

# OPUNTIA

## 63.5A

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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]

FROM: Franz Zrilich  
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Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

2007-02-??

Could you describe the political administration of Calgary for us? Here, a similar city would be Cleveland, with a mayor, city council, several separately elected executive officers such as treasurer, and a county government run by a three-man Board of Commissioners, several separately elected executives, and city and county judges elected by the public.

[Alberta is divided into urban municipalities and rural municipalities. Urban municipalities are incorporated villages under 1,000 population, towns under 10,000, and cities greater than 10,000. Rural municipalities are incorporated counties, unincorporated hamlets, and municipal improvement districts. MIDs are very low population density areas in remote areas such as the boreal forest or Rocky Mountain slopes, and are directly run by the provincial government. All the incorporated municipalities have a mayor (urban) or reeve (rural), with a bunch of councilors. Treasurers are not elected; they are normal high-ranking appointed bureaucrats. There are no city judges, only provincial

or federal courts, all of the judges being appointed by the appropriate Minister of Justice.]

[Cities might be inside a rural county, but there is no overlap of jurisdiction. Cities grow by annexing adjacent towns or parts of the adjacent counties. There are no metropolitan governments in Alberta. Calgary, for example, absorbed a dozen different villages and small towns around it as it grew, and having absorbed all the adjacent towns, is now nibbling off bits and pieces of the counties. Counties cannot stop an annexation but can appeal to the provincial government for better terms if they can't reach a settlement with the city. Usually the cities buy off county governments by agreeing to provide services such as utilities, fire protection, or ambulances. As an example, if a farmhouse in a county adjacent to Calgary catches fire, it will be the Calgary Fire Dept. that attends the scene.]

FROM: Sheryl Birkhead  
25509 Jonnie Court  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882

What used to be science fiction is frequently becoming fact. Unfortunately these are the dark SF predictions and not any of the more promising future glimpses. Around here there is a massive inequality between population and services (roads, etc.). It's

pretty apparent that humans are simply going to breed themselves into oblivion, taking the planet's ecosystems down at the same time.

[I'm not as pessimistic, although that could be because I live in one of the few places in the world that will be a winner from climate change. If I lived along the Gulf Coast I would have a different view, of course. Having said that, my main reason for optimism is that I have a fair knowledge of palaeobiology, and the fossil record shows that climate change is not the end of life. Sentient life, aka humans, will muddle through, albeit at a cost.]

**I Also Heard From:** Chester Cuthbert, Pete Young, Peter Netmail, Joel Cohen, Garth Spencer, Lloyd Penney, Brant Kresovich

## ON THE JOB IN COWTOWN

by Dale Speirs

### There's No Such Thing As A Stupid Question ... 2006-07-01

... but sometimes I wonder. I was at work, parked across the street from the entrance to Bowness Park, doing a vehicle count. This consists of counting how many vehicles drive into the park in a fifteen-minute period, then multiplying by four to get an hourly number. This is a spot job done as a fill-in during lulls between trouble calls. The idea is to prove what the demand is for the park on weekends. Previously we had used the air-hose type of traffic counter, but they were continually being vandalized.

As I sat there in my Parks truck, a car came by, drove past the billboard that announces the entrance to the park, drove back again, and then came by a third time. The driver of the car got out, walked over to me, and asked the way to Bowness Park. I pointed silently at the billboard and gate not five metres from us. "Oh", said the driver, and sheepishly went back to his car.

### Gridlock.

2006-07-23

Hot, dry weather as Calgary sizzles under 32° C weather. Bowness Park had the usual group bookings at its picnic sites, but matters were made worse today because of the large number of

rafters who came into the park to launch their rafts. Bowness Park is popular with rafters because it is at the upstream end of the Bow River as it flows through the city. People launch there and float down to the south end of the city, about three hours by inner tube.

