

OPUNTIA

586

IN FLANDERS FIELDS.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead: Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.



Remembrance Day 2024

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. There is also an cumulative subject index to all issues available at those sites. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

ABOUT THE COVER: John McCrae's poem as it was first published in the 1915-12-08 issue of PUNCH magazine. The adjacent photo was taken by me in the TD Square mall of downtown Calgary.

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY

2024-11-11

photos by Dale Speirs

Previous ceremony reports were in OPUNTIA issues as follow:

Central Memorial Park - #358, 560

Field of Crosses - #326, 397, 512

Museum of the Regiments - #71.5, 429

North Glenmore Park - #537

Signal Hill - #62.5B, 460

Until the 1990s, there was a concern was that only the old men turned out for Remembrance Day. That changed after Canadian troops began dying in the Balkan wars, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. Now the audience is noticeably younger. Instead of grandfathers to remember, the crowds remember uncles, brothers, sons, and husbands, as well as several female soldiers killed in action.

There are dozens of Remembrance Day ceremonies across Calgary. I visit a different location each year in sequence. Many are too far to travel so I never get to them.

This year I attended the ceremony at the Royal Canadian Legion branch on Kensington Road NW in central Calgary. This was my first time at that location, in the Hillhurst district on the north bank of the Bow River across from the downtown core.

An optimist in Calgary is someone who thinks he can find a parking spot in the central city. Fortunately there was a direct bus route from my neighbourhood to Hillhurst. Twas a beautiful morning, 5°C with no wind or snow. I took the view at right from the bus stop.





A very good turnout for the ceremony. The usual agenda, beginning with singing “Oh Canada!”. Because the official lyrics have been changed several times within living memory, there is always a muddled response in the middle of the anthem.

Us Boomers learned a different version than the younger generations, so half the crowd sang a different set of verses. Fortunately the chorus is still the same so the crowd finished together on the same lines.

Following on were the speeches from military, federal, provincial, and municipal dignitaries, then a bugler playing “The Last Post”, a minute of silence, and wreath laying. Shown on the next few pages.

The ceremony wrapped up with the crowd singing “God Save The King”. I suddenly realized that this was the first time I had ever sung this song. I was born three years after Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne. Like the vast majority of Canadians, I had never known any other monarch. Now the King of Canada is on the throne.



There was a flyover of RCAF fighter planes but they came by so fast I wasn't able to get my camera up in time for a decent shot. Here is the only photo I got.









AROUND COWTOWN

photos by Dale Speirs

Last winter the Opuntiamobile spun out several times because the tires were worn. I didn't forget and on November 1, the car went in for a new set of snow tires, \$550 installed. This probably means Calgary will have the warmest winter in history with no snow. After all, anytime we need rain, I just wash the car.



The *fad de jour* among citizens with too much time on their hands is to put out signs like this in the hopes their precious kiddies won't be run over by their neighbours. I'd tell them to instead teach their children to look both ways before crossing the street but that would invite backlash.

This sign briefly appeared in my neighbourhood a few blocks from Chez Opuntia. Someone drove over it. I was not surprised.



ALBERTA FANDOM

Suddenly lots of news at hand about Alberta fandom.

Edmonton Bidding For 2030 Worldcon.

A group of fans from Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, have announced they are bidding for the 2030 Worldcon. Edmonton is a four-hour drive due north of Calgary. The few fans who have been identified with the bid are unknown to me but given the atomization of Canadian fandom that means nothing.

In 2030 I shall be 75, so I won't be volunteering. Hopefully I will be able to attend in good health.

Calgary's Readercon.

For them that has read a book, there is When Words Collide 2025. Calgary's annual readercon has a membership limit of 1,000 plus volunteers and guests. The event always sells out a few months before. Reports of previous WWC conventions appeared in OPUNTIA #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, 350, 387, 421, 452, 481, 507, 532, 555, and 580.

The 2025 WWC will be held August 15 to 17 at a new location, the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel, 2620 - 32 Avenue NE. The Alexandra Writers Centre in Calgary are the organizers. They did a good job in 2024 and will no doubt do so again in 2025. Details from www.whenwordscollide.org

WWC has become Canada's biggest and best readercon. Numerous authors, editors, agents, and publishers will be in attendance. The dealer bourse is restricted to books. The average customer buys tote bags full.

The War of the Words story competition is open to writers across Canada, the US, and attendees of When Words Collide 2025. Whether you're an experienced writer or new to the craft, we invite writers of all ages to showcase their creativity and storytelling abilities. The theme is Lovers, Liars, and Labyrinths.

Submission deadline is March 31, 2025, by 23h59 Mountain Time. Submission fee is CAN \$5. Eligibility: Open to residents of Canada and the USA, as well as attendees of When Words Collide 2025. You do not need to attend the

festival to participate. Guest Judge is Finnian Burnett and the Editor is Sarah Pratt.

Prizes:

1st Prize: \$300

2nd Prize: \$200

3rd Prize: \$100

7 Honourable Mentions: \$50 each

Top 10 winning entries will be published in War of the Words Anthology Volume 2, and authors will receive a free copy. The winners will be celebrated at a special event during When Words Collide 2025 in August.

To participate in the 2025 War of the Words Writing Contest, please carefully follow these guidelines to ensure your submission is eligible:

Submissions must be original, unpublished works. Only one entry per author. Co-authored stories are welcome; prize winnings are awarded per story, not per author. Stories must not be submitted elsewhere during the contest period.

All forms of prose and genres are accepted. The theme for the contest is Lovers, Liars, and Labyrinths. Submit in .doc or .docx format only. PDF files will not be accepted.

Pages must be numbered, and the title of the story should appear in the header. Do not include your name anywhere on the document. Submissions should be typed, double-spaced, using an 11 or 12 pt font (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial). Stories must not exceed 2,500 words. Authors retain all rights to their stories.

Please note: The AWCS and When Words Collide proudly supports creative writers. We will not accept submissions created with the use of AI such as ChatGPT. If your story is found to be created by AI in any facet, either before, during or after the contest, your submission will be disqualified. We want to protect the intellectual property and copyrights of all writers and currently the use of AI in this form is unethical and an infringement on those rights.

For information on submission guidelines and more, visit www.whenwordscollide.org.

FOOD COZIES: PART 30

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 29 appeared in OPUNTIA's #432 to 434, 436, 438, 441, 442, 444, 447, 450, 454, 456 to 458, 460 to 462, 465, 475, 507, 512, 524, 530, 538, 550, 565, 573, 576, and 579.]

One important rule about food cozies: Never read them on an empty stomach.

Catering For Crime.

THE DIVA SAYS CHEESECAKE! (2022) by Krista Davis was the 15th novel in a food cozy series about Sophie Winston of Alexandria, Virginia. She was an event planner and caterer who Marpled on the side.

Sophie was hired to cater a Midsummer Night's Dream party by Bobbie Sue Bodoin, the self-styled Queen of Cheesecake. The stipulation was no cheesecake on the menu. Bobbie Sue and her staff at her bakery produced cheesecake all day long, so they didn't want the stuff on their day off.

The bakery was a wholesale operation supplying restaurants in the district including a tavern owned by Bobbie Sue's husband Tate. He didn't survive past Chapter 4, murdered in his tavern. Sophie was an experienced Miss Marple, so Bobbie Sue asked her to investigate. The police? What of them?

The back stories came out in between Sophie's daily grind of catering to various events. In what must be a first for a food cozy, Tate's stomach contents at time of death became a vital clue and were much discussed. The medical examiner advised that Tate's last meal was crab, shrimp, flounder, white wine, spinach purée, rice, cheese, and chocolate mousse.

None of those items were on the tavern menu, so the question was where did he eat before dying. Cheesecake was found at the murder scene, which everyone agreed was brought by the killer.

Sophie had her scene with the culprit but lived to cater another day. The murderer was an obsessive who fancied Bobbie Sue and wanted Tate out of the way. All ended well with the killer in prison and the survivors enjoying a hearty meal of cheesecake.

The recipes appendix began with Egg Muffins, Baked Potatoes, Veggie Kabobs, and Mushroom Havarti Cheese Omelet. The Berry Coolers had 4 oz of vodka and 4 oz peach schnapps, so make certain you have a designated driver. Then on to the cheesecake varieties, which included Chocolate Mousse, Blackberry, and Japanese. Finishing up were Pumpkin Pie, Strawberry Butter, and Pear Héléne.

THE DIVA DELIVERS ON A PROMISE (2023) was the next novel in the series. The plot got off to a jackrabbit start in the first chapter when Sophie Winston attended a charity executive meeting for a group called A Healthy Meal.

Before the minutes of the last meeting could be read someone noticed a dead man lying on the floor at the far end of the table. Well, it was a long table. He had a knife stuck in him. Hardly had the police hauled him away when someone bludgeoned a delivery driver nearby. Guess who found him.

The second victim was still alive. He worked for a ghost kitchen, which is a restaurant that delivers food only, with no dine-in facilities. The pandemic gave a tremendous boost to the industry and now every city has them by the hundreds.

Sophie had been hired for a convention of the Association of Ghost Kitchens, which began just as the murders did. That kept her diverted to the hotel. The food for the convention was ordered in from local ghost kitchens.

That surprised me because most hotels do not allow outside catering. I've worked enough philatelic conventions since 1980 to know that hotels consider food services one of their profit centres. But I digress.

Sophie went about Marpleing, not to mention the police. The usual dirt was dug up. Suspicion was flung about as if from a manure spreader in compound low gear. The alarms and attempted murders splashed blood and tomato sauce everywhere.

The convention faded out of the plot halfway through the novel. Everyone ate meals ordered from the local ghost kitchens. The killers were settling grudges from back when and a crazy woman was trying to gaslight a widow out of her home. The epilogue finished with a hearty meal at Sophie's house. Home cooked, not ordered in.

The recipes appendix began with Salmon Mushroom Salad, then Cobb Salad. Following on were Pumpkin Spice Cake, Lemon Meringue Pie, Cherry Chocolate Chip Cookies, and Fruit Salad. To drink was Red Berry Smash (vodka and raspberries) and Blue Ghost (rum cocktail in vanilla ice cream).

If that didn't fill you, there were Panna Cotta (gelatin dessert), Peach Crisp Oatmeal Crumble, Strawberry Poke Cake, and Peach Berry Parfait.

Food Critics.

A SIDE OF MURDER (2021) by Amy Pershing was the first novel in a cozy series about Samantha Barnes of Fair Harbor, on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. After a disastrous stint as a chef in New York City she returned to Cape Cod, having inherited a house from her aunt.

She got a job as a restaurant reviewer. Her first assignment was Bayview Grill on the shore, for which she took along several friends. She had to teach them the objective ways to review food and, most importantly, don't let the restaurant staff know they were food critics.

After the meal Samantha stepped outside for a stroll and promptly found a body floating against the shoreline. Estelle Kobolt, an old enemy from way back when. The harbour patrol commander was Jason Captiva, an ex-lover of Samantha who had parted with her years ago on unfriendly terms.

The newspaper promptly changed her job from a food critic to a crime reporter. The Deppity Dawg wasn't happy that Samantha was interrogating him instead of vice versa. She did get her food review printed though.

The plot then paused while Samantha hosted a large dinner party. Lots of food descriptions and cooking tips. Don't read this if you are even mildly hungry or you'll end up in the kitchen cleaning out your refrigerator. Jason was an uninvited guest although Samantha welcomed him.

