Results with the Curve-Unifying Paradigm. A normal distribution curve (shaded) was truncated at one standard deviation either side of the mean. Beyond 1 standard deviation the remainder of the curve was inverted. For further details see text.

Develop Each Lowly Pattern However Insignificant Association—that is, MILK standards were obtained from PHILADELPHIA CREAM CHEESE.

Results

The new marking system results in an almost symmetrical plot, which has been described by a Curve-Unifying Paradigm (figure). The secondary curve to the right resulted from candidates whose Symbolic Points In Linearly Tested MILK could not be removed by use of Weight-Assigned Theoretical Exponential Rectification. Further curve-smoothing by addition of a Scientific And Ultra-Conservative Experiment Ratio improved the confidence limits when handled by the modified tea test, Student's Universal Grade Averaging Regimen.

Discussion

Tertiary Educational Assessment has many forms, including Integrated Cognitive Experiential Discussion and Learning-Enabled Mental Objective Numeration. In discussing options with other educators at a recent morning seminar, however, most still chose Herd-Orientated Traditional TEA with Time On Assessed Subservient Tasks. Several also expressed a strong additional preference for Mensural And Rationalised Managerial Algorithms Labelling All Distinguishing Echelons, appalling us with their disinterest and lack of behavioural modification.

While recognising that it may not suit the tastes of all decision-making groups we recommend that TEA should now include MILK with SUGAR.

Reference

- ¹ Longmore RB, McRae DA. Random assessment by projected examination scripts (RAPES): a new look at examination marking. *Br Med J* 1979; ii:1640-1.

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The road through Oxiana, 1978

B MILSTED

He called it his magic teapot because it never ran dry and certainly it seemed that however many people crowded into his tiny leatherware shop (fig 1) there was tea for everyone and a little left over for himself. He was as tiny as his shop, and as we drank he talked of his life and of his country Afghanistan. He sought our approval of his latest designs for sandals, belts, and bags and showed us somewhat balefully an enormous pair of leather shoes made for a traveller who had never returned to collect them. After an evening of much good humour we left, promising to return the following evening for more tea and to search diligently meanwhile for a prospective purchaser with large feet. We returned to our hotel to find the proprietor engaged in stuffing the sole of his right sandal with cannabis ready for a forthcoming trip to London. After some discussion I pointed out to him that if he walked through Heathrow with a pronounced limp in open sandals at the height of the English winter he would be unlikely to reach the far end of the customs hall a free man. He seemed genuinely grateful for this information and was deep in thought when I retired to bed.

Although it is fairly remote, being a few miles from the border with Iran, the difficulty with Herat was not so much getting there as ever finding the energy or enthusiasm to leave. Certainly it took two hours for the bank to change a traveller's cheque, but that was compensated for by the pleasure of browsing in the many shops and taking multiple cups of tea with the various proprietors. The most expensive hotel room cost £1 a night and a good meal could be had for considerably less. Occasionally local tribesmen would ride into town, turbaned and dressed in white, carrying ancient rifles, and looking like something out of a rather elegant Asian version of *High Noon*.

To the north of Herat lay mountains and to the south and east was desert. On the west side of the town were six ancient minarets. There would be 12 but for Eldred Pottinger. My own view is that he was a secret agent in the employ of the British Government. The official line, however, is that he was a civil servant who decided to spend his leave in search of adventure. Either way, in 1870 he dressed himself in native costume and rode across Afghanistan on a camel, arriving in Herat to find the Persian army advancing on the town. He organised the town's defences, restored the only cannon, and, finding the minarets in his line of sight, demolished half of them. The Persians wilted under the unexpected artillery barrage and

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retreated in disarray. Sated with adventure and with his leave running out, he mounted his camel and returned to India. The cannon is still there.

The road runs south through the desert to Kandahar and north again to Kabul. Crossing it were tribes of nomads with large herds of goats and sheep and heavily laden donkeys and camels. An occasional camel would have a small child and a couple of hens hanging on for dear life. At one point there was a camel train stretching as far as the eye could see. Scrutiny of the map failed to show where they had come from or where they might be going. They were just shifting from a mountain wilderness to a desert one.

