

December 14, 2014

Mental Floss tells the story of the woman whose discovery shook the foundations of the science of geology.

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For centuries, scientists had believed that the ocean floor was basically flat and featureless—it was too far beyond reach to know otherwise. But the advent of sonar had changed everything. For the first time, ships could “sound out” the precise depths of the ocean below them. For five years, Tharp’s colleagues at Columbia University had been crisscrossing the Atlantic, recording its depths. Women weren’t allowed on these research trips—the lab director considered them bad luck at sea—so Tharp wasn’t on board. Instead, she stayed in the lab, meticulously checking and plotting the ships’ raw findings, a mass of data so large it was printed on a 5,000-foot scroll. As she charted the measurements by hand on sheets of white linen, the floor of the ocean slowly took shape before her.

Tharp spent weeks creating a series of six parallel profiles of the Atlantic floor stretching from east to west. Her drawings showed—for the first time—exactly where the continental shelf began to rise out of the abyssal plain and where a large mountain range jutted from the ocean floor. That range had been a shock when it was discovered in the 1870s by an expedition testing routes for transatlantic telegraph cables, and it had remained the subject of speculation since; Tharp’s charting revealed its length and detail.

Her maps also showed something else—something no one expected. Repeating in each was “a deep notch near the crest of the ridge,” a V-shaped gap that seemed to run the entire length of the mountain range. Tharp stared at it. It had to be a mistake.

She crunched and re-crunched the numbers for weeks on end, double- and triple-checking her data. As she did, she became more convinced that the impossible was true: She was looking at evidence of a rift valley, a place where magma emerged from inside the earth, forming new crust and thrusting the land apart. If her calculations were right, the geosciences would never be the same.

A few decades before, a German geologist named Alfred Wegener had put forward the radical theory that the continents of the earth had once been connected and had drifted apart. In 1926, at a gathering of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, the scientists in attendance rejected Wegener’s theory and mocked its maker. No force on Earth was thought powerful enough to move continents. “The dream of a great poet,” opined the director of the Geological Survey of France: “One tries to embrace it, and finds that he has in his arms a little vapor or smoke.” Later, the president of the American Philosophical Society deemed it “utter, damned rot!”

In the 1950s, as Tharp looked down at that tell-tale valley, Wegener’s theory was still considered verboten in the scientific community—even discussing it was tantamount to heresy. Almost all of Tharp’s colleagues, and practically every other scientist in the country, dismissed it; you could get fired for believing in it, she later recalled. But Tharp trusted what she’d seen. Though her job at Columbia was simply to plot and chart measurements, she had more training in geology than most plotters—more, in fact, than some of the men she reported to. ...

NY Times compares wheat and rice cultures; individualistic and cooperative.

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Their test case was China, where the Yangtze River divides northern wheat growers from southern rice growers. The researchers gave Han Chinese from these different regions a series of tasks. They asked, for example, which two of these three belonged together: a bus, a train and train tracks? More analytical, context-insensitive thinkers (the wheat growers) paired the bus and train, because they belong to the same abstract category. More holistic, context-sensitive thinkers (the rice growers) paired the train and train tracks, because they work together. ...

19 secrets of UPS drivers from **Mental Floss**.

You may have a good relationship with your UPS driver, but how much do you really know about his or her job? The brown-clad United Parcel Service workers deliver more than 15 million packages a day to more than 220 countries and territories around the world; they even deliver to the North Pole. But what's it really like to be a UPS driver? Here are some little-known facts from drivers who did their time.

1. They're always being watched.

UPS knows time is money, and it is obsessed with using data to increase productivity. Jack Levis, UPS's director of process management, told NPR that "one minute per driver per day over the course of a year adds up to \$14.5 million," and "one minute of idle per driver per day is worth \$500,000 of fuel at the end of the year." The hand-held computer drivers carry around, called a DIAD (short for Delivery Information Acquisition Device), tracks their every move. Ever wondered why your UPS man can't stick around to hear your life story? He probably has between 150 and 200 stops to make before the end of the day, and he's being timed. "You're trained to have a sense of urgency," says Wendy Widmann, who drove for 14 years. "Be polite, but you gotta go." Sensors inside the truck monitor everything from whether the driver's seat belt is buckled to how hard they're braking, and if the truck's doors are open or closed. All this data is compiled for UPS analysts who use it to come up with time-saving tactics.

