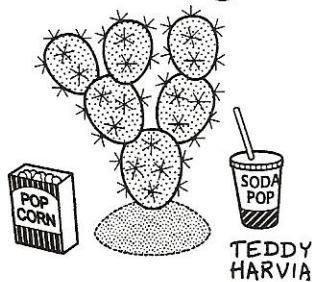


The director told me I could be a star but only if I showed my top.

# OPUNTIA

## 48.5A

When's  
showtime?



**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, and x.5 issues are perzines.

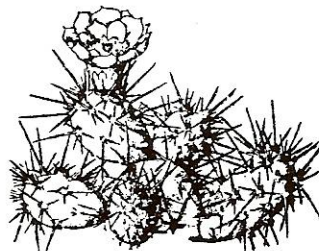
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**WORLD WIDE PARTY #8:** I'll have this in a forthcoming issue. If you sent something to me, don't worry; it'll show up.

**LETTERS  
TO THE  
EDITOR**

[Editor's  
remarks  
in square  
brackets]



**FROM:** E.B. Frohvet  
4716 Dorsey Hall Drive, #506  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21042

2001-06-30

Perhaps you can advise me concerning fallen trees on public land. My theory is, finders keepers; in short, deadwood on public land is public property and belongs to anyone who wants to cut it up and haul it away. I have supplied myself with firewood the past two winters without paying a cent or touching a living tree.

[In Canada, everything on public land belongs to the public, not the individual; therefore it is illegal to take deadwood or anything else. Granted that few are prosecuted, but it is still theft. It is also bad ecological practice. Parks workers discourage removal or burning of deadwood because it interrupts the recycling of nutrients from the tree back into the soil. When you take out deadwood, you are destroying microhabitats at the base of the natural food chain. Don't do it, please.]

# TRAUMATIC LAPAROSCOPIC CHOLECYSTITIS

by Dale Speirs

More commonly known as emergency gallbladder removal. It was the first time I'd been in a hospital in thirty years, and the first time I'd claimed sick leave at work in twenty years.

## Old Bugaboos, Or, What Waiting List?

2001-05-25

I've always been suspicious about horror stories of people dying while on the waiting list for an operation. American opponents of public health care use these stories against a universal health care system down there, while Canadians trade stories about friends who were sick in hospital a day or two down in the States and got billed in the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. All of that is anecdotal evidence; what really matters is the overall health rate statistics.

In Alberta, waiting lists are based on medical triage. A 50-year-old overweight chain smoker who is a Type-A personality businessman will wait a lot longer for treatment than a 5-year-old child with a life-threatening problem. My 72-year-old uncle has been on a waiting list for a kidney transplant for two years now here in Calgary. If, as may very likely happen, he dies before getting a new kidney, is that the fault of medicare or is it prioritizing the recipients?

Consider the events of Friday morning, May 25th. Doubled over in pain with cramps, I had a co-worker drive me to Foothills General Hospital emergency ward. The pain, a dull ache like having strained every muscle in the lower abdomen, started last night. I got about two hours sleep in several small interludes. I hoped the cramps would go away and decided to tough it out at work. After an hour in the office, I realized I had made a mistake, and went in to the hospital.

Upon registering with the clerk, I waited two hours for attention. Was that a waiting list? Not really. The waiting area was openly labelled as "Medical Triage", and signs explained that patients would be called in order of medical seriousness, not first-come-first-served. I watched as ambulance paramedics hustled others past me; a middle-aged woman moaning from an obvious heart attack, a silently blinking traffic accident victim still dazed by his altered circumstances, and another man gasping heavily for air from a major asthma attack. My cramps would not immediately kill me. I can't complain but sometimes I still do.

Finally I was into the emergency ward, stripped, given the usual vital signs workup, and shuttled about on my stretcher up and down endless corridors for tests. X-rays, CAT scan, ultrasound. At each stop I waited on my stretcher in the hallway as line-jumpers went ahead of me. What was a total of about five hours



actual work kept me on a stretcher from Friday morning until just before midnight Saturday. Should I have complained? Certainly not to the teenaged boy who had been wheeled in ahead of me, staring in stupefaction at where his right foot used to be until an hour ago. I don't know what that Italian man had, but for one of his kind, the stereotypical wiry construction worker never sick a day in his life, to be unashamedly crying in front of strangers, then it must have been bad. I can't complain but sometimes I still do.

