

## WATER AND MINERAL DIVINING EXPERIENCES IN SOUTH AFRICA

By A VETERAN DOWSER (J. J. MORTON)

Writing articles on any subject is a bit out of my line, but your President has asked me so often to contribute an article on my experiences with water divining in South Africa that I feel ashamed of myself for not having done so before.

I am making mention of matters which do not really come under the heading of water divining but may indirectly lead up to the subject; to those who know South Africa my comments may be of interest, and to those who do not they will perhaps be better able to follow my somewhat rambling article.

Our up-country towns (dorps as they are called) are mostly supplied with water from a large dam fed from catchment water from the mountains, and where there happens to be a surface spring, it can be opened up and the supply of water increased. As a rule when it rains it comes down in torrents. I remember in the year 1894 we had a heavy thunderstorm every afternoon for half-an-hour, commencing on the first of February and lasting until the 28th. The low places across the roads were impassable for a short time, and the sun was shining all the time. This water found its way into the dam at Middleburg, Cape Colony, which is 4,000 feet above sea level.

There are water and dry erven; the former have cement furrows about a foot square with grooves cut in; the occupier of the erven (garden land) below is allowed to turn the water in for an hour twice a week. The dry erven are useless for gardening unless a well is sunk, and the puzzle was to find a subterranean stream.

It is very strange that before knowing anything about the divining rod, 44 years ago, I hired a house and water erven in Middleburg, and across the road I bought two dry erven. Something seemed to tell me there was a spring of water there. I therefore sunk a well with convict labour, struck a lovely stream of water, and sold the erven at a good profit. People all round me tried to tap that stream, but none could; had there been one who knew he was a diviner it is possible he would have had no difficulty. I then bought two plots (erven) in the lower part of the town, and my instinct again showed me where to strike the spring. I then hired 1,500 morgen (3,000 acres) near the town, for dairying, poultry and Angora goats. I had a lease extending over five years with the option of purchase at

any time at £1 per morgen. There was not a tree nor fence, just karoo bush and bare veldt. The landlord agreed to build me a house and I could choose the position. I walked straight to a certain part and said "Here is a good spring; I will have my house near it." I had any amount of water, and I was doing well: then came the Jameson Raid and, later on, the Boer War. I was so fed up that I gave up the right of purchase and the military paid my landlord £10,000 for the farm, so I lost £7,500. Anyhow, I had some compensation, as I made friends with the Cape Government geologist, a Mr. Reimer. He could not make out how I found these good streams of underground water and I could not enlighten him.

Now we come to the divining rod. After the Boer War I was appointed manager of the Orange Free State Government Stud and Experimental Farm. His Grace the Duke of Westminster's estate adjoined the Government farm; his estate agent was Colonel, afterwards General, Byron; he was a dowser. After testing me he said, "I am surprised at the way the rod works with you; you are a super water diviner." Then and there I started water divining, with a willow rod, the only suitable wood in those parts at the time.

We started a large creamery on the farm for the benefit of settlers farming all round. The Government sent their geologist to find streams of water, as a large quantity was required, and who should it be but my old friend Reimer. He was delighted to meet me again, and also to see I could use the divining rod. We both located a good stream at the same place. Reimer was not a diviner and remarked: "We geologists know the strata, different formations, &c., where a likely stream is to be found, but you can with your rod point out the exact spot." This I did, and also gave the correct depth; as to the strength, I knew it was extra strong, as the rod flew out of my hands, I not being then prepared, as I am now, for such an emergency.

This was in January, 1905, and although a large oil engine was established, the borehole to this day has never been pumped dry.

I think I am right in stating that my water divining covers a period of 33 years, without adding on the 10 years previous to the advent of the rod.

Several years afterwards I was very fortunate in getting in touch with a Norfolk man (the late Mr. B. Tompkins), born near my old home; he knew my people (we had been farmers for generations). We constantly exchanged ideas, which was very helpful, especially so as he had had a trip to South Africa in 1896. Previous to the Boer War (1899 to 1902) it was looked on as a

great undertaking, but the thousands who landed during those 2½ years made a great difference. It is sad to relate the thousands who never returned, having died of enteric ; a very large number are buried in Bloemfontein. It is strange how one can call people friends whom one has never seen, but such was the case with Mr. Tompkins. I still have the two twigs he kindly sent me, a hazel and a whitethorn.

I am very heavily handicapped, having had a complete destruction of one ear, on my first trip to South Africa 45 years ago, and the other ear was damaged a few years back from the bite of a spider, so I cannot mix in company and can only talk to one person at the one time, and that only when we are facing one another. I suppose it is lip reading or waves like wireless, and that reminds me that, owing to my deafness, I have to spend most of my time experimenting with my divining rod. In my several articles to the S.A. Press during the last ten years or more I have stated "There is nothing more wonderful about water divining than about wireless telegraphy, the one being waves under the ground and the other above. I have noticed that Dowsers who have no faith in themselves remark : "Yes, I am a diviner, but I don't believe in it." I ask them : "Do you believe in wireless ?"