Before the other guests arrived, they had a glass of wine and discussed why Estelle's body was floating face up. Drowning victims float face down because arms and legs hang that way naturally. The conclusion was that she had been freshly murdered at the time her body was discovered.

Assorted complications filled out the plot, intermixed with food preparation tips. Trey Gorman was a childhood friend of Samantha who was now a real estate developer trying to build a gated community in the village. Don't let fried chicken sit in its grease; put it on a grill.

Estelle was revealed to be a blackmailer. Use lots of butter to make cookies soft and chewy. Blackmailers tend to have shortened lives. Trey uttered threats against Samantha, to which she responded by getting a restraining order. Samantha's sleuthing resulted in her getting everything wrong, which then got her into the usual confrontation with the killer.

Since she had a future in the book series, she prevailed. And so to a happy ending gulping down seafood. The recipes appendix began with Onion Rings, then Clam Chowder. Following on was a salad made with layers of arugula, mango, and goat cheese, dressed with honey. For dessert, Chocolate Chip Cookies.

AN EGGNOG TO DIE FOR (2021) was the sequel, set at Christmas time. The village of Fair Harbor was hosting a new festival called Santa's Seashore Selebration. And yes, that last word was spelled with an S.

There was a 5K Santa Stroll, plus a Santa Trolley if strolling was too strenuous. Mrs Claus's Pancake Breakfast was good for calories. Santa arrived on the harbourmaster boat, steered by an elf.

Samantha Barnes decided to host a Christmas feast for family and friends. One little annoyance was that she referred to her parents as 'rents. I suppose some people actually use that contraction but to me it was just irritating.

She was going to cook fish, her father would do a roast beef, and everyone argued what flavour the eggnog should be. Her mother was on a health food kick and wanted a tofu turkey. Some people will eat anything.

The newspaper owner asked Samantha to continue her food reviews but she was also put to work making cooking podcasts. Problem was, food critics should be anonymous to restaurants lest they be recognized and given special treatment. With Samantha's face online, she had trouble with that, especially in a small town.

As the festivities went on, Samantha was in a studio recording another episode of Cape Cod Foodies. Her guest was whipping up a variety of Christmas cocktails. T was there that she found the body of Santa Claus. The deceased was Caleb Mayo, dressed for the occasion. He had an unsavory reputation.

The plot then bogged down with Samantha's angst over her life and romantic relationship with harbourmaster Jason Captiva or lack thereof. More angst ensued when her parents arrived from Florida to stay the holidays in their old hometown.

She had to get a Christmas tree but didn't have the money to buy ornaments. Being a food critic for a small-town newspaper doesn't pay much. A friend proposed a solution, an all-edible tree.

Not the tree itself of course, but it would be decorated with popcorn and cranberry strings, candy canes, and frosted cookies dangling on ribbons.

Samantha's Marpleing went on, interspersed with food preparation details and Christmas present shopping with her mother. The two women speculated about possible suspects, much of which would constitute slander in a court of law.

December 24 arrived with the big family feast that Samantha prepared:

Tree Trimming
Coconut Eggnog
Champagne and Wellfleet Oysters
Madam Phi's Shrimp Spring Rolls
Angel-Hair Pasta with Clams
Nonna's Fish Pie with Saffron and Leeks
Calamari, Pine Nut, and Baby Spinach Salad
Dessert à la Surprise

After whipping up all that, Samantha had time to sit down and write out a list of suspects and their details. By her own account the process took 45 minutes. She then left the list on the coffee table, making the reader think of Chekhov's Gun. Instead everyone feasted and then settled in the living room for conversation.

Samantha progressed with the usual Marple methodology such as break-and-enter, theft, and obstruction of justice. She established that Caleb Mayo collected blackmail everywhere he could.

After naming several suspects as the murderer, Samantha then got herself trapped with the real killer, as we knew she would. That was also standard Marple methodology, plus the last-second rescue. The epilogue was a seafood dinner where all the loose threads of the plot were tied off along with fish cakes and oyster stew.

The author surprised the reader in the recipes appendix with no seafood recipes. Fine by me; I'm a flatlander who grew up in barbecue country, have never eaten an oyster, and don't intend to try the stunt.

The appendix began with Braised Leeks With Parmesan, then Buttermilk-Brined Roast Chicken. Oven-Roasted Butternut Squash was next, and for dessert there was Chocolate Mousse.

L A I D O U T T O R E S T (2022) by J.C. Eaton (pseudonym of wife and husband Ann I. Goldfarb and James E. Clapp) was the first novel in a food cozy series about Katie Aubrey of Cave Creek, Arizona.

The story began with Katie quitting her high-tech job, buying a sandwich shop, renting a house, and planning a high-end catering service. The shop would be converted to charcuterie and the catering business would carry on that trade.

Pause for digression. Charcuterie was invented by the French in the 1400s but the modern form in Canada and the USA is the charcuterie board, quite unlike the original. I don't know elsewhere but in Calgary all the boards have a large handle for carrying.

The wooden boards are lined with a variety of cold-cut meats, deli cheeses, nuts, artisanal crackers, dried fruits, and non-leafy vegetables. They are then sealed with transparent plastic wrap.

Charcuteries are basically a fancy-dress ploughman's lunch but far more expensive. The cost is not so much the ingredients as it is the labour to assemble them. I've never bothered with them because I can make my own selections much cheaper and eat off a proper dish.

Charcuterie boards recently became a fad here in Cowtown in every supermarket or delicatessen.

Strictly in the interest of research for this review, I bought a charcuterie board for \$18 from my local Safeway. Three kinds of cheese, two meats, artisanal crackers, plum jelly, fruits and nuts.



Which brings us back to the plot. The sandwich shop had two staff, Lilly-Ann and Matt, who were happy to stay on and teach Katie. She let them know that the shop would be converted to a charcuterie.

Katie's thinking was that her charcuterie catering would be aimed at business and club meetings, an untapped market. She would leave the wedding receptions for the bigger outfits. The staff would be taught how to arrange slices of bologna to look like flowers.

When Katie moved into her house, a stray beagle was there ahead of her. She named him Speedbump since he spent most of his time stretched out on the floor sound asleep.

In the house, however, a ghost began causing problems. The absentee landlord was the nephew of the previous occupant Edith Ellory, an elderly food critic who gave nasty reviews. She supposedly died peacefully in her sleep in the house but her ghost insisted her death was murder.

Edith suspected one of the restauranteurs who got bad reviews from her or else her neighbours, whom she constantly annoyed. That made for a long list of suspects. Katie's problem was approaching all the suspects.

Food critics review expensive restaurants, not the chains or fast-food outlets. Katie first thought she would dine at each suspect's establishment as an excuse to interrogate the staff. The cost of such pricey meals put her off.

Then she realized there was a different method that would not only be cheaper but might even earn her a profit. Since she was opening a charcuterie shop, the natural thing to do was to visit local restaurants and solicit orders. That would give her a chance to ask questions about the place.

Unfortunately Edith insisted on accompanying Katie to the restaurants. No one else could see or hear her. That made for some embarrassing moments when Katie forgot herself and spoke to Edith.

Traditional Miss Marple methods were used, such as multiple break-and-enters in search of evidence, none of which would be admissible in court. The plot paused every so often for details about how to arrange charcuterie boards and make them look exciting. To be honest, laying out cheese slices and sliced meats is not exactly high cuisine.

Eventually the denouement arrived at a party where Katie was supplying charcuterie boards. The host killed Edith in anticipation that she would trash his newly-opened restaurant in her review. There were others at the party acting out unrelated problems. The event made the news.

The recipes appendix was a basic primer on how to lay out a charcuterie board. Fast food stuff basically. I'm surprised Subway or Olly Fresco's don't already offer boards.

Doughnut Commit Crimes.

DOUBLE GRUDGE DONUTS (2024) by Ginger Bolton (pseudonym of Janet Bolin) was the eighth novel in a food cozy series about Emily Westhill of Fallingbrook, Wisconsin. She owned the Deputy Donut Café.

Emily's wedding was nigh but she still had time to Marple. The Fallingbrook Arts Festival was underway, which included a Highland bagpipes competition. One piper wasn't playing fair. After someone caught up with him, he wasn't playing anything anymore.

One of the clues was a broken fragment of a Deputy Donut mug, which was good enough for the local police. This was Emily's eighth murder, so they had it in for her constantly showing them off.

The Festival held the children's talent show on the street in front of the doughnut shop. That was good for Emily's business. If you want to drive people off the streets, just have a bunch of kids singing off-key and off-beat. Meanwhile the clue gathering proceeded.

The dead man had been trying to extort someone else for an unrelated murder elsewhere. The denouement involved drones and a confrontation on the roof of the doughnut shop. And so to the wedding.

The recipes appendix was for Double Fudge Donuts and Lemon Curd Long Johns. There was a useful hint on what to do with all those zucchinis left over. Puree them and add them to the batter. They make it creamy but are tasteless.



At left: Tim Horton's offered these doughnuts in August 2024 before the Calgary Stampeders football team knocked themselves out of the playoffs.

The team logo was printed with edible sugar.



Above: Seen at the 2024 Calgary Stampede on one of the food trucks. I had just eaten a pizza so I didn't have room for a doughnut burger. I meant to come back later in the day but never got back. Perhaps at the 2025 rodeo.

Grilled Cheese.

NO PARM NO FOUL (2022) by Linda Reilly was the second novel in a food cozy series about Carly Hale of Balsam Dell, Vermont. She operated the Grilled Cheese Eatery. She apparently did good business in gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches during the tourist season. When school was in, the shop did even better with the teenagers.

One of her staff was Grant Robinson, a young man who also worked part-time at the nearby Sub-a-Dub-Sub. He didn't like their sloppy hygiene, complained to the health board, then quit to work full-time at the Eatery. The sub shop owner Ferris Menard was furious and blamed Carly. There was a nasty confrontation.

He was later found dead on his shop floor with a knife into his heart. Ferris had angina. The autopsy revealed he was dead before the knife was stuck into him. There was a footprint on his chest, suggesting that someone stood on him during an angina attack and prevented him from reaching his medication.

Ferris had a plethora of enemies but since Carly was a possible suspect, she went Marpleing. Not helping were her unsubtle methods of investigating, which annoyed many villagers. Adding to her problems was a rough patch with her boyfriend Ari Mitchell.

An anonymous telephone call to the police revealed work boots in Aris trash can that might match the footprint on Ferris' chest. Most believed it was a set-up. Carly's obsession with sleuthing caused her to neglect essential details of running her shop. She was short-staffed and looking for help.

One of the applicants was Ferris' daughter Holly, who was desperate for an income after the sub shop was closed. She told Carly that she didn't believe Ferris had been murdered by her. Carly was equally desperate for help, so she hired Holly.

The ability of Carly to stir up bad memories and multiply suspects was impressive for any Miss Marple. She bumbled and irritated her way around town without accomplishing much. An elderly friend was pushed down some stairs and taken to hospital unconscious. There was a boot footprint at the scene, once again making everyone suspicious.

As per standard Marple tradition, Carly got herself trapped with the murderer. He was being blackmailed by Ferris over a hit-and-run decades ago. She was lined up for the next novel in the series, so she survived. An extended epilogue sorted out all the details about the remaining characters.

