

LOCAL DOWSERS HARNESS INTUITION TO FIND WATER AND PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

By Edwin Arnaudin

For centuries, humans have used dowsing to tap into their intuition and find answers to a host of questions. And for nearly as long, skeptics have sought to disprove the ancient method. While numerous scientific studies have failed to definitively support the practice's validity, Asheville-area dowsers remain steadfast in their commitment to harnessing forces beyond the five senses and introducing interested parties to the plentiful rewards they've experienced.

"Our culture is very dominated by the rational mind, and our rational mind can do incredible things, but it's only one tool we have accessible to us," says Bill Muerdter, a dowser based in Maggie Valley. "The intuition, we've minimized that, and it's an equal part of us."

Historical energy

Dowsing has long been associated with locating water sources, and the image of a person walking around, holding out a forked stick is likely what first comes to mind when most people hear the word. The practice is still used to pinpoint places to dig a well. The American Society of Dowsers claims the water-finding method dates back at least 8,000 years, citing paintings on the Tassili Caves in North Africa that depict a person "holding a forked branch in his hand, searching for water, surrounded by a group of admiring tribesmen." Modern dowsing has been traced to 15th century Europe, when it was employed to find minerals and metals.

Regardless of what is sought, Muerdter says the general approach remains about the same.

Instead of Y-shaped willow sticks, dowsers now primarily use two L-shaped metal rods. Dowsers hold these "L-rods" loosely by the short end, one in each hand, parallel to the ground with the long end pointed forward and the short end facing the ground.

"The main thing is asking a really refined question," Muerdter says. "Then it's just a matter of going into a meditative state."

After pausing to relax, slow down and get into a more receptive mindset, Muerdter typically puts forth a prayerlike request prior to dowsing. He asks that the answers come only from the highest and purest sources; that they're not influenced by his own expectations, desires, uncertainties or limiting unconscious directions, nor from malignant or malicious entities or energies; and that they are pure and accurate. He then sits in that space and asks his question. The rods respond almost instantly, he says.

Beginning dowsers first ask to be shown which response is "Yes" (usually both rods bending inward) and "No" (rods bending outward to either side). Muerdter says it's important for dowsers to set their egos aside and not ask a question with a preferred answer already in mind. He adds that new dowsers also tend to doubt what the L-rods tell them and repeat the query, which usually clouds the accuracy of the answer.

He compares such persistence to a child who continues asking the same question, hoping for a different response, noting that doing so suggests distrust, which is essentially the antithesis of dowsing. But much like entering a more specific set of terms into an internet search engine or database, rephrasing the question typically produces a confirmation.

"The skeptical mind is very potent," Muerdter says. "It's a lot like if you were a person before television or radio and somebody started to talk to you about, 'You know, if you had an antenna, you could start picking up this amazing thing. You could even hear voices and see images.' They would think, 'This is hogwash,' because it isn't part of the visible world. ... L-rods are like antennas. If you relax with them, they can be an incredible tool for self-knowledge and information."

WNC talent

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, [Appalachian Dowsers](#), the local chapter of the ASD, held quarterly meetings at A-B Tech, with time built in for socializing and two hands-on dowsing tutorials for beginners. The inability to meet in person this past year prompted a pivot to webinars, featuring talks by such renowned dowsers as **Joey Korn**, author of *Dowsing: A Path to Enlightenment*.

Among the chapter's members is **Lee Barnes** of Haywood County, ASD's 2019 Dowser of the Year and a popular locator of well sites throughout the state. He also holds a doctorate in environmental horticulture.

Barnes describes science as “a linear sequence of knowledge” and dowsing as something “so holistic that it’s hard to be tested” by traditional means. He says these scientific studies are often conducted “with underground pipes under a building” instead of “in the field where [dowsers] have developed this skill and craft.” But his track record of consistently finding water sources that produce the amount of flow specified by property owners suggests to him and others that dowsing is an effective practice.

“When I find good water, I think I sense the electromagnetic fields around the fractures and the flowing water,” Barnes says. “When I pick a spot that’s 10 feet from a 600-foot dry well and get them 13 gallons a minute ... I’m convinced by the number of times [that’s happened] that I’m definitely sensing something that, you know, helped save lives. That’s why we’re surviving is our ancestors used these abilities to find water.”

On multiple occasions, Barnes and Black Mountain’s **Marty Cain** have dowsed the same land without knowing the other’s findings and come up with the same results.

Cain, however, specializes in the spiritual side of dowsing and has travelled the world to [set up labyrinths](#) in England, South Africa and Brazil. She also clears detrimental energy from houses and responds to electromagnetic fields in the earth to find spots that are conducive for sleep and work.

“The most important part of it is dowsing nature and knowing that the earth and everything on it is alive and intelligent. And once you start speaking and dowsing questions of these other beings — be it rocks or trees or animals or birds — they can tell you what they want and need,” Cain says. “The more we’re connected to where we live and the more we know how to live on it in a way that’s in harmony with each other and with all the other critters — I mean, it’s a joy. A total joy.”

Learn more at appalachiandowsers.org

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THE QUEST: Bill Muerdter dowses his Asheville property using a pair of L-rods. While the practice is primarily known as a way to locate water prior to digging a well, dowsing also has a long, rich history in exploring energy in general and as a tool for expanding one’s intuition. Photo by Judy Muerdter