I am of opinion that if one is not too well blessed with scientific knowledge, like myself, and no one to discuss or compare notes with, it is far better to stick to the "crotched stick." I find that like a favourite old cricket bat, a gun, or even a push bike (my old Raleigh is 23 years old), one gets attached to them and they are real companions. I mostly use a quince, as it does not break off at the crotch. To find a stream, of course we all know we must cross it. By turning round, the twig will point to the exact course it is taking, and this is how one can tell the difference between a stream of water and a mineralised deposit, which is in a reef and shows no course. As I have often remarked, there have been thousands and thousands of pounds lost, and cattle and sheep died in thousands, during a drought through not being able to get a jumper drill so much time having been lost through boring over "dud" holes. To find where the stream rises, in this country mostly from the mountains, there is a tremendous pull on the rod, and it takes an experienced person. I feel I can almost talk to my rod and it responds ; we have a great struggle, and at last it beats me, and where that points even 10 miles away one can walk to the exact spot from whence it takes its course. Not necessary and often impossible to walk. I carried out this experiment a fortnight ago. My friend had a car, and I took the direction and then kept picking up the

wave. There is no difficulty in knowing it is the same stream, as unless it gives you both directions you know you are on another and must find the right one. This is very interesting work, but with the strain on the rod I took the skin all off my hand on the side where the pull directed, and had to give up divining for a week.

As to the effect it has on me, I suppose, like everyone else, it makes the muscles taut; no doubt the emanation goes up the feet and to the top of the spine, then down both arms to the end of the rod. An old friend of mine who had done, years back, a lot of work on the Rand, will have it only goes as far as the wrist. I said "How is it, then, that you can hide a diamond on the smallest radioactive particle in a small heap of sand, or under a carpet, and I will, even blindfolded, put the point of my rod on it?" I have done this time without number. It is a great mistake to keep on too long; farmers especially have no idea of the strain it has on one's muscles and nerves, and will say "Try here, and now here." I tell them a dowser is only a machine, which cannot be run too long without oiling, or the bearings will wear out, and a tired person cannot find water. I have a very drowsy feeling come over me, and when in South-West Africa I would crawl under a bush and have a lovely rest. I have never taken cocaine, but would think it has a similar effect. The day after a very hard one I feel absent-minded, in a semi-comatose state, as if walking in a trance. Then I can feel the electricity working out of my feet, and after it has all passed away I feel a bit morose. If I have two or three days in succession I will only do a little each day, as I don't believe anyone can do reliable work when fatigued. On sitting at the table testing minerals with various samples (thanks to the sketch of a sampler given in one of the B.S.D. Journals), both feet must be on the ground, and if kneeling, then both toes. On horseback both feet must be in the stirrup irons, &c.

While Manager of the Government Stud and Experimental Farm, a large party of the touring British Association visited me. Amongst them was Sir Ray Lankester. In his book, *The Diversions of a Naturalist*, written during the Great War, he rather ridicules water divining; but would he do so to-day?

In one part of his book he states that if a dowser could find the same place again blindfolded it should be proof enough of his genuineness. This seems the one proof that nearly all doubtful people ask for. In 1906 the Duke of Westminster, with a large house party, asked me to give a demonstration on his estate. After tracing one or two streams of subterranean water, I was blindfolded, turned round several times, and then put in the

direction of the stream some 20 yards away; when my rod pulled down over the exact spot they were surprised and asked me to prove myself again. This time I went up a small mountain full of iron stone and boulders and found it with my hands instead of the rod. One of the party thought he would be clever and asked me if it would pull down over a tumbler full of water. I said I was afraid not unless it had a good stiff whisky in it. One might say that no person ought to lay claim to being a genuine dowser unless he could carry out this test, but I remember in my very young days that even playing "Blind Man's Buff," the very fact of having a handkerchief tied round the eyes would quite upset some nervous lad. I was staying near Durban with friends who had a dairy farm some 200 feet above the level of the road and had to cart water with panniers on donkeys and later spent £200 on hiring a well of water and pumping it up the rise. It was usual to milk at midnight and deliver at 2 a.m. It was a lovely night, and I picked up the baby and was showing her the cows when my legs began to tremble. I found I was over a strong stream. I could hardly believe it to be true when the depth only showed 70 feet, and was delighted to find my hands showed no signs of rock.