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USA Today writes on the Grand Canyon filling with clouds. Good pictures of the rare event.

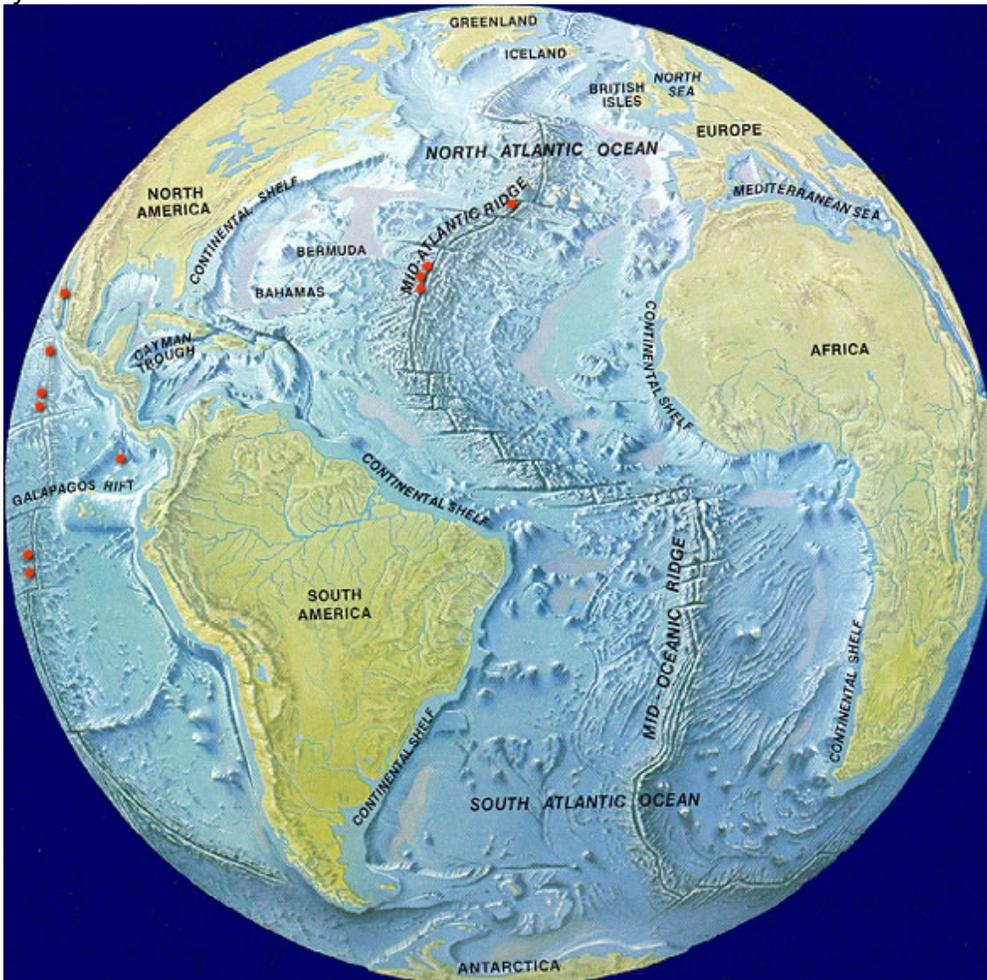
... "Almost looks like the tide coming in and going out," the Grand Canyon National Park staff wrote on its [Facebook page](#).

"Rangers wait for years to see it. Word spread like wildfire and most ran to the rim to photograph it," a ranger wrote about last year's fog. "What a fantastic treat for all." ...

