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**FTT 20**

# FTT 20

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It's that time of the year again -- which means that it's once again time to pub our ish and save (some) postage by distributing (some of) the British copies at the Eastercon. (Good God. Two Eastercons in as many years. Where will this resurgence of convention-going end? In a trip to Palmyra, probably.) As last year, the overseas copies will follow later, when we have the money to print them. Or should that be when we have the time to print them, in between work on our new allotment....

As ever, this is a science fiction fanzine with scarcely any mention of science fiction -- and scarcely any mention of science fiction fandom, for that matter -- which is available for all the usual reasons:

- your publication in exchange (except for *Star Trek*, UFO, poetry, etc. etc., tat); or
- a suitable contribution (i.e., no poetry or articles about *Star Trek*, UFOs, etc. etc.); or
- a letter of comment on this or previous issues; or
- £1.00 a copy.

An active readership being infinitely preferable to a passive one, the fourth of these options should be adopted only by those who have absolutely no time to pursue any of the other three.

Inevitably, there are one or two reprobates who have utterly failed to do any of these four things, and whose last copy this will be unless they pay heed to the runic mark adjacent to this paragraph.

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The cover is by Steve Jeffery. The illustration (and its caption) at the end of Yvonne Rousseau's article on page 21 is taken from Arnold Pacey's *Technology In World Civilisation* (Basil Blackwell, 1990). There are no other internal illustrations, because we do not believe in breaking up the text with scads of completely irrelevant little pictures which seem intended for no other purpose than to give the readers' brains a rest between all the dreadful long words (expression copyright D. West 19--), and because we know that *FTT*'s readership will have absolutely no trouble whatever with any of the dreadful long words we may use.

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# REINVENTING LIFE

*Judith Hanna*

Telling your boss he's worse than Stalin is very satisfying -- but it's a thing you can only do once. I had handed in my resignation a couple of weeks before, in fact, so felt blithely free of any need to try to deal reasonably with yet another unreasonable demand. Management by tantrum, backstabbing and changes of mind was Peter's style. I put down the phone on the exit line, "That is another example of why I am no longer willing to work here," and the grinning faces of two colleagues also working late popped up over the partitions and applauded -- both made their escapes a couple of months after I left. "We thought you got on better with Peter than anyone else here," they told me.

Of course it had been an interesting place to work -- editing, writing and managing a range of Britain's leading magazines for transport planners and practitioners. When Peter wasn't being a bastard, he sparked with enthusiasm and ideas, was fun to debate with and often charming. That, and the fact I was learning a lot about how magazines and books are made, kept me there for nearly two years. Then I realised that many of the ways I'd devised for coping with three other people working within arm's length, two of them selling advertising -- in a large office two-thirds occupied by Peter's unsorted accumulations of random papers -- were bad habits like working mornings at home, and starting late in order to compensate for working late. But even more, you can't manage others, or take responsibility for projects, when agreed decisions are simply thrown out the window overnight by an owner who changes his mind. So I resigned.

This worried Joseph, who felt his salary quite unequal to becoming sole supporter of our nice new joint mortgage. Throwing away a perfectly good job, however rotten it was, was not his idea of sensible. Come to that, having a steady income sufficient for life's little luxuries is one of those addictions that creeps on you once you give up bumming about as a student. On the other hand, over the two years with the firm, I had decided that the money I was getting didn't make up for having neither time nor energy left for the things I really wanted out of life.

What did I want to do? I'd been asked if I'd become vice-chair, then chair of the New Economics Foundation, a nice cuddly think-tank working on getting people and environment to count in the arid abstract theorising of orthodox economics -- they're best known as the originators of 'The Other Economic Summit' events. If I stopped working more than full-time, I could take that on. I'd got involved with NEF through co-organising a conference on "What Are Roads Worth?" and editing the conference report of the same name -- the matter of what's counted and not counted in the COBA cost benefit formulae used by the Department of Transport to decide whether there is an economic case for a new road is hocus-pocus of the first order. The way 'value of time' -- specifically, time savings for motorists -- is used is a major element of COBA's dodginess (for instance, economic justification for the controversial Newbury bypass is based almost entirely on a predicted saving of just two minutes for each car journey past Newbury.) These days, NEF is one of the leaders in developing a range of 'real' economic indicators which can show whether economic activity is producing useful or harmful effects (GNP/GDP just measure money sloshing about). It also heads 'social audit' work in the UK, encouraging companies to examine and report on how their activities affect all their stakeholder groups. And it promotes community economic activities, such as the LETS systems discussed in *FTTs* 14 & 15. They're a nice bunch.

One of the very readable and persuasive books by NEF guru, ex-Treasury mandarin James Robertson, deals with the personal and social benefits of an 'own work' economy. *Future Work*

argues that the paid work available needs to be shared by more people working part-time, shorter shifts, job-shares and so on. This is the obvious solution to the present trend of fewer and fewer employees being worked for longer and longer hours, leaving more and more people on the economic scrapheap of unemployment. From another angle, this had been a key point made in my first full-time job out of university in Australia with one of the early equal opportunity units -- if men and women are to play equal roles in workplaces, then flexible worktime arrangements with equal pro-rata entitlements need to be normal for all. Employers should expect their employees, both male and female, to fulfil family responsibilities, or indeed to want to study, pursue hobbies or voluntary work, or whatever.

Chuckling away a perfectly good income concentrates the mind. What I wanted out of life was to garden, write, paint, go swimming at the sports centre round the corner, rescue the picturesque historic but falling down Old Sunday School and its schoolyard on Tottenham Green, save the world and be lazy. All these needed time, not money. On balance, I decided, reclaiming half a week of own time would give me better value than earning more than I could easily spend. So I started asking about part-time jobs. Marjorie pointed out that her department at the Commission for Racial Equality was looking for an editor/writer, the ad said that job-share would be considered, so I put in an application and was offered half the job. The other person they wanted to appoint, Matthew, uses the other half of his time as a football, sports and civil liberties journalist.

When someone asks the common enough question "What do you do?" my answer now is either a long story, or else depends on who is asking and how I feel at the time. I can say that I write about environment, transport and gardening -- a monthly environmental column in the newly launched Paris-based *Urban Transport International* magazine, articles in *New Scientist*, *Geographical*, *Organic Gardening* and *Permaculture* magazine, reports for New Economics Foundation on 'future visioning', and for the Transport and Health Study Group following up a Department of Health report which found that more regular walking is the only practical way that most of the population can get enough exercise to remain healthy.

Sometimes I talk about having gained a permaculture design certificate and being on the Permaculture Association UK council of management, another jolly nice and worthy body trying to get the world to design itself sensibly for sustainable living, as Christina discussed last issue. Sometimes I talk about my own local permaculture projects -- our edible-ornamental back garden, my brand-new allotment half-plot on a stretch of what used to be a rail line from Tottenham to Alexandra Palace on its hill above the East Coast Main Line. Sometimes what seems top of my action portfolio is the fact that I've now got the Holy Trinity Parish Church Council to agree that it would like to establish a 'nature garden' in the litter- and weed-covered half-acre Old Sunday School yard bordered by bus-stops, the A10 and what's left of Tottenham Green -- and made contact with a handful of other local women genuinely interested in being involved in the project.

Or there's acting as transport and land-use campaigner for the local Friends of the Earth group, being a 'Tree Warden' on the new Haringey Tree Trust steering group, advising the council's Local Agenda 21 team, and avoiding actually attending the worthy but excruciating meetings of Tottenham Conservation Committee. The looming campaign is about the way that nearly every bit of open space in the Tottenham area has now been sold off for housing development.

A flick through London's A-Z street guide shows that Tottenham is among its most densely built-up areas. Past municipal councils bought up scattered patches of open space amid the terraces to protect them for community use. Ironically, flogging off these 'protected' spaces to housing associations is now the only way the current borough council can bring in new capital to keep up with the massive debt on Ally Pally in the more prosperous and leafier Muswell Hill, Hornsey and Highgate western



half of the borough. So Tottenham has been further crammed. Creating housing for people who need it is a jolly worthy goal, of course. But it is doing homeless people no favours to cram them into an area without local jobs, and without spaces where their children can run about, ride their bikes, get a bit of exercise, and adults can sit out on sunny days, and without trees to filter and air-condition the local micro-climate.

English Nature has just published a report on *Accessible Urban Greenspace* which points out that if the nearest open play area is more than 280 metres from a child's home, they aren't allowed out to it. It's an issue that brings together a lot of my pet subjects: traffic danger is one of the main reasons parents won't let their children out alone. And traffic nuisance taking over the streets drives people behind their front doors so they don't get to know their neighbours (as Donald Appleyard's 1978 *Liveable Streets* research in San Francisco showed). Naturally, if you live among strangers instead of among neighbours, then fear of 'stranger danger' increases. So children end up as prisoners in their own homes, and in the UK one in four schoolchildren are now so medically unfit for lack of regular running-about exercise that they are likely to suffer heart attacks during their thirties. There is, of course, a sensible and obvious permacultural solution -- and radically slowing and reducing car traffic in local streets is the starting point. Things like the 'nature garden' project, and helping local parents' groups to campaign for traffic calming in their areas are practical steps towards it.

What it all feels like is having a life, instead of just a job. Work is now, on the whole, things I want to do, rather than things someone else wants me to deal with. Keeping busy is no problem. *Au contraire*, it's still a battle finding time for such indulgences as going swimming or playing with water colours. For someone who's really addicted to laziness, I don't half complicate life by taking on twice as many interesting projects as I can really deal with (err, just like my Mum -- perhaps it's hereditary madness).

Every now and then I get asked to give a talk on something like 'Sustainable jobs in a sustainable economy'. Usually, someone gets up and says "Well, it's all terribly idealistic and it would be nice if it would work that way. But you can't really expect people to give up well-paid jobs so that others can share them, and put their time into saving the world." Maybe it is idealistic to act on the belief that you can do what you want in life. But at least I can't be accused of not putting my money where my mouth is -- and I can say from experience that having more time and less spare money is a lot more fun than mortgaging the days of your one and only life.

There must be drawbacks, you will be saying. Well, less money, of course. But three days a week at the CRE takes care of roof over head and basic subsistence. I aim for a couple of thousand a year on top of that to provide for holiday travel, going mad with gardening catalogues and getting ourselves fitted up with one of them new-fangled modern thingies. By the end of April, I will have achieved this year's target. Err... that's it, really.

My other worries are not having really got started on writing my book, which has the modest working title of *Space, Time and Civilisation*. But mostly that's because practical pursuit of the social and environmental issues it will deal with kept grabbing the time available. So did deadlines for freelance paying work. And with spring creeping in, so no doubt will the claims of keeping up with all three gardens I've now taken on: the home back and double-front gardens; the allotment, and the community nature garden. And there will be flowers and outdoors to practice painting and drawing. There's a Local Agenda 21 display to run up for the local library after Easter, and a Green Transport fortnight in June to coordinate. With a (more than) full-time job, I couldn't have even thought of attempting all those things. Of course, I only took them on because they are things I enjoy doing and think someone jolly well ought to do. The grumbles are entirely self-inflicted.

# UNDER THE AGE OF CONSENT

## Growing Up With The Republican Right

*Marjorie Thompson*

I suppose it all began when my grandfather Ben Neubeiser was running for Congress in the 9th district of Missouri in 1964 -- that is, running for the Republican nomination. I remember driving all over Missouri with my mother, attending countless picnics and barbecues and getting a gold elephant (the Grand Old Party symbol) with black hornrim glasses on it. Barry Goldwater was running for President. I saw *The Mouse That Roared*, a film about a third world dictatorship (although the novel was about a benevolent anarchic monarchy which declared war on the USA in order to receive Marshall Aid afterwards), where black plastic mice were given away; and Jack Lemmon in *Good Neighbour Sam*, about covering up for someone's affair -- movies that made a big impression on a kid whose only previous cinematic encounters were *Lady And The Tramp* and *101 Dalmations*. (Later, *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound Of Music* would be the start of a lifelong interest in London, Europe and World War II.) My grandfather didn't make it through the primaries, but years later the Democrat who won the election, William Hungate, took me out for lunch in Washington DC and told his office to give me help any time I needed it. Shortly after that he got fed up with Washington red tape and went back to Missouri to become a judge.

We moved to California in 1966 and that's when the fun really started. Myriads of mailmerged funding pleas from people like Jesse Helms, a Senator from North Carolina who now spends his time on Capitol Hill routinely blocking State Department appointments, were landing on the doorstep. "*Dear... , If you just send \$10 right now, we can prevent the Communists taking over...*" Let your imagination run wild -- there were constant references to Krushchev's UN comment that "We will take you without firing a single shot". If it was going to be that insidious, I wondered later, why did we spend so much on the military build-up? But the propaganda machine seems to have done the trick anyway. You can imagine the impact of such missives on wholesome Midwesterners -- that's how the Right amassed such cash and influence. The Democrats, and the left in general, deferred building their mailing lists until too late -- though who knows whether a progressive message would ever have taken off on radio and TV as Christian fundamentalist evangelism has done.

We also had regular mailings from Alton, Illinois, where a woman called Phyllis Schafly -- who like Nancy Reagan and Margaret Thatcher was married to a divorced man years her senior who was rich enough to subsidise her activities -- started a group called the Eagle Forum in which my mother became active. Each year she would go to an "Eagles Are Flying" conference, while Phyllis pumped out books like *None Dare Call It Treason*, which were avidly seized on as proof of communist subversion in the State Department. I was always intrigued that whilst Phyllis's message to American women was that they should stay at home, she never seemed to. Most of her children went to boarding school and her husband's sister looked after the rest of them in their riverside mansion.

My parents were founding subscribers of William F. Buckley's *National Review* -- or, as my brother called it *National Rearview*. (Buckley was nicknamed "The Reverse Immigrant" -- his grandfather started out in Texas and Buckley ended up with a pretentious English accent.) I enjoyed reading Aloise Buckley Heath's stories of her family's Christmas celebrations each year, but the contempt and vitriol poured on everything else struck me as being not exactly Sunday School. *National Review* seemed to aspire to the kind of readership enjoyed by the British *Spectator* (of which I'm an avid reader), but never quite managed it. The American version was simply full of hate and seemed to foster the kind of personal smear campaigns and dirty tricks now beginning to take root across the Atlantic.

I am not sure if my mother ever got on to the California State Central Committee of the Republican Party, but she was very friendly with people like Ann Bowler (nicknamed "Bowling Ball" in our household) and Ginny Braun, whose husband Henry was part of either Bechtel or the Braun Company, firms which the World Bank forces Third World countries to use for their infrastructure loan contracts. We mixed with the Gillettes or Schicks or whatever their name was, whose father Patrick owned the razor blade company, and with Justin Dart of Dart Drugs and Alfred Bloomingdale of the department store family, whose penchant for young women, whips and rubber was at that time undisclosed. This was Reagan's kitchen cabinet when he was Governor. Reagan was also a speaker for General Electric and out on the rubber chicken circuit a lot -- his Presidential bid was being planned even then.

State politics got quite ferocious, and I remember being drafted into stuffing envelopes for someone called Max Rafferty who I think was running for State Superintendent. Max made a big song and dance about student draft dodgers. Years later, I discovered that his own war record in either WWII or Korea had been very undistinguished. That was part of learning that hypocrisy was the name of the game. Maybe this is true of all politics. But the Right, I came to realise, had too many misogynist gays running around preaching Motherhood and Apple Pie, which boils down to women being tied to the kitchen sink, for me to be able to buy into the philosophy as a grown-up.

And next thing you know, half my family was in Miami for the Republican convention where Nixon and Agnew emerged to fight Humphrey and someone else for the November 1968 Presidential election. (I just went along to visit my cousins in Fort Lauderdale.) Nixon's slogan was "Nixon's The One", and everyone had styrofoam hats to prove it. Apparently my mother called my dad in tears -- even though Reagan had only been governor of California for 18 months, there was a proposed Reagan/Rockefeller ticket in Miami and she had really believed in it.

At that time my brother and I were attending a private school called Progress, which was a windowless cement block in downtown Long Beach with an asphalt driveway for a playground. Most comprehensive (state) schools in California at the time had swimming pools, basketball courts and football fields. The owner of ours, Mrs Frances Neilsen, was a carrotjuice-swilling Republican in her seventies who "believed in the Bible". Her nephew, Lyn Nofziger, was a Reagan aide, and accompanied him to the White House. I felt a thrill of childhood revenge a while ago when I looked at a newspaper over someone's shoulder in the London Underground and saw that Nofziger had been sent to prison.

Dinner table conversations at home seemed to revolve around the misdemeanours of the Kennedy family, the antics of trade union barons, and the audacity of Cesar Chavez who wanted lettuce and grape pickers to be paid a living wage. Accompanying my mother to a conference or committee meeting in Bakersfield, I spent the evening with Eric Voight, son of Republican activist Louise Voight. Eric showed me how to charge cheeseburgers to room service and we went swimming at midnight -- he is now in a California state penitentiary.

