Welcome to the Calgary Stampede Parade

OPUNTIA 553

Calgary Stampede Parade 2023

ONCE MORE WITH FEELING   2023-07-07
photos by Dale Speirs

The Calgary Stampede is the world's largest rodeo, with 1.4 million paid attendance over ten days. This year's event was from July 6 to 16. The whole city gets involved, with hundreds of free pancake breakfasts, everyone dressing western, the beer tents packed, and yeehawing all over the city.

The celebrating begins a week or so early, and once the rodeo is in full swing no one can visit Calgary and be unaware of the festivities. I like to call the Stampede the world's largest cosplaying event. Now that the pandemic is over, everyone is making up for lost time.

This issue will cover the parade that opened the rodeo on Friday, July 7, with about 300,000 spectators in the downtown core, myself included. I could fill an issue with 100 megabytes of photos, even after file size reduction. These are just a small sampling of the two-hour-long parade as it looped through the core.

Below: Alberta Premier Danielle Smith
Bottom: Calgary must have a dozen line dancer groups. Here is one of them.

Parade Marshal
Astronaut Jeremy Hansen
Artemis II – First Canadian To Fly to the Moon

2023 is the 150th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They were organized in 1873 as the North West Mounted Police and arrived in what is now Alberta in 1874. They established a series of posts across southern Alberta, one of which was founded on August 28, 1875, and named Fort Calgary.

An interesting group of trail riders. I presume they don't use the wings when they're out in the mountains.

Above: No, the squaddie wasn't run over. He just wanted a different angle of the APC on his smartphone camera..

At left: World's biggest cowboy hat?

Above: The first Calgary Stampede was in 1912 but not until 1923 did the chuckwagon races commence.

Free pancake breakfasts are a city-wide tradition, beginning as early as middle June. I make certain I get my share of carbohydrates and sausages each morning during the Stampede. The breakfasts are staged by business groups, shopping plazas, churches and mosques, and community associations. Plan wisely and you can eat free for about three weeks.

I won't document all the breakfasts I attended since they were much the same but herewith are some photos from the First Flip breakfast on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall downtown. The crowds were big (free food always brings them) but the organizers were very efficient. The lines moved quickly and I didn't wait more than about five minutes.

OUT WHERE THE WEST COMMENCES: PART 10
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 9 appeared in OPUNTIAs #68.1D, 356, 418, 419, 435, 446, 478, 504, and 529.]

When The Cows Come Home.

THE WHISTLER was a radio anthology series which aired from 1942 to 1955. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary   This was not a mystery show. Both the narrator and the protagonist explained everything to the listener as a perfect crime was plotted and carried out.

The criminal would gloat after the crime and get in a few bwah-ha!-ha!s. After the final commercial, the epilogue would reveal some little detail the criminal overlooked that tripped him up and brought him to justice.

"The Affair At Stoney Ridge" was written by Louis Estey and aired on 1946-06-17. Myra was a farm girl who lived with her uncle Rance and aunt Bess. She was dating Jody when she saw him with another woman while visiting town, and broke off the relationship.

Returning to the farm much later, she couldn't find Rance and Bess, just a bunch of mooing dairy cows. Jody was lurking about. He wasn't happy and was carrying a gun. Rance was known to have cash hidden on the farm and Jody wanted it. He tried to sweet-talk Myra into telling him.

Jody became nasty when she wouldn't tell. Myra broke and told him the money was hidden in the cellar. The key was in an upstairs closet. The drama paused for a Signal Oil commercial touting its premium oil for cars.

Myra went upstairs. En route she saw Rance's bedroom torn apart, with bloody sheets, and realized what Jody must have done. She tried to reach a telephone but Jody caught her.

Just then, a farm neighbour named Benson arrived. Jody was listening from a hiding place so she couldn't warn him. Benson left and they went into the cellar. She managed to flee but messed up her opportunity.

Jody caught her again, just before the final commercial. The cash wasn't in the cellar; he had determined that much. Then came the twist. Myra blacked out from fear. When she woke up, Benson and the sheriff were there. They had dealt with Jody.

Throughout the episode, the mooing of cows was often heard in the background. Being a farm boy, the constant mooing gave me a pretty good idea what the twist would be. I was right. Cows normally only moo occasionally, to call a calf or to keep in touch with the herd.

Benson had heard the mooing. He recognized the cows were in distress because they hadn't been milked. He knew that Rance, for all his sins, was a good farmer and never would have left the cows unattended. Dairy cows have to be milked twice a day.

Benson told Myra the second twist. Rance hid his cash in the lining of an old greatcoat. The one that Jody wrapped Rance's body in when he buried him and Bess.

SOUR APPLES (2012) by Sheila Connolly was a novel in a cozy series about Meg Corey of Granford, Massachusetts. She was settling into a new life owning an apple orchard and sleuthing part-time.

The trouble began when her neighbour, dairy farmer Joyce Truesdell, was found dead in her barn, supposedly kicked in the head by a cow. However, the autopsy showed the blow was done by a blunt instrument, not a hoof. Joyce's husband Ethan might have been a suspect, but there was more to the matter.

The Truesdells had recently rented pasture adjacent to their farm. Grazing made their cattle sick from lead poisoning. A parallel plot was an election campaign by Rick Sainsbury, a rising star in state politics. He had been connected with the company that had the contract to clean up the contaminated land back when.

They obviously didn't do a good job, which modern-day political bosses would rather not be publicized just because some cows got sick. There were Marpleian encounters, threats were uttered, another murder, and assorted other alarums.