A few weeks beforehand I had come across a newly-published reference in NATURE about how hospital waiting lists work in various countries [Smethurst, D.P., and H.C. Williams (2001) Power laws: Are hospital waiting lists self-regulating? NATURE 410:652-653]. The authors prove mathematically what hospital administrators around the world have known for years, that the demand for social services is infinite but the money to pay for them is not. It was suggested that health care systems should be judged by overall quality of medical care, not the length of waiting lists, since no system of health care can ever eliminate waiting lists, not even in theory.

#### **Room 1063B.**

2001-05-26

After being shuffled about for all the tests, I was wheeled into a semi-private ward where I would spend the rest of the week. A semi-private ward is a room with two beds, curtained off between

them, and sharing a large bathroom suite with the next room. Bed A is the one closest to the door, and I was in Bed B, the window side. This wasn't as much of a benefit as expected, since the windows were too high to see out of from a bed, were in any event covered with reflective bronze coating (to reduce summer heat loading) that blurred everything, and, as I discovered next morning, allowed the rising sun to shine directly into my eyes. I can't complain but sometimes I still do.

As I was wheeled into the room on my stretcher, I turned to see who the other occupant was. He was a middle-aged Englishman whom I'll call John; not his real name of course. Both of us were flat on our backs. We nodded silent hellos to each other. John, I later found out, had just been brought in from surgery where he had a cancerous colon removed. Later in the week, he was to check out a day earlier than I did but whereas my gallbladder removal story had a definite ending, he was looking at years of radiation and chemical therapy ahead of him. I can't complain but sometimes I still do.

#### **Jump Cut.**

2001-05-26 and 27

The diagnosis was made. Gallstones, sludge, pus, and bleeding inside what was basically a hair-trigger gallbladder waiting to burst. The surgeon came in and explained the operation to me,

drew a diagram explaining what would be done, and had me sign some consent forms. About a half hour before midnight, Saturday night, I was in the surgical theatre for the 4-hour operation. I wasn't especially nervous, since I knew I would get to sleep through it all. What I thought was funny, but didn't say out loud at the time, was that the surgeon introduced me to each and every surgical staff member. Since I would never see them again after the few seconds it took before the anaesthetic started, this seemed pointless. What made me smile inwardly was that they were all wearing surgical masks, so even if I could have remembered their names I certainly couldn't know their faces.

The most impressive thing about the operation was the sudden switch in scenes, like a jump cut in a movie from one scene to another. One moment I was lying on my back trying not to be blinded by the brilliant lights of the surgery theatre. A split-second later, I was again in my ward, looking up at the ceiling of room 1063B. It was Sunday morning, May 27. There was not even a moment of grogginess. In the time it takes to blink an eye, I made the jump cut. Five hours vanished instantly.

I turned my head and saw on the bedside table a pill vial with the ten gallstones the surgeon had extracted, a nice little parting gift. The stones ranged from marble size down to split-pea size when fresh, although they have since shrunk a bit as they dried out.

## **Wake Up, Mr. Speirs, It's Time For Your Sleeping Pill.**

2001-05-30

My blood pressure was gradually creeping up, and the night nurse kept coming in to check it. Once an hour. As I was in mild pain from the aftereffects of the surgery, I wasn't getting much sleep to begin with. But I got none that night. Whenever I was just about to doze off, in she would creep. Why she crept, I don't know, since as soon as she put the pressure cuffs on my arm I would awake fully. John was also having a hard time, and nurses were in and out of his side of the curtain.

Once, in a brief nurseless pause in the activity, I heard John moving about on his side of the curtain. I asked him if he minded me turning the lights on over my side of the bed; I didn't wish to disturb him otherwise. He said go ahead; he couldn't sleep either. "This room has more traffic than out on Crowchild Trail freeway", I muttered. He heard me and laughed, and for the rest of our mutual stay it was an in-joke between us.