The role of women in politics at this time seemed to be about getting the boys elected. But one could also find oneself in the curious role of being a pimp. My mother and her friend "Amazing Grace" Iten were organising a reception for Senator John Tower, the cowboy hat and boot wearing miniature senator from Texas who was later rejected as Secretary of State for Defense during the Reagan administration and shortly afterwards died in a plane crash. They were asked quite bluntly by either Tower himself or an aide to procure a blonde for the senator's entertainment. Another Tower story, heard when I was working on Capitol Hill many years later, was that a lift attendant stopped "Senator Munchkin" in his hicksville outfit from boarding it because a vote was on and the light said "Senators only". Tower's vengefulness knew no bounds, and the lift attendant was sacked.

Eagle lunches, envelope stuffing, and precinct walking (canvassing) were punctuated by such highlights as lunches with political heavyweights like Phil Crane, an extremely handsome Congressman from Illinois or Indiana, whose brother Dan was not only a renowned basketball player in the Congress team but was known

to have sex with underage girls -- both Cranes had viciously hounded Congressmen who openly declared their homosexuality. Then there was Robert Dornan, who rabbited on endlessly about Chappaquiddick, reminding me of some columnist's comment about "Kennedy haters on the fringes of politics sitting alone in motel rooms" -- except that Dornan is no longer fringe, but has become mainstream.

The subconscious beginning of my break with all this started during the summer of 1975, when I was working as an intern, placed by the American Conservative Union, in an Oklahoma senator's office on Capitol Hill and taking courses at Georgetown taught by rightwing priests who wrote for *National Rearview*. Lev Dobrianski, later to become Reagan's ambassador to the Bahamas, was the course director. After some argument I had with him, he moved my roommate and me to another dormitory because he thought we would subvert our classmates, and told my parents that I was no longer on the course. They ordered me to come home -- but the Senator's office had offered me a full-time paid job for the rest of the summer dealing with their mail backlog, so I refused.

Since that was the summer after Watergate had finally driven Nixon from office, everybody was reading *All The President's Men*. I was going out with Bo Miller, son of Nixon's lawyer Herbert Miller, and went with my friend Pepper to stay at the Miller's Potomac, Maryland home with its guest house, swimming pool and stable. Determined not to succumb to the adolescent fumbblings of Bo and friends, we barricaded ourselves into our room overnight. At breakfast next morning, Mr Miller had just arrived back on the "red-eye", the overnight flight from California, after seeing Nixon in San Clemente -- but he made good orange juice.

Next year, June 1976, I cast my first ever vote -- for Ronald Reagan in the primaries. As I walked into the polling station, which was someone's house, the woman at the table asked "Republican or Democrat?" Someone else replied: "That's Janet's daughter, she'll be a Republican." I felt annoyed at being second guessed. Ford won the nomination. I spent a term in London and partied all through the election night at the English Speaking Union. Carter won.

Back in the USA, in Colorado, I started a campaign to get my college to divest itself of shares in companies operating in South Africa -- I was moved by the personal stories told by a black lecturer in international law. I was doing a lot of reading about the Spanish Civil War, which led me to question my mother's tales of a benevolent General Franco from when she had been living in Spain in the 1950s. Nor could I any longer accept that, pre-Civil Rights Act, black people had been "happy in their own restaurants". Returning to London for graduate school in 1978-1979, I found myself being told that I was personally responsible for the Vietnam War, among other things, by the champagne-quaffing, Yves St Laurent shirt wearing, Mayfair-living son of a prominent Greek Socialist politician, who now works for the International Monetary Fund.

In autumn 1980, the year Reagan finally became President, I went back to Washington DC. But my lust for power (or proximity to it) was not so great that I wanted to use my mother's connections to get a job in the White House. Besides, I'd been enough of a rebel for some people to realise that I wasn't wholly on side -- not "sound" as the British Tories would say -- so I worked as a temp at the World Bank. My mother came to town for Reagan's inauguration, to see her 17-year-old dream come true, and stood weeping joyously on the lawns of the Capitol. After all, she had a picture of herself with the guy hanging over her bed. The gala evening at the Capitol Centre, where Nancy and Ron sat on thrones while a black dancer did a soft shoe shuffle in front of them, and Frank Sinatra sang "Nancy With The Laughing Eyes" while the ascendant representatives of big business applauded, made me gag. There was so much jewellery clanking that I was reminded of John Lennon's comment about a song being "for the real people in the back row -- if you can hear it above the jewellery of those in the front". I took a job working for Congressman Jerry Solomon, whose knowledge of geography was unparalleled ("Where's Ed, where's Geoff, where's Libya?" he said during the 1981 Gulf of Sirte incident, asking for both the male legislative staff and a map as he pointed to Brazil). He's now Chair of the House Rules Committee, with a picture on his wall of Congressman Harold K Smith, a Southern Democrat infamous for blocking civil rights legislation, and an assistant named Barbara Morris who had married Congressman Norman Lent of Long Island after a long affair but been palmed off to work for Solomon because Lent couldn't bear to have his wife working for



him. Barbara Morris ran a reign of terror reminiscent of the Joan Crawford film *Mommy Dearest* ("What, wire hangers?"), but that's another story.

I moved to Britain full time in 1982, got married and later divorced, went to work for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament -- first as Parliamentary Liaison, then as (unpaid) Chair. In the latter capacity, I became co-chair of the Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf during 1990-1991, and in early 1991 was on a TV programme about it with then Labour Party deputy leader Roy Hattersley, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neil who was then editor of *The Sunday Times*, and Michael Howard, then Environment Secretary and now Home Secretary. During the programme break, Andrew Neil started bragging about his presidential cuff links. He was pretending that a Reagan interview printed in his paper was a real one, rather than just a typed response to a list of questions delivered in advance. I knew that numerous newspaper editors had been called in, given a 30 second photo opportunity, and shooed out again. Neil went on to say that Mrs Thatcher -- from his tone, another close personal friend -- would be at Reagan's 80th birthday party the following week. The rest of us nodded politely; I may have made some sarcastic remark.

Hattersley turned to me: "You used to work for Reagan once, didn't you, Marjorie?" No doubt he expected to embarrass both me and Neil -- the Labour Party was keen to distance itself from the peace movement, having sold out on disarmament, and was gung-ho to show itself as patriotically keen on the Gulf War in anticipation of a General Election the next year. I thought fast -- what should I say?

"Yes," I replied. "But I was under the age of consent".

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*I first worked with Marjorie at the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament twelve years ago, says Judith, and she laughed uproariously over the first few issues of FTT. I'm now working with her again at the Commission for Racial Equality, and she spent part of last year's Thanksgiving trip to her family in Orange County writing up the long-promised tale of her early days in politics.*

*I've known the writer of the next piece even longer -- all his life. He's always been my little brother, and I can't see that him being nearly a foot taller than I am should change that. In May 1995, he left the ten thousand woolly merino sheep he runs on the three-thousand-acre family farm at Kojonup in Western Australia to the tender care of his sheepdogs and a couple of his more-or-less human mates, and set off to check out the rest of the world.*

*As mentioned in passing last time, he arrived here over the weekend of the Scottish Worldcon, then set off to see Britain and Europe a few weeks later. A postcard of a Norwegian church, bearing an Irish stamp, told us that he had been through France; a scribbled note on the outside of a large cardboard box suggested, as the Parcelforce delivery chap commented, that he'd been having an interesting time. That too bore Irish stamps, and -- posted in November -- said he thought he'd reach us towards the end of the month.*

*He finally arrived a day or so before Christmas, having cycled from Limerick through Wales, the snowy Peak District, and along various Midland canals, taking in Stow-on-the-Wold, Stratford-upon-Avon, and Oxford. "I didn't see any other cycling tourists," he told us. Not surprising, given that daytime temperatures then were barely above freezing -- but he reckoned he'd enjoyed himself.*

*Next thing we knew, he was practically dying on us. Food poisoning or gastro-enteritis, said the doctor. Initial suspicion fell on my cooking, but it later transpired that, thinking himself selenium deficient, he'd been drenching himself with selenium supplement -- just as he does the sheep.*

*Over the years, I've suggested that he should write up the story of how he almost blew up a neighbour's shearing shed with a beer keg, or the time his fork-lift tried to kill him. While he was staying with us, we lashed him to the word processor to come up with the following account of his trip through the US last summer.*

*Meanwhile, Zena, who wrote about climbing volcanoes in FTT 18, recently gave birth to an 3.8kg Holly Elizabeth, whom my mother pronounces "a good little thing -- very quiet" and clearly very intelligent. The things one's baby sisters get up to! Now, Roslyn, about that hippo....*

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# THROUGH DARKEST AMERICA

## LIFE IN THE FEAR LANE

*Julian Hanna*

So where have I been? Landed in Los Angeles where no one, especially white, dares to venture downtown after dark for fear of being killed or mugged by one or more of LA's 250,000 gang members. Then across to the bright lights of Las Vegas -- \$9,000,000 of electricity wasted lighting up the casino area every night. There I bought a rather suspicious-looking 1972 Ford Mercury from an Irish-American. He saw me walking down one of Las Vegas's less glamorous streets in the middle of the day and stopped his car to say, "Hey, be careful, there are blacks in this neighbourhood. It's a dangerous place to be." This was typical of the paranoia of everyone I met from the start of the trip to the finish.

Next major town was Flagstaff. There an inebriated and penniless 35-year old Red Indian, Keith Goldtooth Jnr, who was trying to sell bows and arrows, warned me where not to go or leave the car. "The blacks around here are bad people, they can't be trusted. Leave your vehicle over next to the Indians in that street," he told me. Red Indians apparently have a higher percentage of their population in gaols than any other racial or cultural group. I spent about five hours yarning with Keith, and was amazed at just how much tribal wisdom he knew and was ready to impart.

Though the last ten years have seen their culture gain popularity and in some places a revival of old ways, Keith said that the true "old way" Indians have nearly all died of old age and alcohol still has most of the people by the throat, even those like him who make the arrows and are proud revivers of the old ways. The old folk were wise, and the medicine men had "strong powers". Respect, self-discipline and daily prayers of thanksgiving were all part of the culture. The people stored corn and dried meat, and wore clothes for warmth and moccasins for comfort. They were very war-like, but how else can a Brave show that he is brave?

In Flagstaff I picked up a hitchhiker, Vladimir, my "Czech mate", and we spent two weeks touring the Grand Canyon area. It struck me as similar to a lot of inland Australia -- but even out in the middle of a desert, five hundred miles or so from Los Angeles, air pollution blurred the view. At least we could still make out the far wall, and it still looked a long long way down -- and even more so after we had been hiking towards the bottom for two hours and realised that we were just a quarter of the way. We spent the night on Point Plateau, quite illegally, on a shelf of rock with a sheer drop of 1500 feet to the mighty (and mighty bloody freezing) Colorado River snaking and raging below. The top of the canyon 3000 feet above all was but invisible. The temperature can be extremely hot near the bottom of the canyon and very cool near the top -- but we had picked a good day and suffered neither extreme. By 11.30 the next morning, we were back on the top with calf muscles aching.

We headed towards Tuba City, a "dry" Red Indian town of about 5000 people where alcohol cannot be purchased legally. Seeking directions, I pulled off the road into a small park where a few Indians were gathered. No sooner had our vehicle stopped than up roared a big phallic 4WD with lots of flashy blue lights and space age sirens and two redneck law officers brandishing "big irons". "Put your hands where we can see them and step out of the car," we were told -- a phrase I became quite familiar with. They did an ID check on both of us and on the car, then a thorough vehicle search and we were allowed to proceed on our way. No explanations were given. "Wrong place at the wrong time?" I asked. "Yes," one officer replied as they drove away. I suppose they thought that the only reason the "white man" speaks to "red man" is to sell drugs, alcohol or guns.

After Tuba City we visited a long line of national parks and monuments -- beautifully eroded landscapes, ancient Anasazi ruins and artefacts. There was also Lake Powell, a vast freshwater lake in the middle of the desert, reputedly with more shoreline than the east coast of the US and apparently serving no other

purpose than recreation. Flanked on the east by a moonscape-like range of eroded high hills, it was completely devoid of vegetation right down to the water's edge. But there were thousands of pleasure craft and, shockingly, lots of signs saying that the water was unsafe to swim in due to sewage.

After about an hour's twisting drive through the lunar hills trying to reach the shoreline, our way was cut off by water. Apparently the lake was at a record high level and our access road was flooded. We knew we must be close to a usable section of lake because we could hear the roar of jet-skis. To the south, I saw a couple of other vehicles in the same predicament so I politely asked a lady how we could get to the beach. I was a bit taken aback by her reply: "*Fuck off!*" she screamed. "*Just fuck off! Get out of my space!*" Her eyes were wild, she was frothing at the mouth.... Hoping that she wouldn't have time to find a gun, I thanked her for her kindness and made a rapid withdrawal.

In the Monument Valley area, we had lots of contact with the local Indians, culminating in attending a four-day sundance ceremony. About ninety shirtless, shoeless and hatless braves stood out on the hot red sand, and danced from 6.30 in the morning until 6.30 at night. The voices of the singers were loud and deep, the drum beat was strong and constant and relentless, and the air was full of tiny vicious black gnats whose bites initially left a large welt, then itched like hell for more than a week. An extra discomfort for the dancers in the extremely hot weather was that they were not supposed to drink any liquid or eat any food during daylight hours.

A final discomfort for some of the dancers was that, at times during the next four days, they would go into a sort of controlled frenzy. About a quarter of the dancers present had their skin pierced just above their pectorals or on their shoulder blades. Wooden sticks were passed through the skin, then ropes tied to these sticks and passed over a bar. Dancers would either yank on this rope or tie it to the pommel of a fleeing horse, so the rope and stick were pulled away from the body. In days gone by, the braves would be ceremonially raised from the ground by these ropes and would hang and spin for hours. But due to today's braves being less brave, and most of them between somewhat and shockingly obese, I only saw one brave actually leave terra firma. Nonetheless, Flesh was given, and Mother Earth and Father Sky were very pleased. These wounds were then dressed with a special healing crystal compound, which gave the added bonus of leaving a big prominent scar -- so everybody can tell that you are an initiate. Some of the men, both old and quite young (in their thirties) had many, many of these "cigarette burn" marks.

One brave was very brave! Or maybe high, no doubt through taking some ancient concoction. He seemed to border on being possessed. Fit and dark skinned, he didn't look like an ethnic Red Indian. He danced frenziedly hour after hour with his head in a sack until eventually he fell over in exhaustion. I was sure he would not make it through the four days -- but every morning, there he was, ready to carry on. Braves would attach ropes to the wooden stakes pierced onto his shoulder blades and he would pull a large steer head through the soft sand for an hour or two. At the "giving of flesh" ceremony, he actually towed eleven large steer heads through the sand, only stopping now and then to fall over from fatigue or to spit parts of a melon-type fruit into the faces of the other braves and initiates. If all the braves did one thing, then this bloke would do something totally different. He was a sort of mischief maker, a court jester diverting and distracting people from the main ceremony. He also helped the other braves be braver, knowing that this possessed person was enduring ten times the hardship and pain they were going through.

Three times a day, the sundancers entered the sweat lodge. This was layers of canvas and carpet strung over an igloo-like frame, about 3 metres across and 1.3 metres high, or just big enough for ten people to sit shoulder-to-shoulder around the edge. In its centre, 22 red hot rocks of 10 kg were placed -- 7 at first, then another 7, then 8. Water was splashed onto each batch of rocks as they were placed and prayers were offered. Sundance supporters like me were allowed to enter a sweat lodge in the evenings, after all the dancers had finished. Ten people in a very restricted space and very little air, then the rocks were added -- intense heat. Then the flap was closed -- pitch darkness. Prayers were said, and the water was added. Maybe this is where I die, I thought as the steam hit me. There was no escape, movement was impossible. Just concentrate on breathing, I told myself; if I panic I'm a definite goner. Talk about baptism with fire! I was hot enough to melt, and then some. I heard more vaporising water, and knew that another cloud of steam would hit us. Vladimir said, "If it gets unbearably hot, duck your head down -- it's cooler and there is some air to breathe near the floor."

It was too crowded to move more than a fraction, but I managed to drop my head a few inches and it certainly made a huge difference -- I knew that I would live. Then it began to get cooler again. The sweat leader called for more rocks. Three people asked him for permission to leave, and the igloo became less crowded. Vladimir and I were determined to stay and get the full experience. The second steaming was marginally worse than the first. After the third lot of rocks had been added (and another person left), I was hit by the last and traditionally hottest cloud of steam. I felt sure my skin would lift off the bone. I prayed like I've never prayed before. But it was only faith that the sweat leader must have lived through such heat before that gave me confidence to survive.

