

Kid's KOrner

Despite unknown origins, pogo stick keeps bouncing along

WASHINGTON — Question: The pogo stick was invented by:

(A) A French explorer who returned to Paris in 1919 with sketches of a stick used by the Dayaks of Borneo in their sacrificial dances, whereupon it became a craze among the upper crust of Paris in the early 1920s, and spread to the United States a few years later.

(B) George B. Hansburg, an American who patented it in 1919.

Answer: Who knows?

Both theories have their adherents, but amazingly little is known for certain about the stick that one dictionary describes as "a kind of single stilt with a strong spring at the bottom and a raised step on each side of the pole."

What, No Hall of Fame?

There is no American Pogo Stick Association, though one manufacturer tried to establish a Pogo Stick Hall of Fame; he failed. There apparently are no books or journals devoted to its history or its practice. Even those who claim pogo-hopping records differ about whether the record should honor the pogoer who hops the farthest or the one who hops the longest.

Despite all this lack of organized interest, however, despite its lack of a highly visible place in the public life of America, the pogo stick just goes bouncing happily along. It is not a major item in the toy business, never becoming a craze like the hula hoop or the Cabbage Patch doll. But it is a steady seller year after year, occasionally popping into view and then apparently vanishing again.

One recent Sunday evening, for example, Gabe Jacobson was sitting quietly in his Chicago-area home watching television when he saw a scene that brought a glow to

his cheeks. It was Punky Brewster, the doughty heroine of the prepubescent set, bouncing into a room.

Now Punky Brewster always seems to be bouncing, but this time was different: She was bouncing on a pogo stick. And Gabe Jacobson happens to be vice president for sales of the G. Pierce Manufacturing Co., which makes pogo sticks.

"Any exposure like that is good for business," says Jacobson, who adds that his company annually sells about 50,000 sticks that retail for about \$12 to \$15.

Ignored by Famous Journal

Jacobson is a devotee of the French explorer-among-the-Dayaks-of-Borneo theory of pogo-stick history (though it should be noted that an article about the Dayaks in a 1911 issue of National Geographic made no mention, and showed no photograph, of anything resembling a pogo stick).

Irwin Agrinsky, on the other hand, is a firm believer in the let-George-(Hansburg)-do-it version. But, then, that's natural; Agrinsky bought a pogo-stick-manufacturing business from none other than George Hansburg in 1967.

"Hansburg's earlier pogo sticks were made of wood with a spring," recalls Agrinsky, whose firm, Master Juvenile Products, is located on Pogo Plaza in Ellenville, N.Y., and sells about 100,000 pogo sticks a year. "The only change since then is that they're now made out of steel tubing; Hansburg went to steel in the late '30s. But the principle was the same."

What about the Dayaks?

"I heard that from Hansburg," Agrinsky says carefully. "He was

a marketing genius, a creative person with a magnificent imagination, and he also was an insomniac, which meant that he had more free time than most people to be creative. So the Dayaks..." His voice trails off.

Agrinsky says that Hansburg's creativity extended to naming the pogo stick for the sound the device made as it bounced along. ("Arbitrary coinage," sniffs one dictionary.)

Despite their other differences, both Jackson and Agrinsky are traditionalists, viewing their products as something to be used by small persons who can propel themselves.

There have been radicals, however. A hot seller during the 1972 Christmas season was a gas-powered pogo stick; each downward thrust fired up the engine and made the stick go up. A year later, a Wichita, Kan., firm bought out the Hop Rod, a battery-powered model complete with spark plug, carburetor, piston, and dual exhaust. It was abandoned in 1975. "I don't think the sales were there," a spokesman said.

The most recent innovation is the German-made Jet Star Super-trainer, made of plastic, with motocross handle grips and an industrial-strength spring. Distributed by Trileen Inc. of Orange, Calif., it is not a toy, but an exercise apparatus. To promote the device, Trileen has formed a Jetstar Demo Team of five gymnasts.

Flipping to Music

"They do flips, ring-around-the-rosies, and a gymnastics act to music," says Mary Van Sickle, the firm's sales coordinator.

The 1986 "Guinness Book of World Records" says that Guy

Stewart of Reading, Ohio, holds the pogo-stick mark for hopping 130,077 times in 17 hours and 10 minutes on March 8 and 9, 1985. Actually, he is Gary Stewart, now 19 and a college freshman, who says that he had never pogoed longer than five minutes at a time before his epic feat.

"I survived on cold pizza, apples, and orange juice and soda pop, but there were times after a while that I wasn't aware of what was going on," Stewart recalls. "So a friend brought over a rock tape that made me go faster."

But others claim records for distance instead of endurance. Van Sickle tells of a Denver disc jockey who pogoed through the snow for 40 miles, a Boston disc jockey who pogoed the entire route of the Boston Marathon, and the New York health food store owner who pogoed 5 miles up, down, and around Mt. Kilimanjaro and 6.2 miles on Mt. Fuji.

All such devotees may take heart from the work of Dr. V. Franklin Colon of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. He compared the use of pogo sticks with traditional straight leg-raising exercises in rehabilitating injured knees. While cautioning anyone with a knee injury to consult a doctor before climbing aboard a pogo stick, Colon says that, though both methods succeeded in reducing pain, 16 daily minutes of pogoing proved considerably more successful in developing muscle strength and power than nearly two hours of conventional exercise.

It can be assumed that George Hansburg would be pleased. The Dayaks probably don't care, though that has not been firmly established, either.

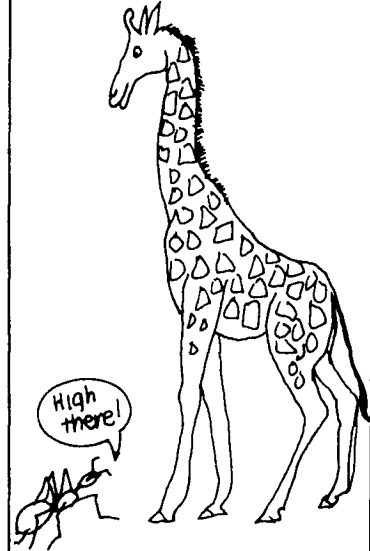
WILD GREETINGS

by Ida M. Pardue

What did one penguin say to another? **Have an ice day.**

What did one owl say to another? **Yoo-hoo.**

What did the ant say to the giraffe? **High there.**



What did the giraffe say back? **'Lo.**

What did the spider say to the fly? **Glad to meat you.**

What did one wolf say to the other? **Howl are ya?**

What did one snail say to the other? **Long slime no see.**

What did one horse say to the other? **Hi, neighbor.**

What did one canary say to the other? **Hi, tweetie.**

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. PEACH |
| 2. PINK | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

THE GUAR IS A WILD OX FOUND IN INDIA, BURMA AND THE MALAY PENINSULA. THE BULLS STAND FIVE FEET TALL AT THE SHOULDER AND WEIGH OVER A TON. BOTH THE MALES AND FEMALES GROW LONG CURVED HORNS THAT BECOME HEAVY AND SHARP. THEY LIVE IN FORESTS AND ROCKY HILLS.