The nurses were just doing their jobs. When a patient's blood pressure starts climbing unexpectedly after surgery, they have to monitor for signs of danger. I can't complain but sometimes I still do.

The post-op pain was mild enough during the day, and I hardly noticed it. At night, it kept me from sleep, and I finally agreed to the nurse's suggestion of morphine. Because I had a drain on my right abdomen and an intravenous tube on my left arm, I couldn't sleep on my sides as I normally do. Sleeping on my back is difficult for me because it strains my back muscles. I also start to snore, which doesn't bother me directly (John might have had a different opinion) but eventually wakes me up because it dries the throat out. Between the nurses and the pain, I only had intermittent sleep. Nor was it deep relaxing sleep; it was the REM intense-dreaming type of sleep where one dozes off and then wakes up fifteen minutes later, still feeling tired.

### **Our Friend, The Moose.**

At any given moment I like to have a couple of stacks of reading material in my house. Recuperating in the hospital, I was bored silly without something to read. Television sets were available for a nominal rental but I don't watch it at home, and in a hospital I would be unlikely to see a complete programme all the way through, given those constant blood pressure tests. When hospital meals are the highlight of the day, you know you're bored. Good food though; I have no complaints about the institutional cooking of the Foothills.

So I toddled down the hallway to the Common Room, clutching my gown closed with one hand and, with the other, leaning on the wheeled intravenous pump I was hooked up to. I was in luck. There were about three cartoons of newsmagazines and NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICs. None were current, naturally, but beggars can't complain. Most were in the 3 to 5 years old range, with the occasional issue speculating whether this new man Gorbachev would allow re-unification of the two Germanies. The most enjoyable reading was from late 1999, as newsmagazines explained how the Internet would eliminate brick-and-mortar stores within five years, that NASDAQ would pass 10,000 within a few months to become the world's largest and best stock exchange, that profits didn't matter anymore, and that this boom was different from all the others and would go on forever. The NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICs held their age the best, which is not too surprising. Stories about the life cycle of moose are timeless.

About four times a day I toddled to the Common Room to get a fresh handful of magazines. I timed my reading so that I ran out of magazines to read about a half day before my discharge. My brother brought in my mail later in the week, which helped fill the time. I even bought a daily newspaper once or twice. Not more than twice anyway. Several years ago, I had taken a vow, occasionally broken, to ignore current news as too stressful and unnecessary. I fell off that wagon while in the hospital.



Surgery Sunday, discharged Friday. (And for the benefit of my American readers; medical bills were zero dollars and zero cents.) I actually could have gone home Thursday but the doctor wanted to double-check something. Today, a week and a half later, I went back into the hospital for a brief follow-up by the surgeon. Everything seems to be healing nicely, and I am reasonably mobile, excepting that I can't bend easily to the right or lift anything heavy that would tense the abdominal muscles. The bad news is that I appear to have permanent high blood pressure now, and will have to visit another doctor later for that problem.

On the way home, I stopped at the post office and picked up my mail. In it was the July/August issue of THE THOUGHT, published by Ronald Tobin out of Arizona. I quickly skimmed it while standing in the box lobby. A paragraph near the back of the issue leaped out at me. Cliff Kennedy, zine publisher in Toronto, had died suddenly of a heart attack on the night of Sunday, May 27. We had never met in person but often corresponded and had articles published in each other's zines.

It was like I had been physically punched in the head. Given the time zone difference between Alberta and Ontario, it appears that at the exact time I was coming out of surgery in a Calgary hospital, Cliff was dying in Toronto.