The Sundance took place about eighty miles from Monument Valley, often featured in Western movies, with its vast stone monoliths ---- the remnants of an eroded plateau separated from each other by flat expanses of treeless semi-desert, not unlike the saltbush plains of southern Australia. Family groups of Navaho Indian dwellings dotted the plains. Each group had a small flock of about 100 sheep, 50 goats and 50 cattle, more for personal consumption than sale. Sales of woollen blankets and jewellery are their main source of income. At one of these camps, I helped with the slaughter of a couple of sheep. I had been told that prayers are offered, but it was quite unceremonious. The friendly, ill-fated animals were caught from the mob with a lariat, trussed up, then wheelbarrowed to the killing pole. The throat was severed with a blunt knife and the wind pipe left intact. Nothing of the animal was wasted. It slowly bled to death in the arms of two women who were laughing and chatting in the native Navaho tongue. The blood was collected in a metal bowl. Then the animal was skinned and disembowelled. Every organ of the body (except the gall bladder) was cleaned and stored to be eaten. The Navaho, unlike the Mexicans, don't seem to use any herbs or spices whatsoever -- they just boil meat up in a big pot. I was offered some "sausage" at one table meal, and it turned out to be just a bit of stomach lining wrapped around some kidney fat.

Vladimir left the day after the Sundance, to start hitching back to Flagstaff. He intended to head from there, via Los Angeles, to New Zealand.

After my Red Indian experience, I drove through some beautiful parts of the Rockies to Gunnison in central Colorado, arriving there in time for the "Cattlemen's Days". This was a four-day event equivalent to our local agricultural show, except for its emphasis on it being primarily a Rodeo. Gunnison, being a small town with no blacks in it, was a very safe area, I was told (although someone had died in a gun fight in the neighbouring town the week before). Everyone was about as relaxed as Americans can be. But I still had trouble finding friendly, trusting people who were good value to talk to -- people who knew how to ask interesting questions or appeared interested in what a stranger might have to say.

All the ranchers were real cowboys who normally spent at least a couple of days a week out on the range, just checking and moving the cattle. Chewing tobacco and/or smoking and drinking heavily are still accepted as perfectly normal behaviour. Yes Sir, Boy, Howdy....they were Real Men up at Gunnison! Big hats, big saddles, lots of dogs, chaps, spurs, lariats, big rifles...all the fruit! It was good to see the tradition living and working still, but apparently there's not much money left in ranching and I wonder how much longer this lifestyle will continue.

At Gunnison I stayed with Brett Redden, a mate of my Kojonup neighbour Mick McFall. Brett was a dinkum high country cowboy, with a few hundred head of cattle up in Gunnison National Park around the 10,000 feet altitude mark and a 1500 acre ranch at about 7000 feet. After a few days tailing cattle, I hung up my spurs and headed for white water rafting country. My best mate Yern would have been proud of me -- I jumped out of the raft among all the exciting rapids, exclaiming "Hey everybody, I think this is where I die!" But I didn't.

So it was off to Denver to try my luck there. The centre of Denver was just like LA -- destitute blacks and unlocked dilapidated cars everywhere. I went to a youth hostel to ask if anyone would like a lift and found the place shocking. It was on the worst commercial street in the city. The entrance was through a laundromat, where a man on guard sat in a tiny cubicle behind inch thick steel bars. Before he would give me a key to unlock a series of doors so that I could speak to people in the hostel, I had to hand over my wallet and credit card for collateral. I left Denver without an accomplice, and less a few dollars that I had given to black beggars, but relieved to be heading out into the country again.



I crossed the mid-western wheat fields without any great alarm or excitement -- Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana -- stopping at a research farm here and a swimming pool there. America was much hotter than I had expected, and overall it seemed a far more unpleasantly hot and humid summer than the parts of Australia where most Aussies live.

It was in Ohio, which is often portrayed as a friendly backwater, that I had my second run-in with the fuzz. About 9.30 one morning, I was in a park under a tree doing a few exercises on a piece of groundsheet, and had just got back into the car to leave when two cop cars with four cops came screaming up. "Put your hands where we can see them and step out of the car!" Here we go again, I thought.... "Got any ID with you?" I reached into the glove box to get out my passport, and suddenly two guns were trained on me: "Hey man, don't go reaching in there, man!" These people were paranoid, all right. After fifty minutes of intensive questioning and a vehicle check and search, they told me: "We don't believe your story." I laughed and told them I wasn't going to make up another one just to please them. As the second car drove away, the driver leaned out of his window and gave me this pearl of wisdom: "Take my advice. Here in Cincinnati, Ohio, Do Not Exercise In Public Or You Are Liable To Be Arrested!"

Then it was on through Pennsylvania and down through the Appalachians into West Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee, with lyrics from John Denver albums and songs like "Chattanooga Choo Choo" suddenly meaning more than they used to. On a tourist-packed pathway between the car park and an observation point on the highest mountain in Eastern USA, somewhere in the Smokies, I asked a middle-aged lady with two school-age children whether she was coming from or going to the top. She ignored me, and I politely asked again. "We don't speak to strangers," I was informed sharply. That just about sums it up, I thought sadly.

About two hours later, I reached a small tourist town on the edge of the mountain range. It had been fine and sunny, but as soon as I arrived rain fell by the bucketful, the wind whipped up a treat, and thunder and lightning put on a real show. Hmm, I thought as I sheltered in a phone box that was hardly any shelter at all, It's looking pretty frisky, maybe this is where I die. No sooner had the thought crossed my mind than I heard the sound of rustling tin. Across the road the roof of a huge shopping complex reared up at 90° to the architect's design. Moments later, with one hell of a crack and a spark display to rival nature, the roof tipped over completely, onto an assortment of high tension power lines. All this was less than a hundred metres from where I was standing, but I could hardly make it out through the driving rain.

A man near me got in his car and drove off. Idiot, I thought, what's the point of trying to drive in this weather? Half an hour later, the weather hadn't improved, and I realised that my heavy "yank tank" of a car would not be easily blown off the road, if I could see where the road was. So I set off....and bugger me if I hadn't gone more than a mile before there was not even a breath of wind in the air nor a drop of rain on the road, and the sky was as clear as the Pope's conscience.

Next day, somewhere between Tennessee and Alabama, I think I met some of the characters on which the film *Deliverance* was based. It was a strange bit of country. No matter how many back ways I tried to take, I just couldn't get off bitumen roads, and no matter how far I drove from a town, there were always houses, just like in the suburbs: white-painted wooden two-storey buildings set about twenty metres back from the kerb, surrounded by a three-acre lawn, with not a flower in sight, but perhaps a couple of evergreen bushes in front of the porch and maybe a tree out the back or the side. It was very strange: all these houses, no visible industry, stock or crops, but lots of trees and forest with seemingly no access.

I stopped outside a very old looking shop-like place. It didn't seem to be connected to the national electricity grid, because it was not air-conditioned but as hot as hell inside. The torn and flapping flywire screen on the door seemed to be attracting "varmints" rather than deterring them. Inside the darkened room were two twisted men in their sixties in "grandpa" overalls, drinking from clay cups that smelt of whisky. "What do people work at in these parts?" I asked. They didn't seem to have understood a word I had uttered. Each time I repeated myself, more slowly and clearly than before, they became more agitated and suspicious. Eventually one of them mumbled, in between twitches, something that sounded like: "Cut wood and make moonshine, and you had better be careful round this area or you'll get shot." I asked for a cold can of Coke and, after being handed a hot can of beer, I headed back out into the sweltering humidity and continued on my way.

On the way through Alabama, I had another three or four run-ins with the cops, with up to four cop cars and eight cops disturbing my sleep at 2.00am to tell me that I was not allowed to sleep next to this piece of road or that piece of park. This happened in "black" neighbourhoods as well as "white" ones.

Near the Mississippi-Alabama border, I heard the sound of hundreds of cockerels, so I pulled under a tree to investigate. A big, tough-looking old woman came out from one of the buildings and proceeded to show me around her fighting cocks. There was a legal cock-fighting ring about a hundred miles away which had fights every second week or so, and her aim in life was to breed up a good team of ten cocks that could carry off the \$50,000 prize-money. To win the money, every cock has to win its fight -- a fight to death, sped up by removing the natural spurs on the cockerel's legs and strapping on sharpened knives instead. I asked if she had much trouble with foxes, and she was off -- telling me about all the different "vermits" that she had to blast into oblivion daily. "Well, coons are the worst," she said with a note of excitement in her voice. "One coon can make a real mess of me chickens in no time at all, but marr dorgs will soon enough let me know when one's creepin' around. And there's skunks -- them's vermits....and there's coyotes -- them's darn vermits, and there's them eaglehawk and raven vermits....just as soon grab a chicken as look at you.... Come to think of it, most things that walk or fly round here, I'll normally have a blast at, cause they're either coming from or going to some sort of trouble or other. Like them armadillos, well, they're not really a vermit, them's more sort of a critter really...funny things, don't eat no crops or animals, just eats worms and leaves and roots I reckon....but as long as I keep on blasting them -- well, I seem to keep their numbers down." Glad that I hadn't been mistaken for a vermit or a critter when I first approached her, I set off once again, swerving hard to the right in her driveway as I left, to try and skittle a frog and thus gain her approval.

At Biloxi, a casino town near the Mississippi--Louisiana border, everyone was on tenterhooks because a hurricane was within a hundred miles of the coast and could easily come their way. Talk about shit-scared - - everything in the town was closed down and boarded up, including all the casinos, and the day was declared a "national disaster" holiday. All emergency services were on stand by. Looks like the hurricane is likely to slip by to the north, I reckoned. This thought had also occurred to tens of thousands of northern residents who were shown on TV making a mass exodus to presumably safer inland areas. Bugger it, I thought, you can only die once, and this could be as good a way as any. So I headed north towards the approaching hurricane. It was a pleasant drive, I had the whole road to myself but, sadly, Mother Nature had fizzled out by the time she hit the coast, despite all the hype she had been given for "potentially the worst hurricane in 25 years."

New Orleans was jazz bands, casinos, flashy shopping malls and black crime areas. I headed off for San Antonio in Texas, and what a great buzzy little city it was, complete with English-style pubs and a healthy international tourist industry -- which does wonders in making a US town seem friendly. An international Folk Festival was in full swing when I arrived, with at least fifty different peoples from around the world represented. I met some Poms and had a great time.

San Antonio's real claim to fame is that it was the scene of arguably the most heroic and patriotic battle in US history: the siege of the Alamo -- a very appealing story to an Anzac worshipper like me. Outnumbered and out-gunned by at least fifteen to one, they fought bravely until the last man was dead, and the surviving women were allowed to go free to tell the rest of Texas what happens when Texans defied the Spanish. The Spanish incurred huge losses in the storming of the Alamo, and their army remained severely weakened by the victory for many months to follow. I left San Antonio feeling that at least there was one thing in American history that they can justifiably be proud of.

Then it was on to Laredo and the Mexican border, where more people speak Spanish than English. Once again, there was an air of crime, poverty, illiteracy -- and fascist running-dog CIA border guards and arrogant, pompous, unhelpful, sadistic bureaucrats. I spent three days making half-a- dozen unsuccessful attempts to cross into Mexico, each one involving paying toll money to cross the bridge and then, after rejection by the Mexican border guards, paying another toll to get back across, then waiting for an hour to have my vehicle systematically and thoroughly searched by the US border guards before re-entry to the US.

Finally, I took advice to head for Brownsville on the East Coast where all the interstate trucks cross. A few

dollars here and there got me someone who could write in Spanish and talk to me in English. It took another six hours going backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards between four different buildings -- luckily there were no long queues -- then with the thumping of rubber stamps still ringing in my ears, I was legally in Mexico, in the heaviest rain I have ever seen, on a thin strip of bitumen road full of hidden potholes.

The road was like a lake. One of the US border guards had warned me: "Don't even think of going down the east coast of Mexico until at least a week after this mega-hurricane clears off. Better still, don't go into Mexico at all! It's a bad place." With the rain getting heavier, getting as much as possible of the 280-mile coastal plain traversed before the flood came into full effect seemed the best plan. I followed a truck, hoping that it knew where it was going. There were still vehicles coming towards me, which had to be a good sign. The other traffic was mostly old dilapidated trucks and cars all, thank God, being driven at sensible speeds.

I had opted to maximise my Mexican experience by being as ill prepared as possible: no Spanish/ English phrase book nor tourist guide, minimal cash, car spares and tools. As for insurance -- what was that? This could be a great place to die. Anyway, this was a business trip -- take the car down the east coast of Mexico, into English-speaking Belize to sell it for twice what you'd get in the US. It seemed easy enough in theory, so why wasn't anyone else doing it? Who cared? I was on my way! This was more like it, I thought, just what the doctor ordered, a bit of gravel to rub in the wound where I'd had a melanoma removed just before I left Australia.

About 11.30 at night, hardly able to see a thing through the rain and water, I was still looking for somewhere to stop for an hour or two, knowing full well that if I left the hard surface of the bitumen I'd have as much chance of getting back on the road as The Beatles. Eventually I found a suitable place and what a surprise I got -- a bloody car had been following me. With no windscreen wipers and no lights, it trundled off into darkness and certain oblivion. Mexicans mightn't be speed freaks, but they were certainly maniacs!

Not long after that, I reached my first fuel station, a foretaste of the norm to come. A big brand new modern western-style BP-like complex, almost completed. In one dimly lit corner were two dodgy-looking petrol pumps, staffed by a couple of people. As soon as I'd stopped, a bucket of very detergent water was thrown over my windscreen and a youth was rubbing vigorously at my already perfectly clean and specially treated windscreen, and asking for money. I went towards where a shop should have been but there was just a gutted glass structure. I asked to use a toilet and was motioned in the general direction of a brand new flash toileting set up, complete except for lighting, toilet paper -- and plumbing, which hadn't yet been connected. The smell made it obvious that these minor details hadn't deterred a lot of people.

As I drove off, I watched the rain smear and streak where previously it had balled and run as it should. Next morning I noted that the window was now covered by fine scratches, obviously inflicted by the lad's pot-scouring technique. You bastard! I thought. I was to re-think this many times in the next few days because the same thing kept happening -- I was never sure when or from where the next bucket of soapy water would be flung at my defenceless windscreen, followed by an attack with some sort of pot scouring device.

It rained steadily and hard until morning. Looking around in the daylight, I realised that I'd now reached higher ground, and all that I'd have to worry about were land slips. The country had become quite tropical-looking, used to high rainfall, unlike the desert country that I'd just waded through.

I was hassled by the authorities at least fifteen times during my few days in Mexico. Every twenty miles or so up by the US border there was a passport check, with vehicle search and generally an attempt to extract a bribe. Once I reached southeast Mexico, I started getting stopped and checked by men in jungle greens, toting semi-automatic weapons. Once, a young bloke, from a truck with two dozen similar-looking lads in the back, thoroughly scrutinised all my papers and the vehicle. Then he looked across at his mates and asked me for "Moonay!" By this stage of the game I'd had enough. "I don't understand," I said. "Moonay, Moonay!" he kept repeating. As he tore at his hair, he pulled some US money out from his pocket and stuck it in front of my face. I waved his hand aside, and said, "No thanks, I already have

some." "Moonay! Moonay!" he repeated with a nervous look over his shoulder to his mates, who were presumably telling him to hurry up and get the money. "No. Bugger you," I said, "I haven't got enough as it is." In the end I gave him one US dollar note and he retired to the truck with a sort of frustrated but relieved look.

Southeast Mexico was crawling with soldiers guarding everything in sight, including the massive Mayan ruins such as Palenque. Bit of an overkill, I thought. "Anyone would think there was a war on," I remarked as I passed yet another truck full of soldiers. It wasn't until I mentioned all the troops and road blocks to a bloke in Belize that I found out that was exactly what was going on -- the Mexican government CIA running dog fascist pigs (as Joseph would doubtless say) against the heroic oppressed Chiapas people's freedom-loving liberatory forces.

The highway was a major thick black line on the map -- almost as wide as it was in reality. But at least it was bitumen -- well, half of it was. The other half was impressively large potholes, interspersed with traffic calming devices. As this "major highway" approached a village, all manner of ingenious devices were employed to slow down through traffic. There were speed gutters -- four or five hollows across the road at about a one metre spacing. There were speed bumps -- four or five raised concrete ridges across the road at one metre spacing. Both were quite effective. But the real mother of all traffic calmers was a mighty wheel-wrenching, rim-rooting, sump-seizing, muffler-mangling, diff-denting Horror Hump -- a mass of steel reinforced cement, cunningly concealed by being the same colour as the bitumen, and rising abruptly like a small-scale replica of the Andes. These little beauties were plentiful, every fifty or one hundred metres where the highway snaked through the centre of cities. Successfully negotiating a Horror Hump required all vehicles to come to a complete stop, then to ease each set of wheels over. Even then car and concrete would often come into traumatic contact.

Eventually, I reached the huge queue waiting at the Mexican border to cross into Belize. A mere three hours later I was snaking along a winding pot-holed road inside the country. Still ringing in my ears were the words of yet another arsehole border-bureaucrat: "*Do not attempt to sell your car or you will go to gaol!*" Well, maybe this is where I die, I thought. Then again, what he doesn't know won't hurt him. Arr, she'll be right, I convinced myself, as I stuck a For Sale sign on the back and side windows and headed towards the "car sales" side of town.

