

COLLOQUY

A long-time reader of Word Ways has written to say that he finds recent articles in the magazine unreadable. Is his perception shared by others? Which articles have readers had trouble with? Word Ways earnestly solicits comments on both its content and presentation.

Susan Thorpe writes "I have some criticism of Mike Keith's 'Typewriter Words'. In a nutshell, it has not been adequately researched. His reading appears to stop at *Language on Vacation* (1965) and he fails to acknowledge any of the items which have appeared on the subject in Word Ways over the years. This is...inexcusable... Keith appears to think that he does not have to bother about providing sources for his words...It is important to maintain a high standard and I feel [he] has not achieved a satisfactory level. Contributors should do their research thoroughly, acknowledge other people's work, and provide the sources of their words." To this Rex Gooch adds "It is with a mixture of anger and despair that for the second successive issue I have to comment that Michael Keith has ignored recent and clearly titled articles of mine: this time 'Top Row Typing'...It is no consolation that he has also ignored the work of many others."

Yes, Mike's sources should have been included in the article. Mike works with an Internet-based word list which is essentially unhyphenated words from Webster's Third. It was never his intent to present the "best" words from a wide variety of published sources; instead, his goal was to suggest new varieties of typewriter words and compare them using a common database. Of course, this should have been spelled out in the article, and the (obsolete) Borgmann records not emphasized. The editor must share the blame that this was not done!

Rex Gooch also writes "My understanding is that the layout of the QWERTY keyboard was driven by the need to separate common bigrams, not merely to do with two hands. Certainly, the problem with typebar clashes does not arise from the smooth flow of a fast trained typist, but rather from inexperienced typists encountering very common words like THE, whose letters are typed almost simultaneously. This was overcome on later typebar machines by a stroke storage system. Computers consoles with typebars did not suffer from clash problems because of this, and golfball mechanisms were free from such problems at 15.5 cps. The typical modern PC keyboard is built down to a price, and tends to encourage more errors because the tactile feedback (sudden "give"), the audible feedback, and the electronic generation of the character are either short of the ideal, or do not all coincide precisely." In any event, he adds, "The calculation of ease of typing is dodgy. Firstly, Keith is

assuming a rectangular layout, which is not the case. Secondly, he assumes all fingers are equal, which is far from the truth."

Rex Gooch and Susan Thorpe point out that Darryl Francis in "The ADEINRST Alphome" was incorrect in crediting Rex Gooch with the coinage of the term *alphome*. This in fact was done by Susan Thorpe, in her article of the same name in August 1995: "*alphome*: noun a set of alphabetically-ordered letters of which at least one arrangement is a word."

Chris Cole responds to Jeff Grant's critique of *Wordplay* in the November Colloquy:

1. He cites *questionnaire* and *straitjacket* as misspellings. These are both listed as variant spellings in Web 3. *Questionnaire* is used because it is the record holder, not its more common alternative spelling. *Straitjacket* is more common than *straightjacket*.
2. *Breadcrumb* is indeed an uncommon word; it is *breadcrumbs* (the plural) that is common. This weird situation is discussed in the introduction on page 11.
3. The onomatopoeic *tattarrattat* is omitted because once you start down that road it's hard to call a stop. I think this is a dictionary error like *dord*.
4. The scoring system I was using for Scrabble words was just the maximum that any one word could score, assuming it alone was placed on the board. There have been higher scores reported for multi-word situations but I don't think any one has proved these are maximal. At any rate, this book is restricted in the main to single-word records.

With respect to "Geometric Letters" Rex Gooch comments "MEN are totally straight, but GIRLS are rather curvy, as are BIRDS and CHICKS!"

The editor reports that, as the result of some new signs along south-bound Interstate Route 287 in Morristown, the pangrammatic interval is now only 0.35 mile: WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS, BRIDGE FREEZES BEFORE ROAD SURFACE, ENTERING MORRISTOWN, EXIT, LAFAYETTE AVENUE, and NEW JERSEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL.

Susan Thorpe writes "In my Colloquy item in November 1999, re words with two AEIOUs, the exclusion of AUDIO-MAGNETOTELLURIC was deliberate. In February 1972 Andrew Griscom toys with using one of his professional papers to try and get the hyphen removed. In May 1980 he notes that the word appears without a hyphen in the Feb 13 1979 issue of EOS (Transactions, American Geophysical Union), but is silent on whether it had a helping hand. If he did have a hand in this, we have to ask ourselves if this is acceptable and, if so, do Word Ways contributors have a Machiavellian future?" In this connection, the Feb 1991 Word

Ways relates how Ed Wolpow persuaded a colleague, Dr. Lowell A. Goldsmith, to use the coined isogram SUBDERMATOGLYPHIC in a technical paper.

