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# 'Dowsing works' says Humphrys after using it to find water on his Welsh farm

'I felt a total fool walking up and down this field. And then, kapow, the thing bent forward.' CREDIT: RII SCHROER

By **Olivia Rudgard**, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

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Dowsing works, John Humphrys has said, after he used it on his farm to find a broken pipe.

Speaking to Professor Richard Wiseman from the University of Hertfordshire, the Today Programme presenter said he "felt a force" when using the method, also known as water divining, to find a pipe which had been cut through by a plough.

The exchange followed the discovery earlier this week that engineers from most of the UK's major water companies use the method to find leaks or broken pipes.

10 of the 12 companies **admitted on Twitter to using the method** (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/11/21/water-companies-admit-using-divination-order-find-leaks/>), which involves using rods which are meant to move when the user walks over underground water, **after science blogger Sally Le Page began making enquiries** (<https://medium.com/@sallylepage/in-2017-uk-water-companies-still-rely-on-magic-6eb62e036b02>).

Humphrys had previously hired a dowser to find a water source on his farm in west Wales, and was encouraged to try the method again when a ploughman suggested he use it find the broken pipe, which had stopped the water supply to his house.

He said: "I brought in a dowser for that little farm I bought in Wales. The well had run dry and it needed a bore hole.

‘I brought in a dowser and he found a wonderful supply. Now OK you could say that was a bit of luck and he knows the land and all that."

"However, a few years later we’d laid the pipe and all that and I brought in a man to plough the field above the house and the water stopped in the house."

He said the man "handed me a bent coat hanger" and suggested he use it to find the cut pipe.

"I felt a total fool walking up and down this field.

"And then, kapow, the thing bent forward – I couldn’t stop it – I felt a force I really did.

"And he dug down and I did it again thinking ‘this is just stupid’, but he dug down and there was the cut pipe where this had happening.

Dowser John Baker, dowsing in his local churchyard at St Paulinus' in Crayford, near Dartford CREDIT: HEATHCLIFF O'MALLEY

"I know it’s not science but explain it."

Professor Wiseman, an expert in the psychology of luck and the paranormal, said: "It's a great example of you saying 'OK, I did this thing and something surprising happened.'

"The question would be, how many people did that thing, something surprising didn't happen, they didn't find any water?

"They're not going to be on the radio going 'It was amazing'."

Mr Humphrys responded by saying "Ah well, they weren't in tune with nature."

The method is still widely believed in and used by farmers and businesses to find water sources but controlled tests have found no evidence that it works.

Scientists believe it is a product of the ideomotor effect, which causes subconscious movements when the user picks up on other environmental factors such as the vegetation and climate in the area.

The effect is also thought to be behind movement on Ouija boards.

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