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- ▶ A quarter of all British male employees work more than 48 hours a week, a fifth of all manual workers work more than 50 hours a week, and one in eight of British managers works more than 60 hours a week.
  - ▶ Ten thousand people in Japan are thought to die each year from overwork.
  - ▶ In the USA, the average employed person now works the equivalent of one month more a year than in the 1970s.
  - ▶ Time off work with stress-related illnesses has increased by 500% since the 1950s.
  - ▶ Seven out of ten British workers want to work a 40 hour week; only three out of ten do so.
  - ▶ The average duration of a "lunch hour" is now 30 minutes.
  - ▶ Full-time working women have 32 hours a week free time, 14 hours less than men in full-time employment.

All this is necessary, we are repeatedly told by Western politicians, in the name of "enterprise", "labour market flexibility", and "international competitiveness" -- the same Western politicians who castigate us for abandoning "traditional family values" and failing to bring up our children properly.

For Western politicians to make any connection between the two would presumably entail too unavoidable an acknowledgement of the deficiencies of their free-market ideology.



# CHENG HO IN AUSTRALIA

## SOME HISTORICAL RECORDS INVESTIGATED BY

*Yvonne Rousseau*

Joseph's musings about Admiral Cheng Ho in "Trajectories of History" reminded me of Charles Patrick Fitzgerald's 1953 essay "A Chinese Discovery Of Australia?" in *Australia Writes: An Anthology*, which gives rather a different account of Cheng Ho. Fitzgerald states:

"Yet it remains possible and there is some evidence to show that to the Asiatics, as to the Dutch and Spanish, Australia was both known and visited but held in slight esteem. The northern coast did not appear attractive to such Malays as touched upon it, and these peoples lacked the vigorous incentives and the advanced organization which impelled and enabled the peoples of Western Europe to sail the distant seas. But beyond and northwards of the Malayan islands lies China. No one who knows the Chinese will doubt their enterprise, their patient pursuit of small gains through great hardships, their ability to survive in bleak surroundings and to adapt themselves to all extremes of climate. With them, too, the strong incentive of a teeming population pressing upon the food supply provided a ready motive for overseas colonization. Yet they missed the Australian opportunity. It may be that they missed it more narrowly than we have been taught to think, and that there were those glancing contacts such as preceded the definitive European settlement; that but for the turn of events in China itself permanent shore establishments would have followed. Such a hypothesis rests on a rather frail foundation, yet the single concrete piece of evidence is so suggestive as to merit detailed enquiry.

"Strangely enough this evidence has long been known; it is not the fruit of recent research or an organized archaeological expedition, but a chance discovery made nearly eighty years ago. All that can be said is that for various reasons the full significance of the discovery was only tardily recognized, and has perhaps not yet been correlated to what is known of Chinese maritime activity in past ages. Here I shall attempt to bring an old story up to date, and to place a small fact in a wide setting.

"The only surviving original, or nearly contemporary account of the discovery is contained in the well known work *The Aborigines Of Australia* by T. Worsnop. The relevant extract follows:

'As evidence of the visit of foreign people to the north-west part of the continent, I have in my possession an image or idol found in an excavation near Palmerston, in the Northern Territory, of which the following remarks are descriptive and also of the circumstances connected with its discovery.

'Plate No. 2 is the exact size of the image which was found in the year 1879 by Mr Strawbridge, then an officer in the Public Works Department of the colony, who was superintending a party of Chinese labourers employed by the Government in clearing a road through the dense scrub or jungle which then existed between the inhabited portion of the town of Palmerston at Port Darwin and the sea coast. About sixty chains west from the east end of Mitchell Street, and fully seventy feet above the sea level, they came across a large banyan-tree, and at about four feet below the surface this image was found firmly wedged in between the roots. It appeared to have been buried for a long period of time, being quite black with the impregnation of the soil. It represents a man clothed in long flowing robes, bound round the loins with a girdle, and with a long beard reaching down to the waist, seated astride of an elegantly-formed gazelle or

antelope. The animal has lost both horns and part of the muzzle, but shows the cloven hoof. There appears to be a saddle with a raised pommel on the animal, but no stirrups. The left hand of the rider evidently grasped one of the horns, that on the left side, but was lost when the horn was broken off. The right hand, which is beautifully formed, holds what looks like a large mango or, as it might be, a coconut. The lobes of his ears are very long and pendant, the mouth large, with full lips; the nose long and finely formed; and the eyes of the Caucasian type, full and prominent. He wears a peculiar head dress, with an oval ornament on the front, fitting close to the head, but so covering the hair that it is not shown except at the back, where it appears below the head covering, rolled up and tied in a knot. The feet appear to be covered with square-toed shoes, the sole being shown as distinct from the upper leather. The material out of which this is carved is a kind of jade, now very hard and nicely polished. Models of this image have been sent to the Brahminical colleges in Bombay, with a view to ascertain its nature and meaning, but without result.'

"It will be noticed that Worsnop, who actually owned the object found near Darwin, did not, in 1897, realize that it was a Chinese artifact, and had not identified its land of origin. This was already nearly twenty years after the discovery; consequently by the end of the century, the Brahminical College at Bombay having made no helpful contribution, the fact that the image was Chinese remained unrecognized. Readers of Worsnop may have been intrigued by the mysterious find, but had no reason to suspect its origin. Perhaps for this reason it was not purchased when offered to the Museum, Adelaide, by Worsnop's heirs, and remained in private hands. A cast of the image was, however, obtained by the Museum, and with this and photographs Mr. N. B. Tindale for the first time identified the object as Chinese, and published his findings in a paper read to the Royal Society of South Australia on 8 March 1928. The relevant extract from the *Transactions* reads:

'The absence of true native words for all foreign articles of trade is, perhaps, evidence that the Macassar men were the first regular invaders of the isolation of the aborigines.

'That they were not the first casual visitors to the coast of Arnhem Land is probably shown by the polished black jade figure of Shou Lao, Taoist immortal, unearthed from a depth of four feet (in soil) beneath the roots of a banyan tree at Port Darwin, in 1879. He is represented as seated upon an axis deer (*Cervis axis*) and bearing a peach, symbol of longevity, in his right hand. The object was figured by Worsnop, who obtained no details as to its name or country of origin.

'Apparently it belongs to the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906), and may have been brought to Australia during that period. During that dynasty the Chinese Empire (more especially during the reign of T'ai Tsung and of his successor) reached its zenith in power and extended from the Aral to the Yellow Sea, and from Siberia to Farther India. Chinese civilization at this time found its way into Indo-China as well as Sumatra, Java, and other islands of the Malay Archipelago. Fleets of Chinese junks sailed as far as the Persian Gulf, and, in company with the Arabs, maintained a virtual monopoly of the world's commerce. Coins and other relics of the dynasty have been found buried in Alaska.'

"Mr. Tindale's article established the character of the image, identified it, correctly, as representing Shou Lao, one of the Triad of Gods of Long Life in the Taoist pantheon. The type is in fact a well-known style for representing this very popular and purely Chinese deity. Mr. Tindale, when he consulted European experts, was only able to show them the cast and photograph, not the original, which was in private hands. Perhaps for the lack of opportunity of studying the original itself, the opinions he obtained on its date would appear to the present writer to be too early, and as will be shown presently, it is more probable that the date of the object's introduction to Australia should be very much later than the T'ang period."

Fitzgerald occupies the next two pages explaining how the object came to be (at the time he wrote) on

permanent display in the Chinese Collection of the Technological Museum at Sydney -- arguing against the possibility that the object had been lost or even 'planted' by the Chinese labourers who uncovered it in 1879 -- and discussing the cult of Shou Lao and its incidence. Fitzgerald then continues:

"In speculating upon the why and how of the image's arrival in Australia and its location at the head of Doctor's Gully, Darwin, we are in the realm of conjecture. But when we turn to consider at what periods in Chinese history such a voyage was possible, or probable, we have very positive evidence and clear historical records to rely upon. The Chinese dynastic histories, official compilations, which are more in the nature of historical encyclopaedias than narrative histories, contain a section which gives the summary of what the Chinese of the period in question knew of various foreign countries with which they had either come into direct contact or learned about by hearsay. From these records it is possible to know whether at any given time Chinese exploration had reached such and such a country of the South Seas, or of western Asia. One thing emerges quite clearly from a study of the dynastic histories. There is no entry which can be in any way thought to refer to Australia, but there are a number, as time goes on an increasing number, of references to the islands of Indonesia, and among those known to the Chinese from an early date were Java, Sumatra and Borneo. These countries were already named by the Chinese, and apparently visited, as early as the fifth and seventh centuries AD. But it is not until much later, the Ming period, 1368 to 1644, that there occurs a direct mention of the island of Timor, the nearest of all the Indonesian islands to Australia, and that which lies closest to Darwin.

"The connection in which Timor is referred to in Chinese records is also particularly significant, since it is mentioned in accounts of the great maritime expeditions which were sent forth at imperial command in the early years of the fifteenth century, during the reign of the great Emperor Yung Lo, the builder of Peking. The Chinese had from an early time sent trading vessels to the Indonesian islands; it is probable that they also coasted round Malaya, and may have crossed to Ceylon. These countries were all well known to the Chinese from the T'ang period (AD 618-906) onward. But earlier records make no mention of the more southerly islands of Indonesia, or of New Guinea, nor does it appear that Chinese maritime enterprise was, prior to the reign of Yung Lo, ever anything more than private venturing. The Emperor and his successor, however, initiated a series of very large-scale overseas expeditions which pushed Chinese knowledge of the world to regions hitherto unknown. The Chinese crossed the Indian Ocean, discovered Africa, entered the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, explored the Indonesian Islands.

"During the relatively short period during which the Imperial enthusiasm for overseas exploration was sustained, from 1405 to 1433, seven great oceanic expeditions were carried out by very large numbers of junks built for the purpose, and certainly the largest Chinese vessels ever constructed before modern times. The expeditions carried strong forces of troops, some 27,000 men was the usual figure, and there were sixty and more ships engaged. Some of these are described as 440 feet long -- and, a curious feature if our figures are not corrupt -- 180 feet wide. Whatever the real measurements the size was great, since there seems no doubt about either the number of the men or the number of the ships, which are repeatedly confirmed in the texts. Accounts of these voyages exist both in inscriptions, the official annals of the dynasty, and also in a book written by an officer named Fei Hsin who sailed on more than one expedition. From these records it is plain that while the main fleet was always directed to some particular destination, Java, the west coast of India, Ceylon, Ormuz in the Persian Gulf or Aden, individual ships were detached on special missions to places of less importance. We do not have any detailed and complete record of these lesser and subsidiary voyages, except in instances such as a voyage to Bengal in which Fei Hsin took part.

"Such records were almost certainly kept at the time and would have been preserved with the usual Chinese care for historical source material had it not been for political complications which embroiled the whole policy of the great oceanic expeditions. As these developments directly affected the future of Chinese maritime enterprise they must be briefly recounted. It has already been pointed out that the Ming sea-going expeditions differed from all previous -- or subsequent -- Chinese sea-going enterprise in that they were directly fitted

out by the Emperor, had no trading purpose but were undertaken for political reasons, to which one might almost add as a secondary motive something not far removed from scientific enquiry. The Ming had only recently, in the late fourteenth century, driven the alien Mongol dynasty from China. They were concerned to prove to the neighbouring parts of Asia that they, the Ming, were now the legitimate and powerful successors of the fallen Mongol regime, which had in its heyday dominated a vast area of Asia far beyond the Chinese border. One major purpose for the Ming expeditions was to impress the smaller kingdoms of south-east Asia with China's power, and to exact from these countries token tribute.

"The second motive was to gratify the Court's appetite for novelties, rarities, and luxuries produced in far-off countries. Under the guise of tribute such things were collected by the fleets and presented to the Emperor. The supreme achievement in this field was the expedition to east Africa which succeeded in bringing back to China a live giraffe, an animal never before seen in China, and which the Court officials identified as the mythical Chi Lin, the gentle creature which only appears on earth during the reign of a perfect sage.

"The quest for strange animals was thus an important part of the task assigned to the commander of the expeditions. Here, perhaps, appears the most striking contrast between the motives and methods of the great Chinese navigators and their successors in these waters, when only sixty years later Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape (1497). The Portuguese navigators were aristocratic soldiers ready to engage in trade or piracy as occasion offered, ruthless and fanatical in their effort to convert the heathen. Religion was with them the second motive, perhaps with some held equal place with the hope of gain. The Chinese expeditions sent out by the Emperor Yung Lo and his successor were commanded by a certain Ch'eng Ho, who was neither an aristocrat nor a soldier, nor even a civil official, but a Palace eunuch. Under cover of a diplomatic mission to enter into relations and exact tribute from the Asiatic and African nations of the Indian Ocean his main duty was to collect curiosities for the Court. He had no interest in and no instructions concerning the religions of the nations he visited, nor did his fleets engage in commerce. It would be difficult to find motives more strangely contrasting for activities so similar.

"Yet Ch'eng Ho, by what must be chance and no part of the Emperor's expectation, proved to be one of those rare examples, like the Byzantine Narses, of a eunuch who developed, beyond the Palace walls, the bold and resolute qualities of leadership. He reacted swiftly and with complete success to a treacherous plot by the King of Ceylon, dethroned the culprit and brought him back captive to China. He intervened with effective authority in the civil wars of Sumatra and restored peace. All this was accomplished with small forces, not 30,000 strong, operating at an immense distance from China, and without any permanent base in these far-off regions. He seems to have been personally responsible for pushing the work of exploration across the Indian Ocean to Africa. Had the Emperor been seeking to found a colonial empire in the Indian Ocean, it is certain that Ch'eng Ho could have established strong and lasting bases in these lands. How the Portuguese might then have fared when they entered these seas cannot be surmised, but it is clear that overseas Chinese expansion into the Islands and south-east Asia would have radically altered the situation in that region and established, six hundred years ago, those large Chinese colonies which modern trade and industry have attracted only in the past century.

"Ch'eng Ho was a eunuch; the spectacle of a Palace eunuch successfully commanding fleets and armies, winning great renown, and great influence, was very unwelcome to the regular civil service. They had at all times condemned the power and influence of the 'rats and foxes' of the Inner Palace. It was an old war, waged in every dynasty. As soon as the Emperor Yung Lo was dead, the higher officials combined to persuade his successor to discontinue what they described as expensive and wasteful expeditions which served no real purpose. They were not at first wholly successful; either the influence of the eunuchs, or the appetite of the Court ladies for rarities persuaded the Emperor to send another expedition, but that was the last (AD 1430-33). Ch'eng Ho was old, and when he died there was perhaps no one left who had the knowledge, the courage and the influence to induce the Emperor to finance another voyage. Some years later, under another reign, the prospect was revived; there appeared to be a real probability that the Court would sanction more

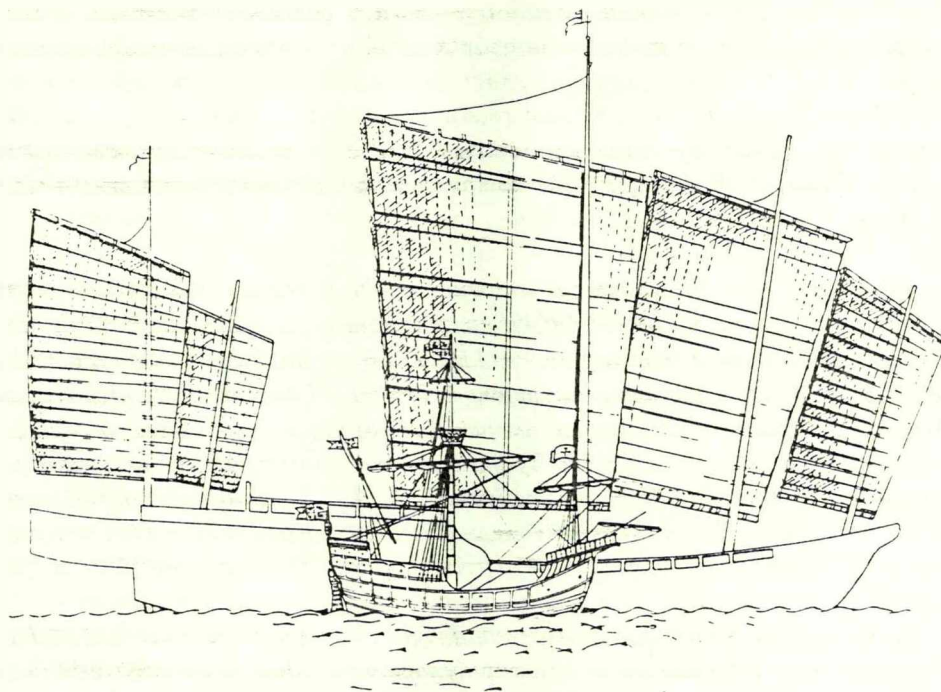


expeditions. At this threat the civil service reacted in the way which is always open to any civil service, under any regime, however arbitrary. When enquiry was made for the necessary detailed records, sailing directions, and other requisite data, these essential documents had all been 'lost'. They are still lost; in fact, as was later admitted, almost exulted in, the group of high civil officials opposed to eunuch influence had destroyed all they could lay hands on. There remains only the simple record of the main voyages, and the account given by Fei Hsin.