I drove into the park about 14h00 in my 1-ton crewcab. I had a bad feeling as I went in and realized too late that I shouldn't have entered. Bowness Park was built in 1911 and was originally accessible only by trams (which disappeared about the time I was born). The internal road system was never intended for automobiles. A Calgarian is someone who refuses to walk more than ten metres from his car. Many people assert that it is guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution that everyone has a right to park close to their destination.

The inner park road is in the form of a figure-8, and for whatever reason, had gridlocked. No one was moving. I pulled my truck up onto the grass, locked it up, and walked back to the entrance. With the help of one of the park attendants, I locked the entrance gate, leaving the exit gate open so park traffic could clear out. For the next half hour, we talked to the line-up of vehicles coming into the park and told them to come back later once we had flushed out some space on the park roads.

I quickly fell into a standard spiel. I wore my white cowboy hat, which I have found from experience

that people associate with Parks staff authority, even though it isn't. I think people get the idea that it is so from the forest rangers. I also carried my clipboard, which everyone associates with official business at every job site in the world. I waited for each vehicle to roll up to the gate. Power windows down, a blast of air-conditioning, the driver leaning over to hear me: "There's 100% gridlock in the park, sir. We're keeping the entrance closed for about 15 minutes to let the park clear out."

Most people acquiesced, but there were some returning rafters who didn't get the idea and said they needed to get their vehicle out of the park. I repeated that traffic was in a gridlock and come back a little later.

When the outflow of vehicles from the park dropped to near zero, we re-opened the entrance gate. Alas, for a minivan had overheated in the gridlock and almost made it out of the park before stalling and reducing traffic to one lane. So this time, I set up one of the park attendants as a flagman until the vehicle could be moved off the road.

I studied horticulture for four years at the University of Alberta, but in my landscape maintenance courses, nothing was said about traffic control.

## Weird Weather.

2007-01-07

As far as park maintenance is concerned, the windiest months that create trouble with broken branches or trees blown down are June and July, sometimes extending into August. Once the leaves fall off the trees in autumn, their wind loading decreases steeply. In winter, we ordinarily only get trees run over by commuters in icy weather or drunks coming home from the tavern. Although we get winds in the cold months, they have not been so strong as to snap branches or entire trees.

This winter, however, has been different. The temperature has been mild, fluctuating around the freezing point with little snow, but we have also been getting howling gale-force winds never previously experienced in a Calgary winter. As a result, I have had a record number of calls for branches or trees down, something completely new to me after 27 years in park maintenance.

During the night, the wind blew so hard that all the ice in the east-west section of the Bow River was shoved against the south bank to create a massive ice jam. This changed the flow of the main current, causing it to bend at a right angle and bounce perpendicularly off the north bank before turning downstream again. The riverbank is three metres of sand overlaying a metre of pebble gravel, so it is too weak to withstand the current.





*Pathway being  
eaten away by  
the Bow River.  
The damage  
you see here  
was done in  
one day.*

I received a trouble call this morning (Sunday) that sections of the riverbank park were falling into the current. On arriving at the scene, I watched as metre-wide chunks of the park fell into the river, being undercut by the current. What used to be a broad grassy bank separating the pedestrian pathway from the shoreline was now a vertical cliff at the pathway's edge. The only thing I could do was to put up warning signs and barricades to close off the pathway. I sent an e-mail to the weekday shift advising of this high priority hazard.

2007-01-09

My day off today, but since I was in the neighbourhood running some errands, I stopped by the riverbank. The weekday crew had blocked off the afflicted section of the park with chain link fence and construction equipment was parked along the road. Chunks of the pathway were now falling into the river as the ice jam continued to divert the current.

2007-01-12

Back to work for a new weekend. I found the time to drive by the riverbank. The pathway was gone, but an excavator had cut a ramp down to the water and was placing giant 1-metre boulders along the shoreline. No river current would displace them, and with the boulders as a base, a new riverbank could be built up.