The appendix had two grilled cheese sandwich recipes. Panko Perfection was sliced tomatoes and sharp cheddar cheese melted with panko crumbs. I never heard of the latter so I looked it up on Google. Panko is steamed and dried Japanese bread crumbs. The other recipe was Farmhouse Cheddar Sleeps With The Fishes, which was tuna flakes and sharp cheddar grilled on ciabatta bread.

I saw this food truck at the 2024 Calgary Stampede but passed.



CHEDDAR LATE THAN DEAD (2023) was the next novel in the grilled cheese saga. The plot began with Carly Hale catering a bridal shower. She had managed to hire another staffer and the Eatery was on an even keel again.

The bridezilla Klarissa Taddeo had booked a local inn but neglected to get her cheque in by the deadline to hold the reservation. She therefore decided to have the shower at her maid of honour mother's mansion.

The space was there but Mama wasn't going to cook for thirty guests, so Carly was hired. The maid of honour Dawn Chapin remembered that a while back she and Klarissa had been in a Maine roadhouse that served grilled cheese doughnut sandwiches.

More about that at the end of this review when I discuss the recipes appendix. Carly added extra to her estimate. Klarissa was desperate and agreed. The food was a success but the shower wasn't.

Carly kept her ears open while she worked. Basically everyone hated each other and had past histories with each other. The groom Tony Manous was despised by his future mother-in-law, and his stepmother detested the incoming bride.

Tony didn't survive past Chapter 3. He was found dead at the foot of a staircase in the Chapin mansion, a spilled glass beside him. The autopsy revealed the fall didn't kill him. Cause of death was poison.

Dawn was the prime suspect so she asked Carly to help her. In any event a draft horse could not hold back Carly. She barged about as Miss Marples so often do. Throwing fuel on the fire was the sudden disappearance of the town manager Gretel Engstrom.

Carly's reputation as a Miss Marple preceded her, which often made her sleuthing difficult. Everyone had something to hide. She was snooping for two cases, the murder and the disappearance.

The two were related as Carly found out when she was kidnapped by the murderer and tied up in a basement with the missing Gretel. The killer resented Tony barging into her family's life. She blabbed all at great length and any missing details were clarified in the epilogue.

And so to the appendix, comprising only two recipes, Grilled Cheese Donut and Tomato Soup. Regarding the former, this was a glazed doughnut sliced lengthwise, buttered on the cut sides, shredded cheese in the middle, and then grilled as a sandwich with the cut sides outward.

Cooking Shows.

BARBACOA, BOMBA, AND BETRAYAL (2023) by Raquel V. Reyes was the third novel in a food cozy series about Miriam Quinones of Miami, Florida. She was a cooking show producer when not Marpleing. The dialogue fluctuated between English, Spanish, and Spanglish patois, which will slow down anglophone readers.

The plot zigzagged between families in Florida and a business trip to Puerto Rico. The filming was mixed in with a Bitcoin convention and a stalker leaving threatening notes for Miriam. She traveled about the island filming episode segments.

Locations ranged from a coffee shop that processed beans by hand and a café that featured homemade mild spicy sauces. Then on to a food vlogger who prepared bacalaitos (salted cod fritters) for the camera. As she toured the island, Miriam gathered food video clips and alarums in equal measure. Everything swirled around a complicated mess involving property speculators and fraud.

The recipes appendix began with Tamarind Juice, the first time I've seen a cozy recipe with a disclaimer that the taste might not be enjoyable. The author described the drink as smelling like boiled orange juice. I've never even heard tell of anyone boiling orange juice, so that description didn't help much.

Better luck with the next item, which was Sorullitos (sweet corn fritters), Pique (mild sauce), Arroz Con Pollo (chicken on a bed of rice), and Pastelon (cheese lasagna).

Fortunes In Baking.

ILL-FATED FORTUNE (2024) by Jennifer J. Chow was the first novel in a food cozy series about Felicity Jin of Pixie, California. Her family operated a bakery where she made fortune cookies. When she ran out of generic fortunes, she began writing personalized predictions subconsciously.

The bakery was very specialized and had only two other items on the menu besides fortune cookies. Egg tarts and pineapple buns. The latter contained no pineapple but just looked like one.

As so commonly happens in cozies, a murder victim was found behind Miss Marple's shop, or in this case the Gold Bakery. (The name Jin means 'gold' in Mandarin.) The deceased had one of Felicity's fortunes, which unfortunately could be read as a prediction of how he would be murdered.

The unlucky fellow was Charlie Gong, owner of Smiley Fortunes. His operation was a fortune cookie factory in the shoddier part of the industrial district. The product was rock hard. He was being sued after a bridal party got food poisoning from his cookies.

An additional part of the background was a restaurant Foo Fusion, unliked by either Gold Bakery or Smiley Fortunes. However the owner Michael Fu placed an order for 300 fortune cookies. That put Felicity in an awkward position since Smiley Fortunes previously had the contract.

She worked late into the night to fill the order. The bakery lost customers because of the rumours generated by the murder. Felicity hustled as a wholesale supplier of fortune cookies to generate some income.

Always time for sleuthing though, including dumpster diving at the Smiley Fortunes factory. Which had security cameras. Which the police were monitoring. Then Felicity wondered why she was the prime suspect.

Fu increased his order for fortune cookies. Felicity learned the hard way that hand-crafting small orders was fun but by the thousands the job was hard on the hands and monotonous.

Assorted alarums, plot twists, and weird connections followed, culminating in the traditional trapped-with-the-killer denouement. Charlie Gong had wronged a woman who therefore set him up for revenge. She was helped by not only Felicity but several others acting as complete idiots. The appendix had a recipe for fortune cookies, how to make rose bouquets, and creating gold glitter candles.

Berry Much Trouble.

MULBERRY MISCHIEF (2019) by Sharon Farrow was the fourth novel in a food cozy series about Marlee Jacobs of Oriole Point, Michigan, on the lake shore. She operated The Berry Basket, whose stock in trade was obvious from its name.

The Harvest Health Fair was underway, organized by a health food fanatic who wanted an alternative to Halloween candy. Marlee had a booth but was busy with an army of contractors bring her shop up to building code.

She also had to deal with Leticia the Lake Lady, a local eccentric who wanted a bulk order of dried mulberries, enough to cover her house and protect her against evil spirits. As events transpired, Leticia wasn't the only person who needed protection.

A mysterious stranger named Felix Bonaventure arrived in the village asking questions about a woman named Ellen Mulberry. Contrary to his surname, his trip was not a good one. He was found dead on Leticia's land, shot through the heart with an arrow made of mulberry wood.

Marlee, being the resident Miss Marple, found the body. Leticia had disappeared. She was proven to be Ellen Clark, who had served time for murder.

The Sable family was then introduced into the plot. They were old money on the island. Two of their younger sons wanted to market berry extracts as part of their Sable Diet health food line. They approached Marlee just after she learned the Ellen's murder victim had been their nanny.

Marlee was busy with her shop, the festival, a Halloween parade, bulk shipping mulberries, and sleuthing. Alarums multiplied until Marlee was trapped with the murderer. He had killed Ellen to keep her quiet about him being the real nanny killer, whom he had gotten pregnant.

The culprit explained all the plot points, past and present, in a lengthy denouement before justice was served. The recipes appendix began with Mulberry Muffins, then Mulberry Pancakes. Following on were Halloween Bloody Cups (raspberries and chocolate) and Strawberry Ghosts (strawberries powdered with white chocolate).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2024-11-03

OPUNTIA #584: [Re: the end of Lifesavers] I grew up with LifeSavers, too. The Five Flavours were good, but so were the butterscotch ones. To be honest, I haven't been looking for them in the local variety stores, but maybe now I will. So many things from our childhoods have slowly gone away.

[After I wrote that piece I discovered the American 5-Flavour Lifesavers I ordered from Amazon contained watermelon and grape flavours instead of lime and cherry. They did have pineapple, raspberry, and orange though. Better than nothing I suppose.]

Thanksgiving: We did have a great Thanksgiving dinner with Yvonne's sister Monique, and her husband Rick. Monique said she did have something special for us, and it was a delicious beef bourguignon. A little dairy dessert and some liqueurs finished the fun evening.

[My brother and his wife hosted our family gathering in Calgary. The traditional turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, and stuffing, with lemon meringue pie for dessert. I had to diet for a week to get my weight back down. But I knew that was going to happen, so no big deal.]

In less than three weeks, Yvonne and I will be heading down to Los Angeles for Loscon 50, and will share an American Thanksgiving dinner with friends we haven't seen in a long time. Nothing like a good Thanksgiving dinner twice.

We've made the decision that we just can't come to Calgary for When Words Collide, but we will do the next best thing, and we are planning to go to Can*con 2025 next year.

I checked our records, and our previous Can*con was in 1995, thirty years earlier. Interests do change over time, and with Amazing Stories, I think I can enjoy the con and get something out of it.

My previous letter of comment: If the CBC can't put their radio dramas on Gem, perhaps there are licensing problems that have yet to be overcome.

[I don't think licensing would be the problem since CBC would have locked up all the rights in the old days. Probably the cost of transcribing for little or no income is why Canadian old-time radio is absent.]

With so many writers' associations in trouble, I would wonder if a general Genre Writers' Association might be helpful, and financially viable.

[I doubt it. An authors' organization needs muscle and financial resources for the ability to block AI and plagiarist websites and sue megacorporations. Instead the genre organizations squabble about DEI and boycott authors who groped women.]

OPUNTIA #585: I gather the fall colours in Northern Ontario were spectacular, but down in my part of the province, leaves turned yellow and dropped off, nothing to write home about.

Hallowe'en is always a quiet time for us. We did run registration at the Anime North Hallowe'en party, so that kept us busy. For the actual night, we live in an apartment building, and there's never been any call for candies to give out at the front door, so the kids don't come, and there's no knocks at the door.

[I turn out the ground floor lights and retreat to my basement den. Few if any children in my neighbourhood.]

Another day of work tomorrow, and then I can relax for another six days. We are vending at a Christmas show elsewhere in Etobicoke in about a week and a half, and then comes the trip to LA. After that we really have no plans for quite some time. So, it looks like we will gladly rest and recover financially until something else comes up.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Astronomy.

Cunningham, T., et al (2024) **Expansion properties of the young supernova type Iax Remnant Pa 30 revealed.** ASTROPHYSICAL JOURNAL LETTERS 975:doi.org/10.3847/2041-8213/ad713b

[Chinese and Japanese astronomers recorded a supernova in 1181 AD. Modern-day astronomers had been unable to relocate until this report.]

Authors' abstract: *The recently discovered Pa 30 nebula, the putative type Iax supernova remnant associated with the historical supernova of 1181 AD, shows puzzling characteristics that make it unique among known supernova remnants.*

In particular, Pa 30 exhibits a complex morphology, with a unique radial and filamentary structure, and it hosts a hot stellar remnant at its center, which displays oxygen-dominated, ultrafast winds.