"Our story therefore ends with a question mark. Did one of the detached vessels which Fei Hsin tells us were sent on minor expeditions reach Timor -- an island he names as one known to the Chinese -- sail on, by accident or design, and touch upon the forbidding coast of northern Australia, there to harbour in the cove under Doctor's Gully, while the crew camped among the trees on the cliff top? And if this was how the image of Shou Lao came to be left there, why did the Chinese -- so far as we know -- never return? It might be, seeing the importance that the Court attached to strange animals, that in Timor they had heard some vague rumour of a southern island where there were strange beasts -- the kangaroo -- and came to try and catch one. They clearly did not succeed, or did not get safely back to China, for such a rarity would without question have been recorded and described.

"The ship that touched at Darwin had aboard a jade image of Shou Lao, doubtless already a venerated antique, perhaps the property and the peculiar talisman of the commanding officer, for it is not the kind of object any common sailor or junk master would possess. It is more probable that such a ship belonged to the great fleets which Ch'eng Ho commanded in the first years of the fifteenth century than that it should have come at any earlier or later time. We do not know whether it ever returned to report its finds to the Commander-in-Chief, and whether, if so, these records like many others were suppressed by the political opponents of the eunuch navigators. For a brief moment the power of China brushed along the northern coast of China, touched, and departed, leaving a striking and unique trace of this contact."

I've made no study of Sinology, so don't know what if any ripostes were made to Fitzgerald's conjectures.



Fifteenth century ships from China and Europe.

These ships could never have been seen side-by-side because the great vessels of Zheng He's fleet had been scrapped before European boats entered the Indian Ocean, and no more of comparable size were built. There has been controversy about the Chinese vessels' dimensions, with estimates for length at the keel mostly over 100 metres. This drawing does not represent such an enormous size. If the three-masted Spanish ship with a lateen mizzen sail is 30 metres long, the corresponding measurement for the Chinese vessel is 84 metres.

# THE LETTER COLUMN

*Edited by Joseph Nicholas*

*Readers may recall that last issue we WAHFed an eight-page rejoinder by Taras Wolansky to my exchange with him in issue 16, but offered a copy of the letter to anyone interested. Not a single person wrote in for one -- which perhaps suggests that Taras should consider doing something other than continually refighting the Cold War.*

*Reaching further back in time, we have the following late response to issues raised in FTT 17:*

Michael Hailstone  
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Australia

"The sixties were about a lot more than just revolution. I remember -- albeit vaguely -- the atmosphere at the end of the sixties, something we have nothing of now. The music was very much part of it. You're not the first to say that the hedonism and self-gratification of the sixties were directly responsible for the greed and selfishness of the eighties, but I fail to see the connection. The ideology of the eighties, a reassertion of naked capitalist values, struck me as very much the total negation of

what we strove for in the sixties.

"I can't speak for what's going on in Britain today, but I do know something about what was happening in the late sixties, since I was there. In the northern spring of 1968, I read an article in *Oz* -- published by my countryman, Richard Neville, who now lives here in Blackheath -- about alternative communities, which had already been set up in California, and which there were now efforts to establish in south-east London's Blackheath. In June 1969, *Oz* published an article entitled 'John Gerassi Lives The Revolution', which is now probably long-forgotten but was to me a pretty good blueprint of what the sixties was about: not a violent revolution like those of the past, but rather one based on civil disobedience, on living by example, refusing to conform to the norms set forth by the mass media. Indeed, I object to your statement that my generation had nothing better to do than march in the streets against things, with no positive alternatives to offer. True, it was hard to come up with a complete viable alternative, but the will and spirit were there. There was a lot going on that was hard to pin down; intangible stuff probably not readily graspable by those who weren't there.

"And if it's only the young who are now doing anything positive in Britain -- this D-I-Y ethos you write of -- then that's pathetic. Here in Australia people of all ages have pursued alternatives. I moved to Melbourne to be part of an alternative community there, but it failed largely because few people seemed to understand that we have to get our interpersonal relationships right before we can achieve anything else. I think that we were also beaten by the new poverty, but also by an unwillingness to seek a livelihood outside The System. However, there is a LETS scheme here in the Blue Mountains, which I've joined, and its members are of all ages."

*I accept that the protests of the sixties, and the alternatives the protesters sought to construct, were more diverse than any snapshot summary allows; but I'd contend that these alternatives were not alternatives to but alternatives within the dominant paradigm -- within the left-right duality which marked out the terrain of debate, and constrained by the perceptual framework embedded within that political discourse. Yet, as I stated in the first of the two arguments, "whereas the rebels of the sixties wanted to replace the certainties offered by the right with the certainties offered by the left, their contemporary equivalents have recognised that for all practical purposes 'left' and 'right' are identical". D-I-Y culture and the new social movements associated with it engage with an entirely different political discourse, and in that sense are qualitatively different from the previous generation of rebels. The faultline of the emerging political conflict, between environmentalism and technocracy, cuts right across the old left-right division, which from the environmentalist perspective is almost artificial: left and right are equally technocratic, and therefore equally incapable of positing genuine alternatives. Nor is it only the young who have embraced the environmentalist paradigm; the age-group 19-24 is the most directly affected by the Criminal Justice Act, but this hasn't prevented others from engaging with it.*

*The connection between the hedonism and self-gratification of the sixties and the greed and selfishness of the eighties is best summed up by the title of one of Kingsley Amis's early novels, I Want It Now. As a slogan, this underpinned much of the era's campaigns -- against repressive sexual politics, for*

*the freedom to wear what one wanted, against the conformities of middle-class society, for pop music which spoke with a living mouth....wants which, internalised by one generation, were later passed on to its children -- who grew up to wear stripey shirts, drive shiny cars, carry bulging filofaxes and speculate on the international finance markets.*

Michael Hailstone (address as before) "I can't speak for everybody and everything that went on in the sixties, but I always thought that subverting the dominant paradigm was very much part of the phenomenon. I first came upon the phrase 'the alternative society' in a book of pictures of the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival. The whole sixties thing was essentially *radical*, and by that I don't mean Marxist, as you imply. And where on Earth do you get the idea that 'the faultline of the emerging political conflict' was invented in the last shower? Richard Neville has recently been sneering at the sixties, saying that the green movement 'probably' owed something to it, but -- God help us -- it grew directly from the sixties.

"But what happened to all this? Marcuse had it right. The Establishment (as we called the ruling power-elite) was hardly going to sit back and let its power be taken away. To deal with the ideas which threatened it didn't need terror, concentration camps, and other crude methods of repression: it just incorporated these new ideas into itself and twisted them to suit its own ends. Thus all these initially liberating ideas were twisted into the destructive environmental doom and gloom of the eighties and the 'soft totalitarianism' known as political correctness. But it's no good raging at the Establishment about that; any rage should be aimed at the people who let themselves be brainwashed into selling out."

*In fact, the green movement in Britain began in the late nineteenth century, with the successful campaign led by Octavia Hill to keep the railways out of the Lake District and the subsequent foundation of organisations such as the National Trust and the Open Spaces Society. But while modern-day environmentalism may well be a product of the sixties, it should be remembered that it takes time for such trends to acquire political momentum, to become lodged in public consciousness, to attract and sustain the attention of the mass media; thus, while it may have been twenty or thirty years in the making, the faultline is only now "emerging". And although D-I-Y culture may appear to you as a pale copy of the alternatives pursued during the sixties, it seems to me to be more firmly rooted, and more realistic a response to the failures of technocracy, than the communal and other lifestyle experiments of thirty years ago.*

*But let's stick with the politics of left-right for a moment. The following letter was written in November 1995, some months before Keating's recent defeat in the Australian general election:*

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"As usual with *FTT*, number 19 provides much food for thought. But as is also usual, I won't comment on the bulk of them, just pick out the statement I have a few thoughts on. That being: 'In a way, it might be preferable for Labour to lose in 1996, since that would speed its disintegration and thus the emergence of a new oppositional coalition without any of the statist ideological baggage with which Labour is still encumbered. And with a more radical vision than sharp suits and short, verbless sentences, too'.

"Firstly, I was under the impression that Labour, under Tony Blair, was beginning the long campaign of ridding itself of the ideological baggage to which you refer. Isn't it reducing the power of the unions in the running of the party, of the pre-selection of candidates and the election of the party leader? The more and more I see of Blair, the more and more he reminds me of the changes that were undertaken by Whitlam, Hayden, Hawke and Keating here in Australia, as the four leaders who moved the Australian Labor Party away from the ideological hardline left towards a more moderate centre stance. In my view they've gone too far, but even in their current position I find myself having more in common with them than the conservative alternative.

"In the late sixties here in Australia, Gough Whitlam had to fight tooth and nail to break the stranglehold a group of 'faceless men' had over the Labor Party. I believe it came to a head when, just before an election in the mid-sixties, Arthur Caldwell (then Opposition leader) and Whitlam (his deputy) found themselves in a corridor of a hotel, outside the room where the 'faceless men' were determining the future of the party and its leaders. Whitlam was so incensed he vowed never to be embarrassed again. He wasn't, and the 'faceless men' faded back into the irrelevance they were. But he had to practically re-invent the Labor Party in the process, losing the 1969 election and just getting up in 1972.

"Secondly, unless you have some form of election process which doesn't involve 'first past the post'

you will only ever have two main parties in Britain. A party won't survive for long as either a political entity or as an idea in voters' minds unless it has more than a few bums on Westminster seats. I should state at this point that I'm in favour of compulsory voting and an optional preferential electoral system, which will probably put me at odds with the bulk of your readers. But I believe that people should be responsible for the election of their governments as much as governments should be responsive to the people who elect them. I believe it is far more of a duty to elect a country's government than a right. If you live in a country then you are part of its political process whether you like it or not. There are lots of arguments against this, of course, most of them put up by people who don't want to vote. But my line is 'if you don't vote then don't talk to me about politics'.

"If Britain had had preferential voting in the eighties, how might the political scene have differed? It might not have been any better, but I can't see that it would have been any worse, and the Liberal Democrats might have become a major player. But it didn't, and they won't.

"Thirdly, the major problem I have with the Labor Party in Australia -- and presumably the same holds with the Labour Party in Britain -- is that as it moves more towards the centre, the opposition or Conservatives move more towards the right. This is a dangerous prospect if, for whatever reason, the voters become disenchanted with an incumbent Labo(u)r government and find themselves voting in a rampant neo-conservative (read heavy-handed, holier than thou, we know best) party that does whatever it likes. I speak from the experience of living in Victoria for the past three years as state premier Jeff Kennett has gone about destabilising the hospital, ambulance, general medical and educational systems in order to placate the public with casinos and Formula One races. Oh what fun it is.

"Hopefully, Blair and the Labour Party will move far enough to get elected and then make a lot of hard, unpopular, but necessary choices in their first two years in power. I wish you and him and them all the luck available."

*It now seems that, barring unforeseen upsets, there won't be an election here this year; but I won't let that hold me back. To take your points in the order in which you make them: Labour is certainly ridding itself of ideological baggage, but your response (a) focuses largely on the party's internal organisation rather than the things in which it believes, and (b) misses the important qualifier "statist" in the statement of mine you quote. My point is that although New Labour has abandoned common ownership and control, it remains wedded to the idea that only the state (and the organs of the state) is capable of delivering the changes it wants; it allows no room for the participation of individuals as individuals rather than as units of production. In addition, New Labour is becoming just as coercive as the Tories: embracing the language of "rights" and "responsibilities" popularised by Amitai Etzioni, Shadow Cabinet members Gordon Brown and Jack Straw fail to recognise how this "communitarianism" effectively erases any difference between them and the Lilley-Portillo-Redwood axis, and that forcing people into low-paid jobs by threats to reduce benefit is the same policy irrespective of whether the goal is to reduce unemployment (Brown, Straw) or cut public spending (Lilley-Portillo-Redwood).*

*Secondly, when I referred to the emergence of a new oppositional coalition as a replacement for Labour, I wasn't thinking of the next or the next-but-one election but twenty or thirty years from now, long after the party has disintegrated and a mass of competing factions has arisen to replace it -- and at a point when those factions have been forced into a "popular front" by widespread pressure to for-God's-sake-let's-get-the-Tories-out. It will be in the nature of these factions to attempt to preserve their distinct (or perceived as distinct) identities; hence an early policy target would be reform of the voting system, to make elections less of a two-horse race.*

*Thirdly, and this time to agree with you, your perception that as Labour tries to reoccupy the centre ground it perceives the Tories to have vacated, so the Tories move away to the right, is absolutely accurate. In the process, the Tories pull the perceived centre after them, and Labour has to follow them onto their terrain in order not to be seen as left-wing. The result is that there is now an echoing void on what used to be the social democratic left; and that, having previously claimed to be equidistant between the extremes of the two main parties, the Liberal Democrats are in several respects more radical than New Labour. But, irrespective of specific policy commitments, Labour's continual aping of the Tories risks repeating the error it made in 1990-1992: that in sounding too much like them it will fail to set out a coherent alternative vision, and thus fail to give anyone a positive reason to vote for it.*

*Finally, you suggest that once elected, Blair and the Labour Party will "make a lot of hard, unpopular, but necessary choices in their first two years in power". The question is how many of these choices will be driven by what they want to do rather than by the economic circumstances they'll inherit.*



*The Conservatives' only strategy now is to wreck the place for their successors, repeating their game plan for the 1992 election; then, they expected to lose but surprised everyone, including themselves, by winning; now, they know their time is definitely running out, so why not go for unsustainable tax cuts and idiotic public expenditure allocations? Given Labour's stated commitment to controlling inflation and keeping the international finance markets happy, Blair won't be able to reverse any of it, and will thus be faced with the impossible task of trying to kick-start an economy lodged in near-permanent recession. Failure will be inevitable, and Labour's only conceivable platform for the next-but-one election is that it should have another five years in which to try again -- to which the electorate's rejoinder will be that it had its chance and doesn't deserve another. Back will come the Tories, and into the dustbin of history will go Labour.*

*Finally finally, you say that your line is "if you don't vote then don't talk to me about politics" -- one implication of which is that electoral politics has absolute primacy over other forms and that extra-parliamentary activity has little or no legitimacy. Not in this fanzine!*

*But enough theorising about politics for the present -- let's have some theorising about music from:*

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"I don't believe that the pop music of any particular era is related to the government of the time. More likely, perhaps, is that it is related to the economic and media conditions of the time. There can be no doubt that the rise of The Beatles was intimately related to the expansion of the media during the sixties, and to its changing character. The colourful excesses of psychedelia mirrored the appearance

of colour television. The uniquely arid style of rave music -- never before has there been a popular music with no melody and no lyrics -- is due to the way it's composed, with computers. Rave and dance music sounds the way it does because when you use music software you are almost forced to compose in a repetitive manner, constantly looping and copying fragments of musical information. To compose a piece of Goa Trance, for example, is both difficult and easy -- difficult in the sense that you cannot go to a computer for an idea, easy in the sense that copying and repeating is what computers are good at.

"But some music *does* 'energise long-term change'. It is just that such change is personal, not political. I know many people who have experienced personal change based on music. In some cases this has been part of their own self-absorption, but in most it has been genuine -- the impact of The Levellers, for example. It could be argued that The Levellers have changed nothing in society, and as a statement that is true; but they have changed the personal characters of many, by encouraging people not to become involved in mainstream society, but to reject it and escape it. This attitude is exactly the same as that found in those who believe in and use LETS schemes.

"The trouble with people like Pet Shop Boys, brilliant though they are, is that they are part of the problem. Satirising the Tories just draws more attention to them. Satirising Labour would do more good, I think. Similarly, the savage and remote lyrics of the Pet Shop Boys are part of society's problem. They nurture the culture of emotional distance, and this is ultimately self-defeating.

"Musicians are caught in the battle between realism and idealism. If you are a realist, like the Pet Shop Boys and John Lydon, you are applauded for accepting the truth of society as it is, but you are unable to express any idealistic notions. If you are idealistic, like Ozric Tentacles and John Lennon, you offer solutions for the future but are hammered for being escapist. And if you are in the middle, like the majority, you are accused of being blandly middle-of-the-road. Personally, I would always lean towards the idealistic camp, since to create meaningful change you have to have a goal, or at the very least a direction.

"The most fascinating groups of the moment are all underground. It will always be that way. Choose between Ozric Tentacles, who recently created an album sleeve entirely from hemp-paper; Gorky's Zygotic Minci with their absurd lyrics and obsession with salt; Muslimgauze, who supported the Palestinian Intifada from his bedroom in Manchester; and the offbeat observations on life of Porcupine Tree."

George Flynn  
P.O. Box 1069  
Kendall Square Station  
Cambridge  
Mass 02142, USA

"Well, of course rock music isn't really revolutionary. The local Republican governor -- a stereotypical yuppie in most respects -- makes much of being a fan of The Kendall Square Station Grateful Dead, but this has no visible moderating influence on his devotion to eliminating or privatising every social programme that he can find.