## The Keys To The City.

My boss had some obsolete Parks keys that were of no value, so he tossed them into his wastebasket. The next morning they were sitting on his desk again. The cleaning lady had spotted them while emptying the wastebasket and thought that they might have fallen in by mistake. Since the Parks office is in the middle of a park, my boss decided to throw them into a bear bin as he was on his way out to the parking lot. (We use bear-proof garbage bins in all our parks, which have a double-action lid that prevents animals from scavenging in the garbage.)

The next day, the Parks garbage truck driver brought them in and left them with the receptionist for the boss. I happened to show up a few moments later. I mentioned to my boss that I was going down to look at the Bow River pathway, so he handed me the keys, explained the situation, and told me to toss them into the middle of the river. This I did.

A passerby driving past saw me throwing something into the river, and as I apparently looked suspicious, he called the police about a man throwing some sort of glittery object into the river. It happened that the police were at that moment searching for a gang member with a handgun, and responded. By then I had left the scene. The police divers were just starting to suit up to search the riverbed when one of my park attendants came along. I had talked



to him just before throwing the keys in, so he spoke to the police inspector and told him the story. They called me to verify it, and the whole matter was allowed to quietly fade away.

The Bow River is a meandering river, and the gravel bars constantly disappear and new ones rise up as the current changes. I have this foreboding suspicion that ten years from now some fisherman out on the river is going to find those keys and bring them in again. Fortunately I shall be retired by then.

## **LIFE IN A BOOMTOWN.**

### **Customer Service.**

15h30 on a Tuesday afternoon. I was out running errands and decided to grab a quick bite to eat. I turned into a Harvey's fast food outlet on Macleod Trail, the main drag in south Calgary (eight lanes). Parked the car, walked to the front door, and saw a handwritten sign "Due to staff shortage, we are closing at 3 p.m."

Back in the car, I mused on the contents of my refrigerator at home and remembered that I needed to do my grocery shopping. I decided to stop at the supermarket nearest my house and get some fixings. It was open but of the twelve cash registers, only one was staffed. As with every other business in town, there was

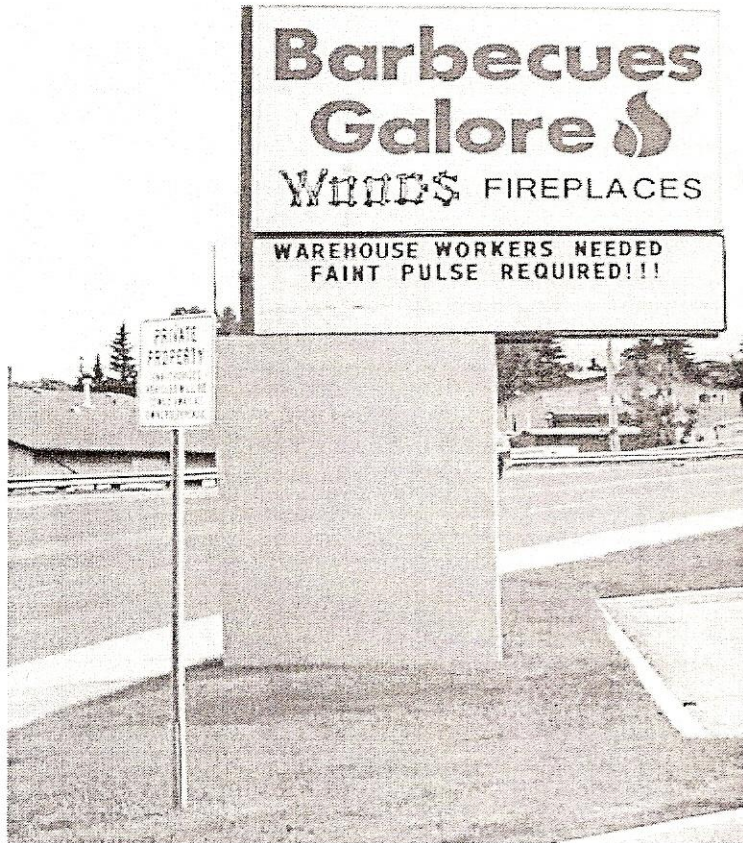
a Help Wanted sign at the entrance.