FIG 1—An Afghan teashop complete with proprietor and customer.

Cabaret on the roof

The road from Kabul to the Pakistan border winds over a rugged mountain pass. The scenery was wild and beautiful and all was right with the world until we rounded a bend to find the road blocked by an overturned lorry. The atmosphere was one of total confusion as a steady stream of buses and highly decorated lorries (fig 2) piled up behind us and the crowd around the obstruction grew. A Pakistani family en route from Birmingham to Rawalpindi for their holidays seemed to think a crane would have to come from Kabul. That would take time. Animals were unloaded to graze; donkeys, sheep, and cattle were all tethered at the side of the road. The small pick-up truck in front of us disgorged two sheep, a cow, a calf, two men, a woman, and a child. The cabaret was provided by their luggage on the roof or to be more precise by an errant rooster who escaped from their luggage periodically to announce his freedom joyfully to the world. The woman would then ascend to the roof with extraordinary agility, stuff him back in the sack, and we would settle down to await the next escape bid.

After five hours we were still surrounded by men, veiled women, animals, and confusion. After seven hours the light was fading, and the unappealing prospect of spending a night in the Afghan hills was becoming a real possibility. Somehow the faces in the crowd didn't look as friendly as they had in the daylight or was it my imagination? Up front, however, the crane-driver had done something right, and the road was

partially clear. The pick-up truck was loaded up, the cow celebrating the way cows usually do. The rooster escaped for the last time and was recaptured, and we were on our way. The faces seemed friendly and cheerful again. Many hands helped push our van over a large pile of gravel, and we were on our way again, towards the Khyber Pass and Kipling's frontier.

Thus we left behind us a country and a people who had shown us much kindness and not a little humour. Some months later the Great Bear came down from the North and stole from them the only thing of value they possessed. Presumably, now, the magic teapot only makes tea for one, and perhaps a Russian soldier with very large feet has got himself a new pair of shoes.

Hospitality is total

The trip through the Khyber Pass into Pakistan was uneventful apart from an encounter with an intrepid British cyclist, complete with khaki shorts. On the outskirts of Peshawar we were met by Sher, who was to be our host. We had worked together in England some years previously, and being now a consultant in nuclear medicine in Peshawar he had offered us hospitality on our trip. We were soon to discover that hospitality in this part of the world is total. We were to stay in a guest house on the university campus, complete with chokidar or night-watchman, sporting a sash of bullets and an ancient rifle. We learnt that one of the hospital doctors had only recently been abducted in his car by some local tribesmen before being dumped, minus car, on the edge of town. In a display of solidarity to bring a tear to a BMA negotiator's eye the rest of the doctors promptly refused to treat any of the hill people until the car was returned, and within 24 hours it was back in the hospital car-park.

The next day we visited the institute and Sher's outpatient clinic. Doctors are clearly held in high respect here. All the patients stood when Sher walked into the outpatient corridor, and numerous greetings were exchanged. I was introduced to an old lady with an enormous thyroid goitre. She had travelled from near Jalalabad in Afghanistan the 100 or so miles to the frontier, crossed into Pakistan, and travelled to Peshawar just to come to the outpatient clinic. I was somewhat stunned by this information but was assured it was not at all unusual. The hill people think nothing of travelling large distances, and for them the border does not exist. Some patients in England moan if they have to travel one mile to the hospital, and if you suggest they might make it under their own steam rather than have an ambulance they get a look on their face as if they have lost a shilling and found a farthing. One young

FIG 2—The highly decorated lorries that ply between Kabul and Jalalabad.

FIG 3—A Pakistani village in Swat.

boy from a village 100 miles north had clearly got an acute leukaemia, a potentially curable condition in London or Memphis but not here, not yet.