The ending fizzled out when Sainsbury appealed to the electorate to forgive and forget. And so back to the apple orchard.

There was a recipes appendix, beginning with Apple Custard Cake. Following were Mushroom Potato Gratin, then Butternut Squash And Blue Cheese Pappardelle.

We Shall Come Rejoicing, Bringing In The Sheaves.

THE ALDRICH FAMILY aired on radio from 1939 to 1953, an inoffensive comedy series about a teenaged boy Henry Aldrich and the troubles he got into. He was usually aided and abetted, or tripped up as the case might be, by his schoolmate Homer Brown. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

"Paid In Corn" was written by Clifford Goldsmith and aired on 1952-09-11. Henry and his friend Homer had worked summer jobs for a local farmer Mr Frederick. He owed them $4 each but instead paid them in corn, 6 bushels each. They had no choice but to accept.

The boys learned that peddling corn wasn't easy. Since commodity prices fluctuate, they tried to bet on an upswing. The problem was that no broker or farmer would deal in such a tiny amount of corn, and no homeowners needed 12 bushels at once.

However, Henry and Homer steamrollered the high school social committee into changing the school dance into a corn roast. That got the girls angry because they didn't want to eat such a sloppy food while wearing their best dresses.

Congratulating themselves for selling the 12 bushels to the student union, the boys hit another roadblock. They learned they had feed corn, inedible for humans, instead of sweet corn.

At the next dance committee meeting, Henry recovered by proposing a barn dance, the barn to be decorated with corn. He and Homer re-sold their corn at a good price for the dance. Returning home, Henry discovered the corn was gone. His father Sam had taken it back to the farmer and demanded cash.

Frederick was the smarter negotiator and convinced Sam to take potatoes instead. Once more unto the breach. The next committee meeting turned into a riot when Henry pushed through a potato roast to replace the corn dance. An actual riot, with students shouting and shoving.

Homer's father took over, noting the potatoes were sprouting and unsuitable for roasting. He hauled them back to the farm. Frederick got him as well and replaced the potatoes with spinach.

Even Henry, with all his eloquence, couldn't get that one past the committee. He saved face and proposed a regular dance, returning everything to the status quo ante. Homer's father was stuck with a truck load of wilted spinach.

Another bland family sitcom was FATHER KNOWS BEST, which aired on radio from 1949 to 1953 before moving to a successful run on television. Jim and Margaret Anderson and their three children were suburbanites little different from the Aldrich family. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

"Big Inheritance" was written by Ed James and aired on 1953-09-17. A lawyer arrived at the Anderson house and informed them of an inheritance from Jim's father's cousin. The bequest was a 15,000 acre cattle ranch out west.

The lawyer speculated that the land might be worth as much as $9 million, certainly an incredible fortune in 1953. Word quickly got around to friends of the Andersons, which set off various contretemps.

People reacted in different ways to suddenly finding themselves associating with millionaires. Some shunned the Andersons while others hoped to gain an advantage.

Jim Anderson tried to calm down his family, telling his wife and children that $9 million was probably a high estimate. In this he was quite correct. He explained, as much to the listening audience as to his family, that ranches are valued by cow-calf units.

Pause for a considerable digression. A cow-calf unit is the amount of land required to sustain a cow and her calf for one year. Even very lush green pasture would require several acres per unit. In the American Southwest or the Canadian prairies, hundreds of acres might be required per unit in desert country.

As a personal example, I grew up on a ranch in west-central Alberta, which is well-watered country. Our ranch was a cow-calf operation, meaning that after the calves were weaned in autumn, they were gradually sold off over the winter to feed lot operators and finishers.

Those buyers would then fatten up the cattle for the packing plants, as we called slaughterhouses.

Our ranch supported 200 head of cattle on a section of land. A section is a surveyed square mile containing 640 acres. Say about 3 acres per unit. In the desert of southeastern Alberta, 100 acres per cow-calf would be the minimum.

The American Southwest would be much higher. City slickers might be impressed if a Texas rancher bragged he had 50,000 acres but the important figure is how many head of cattle could be supported on that land.

Meanwhile, back at the Anderson family, Jim got a return visit from the lawyer, who had more information. The ranch operated at 1,200 acres per unit, which dropped the value of the ranch down to $7,500.

Jim philosophized that the ranch would at least make a summer vacation home. The lawyer then dropped the other shoe. He advised Jim not to take possession of the ranch and to refuse the bequest. The reason was $8,200 in property taxes.

Bury Me Not.

BOSTON BLACKIE, real name Horatio Black, had at one time been a jewel thief in Boston, but later became a freelance paladin. He was created by Jack Boyle who only published one book about him, a collection of stories in 1919.

The radio shows are leavened with humour and quips. Everyone, including his girlfriend Mary Wesley, called him Blackie. Writers were not credited, although the actors were. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

Blackie's nemesis was NYPD Homicide Inspector Farraday. The name was originally spelt in the usual way with one 'r' but after the series got going for some reason the extra letter was added.

"Murder At The Rodeo" aired on 1946-10-15. The rodeo was in town. The opening scene began with two cowgirls, Hazel Henry and Belle Adams, being catty with each other as the bronco riding event was about to open. Hazel's husband Slim Waters wanted to divorce her and marry Belle.

Belle was thrown hard in her ride and seriously injured. Subsequent investigation revealed someone had placed a burr under the saddle. The problem was that Belle was to have ridden a different horse. At the last moment, she changed to a horse Slim was to ride. The question then arose as to who was the real target.

Boston Blackie investigated, and Inspector Farraday was not far behind. Hazel was the obvious suspect, particularly after she threw a bowie knife at Blackie. She was soon eliminated from the list when someone murdered her.