What made it worse for me was that after getting back home from the hospital, I had been filling in time by continuing my subject index to Canadian zines. I was currently working through my runs of Cliff's zines DRIFT, BIBLIOFANTASIAC, and THE BLOTTER. Still worse yet, the issue I was indexing was DRIFT #83, a memorial issue devoted to the zine publisher Ernest Mann, who had been murdered by his grandson. And on page 23 of that issue, Cliff Kennedy wrote the following essay:

*"A FEW NOTES CONCERNING DEATH"*

*"When people die, at first they begin to drift, and after a while, they start to become aware of the drifting. It is not a painful process, nor is it exhilarating, not in the beginning, anyway. Gradually they will see their new surroundings, and as they do so, will react accordingly. For most, the experience will not come as a shock at all, for they will have been somewhat prepared for the eventuality by their subconscious minds, which have been at work within them since birth."*

*"The shock of life itself lasts until death, because there seem to be no solid answers to any of our questions about it, but there is no such shock as we begin the longer journey of death. It is something we have been preparing ourselves for since birth, although we are seldom conscious of this."*

*"By what authority do I state this as plain and simple fact? let me ask the reader: by what authority does anyone state anything when it comes to these issues? While one may be thought of as "more intellectual" or "more spiritual" to say one believes in long, complicated theories, what good does it do anyone in the end?"*

*"No matter what we may think awaits us when our days are finished here, I would like to state irrevocably, here and now, that when we die, we simply begin to drift. If we think we know where we're going, the soul will act as a rudder, to take us there. If we have no idea where we're headed, I suppose we'll go wherever the tides take us. And so it will be, for all who dwell on the earth."*

[Cliff Kennedy, circa 1992]

### **Obituary.**

Lloyd Penney advised me that Cliff's widow Sara Clenyg-Jones had contacted him about the death and wrote that it was breathing problems; a few days later I got a copy of the same letter direct from her. Lloyd mentioned the obituary was in the TORONTO STAR, so I repeat the following from the May 30 issue (page B6):

*"Kennedy, Clifford Fairn: Died peacefully, at home in Toronto on Sunday, May 27, 2001. Beloved husband of Sara Clenyg-Jones.*

*Father of Michael and Colin Kennedy, Kimberley MacIntosh and Jesse Solum. Stepfather of Bronwen Eadie. Son of the late Robert and Mildred (Fairn) Kennedy of Sydney, Nova Scotia. Beloved brother of Mary (Terry) Henderson. Uncle of Lisa, Laura, Robert, Donald, Stephen, and Julie. Grandfather of 4. Service to celebrate his life will be held at Kingston Road United Church, 975 Kingston Road (west of Victoria Park Ave.), Thursday, May 31 at 1 pm. Visitation from 12 noon to 1 pm. Gathering at the church afterwards."*

### **ZOO NEWS.**

2001-07-16

Possibly the best investment I ever made was to buy a life membership in the Calgary Zoological Society for \$100 in 1973, which got me unlimited admissions into the Calgary Zoo, subscription to their newsletter, and various other perks. At that time an annual membership was \$8; now that is the daily gate fee. I've long since made back my cost with my visits to the Zoo over the past three decades.

I went today to have a look at their new Canadian Wildlife habitats, with eagles, wolves, porcupines, and our friend the moose in realistic and very large habitats. Quite a bit of walking, but then I can use the exercise. Judging by the tonnage of other



Zoo visitors, they could use a walk out to Vancouver and back for exercise. It looked like an SF convention, except there were more screaming babies at the Zoo.

### **Haw, Haw, On You!**

The first habitat I looked at was a duck pond, with lots of duckweed but no ducks. The duckweed covered the pond with a solid blanket of green. I never did spot the ducks anywhere near the water, but there were lots of English sparrows fluttering about. One sparrow perched in the mesh of a chainlink fence running through the pond. The sparrow eyed the green surface of the duckweed, uncertain if it was solid or not. I could tell exactly what it was thinking, and stayed still to see what it would do. The sparrow dropped down and landed on a twig floating on the green. So far, so good. More eyeing of the green. Finally it came to a decision and hopped onto the duckweed to search for insects. And, of course, splashed into the water. It immediately flew back up to the fence in a spray of liquid and green, then looked around to see if anyone had noticed. I don't think this was anthropogenic imagining on my part. If a sparrow could look embarrassed, this one was it. Laugh, I thought I'd die.

### **Our Friend, The Moose: The Sequel.**

Having thoroughly read up on moose during my hospital stay, I was particularly keen to see them in the flesh. I did, but they were lounging about on the turf idly digesting their meals. Some were sitting up watching the bipeds watching them. Others were sprawled out on their sides, sound asleep. Much like watching cattle back on the farm sans the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC articles.