Soon after I left for Rhodesia to manage a farm and received a letter to say at 69 feet they struck a strong stream of water as clear as crystal and cold as ice and it had put £500 on to the value of their farm.

On arriving in Rhodesia they had spent thousands in sinking wells 200 feet deep, mostly through granite and, more so, decomposed granite. The nearest water for animals was two miles away. We dipped our cattle on Sunday mornings, so the oxen were fit for work next day; afterwards I usually walked home, hot and tired. I would lie down on the floor (being cooler than a mattress), and if flies were about would crawl under the bed and soon fall sound asleep. On one occasion my wife called me for tea. I told her not to disturb me, as I was having a lovely sleep. After an hour I told her the same; the next time she had a great trouble in waking me and I could hardly stand. I discovered afterwards that I was sleeping with my neck over a strong stream and possibly was being gently, but surely, electrocuted.

I never get into a strange bed without testing it, as I must say I thoroughly agree with an account I read in the *Cape Times*, by a Dr. Hagen, Chairman of the Medical Board in Stettin, on cancer and other diseases caused or intensified by people continuously sleeping or sitting over subterranean streams, especially cross streams. The next day I sent an article stating that the



emanation from electro mineralised deposits had quite as much effect, from their emanations as subterranean streams, but it is strange one seldom sees it mentioned in the *B.S.D. Journal*. I find it so in some parts of South Africa, and especially in South-West Africa, but I have never found one to be more than three feet deep. I saw one borehole which a diviner thought was water, sunk to a depth of 600 feet with a shot drill, costing £1 a foot to drill, and if the diviner had put his rod over the hole after drilling four feet he would have felt no attraction on his rod. As I stated before, thousands upon thousands of pounds annually are lost through diviners not knowing the difference. I put my twig over this 600-foot hole and found no attraction, but on either side there was a strong emanation. Just for a test I traced this reef for three miles. I find these reefs, like subterranean streams, do not necessarily take a straight course from what I can see up to the present, but I am still making experiments. The mineral deposits are about two feet apart, like links in a chain.

The excellent article in your Journal for September last, "Cancer in the Light of Geophysical Radiation," has given me food for thought, and I have since proved that any amount of fruit trees, as well as others, are killed by these underground currents, but there are so many more of these mineral deposits in some parts than streams of water, and the great benefit is that they can be so easily taken out, as the deposits seem to run in a chain about two feet apart. I have also dug out the small deposit on either side of the tree, and if done in time the tree has recovered. This one could not do where the tree is over a stream of water.

Although I have only mentioned working with the crotched stick, I use my hands where there is a rocky formation, and, although the rod will work where there is a spring of water under it, my hands clasped together will not do so. I think this might be called a double gift, and is a most important factor and saves a lot of unnecessary expense when boring for water. I was asked to find water on a farm just above me in the Orange Free State. The owner's brother, a Government engineer and a geologist, accompanied me. The two men with the machine were both water diviners. We all agreed on the same stream running the whole length of the farm and just where water was required for building the homestead. The charge for drilling was 15s. per foot. The first hole was drilled to a depth of 140 feet, when ironstone was struck; the next the same. I felt disheartened and inclined to give it up; the others started another hole. By sheer luck I met an old Dutch farmer, who said that

his wife was the only person whose hands would show where there was rock too hard for a jumper drill to penetrate. I tried a few places on my farm, and found my hands would not work over iron stone. The old gentleman remarked: "There is a fortune for you." (I am still looking for that fortune). It has proved a great benefit to myself and my clients. I went up to the farm, and they were then on their fourth hole and had altogether drilled over 300 feet at a dead loss of £250. Without letting the drillmen see what I was doing I found several streams with my rod and tested all separately with my hands; all showed ironstone or rock. At last, to my delight, down came my hands. I said nothing to the others but "Just drill over this peg and you will not strike anything too hard for the jumper drill to penetrate." Such was the case, and at 120 feet they struck an excellent supply of water. My son has recently made a special visit to this farm (February, 1938) and tells me there is a plentiful supply of beautiful spring water in the well; his companion was astonished to find a well of water on such high ground under a kopje. I have had wonderful success with my hands on the farm in Rhodesia previously referred to.