Blackie didn't get on well with Slim, probably because he accused him on stage-managing the incident to get rid of both women. Meanwhile Mary Wesley made several cameos trying to learn how to throw a lasso. Nota bene.

After Hazel's murder, Blackie suspected Belle but was inconvenienced by her supposedly being in a hospital bed. Slim and another cowboy named Barney argued as to whether she should ride that night. Belle decided she would despite her injuries.

At the rodeo, Blackie set up a stunt. He told Slim and Barney that he knew who killed Hazel. He couldn't prove anything so he put a burr under the saddle of the killer to provide justice. Nothing happened when the two men climbed on their horses.

Mary went back to her rope twirling. Blackie said that eliminated two suspects but left Belle as the third. Had she kept quiet, nothing could have been proven. Instead, she pulled a gun and blabbed all.

Belle forgot Mary was standing near, who then dropped a rope over her and lassoed her good. She would be buried not on the lone prairie but in the Sing Sing yard.

"Blackie And Mary Go To Canyon Dude Ranch" aired on 1949-05-25. The title pretty much explains the plot. Siblings Agatha and Henry Canyon operated the ranch but worked a Black Widower scam on the side. She was a battleaxe and he was a whining wimp.

Henry would marry a dear old rich lady, a guest at the ranch, and sooner rather than later inherit her fortune. The hired hand Tom ambled in one day, said he discovered the scheming, and was going to take a big piece of the action. He hadn't finished his fifth sentence when Agatha picked up the nearest blunt instrument and snapped his neck. She buried him out on the lone prairie.

Tom had a girlfriend Katherine Sloan, who began making enquiries after he suddenly disappeared. She asked Boston Blackie and Mary Wesley for help. They arrived undercover as Bud Benton and Mary Winters and immediately began snooping.

Henry was a sentimental old fool and kept the wedding bands from his three previous wives, which Blackie found. Another hired hand Slim made the same demands as Tom and met exactly the same fate from Agatha.

"*Light and lively*" was the next line after Slim fell to the floor, as an announcer cut in for the commercial and burbled about the joys of drinking Champagne Velvet beer. Once the joys of smooooth beer were catalogued, the announcer then catalogued the plot, summarizing what had happened. No listener ever got lost with a Boston Blackie plot.

Bud and Mary staged a fight. She told Agatha that he only wanted her money, which immediately put dollar signs in the Canyons' eyes. Henry moved in on Mary.

Blackie called Inspector Farraday out west to help. Yeah sure, an NYPD Homicide detective out on the lone prairie where he had no jurisdiction. Blackie tricked Agatha into blabbing the details. She and Henry argued violently, an argument which he settled by shooting her dead.

Jessica Goes West.

Do I need to introduce Jessica Fletcher? Even after her television series ended, the novels continued, written by Donald Bain. MURDER AT THE POWDERHORN RANCH (1999) began with Fletcher taking flying lessons at Cabot Cove, Maine. For those not familiar with the series, both television and books, she never drove a car.

That was set aside when Jim and Bonnie Cook invited her out to their Colorado dude ranch. Other guests at the Powderhorn Guest Ranch were the Morrison family reunion and vacationers Paul and Geraldine Molloy. The latter two did not have an extended stay.

from STARTLING STORIES, 1947 March

First Paul, then Geraldine were murdered. The Morrisons might well have been named the Bickersons. Various alarums and family feuds were played out on the lone prairie.

Fletcher went flying in a small plane with one of the Morrisons, taking off from a grass airstrip on the ranch. He gave her a few alarums but she managed to land safely.

Both the Molloys and the Morrisons were in land development and, as was uncovered during the denouement, illicit arms dealing. They were both after land adjacent to the ranch which had uranium prospects. The J'accuse! meeting used video cameras to point out clues to put away one of the Morrisons. In the epilogue, Fletcher got her pilot's licence.

The New Old West.

"Return To The O.K. Corral" by Clark Howard (1983 November, ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE) was set in modern-day Tombstone, Arizona. This time the gunfight on Fremont Street was between the law and drug dealers. (Contrary to popular belief, the original gunfight was not in the corral but a block away on Fremont.)

On both sides were great-grandsons of the original combatants. Events duplicated the original battle, with adaptations such as Jeeps in the street instead of horses. An interesting re-take.

The Weird West.

THE SILVERBERG BUSINESS (2022) by Robert Freeman Wexler was set in Texas during the 1890s. A private detective named Shannon (né Chanun) arrived in Galveston for a wedding.

The officiating rabbi asked him to locate Nathan Silverberg, who went missing with big money to be used in resettling distressed Jews into Texas. Shannon moseyed about hither and yonder. He cluttered the novel with a wide range of characters he met along the way.

Sand dune totems, skull-headed poker players, and a white-haired man stalking Shannon were among the supporting cast. Every so often an ordinary door would open into weird landscapes not of this world.

Crab creatures from another dimension were trying to invade Texas. They used hurricanes as their advance guard. The novel finished up in Galveston in the year 1900, when the creatures almost succeeded with a bigger than usual hurricane.

Riding The Range.

Jack Benny, real name Benjamin Kubelsky, was considered the greatest radio comedian, from the dawn of broadcast radio in 1932 to the death of OTR radio in 1955. He ran his show concurrently on television from 1950 to 1965 but was never as successful there.

His shows appeared under a variety of sponsor's names but everyone, then and now, referred to the shows as "The Jack Benny Show". Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

Benny's wife Sadie Marks played Mary Livingstone, not his girlfriend but a girl who was his friend and worked as his assistant. Tenor singer Kenny Baker sang once in each episode in early years and was later replaced by Dennis Day.