"I'm inclined to agree that whatever Marxist influences may exist in the *Foundation* series are primarily reactions to the *zeitgeist*; after all, the Futurians as a whole were a group of parlour-Marxists (or at least *thought* they were). But the rationalism came straight from the obvious source, Gibbon.

"You say in reply to Jerry Kaufman that 'it's not just *some* SF which has failed, but *all* of it'. Yet

I wonder whether one can say anything meaningful about SF as a whole, given that there are so many different sub-species lurking under the same label, and that nobody reads all of them. The 'SF' that is really fantasy in disguise, for instance, surely has very little to do with technocratic ideas as such, except to the extent that they permeate all contemporary thought."

Cedric Knight  
85 Boleyn Road  
Forest Gate  
London E7 9QF

"I confirm above average political content in Pet Shop Boys songs. 'Shopping' was a pretty clear message about privatisation -- 'We're buying and selling your history/ Our gain is your loss' -- but the problem is that listeners and critics often mistake for lack of passion in Neil Tennant's voice what is actually cold rage. Can it be anything else in the line 'We're the bums you step over when you leave the theatre'?"

"I don't know what would make up a list of 'working class hero' type songs, although it's clear that in this respect the nineties are nothing like the sixties, but you do get the occasional good Thatcher-hate anthem like Aztec Camera's 'Good Morning Britain'. Pulp's 'Mis-Shapes' is an interesting case, described in *The Guardian* as about the rise of the band itself but capable of being post-structurally reinterpreted as a call for revolution: 'They think they've got us beat/But revenge is going to be so sweet/We won't use guns/We won't use bombs/We'll use the one thing we've got more of/And that's our minds'. *The Mirror* started a campaign to ban the single 'Sorted For Es And Whizz' and its suggestion that drugs might be all right, but I don't recall anyone being so quick with the rather less ambivalent Shamen song 'E's Are Good'.

"Contrary to Steve Jeffery's description of rave culture as 'escapist hedonism' (although Jarvis Cocker might agree with him), I've found that despite its lack of lyrics its zines are, as a consequence of the Criminal Justice Act, very politically aware, and closely linked to the politics of anti-roads campaigners. In addition, most indoor raves are held in squatted buildings, squatting now being a political action in itself and a natural solution to homelessness.

"Steve Jeffery says hedgehogs are unimpressed by pet food. For traumatic reasons too complicated to go into here, I had a cat trap set up, and caught a hedgehog by mistake. It wasn't the cat food it was after, but the moisture which last summer lacked. A friend had intended to sleep *al fresco* on our lawn, but had heard stories of hedgehogs biting people in hunger. He aborted the attempt and took to the sofa instead after hearing ominous rustling from the compost heap at 3.00am."

*And with that anecdote we shall plunge into a whole series of observations of local nature by other readers -- pausing only to announce that, having seen a frog in the pond as early as the last week of January, on 8 March we found two enormous blobs of pale grey frogspawn anchored to the weed on the surface. Wheel!*

Harry Andruschak  
P.O. Box 5309  
Torrance  
California 90510-5309  
USA

"Here in the heart of the Los Angeles basin, I do not see many frogs. We do have rabbits. I think they are former pets that either escaped or were turned loose. My landlady has mixed emotions about them -- on the one hand, they eat her flowers and other plants, but on the other she doesn't want them killed or hurt since, well, they are cute li'l bunnies. She just wants them to go away, but as their nest is right under the house, I doubt if they will go away soon. They seem to do quite well at avoiding the local stray cats and dogs. The dogs like to poop on the grass, but not catch rabbits."

Pascal Thomas  
7 rue des Saules  
31400 Toulouse  
France

"There's no pond in our garden -- it would dry out in the summer -- and so no frogs, and although in the past we've had visits from one hedgehog, wildlife here these days, beyond birds, is reduced to cats -- undoubtedly on the prowl from their regular flats, entertaining delusions of jungle in our small bamboo grove.

"A couple of weeks ago, however, we had a most unusual visitor -- a chicken, most likely a hen (although we found no eggs afterwards), which had wandered in from who knows where, looking quite lost. Hens are not noted for their brilliance. I was reminded of the title of a Robyn Hitchcock & The Egyptians album, *Gotta Get This Hen Out!* Nobody came to claim it, and despite a run-in with our most regular feline visitor it did not seem to want to go away so, worried that it might succumb to hunger and thirst, we laid out some bread crumbs and water. Perhaps, I mused, it would stick around, feed on worms, lay eggs, or at least contribute some fertiliser to our lawn. Alas, its only droppings were on our cement walkways. (As I said, hens are not noted for their brilliance.) We went away for a weekend, and upon returning saw no sign of the bird. We can only hope it found its home again.

"Or perhaps it was but a ghost of the many chickens who were slaughtered on these very grounds during the years when the previous owners were raising poultry in the backyard and leading them to their

ends in the very office where I type this, then a semi-basement used as a chicken abattoir."

Irwin Hirsh  
26 Jessamine Avenue  
East Prahran  
Victoria 3181  
Australia

"We don't have a pond, but we do have a swimming pool, and every spring and summer since 1991-1992 we've had some visitors -- one, two or, once, three ducks. They'll swim around in the water, walk around the pool's edge, stay for a day or two, and come and go. We're not sure why they visit us -- a neighbour tells us the previous owners never had such visitors. My guess is that as we inherited the pool, the water isn't maintained in the state of Hockney Clear Blue it would be if we'd installed the pool ourselves.

"This spring the duck arrival was unusual as one duck spent a fair amount of time waddling about in the greenery to the side of the pool. 'I wonder if....' Wendy and I would say to each other. And sure enough, looking out the back window one October Sunday morning, Wendy saw a duck swimming around, followed by a number of ducklings. We ran into the backyard, and saw that the mother was being shadowed by a brood of thirteen. I snapped a couple of photos, and with the video camera recorded about a minute of the ducks, intercut with shots of Adrian and Kieran looking and pointing. 'We should contact the TV channels,' I said to Wendy, 'Their news services will love this.'

"It was all rather exciting. Adrian had a strong desire to tell someone about our visitors, and decided to telephone Danielle, his cousin, who wants to be a vet. She wasn't home, so instead Adrian told Rodney, his other cousin, who wants to be an American basketball player. Adrian also said that this was what he would talk about at the next kindergarten show-and-tell.

"As we watched the ducks, I noticed that while the mother had no problems in jumping up the 40cm from the water to the pool's edge, the ducklings couldn't follow her. At that stage it wasn't a problem -- the mother didn't appear to expect them to follow -- but I knew that later in the day, when she wanted them to return to the warmth of the nest, it would cause some difficulties. I telephoned the RSPCA for some advice. The early part of the conversation reinforced what we were doing -- we'd been keeping our distance, for example -- but didn't help me in helping the ducklings get out of the pool. It would be a few weeks before they could fly, and spending the evenings on unsheltered water would be dangerous. I didn't want things to progress to the point where I'd be lifting them out, but there was still that 40cm vertical rise they had to bridge. After some discussion and some trial-and-error, we attached Adrian's kickboard to the pool ladder. This, together with raising the water level by 10cm, gave the ducklings a platform from which they could jump up the distance to the pool's edge. We also tossed in a couple of floating bean bags, to act as islands for the ducks' fun and pleasure.

"Over the next few hours, we sat in the backyard, reading and watching. When we first saw them, the ducklings swam in a tight bunch behind their mother. After a few hours they were more carefree, with one taking a particular delight in deliberately swimming away from the rest. They appreciate the islands we'd created for them. Adrian declared the ducklings to be the cutest things he'd seen in his five-and-a-bit years. We asked him what other creatures he thought were cute and he rolled off a small list: the penguins in Phillip Island, baby koalas, the smaller monkeys at the zoo, and his little brother. Then he corrected himself: the ducklings were the second cutest things he'd ever seen -- Kieran topped the list.

"Mid-afternoon, we went to do some shopping. In the half-hour prior to leaving, we'd noticed that when the mother jumped out of the pool she wanted her children to follow. Coming home, we found them out of the pool, which made us want to know precisely how they got out. It didn't take long, for the mother led them back into the water for one last circuit. Sure enough, the ducklings used the kickboard as we'd intended, though two or three attempts were required before they cleared the pool. Our last sight of them was watching the mother leading her young charges along a path in the bushes towards the nest.

"As we ate dinner, Adrian talked about the ducks from his perspective. 'Their mummy will be giving them something to eat, and then it'll be time for bed and story. I wonder if she'll read them *The Ugly Duckling*? Then Adrian required a memory prompt, 'Why was the duckling ugly?' and we retold him the story. Twenty minutes later, we switched on the TV and caught the tail end of the news. And as the closing credits rolled up the screen, we saw footage of an ugly duck waddling along a footpath, followed by her three ugly ducklings."

Vicki Rosenzweig  
33 Indian Road, 6-R  
New York  
NY 10034, USA

"The ducks here have been suffering from the cold winter. They'll almost always come to take hand-outs (except for a short period before they migrate, and during nesting season for those who pair off), but with the inlet near us frozen they've been coming up on land and staying there even when people arrive. This is convenient,



much more so than climbing over the rocks (which are also icy, making them not merely inconvenient but potentially deadly to climb), except for one thing: along with the ducks, we've been visited by Canada geese. These aren't the geese from barnyards and children's books: these are large, long-necked animals with no manners or shyness. One morning, there was a foot or so of snow left from the previous week's blizzard, but the birds were on land, and I started tossing bits of bread to them. Ducks get around reasonably well on dry land, but are awkward and even comical on ice. We were all having breakfast together, a bit chilly but cheerful, when I felt a tug on my leg. One of the geese, not satisfied with the menu (I think he objected to the size of the portions), was doing his best to bite my leg. Suddenly very glad that birds don't have teeth, I waved my tote bag at him menacingly, and convinced him to back up a foot or so. I then tossed bread a few feet beyond him, in an ineffectual attempt to get him to stand back, and thought dark thoughts about paying Danegeld and the possibilities of roast goose in my altogether inadequate oven."

Susan Francis  
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Colchester  
Essex CO3 3JW

"My own garden is thoroughly overgrown: every so often I do some hacking and slaying of the stuff that there's blatantly too much of -- a vine that I suspect strangles things, nettles where they're likely to collide with people, and so on -- but it's rarely possible to see what I'm treading on. Instead of froglets, though, I have snails. In wet (that is, anything but dry) weather in spring and summer it's impossible to get down the 'there used to be a path under here' without a constant accompaniment of crunching snails. I harden my heart and suppose that I'm providing something's dinner."

Murray Moore  
377 Manly Street  
Midland  
Ontario L4R 3E2  
Canada

"The article on your garden frogs triggered childhood memories of lily pads on lakes in central Ontario, vacationing in rented cottages and rowboats. The Otter Creek is a two minute walk from the house in which I lived for the first 25 years of my life, and frogs were common. One summer, a neighbourhood boy followed the creek, armed with a pole with a metal tip. He threw it at frogs, crushing them. He wanted only the legs, to take home for a meal.

"The immediate area was a village park, part of which flooded in the spring. The noise of the frogs at dark was continuous. A dam was later built upstream, to control the flooding. That stretch of Otter Creek now is dead, vacant of frogs, crayfish, and fish (unless you consider carp a fish)."

Lloyd Penney  
412-4 Lisa Street  
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Ontario L6T 4B6  
Canada

"The only body of water near us that qualifies as a lake is a small, water-filled quarry just outside our building's property that has been renamed Norton Lake. Near the 'lake' is a vigorous stream, name unknown, and somehow the two connect. The river has its usual life, but Norton Lake's only purpose seems to be to giving flocks of mallard ducks and Canada geese a place to land and rest. But the park around the lake is a wonderful place to spend a summer's day on a picnic or sunbathing session.

"My only volcano story is that I was living on nearby Vancouver Island when Mount St Helens in Washington State exploded in 1980. Everyone was glued to the television, watching the Seattle stations covering the natural disaster. Over the next few days, after the destruction had been detailed in acres of forests damaged and tons of rock and earth displaced, we watched the volcanic cloud drift away in the upper atmosphere and received instructions over the radio on how to remove volcanic dust from the car without ruining the paint.

"I would agree with Neil Henderson that science fiction is a literature which can both entertain and comment upon a theme in today's society. The books I enjoy place entertainment before comment, but have a particular balance of both. Once that subjective balance is upset, I feel like I'm being attacked with the comment, and I'm likely to rush through the rest of the book or put it down. Perhaps today's SF is suffering from an imagination gap. The SF of the thirties had an inkling of what would be happening today, but do we have any ideas about our future? Not many. One author I talked to a couple of Worldcons ago said the future will be like the present, but with more auxiliary technology and more complex problems. Where the thirties had optimism and a distant but visible future, we have neither, unless we discover a whole new field of science, as scientists did then."

Neil Henderson  
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"I used to have regular hedgehogs in my back garden, encouraged by left-over cat food when my two cats were ageing and beginning to ail. Since the cats succumbed, a year apart, to euthanasia, I haven't noticed any hedgehogs at all. (I did come across one asleep at the base of red hot poker plant, somewhat overgrown, which I was

attempting to hoe around, but I don't think I disturbed it too much.) I once saw a hedgehog scratching itself, and was amazed at how long its hind leg actually was. They can in fact run quite fast, and do not -- as I had always believed -- trundle along sedately on hidden wheels. It's a pity they couldn't 'descent with modification' to run across roads, instead of presenting traffic with a ball of prickles. Perhaps this is analogous to the supposition that human intelligence (our great evolutionary specialisation) can get us out of every scrape -- just chuck a load of complex solutions based on spiny theory at the nasty reality, and it will go away. Meanwhile, the juggernaut of inevitability continues to thunder towards us.... (Cliche, or wot?)

"As with last issue, I agree with Stephen O'Kane -- this time about falling male fertility meaning a removal of aggro-drive. Perhaps in the long term it may also benefit other species, such as the reptiles and fishes which I believe are similarly affected. It might be that if their numbers dwindle sufficiently through breeding failure, they can escape being hunted to extinction by being effectively rendered unavailable anyway. In the case of supposed 'dangerous' animals, such as alligators, the reduction in numbers through infertility might obviate mass fear-based slaughter. Then again, they might just become extinct regardless. I understand the coelacanth is now nearing extinction. Maybe it was always doomed, and it's just a fluke that science discovered any living specimens -- they are like dodos of the sea, simply waiting for the first threat to come along (in this case, the increased fishing capabilities of the locals).

"But surely all species must inevitably become 'extinct' -- either by dying out altogether or by 'evolving' into something new, but different. (I take your point about the myth of 'progress', and that the most stable and wholesome societies are the ones which aren't involved in expansion, but it does seem to be an inbuilt fact of nature that whenever a niche appears, species expand into it. Mind you, humanity may be too adept at forcibly creating new niches....) We do seem to have an obsession with immortality, though. Even if *homo sapiens* dies out, some record will remain to be debated by alien archaeologists. I like to think that there will be future alien librarians tending a library of every small press publication that's ever been issued -- rendered perfect by sophisticated typo-eliminating technology. Perhaps some kind of psychological regeneration technique will be able to resurrect the minds of the authors for post-apocalyptic intergalactic conventions, or simply to preserve them in the psychic equivalent of a bottle of formaldehyde. I suppose this is the first generation that's really had to face the prospect that there may be no such thing as 'posterity'....hence the attraction of 'fantasy futures'."

Dale Speirs  
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Canada

"Alternative histories are always fun to speculate about. Since there is no way to check speculations against facts, one can wander anywhere the heart leads. What if Louis Riel had won his second rebellion in western Canada? Would I be writing this letter from Eau Claire instead of Calgary? (The former is the francophone name for Calgary, which almost but not quite might have been the official name.)

"But stasis is ultimately a dead end because the Earth will not last forever, even if we were in perfect balance with it. One hiccup from the sun or an on-target asteroid, and humans vanish. Better to get out into space. Humans are generalists, not niche specialists, which is why the species has spread over the planet so successfully, and we can adapt to wage slavery and urban life no matter how much it may grind our souls down. I do it by working for the Parks Department, and taking 'inspection tours' of natural areas whenever the stress seems overwhelming. Others adapt by drinking large quantities of alcoholic beverages. Some try to forget by letting avocational subculture take preference in their lives, such as SF fandom or campaigning to preserve a moor that is the wasted remnant of what was forest two thousand years ago. Nor are 'primitive' people paragons of virtue. The inhabitants of Easter Island deforested their island, and died out. The aboriginals in the Americas did not have the population to seriously affect their habitat, save that as they spread down from the Bering Strait to Patagonia a wave of extinctions travelled with them as large mammals and birds were wiped out by over-hunting."

*An immediate rejoinder to the claim that our species is successful because it has spread all over the planet is to point to your own horrible example of Easter Island as an indication of how unsuccessful we are at adapting to its different environments. And history provides plenty of others -- Mesopotamia, for example, which is these days difficult to imagine as a "cradle of civilisation" but once consisted of forests and meadows rather than today's salty deserts. In addition, just as we can point to waves of extinctions which accompanied human expansion into new areas in the past, we can also point to the present increase in the rate of species extinctions attributable to our superabundant numbers and the demands we make on the Earth. If we continue in our present fashion, we will eventually render the planet uninhabitable for*



everything on it, irrespective of what the sun or an asteroid might do.

