

INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS
MT SAN ANTONIO, CA

DATE: June 10, 2026
TO: The Herald, Church of Alienism
FROM: Howard Stonecipher, Director
SUBJECT: Field Notes Concerning Aspartame in an Obscure Dry Lakebed

PROSPECTIVE HERALD SUBMISSION

Field Notes Concerning Aspartame in an Obscure Dry Lakebed

Submitted for consideration by The Herald.

Several weeks ago, personnel from my office obtained copies of field notes prepared by a geological team working an obscure dry lakebed in the western United States. The notes were acquired without the knowledge of the original field workers and were initially interesting only because their sediment chemistry appeared unusually inconsistent from one transect to the next.

One recurring entry concerned an unidentified sweet-tasting residue in fine evaporitic material. Subsequent laboratory notation proposed aspartame or a closely related compound. This was sufficiently implausible that we assumed contamination: food waste, sample handling, laboratory carryover, mislabeled standards, or a field worker with an unfortunate beverage habit.

The Institute therefore attempted to reconstruct the provenance of the observation without contacting the original team. Using correspondence available to us through advanced collection techniques, we pieced together portions of the field workers' email and telephone traffic, shipping records, laboratory scheduling, and informal discussion of the samples. The resulting chronology is imperfect but useful. The aspartame finding was noticed independently by more than one person, generated internal confusion, and appears to have preceded any discussion that would have made suggestion or expectation an obvious cause.

The concentrations described in the notes are not compatible with the casual disposal of a single diet beverage. Nor do they follow the expected distribution of ordinary surface contamination. The strongest readings appear associated with a narrow subsurface horizon in the former lakebed, beneath material that is otherwise chemically unsurprising.

Aspartame is not geologically stable on useful timescales. It decomposes. It does not ordinarily mineralize into ancient sediment, survive burial as a recognizable sweetener, or emerge from an evaporite sequence merely because a field team happens to be looking. If the identification is correct, either the material is much younger than the surrounding horizon, it entered through a pathway not evident in the field notes, or the compound being detected is not aspartame despite behaving similarly in the assays used.

There is also an Alienist interpretation, although I place it last deliberately. Several Church texts describe the Record as capable of preserving agreement between histories that do not necessarily share the same sequence of causes. A chemical signature appearing where its ordinary history does not belong would be a small, almost ridiculous example of such a disagreement. That is precisely why it deserves restraint. Grand anomalies are easy to romanticize. A sweetener in lake sediment is difficult to respect, which may make it more useful.

We are attempting independent sampling without alerting the original team to the reason for our interest. Until that work is complete, the Institute makes no claim that the lakebed contains geologic aspartame. We do claim that several competent people appear to have measured something they did not expect, discussed it privately, and failed to explain it away.

That is enough to keep the file open.

Respectfully,
Howard Stonecipher
Director
Institute for Environmental Systems Analysis