Mental Floss

[How One Woman's Discovery Shook the Foundations of Geology](#)

by Brooke Jarvis



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In the 1950s, as Tharp looked down at that tell-tale valley, Wegener’s theory was still considered verboten in the scientific community—even discussing it was tantamount to heresy. Almost all of Tharp’s colleagues, and practically every other scientist in the country, dismissed it; you could get fired for believing in it, she later recalled. But Tharp trusted what she’d seen. Though her job at Columbia was simply to plot and chart measurements, she had more training in geology than most plotters—more, in fact, than some of the men she reported to. Tharp had grown up among rocks. Her father worked for the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, and as a child, she would accompany him as he collected samples. But she never expected to be a mapmaker or even a scientist. At the time, the fields didn’t welcome women, so her first majors were music and English. After Pearl Harbor, however, universities opened up their departments. At the University of Ohio, she discovered geology and found a mentor who encouraged her to take drafting. Because Tharp was a woman, he told her, fieldwork was out of the question, but drafting experience could help her get

a job in an office like the one at Columbia. After graduating from Ohio, she enrolled in a program at the University of Michigan, where, with men off fighting in the war, accelerated geology degrees were offered to women. There, Tharp became particularly fascinated with geomorphology, devouring textbooks on how landscapes form. A rock formation's structure, composition, and location could tell you all sorts of things if you knew how to look at it.

Studying the crack in the ocean floor, Tharp could see it was too large, too contiguous, to be anything but a rift valley, a place where two masses of land had separated. When she compared it to a rift valley in Africa, she grew more certain. But when she showed Bruce Heezen, her research supervisor (four years her junior), "he groaned and said, 'It cannot be. It looks too much like continental drift,'" Tharp wrote later. "Bruce initially dismissed my interpretation of the profiles as 'girl talk.'" With the lab's reputation on the line, Heezen ordered her to redo the map. Tharp went back to the data and started plotting again from scratch.

Heezen and Tharp were often at odds and prone to heated arguments, but they worked well together nonetheless. He was the avid collector of information; she was the processor comfortable with exploring deep unknowns. As the years went by, they spent more and more time together both in and out of the office. Though their platonic-or-not relationship confused everyone around them, it seemed to work.

In late 1952, as Tharp was replotting the ocean floor, Heezen took on another deep-sea project searching for safe places to plant transatlantic cables. He was creating his own map, which plotted earthquake epicenters in the ocean floor. As his calculations accumulated, he noticed something strange: Most quakes occurred in a nearly continuous line that sliced down the center of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Tharp had finished her second map—a physiographic diagram giving the ocean floor a 3-D appearance—and sure enough, it showed the rift again. When Heezen and Tharp laid their two maps on top of each other on a light table, both were stunned by how neatly the maps fit. The earthquake line threaded right through Tharp's valley.

They moved on from the Atlantic and began analyzing data from other oceans and other expeditions, but the pattern kept repeating. They found additional mountain ranges, all seemingly connected and all split by rift valleys; within all of them, they found patterns of earthquakes. "There was but one conclusion," Tharp wrote. "The mountain range with its central valley was more or less a continuous feature across the face of the earth." The matter of whether their findings offered evidence of continental drift kept the pair sparring, but there was no denying they had made a monumental discovery: the mid-ocean ridge, a 40,000-mile underwater mountain range that wraps around the globe like the seams on a baseball. It's the largest single geographical feature on the planet.



In 1957, Heezen took some of the findings public. After he presented on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge at Princeton, one eminent geologist responded, "Young man, you have shaken the foundations of geology!" He meant it as a compliment, but not everyone was so impressed. Tharp later remembered that the reaction "ranged from amazement to skepticism to scorn." Ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau was one of the doubters. He'd tacked Tharp's map to a wall in his ship's mess hall. When he began filming the Atlantic Ocean's floor for the first time, he was determined to prove Tharp's theory wrong. But what he ultimately saw in the footage shocked him. As his ship approached the crest of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, he came upon a deep valley splitting it in half, right where Tharp's map said it would be. Cousteau and his crew were so astonished that they turned around, went back, and filmed again. When Cousteau screened the video at the International Oceanographic Congress in 1959, the audience gasped and shouted for an encore. The terrain Tharp had mapped was undeniably real.

1959 was the same year that Heezen, still skeptical, presented a paper hoping to explain the rift. The Expanding Earth theory he'd signed on to posited that continents were moving as the planet that contained them grew. (He was wrong.) Other hypotheses soon joined the chorus of explanations about how the rift had occurred. It was the start of an upheaval in the geologic sciences. Soon "it became clear that existing explanations for the formation of the earth's surface no longer held," writes Hali Felt in *Soundings: The Story of the Remarkable Woman Who Mapped the Ocean Floor*.

