

## Dowser Still Successful Finding Water

James Kuebelbeck tried dowsing for water to prove it couldn't be done, but instead, he found water. Nearly 50 years later, he's still finding water for people, and he still doesn't know how he does it. That hasn't stopped him and his wife from making a living from the service they provide (Vol. 29, No. 2).

"If you can tell me how dowsing works, I would like to know," says Kuebelbeck. "I think the best way to get started is to walk around and try to sense the difference in the ground. I've discovered that most people can sense the earth has been disturbed and find water lines, electric lines, and pipes. That doesn't mean they're water finders. We all have different talents, capabilities, and faculties."

Kuebelbeck has found that adolescent girls seem to be the most sensitive. He believes that's because they have intuition and are open to things. "They haven't learned differently," says Kuebelbeck.

In his case, he hoped to discredit a local

priest who would tell people where to dig their wells. The priest used a small willow branch and found water on the Kuebelbeck property.

"I cut a willow branch and started going to places where they had dug dry holes and good wells," says Kuebelbeck. "I walked around and tried to sense the difference. I learned to concentrate."

In the half-century since, Kuebelbeck has sensed water thousands of times across the Midwest, from Michigan to South Dakota and south to Kansas. While he no longer cares to travel much, he occasionally makes the exception. Recently, he was flown to Michigan in a private jet by a man determined to find water on his land. This summer, he plans to be in the Black Hills of South Dakota to help find water.

Kuebelbeck's reputation in that area has been stellar since finding plentiful water. The Crazy Horse Memorial was short of water, and the city of Custer wanted to sell them water. Crazy Horse Memorial hired

Kuebelbeck, and he found a plentiful water supply.

"When a guy called recently from that area and asked me to come out, I told him I would have to pass on it," says Kuebelbeck. "He called back and said several local well drillers told him that if he wanted water, he needed to work with me."

Kuebelbeck doesn't always find water on a property. One landowner had drilled multiple dry holes when he asked Kuebelbeck to use his skills.

"I walked the property and told him there wasn't decent water to be found," says Kuebelbeck. "He drilled a fourth dry well before getting an easement on a neighbor's land. He asked me to come back, and I found water not 16 ft. from the corner of his land."

One thing Kuebelbeck won't do is tell a landowner at what level water will be found. "I may sense it at 50 ft., but the driller may have to go to another 20 to 30 ft. to get into the main supply," he says.

Kuebelbeck encourages people who are interested to try dowsing. The stick used doesn't matter, he says. While he started with a willow stick, he soon switched to two nylon rods tied together at one end with an electrical connector.

"I decided I needed to look more



Kuebelbeck has been finding water on properties for nearly 50 years.

professional than simply cutting a branch," he recalls. "However, it's not the instrument but the person that matters."

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## Co-Op Custom Mills Chestnuts

With the help of the regional non-profit Rural Action, the Route 9 Cooperative is expanding markets for chestnuts, turning them into pancakes, bread, and even beer. The co-op was formed to help a group of chestnut producers in southeast Ohio market their nuts. It all started when Amy Miller's grandfather planted chestnut trees in the late 1950s.

"My father turned a chestnut sales hobby into a business in the 1980s selling chestnut flour and peeled nuts," says Miller. "He got a grant to develop machines for the process, but then the fresh market emerged."

Soon, the Millers were selling out the bulk of their nuts as fresh each fall and buying and selling those produced by neighbors. By 2009, production exceeded 60,000 lbs. of nuts, and five growers formed Route 9 Cooperative. A common packing and storage facility with shared administrative and marketing costs made economic sense.

Today, the co-op offers fresh nuts in season, freshly peeled kernels, dried kernels, and chestnut flour. They even custom-mill chestnuts for grits and other culinary uses. They also sell chestnut and Chinkapin oak seeds, bare-root seedlings, and container nursery stock (4 to 5 ft.).