Adjacent to their pasture was the porcupine habitat. Two porcupines were a bit more vigorous, hunched over their food trays and busily stuffing themselves. They dined on orange pieces, green peppers, apples, and spinach. Not what they would eat in nature. Then again, most of the Zoo visitors watching them didn't eat naturally either from the looks of them.

On to the next habitat, an upland meadow and soaring crags for the Rocky Mountain sheep. The habitat was built of ledges and cliffs of blue dolomite boulders hauled in at great expense from the nearby Rockies. I have no doubt that the meadow had the same plant species mix as the real ones. It looked incredibly realistic to me, and I have trod the real ones out in Banff and Yoho National Parks. There were only two jarring notes in the simulated habitat. One was the steel door set in the cliff face front

and centre where it would attract the eye. The other was the lawn sprinkler perched on the skyline of the cliff, like a military picket keeping watch for restless tribes.

## **GAS PAINS.**

2001-07-22

Sunday morning of my weekend shift at work. I was sitting in the entrance hall of my house, lacing up my work boots. The time was 06h20. As I pulled on the laces, the front door suddenly rattled by itself. Unusual because there was no wind; it was perfectly calm. I shrugged it off as one of those mysterious trivialities of life that aren't worth the trouble to investigate.

A few minutes later I was driving north on Crowchild Trail to work. To the west, a giant tower of dark brown smoke stood up vertically over the Killarney neighbourhood, about 3 km west-northwest of my house. A house fire, and I had a pretty good idea why my front door had rattled. As I went underneath the 17 Avenue SW overpass, I saw an EMS Supervisor jeep roaring west with lights flashing. Moments later, I passed an ambulance heading in the opposite direction to me on Crowchild Trail, also in a full blaze of lights, obviously heading to the explosion site.

An advantage of being a City worker is access to the internal news feed City Beat on our computers, which has the police and emergency reports. I was busy first thing with my regular duties

and in any event the explosion reports wouldn't be posted for an hour or two until the situation was known. I guessed a natural gas explosion, which would be the only thing that could send a shock wave 3 km into my neighbourhood. (All buildings in Alberta are heated by natural gas; the province floats on the stuff.)

And so it was. The reports said a man and a woman were transported to hospital with burns and injuries. The house was shredded into nothing above ground level, and debris was scattered over a city block. Not surprisingly, the adjacent houses were damaged. Quite a wakeup call for the neighbourhood. (Old-time Canadian SF fan Bob Gibson, active in the 1940s/1950s and now gaffiated in his late 80s, lives about ten blocks away from the blast site.) Exact cause was still under investigation but furnace or water heater problems were suspected. A gas leak of some kind would have filled the basement with fumes until ignited by a pilot light.

Later in the day I met up with one of the other weekend shift foremen, who worked out of the Richmond Green depot a few blocks away from the blast. Doug said the depot was blanketed in thick smoke, although it quickly disappeared once the gas company got the main turned off and the firefighters controlled the blaze.

Today the men came to replace my furnace. It was the original one that came with the house when it was built circa 1956. It had been pretty reliable for the twenty years I have owned this house but last winter it gave me trouble twice, and I no longer trusted it. Additionally, it was only about 50% efficient, which didn't matter in the days of cheap natural gas, but did this last winter when prices soared. I got a bid from a contractor for a new state-of-the-art furnace with 93% efficiency, and had booked the replacement for today.

It's an all-day job to replace a furnace, half to take out the old iron monster, and the other half to put the new compact, high-output model in. I stayed upstairs doing reading and writing, at least as best I could with all the banging and thumps going on below stairs. They started about 09h00 and worked steadily through the day into the evening.

They weren't able to finish up in one day though, so they returned the next morning. Fortunately it had been a warm day, so the house didn't cool off too much overnight without a furnace. Calgary is on the edge of the Rocky Mountain foothills. The official altitude of the city is 1 km, but that is taken at City Hall, which is on the floor of the Bow River valley. Most of the city, my house included, is up on the plateau of the prairie, about 100

metres higher, and the new suburbs to the west, up in the foothills, are as much as 1.3 km above sea level. No matter how warm it gets during the day, it always cools off at night down to about 10°C. My house was insulated enough that the overnight temperature was only about 15°C, tolerable enough.