Both singers also played the part of the village idiot, if Los Angeles can be considered as a village. Phil Harris was the bandleader, played habitually drunk and a womanizer in the early years. In 1941 he married singer Alice Faye and changed his on-air character to a faithful husband who lived off his wife's money.

With the Jack Benny radio shows there were a number of continuing skits which appeared every so often. One such serial was "Buck Benny Rides Again", parodying any western you care to mention. It was later made into a movie.

The running gag was that the installments were constantly interrupted by events on or off stage and never finished before time ran out. The following installment would pick up where the plot left off in the middle of the previous one.

"Kenny Baker's First Anniversary" aired on 1936-11-15. Baker did well as the show's young tenor. In appreciation, Jack Benny gave him a pair of roller skates. After various gags, the first Buck Benny skit began.

Buck Benny called on Daisy Carson (Mary) to warn her father about cattle rustlers. Pappy (announcer Don Wilson) had to stop branding because he ran out of brandy. That was as far as the sketch went.

They were interrupted by an LAPD police officer who barged on stage. He told Jack that he had arrested Baker for roller skating on Hollywood Blvd and knocking over a pushcart.

The dealer wanted huge damages but settled for $25 cash from Jack. Time ran out and the sketch was left unfinished, much to Jack's disgust.

BBRA #2 aired on 1936-11-22 the following week, just before the American Thanksgiving. Mary Livingstone read a Thanksgiving poem, there were turkey jokes aplenty, and finally to Ye Olde West, where Buck Benny was now the sheriff of Cactus County.

The episode was constantly interrupted by telephone calls to Phil Harris from Hollywood actresses. This was when Harris played as a ladies man in great demand by women. Jack Benny tried to cut in on the telephone calls with what he thought was savoir faire. Instead he was given the cold shoulder by the women, who thought him creepy.

Meanwhile, Buck Benny had his troubles. The deputy was the village idiot (Kenny Baker) who let the prisoners out for breakfast because the cook quit. A telephone call came in from Daisy Carson, who said her pappy's cows had been rustled. Buck said he'd be right over.

Much whooping and shouting by the posse as they saddled up and spurred their horses. Two seconds of galloping was followed by the sounds of arrival. The Carsons lived directly across the street from the sheriff's office. Buck and his posse could have walked over faster, but this was America, where no one walked if they could ride.

The next scene was never finished because a telephone call came in for Harris from Ginger Rogers. As he chatted with her, an impatient Benny kept nagging him to finish up the call so the episode could be completed.

Instead, the mooing of cows was heard, almost drowning out the dialogue. In disgust Benny told Harris not to rush. The cows came home on their own. Time ran out and so to the closing music.

Farm Living Is The Life For Me.

I always laugh when someone tells me they'd like to buy a farm and settle into the simple life. Little do they know. Having grown up on a cattle ranch, I much prefer the easy life in the big city.

THE CAMEL CARAVAN was a variety show that aired on radio from 1933 to 1954 under several titles and numerous hosts. It was rebroadcast by the American Armed Forces Radio without commercials under the name COMEDY CARAVAN. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

The episode at hand, hosted by comedians Jimmy Durante and Garry Moore, aired on 1946-03-01 with the title "Ode To A Cow". Special guest star was singer/actress Dale Evans, wife of cowboy actor Roy Rogers.

Durante and Moore had just bought a milk cow for their backyard and were asking around if anyone knew of a good cow sitter. The landlady came by to complain because they had tried to put the cow in a Murphy bed. The bed accidently closed up against the wall and the cow gave three quarts of whipping cream.

She gave them notice of eviction, a serious matter because of the postwar housing shortage. A big-band orchestral number intervened, after which Moore attended a meeting of the Robertstocking Club, who were high-class bobbysoxers. He appealed for their help in saving the cow and recited a poem, an ode whose lines need not be transcribed here for posterity. The lyrics were mostly all the possible words that rhymed with 'cow'.

Meanwhile Durante was circulating through the neighbourhood with a petition to save the cow. This allowed him to do a few routines with supporting characters. One of them was Dale Evans, who took the opportunity to burst into song. Not a western song but a Broadway tune.

Finally into the courtroom. They interrogated the landlady but veered off into one-liners and gags. The cow was brought in, to which the judge objected. Nonetheless Bessy was questioned, to which all of her replies were variations of 'moo'. Moore then milked her. The ending was too nonsensical for transcription, so off to another big band number to conclude the show.

HANCOCK'S HALF HOUR aired on BBC Radio from 1954 to 1959, and also became a television series. The radio series was a pure situation comedy, not a variety show as were most comedy shows on air at the time. All the episodes were written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson.

Tony Hancock was the star, assisted by a variety of supporting actors. Unusually, their characters were fictional but used their real names. They generally shared accommodations such as a council house. Hancock lived in East Cheam, a bland English town.

Regulars were Sidney James (who played a spiv), Bill Kerr (an Australian who played the village idiot), Hattie Jacques (best known for authority figures but in this series as Hancock's secretary), and Kenneth Williams (a wide variety of voices but always antagonistic toward Hancock).

The opening theme music was a tuba solo. Hancock was often called Tub by his acquaintances, a reference to his plumpness. In each episode, he would go haring off with some new fad or job. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

"Agricultural Hancock" aired on 1957-02-03. The episode opened with Hancock announcing to his fellow tenants that they had to move. He had been claiming a subsidized rent as an agricultural labourer but the local council found him out.