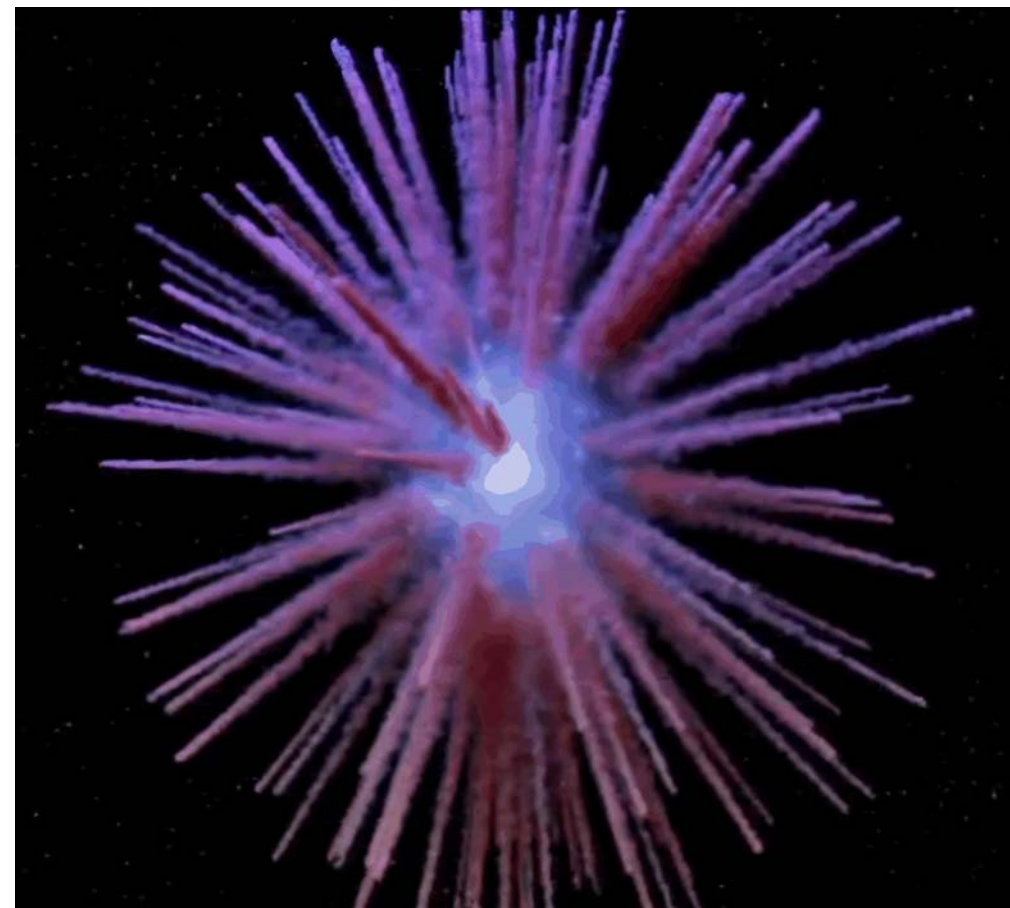
Because of the surviving stellar remnant and the lack of hydrogen and helium in its filaments, it has been suggested that Pa 30 is the product of a failed thermonuclear explosion in a near- or super-Chandrasekhar white dwarf, which created a subluminescent transient, a rare subtype of the Ia class of supernovae called type Iax.

We present here a detailed study of the 3D structure and velocities of a full radial section of the remnant. The Integral Field Unit observations, obtained with the new red channel of the Keck Cosmic Web Imager spectrograph, reveal that the ejecta are consistent with being ballistic, with velocities close to the free-expansion velocity.

Additionally, we detect a large cavity inside the supernova remnant and a sharp inner edge to the filamentary structure, which coincides with the outer edge of a bright ring detected in infrared images.

Finally, we detect a strong asymmetry in the amount of ejecta along the line of sight, which might hint at an asymmetric explosion. Our analysis provides strong confirmation that the explosion originated from SN 1181.

[Image shows filamentous supernova.]



Geology.

Zhou, H., et al (2024) **India-Eurasia convergence speed-up by passive-margin sediment subduction.** NATURE 635:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-08069-6 (available as a free pdf)

[65 megayears ago India broke loose from Africa and began traveling north. The island, as it was, collided with Asia and began digging underneath, creating the Himalayan uplift. India is still burrowing underneath. Several tens of millions of years from now nothing will be left of India except the even higher Himalayan mountains.]

[As the Himalayan mountains rose, eroded sediments coming off them acted as a lubricant to speed up the rate at which India is ploughing underneath Asia. India is now moving at 18 cm per year.]

Authors' abstract: The fast increase of convergence rate between India and Eurasia around 65 million years ago (Ma), from approximately 8 cm per year to a peak rate of approximately 18 cm per year remains a complex geological event to explain, given the inherent uncertainty surrounding the tectonic history and the intricate interplay of forces influencing plate speed.

Here we use a combination of geochemical analysis and geodynamic modelling to propose that this rapid convergence can be explained by sediment subduction derived from the northern Indian passive margin.

Through isotope and trace element analysis, we find an enhanced contribution of terrigenous sediment melt to the mantle source of the Gangdese magmatic rocks around 65 Ma, concurrent with the acceleration of India-Eurasia convergence.

Numerical experiments suggest that subduction of sediments more than 1 km thick covering an approximately 1,000-km-wide ocean basin abutting the northern Indian passive margin starting from 65 Ma could have spurred the increased convergence rate and further led to significant crustal extension, consistent with empirical observations.

Our study implies that the acceleration of India-Eurasia convergence marks the arrival of passive-margin-derived sediments, constraining the initial India-Eurasia collision to be around 60 Ma. It further suggests that temporary accelerations in subduction rates might be a common feature at the final stage of continental assembly.

Laboratory experiments have shown that sediments are intrinsically weaker and have a lower friction coefficient and higher pore fluid pressures than the mafic rocks that comprise the oceanic crust, leading to the speculation that sediment subduction may lubricate the plate interface and further cause the speed-up of plate convergence.

We propose a scenario where the large-scale erosion of the Indian passive margin produced large amounts of sediments that deposited on the Neo-Tethys Oceanic plate whose subduction caused the acceleration of India-Eurasia

convergence and synchronous crustal extension in the upper plate. This scenario is consistent with multiple lines of observations and has important implications for the initial India-Eurasia collision.

Paleobiology.

Chuliver, M., et al (2024) **The oldest tadpole reveals evolutionary stability of the anuran life cycle.** NATURE 634:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-08055-y (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Anurans are characterized by a biphasic life cycle, with an aquatic larval (tadpole) stage followed by an adult (frog) stage, both connected through the metamorphic period in which drastic morphological and physiological changes occur.

Extant tadpoles exhibit great morphological diversity and ecological relevance, but their absence in the pre-Cretaceous fossil record (older than 145 million years) makes their origins and early evolution enigmatic.

*This contrasts with the postmetamorphic anuran fossil record that dates back to the Early Jurassic and with closely related species in the Late Triassic (around 217 to 213 million years ago (Ma)). Here we report a late-stage tadpole of the stem-anuran *Notobatrachus degiustoi* from the Middle Jurassic of Patagonia (around 168 to 161 Ma).*

This finding has dual importance because it represents the oldest-known tadpole and, to our knowledge, the first stem-anuran larva. Its exquisite preservation, including soft tissues, shows features associated with the filter-feeding mechanism characteristic of extant tadpoles.

*Notably, both *N. degiustoi* tadpole and adult reached a large size, demonstrating that tadpole gigantism occurred among stem-anurans. This new discovery reveals that a biphasic life cycle, with filter-feeding tadpoles inhabiting aquatic ephemeral environments, was already present in the early evolutionary history of stem-anurans and has remained stable for at least 161 million years.*

Tadpoles are the free-living, non-reproductive aquatic larvae of anurans, which have to go through a metamorphic phase of profound morphological and

ecological changes within a short period of time to reach the adult reproductive stage.

This drastic type of metamorphosis of anurans is the most extreme among extant tetrapods, and tadpoles represent a highly derived larval stage. Studies on the evolution of the tadpole morphospace indicated that key characters have evolved during the stem-anuran radiation around the Triassic-Jurassic boundary.

Nevertheless, these hypotheses are based solely on evidence from extant anurans and remain untested because fossil tadpoles are completely absent in the Triassic and Jurassic fossil record.

Moreover, stem-anurans are known only from post-metamorphic individuals. Thus, the timing and evolutionary transformations involved in the origins of the tadpole body plan remain enigmatic and a matter of debate.



Here we describe the oldest-known tadpole from the Middle Jurassic La Matilde Formation (Bathonian-Callovian, around 168 to 161 million years ago (Ma)), based on a well-preserved specimen found in the Estancia La Matilde locality (Santa Cruz Province, Argentina), which is referred to the stem-anuran *Notobatrachus degiustoi*.

This species is also represented by a large number of superbly preserved adult specimens from the same locality. The exquisite preservation of the new specimen, including most of the hyobranchial apparatus and soft tissues, allows us to infer the mode of life and feeding habits of the *N. degiustoi* tadpole.

[Images are from this paper.]

Selden, P.A., and J.A. Dunlop (2024) **A remarkable spiny arachnid from the Pennsylvanian Mazon Creek Lagerstätte, Illinois.** JOURNAL OF PALEONTOLOGY 98:doi.org/10.1017/jpa.2024.13 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The forests of the late Carboniferous period (about 300 to 320 million years ago) harbored a great variety of arachnids. In addition to the familiar spiders, harvestmen, and scorpions, there were other, stranger kinds of spider-like animals.*

Here, we describe a large spider-like arachnid with very spiny legs (presumably to deter predators), from the world-famous Mazon Creek fossil localities of Illinois, USA.

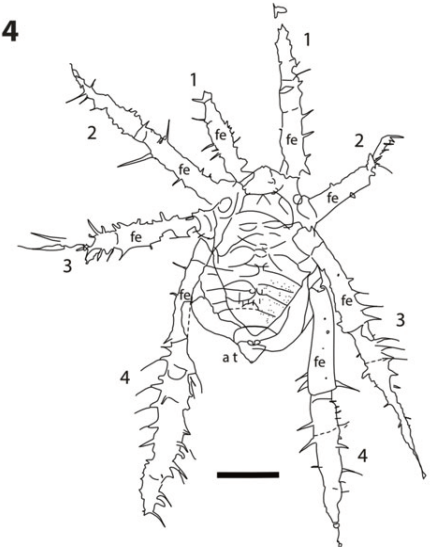
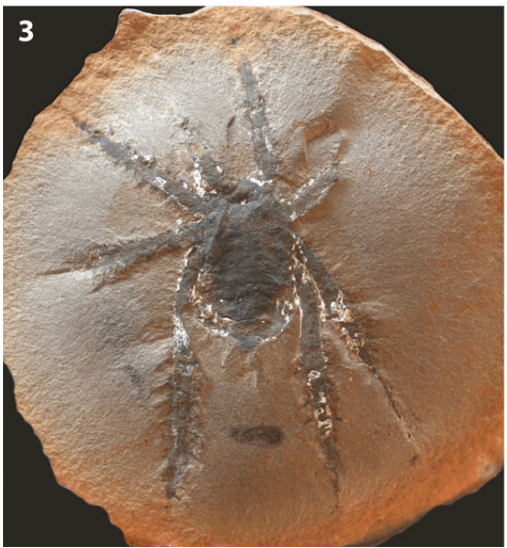
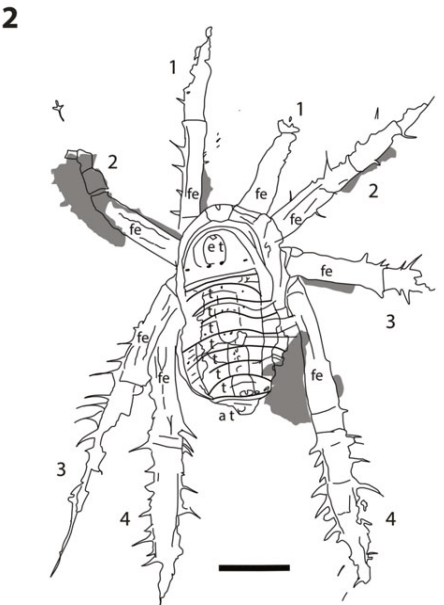
A new genus and species of arachnid (Chelicerata: Arachnida), Douglassarachne acanthopoda, is described from the late Carboniferous (Moscovian) Coal Measures of the Mazon Creek Lagerstätte, Illinois, USA.