Tharp stayed out of these debates and simply kept working. She disliked the spotlight and consented to present a paper only once, on the condition that a male colleague do all the talking. "There's truth to the old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words and that seeing is believing," she wrote. "I was so busy making maps I let them argue. I figured I'd show them a picture of where the rift valley was and where it pulled apart."

By 1961, the idea that she'd put forward nearly a decade before—that the rift in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge had been caused by land masses pulling apart—had finally reached widespread acceptance. The National Geographic Society commissioned Tharp and Heezen to make maps of the ocean floor and its features, helping laypeople visualize the vast plates that allowed the earth's crust to move. Throughout the 1960s, a slew of discoveries helped ideas such as seafloor spreading and plate tectonics gain acceptance, bringing with them a cascade of new theories about the way the planet and life on it had evolved. Tharp compared the collective eye-opening to the Copernican revolution. "Scientists and the general public," she wrote, "got their first relatively realistic image of a vast part of the planet that they could never see."

Tharp herself had never seen it either. Some 15 years after she started mapping the seafloor, Tharp finally joined a research cruise, sailing over the features she'd helped discover. Women were generally still not welcome, so Heezen helped arrange her spot. The two kept working closely together, sometimes fighting fiercely, until his death in 1977. Outside the lab, they maintained separate houses but dined and drank like a married couple. Their work had linked them for life.

In 1997, Tharp, who had long worked patiently in Heezen's shadow, received double honors from the Library of Congress, which named her one of the four greatest cartographers of the 20th century and included her work in an exhibit in the 100th-anniversary celebration of its Geography and Map Division. There, one of her maps of the ocean floor hung in the company of the original rough draft of the Declaration of Independence and pages from Lewis and Clark's journals. When she saw it, she started to cry. But Tharp had known all along that the map she created was remarkable, even when she was the only one who believed. "Establishing the rift valley and the mid-ocean ridge that went all the way around the world for 40,000 miles—that was something important," she wrote. "You could only do that once. You can't find anything bigger than that, at least on this planet."

NY Times

Wheat People vs. Rice People

Why Are Some Cultures More Individualistic Than Others

by Tanya Marie Luhmann

AMERICANS and Europeans stand out from the rest of the world for our sense of ourselves as individuals. We like to think of ourselves as unique, autonomous, self-motivated, self-made. As the anthropologist [Clifford Geertz](#) observed, this is a peculiar idea.

People in the rest of the world are more likely to understand themselves as interwoven with other people — as interdependent, not independent. In such social worlds, your goal is to fit in and adjust yourself to others, not to stand out. People imagine themselves as part of a larger whole — threads in a web, not lone horsemen on the frontier. In America, we say that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. In Japan, people say that the nail that stands up gets hammered down.

These are broad brush strokes, but the research demonstrating the differences is remarkably robust and it shows that they have far-reaching consequences. The social psychologist [Richard E. Nisbett](#) and his colleagues found that these different orientations toward independence and interdependence affected cognitive processing. For example, Americans are more likely to ignore the context, and Asians to attend to it. Show an image of a large fish swimming among other fish and seaweed fronds, and the Americans will remember the single central fish first. That's what sticks in their minds. Japanese viewers will begin their recall with the background. They'll also remember more about the seaweed and other objects in the scene.

Another social psychologist, [Hazel Rose Markus](#), asked people arriving at San Francisco International Airport to fill out a survey and offered them a handful of pens to use, for example four orange and one green; those of European descent more often chose the one pen that stood out, while the Asians chose the one more like the others.

Dr. Markus and her colleagues found that these differences could affect health. Negative affect — feeling bad about yourself — has big, persistent consequences for your body if you are a

Westerner. Those effects are less powerful if you are Japanese, possibly because the Japanese are more likely to attribute the feelings to their larger situation and not to blame themselves.

There's some truth to the modernization hypothesis — that as social worlds become wealthier, they also become more individualistic — but it does not explain the persistent interdependent style of Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong.