Hancock decided to work as a farm labourer to keep his council house. Anyone could get by as a farmer, he thought. Rotate those crops and get them spinning round. He decided to begin with two fields of pigs and then plant a couple of acres of chickens.

But first, Hancock had to buy land. He went to Sid James to see what was available. He declined the 10,000 acres in Scotland because the daily commute from East Cheam would be too long.

Hancock put the matter clearly. None of James' sharp practice. He wanted a 20,000 acre farm for not more than £50. James declined but said that for a £100 retainer he would look around. They settled on £22, after which James shortchanged Hancock with some fast talk.

James was at a loss to find something. His henchman Fred was surprised that Hancock wanted to be a farmer, remarking that the git didn't know the difference between a pasture and a cricket pitch.

That gave James an idea. Lord's Cricket Grounds is a massive stadium in London that is considered the world centre of the sport. The cricket season wouldn't begin for a few months, so James took Hancock there for a sale.

Kerr and Jacques were suspicious but Hancock was oblivious. He admired the huge farmhouse with balconies and convenient steps that led down to the pasture.

James explained the rows of seats were terraces for growing grapes. The big white screens at the ends were marrow shades, designed to keep marrows from being sunburned. The heavy roller sitting on the sidelines was to produce mashed potatoes.

Hancock signed the lease and set to work. The cows damaged whatever wasn't ploughed for crops. All went well until eleven men in white pants came out onto the field. There were led by Williams, playing the part of an upper-class twit with a snide voice.

Snide said they were there for practice but Hancock wasn't going to let them learn milking on his cows. When Kerr barged in, Snide said he knew there'd be an Australian causing trouble. (That will be funnier to cricket fans.)

The cricketeers tried to play around the cattle to little avail. The police arrived. Jump cut to James mollifying Hancock by selling him Wimbledon tennis grounds for £300.

Hopalong With Bill.

THE BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW brought in William Boyd for their 1949-05-05 episode "George The Cowboy". Gracie Allen played a Dumb Dora part and her husband George Burns was the straight man.

Television was beginning to worry radio performers. Many of them suspected, rightly so, that they would not make the transition, just as talkies wiped out most of the silent movie stars.

Gracie fretted about George not surviving on television. He was more complacent. She mentioned William Boyd, stage name Hopalong Cassidy, who not only made the transition but was the biggest star on television.

Her thought was that if William Boyd could be convinced to retire, then George might become the next big cowboy star. He suggested that he re-unite with Trixie Lorraine, a dancer who had been his last vaudeville partner. Gracie was jealous of her and certainly didn't want them getting back together.

Gracie went over to Boyd's house. She spoke to him in Hollywood's idea of how cowboys talked. He, however, spoke refined English. She tried to bluff him about how she had just ridden in from her giant ranch in Texas.

Boyd was a kind man and humoured her along, recognizing one of God's fools. She told Boyd that her husband Saddle Face Burns would be ideal to take over his position.

Boyd asked if her husband was a wrangler and she replied yes, he argued over anything. More gags followed on her misunderstandings of cowboy slang. He finally called her out as Gracie Allen.

He did agree to consider hiring George as a cowboy, and went over to the Burns' house. They chatted at cross purposes because George thought Boyd wanted him to do an old vaudeville routine.

In turn, Boyd thought Trixie was George's horse. When George said the main part of their act was tap dancing on roller skates, Boyd was amazed. "*Wait 'til Roy Rogers sees this!*" The arrangements were made sight unseen.

Gracie's jealousy was fully inflamed, so she spoke to the show's announcer Bill Goodwin, who fancied himself a ladies man. Trixie was flying in from her ranch near Bakersfield.

Goodwin was to intercept her at the airport and keep her away from everyone else. He failed. Various complications developed based on all the misunderstandings and deceptions. Finally the air was cleared, and Boyd rode off into the suburbs, if not the sunset.

THE MARTIN AND LEWIS SHOW was the breakthrough radio show that took singer Dean Martin and comedian Jerry Lewis from Las Vegas headliners

to national stardom. Being a variety-comedy series, there were no episode titles. Available as free downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

The series aired from 1949 to 1953 and was a variety show. Martin did the singing, along with a chanteuse, and acted as straight man to Lewis during comedy scenes. There was always a celebrity guest star to join in.

The episode of 1949-08-02 featured as guest star William Boyd. The episode opened with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis discussing where to take their summer vacation. Lewis was for the Canadian Rockies and Martin for Hawaii. Supporting characters offered suggestions.

Their next-door neighbour Soapy convinced them to go to the High Sierras and so they did. After some gags about city slickers setting up camp in the bush, none other than William Boyd appeared. He told them he was looking for rustlers who stole 1,000 head of cattle.

Lewis protested he wasn't the thief and Boyd could search him if he wanted. The three settled into their sleeping bags, which gave an excuse for Lewis to have a dream about chasing rustlers. Off to the Red Dog Saloon, where every cliché of western movies was trotted out and displayed.

Soapy showed up as a bartender who had just bought 1,000 head of cattle for a dollar. Boyd was indignant, so Soapy offered to refund him the dollar. Lewis opened a closet door and found a herd of cattle. Before the gunfight began, Lewis woke up screaming, just in time for the end credits. One wonders if Boyd ever did have his cattle returned.

Deducing Out West.

THE DOUBLE-A WESTERN DETECTIVE AGENCY (2018) by Steve Hockensmith was a humourous novel set in the American Old West of the 1890s. The brothers Gustav "Old Red" and Otto "Big Red" Amlingmeyer were Sherlock Holmes fans.