"We mainly sell fresh chestnuts in shell, but as more chestnut trees are planted and come into production, we expect the market to become saturated," says Miller. "We want to be ready with other products when it does."

Supplies fluctuate with nut production (2023 produced a small crop), and fresh Grade A nuts (the highest quality) often sell out in November. Usually, around 20 percent of production is not suitable for fresh sales. Grade B nuts, which are smaller and less consistent in size, are processed and available in late November in quantities as high as 25 lbs. or up to 50 in special orders. Milling of Grade B nuts generally starts in January and goes through March. The co-op also offers directions for using fresh, peeled, and dried nuts and nuts in recipes on their website.

"My personal favorite is a recipe for chestnut pancakes," says Miller. "It's a family recipe we had on special occasions."

While the co-op has an active online retail sales presence, it also sells in



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the wholesale market. The larger buyers repackage and distribute, mainly to the northeastern states today.

"There's a lot of interest in exploring the use of chestnut flour, especially because it's gluten-free," says Miller. "People on restricted diets and others are experimenting with many different products."

Flour samples and other processed chestnuts were provided to bakers and brewers. They made bread, pastries, and beer. Chestnuts were even used in ice cream.

"A big win was getting a famous chef in New York City to try the flour," says Michelle Ajamian, Rural Action. "Now he's ordering it every year for a seasonal offering."

Rural Action and Route 9 are hoping to expand the effort. They have applied for a grant to lease a coffee roaster to dry and roast chestnuts. The goal is to create different flavor profiles and provide bakers and brewers with samples to experiment with.

"Drying and peeling equipment is available from Turkey and Italy, both large chestnut-producing countries," says Miller. "My dad invented an impact peeler and had it custom fabricated. However, it's not available on the market. We've considered making plans for it available. We think ours is better than those from Turkey and Italy."

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Group visit to a farm in Brazil as part of a guided tour trip.

## Worldwide Tours Focus On Agriculture

By offering a mix of farm visits and traditional tours, Explorations by Thor attracts agriculture groups, businesses, and individuals to sign up for customized travel worldwide. The idea to focus on agriculture tours was inspired by six farming uncles who wanted to travel internationally, says Alex Thor, who owns the tour business with his wife, Donna.

Thor caught the travel bug after high school while backpacking with friends and attending college. When he met and married Donna, they shared a passion for travel, and about 15 years ago, they started their business. It took off when they networked with people from their travels to develop farm contacts to showcase agriculture with their tours.

"People like to see, feel, and touch what's going on," Thor says. "The tours are educational, and farmers everywhere talk about the same issues such as policy, soil, weather, and climate."

He contacted the University of Kentucky, a land-grant university, to set up his first tours. About a third of Explorations By Thor tours are with various ag studies. Another third of the tours are with state and county Farm Bureaus, commodity and livestock producers' groups, etc. Finally, some tours are set up as trade missions with business in mind.

"Some trips are open for anyone wanting to join," Thor says, noting he promotes his business at ag trade shows, on the business website, and through emails.

Setting up a tour starts with a phone conversation to determine the group's

objectives, available travel time, and budget. Trips are typically \$2,000 to \$4,000/person (excluding airfare) and 7 to 9 days long or 2 weeks in distant locations such as Africa and Australia. Travelers visit about 10 farms plus local landmark attractions such as the Eiffel Tower in France or cathedrals between farms in Ireland.

"What sets me apart is that as a geography major and cartographer, I'm very detail-oriented with logistics and passionate about ensuring that I've looked at everything prior. I know exactly what people will see," Thor says.

When possible, he and his wife book rooms in smaller hotels and keep the groups small, typically at 20 to 40 people.

With two young children and a home in Kentucky, the Thor's travel is mainly focused on visiting farms and sites to add to their tours, but they have a network of guides worldwide.

"The biggest thing is, when people work with us, they don't have to think about anything from transportation to farm visits to accommodations and meals. Someone is there to greet them and get them back to the airport," Thor says.

The website offers more information about future trips.

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