Life in a boomtown is one of expecting that no matter what route you drive, you will be delayed by road construction. It is taken for granted that every other clerk who serves you in a store will have an In Training badge on their blouse. In the smaller boutique stores in malls, it is standard to have only one clerk on duty, with a 15-minute wait in the lineup for the cash register. Full-service fuel pumps extinct at many service stations, and supermarkets and department stores are converting to self-serve checkouts.

### **When You're Rich, It's On Paper ...**

2007-01-31

The City of Calgary mailed out its property tax assessments, which everyone received today. Alberta uses fair market value assessment, so in a boom economy this can cause some gnashing of teeth as property values rise. I knew from past experience to be sitting down when I opened the letter. This year surpassed even my wildest expectations, as my bungalow went from \$281,000 valuation last year to \$417,000. The sad part is that I have to agree with it, as I have been watching the real estate listings for my neighbourhood and in the past year have seen nothing under \$400,000 listed for a bungalow. Even though my neighbourhood is 5 km from the downtown core, it is now classified as an inner city neighbourhood.



It is a high-demand area for people fed up with spending an hour every morning crawling to work in traffic jams from the far-flung suburbs. I frequently find letters in my mail box offering to buy the house, from contractors, not realtors.

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Just out of curiosity I went through my older assessments. The list is as follows.

2002 - \$168,000

2005 - \$238,500

2003 - \$190,500

2006 - \$281,000

2004 - \$215,500

2007 - \$417,000

I don't have the previous years because I destroy most financial records after six years. I bought the house in 1982 for \$80,000. I wasn't eligible for a mortgage at the time but I assumed the mortgage from the previous owner, which was a 5-year term at 17%. (Banks can't stop mortgages from being transferred as long as the new owner keeps up the payments.) That was a good deal at the time. Most people were paying about 18.5%, and not long after it spiked to 22%. I never paid less than 10% thereafter, and usually renewed in the 12% to 14% range in one or two year terms until finally paying off the mortgage in 1997.

I figure I probably paid about \$160,000 in interest. Against that though, I would have had to pay rent if I didn't own, so the actual



cost to buy would have been about \$190,000 total. Therefore I didn't break even on my house until 2003.

Property assessment is revenue neutral if your house goes up at the same rate as everyone else's. My property taxes, which won't be announced until June, probably will only increase by \$50 to \$100 to about \$2,200, if past experience is any guide.

### **The Landlord Is The Universal Enemy.**

Although the petroleum boom roars on, it seems likely that house prices will start to moderate as developers slowly catch up with the backlog. They won't go down because 25,000 people are moving to Calgary each year, but the supply won't be as critical.

Rents, meanwhile, continue to soar, since little or new rental property is being built and many existing apartment buildings are being converted to condominiums. The main problem is that landlord-tenant laws in Alberta are too lopsided in favour of the tenant, so no one wants to build new rentals. A decent one-bedroom suite in a respectable part of town starts at about \$900 per month. Most are never advertised. In March 2007, I had to move an elderly uncle out of his apartment into a nursing home. Even as I was still emptying out the place, the landlady had a waiting list for his suite, without any advertising. Other tenants in the building heard the news about Uncle Norman and immediately

phoned family or friends looking for a place.

This isn't a major crisis for incomers who have well-paying employment, such as tradesmen or professionals. There are lots of expensive suites readily available. Well-to-do incomers may not find the place of their dreams at first, but at least they can get some place for a while, albeit expensive. Unfortunately, Calgary is attracting lots of common labourers and convenience store clerks who are always going to be struggling. Convenience stores and fast-food outlets now pay at least \$10 per hour plus night-shift bonus plus benefits plus retention bonus, but in Calgary that is minimum wage.