*Finesse our way around these problems by getting out into space? But this simply raises anew the question I posed to Greg Benford in the previous issue: where, exactly, are we going to go?*

David Redd  
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"My reason for disagreeing with Greg Benford's upward-and-outward 'a smart bird learns to fly' agenda is that I've been working too hard. I mean it quite literally.

"Property developer buys local land, arranges for Safeway store to be built to guarantee his investment, also arranges new road access to it via new roundabout which must be operating well before Christmas 1995 so that Safeway can take in £500, 000 a week from Christmas trade....so David Redd gets slung into the firing

line for the seven-days-a-week rush to get the roundabout built, having just finished a road reconstruction under the lane rental system which basically works everyone into the ground so that the government can save a few quid.

"The general situation, of which I am one minor example, is that the commercial bottom-line pressures now operating throughout society have put over three million people out of work and make everyone else work much harder and longer with less security and often less reward. The short-term efficiency gains -- all that our leaders see -- are wiped out by the whole-life costs of the social effects, not least the cost of caring for or containing the disaffected jobless. In this situation, with real efficiency and wealth falling, Benford's upward-and-outward agenda is simply irrelevant. We are running so hard to avoid falling behind too much, and failing, that we have no energy left to reach for anything more. Although visions of a human-scale future are a nice dream, I suspect all the nice middle-class pastures will end up being abandoned by the wealthy haves and then torched by the unwealthy have-nots. The space frontier will be out of sight.

"I agree that it would be nice to, say, take core samples through the Martian poles and correlate any variations with similar data from Earth, but from a British perspective it won't happen. Greg Benford lives in the most prosperous state of the most prosperous nation on Earth; I don't. I can barely manage a few letters to fanzines, let alone subsidise space exploration."

George Flynn  
(address as before)

"You suggest that 'the Ming emperors' desire to protect their society from alien and subversive influences makes perfect sense' -- yet the most systematic such policy in the world today is perhaps that of the theocrats in Iran, and similar motives inspire

most of the world's unlovely nationalist movements. There must be something better. Indeed, was not the 'myth of progress' largely sparked by the realisation that there *were* other (existing or potential) ways to arrange society than things-as-they-were, accompanied by the unspoken (and, alas, often invalid) assumption that any alternative couldn't be worse? And why did those hunter-gatherers in 10,000 BCE change their way of life anyway, if it made them so much worse off? Presumably it must have made them better off in the short run."

Vicki Rosenzweig  
(address as before)

"Thinking of some of the more manic technology boosters, the ones who seem to think that we can solve all our problems by transferring our consciousnesses into machines -- as if this would be either possible or desirable -- I find myself wondering

if the distinction between technocrat and environmentalist can equally well be looked at, in philosophical terms, as that between realist and idealist. The technocrats, for all their concentration on machines, don't quite seem to have absorbed the fact that the physical world is important, let alone accepted that humans are a species of animal, not spirits temporarily housed (or trapped, to listen to some people) in bodies that have nothing to do with whatever we 'really' are.

"It seems to me that we need to recognise that much of the West has gone past prosperous -- that pleasant state where you have enough clean water, need never worry that your children will go to bed hungry, and don't work yourself into an early grave -- and are driving ourselves, and possibly many other people, into the ground for things we don't need. Not hepatitis vaccines, or enough books to read (my own weakness), but clothing bought for one special occasion, 'executive toys' that are defined by being expensive and useless, and expensive cars that do nothing a cheaper one can't. (I'm rather proud of never having owned a car, but I recognise that not everyone who is part of a modern industrial economy can do this: geography and physical ability are factors.) This, I think, is what drives people who want to fund the space programme, not because they find planetary astronomy wonderfully fascinating (I sometimes think we should fund planetary exploration from the money we would otherwise spend on television and cosmetics -- that

is, from the entertainment budget) or even because they still believe in some variation of 'manifest destiny' (history as teleology), but because it will 'drive the economy', as if we couldn't do the economy at least as much good by building schools or rebuilding bridges. Any programme which has to be justified as 'driving the economy' should be assumed to be a failure -- if it can't be justified in its own terms, we might as well pay one group of people to dig ditches and another to fill them in, or spend the money on fireworks.

"Your article on contingent history was quite interesting. One point worth raising is that, however (unimportant) European colonial expansion turns out to have been politically, future historians (if there are any -- history as we view it is a product of a certain view of time, events and society) will almost certainly consider it of importance biologically. The current wave of extinctions owes as much to our not-always-deliberate transport of species as to hunting or (I would guess) habitat destruction. Cat-lovers took their pets to little islands, and wiped out ground-dwelling birds. The prairie that was once a major North American ecology has been transformed so that the dominant plant species are wheat and maize -- there's been maize here for millenia, but not in the current multi-square-mile monocultural fields. Even in terms of human survival, this sort of thing is risky: too many people are depending on too few varieties of too few plants. I recently read an overview article on the Gaia hypothesis -- it was nothing new if you've been following the literature, but many readers of *The New York Times Magazine* haven't been -- in which Lynn Margulis said that there's no need to worry about Gaia's survival in the short to medium term (when the sun turns into a red giant in a few billion year's time, that's curtains, regardless): human beings are vulnerable, as are mammals generally (we have no protection against chance, disease or meteorites just because we're furry and reasonably clever) and even trees as a group, but the microbes that predate us and pervade the ecosystem will be fine. This is a little comfort, but not much, at least for me: I'd like to see humanity survive, and contemplating a world once again without flowering plants is depressing. It may satisfy Margulis, who has spent her life studying microbiology. Even those of us who accept contingency and know that natural selection doesn't inherently create greater complexity may not enjoy these thoughts. I think there's something in the human brain that enjoys complexity and variety, perhaps because we evolved in places that had large amounts of both or because the brain is good at finding (or inventing) patterns.

"I also can't help thinking that we have the luxury of analysing things this way because we belong to (for the moment, at least) the winning side. The death of the Choctaw language was reported in January: the last speaker, who had been the only speaker of the language for years, died in his seventies. This is not an unusual event: linguistic diversity is going even faster than biological diversity. Our descendants, speaking perhaps twenty or thirty or one hundred 'Englance' languages scattered around the world, may live a life which has little in common with twentieth century industrialised Britain or America. In some ways that's inevitable: they may preserve our styles of dress, our religions, or our cookery, but there isn't room to preserve the more-better-faster paradigm of our economy. But they will nonetheless be largely descended from Europeans. I wonder, suddenly, how long it will take the ozone hole plus natural selection to produce a dark-skinned people from the British stock now resident in Australia. It's too soon to tell, and there are a lot of variables, ranging from what we do about the ozone hole to how much genetic admixture there is from the aboriginal Australians, but it will probably happen, assuming that the British stock don't die out completely or go back to Britain and its milder sunlight (milder, at least, until the Arctic ozone goes the way of the Antarctic if we don't get our act together: the loss is already measurable in Toronto, and London is north of it)."

Stephen O'Kane  
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"The pond frogs theme, and even just hosting Worldcon fans, made me wonder about a different ecological matter. Over the twenty-one years 1975-1995 the UK has had eight hot, dry summers (by UK standards) whereas we were previously accustomed to expect such summers once every eight to ten years. How much longer will SF fans, journalists, or tour operators be able to go on talking about the British summers in contrast to 'real' summer in the sub-tropical anticyclone belts? And what will happen to their sense of British patriotic duty if they cannot? An interesting question for Eurosceptics there.

"Christina Lake's piece left one point unanswered -- did she let on to her environmentalist friends that she is herself an SF fan and writer, and what reception did she get for that? Some of my associates in the Brighton SF group seem to have found, either themselves or through the convention grapevine, that some green activists are actually hostile to SF as gung-ho technophile, although one of our group is a keen environmentalist himself. (I am also a member of Friends of the Earth, but a less fervent supporter of the cause.) Maybe Christina was able to do a little education in reverse, so to speak? Or is it just that green responses to SF vary according to whether they come across John Brunner or Jerry Pournelle?"

*We referred this enquiry to Christina -- but before hearing from her, readers should be advised that the Liam the permaculturalist she referred to is also known to Judith, since both are members of the Council of the Permaculture Association. Until November 1995, however, neither Liam nor Christina were aware of this link....*

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Bishopston  
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Avon BS7 8QA

"The only responses at Bath Environment Centre to my admission to being a science fiction fan (unavoidable in the context of taking time off for Intersection) were of the predicatable and non-green variety and placed somewhat mocking emphasis on a certain Vulcan and his ears. This angle was not helped by one of the other staff at the Centre being very keen on *Star Trek* and *Babylon Five*, and me being quite willing to talk about these programmes (though I drew the line at trying to emulate her typically anally retentive knowledge of the entire *Star Trek* canon).

"I can see why environmentalists might feel alienated by some of the techno-fix aspects of science fiction, but there are also a number of common elements, given that SF also covers utopias, eco-disasters, and extrapolations of future societies. Personally, I feel that science fiction has been a point of contact between me and the environmentalists at the Bath Environment Centre -- not in jargon terms or having read the same titles, but through a shared interest in how the world *could* work in the future and a willingness to imagine some of the technologies (other than computers and space rockets) and societal changes that could take us there.

"I suspect that Liam was a bit shocked to be presented with my article in *FTT*. I don't think his deductive processes had quite got around to working out a link between Judith and me. And nobody ever understands when I try to explain fanzines (though environmentalists with all their newsheets ought to have some inkling). Anyhow, he hasn't filed any libel suits against me for misrepresentation of his training programme, though we did have to go out for a drink to discuss it all (and ended up, as usual, gossiping about what was wrong with Bath Environment Centre!)"

Alan Sullivan  
30 Ash Road  
Stratford  
London E15 1HL

"Christina's article reminded me of every committee I've ever been on. They seem to come in two flavours: those made up of people who already know each other, and those made up of people who don't. The former get on much better, have fewer internal conflicts, and are rather more cohesive. The latter tend to pay more attention to the job in hand, and actually try to get things done. Both types, sadly, suffer from a tendency to become preoccupied with deciding the how, what, where, when and by whom of the job, rather than actually getting on with it. Definitions and a clear brief are important, but they're hardly the be-all and end-all.

"Then there's the problem of outside influences. Politics, vested interests, pressure groups, financiers....a committee that gets to work without such things is lucky indeed (and rare). Flip as it may sound, I have often thought that every committee should have an External Influences Countermeasures Officer, whose role is to keep these people off the committee's back while they get on with the job in hand. If only...."

Derek Pickles  
44 Rooley Lane  
Bankfoot  
Bradford  
West Yorks BD5 8LX

"Christina Lake's travails in setting up the Bath Environment Centre leave me green with envy. I was involved in setting up an advice centre whose initial furnishing were three old desks and three even older chairs along with two filing cabinets that didn't lock, all of which had come from the council furniture store to us on the basis that it cost less to transport the stuff to us than the municipal tip as we were nearer. We had no photocopier, one telephone which we all three shared and could only be used for local calls except when the grant was running out and we could only use it after 1.00pm, on the then cheaper afternoon rate. We didn't even have a typewriter; there was one upstairs in the Centre office, but only the typist was allowed to use it and she was part-time.

"Writing about old furniture reminds me of a headmaster I knew who used to indent for furniture for his school. Processing the request forms took forever, so he used to go down, with his deputy head, to the council furniture store. He engaged the storekeeper in conversation about his missing furniture, and his deputy head wandered off round the aisles with a stick of chalk in his hand. The head would ask where his two cupboards and filing cabinet were, the storekeeper would go through his sheets and not find any requisition forms, and then a voice would call from the depths of the store: 'Here they are, Mr Smith, they've got our name, Grange Primary, written on them'.

"Pam Baddeley, in *FTT* 18, described my life in the thirties as 'deprivation'. I didn't think I was deprived then, and I don't think I was deprived when I look back on it. There was always food on the table, a fire in the grate, and good clothes on my back. There were certainly much poorer children than I at primary school. One friend of mine wore wellington boots almost all year round. All the boys wore knitted jerseys and knitted narrow ties. Some had darned elbows and were heavily pilled, but they were all clean.

"I go to football matches nowadays and look at young lads with expensive 'tarbrush' or 'pudding basin' haircuts, and reflect that when I was their age you had haircuts like that when you were poor, often done by your mother who couldn't afford the sixpence the barber charged.

"I think it's really a matter of expectation. I did what my friends did and wore similar clothes. Our houses were similarly furnished, and if we went on holiday it was to Blackpool or Morecambe ('Bradford-by-the-sea', where so many Bradfordians retired to or commuted from on a special train that the Bradford evening paper, the *Telegraph & Argus*, had a Morecambe edition), or to Scarborough and Bridlington.

"We didn't have carpets on the floor as the first houses I lived in had stone-flagged floors -- scrubbed every day -- and 'tabbed rugs'. My great-aunt used to make and sell tabbed rugs for family and friends; she collected clean worn-out clothing and cut the cloth into strips about an inch wide by four inches long. I used to go to a very old lady who'd worked with Miriam Lord (who was on the first Bradford School Board) pioneering school medical officers and school dinners -- the first in the UK. This old lady had an oat-cake bakery, and I used to collect old flour sacks. My great-aunt washed the sacks, cut them into rectangles, hemmed them, and then pushed the strips of cloth through the weave and back up again with a wooden skewer. By using different colours of cloth strips, she made patterns. This was very many years before Readicut did the same thing commercially, and made a fortune."

Vince Clarke  
16 Wendover Way  
Welling  
Kent DA15 2BN

"Derek Pickles's reminiscences in *FTT* 17 and his personal dedication were outstanding. I kept thinking of my son-in-law. He recently gave up being a Chartered Surveyor on a local council (the government squeeze on Labour councils led to fierce office politics) and is now learning to become an ambulance technician. He gets, ridiculously, about half of his previous wage, the saving of lives being deemed inferior to measuring buildings. But he's far happier."

*As readers will have noticed, the letter column has been constructed to ensure that each successive letter has had an obvious connection with the one preceding it -- but this is the point at which the connections evaporate and editorial links remain frustratingly uncontrivable. Poot. But the following comments inspired by *FTT* 19's cover perhaps mark a suitable point at which to draw this letter column to a close:*

Murray Moore  
(address as before)

"The cover image reminds me of the ingrown nail I had as a teenager. The toenail of my left big toe persisted in growing sideways. Our family doctor operated, without anaesthetic, in his office. The problem was not fixed. I was subsequently taken to the local hospital and operated on under anaesthesia.

"That operation was the second of my three operations in 44 years. My first was the removal of my tonsils. My third, and I am hopeful my last, operation was my second vasectomy.

"My first vasectomy happened under local anaesthetic in Midland's hospital. All was well for a month; then my testicles enlarged to the size of oranges. The insult to injury was that I was still producing sperm.

"I had a specialist do the second vasectomy. He recommended full anaesthesia, because he expected scarring. When I woke, he told me that he found no scar and could have operated in his office. He avoided answering my question why the previous operation by his colleague had failed.

"My orgasms have been less intense since my vasectomies. My advancing age might be a factor. Of course, I don't let on to my wife. I fake my orgasms. And I don't have the advantage of being able to think of England."

Sheryl Birkhead  
23629 Woodfield Rd  
Gaithersburg  
Maryland 20882, USA

"I can't look at that cover without wincing. I have, somewhere in fandom, mentioned the one piece of art I did on vellum -- corrections can be done, carefully, by scraping the ink off, and I have always chosen to use disposable scalpels for that. They are very sharp, have a nice point, and are easier for me to handle than an x-acto knife. On that particular illo, I corrected but wasn't paying attention to the growing pool of blood. The blade on a scalpel is, usually, curved, and as I slid my hand down to hold it better it cut the

devil out of my index finger. It was so sharp that it didn't hurt. I made sure the blood was out of the way, and sent the piece off with a note to the fanned that I wanted him to know I really put myself into my work."

*And finally, responding to a request for an explanation of the traffic jam of letters and numbers at the start of her address:*

Susan Zuege  
W63 N14262  
Washington Ave,  
Apt 88  
Cedarburg  
Wisconsin 53012-3016  
USA

"I haven't the slightest idea what all the letters and numbers in my address signify. At first, I thought they indicated where my apartment was located in the city, but soon abandoned that idea when I realised that I'm not on the west side of the city or even west side of the avenue. I'm on the east side. Likewise, I'm not on the northern end of the road or the city. Quite the contrary. My building is right beside the sign marking the southern boundary! My best guess is that it is some bizarre plot concocted by city officials and the post office to keep the residents confused and totally reliant on those in power to find housing, purchase the necessities of life, and stay in communication with the rest of the world. Whatever the answer really is, it must have been arrived at through the usual government procedure of boards, committees and expert advice all carefully considered and debated before the job was given to the mayor's son-in-law."