In May, the journal *Science* published a [study](#), led by a young University of Virginia psychologist, [Thomas Talhelm](#), that ascribed these different orientations to the social worlds created by wheat farming and rice farming. Rice is a finicky crop. Because rice paddies need standing water, they require complex irrigation systems that have to be built and drained each year. One farmer's water use affects his neighbor's yield. A community of rice farmers needs to work together in tightly integrated ways.

Not wheat farmers. Wheat needs only rainfall, not irrigation. To plant and harvest it takes half as much work as rice does, and substantially less coordination and cooperation. And historically, Europeans have been wheat farmers and Asians have grown rice.

The authors of the study in *Science* argue that over thousands of years, rice- and wheat-growing societies developed distinctive cultures: “You do not need to farm rice yourself to inherit rice culture.”

Their test case was China, where the Yangtze River divides northern wheat growers from southern rice growers. The researchers gave Han Chinese from these different regions a series of tasks. They asked, for example, which two of these three belonged together: a bus, a train and train tracks? More analytical, context-insensitive thinkers (the wheat growers) paired the bus and train, because they belong to the same abstract category. More holistic, context-sensitive thinkers (the rice growers) paired the train and train tracks, because they work together.

Asked to draw their social networks, wheat-region subjects drew themselves larger than they drew their friends; subjects from rice-growing regions drew their friends larger than themselves. Asked to describe how they'd behave if a friend caused them to lose money in a business, subjects from the rice region punished their friends less than subjects from the wheat region did. Those in the wheat provinces held more patents; those in the rice provinces had a lower rate of divorce.

I write this from Silicon Valley, where there is little rice. The local wisdom is that all you need is a garage, a good idea and energy, and you can found a company that will change the world. The bold visions presented by entrepreneurs are breathtaking in their optimism, but they hold little space for elders, for longstanding institutions, and for the deep roots of community and interconnection.

Nor is there much rice within the Tea Party. Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, [declared recently](#) that all a man needed was a horse, a gun and the open land, and he could conquer the world.

Wheat doesn't grow everywhere. Start-ups won't solve all our problems. A lone cowboy isn't much good in the aftermath of a Hurricane Katrina. As we enter a season in which the values of do-it-yourself individualism are likely to dominate our Congress, it is worth remembering that this way of thinking might just be the product of the way our forefathers grew their food and not a fundamental truth about the way that all humans flourish.

[T.M. Luhmann](#) is a professor of anthropology at Stanford and a contributing opinion writer.

Mental Floss

19 Secrets of UPS Drivers

by Jessica Hullinger



You may have a good relationship with your UPS driver, but how much do you really know about his or her job? The brown-clad United Parcel Service workers deliver more than 15 million packages a day to more than 220 countries and territories around the world; they even deliver to the North Pole. But what's it really like to be a UPS driver? Here are some little-known facts from drivers who did their time.

1. They're always being watched.

UPS knows time is money, and it is obsessed with using data to increase productivity. Jack Levis, UPS's director of process management, [told NPR](#) that "one minute per driver per day over the course of a year adds up to \$14.5 million," and "one minute of idle per driver per day is worth \$500,000 of fuel at the end of the year." The hand-held computer drivers carry around, called a DIAD (short for Delivery Information Acquisition Device), tracks their every move. Ever wondered why your UPS man can't stick around to hear your life story? He probably has between 150 and 200 stops to make before the end of the day, and he's being timed. "You're trained to have a sense of urgency," says Wendy Widmann, who drove for 14 years. "Be polite, but you gotta go." Sensors inside the truck monitor everything from whether the driver's seat belt is buckled to how hard they're braking, and if the truck's doors are open or closed. All this data is compiled for UPS analysts who use it to come up with time-saving tactics.

2. They go to bootcamp.

All drivers must attend and graduate from a specialized training class called “Integrad,” which teaches them everything they need to know out in the field. They learn how to handle heavy boxes, which are filled with cinder blocks to simulate real packages. They’re taught how to start the truck with one hand while buckling up with the other to save time. And the “slip and fall simulator” teaches them to walk safely in slick conditions. There’s even a miniature delivery route complete with tiny houses “where they will drive in their truck and make simulated deliveries at houses,” says UPS representative Dan Cardillo.