This is a unique animal with distinctive large spines on the legs. It has a subovate body, a segmented opisthosoma, and a terminal anal tubercle. The legs are robust and appear to have been similar in construction throughout the limb series, with heavy spination of the preserved proximal podomeres.

The mouthparts and coxo-sternal region are equivocal. The preserved character combination does not permit easy referral to any known arachnid order, living or extinct, thus the new fossil is placed as Arachnida/Pantetrapulmonata incertae sedis.

It contributes to an emerging pattern of disparate body plans among late Carboniferous arachnids, ranging from anatomically modern members of living orders through to extinct taxa, such as the present fossil, whose phylogenetic position remains unresolved.

[Images are from this paper. Scale bars are 5 mm.]



West, C.K., et al (2024) **Paleobotanical evidence for Mediterranean climates in the western Canadian paleoarctic during the late middle Eocene.** PALEOCEANOGRAPHY AND PALEOCLIMATOLOGY 39:doi.org/10.1029/2024PA004874 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Paleogene age deposits east of the Fifteenmile River, northwest of Dawson City, Yukon, Canada preserve a diverse high-latitude fossil flora.*

Here, we provide new data on the age of the fossil site based on laser ablation-inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry U-Pb dating of tephra zircons, paleobotanical paleoclimate reconstructions, and growing season length estimates based on photoperiod.

These new data indicate an age of the Fifteenmile River fossil locality as late middle Eocene and likely within the Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum episode.

The paleoflora-based paleoclimate reconstruction indicates the region was relatively wet and warm with non-freezing winters, but also experienced seasonal dryness, with an approximate 7 months long growing season as suggested by photoperiod.

We interpret this paleoclimate as summer dry and winter wet, a climate analogous to modern day warm Mediterranean climates in the Köppen-Geiger climate classification system.

The Eocene (56 to 33.9 megayears ago) represents a time of modernization of global biota, when many plant and animal groups appeared that are still present today in our modern ecosystems; however, the Eocene is perhaps best known as a time of globally warm climate and elevated atmospheric CO₂.

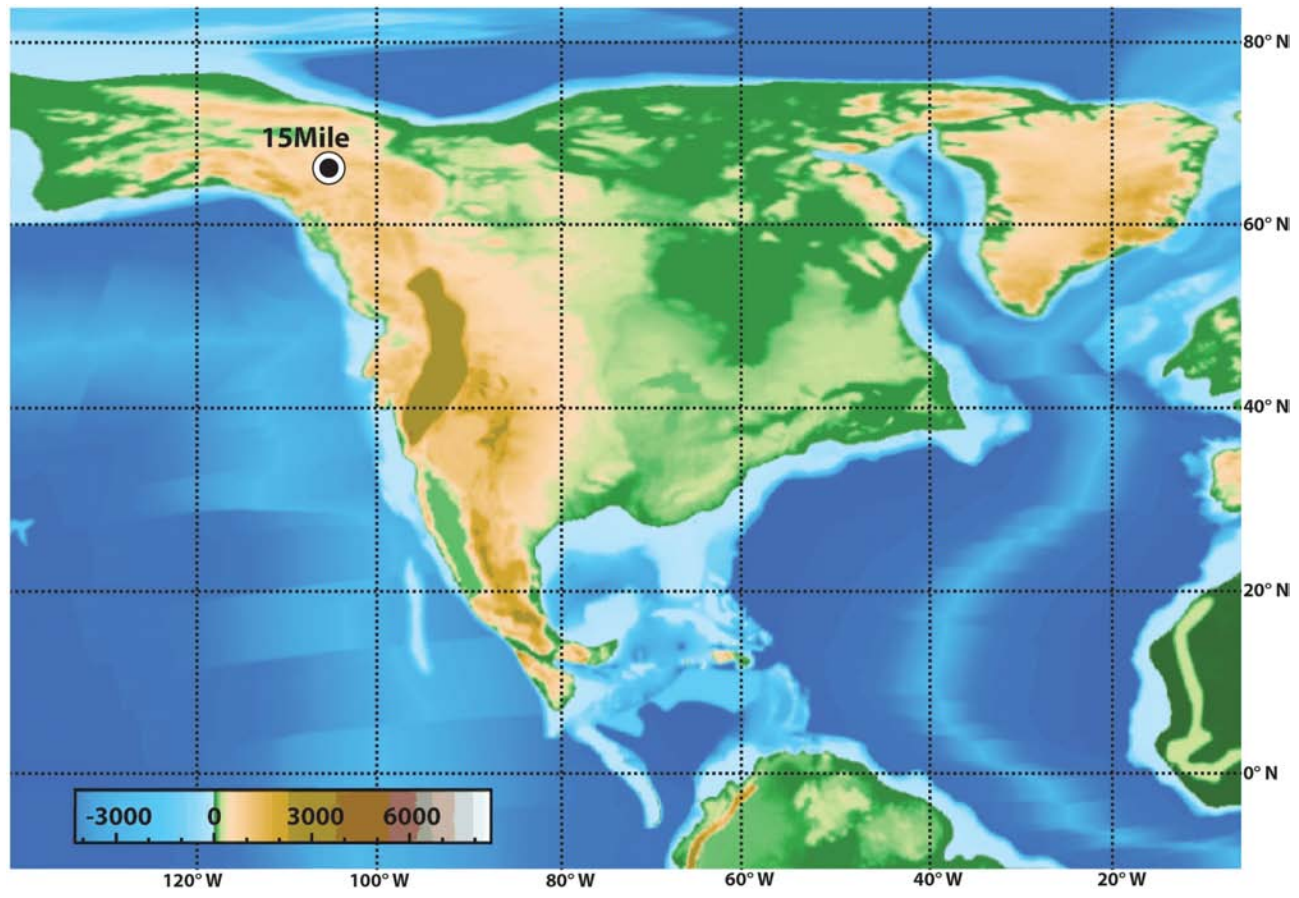
The Eocene Epoch was characterized by an initial warming trend that was punctuated by a series of hyperthermal events attributed to the addition of large amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere, such as the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum, an episode of rapid global warming analogous to modern anthropogenic warming, which culminated in the Cenozoic's temperature acme.

Toward the late middle and late Eocene, global climate began to cool, likely as a result of declining atmospheric CO₂, leading to the decline of the hothouse and the onset of the late Cenozoic icehouse.

This global cooling trend from ~49 to 34 megayears ago led to the development of Antarctic glaciers by the early Oligocene. The overall cooling trend of the latter part of the Eocene was, however, interrupted by an episode of global warmth known as the Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum at ~40 Ma.

The Eocene presents an opportunity to understand the interactions between climate and biota under carbon dioxide levels higher than today, providing valuable insights into the potential impact of anthropogenic global warming.

[Map shows North America during the Eocene before Central America formed and cut off the flow of warm water to the Arctic. The fossil leaves are semi-tropical to warm temperate species.]



Dinosaurs.

Smyth, R.S.H., et al (2024) **Hand and foot morphology maps invasion of terrestrial environments by pterosaurs in the mid-Mesozoic.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 34:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2024.09.014 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Pterosaurs, the first true flying vertebrates, played a crucial role in Mesozoic terrestrial ecosystems. However, our understanding of their ability to move around on the ground and, more broadly, their terrestrial paleoecology remains limited.*

Here, we demonstrate an unexpectedly high degree of variation in the hands and feet of pterosaurs, comparable with that observed in extant birds. This suggests that pterosaurs were adapted to a remarkably broad range of non-aerial locomotor ecologies.

Small, early, long-tailed pterosaurs (non-pterodactyliforms) exhibit extreme modifications in their hand and foot proportions indicative of climbing lifestyles. By contrast, the hands and feet of later, short-tailed pterosaurs (pterodactyliforms) typically exhibit morphologies consistent with more ground-based locomotor ecologies.

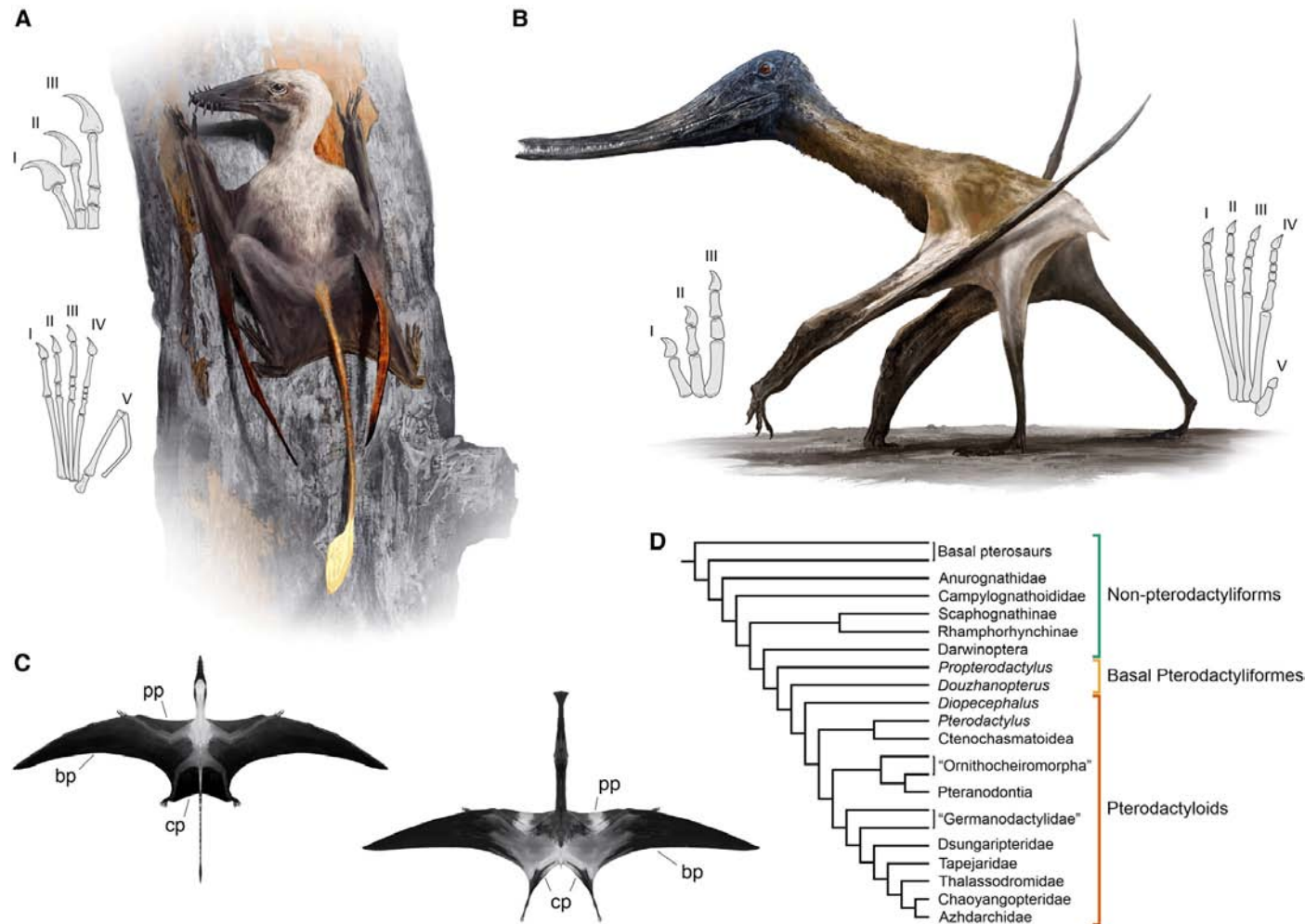
These changes in proportions correlate with other modifications to pterosaur anatomy, critically, the separation along the midline of the flight membrane (cruropatagium) that linked the hindlimbs, enabling a much more effective locomotory ability on the ground.

