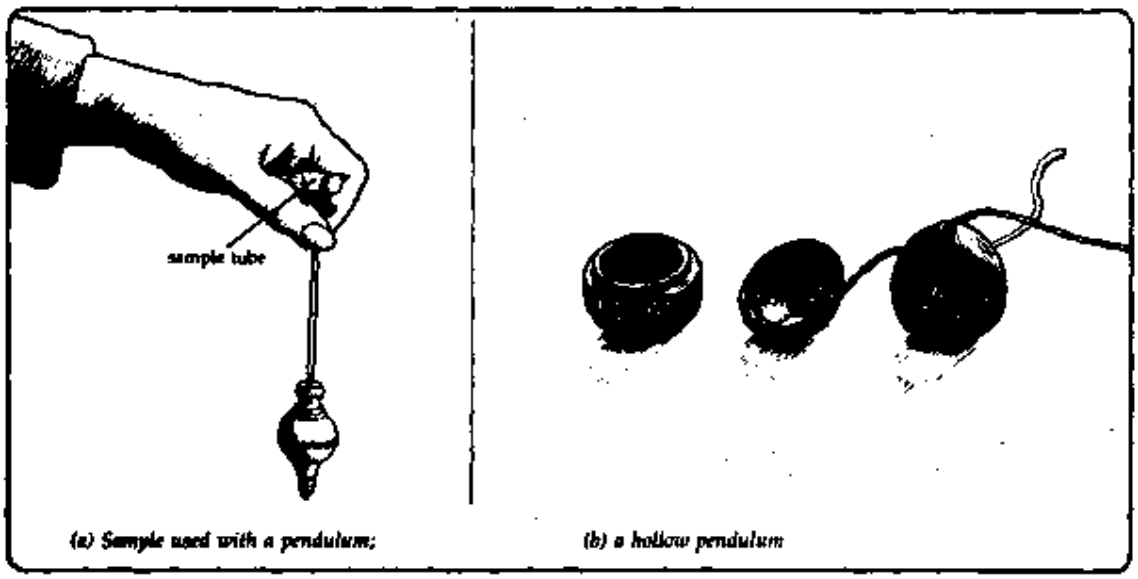
You can also work on maps and diagrams as well as on-site, using the same techniques already discussed: but it does need some practice to get as good results as on-site, for when working from maps you're working only on an *imaginary* world. To get accurate results you have to get that imaginary world to coincide with the 'real' one, which needs a high degree of mental control and agility.



The same applies in dowsing. And the same kind of direction of action as on a pushbike is used to select how the dowsing instrument will react: on a pushbike you think about where you want to go rather than deliberately steering the thing, and in dowsing you redirect your conscious attention on to the effect (or intended effect) of a given reflex movement, so as to let the body produce, unconsciously, the right 'cause', the right reflex or sequence of reflexes. The simplest way of doing this, if you won't feel too embarrassed, is to 'talk to' the instrument, as if it were a slightly cantankerous child - for that's effectively the relationship between the two aspects of yourself.

Note also that any conscious, semiconscious or unconscious prejudices and assumptions can, and often will, interfere with the results in the same way as above. The first level of this is jumping to conclusions - this will tend to give you the result (or non-result) that you expect to get - and control of this is just a matter of self-observation. It needs practice, but it's not particularly difficult.

What is difficult is the control of unconscious prejudices - they're difficult to control simply because they *are* unconscious. These are so deep-seated even those who honestly trying to be open-minded (let alone those who think they can be 'objective' about the whole business) that reliable results - especially in the more controversial areas such as map- and time-dowsing - can be hard to come by. In theory the only way of handling this problem is to *isolate the self entirely* from the process, with the sole exception of that part of the self that is applying whatever conscious directions and controls are needed. Only when you are truly 'at one with the object' can you truly be 'objective'.



(a) Sample used with a pendulum; *(b) a hollow pendulum*

This is a theoretical ideal, of course, but with practice and with experience you should be able to come pretty close to it. The most practical way of doing this is some form of meditation (in the open sense of the word), some form of reflection on yourself and the work being done. Try resting your mind on three points: on the balance of the instrument; on where you are; and on the problem-at-hand, the particular part of the technique that you're using at that time. Set up that 'tripod' in your mind; meditate on it, and its changes; and set it so that the instrument reacts at the point required by the problem-at-hand. That's one way - there are plenty of course, so try out various ways in practice, and use whatever seems to suit you. Use whatever works, whatever gives you the results you need. Try it and test it in practice: for it only makes sense in practice.

Don't try to be 'scientific' about dowsing - it will only make it impossible for you to do it. So don't stay sitting on your backside, pontificating on whether it can work, or how it can work - get up and do it for yourself!

Undercurrents magazine no longer exists as such, but was long ago incorporated into *Resurgence* magazine on social / philosophical / spiritual issues: still going strong a quarter of a century later, and still edited by the indefatigable Satish Kumar - a truly examplary man who not only practices but *lives* what he preaches. Long may he continue to do so! Godfrey Boyle and many of the other *Undercurrents* collective-members and contributors stayed strictly in the 'alternative technology' field, but some went on to make names for themselves in other - and sometimes much stranger - arenas. Peter Sommer, for example, became head of the paperback division of Granada Publishing; Richard Elen extended his involvement in the recording industry and in magical technologies; Paul Devereux took on the editorship of *The Ley Hunter* magazine and became one of the gurus of the 'earth mysteries' scene; whilst Duncan Campbell became an investigative journalist, and gained international notoriety in a farcical spy-trial in which the then British Government attempted (unsuccessfully) to prove that he'd breached the Official Secrets Act by illegally deciphering the hidden meaning of the London telephone directory! Strange times... interesting people...!