### **On The Buses.**

2007-05-29

In 2001, Calgary Transit drivers lost a 50-day strike. They are currently without a contract, and negotiations are not going well. The average driver makes about \$25 per hour on the big buses, and \$20 on the small buses. The sticking point is not wages but job classifications, which vary with the size of the bus. The main transit routes use the big buses, while suburbs are serviced by small vans. The union wants to decide what bus length requires what rate of pay on what route, while the City of Calgary insist that it is a management decision.

A couple of weeks ago, the union declared an overtime ban as part of pressure tactics during the negotiations. Because of the oil boom, Calgary Transit is already short several hundred drivers. This problem was invisible until the ban, when it became apparent just how many of the drivers were racking up huge amounts of overtime. CT sacrificed its weekend routes in reaction to the ban, in order to keep a semblance of service frequency on weekdays. The weekend buses are now mostly running about once every one or two hours. The weekday bus schedules are nowhere near the published tables, and anyone waiting for a bus has to be resigned to random-chance frequency.

Today (Tuesday), the union served a 72-hour strike notice for a one-day walkout on Friday, timed to embarrass the City, which is hosting a municipalities convention beginning that day. The union faxed the notice, but the City management invoked provincial law which says the original document must be personally delivered. A union representative then hand-delivered the notice but got stuck in traffic and didn't get to City Hall until the lunch hour. Evidently he didn't take the bus, which is not surprising because the union headquarters is out in the suburbs and even in the best of times the routes are infrequent.

As a result, the strike will now start at 12h30 on Friday instead of being for the full day, and will go to 12h30 Saturday.

## On The Buses (Route 9 Version).

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In March of this year, the free tabloid METRO began circulating in Calgary. Within a week, both the CALGARY SUN (right-wing tabloid) and the CALGARY HERALD (right-of-centre broadsheet) had their free versions on the street, 24 HOURS and RUSH HOUR respectively. So began the race to the bottom, as the newspapers slowly decline in the face of the Internet. I stopped buying regular newspapers years ago, but now the freebies are available, I have started reading yesterday's news in them. The big item for transit riders today is that the City and the union reached a tentative agreement, and the one-day strike is postponed pending a vote.

I got on the #9 bus to go to the university. The young woman driving the bus was clutching a route map in one hand as she steered with the other. At each stop, she anxiously perused the map to memorize the next segment of the route. This lengthened the elapsed time for the bus to complete its route, but because all the buses are off schedule anyway, it was no use to even think of complaining. Evidently her training had been confined to a once-around-the-route drive-through. Since no one can learn a route in one pass, she would be doing it on the job. I was grateful that the #9 does not travel down steep hills or along a precipice. The front passengers cheerfully helped her along and pointed out the bus stops, presumably because the sooner she learned the route, the sooner we would get to our destinations.

The good news is that the drivers voted in favour of the proposed contract. The union leadership had previously announced a fight to the death over job classification and bus sizes. The new contract allows Calgary Transit management to continue making those decisions, so the union blinked again.

Meanwhile, the Mayor of Calgary, Dave Bronconnier, is in a fight to the death with Premier Ed Stelmach over provincial funds promised to the city but not yet delivered. The Premier, nicknamed Unsteady Eddie by the public, seems surprised that the Mayor is so indignant about not getting a multi-billion dollar cheque from the provincial government.

### **Just Walk On By.**

2007-06-11

I took the #7 bus downtown, carrying my camera with me. Today, at 12h15, a ceremony was held on the front steps of Old City Hall to mark the occasion of the 100th anniversary of letter carrier service in Calgary. Back then on that day, the first group of letter carriers set out from those exact same steps, so the ceremony was appropriate not only in time but in space. Old City Hall is a sandstone edifice whose construction was begun in 1907 but not completed until 1911, there being a wheat boom underway at the time and it was difficult to get tradesmen. There is no new thing under the sun.

The ceremony began with a Canada Post letter carrier wearing the 1907 uniform and walking down the sidewalk of Macleod Trail carrying the day's mail for the Mayor (real business mail, not ceremonial mail). He then turned and came up the steps to where Mayor Dave Bronconnier was waiting for him. The mayor jokingly told him that he was expecting an important cheque, but alas it was only bills and official correspondence.