*And that's all we have time for on this occasion. In the few lines which remain, we have the WAHFs: Pamela Boal, Chester Cuthbert (being gloomy about Canada's immediate prospects: "I saw on TV a beautiful building being torn down because it had never been a profitable venture. Breweries are closing because beer drinking has declined. Hotels are being emptied of tenants because the owners do not have the finances to comply with fire regulations. Store fronts are boarded up because city taxes are too high for businesses. My fears of a depression like that of the thirties are growing because of the elimination of social programmes"), Bridget Hardcastle ("Who needs a skiffy sense of wonder, to dream of alien beings or pine for commercial space travel, when they have FTT?"), Par Nilsson ("The cover didn't drip blood on the carpet, but I did. First I jammed my foot under a door, mauling a toe, then managed to strike said foot against a chair, causing the nail of the mauled toe to come off"), Teddy Harvia, Kev McVeigh, D. M. Sherwood (a copy of an extract from an article by Samuel Delany on the marginality of SF practitioners), Michael Waite, Henry Welch, and someone who shall remain nameless but whose letter began: "I am writing to enquire whether you have any vacancies for an illustrator/writer within your company...." And he enclosed a CV! God knows what sort of review of FTT he must have read, or who published it....*

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"Not all national characteristics are entirely imaginary. A colleague in the German public service union tells me a tale of the abortive 1919 Berlin Workers Soviet.

"As the Prussian capital was racked by civil war and proletarian uprising, a group of factory workers were assigned to take over the central railway station. As disciplined trades unionists and militant socialists, they proceeded to Freidrichstrasse, confronted the station master, and advised him that in the name of the working class the railway was henceforth under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Respectful as always of higher authority, the station master bowed to their demands. And equally respectful of their responsibilities as exemplary citizens, each of the armed detachment bought a platform ticket before occupying the platforms."

(From *NUCPS Journal*, monthly paper of the National Union of Civil & Public Servants, July 1995)

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Compare these statements:

1. "Brigades of soil samplers -- skilled in the interpretation of physical, chemical and hydrological characteristics of topsoil -- presided over the construction phase, to ensure effective restoration. Thanks to their analyses, a profile of every field and fell crossed was assembled so that each could be restored in appropriate fashion....in fact, crossing of that narrow strip of oak and sycamore was delayed until the seeds of bluebells, celandines and sorrels lay dormant in topsoil. Only then was the rich layer lifted carefully and stored, so that a colourful carpet of wild flowers would be certain to greet spring visitors."

*Shell pipeline brochure describing the burying of an oil pipeline in the UK*

2. "We do not operate double standards between Nigeria and Britain."

*Shell International press briefing*

(Quoted in John Vidal's "Ecosoundings" column in *The Guardian*, 29 November 1995)



# CLEOPATRA GRIP

*Joseph Nicholas*

One Sunday in mid-February, we went for a walk in the countryside. The countryside was around Newbury; and we were accompanied by six thousand other people.

We were there to protest against the proposed Newbury bypass -- the second such to be constructed around the town, and the road project which exposed as a complete sham the government's much-vaunted "great transport debate". Having promised in 1994 to review the case for the road, then transport minister Brian Mawhinney slipped out the decision to proceed with it as a written answer in *Hansard* (the usual method of burying politically embarrassing announcements) in July 1995, months in advance of his own expert panel's report and on the very day of his own shift to another Cabinet post. It is a road project for which no proper environmental impact assessment has been conducted; which breaches the Department of Transport's own guidelines by cutting through (and thus partially destroying) three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Snelsmore Common and the Rivers Kennet and Lambourn), the North Berkshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the site of the First Battle of Newbury in 1643 (recognised as a site of national importance); for which the Highways Agency's cost-benefit analysis remains secret, in defiance of the government's own code on Open Government; which ignores the SACTRA findings on "induced traffic"; which was first proposed thirty years ago and rejected even then by the Buchanan Report on *Traffic In Towns* as incapable of solving Newbury's problems, the causes of which are chiefly local rather than long-distance; and which a *New Scientist* editorial denounced as a hopeless attempt to cater for supposedly ever-increasing numbers of cars rather than address the real issue of traffic management.

Six thousand people is nothing compared to the tens of thousands -- and in 1983 a quarter of a million -- who turned out for CND demonstrations in the mid-eighties; but then CND demonstrations took place in London, which is easily reached from most parts of Britain. By contrast, a demonstration in some muddy fields in winter couldn't be expected to attract anything like the same numbers -- but the numbers that did turn up exceeded the organisers' expectations tenfold. With other members of our local Friends of the Earth group and three members from the local Greenpeace group, we arrived at the railway station to find a huge queue for the shuttle buses to the start of the walk on Snelsmore Common -- and a train just pulling in to disgorge its standing-room-only passengers. We agreed on the spot that we would do what hundreds of other people were already doing: forget the buses, and walk. And as we did, so we literally walked back through history.

The modern town of Newbury consists of two villages which have grown together, yet whose market squares survive in recognisably separate form. One of the villages is Speenhamland, now commemorated only by the name of its post office yet infamous for the "Speenhamland System" of poor relief which provided the model for the Victorian treatment of the destitute. The facades of some of the buildings around the market square, even those whose ground floors had been thoroughly interfered with, were clearly Georgian. A little further on, we passed a public house whose low ceilings and low roof marked it out as probably seventeenth century. Yet further, as we crossed the Lambourn and began to ascend towards the Common, we encountered a Tudor alms house, with its characteristic tall brick chimneys (to ensure that stray sparks from the hearths within fell as far as possible from the thatched roofs -- now, of course, long since replaced by slate tiles). Finally, on the Common itself, an expanse of sandy heath and mixed woodland, we came across the remains of a medieval trackway -- the ditch in the centre now largely filled in, but the banks on either side, built up where the plough had turned at the edges of now-vanished fields, still visible. Last autumn's leaf litter still lay underfoot, surprisingly dry and springy after the recent rain. A strangely-shaped stump, perhaps the product of a long-ago lightning strike, protruded from one of the banks, moss gathered in its cracks. The trees -- straight, smooth-barked beech and knoblier oak -- were old and heavy-branched, possibly the second or even the first generation to have grown up since humans ceased using the trackway in any numbers. Although thronged with demonstrators, it still seemed quiet, either because the woods absorbed the noise of our passage or because our chatter had been stilled by a sudden sense of the trackway's age and timelessness. One wondered what landscape historian Oliver Rackham might have said of it.

But I describe this walk not just to record the demonstration but, odd though it doubtless sounds, to illustrate previous arguments about the falsity of the western expansionist paradigm. It's no coincidence, I think, that some of the strongest objections to this have come from the other side of the Atlantic -- from US readers whose nation is founded expressly on the idea of expansionism, and whose history is often conceived in terms of the "conquest" of a "virgin wilderness". This perspective inevitably casts landscape as an antagonist, something that people fought to "tame", and so denied a formal history of its own. Such history as US landscape does have is the history of its occupation prior to European settlement -- a settlement which represents a discontinuity with that prior record, and which must make it difficult if not impossible for a US citizen to experience it similarly to the way a Briton does the British countryside. Unlike US citizens, Britons can walk through their past -- not just centuries of it, as we did at Newbury, but, if they choose, whole millenia: Maiden Castle, the Ridgeway path, Avebury, the White Horse of Uffington....whereas the history of the US is the history of its people, the history of Britain is the history of its landscape.

I can think of several potential objections to this, of course. Firstly, that US landscape has just as much of a history as Britain: for example, the Anasazi ruins of the south-west, or the landscape forms left by the mound-builder culture of the east. Secondly, that the US cares just as much for its countryside as Britain: for example, Yosemite and Yellowstone national parks. And, thirdly, that the British landscape of today is the product of millenia of human interaction with it, whereas that of the US has been subject to modification by European settlers for only the past three or four hundred years. However, I can think of responses to all these objections. Firstly, the Anasazi and the mound-builders are not the direct predecessors of the Europeans; their relics do not therefore constitute part of the same record. Secondly, national parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone are managed as remnants of the supposed "virgin wilderness" rather than as part of the wider countryside; thus they are not viewed in the same way. Thirdly, the fact that the British landscape is the product of millenia of human interaction is precisely why Britons consider themselves to have such affinity for it: because we have worked with rather than struggled to subdue it. In any case, an objection that European settlers have had only a few hundred years to modify the US landscape could be taken as implicitly conceding that expansionism is a short-term phenomenon, by raising the possibility that in a few more hundred years US citizens will be entering into a similar relationship with their landscape as we Britons have with ours. Then they, like us, may begin to embrace the notion of stasis....

One nevertheless has to guard against the false romanticism of the rural idyll about which I wagged a finger in *FTT 7*, some six years ago. Most of us live in towns; accordingly, most of us have little first-hand experience of the countryside, and view it instead as a place of recreation rather than part of everyday life. But whether driven by romanticism or not, walking in the countryside is Britain's single most popular leisure activity -- because it provides us with relief from the stresses of urban living, because it helps reconnect us with the natural world, and because it reminds us of our origins. And that, I suspect, is why six thousand people turned up on a cold Sunday afternoon in February to walk through the countryside around Newbury: because while we recognise that landscape changes over time, as a product of our interaction with it, we also recognise the difference between managing the landscape and destroying it: between handing the countryside on to future generations and tearing it up for short-term financial gain.

The medieval trackway came to an end on the crest of a slope which led down into Honey Bottom, a small, steep-sided vale with heavily-wooded ridges on either side. The vale ran off to our right, and was thronged with demonstrators; in the trees directly opposite were the shelters set up by those who had taken their protests against the bypass as far as living in selected spots along the route. Their treehouses -- reminding one of the makeshift "benders" at Greenham Common peace camp in the eighties, but here built some twenty to thirty feet above the ground -- were connected by aerial rope-walks and netting to help their inhabitants both get around and, more importantly, delay the bailiffs eventually sent in to evict them by the Department of Transport's Highways Agency. One could imagine what this vale might look like in spring or summer, with afternoon sun slanting across a display of bluebells or birds catching insects above the streamlet, and felt an immediate sense of loss. Was this place really intended as the site of a six-lane bypass?

Indeed it was. According to one of the tree-dwellers, the road was projected to come over the ridge in front of us, cross the vale where it opened onto pastureland a few tens of metres further on, and continue over the summit of hill beyond. Except that the road would not travel "over" the ridge and the hill at all, but cut huge swathes through them in the same way that the M3 extension smashed through Twyford Down a few

years ago, with the earth ripped out being pushed into the vale to provide a level surface for the carriageway and thus allow yuppies in their penis-substitute BMWs to accelerate up to the speed limit and save a minute or two on their journeys to their ultra-important sales meetings.

Partway along the vale was an information board erected by the demonstration's organisers, giving details of the particular habitats at risk from the bypass. In the crowds, it was impossible to study it properly; groups of tree-dwellers stood around it, chatting to passing demonstrators and soliciting donations of food and money. Not surprisingly, they looked rather drawn and unkempt, but also very cheerful: perhaps they too were surprised by the numbers who'd turned up. One of them was practising his juggling. What is it about eco-protests and the New Age lifestyle which so attracts jugglers, I wondered. It's very relaxing, said Moira, our group's newsletter editor, who said she used to juggle but had become rather rusty. Her opinion was seconded by Judith, who as far as I know has never juggled in her life.

We passed out of Honey Bottom, walked across a makeshift corduroy laid across a patch of squelching mud, and ascended the slope of the hill beyond. The summit seemed to have been declared a place of rest: people stood around in groups, sat to eat their sandwiches, and one or two had put a kite aloft. After a brief pause to regroup and look back the way we'd come, we pushed on -- through a gate, along a gravel track past an immense dung-heap in the corner of field, and down a steep lane with tall hedges either side into another field which another information board told us was the probable point where Constable had sat to paint his view of the North Berkshire Downs and before that had been a corner of the Second Battle of Newbury.

The Second Battle of Newbury was fought in October 1644, within sight of Donnington Castle, built in the fourteenth century and held for the Royalist cause during a two-year siege -- the longest single siege of the English Civil War. Like all medieval castles eventually taken by Cromwell, its defences were battered down to prevent their possible future use by anti-Parliamentary forces, and all that now remains is the shell of the keep and the outlying earthworks constructed by the besiegers. The shell of the keep -- a square, dour-looking thing -- was visible through the trees to our left; but it was difficult to reconstruct the battle which had been fought in the fields before us. The countryside had then been more open, with fewer hedgerows and longer sight-lines, which had allowed the Parliamentarians to close rapidly with the Royalists as they retreated towards Oxford, recapturing several of their own artillery pieces lost in Cornwall a few months before. But the Parliamentary army had been split between two commanders, and co-ordination was poor: the second wing's attack had not begun until four in the afternoon, by which time the Royalists had regrouped sufficiently to repulse it, before getting away under cover of the gathering dusk. The best which could be said was that the death toll had been less than the five thousand who fell in the First Battle, fought a few miles to the south, where a maze of hedgerows and narrow lanes prevented the Royalist cavalry from mounting a proper charge and the Parliamentary infantry from breaking out of its squares to form a line. Not even the Department of Transport knew whether or how many graves, from both battles, might be disturbed, because it wouldn't pay an archaeologist to find out -- but it was deeply ironic to think of those who'd died for the right of people to determine their own affairs only for their descendants to be confronted with a modern variant of divine right, which regards as criminal all opposition to its technocratic gigantism. More than ironic, in fact; it is an affront to their memory.

We came down into the hamlet of Bagnor on the banks of the Lambourn. Its residents were completely opposed to the road: it would pass within only a few metres of their homes, and destroy their quiet rural lives forever. Not just through noise and pollution, but because it would attract developers in search of "greenfield" sites outside Newbury, in the process encouraging the town to expand towards the hamlet and eventually swallow it, in the same fashion as Speenhamland. This is of course how conurbations grow, and the process is not exclusive to the twentieth century; but in its last decade, in the south-east of England, it's surely gone far enough. We need more open spaces, not less; which means fewer roads, fewer retail parks, fewer trucks cruising back and forth between fewer "just-in-time" manufacturing centres.

In reality, the road will probably go ahead -- but the political cost of building it is now so great that nothing like it will ever be proposed again. This may be the motor car's centenary year, but the anniversary seems to be provoking more commiseration than commemoration. One's feeling is that the car's era of unchallenged dominance is drawing to an end: its costs are too high, and we can afford it no longer. It is time for us instead to relearn how to live with the landscape, and cease trying to overcome it.

Britain now has five times more people working on nuclear weapons than the USA.

(Staff numbers at the core nuclear weapons programme at Los Alamos: 900. At Aldermaston: 5,000.)

British families spend nearly as much on armaments as they do on food.

(UK family of four's average public spending per week on armaments: £40. Weekly expenditure on food and non-alcoholic drink: £50.43. Average annual value of subsidised military exports over the past five years: £4.5 billion.)

If armaments factory workers were redeployed at the post-World War Two rate, Britain could convert to peace in 45 days.

(Numbers supplying the forces in June 1945: 3,887,000. In June 1946: 717,000. Estimated UK employment dependent on military expenditure in 1993-1994: 395,000.)

Every six working weeks, the Ministry of Defence gives its civilian car drivers an Olympic swimming pool of global-warming petrol.

(MoD civilian private car mileage subsidy in 1994-1995: £10.7 million.)

There are seven petrol stations for every railway station in the UK.

(Number of BR railway stations: 2,506. With ticket offices: 1,316. Number of petrol stations: 18,500.)

The Department of Transport spends nearly 500 times more research money on road than rail transport.

(Government spending on road research in 1994-95: £33.8 million. On rail research: £69,000.)

Since 1988, British rail travel has fallen by 2.2 million passenger kilometres a year, while western Germany's has risen by 14 million.

In the past five years, state income from the licensing of motor vehicles has risen by 30%, while from the emptying of future generations' oil wells it has declined by 10%.

Public spending on England's global warming main roads is nearly twice what it was when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, yet the average car is parked for 95% of its life.

(Number of Britons without driving licences: 28.2 million.)

Since 1990, factory farming and supermarkets targeting motorists over other shoppers have made the remaining farmers 60% richer.

(Inflation-adjusted total farming income in 1990: £2.3 billion. In 1994: £3.69 billion.)

1% of the UK's population owns between 50 and 75 percent of its land (the exact percentage is concealed by trust law and the Land Registry).

Annual exports of fruit and vegetables from Spain and Italy have been sprayed with nerve gas-based pesticides weighing 26 Eiffel Towers.

(Annual tonnes of pesticides used in Spain: 134,000. In Italy: 91,000. Tonnes of metal in the Eiffel Tower: 8,757. Species of insect, including major pests, which have developed resistance to chemical pesticides: 500.)

France dumps non-renewable petroleum the weight of 54 Eiffel Towers each year in plastic parts from electrical and electronic products.

It takes modern German civilisation just 101 days to emit the weight of the Great Pyramid of Cheops in major climate-changing pollutants.

(Estimated tonnes of climate-changing gases emitted on an average day in Germany: 69,000.)

96% of complaints to local councils about noise are futile: on average, a local authority takes action less than once a month.

(Complaints about noise to local authorities in 1981: 30,289. In 1992-1993: 111,515. Percentage resulting in noise abatement notices in 1992-1993: 4.3.)

This is *FTT 20*, from:

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REDUCED RATE