The house was like a heart transplant patient on the operating table, in that moment when the old diseased heart has been discarded but the new one not yet sewn into place. The old furnace was off to the scrap yard, and the new one was not yet sewn into the ducts. Although the new one was not yet operational, everything was in place. It was much smaller than the old iron monster, and was the size and shape of a three-drawer file cabinet. There was now more light in the basement. I hadn't realized before just how much light the bulky old furnace had blocked from the basement windows.

After the furnace men had left for the day, I went out to get some food. I also bought a newspaper, something I don't ordinarily do, but the Killarney house explosion was front-page news. Cause was suspected to be mechanical failure; residents had noticed an occasional whiff of natural gas in the street the day before the blast. One of the houses immediately adjacent to the destroyed one was the home of a alderman's mother-in-law. Buried inside the newspaper was a photo and story about a townhouse that had



collapsed in Tottenham, London, England. It had been under renovation by Turkish workmen, who had apparently taken out a load-bearing wall. I didn't recognize any of the spectators in the photo, though I was looking to see if two of them might be SF fannish residents of Jansons Road.

### **Thermostat Pains.**

2001-07-24

The new furnace needed new air intakes and discharges, which meant drilling through the outside walls. Fortunately the joists are exposed, so the workers were able to do so reasonably easy. It did mean that yet another series of pipes was criss-crossing the basement ceiling. The state-of-the-art furnace came with a state-of-the-art programmable thermostat, which could be set to 4 periods in the day, by individual days of the week. This meant 8 settings per day, times 7 days, or in other words, 56 individual settings to be entered. Added to that was the Daylight Savings Time option, which mercifully only had to be added in once. It was worse than programming my cellphone. You know the kind. Each key handles three or four functions, there are sub-menus all over the place to be arrowed up and down, and if you make a mistake and forget to save the changes, then you have to start over again.

As is usual with all consumer electronics, the instruction manual is written by someone who speaks English as a second language.

The first time I gave up and set the default at -12-  
20°C all the time. I re-read the manual a few hours later, and suddenly everything clicked into place and I actually could see how it was done. Back in the early 1970s I had a Hewlett-Packard programmable calculator. As anyone knows who has used one, the H-P techies specified a bizarre method of data entry called Reverse Polish Notation. RPN makes sense once you understand it, but it is not intuitive. Staring at the thermostat manual, I realized in a blinding moment of lucidity that the controls did in fact use RPN. Learning RPN is like riding a bicycle; once you get it, you never forget it. And so I programmed the thermostat.

### **THE GATHERING STORM**

Even as the tear gas was still being pumped through the streets of Genoa, Italy, at the 2001 G-8 Summit, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced that Canada would be hosting the 2002 G-8 Summit in Kananaskis, Alberta, just west of Calgary. Five years ago, before the Battle in Seattle spawned the Permanent Floating Riot, this would have called for celebration among local politicians and businesses, who would have started planning how much to raise prices. Now the response was lukewarm at best. A chorus of voices was raised in protest, the loudest of which were the police forces stuck with the job of security.

It is easy to see why the Prime Minister chose Kananaskis. The park (or series of parks, rather) is in a narrow mountain valley, with only one two-lane highway in. A better chokepoint couldn't be designed on purpose. It is possible for protestors to travel overland across a mountain range, then the Kananaskis River, then up the open slope of the glacial moraine upon which Kananaskis Village sits. The beauty of this from the Prime Minister's viewpoint is that this would split the protestors, with the environmentalists against the others who would trespass en masse into nature. The police wouldn't have to worry about patrolling the forests (although they probably will have a few scouts) as sooner or later any protestor would have to cross Highway 40.

The 2002 Summit would also be held at a time of year when many parts of the park are closed due to bears and cougars, but I've always felt this threat was exaggerated. Only one or two Albertans are killed each year by bears and cougars, and about a half dozen maimed. The grumpiest grizzly sow couldn't keep up with a constant flow of backpackers singing "Solidarity Forever!"