From there, we moved inside Old City Hall to a reception. I've lived in Calgary since 1978 but this was the first time I had ever been inside the Old City Hall, although I've frequently been in the new city hall adjacent, a glass curtain-walled building imaginatively called the Municipal Building. I remarked aloud to one of the other spectators that Old City Hall seemed much bigger inside than it looked outside. Mayor Bronconnier overheard me and suggested I wander around and have a look after the ceremony was over. He pointed out a few architectural features with great pride. His palatial office is on the main floor adjacent to the front doors.

In the reception room, Tom Dixon, representing Canada Post, apologized to the Mayor for not having any cheques but assured him that all the bills and invoices would be coming through on time. The Mayor, in his reply, mentioned that the City of Calgary mails 125,000 pieces per month, not including the recently mailed



property tax notices. “Your taxes are due at the end of this month”, he reminded the audience.

Next up to the lectern was Bob Nickel, a Canada Post letter carrier who is the great-grandson of Calgary’s first letter carrier Bert Rackham. He told some anecdotes handed down through the family about those pioneer days in 1907. Relatives from the Old Country usually sent their letters to Calgary unstamped with postage due, in the belief that the immigrants here were in a land of milk and honey and could well afford to pay the double deficiency. The 1907 letter carriers did not have green drop boxes along their routes. They started out with a maximum of 35 pounds of mail. Any amount over that weight was taken out by wagon and left at trustworthy homes and businesses for the letter carrier to pick up later. In 1907, Calgary was small enough that seven letter carriers could provide twice-daily service in the downtown core and daily service in the residential districts.

Bronconnier then read a proclamation declaring that June 11, 2007, would be Letter Carrier Day. After various presentations, the ceremony was concluded. What was interesting about the audience was how many were family members or descendants of the seven pioneer Calgary letter carriers.

## **Wait On The Corner.**

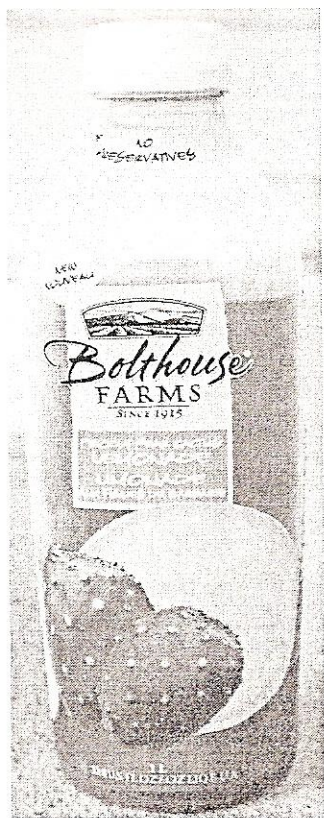
As I exited Old City Hall, I saw a drunk jay-walking across Macleod Trail (four lanes one way) from the Olympic Plaza opposite, weaving in between the passing vehicles. The police station is adjacent to Old City Hall, and the drunk was quickly surrounded by three constables. They escorted him back across from whence he came, gave him a lecture, then made him wait at a crosswalk and make his second trip across Macleod Trail on a green light.

I took the #7 bus home, and happened to get the same driver as I had coming downtown. Fortunately he knew the route quite well. There were only two roadworks in progress on the route, one of which required a detour and the other of which cut a main drag down to one lane. Three lanes of traffic had to merge into one. Contrary to what some people claim, size does matter, and the bus driver was easily able to crowd out cars and thus change lanes.