They set up the aforementioned detective agency in partnership with Col. C. Kermit Crowe and his daughter Diana. The case at hand was cattle rancher Clayton Haney, who was having trouble with rustlers.

The brothers and the Crowes found themselves in the midst of a feud, rapidly shaping up into a range war. Haney was not without sin, nor his enemies the Sweeney family.

Snipers were ambushing people out on the land. The humour stopped momentarily when one victim was shot dead by mistake because he wore the same kind of hat as the intended target.

The brothers roamed to and fro across the rangeland. They constantly asked themselves WWSHD (What would Sherlock Holmes do?). The death toll steadily increased, including Haney. The survivors sorted out all the details in the final chapter. Like thermonuclear warfare, there are no real winners in a range war.

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For scientific papers 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.

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 thousands of old-time radio shows (1930s to 1950s) covering all the genres, such as comedy, science fiction, fantasy, and mystery. Visit www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.

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Postcards From The Western Edge.

I bought these exaggeration postcards at a Calgary stamp show from a postcard dealer. Both are dated 1910 and were state-of-the-art SFX back then.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Astronomy.

Lewis, G.F., and B.J. Brewer (2023) **Detection of the cosmological time dilation of high-redshift quasars.** NATURE ASTRONOMY 7:doi.org/10.1038/s41550-023-02029-2

Authors' abstract: *A fundamental prediction of relativistic cosmologies is that, owing to the expansion of space, observations of the distant cosmos should be time dilated and appear to run slower than events in the local universe.*

While observations of cosmological supernovae unambiguously show the expected redshift-dependent time dilation, this has not been the case for other distant sources.

Here we present the identification of cosmic time dilation in a sample of 190 quasars monitored for over two decades in multiple wavebands by assessing various hypotheses through Bayesian analysis.

This detection counters previous claims that observed quasar variability lacked the expected redshift-dependent time dilation.

Hence, as well as dismissing the claim that the apparent lack of the redshift dependence of quasar variability represents a substantial challenge to the standard cosmological model, this analysis further indicates that the properties of quasars are consistent with them being truly cosmologically distant sources.

Aliens.

Friederich, S., and S. Wenmackers (2023) **The future of intelligence in the Universe: a call for humility.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 22:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550423000101 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Recent astrophysical findings suggest that the era during which the Universe is habitable has just begun. This raises the question whether the entire Universe may at some point in the future be filled with intelligent life.*

Hanson et al. argued that we can be confident that the Universe will, by cosmic standards, soon be dominated by imperialist civilizations which expand rapidly, persist long and make drastic changes to the volumes they control.

The main motivation for this 'grabby civilizations' hypothesis is that it supposedly provides a good explanation of why we are so early in cosmic history. In this paper, we criticize this motivation and suggest that it fails, for reasons analogous to why the notorious Doomsday argument fails.

In the last part of the paper we broaden our discussion and argue that it may be rational to assign a rather low prior probability to the grabby civilizations hypothesis.

For instance, if there are any civilizations that expand rapidly and indefinitely, they may well not make any drastic changes to the volumes they inhabit, potentially for strategic reasons. Hence, we call for epistemic caution and humility regarding the question of the long-term evolution of intelligence in the Universe.

Mieli, E., et al (2023) **Astrobiology: resolution of the statistical Drake equation by Maccone's lognormal method in 50 steps.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 22:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550423000113 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The authors use the mathematical tool of Maccone's lognormal distribution to further factor the Drake equation, which calculates the number of advanced civilizations in the galaxy, from the seven original levels of the Drake equation to 49 levels of overall analysis.*

The Maccone approach, in fact, supported by the central limit theorem, becomes more reliable the more levels are introduced. The resulting study necessarily draws upon an array of disciplines ranging from astronomy, chemistry and geology to biology, palaeontology and futurology.

The final result calculates the number of planetary systems suitable for life in its various stages of development: those which have probably hosted life in the past and those which still host it at its various evolutionary levels. The final evolutionary level is the so-called galactic civilization (often called ETC, or extraterrestrial civilizations).

The number of resulting galactic civilizations is divided between static civilizations, which do not move around the galaxy and whose Kardasëv rating is still low (<1.4), of which we find three examples (we ourselves plus, perhaps, two others), and potentially dynamic civilizations, which move around the galaxy and have a sufficiently high Kardasëv rating (=1.4), of which we find 2000.

To estimate the number of alien civilizations, Drake simply multiplied seven crucial factors.

Original equation
$N = R^* \times fp \times ne \times fl \times fi \times fc \times L,$

R*, annual star birth rate in the Milky Way;
fp, fraction of stars with planets;
ne, number of planets
suitable for life for each star;
fl, fraction of suitable planets where life develops;
fi, fraction of planets
inhabited by intelligent life;
fc, fraction of planets where intelligent life decides to communicate;
L, lifetime of the planet in which intelligent life persists.

As with many other authors, we have preferred not to refer to the classic Drake equation but to a variant of our own which is most suitable for our purposes. This being, in our case:

Changed equation
$N = Ns \times np \times fs \times fl \times fi \times fc \times fL,$

Ns, number of stars of the galaxy suitable for life (of spectral class K, G and F);
np, number of planets per star in the habitable area (of spectral class K, G and F);
fs, fraction of planets stable in the habitable area (function of the duration ?T);
fl, fraction of suitable planets where life actually develops;
fi, fraction of planets inhabited by intelligent life;
fc, fraction of planets where intelligent life decides to communicate;
fL, fraction of the lifetime of the planet in which intelligent life persists with respect to the duration of the last stellar population I

Paleobiology.