3. Driving in reverse is discouraged.

Except for backing into a loading dock, “we generally will tell them the first rule of backing up is to avoid it,” Cardillo says. The way UPS sees it, backing up increases the likelihood that a driver will unintentionally bump into something (or someone). UPS driver Bill Earle [told NPR](#) that he rarely goes a single day without being told he’s backing up too often or too quickly.

4. Good drivers get rewarded...

...with gifts from a catalog. When a driver goes five years without an accident, they get to choose an item from retail stores’ catalogs, including Michael C. Fina. “The more years of safe driving you had, the better the gifts got,” says Kevin Dyer, a former driver who spent 38 years behind the wheel. “One of the first few years I got a highway safety kit. It had everything in there: flares, booster cables, flashlight, tape, you name it. I got a set of golf clubs one year. I wore them out.” One “avoidable” accident bumps you back to zero. “I went seven years and then I backed into a small tree,” says Widmann. “Then I had to start from the beginning again. I was just getting to the good gifts like bikes and gas grills.”

5. Great drivers get a bomber jacket.

A driver who goes 25 years without an accident is inducted into the [UPS “Circle of Honor”](#) and receives a special patch and a bomber jacket.

6. The trucks are “big brown microwaves.”

They don’t have air conditioning, so drivers run their routes with the doors open to stay cool. “It is cold in winter and hot in the summer,” Widmann says. “It was wonderful to have 50 and 60 degree days.”

7. Oh, and they’re not trucks.

At UPS, they’re referred to exclusively as “package cars.”

8. They have to supply their own music.

UPS “package cars” don’t come with radios, so if you want to listen to music, you have to pack your own player.

9. Dog bites are part of the job.

“Most UPS drivers are attacked by dogs,” says one former New Orleans-based UPS driver. “What you do is jump on the hood of the nearest vehicle and don’t move. There were some drivers that sat on the hood of a car for an hour or more.” Of course, UPS doesn’t train its drivers to jump on

top of cars to avoid dogs, but it does tell them to shout “UPS!” before entering the property so dogs won’t be caught off guard. Their handheld devices can also keep track of houses that might have dangerous dogs on the property and warn drivers ahead of time. “We wanna protect our drivers,” Cardillo says.

10. They wish you’d meet them halfway.

Want to make your UPS driver’s job easier? In a [Reddit thread](#), one driver said, “if you see them pulling up and you aren’t in the middle of something, meet them half way, or walk up to their truck.” Every extra step adds a little bit of time to their day. “If 10 of my 150 stops do that in a day I would get home 10-15 minutes earlier and actually get to spend time with my family.”

11. UPS is picky about socks.



The company has a strict dress code to which drivers must adhere: Shoes must be shined, shirts must be pressed, and don’t even think about wearing shorts without buying the UPS-brand socks. “Socks don’t come with [the uniform],” Dyer says. “If you didn’t have the socks with the logo on them, you weren’t allowed to wear the shorts. There was even a left and a right sock because the logo was on the outside of the leg.”

12. Facial hair is frowned upon.

You’ll probably never see a UPS driver with a beard. Mustaches are permitted, but can’t grow below the corners of the mouth. And men’s hair mustn’t touch the top of the collar.

13. They make good money.

On average, drivers today are paid \$30 an hour, according to [Glassdoor](#). That’s double the amount they made in the mid '90s, according to NPR and the head of the Teamsters union, which represents UPS. At the end of his 38-year tenure, Dyer says he was making more than \$75,000 a year.

14. And they get decent tips.

Some drivers get cash, especially around the holidays. Wayne Turner, a former driver in California was once greeted at the door by a butler who gave him and his partner each \$50. “It was the strangest thing, but we made an extra \$50 that day.” But more frequently, drivers get non-

monetary tips like wine and food. Occasionally, they'll get random (but valuable!) stuff: "I had a place that made permanent air filters that you can rinse out," Turner says. "They gave me those any time I needed one. Those were selling at the time for \$65 or \$75. A construction company gave me a piece of 16-foot wood that would have cost hundreds of dollars."

15. Seniority means better routes.

More tenured drivers get the privilege of bidding for the routes they want. The best routes, employees say, cover lots of ground but have few stops. So rural routes are often run by employees who have done their time.