## **World Wide Party #14**

2007-06-21-21h00

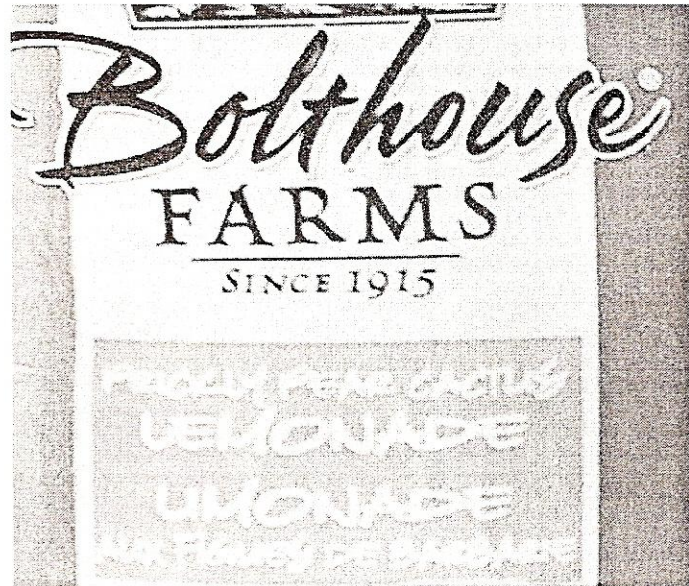
Founded by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world.



The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. If you publish a zine or regularly contribute art or articles to a zine, then you are in the Papernet. If you exchange mail art or write letters of comments to zines, then you are a link between the nodes of the Papernet.

In past years, I toasted with Coca Cola, but this year I did it with opuntia juice. Not bad but a bit too sweet. The juice needs to be diluted a bit. Next time I shall cut it with Canada Dry ginger ale.

I celebrated the WWP in my usual manner. At



the appointed time, I faced east and toasted the nodes and links of the Papernet in that direction, those who had already celebrated the WWP. Then I faced south and north, and toasted the zinesters and mail artists in my time zone,

(Mountain Daylight Time) who were celebrating at the same time. Finally I faced west and toasted those who would be celebrating in the next several hours. And so the wave continued around the world.

## Licence.

2007-07-24

Both my cars are red Honda Civics, and have vanity licence plates, OPUNTIA and NOPALEA. This makes it easier to spot the cars in parking lots amidst a sea of red hatchbacks. I keep an eye out for other vanity plates as I drive, such as WAS HIS (several years ago) and WS HERS (this year, but I don't think it was the same couple). Alberta plates are limited to seven characters or spaces, so the latter plate could not have been WASHERS because people would think it had something to do with washing. At a local mall that I frequently patronize, I see 2TH DOC and CME2C, which belong to a dentist and an optician respectively.

I also watch out for foreign plates. Every province and territory of Canada is well represented in Cowtown because of the oil boom, so there is no challenge there, plus we get them anyway during the tourist season as they head to the Rocky Mountains. Nearby American states such as Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Alaska, and Oregon, are also common. I usually look out for plates from east of the Mississippi, which are rarer, and mostly seem to be Pennsylvania for some reason.

Today I was going east on 20 Avenue North when I saw a pickup truck with a Hawaii plate. I thought to myself that it was the first time I'd seen one. Only then did the penny drop and I remembered that you can't drive a vehicle from Hawaii to Alberta. My conclusion is that the driver is a contract worker who is over here long enough to justify the cost of shipping the truck over.

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Some American states include the county name on the plates, the better, I suppose, to identify outlanders who cross the Macon County line and are ripe for the plucking. A lot of them have pictorial backgrounds and script lettering that make it difficult to read the state name unless you tailgate about two metres close.

British licence plates are fairly common because the British Army trains at nearby Base Sheffield, about 200 km east of Calgary in the heart of the treeless shortgrass prairie. This gives them room to roar around in tanks and bang away at targets over the horizon without worrying about blowing up Shrewsbury or Croydon if a missile veers off course. The squaddies come into Calgary on their leaves, including Prince Harry. The waitresses who served him (draft beer, that is) immediately sold their stories to the English tabloids. When Calgary was still a garrison city, Canada plates were common, but now are rarely seen since the local base was closed in 1997 and the PPCLI troops moved to Edmonton.