Together, these changes map a significant event in tetrapod evolution: a mid-Mesozoic colonization of terrestrial environments by short-tailed pterosaurs.

This transition to predominantly ground-based locomotor ecologies did not occur as a single event coinciding with the origin of short-tailed forms but evolved independently within each of the four principal radiations: euctenochasmatians, ornithocheiroids, dsungaripteroids, and azhdarchoids.

Invasion of terrestrial environments by pterosaurs facilitated the evolution of a wide range of novel feeding ecologies, while the freedom from limitations imposed by climbing permitted an increase in body size, ultimately enabling the evolution of gigantism in multiple lineages.

[Images are from this paper.]



Dececchi, T.A., et al (2024) **Theropod trackways as indirect evidence of pre-avian aerial behavior.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 121:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2413810121 (available as a free pdf)

[Dinosaurs did not go completely extinct after the asteroid. Birds are avian theropods, the only line of dinosaurs still extant.]

Authors' abstract: *Body fossils set limits on feasible reconstructions of functional capacity and behavior in theropod dinosaurs, but do not document in-life behaviors.*

In contrast, trace fossils such as footprints preserve in-life behaviors that can potentially test and enhance existing reconstructions. Here, we demonstrate how theropod trackways can be used as indirect evidence of pre-avian aerial behavior, expanding the approaches available to study vertebrate flight origins.

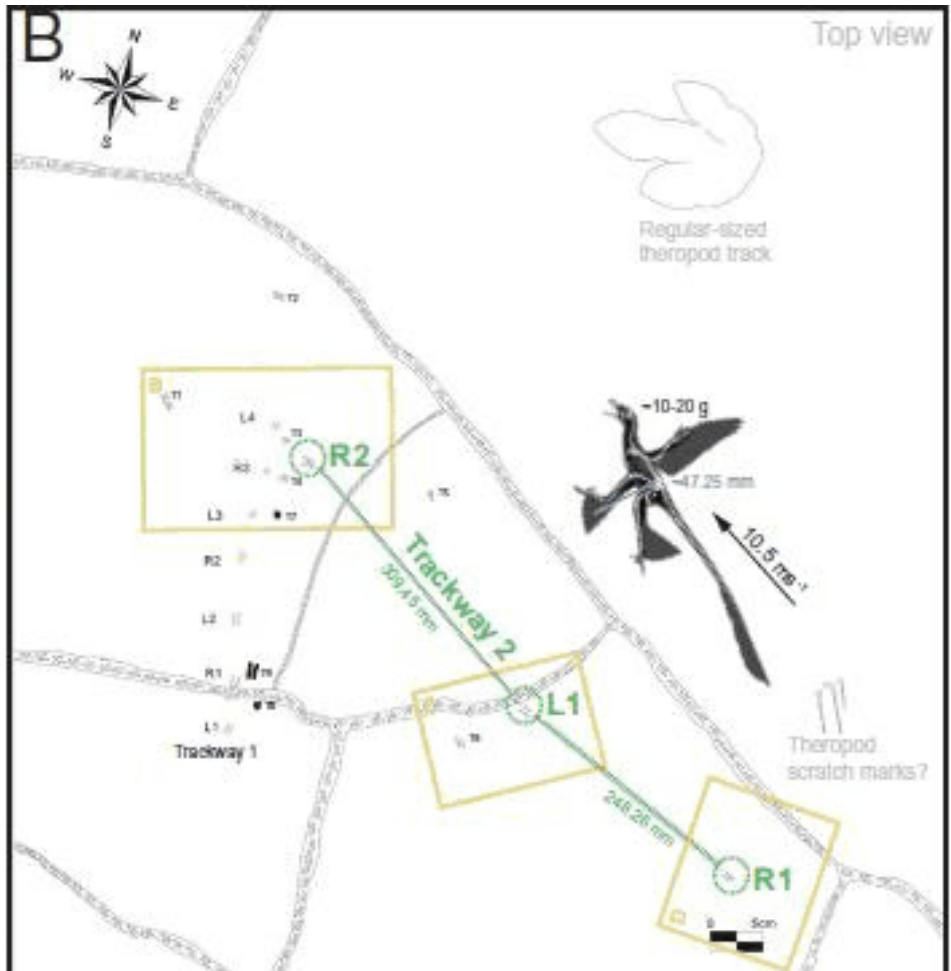
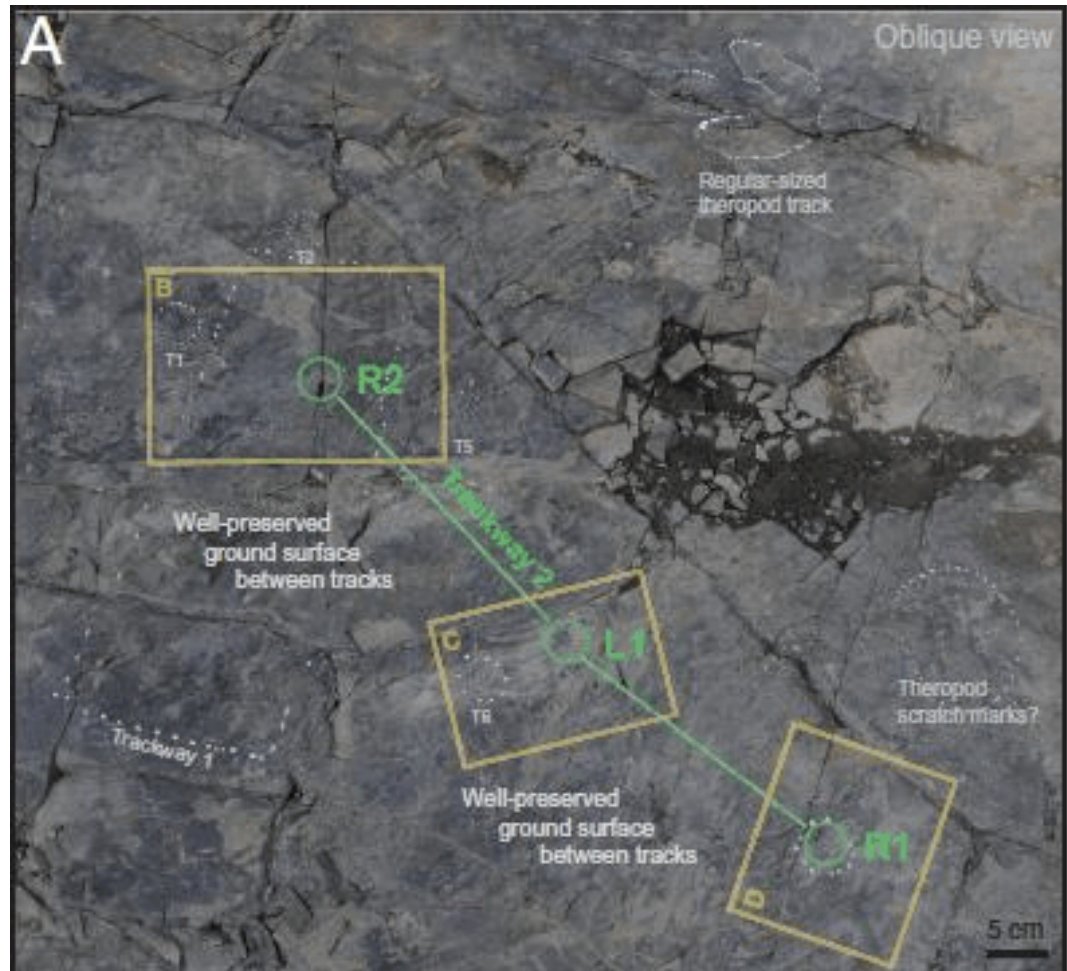
This involved exploring the behavioral implications of a two-toed Cretaceous-aged theropod trackway produced by a small, bird-like microraptorine moving at high speed.

Applying first principle running biomechanics, we were able to conclude that the trackway is atypical, indirectly evidencing pre-avian aerial behavior.

This trackway documents the evidence of wing-assisted aerodynamic force production during locomotion, supporting a broader distribution of this behavior than currently known.

These findings support previously proposed aerial behavior in early bird-like theropods, showing how trackways will help to deepen our understanding of theropod flight origins.

[Images are from this paper.]



Zoology.

Terrapon, M., et al (2024) **Killer whale predation on a giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*), a sicklefin devil ray (*Mobula tarapacana*) and a tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) in the southwest Indian Ocean.** AFRICAN JOURNAL OF ECOLOGY 62:doi.org/10.1111/aje.13342 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Knowledge of killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) feeding ecology in tropical waters is scarce. In the southwest Indian Ocean, opportunistic sightings provide a valuable source of information to better understand their behaviour, diet and distribution.*



*Here, we compile existing records of killer whale predation on elasmobranchs in the southwest Indian Ocean, including sightings of three undescribed prey species regionally: a giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*), a sicklefin devil ray (*Mobula tarapacana*) and a tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*).*

Documenting such observations is important to increase knowledge on killer whale ecology in the tropics and the cascading impact they might have on prey populations.

[Image is from this paper.]

Environmental Science.

Maltz, M.R., et al (2024) **Microbial community structure in recovering forests of Mount St. Helens.** FRONTIERS IN MICROBIOMES 3:doi.org/10.3389/frmbi.2024.1399416 (available as a free pdf)

[Gophers mixed up the Mount St. Helens ash and sped up re-vegetation.]

Authors' abstract: *The 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens had devastating effects above and belowground in forested montane ecosystems, including the burial and destruction of soil microbes.*

Soil microbial propagules and legacies in recovering ecosystems are important for determining post-disturbance successional trajectories. Soil microorganisms regulate nutrient cycling, interact with many other organisms, and therefore may support successional pathways and complementary ecosystem functions, even in harsh conditions.

*Historic forest management methods, such as old-growth and clearcut regimes, and locations of small mammal enclosures and clearcut forests, as well as in locations of historic short-term gopher enclosures (*Thomomys talpoides*), to evaluate community response to forest management practices and to examine vectors for dispersing microbial consortia to the surface of the volcanic landscape.*

These biotic interactions may have primed ecological succession in the volcanic landscape, specifically Bear Meadow and the Pumice Plain, by creating microsite conditions conducive to primary succession and plant establishment.