16. They don't turn left.

By obsessively tracking its drivers (see #1), UPS found that "a significant cause of idling time resulted from drivers making left turns, essentially going against the flow of traffic," according to [Elizabeth Rasberry](#), a former UPS public relations manager. Drivers are instead encouraged to drive in right-hand loops to get to their destination.

Today, many of the routes are designed to avoid left turns, and UPS says the policy has saved 100 million gallons of gas and reduced carbon emissions by 100,000 metric tons since 2004. The habit sticks with drivers long after they've handed in the keys to their big brown truck. Dyer says, "Even today I'll sit in traffic and I'll kind of talk to the car in front of me and say, 'Turn right to go left!'"

17. They're judging you.

"UPS drivers see a lot," one former driver says. And they're not just talking about making judgments based on packages. UPS drivers can discern a lot about your life through a cracked door. "We make instant judgments about you. We see if you have a maid. We know what kind of food you're cooking, or if you have a dog. We know if you have orgies at your house. We can tell when someone's getting a divorce."

18. Yes, people try to seduce them.

"There will always be someone on your route who is interested in pursuing a sexual relationship with you," a former driver says. "The male drivers have stories about women who come to the door dressed in a negligee, and the women experience the same with the opposite sex. It happened to me twice."

19. They deliver some odd things.

A few notable deliveries: In 1987, UPS delivered an iceberg chunk roughly the size of a fridge to a children's museum in Venezuela. In 2007, two whales [were shipped](#) from Taiwan to Atlanta. And in 2008, a group of 2,200-year-old [Chinese terracotta warriors and horses](#) were shipped via UPS to four American museums for exhibition.

USA Today

Fog, clouds fill Grand Canyon in rare weather event

by Michael Winter

The Grand Canyon was a little grander Thursday in a very different, unusual way: It was fogged in. At least, if you were standing on the rim.

The rare climatic event was caused by what meteorologists call a temperature inversion. That happens at night when skies are clear, winds are calm and the ground rapidly loses heat stored during the day.

A cold, moist air mass settled into the canyon during the week, eventually creating a 500-foot-thick "low stratus deck" of clouds, said Brian Klimowski, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service office in Flagstaff, Ariz. With it came fog that hovered at the canyon rim or spilled over.

The canyon — 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and up to more than a mile deep — also filled with clouds and fog in November 2013, though the phenomenon usually happens only every few years.

"Almost looks like the tide coming in and going out," the Grand Canyon National Park staff wrote on its [Facebook page](#).

"Rangers wait for years to see it. Word spread like wildfire and most ran to the rim to photograph it," a ranger wrote about last year's fog. "What a fantastic treat for all."

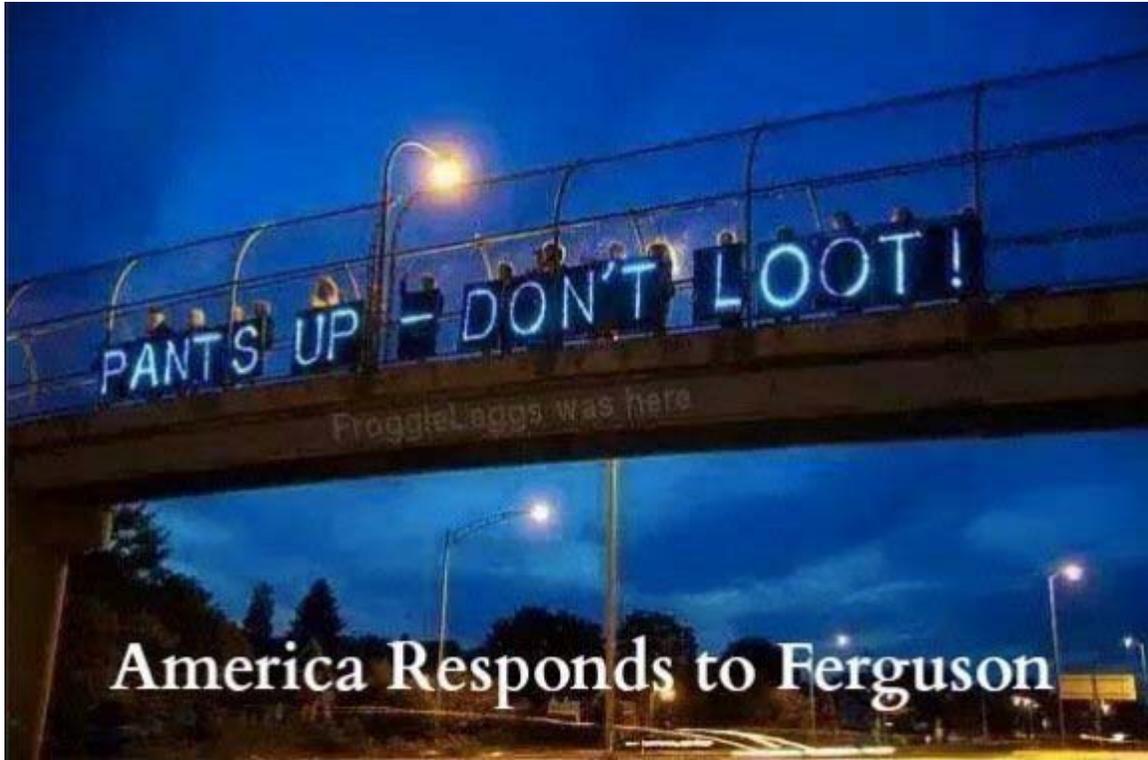
The view from the canyon floor would have been much different, Klimowski said. There was about 4,000 feet between the ground and the cloud cover.