I was lying one scorching hot afternoon near the homestead, in the kopjes under a tree with my lion dogs with me, and felt a peculiar sensation come over me. I found I was over a spring of water. I thought, "Impossible to strike water here on account of the dolerite." Strangely enough, a very pretty little mocking bird was up in the tree and fell on my shoulder. I found the feet were fastened together (evidently copying me with my crossed hands). Could the emanations have affected it? No doubt electricity does affect animals and birds, as well as plants. I made a ring four feet in diameter, and carefully tested it with rod and hands, and found I could sink down two-thirds without encountering anything hard, mostly small boulders and decomposed granite, but one-third was solid rock. It showed the depth to be 30 feet. I started next day on my experiments with two Matabele boys. At ten feet we struck a hard ledge, but went on, and at 32 feet a most lovely stream of water came rushing in. It was the wonder and surprise of farmers all round who came to see six pedigree bulls drinking from a trough, which had previously had water carried two miles in the sun to drink. I sank another well for a friend, and after I had left Rhodesia two or three years he wrote me: "Do come back; we have had two years' drought and mine is the only well with water in it." I was then manager for Sir Thomas Cullinan (of Cullinan diamond fame). I was finding water for Sir Thomas one day. He remarked: "What a pity you cannot find diamonds." I had up

to then only studied water. I loved Rhodesia, but consider it is not the country for an old man to go and settle in ; my son is still there on a ranch.

A party wanted to start a Country Club on a good-sized piece of land and had the option of purchase. I tried all over for water, but wherever a stream there was rock. Before engaging me they went down 150 feet with a diamond drill and lost the crown, worth £80. It cost them altogether £200 by not engaging me in the first instance, especially as in those days I made no charge. Anyhow, they gave up the option to purchase, so no doubt the first loss proved the best. From Sir Thomas I went to Sir Lionel Phillips for three years on that lovely old historic farm "Vergelegen," near Somerset West, and about 30 miles from Cape Town. There they have a very good supply of water from the mountains, led in pipes all over the farm, and the pressure is so great that they could flood the homestead with hydrants if necessary. It is all supplied by natural gravitation. On the one side of the farm is a mountain called "Scarpenberg," and Sir Lionel wanted to go in for sheep, so required water. We found the only stream on the slope of the mountain, and at the foot was the only suitable place for a borehole. The owner of the drilling machine said it would be impossible to reach the spring without striking rock. Sir Lionel was paying £1 per foot for the drilling, and told the drillman that he was relying on my hands showing where we could drill without doing so. We got on to granite, but not too hard to drill. I estimated the depth at 85 feet, and at that depth we struck a good spring. Lady Phillips wrote me only a few weeks ago to say it was owing to my being able to point out the exact spot that we just missed a formation too hard for a jumper drill to penetrate. All down the slope of the mountain were pine trees of about four years' growth. I could not make out how it was that all those over the stream should be sickly or dead. It is now 12 years ago, but it is only after reading your September Journal that I feel sure I now know the reason, for on page 8 it states : "In the garden the trees over the subterranean water courses are either dead or sickly."

After leaving Sir Lionel, I retired from farm life and turned a professional dowser, and for the last ten years have concentrated my mind and whole time on research work, not only with water but anything that comes along.

I had occasion a year or two ago to try and find some lost diamonds, but had to get permission from the Chief Police Officer in Cape Town, to prove I could trace them (and would not pinch any q.q.). He hid three diamonds in another room and I had



no difficulty in finding them all. I had no divining rod with me, so used my hands instead. Another diamond was hid in a small tin box under a typewriter; with this I placed my forefinger over the diamond in the tin.

Some people have an idea that when putting down a borehole you stop all water in the stream from taking its course. I would rather put down two or even three boreholes over a very strong stream than one over a medium one. There is always a certain amount of water passing the casing in a borehole, even while pumping. As soon as the pumping stops, the full flow of the stream passes on to the next borehole.

Recently I found a spring for a large live-stock sale yard at 120 feet (exact depth estimated). I said they should get 40,000 gallons in the 24 hours. One windmill was put over the borehole and filled a 60,000-gallon round reservoir in the 24 hours, with a drinking trough all round for sheep and drinking tanks in all the camps for cattle.

A retired Government official, like myself, but who knows every mountain and kopje, having hiked over most of them, is greatly interested in my work. He kindly takes me in his car, and as I can only run to a push-bike or Shanks's pony, I am greatly indebted to him. We are on the Klipfontein Road. All the streams crossing the road pass under the Municipal Farm, where it is likely water may be wanted to supply drinking water for a lot of houses they may build under a big housing scheme; unfortunately all the streams are supposed to be brackish, and this I found to be the case. At last, with my sample on the divining rod, I struck a fresh-water stream. I turned to my friend, and at the same time turned round with my rod and said, "What is that mountain?" He said, "Heldeberg." I said, "There is the head of this stream; how far away?" "About ten miles." Then I turned round to some white marks on the side of another mountain and said, "That is where the stream goes to; what is that?" He stated, "The old Lakeside Quarry near Muizenberg." "How far?" "About eight miles." "Which direction?" "Most likely near Zee Koe Vlei" (where they have a fine yachting Club). He drives me along, and at different points I keep picking up the wave and eventually it takes me to the (my) quarry.