Human Prehistory.

Ongaro, L., and E. Huerta-Sanchez (2024) **A history of multiple Denisovan introgression events in modern humans.** NATURE GENETICS 56:doi.org/10.1038/s41588-024-01960-y (available as a free pdf)

[All the conclusions in this article are based on analysis of one finger bone. I have my doubts.]

Authors' abstract: *The identification of a new hominin group in the Altai mountains called Denisovans was one of the most exciting discoveries in human evolution in the last decade. Unlike Neanderthal remains, the Denisovan fossil record consists of only a finger bone, jawbone, teeth and skull fragments.*

Leveraging the surviving Denisovan segments in modern human genomes has uncovered evidence of at least three introgression events from distinct Denisovan populations into modern humans in the past.

Each of them presents different levels of relatedness to the sequenced Altai Denisovan, indicating a complex relationship between these sister lineages.

Here we review the evidence suggesting that several Denisovan populations, who likely had an extensive geographical range, were adapted to distinct environments and introgressed into modern humans multiple times.

In 2010, the first draft of the Neanderthal genome was published, and comparisons with modern human genomes revealed that Neanderthal and modern humans had interbred in the past.

Later that year, analysis of a genome sequenced from a finger bone excavated in the Denisova cave in the Altai mountains in Siberia revealed that this bone fragment was from a newly discovered hominin group that we now call Denisovans, who also interbred with modern humans.

These findings greatly impacted the field as they provided genetic data that could be leveraged to address outstanding questions in human evolutionary biology that fossil and cultural phenotype (osteological morphology and technocomplexes of stone tools) data alone could not fully resolve.

For example, Neanderthals, who have a rich fossil record that had been studied for decades, were deemed and perceived as very different from modern humans, but we did not know whether these phenotypic differences would be mirrored in the genetic data.

Access to the Neanderthal genome established their genetic relationship to modern humans and provided evidence that Neanderthals and modern humans interbred.

By contrast, Denisovans have a less comprehensive documented fossil record. Identifying this previously unrecognized hominin group from DNA extracted from a small phalanx markedly transformed the field of human evolution as it provided a new way to identify ancient remains through genetic analysis alone.

While Neanderthals have an extensive fossil record and several Neanderthal genomes have now been generated, only a single Denisovan genome is available, and Denisovans thus remain a more mysterious hominin group.

Nonetheless, recent studies have used Denisovan-like DNA in modern humans, DNA from sediments, and newly identified fossils outside the Denisova cave (in Tibet and in Laos) to characterize the Denisovan-like populations that interbred with modern humans.

Amano, N., et al (2024) **Early Sri Lankan coastal site tracks technological change and estuarine resource exploitation over the last ca. 25,000 years.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 14:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-77504-5 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The island of Sri Lanka was part of the South Asian mainland for the majority of the past 115,000 years, and connected most recently during the Last Glacial Maximum via the now submerged Palk Strait.*

The degree to which rising sea levels shaped past human adaptations from the Pleistocene and into the mid to late Holocene in Sri Lanka has remained unclear, in part because the earliest reliable records of human occupation come from the island's interior, where cave sites have revealed occupation of tropical forest ecosystems extending back to 48 thousand years (ka).

The island's earliest known open-air sites are all much younger in date, with ages beginning at 15 ka and extending across the Holocene. Here we report the earliest well-dated open-air coastal site in Sri Lanka, Pathirajawela, which records human occupation back to ca. 25,000 years ago.

We show that humans at Pathirajawela consistently adapted to changing ecosystems linked to sea level transgression and coastal evolution from the Last Glacial Maximum into the Holocene.

The presence of anthropogenic shell midden deposits at the site from ca. 4.8 ka, focused almost exclusively on a single taxon, indicates intensification of estuarine resource exploitation, as humans responded to opportunities presented by the formation of new coastal ecosystems.

Sri Lanka, located between 5° and 10°N, ca. 50 km off the south-eastern edge of the Indian subcontinent, has produced some of the earliest evidence for modern human presence in southern Asia.

Fossil reef and modelling of bathymetric data suggest that the island has been intermittently connected to mainland South Asia during periods of increased global aridity and low sea levels, most recently during the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM) with eustatic sea-level fall of ca. 130 metres exposing a wide land bridge across the Palk Strait.

This has important implications not only for biogeography but also understanding human adaptations to rising sea levels and changing coastlines following the LGM.

Kelley, K., et al (2024) **Seals and signs: tracing the origins of writing in ancient Southwest Asia.** ANTIQUITY 98:doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2024.165 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Administrative innovations in South-west Asia during the fourth millennium BC, including the cylinder seals that were rolled on the earliest clay tablets, laid the foundations for proto-cuneiform script, one of the first writing systems.

Seals were rich in iconography, but little research has focused on the potential influence of specific motifs on the development of the sign-based proto-cuneiform script. Here, the authors identify symbolic precursors to fundamental protocuneiform signs among late pre-literate seal motifs that describe the transportation of vessels and textiles, highlighting the synergy of early systems of clay-based communication.

The origins of writing in South-west Asia are often sought in the accounting systems that developed over the course of the fourth millennium BC, which physically documented transactions using tokens, tags and bullae (clay balls), numerical tablets and seals.

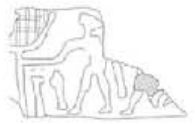
Proto-cuneiform, first attested on clay tablets at the city of Uruk in southern Iraq c. 3350 to 3000 BC, is a complex accounting system with hundreds of iconographic signs, many of which still defy interpretation.

[Images on the next page are from this paper.]

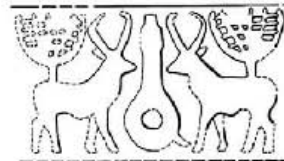
Pre-literate (LC 1-4)

Late Uruk (LC 5)

Proto-Cuneiform Signs



Urkesh - sealing



Chogha Mish - sealing

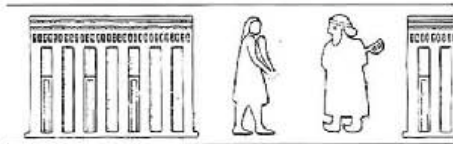


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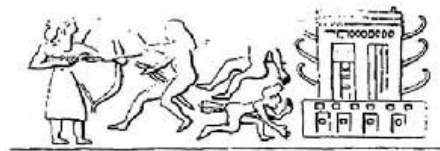
A Net (or standard?)



Uruk - bulla



Uruk - sealing



Susa - sealing



ZATU 591~b UR3

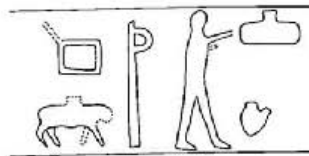


ZATU 129 E2 ?

B Building façade



Susa - stamp seal



Jebel Aruda - sealing



Uruk - sealing

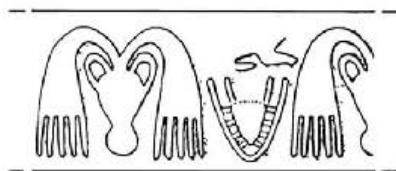


ZATU523



ZATU595

C Reed poles



Uruk - sealing



Susa - tablet



ZATU662



ZATU688



ZATU190 GAN

D Vessel in a net & fringed cloth, textile

Auld-Thomas, L., et al (2024) **Running out of empty space: environmental lidar and the crowded ancient landscape of Campeche, Mexico.** ANTIQUITY 98:doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2024.148 (available as a free pdf)

[Lidar surveys reveal that most supposed pristine jungles in Mayan territory are actually abandoned farms and cities.]

Authors' abstract: *As airborne lidar surveys reveal a growing sample of urbanised tropical landscapes, questions linger about the sampling bias of such research leading to inflated estimates of urban extent and population magnitude.*

'Found' datasets from remote sensing conducted for non-archaeological purposes and thus not subject to archaeological site bias, provide an opportunity to address these concerns through pseudorandom sampling.

Here, the authors present their analysis of an environmental lidar dataset from Campeche, Mexico, which reveals previously unrecorded urbanism and dense regional-scale settlement. Both characteristics, the authors argue, are therefore demonstrably ubiquitous across the central Maya Lowlands.

Ancient Agriculture.

Rossi, C., et al (2024) **The genomic natural history of the aurochs.** NATURE 634:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-08112-6 (available as a free pdf)

[All domestic cattle are descended from wild aurochs. The last wild auroch died in 1627 in a Polish zoo.]

Authors' abstract: *Now extinct, the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) was a keystone species in prehistoric Eurasian and North African ecosystems, and the progenitor of cattle (*Bos taurus*), domesticates that have provided people with food and labour for millennia.*

Here we analysed 38 ancient genomes and found 4 distinct population ancestries in the aurochs, European, Southwest Asian, North Asian and South Asian, each of which has dynamic trajectories that have responded to changes in climate and human influence.

*Similarly to *Homo heidelbergensis*, aurochs first entered Europe around 650 thousand years ago, but early populations left only trace ancestry, with both North Asian and European *B. primigenius* genomes coalescing during the most recent glaciation.*

North Asian and European populations then appear separated until mixing after the climate amelioration of the early Holocene. European aurochs endured the more severe bottleneck during the Last Glacial Maximum, retreating to southern refugia before recolonizing from Iberia.

Domestication involved the capture of a small number of individuals from the Southwest Asian aurochs population, followed by early and pervasive male-mediated admixture involving each ancestral strain of aurochs after domestic stocks dispersed beyond their cradle of origin.

*Now extinct, the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) ranged widely in Eurasia and North Africa. Its fossil presence in Europe stretched from 650 thousand years ago (ka), but its earliest probable ancestors are detected in South Asia, close to the centre of diversity for the tribe Bovini, to which all wild cattle belong.*

During the Holocene, the aurochs was the largest mammal present in temperate fertile zones, and its grazing was instrumental in the persistence of mixed forest and grassland.

Because humans have thrived in similar ecosystems, the aurochs has been intertwined with human culture and society since the Upper Pleistocene; first as a hunted prey, but also as a rich source of iconography, stretching from Magdalenian cave art through to the carvings at Göbekli Tepe, and the bucrania of Catalhöyük.

This relationship persisted until its demise with the death of the last cow in AD 1627 in Poland. The last bull had been shot seven years earlier and its horns, like those of many others, were fashioned into royal hunting horns or ceremonial drinking vessels.

*Today, the aurochs' descendants, domestic cattle (*Bos taurus*), comprise approximately one-third of Earth's mammalian biomass. *Bos primigenius* was one of the first successful targets for ancient DNA research; early work showed that the mitochondrial DNA of European aurochs and domestic cattle was divergent.*

More recently, analyses of four autosomal genomes have supported the inference of interbreeding between aurochs and cattle in Europe, the Levant and Africa. The trajectories of the population ancestries embedded in these clusters were dynamic and responded to both climatic transition and human management after domestication.

Taranto, S., et al (2024) **Unveiling the culinary tradition of ‘focaccia’ in Late Neolithic Mesopotamia by way of the integration of use-wear, phytolith & organic-residue analyses.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 14:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-78019-9 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: Recent studies suggest that in Upper Mesopotamia during the Late Neolithic period, specifically between 6400 and 5900 BCE, simple cereal flour doughs were baked in domed ovens using ceramic pans, commonly known as husking trays.