Thursday's view was short lived. A cold front pushed into Arizona early Friday, clearing out the cloudscape. Strong wind, rain and several inches of snow were forecast through Saturday before the canyon resumes its familiar majesty.

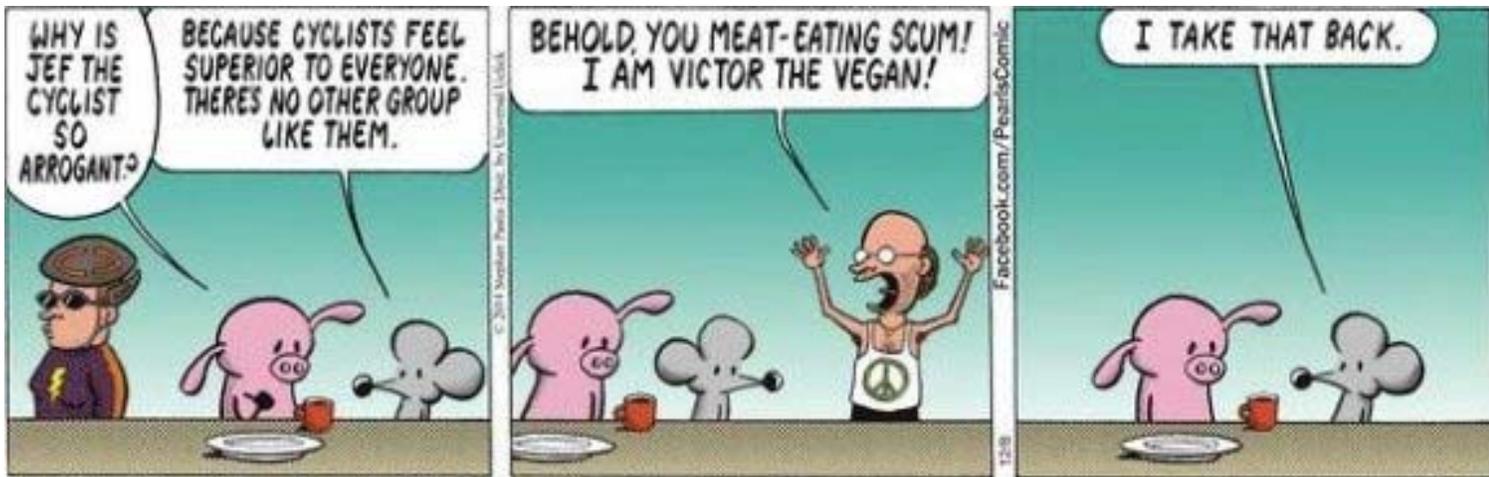




[Click here for 13 fascinating time lapse videos.](#) Number 4 shows clouds acting like waves.



America Responds to Ferguson



And here we see a wild bus drinking water from a river