Sánchez-García, A., et al (2023) **Fossil diversity in 'dawn' hexapods (Diplura: Projapygoidea), with direct evidence for being chemically predaceous in the Cretaceous.** ZOOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY 198:doi.org/10.1093/zoolinnean/zlac101

Authors' abstract: *Diplurans are among the earliest hexapods in the geological record. These primitively wingless relatives of insects are infrequently encountered despite being pervasive in soil habitats.*

Two groups have disparate adaptations for hunting, one mechanical and the other chemical, in Japygoidea and Projapygoidea, respectively.

Here, we report three genera (two new) and four species of fossil Projapygidae preserved in Mesozoic and Cenozoic ambers: Electroprojapyx alchemicus gen. et sp. nov. in mid-Cretaceous Myanmar amber, and Symphylurinopsis punctatus gen. et sp. nov. and two species (unnamed) of Symphylurinus in Miocene Dominican amber.

The exceptionally preserved specimens possess cerci that are morphologically specialized for expelling a glandular substance on prey. The new Cretaceous E. alchemicus is a stem group to all living species of the family and provides conclusive Mesozoic evidence for a rare type of predation involving offensive (vs. defensive) secretions.

The specimen was fossilized in a preying-and-spraying position with its presumptive meal, a Symphypleona springtail (Collembola), reflecting the behavioural predatory repertoire of modern relatives.

Apart from one Cenozoic species, these rare specimens represent the only fossil record of the family Projapygidae.

Our findings demonstrate that these basal hexapods were predators of small arthropods of ancient forest soils and enrich our understanding of palaeoecological associations and behavioural strategies paramount for the survival of species.

Skeels, A., et al (2023) **Paleoenvironments shaped the exchange of terrestrial vertebrates across Wallace's Line.** SCIENCE 381:doi.org/10.1126/science.adf7122

[Wallace's Line is a boundary that runs through the islands between Papua New Guinea and the southeast Asian continent. The two sides have distinct faunas despite the islands only being a short distance apart.]

Authors' abstract: *Faunal turnover in Indo-Australia across Wallace's Line is one of the most recognizable patterns in biogeography and has catalyzed debate about the role of evolutionary and geoclimatic history in biotic interchanges.*

Here, analysis of more than 20,000 vertebrate species with a model of geoclimate and biological diversification shows that broad precipitation tolerance and dispersal ability were key for exchange across the deep-time precipitation gradient spanning the region.

Sundanian (Southeast Asian) lineages evolved in a climate similar to the humid "stepping stones" of Wallacea, facilitating colonization of the Sahulian (Australian) continental shelf.

By contrast, Sahulian lineages predominantly evolved in drier conditions, hampering establishment in Sunda and shaping faunal distinctiveness. We demonstrate how the history of adaptation to past environmental conditions shapes asymmetrical colonization and global biogeographic structure.

Dinosaurs.

Surmik, D., et al (2023) **The first record of fossilized soft parts in ossified tendons and implications for the understanding of tendon mineralization.** ZOOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY 198:747-766 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Preservation of soft parts (collagen fibres, blood vessels and cells) in extinct vertebrates is rare and usually limited to fossilized bone and cartilage.*

Well-preserved coarse collagenous fibre bundles embedded in a mineralized matrix of tendons, as well as numerous hollow, tubular structures consistent morphologically with fibril bundles, blood vessels and associated cells, were identified in ossified tendons of Late Cretaceous ornithischians from North America and Central East Asia.

Detailed, high-accuracy imaging, along with spectroscopic characterization of those fibrous structures and comparison with ossified tendons of modern-day turkeys, support the proposition that physiologically driven tendon ossification is common for avians and non-avian dinosaurs.

The examined soft parts were preserved through the pathway of iron-induced crosslinking and alumino-silification, documenting a variety of pathways for the preservation of soft parts, depending on the burial environment.

For the first time, the structure of dinosaur fossilized tendons is analysed in detail, revealing shared histogenetic principles with modern birds and the nature of preservation.

Biology.

Moger-Reischer, R.Z., et al (2023) **Evolution of a minimal cell.** NATURE 618:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06288-x (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Possessing only essential genes, a minimal cell can reveal mechanisms and processes that are critical for the persistence and stability of life.*

Here we report on how an engineered minimal cell contends with the forces of evolution compared with the Mycoplasma mycoides non-minimal cell from which it was synthetically derived.

Mutation rates were the highest among all reported bacteria, but were not affected by genome minimization. Genome streamlining was costly, leading to a decrease in fitness of greater than 50%, but this deficit was regained during 2,000 generations of evolution.

Despite selection acting on distinct genetic targets, increases in the maximum growth rate of the synthetic cells were comparable. Moreover, when performance was assessed by relative fitness, the minimal cell evolved 39% faster than the non-minimal cell.

The only apparent constraint involved the evolution of cell size. The size of the non-minimal cell increased by 80%, whereas the minimal cell remained the same. This pattern reflected epistatic effects of mutations in ftsZ, which encodes a tubulin-homologue protein that regulates cell division and morphology.

Our findings demonstrate that natural selection can rapidly increase the fitness of one of the simplest autonomously growing organisms.

Understanding how species with small genomes overcome evolutionary challenges provides critical insights into the persistence of host-associated endosymbionts, the stability of streamlined chassis for biotechnology and the targeted refinement of synthetically engineered cells.

The complexity of a genome is reflected by the number of genes that it contains, a quantity that varies by orders of magnitude across the tree of life. Whereas some obligately endosymbiotic bacteria have fewer than 200 protein-coding genes, many plant and animal genomes contain more than 20,000 genes.