### **The Calm Before The Storm.**

2001-07-31

The fluster over next year's G-8 reminded me I hadn't yet been out that way this year, and so it was I drove out this morning. Being on the weekend shift, I have the advantage of going out to

the mountains while most people are stifling at work, and weekdays are much quieter in the parks.

This time I drove all the way up to the head of the Kananaskis River valley. The Kananaskis mountains are in front of the Rockies, just outside Banff National Park. At the head of the valley are two lakes, named with great originality as Upper Kananaskis Lake and Lower Kananaskis Lake. Since you can see both lakes from the upper one, but not the upper one from the lower one, most people, myself included, drive to the upper lake. Highway 40 climbs along the wall of the valley. The clouds are beside the highway, not floating above in the sky, which indicates how high the road goes. The lakes aren't high enough to look down on the clouds, but a determined hiker wouldn't have to go far up the mountainside to accomplish that goal.

Arriving in the lake area, I started to walk west to Mount Indefatigable, but the trail in that direction was closed due to grizzly bears. I turned about and went the other way along the shoreline of Upper Kananaskis Lake. There were a few interruptions en route from honeymooners who wanted me to take a picture of them with their camera, or outlanders who asked detailed questions about the trails. I had to tell the latter I knew nothing about the area. I can't figure out why I am such a magnet for people seeking assistance, but it may be because I always wear

cowboy boots and, in bright sunshine, a white cowboy hat. They probably figure I'm either a local rancher or a forest ranger.

The footpath winding along the shoreline cliffs was shaded by ponderosa pines. The ground was carpeted by mosses and mats of wildflowers in full bloom. Quilts of yellow mosses and orange lichens draped themselves on the cliffs. It was calm, an absolute silence. No wind, and only the sound of my boots scraping the rocks. I had to watch my footing, not because I might fall off the side of the cliff into the water, but because of the elk droppings. It is my belief, based on years of walking through mountains, that the elk is the most incontinent land mammal on earth, elephants and cattle notwithstanding.

Around the curve of the shoreline, a rocky islet came into view, a massive block of dolomite about the size of two bungalows. It was connected to the shore by a gravel bar, so I splashed my way across and climbed to the top of the islet. The absolute silence prevailed when I stood still to admire the view. On the far shore, a distant waterfall tumbled noiselessly down from a glacier. The still waters were a perfect mirror, reflecting an inverted image of the mountains. I felt that if I stood on my head, the reflection would become the reality and vice versa.

In the middle of the lake I saw what first appeared to be a fisherman in a canoe but which I quickly realized was either an

elk or a moose swimming across the lake.

It was about a kilometre away so I couldn't make out any detail beyond that it was brown and had big ears. It turned its head to and fro as it swam across. The lake is quite wide and would be a major swim for a professional athlete. I presumed the animal figured it was easier to swim straight across than to go the long way around the shoreline. It finally splashed ashore below the cliffs of Mount Indefatigable. It immediately raised its tail, defecated on the gravel beach, and thereby positively identified itself as an elk.

Final score by the end of the day for wildlife seen was: 1 elk, 2 whitetail deer, 6 or 7 Rocky Mountain sheep, and 4 golden ground squirrels. I couldn't get an exact count of the sheep because they kept moving around so much; the lambs were very frisky.

### **Spray Valley.**

2001-08-01

The next day I went to the Spray valley, which is the next valley over from the Kananaskis. Both valleys empty into the Bow River valley, whose principal town in that vicinity is Canmore.

Unlike Kananaskis, which has a two-lane paved highway winding up a relatively broad valley, the Spray is a narrow valley filled with lakes and serviced by a corrugated washboard gravel road. It



narrowed to one-and-a-half lanes at times, usually on blind curves for added excitement, but on the other hand one could only drive about 20 clicks anyway. Even the dumbest vacationing suburbanites were slowing down in their SUVs, instead of charging forward as if jockeying for pole position at the Daytona 500.