## Does Not Compute.

Stamp collectors and zinesters are constantly worrying about the greying of their fandoms. The Internet conquers all, and the Papernet is dying. However, I was amused to read recently online at the Virtual Stamp Club that the Philatelic Computing Study Group is disbanding. It seems that contributions to their forums have dwindled away and no one can be found to maintain their Website.

Which reminds me. Whatever happened to Deja.com fandom? Last time I looked, quite a while ago, they were nothing but off-topic posts, most of which seemed to be discussing their cats. The blogosphere was supposed to take over the listservs, then was run over from behind by MySpace, which fell victim to Facebook. The result is a cacophony of trivia and broken links, archived mainly for the purpose of trolling for embarrassing photos or remarks made by college students who later become famous.

## Is This A Record?

On August 6, I went into a Co-op supermarket to pick up a few groceries. They had Halloween candy displays up already. Strangely enough, I don't recall them advertising any Back-to-School sales in June.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Wilkinson, B.H., and B.J. McElroy (2007) **The impact of humans on continental erosion and sedimentation.** GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA BULLETIN 119:140-156

*"Rock uplift and erosional denudation of orogenic belts have long been the most important geologic processes that serve to shape continental surfaces, but the rate of geomorphic change resulting from these natural phenomena has now been outstripped by human activities associated with agriculture, construction, and mining. Phanerozoic rates of subaerial denudation inferred from preserved volumes of sedimentary rock require a mean continental erosion rate on the order of 16 m per million years (m/m.y.), resulting in the accumulation of about 5 gigatons of sediment per year (Gt/yr). Erosion irregularly increased over the about 542 m.y. span of Phanerozoic time to a Pliocene value of 53 m/m.y. (16 Gt/yr). Consideration of the variation in large river sediment loads and the geomorphology of respective river basin catchments suggests that natural erosion is primarily confined to drainage headwaters; about 83% of the global river sediment flux is derived from the highest 10% of Earth's surface."*

*"Subaerial erosion as a result of human activity, primarily through agricultural practices, has resulted in a sharp increase in net rates of continental denudation; although less well constrained than estimates based on surviving rock volumes or current river loads, available data suggest that present farmland denudation is proceeding at a rate of about 600 m/m.y. (about 75 Gt/yr), and is largely confined to the lower elevations of Earth's land surface, primarily along passive continental margins; about 83% of cropland erosion occurs over the lower 65% of Earth's surface. It far exceeds even the impact of Pleistocene continental glaciers or the current impact of alpine erosion by glacial and/or fluvial processes. Conversely, available data suggest that since 1961, global cropland area has increased by about 11%, while the global population has approximately doubled. The net effect of both changes is that per capita cropland area has decreased by about 44% over this same time interval; about 1% per year. In a context of per capita food production, soil loss through cropland erosion is largely insignificant when compared to the impact of population growth."*

Frey, B.S., et al (2007) **Does watching TV make us happy?**  
JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC PSYCHOLOGY 28:283-313

*"Watching TV is a major human activity. Because of its immediate benefits at negligible immediate marginal costs it is for many*

*people tempting to view TV*

*rather than to pursue more engaging activities.*

*As a consequence, individuals with incomplete control over, and foresight into, their own behavior watch more TV than they consider optimal for themselves and their well-being is lower than what could be achieved. We find that heavy TV viewers, and in particular those with significant opportunity cost of time, report lower life satisfaction. Long TV hours are also linked to higher material aspirations and anxiety."*

## WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION 2008

Calgary will host the World Fantasy Convention the weekend of October 31 to November 2, 2008, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the downtown core. Attending membership is C\$115 or US\$100 until September 30, 2007. Cheque, money order, Visa, or Mastercard accepted (credit card charges will appear as Sentry Box on your monthly statement). The mailing address is World Fantasy 2008, c/o The Sentry Box, 1835 - 10 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T3C 0K2. The Sentry Box is Calgary's oldest SF and gaming store.