In principle, the simplest organism is one that possesses only the minimum number of genes for survival and reproduction in a given environment. Any mutation in such an organism could lethally disrupt one or more cellular functions, placing constraints on evolution, as revealed by the fact that essential proteins change more slowly than those encoded by dispensable genes.

Furthermore, organisms with streamlined genomes have fewer targets on which positive selection can act, therefore limiting opportunities for adaptation.

Human Prehistory.

Ruiz-Giralt, A., et al (2023) **On the verge of domestication: Early use of C plants in the Horn of Africa.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 120:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2300166120

[C_3 plants are those adapted to reasonably moist conditions, such as trees, shrubs, and herbs. C_4 plants are dryland species, of which the largest component is the grasses.]

Authors' abstract: *The earliest evidence of agriculture in the Horn of Africa dates to the Pre-Aksumite period (ca. 1600 BCE). Domesticated C_3 cereals are considered to have been introduced from the Near East, whereas the origin (local or not) and time of domestication of various African C_4 species such as sorghum, finger millet, or t'ef remain unknown.*

In this paper, we present the results of the analysis of microbotanical residues (starch and phytoliths) from grinding stones recovered from two archaeological sites in northeastern Tigrai (Ethiopia), namely Mezber and Ona Adi.

Together, both sites cover a time period that encompasses the earliest evidence of agriculture in the region (ca. 1600 BCE) to the fall of the Kingdom of Aksum (ca. 700 CE).

Our data indicate that these communities featured complex mixed economies which included the consumption of both domestic and wild plant products since the Initial Pre-Aksumite Phase (ca. 1600 to 900 BCE), including C_3 crops and legumes, but also C_4 cereals and geophytes.

These new data expand the record of C_4 plant use in the Horn of Africa to over 1,000 years. It also represents the first evidence for the consumption of starchy products in the region.

These results have parallels in the wider northeastern African region where complex food systems have been documented. Altogether, our data represent a significant challenge to our current knowledge of Pre-Aksumite and Aksumite economies, forcing us to rethink the way we define these cultural horizons.

Modern Humans.

Visaria, A., and S. Setoguchi (2023) **Body mass index and all-cause mortality in a 21st century U.S. population: A National Health Interview Survey analysis.** PLOS ONE 18:doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287218 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Much of the data on BMI-mortality associations stem from 20th century U.S. cohorts. The purpose of this study was to determine the association between BMI and mortality in a contemporary, nationally representative, 21st century, U.S. adult population.*

This was a retrospective cohort study of U.S. adults from the 1999 to 2018 National Health Interview Study (NHIS), linked to the National Death Index (NDI) through December 31st, 2019. BMI was calculated using self-reported height and weight and categorized into 9 groups.

We estimated risk of all-cause mortality using multivariable Cox proportional hazards regression, adjusting for covariates, accounting for the survey design, and performing subgroup analyses to reduce analytic bias.

The study sample included 554,332 adults (mean age 46 years [SD 15], 50% female, 69% non-Hispanic White). Over a median follow-up of 9 years and maximum followup of 20 years, there were 75,807 deaths.

The risk of all-cause mortality was similar across a wide range of BMI categories. These results persisted after restriction to healthy never-smokers and exclusion of subjects who died within the first two years of follow-up.

A 21 to 108% increased mortality risk was seen for BMI ?30. Older adults showed no significant increase in mortality between BMI of 22.5 and 34.9, while in younger adults this lack of increase was limited to the BMI range of 22.5 to 27.4.

The risk of all-cause mortality was elevated by 21 to 108% among participants with BMI ?30. BMI may not necessarily increase mortality independently of other risk factors in adults, especially older adults, with overweight BMI.

Fan, Z., et al (2023) **Urban visual intelligence: Uncovering hidden city profiles with street view images.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 120:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2220417120 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *A longstanding line of research in urban studies explores how cities can be understood through their appearance. However, what remains unclear is to what extent urban dwellers' everyday life can be explained by the visual clues of the urban environment.*

In this paper, we address this question by applying a computer vision model to 27 million street view images across 80 counties in the United States.

Then, we use the spatial distribution of notable urban features identified through the street view images, such as street furniture, sidewalks, building façades, and vegetation, to predict the socioeconomic profiles of their immediate neighborhood.

Our results show that these urban features alone can account for up to 83% of the variance in people's travel behavior, 62% in poverty status, 64% in crime, and 68% in health behaviors. The results outperform models based on points of interest (POI), population, and other demographic data alone.

Moreover, incorporating urban features captured from street view images can improve the explanatory power of these other methods by 5% to 25%. We propose "urban visual intelligence" as a process to uncover hidden city profiles, infer, and synthesize urban information with computer vision and street view images.

Economics.

Borowiecki, K.J., et al (2023) **The great margin call: The role of leverage in the 1929 Wall Street crash.** ECONOMIC HISTORY REVIEW 76:doi.org/10.1111/ehr.13213 (available as a free pdf)

[In stock markets, margin is the amount of borrowed money a speculator uses to buy stocks. If the price drops, then the speculator must ante up the difference immediately or have the stock sold and still be liable for any losses, what is known as a margin call.]

Authors' abstract: *The reasons for the 1929 Wall Street crash and why it occurred at the particular time that it did are still debated among economic historians. We contribute to this debate by building on a new model, which provides a measure of the financial system's potential for financial crises.*

The evidence suggests that a tightening of margin requirements in the first nine months of 1929 combined with price declines in September and early October caused enough investors to become constrained that the market was tipped into instability, triggering the sudden crash of October and November.