I missed a lot of the Spray scenery, being forced to concentrate on the jouncy road, which had few guard barriers and no shoulders. The initial ascent up into the Spray valley was about a half-kilometre vertical climb over five kilometres horizontal. One side of the road was a cliff soaring straight up, and the other side was a cliff soaring straight down. If your car went over the edge, you would have about ten seconds to enjoy the weightless feeling before you and the car were suddenly compressed to the size of a breadbox.

The Spray valley is a hanging valley, which empties into the Bow valley from halfway up the mountainside. At the edge of the Spray is Lake Grassi, a deep reservoir held back by a gravel dam. If it ever fails, it will wipe out Canmore, which, with the typical planning that one associates with real estate developers around the world, is located in the single most dangerous part of the valley below. The road edges around Lake Grassi, hemmed in by the cliff on one side. In places, one could throw a stone across the lake and hit the canyon wall on the other side. The roadbed is

only one metre above the water, there is no shoulder on the curves, and if your car goes into the water, the rescuers will need a deep-diving submersible to recover the bodies.

Having sweated my way past Lake Grassi, I came out into safer muskeg. The road went through the muskeg, lined by spruce and pines which edged it so closely that many of the trees had scrape marks on them. Through a gap in the trees, I noticed a blue heron sitting on a stump where the muskeg met the lake. I stopped to watch it, but it wasn't up to much, mostly sleeping with one foot retracted. I wonder why birds do this, as every so often a strong gust coming down from the mountainside would hit the bird and almost knock it off its perch into the water. The heron would frantically flap its wings until it recovered its balance, and then stand a while on two feet before going back to sleep.

Further up the valley are the Spray Lakes, long and narrow and more like canals than lakes. The Spray valley meets the Kananaskis valley at its head, so I turned about and drove back whence I came. On the way back, the road was blocked every few kilometres by small herds of Rocky Mountain sheep, who were licking road salt out of the gravel. The average herd was 3 adults and 4 lambs, give or take a few. Tourist traffic would carefully edge past the sheep, cameras clicking away as they passed. I followed the sheep down the road, the four-way flashers on my

car activated. It reminded me of when I was a young lad back on the farm, helping my father in the annual autumn cattle drive, taking the herd back home from summer pastures along the highway.

I stopped off at the Goat Creek trail, which leads to the Banff National Park boundary a couple of kilometres around the other side of the mountain. I didn't go far on it because most of it was closed due to grizzlies. The creek itself was more like a series of rivulets that happened to be flowing in the same direction. Some of the rivulets wended their way through beautiful quilts of yellow-green mosses before disappearing into the muskeg. Strangely, the creek flowed in the opposite direction of the lakes, being a bit below their level on the mountainside and on a different switchback terrace.

Final score by the end of the day for wildlife seen was: 1 blue heron, 1 whitetail deer, 15 Rocky Mountain sheep, and 3 golden ground squirrels (I didn't count the roadkill squirrels).

### **Waiting For The Worms.**

Calgary is very nervous about the 2002 G-8 Summit at Kananaskis. We successfully hosted the World Petroleum Congress in 2000 without any riots, while Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Windsor, Ontario, had tear gas drifting through their

streets when they hosted

various alphabet agencies immediately prior.

Quebec City and Genoa had full-scale rioting and violence in 2001. Only Calgary escaped the Permanent Floating Riot.

All air access to Kananaskis is via Calgary International Airport, although the delegates will be helicoptered from there to the Kananaskis. The resort, is self-contained for hotels, restaurants, and scenery, so the delegates will not have to brave the picket lines, if indeed they even see them. The Prime Minister has also advised the G-8 countries that they can only send a maximum of 35 delegates each, in order to return the G-8 to its original intention of being a small and informal meeting. By contrast, the USA alone had 900 delegates at Genoa.

More worrying to Calgarians is that the federal government is quietly booking up to 7,000 hotel rooms in Calgary for the news media. Since they aren't going to be on site, save for a few pool reporters and cameras, you can expect a lot of talking heads standing on Calgary streets and spouting press releases as if they were original investigative news reports. The rioters and protestors go where the news media are, which means that Calgary could be faced with riots for something that isn't even happening here.