

**MIRAGE VS. ILLUSION** A mirage is a physical reality in which light refracts through the air, bending and distorting visible objects. It can be photographed.

An illusion is an erroneous perception of reality in which the mind is bent and distorted into believing something false. It cannot be photographed.



**HIGHWAY WATER MIRAGE** One of the most common mirages is the seeming appearance of water on a highway as light from the sky is bent long on its way to our eyes. In this view, the dark asphalt of the recently repaved Highway 60 in New Mexico warms the air immediately above it the morning of April 24, 2004, creating the inferior mirage. Seven (or eight?) varying images of the vehicle precede it; some merged, some inverted, some not. The view was boldly captured from the centerline of the highway, complete with a tripod-mounted telescope and camera.

**WHEN A MIRAGE CAUSES AN ILLUSION** If you see a mirage on the highway ahead, but believe that you are seeing water, you are deluded, because the water—not the mirage—is an illusion.

**WHEN AN ILLUSION IS PORTRAYED AS A MIRAGE** In classic cartoons, characters suffering in a desert not only see an oasis, but experience relief from the heat and their thirst as they dive into water, relax on a lounge chair under a palm tree, and sip a cool drink, before it all suddenly vanishes. A mirage? No. An illusion? Yes.



**WHEN IMAGES ARE “REAL”**

Many people think that an accurate representation of an object is “real,” while a distorted one is somehow “not real.” Yet both are equally genuine. Think of your own multiple images in a mirrored elevator, or in wavy funhouse mirrors: Are you able to choose just one as the “real” you? Similarly, when we view a mirage, we are seeing real images of true objects, however many or varied its parts may be.