Adopting an integrated approach that investigates various types of evidence, such as use-wear, phytoliths, and organic residues, we further refined and explored this hypothesis.

Analysis of a sample of 13 sherds belonging to these trays from Mezraa Teleilat, Akarçay Tepe, and Tell Sabi Abyad provides evidence that a limited number of them could have been used to bake ‘focaccia’-like products with ingredients such as lard or oil.

This research project not only further strengthens the theory that husking trays could have been used for baking, but also provides insights into the variety and elaboration of food practices that existed amongst early agricultural communities, demonstrating the existence of a number of different ‘recipes’ for a particular dish.

Furthermore, from a methodological perspective, this study highlights how only an integrated approach can contribute to the knowledge of the various culinary traits and traditions of ancient communities.

The adoption of practices aimed at promoting the growth of cereals has marked one of the most significant turning points in human history.

This invaluable foodstuff, easy to store for long periods, practical to use and distribute, as well as being nutritious, quickly became a dietary staple in Neolithic Mesopotamia and has continued to be so to this day.

Even before the widespread adoption of fully developed agricultural practices, the production of flour is evidenced by the presence of ground stone tools and flatbread-like products made from mixed cereal and tuber flour as early as 32,600 BCE and 14,400 BCE in the Near Eastern region.

During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, this practice is exceptionally exemplified by the finding at Jerf el-Ahmar in Syria of two small cakes composed of ground and charred mustard seeds or rapeseeds.

Throughout the Neolithic period, the dietary practices of communities in the Fertile Crescent probably underwent gradual, but substantial, changes, chiefly due to the increasingly abundant supply of cereals resulting from the widespread adoption of agricultural practices. Archeobotanical remains testify as to how bread-like products became part of the diet of the communities in the area.

Human Health.

Compton, Z.T., et al (2024) **Cancer prevalence across vertebrates.** CANCER DISCOVERY 20:doi.org/10.1158/2159-8290.CD-24-0573 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: Cancer is pervasive across multicellular species, but what explains the differences in cancer prevalence across species?

Using 16,049 necropsy records for 292 species spanning three clades of tetrapods (amphibians, sauropsids, and mammals), we found that neoplasia and malignancy prevalence increases with adult mass (contrary to Peto’s paradox) and somatic mutation rate but decreases with gestation time.

The relationship between adult mass and malignancy prevalence was only apparent when we controlled for gestation time. Evolution of cancer susceptibility appears to have undergone sudden shifts followed by stabilizing selection.

Outliers for neoplasia prevalence include the common porpoise (<1.3%), the Rodrigues fruit bat (<1.6%), the black-footed penguin (<0.4%), ferrets (63%), and opossums (35%).

During the pandemic, South Asia played an important role as a phylogenetic trunk location of influenza A viruses, whereas West Asia maintained the circulation of influenza B/Victoria.

Chen, Z., et al (2024) **COVID-19 pandemic interventions reshaped the global dispersal of seasonal influenza viruses.** SCIENCE 386:doi.org/10.1126/science.adq3003 (available as a free pdf)

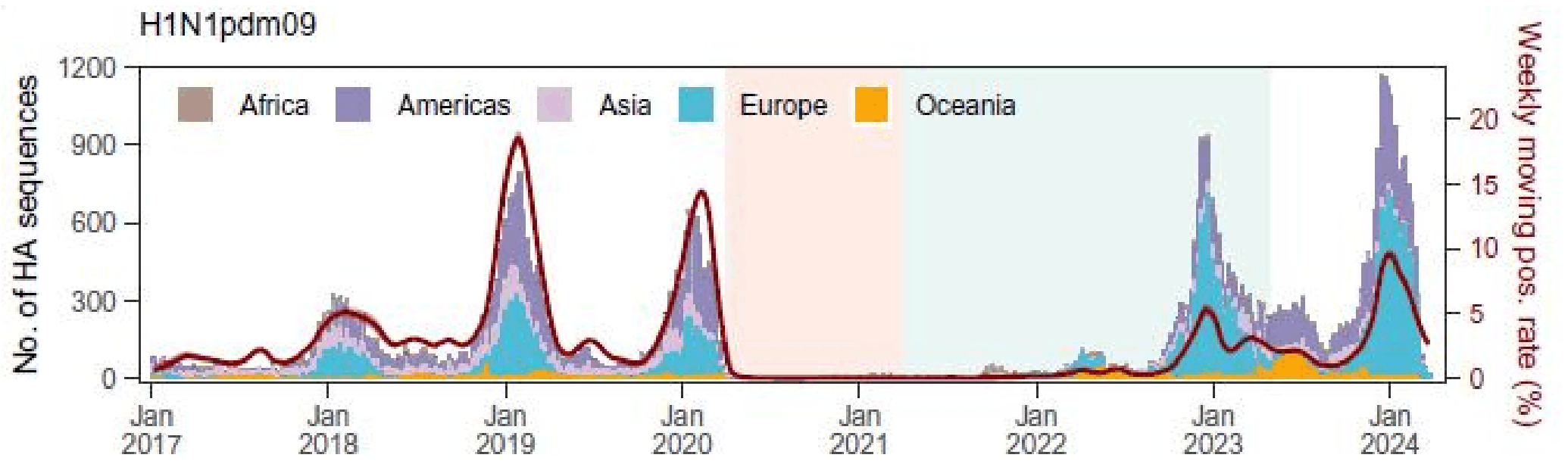
We explore drivers of influenza lineage dynamics across the pandemic period and reasons for the possible extinction of the B/Yamagata lineage.

Authors' abstract: *The global dynamics of seasonal influenza viruses inform the design of surveillance, intervention, and vaccination strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a singular opportunity to evaluate how influenza circulation worldwide was perturbed by human behavioral changes.*

After a period of 3 years, the intensity of among-region influenza lineage movements returned to pre-pandemic levels, with the exception of B/Yamagata, after the recovery of global air traffic, highlighting the robustness of global lineage dispersal patterns to substantial perturbation.

We combine molecular, epidemiological, and international travel data and find that the pandemic's onset led to a shift in the intensity and structure of international influenza lineage movement.

[Chart shows prevalence of H1N1 influenza virus before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown.]



O'Donovan, G., et al (2024) **Associations of the 'weekend warrior' physical activity pattern with mild dementia: findings from the Mexico City Prospective Study.** BRITISH JOURNAL OF SPORTS MEDICINE 58:doi:10.1136/bjsports-2024-108460 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Participants in the Mexico City Prospective Study were surveyed from 1998 to 2004 and re-surveyed from 2015 to 2019. Participants were asked about leisure time physical activity at baseline. Those who exercised up to once or twice per week were termed 'weekend warriors' and those who exercised more often were termed 'regularly active'.*

A Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) was used to assess mild dementia at re-survey. Cox models were adjusted for age, sex, education, income, blood pressure, smoking, body mass index, civil status, sleep, diet and alcohol at baseline.

The attributable fraction was defined as the proportion of cases that would not exist if all adults were to exercise once or twice per week or more often.

The analysis included 10,033 adults of mean age 51 years followed for 16 years. There were 2,400 cases when mild dementia was defined as a score of ≤ 22 on the MMSE.

Compared with the group that reported no sport or exercise, the hazard ratio was 0.75 in the weekend warrior group, 0.89 in the regularly active group and 0.84 in the combined group.

The attributable fraction was 13%. Similar results were observed when mild dementia was defined as a score of ≤ 23 on the MMSE. Conclusions that the weekend warrior physical activity pattern is associated with a reduced risk of mild dementia.

The 'weekend warrior' physical activity pattern may be a more convenient option for busy people around the world.

In this prospective cohort study, the risk of mild dementia was reduced by an average of 15% in the 'weekend warriors' who exercised once or twice per week and by 10% in the 'regularly active' who exercised more often when mild dementia was defined as a score of ≤ 22 on the Mini Mental State Examination.

Technology.

Greene, K.T., et al (2024) **Current engagement with unreliable sites from web search driven by navigational search.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 10:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adn3750 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Do search engine algorithms systematically expose users to content from unreliable sites? There is widespread concern that they do, but little systematic evidence that search engine algorithms, rather than user-expressed preferences, are driving current exposure to and engagement with unreliable information sources.*

Using two datasets totaling roughly 14 billion search engine result pages from Bing, the second most popular search engine in the U.S., we show that search exposes users to few unreliable information sources.

The vast majority of engagement with unreliable information sources from search occurs when users are explicitly searching for information from those sites, despite those searches being an extremely small share of the overall search volume. Our findings highlight the importance of accounting for user preference when examining engagement with unreliable sources from web search.

Mathematics.

Woodcock, S., and J. Falletta (2024) **A numerical evaluation of the Finite Monkeys Theorem.** FRANKLIN OPEN 9:doi.org/10.1016/j.fraope.2024.100171 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The Infinite Monkeys Theorem has long-established the eventual certainty of the complete works of William Shakespeare being reproduced by a monkey randomly pressing keys on a typewriter.*

This only considers the infinite limit, with either an infinite number of monkeys and/or an infinite time period of monkey labour. Here, we consider the Finite Monkeys Theorem and look at the probability of a given string being typed by one of a finite number of monkeys within a finite time allocation consistent with estimates for the lifespan of our universe.

We also calculate the expected number of keystrokes until a target string would first be produced. Given the expected time until the heat death of the universe, we demonstrate that the widely-accepted conclusion from the Infinite Monkeys Theorem is, in fact, misleading in our finite universe.

As such, this places the theorem in a class of probabilistic problems or paradoxes, including the St. Petersburg paradox, Zeno's dichotomy paradox, and the Ross-Littlewood paradox wherein the infinite-resource conclusions directly contradict those obtained when considering limited resources, however sizeable.

FREE STUFF ONLINE

I provide sources for the scientific pdfs and old-time radio mp3s reviewed in this zine. Here is a summary of some good resources, all of which are free.

In particular, the "Seen In The Literature" column cites only peer-reviewed papers. For topics such as climate change or social media effects, more people should be reading these papers instead of blogs where commentators confuse their opinions as being facts.

For scientific papers I cite for which free pdfs are available, the easiest method is to Google either the title of the paper or its digital object identifier, the phrase beginning with doi.org.

Many papers are behind a paywall, so unless you have access to a university library computer, you can only get the abstract. However, the abstract is often enough to understand the gist of the article.

Every scientific periodical has free email notifications of each new issue's table of contents. I subscribe to dozens of notification services, in case you were wondering how I manage to keep up with the literature.

For zines, www.efanzines.com provides current pdf zines as well as some older ones. A club called Fanac at www.fanac.org does the reverse; they provide thousands of old zines from the 1930s to date, with a few current zines. Both sites have a free email notification service you can subscribe to.

The Old Time Radio Researchers have 90,000+ old-time radio shows (1930s to 1950s) covering all the genres, such as comedy, science fiction, fantasy, and mystery. Visit www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.

They also publish a free bulletin OLD RADIO TIMES, available at www.otrr.org/?c=times, with an email notification service. Don't pay money for audio books and listen to a droning voice when you can listen for free to full-cast shows such as Jack Benny or Inner Sanctum from the OTRR.

For pulp fiction magazines from all genres, visit www.archive.org/details/pulpmagazinearchive?&sort=-downloads&page=2 Books in the public domain are free from <https://gutenberg.org>