The next few days were spent travelling up to Swat, a province and kingdom in the North of Pakistan. The road north soon began to climb towards the foothills of the Karakoram range. We passed large groups of nomads on the road, driving their herds of goats down from the mountains. At intervals we stopped in a village (fig 3) to buy delicious pakoras cooked at the roadside or to look at examples of the nomads' jewellery. We also bought unleavened bread that was cooked by slapping the dough on the inside of a hot stone well and tasted delicious when hot but like cardboard when cold. The people were most friendly, although the official government warning is that camping out overnight may damage your health. We were fortunate to be staying in dak bungalows, used by travelling government officials, which provided curry in the evening, rumble-tumble egg (scrambled egg) in the morning, bread and jam in the afternoon, and pots of tea all the time. On the second evening the cook, who had discovered I was a doctor, asked if I would see his nephew, who had what sounded like an uncorrected club-foot deformity. As my knowledge of orthopaedics had never progressed beyond "if you can't pin it—plate it," I demurred, suggesting that he should take the child to Peshawar to be seen by a specialist. "I cannot go to Peshawar," he replied, "because I killed a man and if I go there they will arrest me."

"When would you like me to see him?" I said quick as a

flash, grasping the force of his argument. However, the following morning the cook was not around, and we set off on our return journey feeling slightly guilty and half expecting to be overtaken by a bullet.

We were to be entertained to breakfast by Sher's brother and father in their village. The purdah here is very strict, and from the age of 12 or 13 the women do not appear in public at all but spend their time indoors. We were entertained in a guest room to a delicious meal. The flies were somewhat troublesome and so a servant was stationed by the table to keep them at bay with a piece of privet. Occasionally his enthusiasm would get the better of him and the privet would twitch across a piece of food one was just about to eat, earning him a sharp rebuke from our host. After a filling meal of spicy omelettes, chicken, and fruit my wife went into the house to meet the women and receive gifts before we set off again.

Before leaving Swat we were to call on a local merchant with an inoperable carcinoma. Although there was little of practical value one could suggest, he seemed delighted with our visit and insisted that we stayed to lunch. Another heavily laden table was spread before us and despite the proximity of breakfast we managed to clear our plates. We had, however, forgotten that this was an indication of persisting hunger and in an instant the servants had refilled them.

Finally we had to take our leave, as it was necessary to get over the mountain pass into the valley before dark. The road was very treacherous in places, and some of the other drivers appeared to have a well-advanced death wish. Even in the valley the drive was not without incident as night had now fallen. There is no experience in British driving that quite matches finding yourself bearing down on an unlit bullock cart lumbering along at 4 mph, especially when the rest of the road appears to be the domain of shadowy figures on bicycles, also without lights.

We arrived at Sher's house in one piece to find he had arranged a small party in our honour, complete with musicians. Although very tired, it was the perfect end to our stay. We talked and tried to remember all we had seen and listened to the music of tabla and sitar and tried to drink in the atmosphere of the country. We were a few miles from the Afghanistan border and a million miles from the diabetic clinic. We were a year from a time when the border would be closed and Peshawar would be a city of over a million refugees. We were far enough away from the present to make me wonder now if the evening had been real or imagined; or so I thought until last week when a young Pakistani doctor came up and introduced herself to me in Glasgow. She had been the girl playing the sitar that evening.

Delights of genealogy

A P JOSEPH

My enthusiasm for genealogy flowered early, and I had already begun my quest for my family roots before I reached my teens. The Society of Genealogists (founded 1911) seemed very grand, and I joined it, as a life-member, while still a schoolboy. I divided my preclinical student energies evenly between attempting a grasp of the Cambridge University medical course and the fascinating pursuit of ancestors and ever more remote kin. Clinical studies then brought me opportunities

to record detailed family histories, which were often to me more interesting than the immediate reason for the patient's presence in hospital. By the time I succeeded in qualifying I was already fairly certain that general practice, with its emphasis on family scope, would be the most appropriate niche for me. Besides, by then I had established the trunks of my own family tree (and that of my wife, who was a distant cousin). Our roots were in the Midlands, and I had been offered a chance to join a practice near Birmingham. This presented me with the inviting prospect of exploring many twigs and some foliage of my own tree, perhaps even while at work—surely too good an opportunity to miss.

Meanwhile, however, necessary further training had to be

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