Rex Gooch writes of a Kickshaw item "I suppose that Charles Linnett was trying to avoid upsetting Susan Thorpe in using Ms. I generally take it to designate an unmarried mother living off welfare. It can also mean an academic without a PhD in a trendy department. When a woman professor of my acquaintance was addressed like this, she became incandescent. It is not so widespread here [in England]; the practice is to allow people to choose their own titles."

Three readers commented on Mike Keith's "The Pi Code" and Dave Morice's "Cracking the Pi-Code". Rex Gooch wondered "Would not e have been a more 'natural' base than pi?. Although a little exploration is entertaining, actually the two articles on pi are basically just an indirect way of demonstrating that the digits of pi are random. Bearing in mind all the n-tuplet correlations that have been done over the years, any other findings would be a shock (and an error)." Sir Jeremy Morse, however, was surprised to see that exactly three 7-letter words (and no 8-letter ones) turned up. "Can [Mike] work out the odds against such an exact fit?" Ted Clarke wrote "I do think...that most readers, on seeing two adjacent articles, one entitled 'The Pi Code' followed by the other entitled 'Cracking the Pi-Code', would expect a much greater similarity in their coding methods. While Dave was quite explicit in this respect, I feel that it was very remiss of you to allow the publication of the article by Michael Keith which gave no indication that it was a very different pi code and which gave not the slightest indication as to [how he calculated the base-26 code]..."

Sir Jeremy Morse notes "[In Kickshaws] it is noted that EIGHTH is the only non-compound ordinal made by adding H to the cardinal. Even more extraordinary is the fact that we pronounce the missing second T, i.e. it does not rhyme with WRAITH. There are lots of examples of silent letters; is this example of the reverse phenomenon unique?"

Frank Rubin writes "In your article 'Packing the Cardinals' in the August 1999 Word Ways, you pack the numbers ONE to TEN in a 3x13 grid. Your packing is neither ordered nor linear; if you do it this way it is both ordered and linear:

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T E N E I G H T S E V E N
N I N E T W O O N E S I X
T H R E E F O U R F I V E

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Frank Rubin notes that Michael Keith is incorrect in asserting that PORE or RUTS cannot be embedded in an 8x8 Knight's Tour Letter Square. In the following, one starts with the underlined capital A and proceeds through the capital and lower-case alphabets before finishing with capitals:

P o R E j G L I	R u T s P M F I
S F O p m J y F	U r Q N G J C L
N Q n i d k H K	v S t q B O H E
G T M l q x E z	a V w B I D K l
L Y H U h C r w	x C b <u>A</u> p k J G
I V K b e t A D	W Z e D A H m j
Z c X g B C v s	f y X c h o F K
W J a d u f <u>A</u> B	Y d g z E L i n

In "A Search Procedure for Hamilton Paths and Circuits", published in the October 1974 issue of the Journal of the Association for Computing Machinery, he shows in detail how to construct such Knight's Tours.

In "Edith Plays Word Treblecross" in the Aug 1999 Word Ways, Richard Sabey notes two typos: "In the table of numbers on p 193, the nim values for 15 and 18 are 3 and 2, not 0 and 0 (implying that the second player can force a win). It's rings of 15 and 18 where the second player can force a win, because the first player is forced to turn the ring into a line of 12 or 15, respectively. A line of 15 or 18 offers more options."

James Puder examined Carroll's Sylvie and Bruno (mistakenly referred to as Sophie and Bruno in his August article on palindromes), and found that the word "semordnilap" does not appear there. (The only possible spot would be where Bruno tells Sylvie that EVIL is LIVE backwards.) It appears likely that Martin Gardner got the word from correspondence with Dmitri Borgmann, but one cannot say whether it was an invention by Borgmann. Richard Sabey wonders whether anyone noticed that SYLVIE is a transaddition of ELVIS (not mentioned by Francis in May 1993).

Bill Webster writes "How I wish I had titled ['Het Fryer Dire'] 'Ferry Tale'!" And how the editor wishes he had run it next to Galef's "Furry Dale" in August!

Eric Chaikin has found another 62-letter isogrid to match the ones featured in the February 1999 Word Ways:

ALKOXY	THUMBSCREWING	PDQ
DUMPINGS	F	CARBETHOXYL
WRETCH	POLDAVY	MUZJIKS