

# OPUNTIA

## 303

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When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

### MEMORIAL DRIVE

photos by Dale Speirs

Memorial Drive is a four-lane east-west freeway that cuts across the centre of Calgary. Its oldest section runs along the north bank of the Bow River, across from the downtown core. It got its name in 1922 when the riverbank park between it and the river was planted with poplars, one for each Calgarian killed in World War One. Over the decades, an elaborate network of war memorials have been built along the riverbank.

Shown in these next few pages is the Solace memorial at the 10 Street bridge. The brick building was originally Calgary's second firehall, but by the time I joined the Calgary Parks Dept. in 1979, it was a parks maintenance depot. Later in my career when I was the District Foreman for the area, I used the building as a sub-depot for one of my field crews. It is now a Parks office building.





Looking at the opposite side from the 10 Street bridge a few days later.

A chinook had removed most of the snow.





A reverse view looking back at the bridge. The structure is supposed to be symbolic of a gun emplacement. It has numerous quotes stenciled on the heavy iron plates. In OPUNTIA #300, I showed photos of the Bow River Promenade which runs along the south bank. This pathway system parallels it from the opposite side. During the great flood of 2013, the water was over the top of this viewpoint when the river rose 5 metres and flooded the downtown core.





DEAR MOM AND DAD,

IF I SHOULD DIE,  
I ASK YOU, 'HOLD MY MEMORY HIGH,'  
MY DYING WILL NOT BE IN VAIN,  
IF WARS ARE NEVER FOUGHT AGAIN;  
OR IF AGAIN A NATION'S YOUTH  
WILL NEVER HAVE TO DIE FOR TRUTH;  
BUT LIVE IN PEACE WITH EVERYONE,  
I LOVE YOU BOTH. YOUR DEAREST SON.

-GARTH SCOTT





This pillar at the corner of the bridge has Dr. John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Field", a closeup of which is seen below. McCrae was with the Canadian forces in Europe during World War One but was killed in action shortly after the poem was published in the 1915-12-08 issue of PUNCH.

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

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

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





Looking east along Memorial Drive just downstream of the Solace monument. The pathway runs along the top of the levee. During the great flood of 2013, the

water overflowed and everyone in those houses got a basement full. The text on the poppy banners in the median reads “Lest We Forget”.





# ALTERNATIVE HISTORY REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

VIRTUAL HISTORY: ALTERNATIVES AND COUNTERFACTUALS is edited by Niall Ferguson (1998). How nice to see somebody using the correct term ‘alternative’ instead of ‘alternate’. Ferguson starts off the book with a lengthy, 90-page introduction to the subject of alternative history from the point of view of professional historians, not SF reviewers or fans. He notes the value of alternative history as a guide to avoiding mistakes in the future, assuming that the advice will be taken. Professional historians are generally hostile to alternative history, which is why most of it is written by science fiction authors and axe-grinding propagandists.

Ferguson’s introduction includes a chronological history of alternative history and the centuries of historians arguing between random chance and determinism. He points out that alternative history has a very practical use in the law, as barristers long ago discovered its utility for arguing liability or guilt arising out of an event, the “but for ...” argument commonly used in court trials. He notes that contrary to quantum mechanics supposition, there are not an infinite number of alternative histories, since they are limited by plausibility. “*We should consider as plausible or probable only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered.*” (page 86). In other words, resist having your characters act on the benefit of hindsight they couldn’t possibly have had at the time, or acting to modern behaviour or wishful thinking.

The first essay in this anthology is by John Adamson on “England Without Cromwell: What If Charles I Had Avoided The Civil War?”. Most historians accept that the Tide of History which cost Charles I his throne and his life was a prelude to the long rise of parliamentary democracy and the supremacy of the House of Commons over the monarchy. The point of divergence is the 1637 order by Charles I to impose the English Prayer Book on the Scottish Kirk, which triggered a northern rebellion. Charles sallied off to fight it in 1639, but miscalculated the size of the Scottish army and thought it bigger than it was. He negotiated a peace without a shot being fired. His failure to defeat the Covenanters left him dependent on Parliament for both money and power.

But what if he had waited a couple of weeks? The Scottish army was internally divided, bled by desertions and lack of supplies, and was about to collapse, which is why their leaders were happy to negotiate. An outright victory by

Charles I, who actually had the more powerful army but didn’t know it, would have strengthened his position and prestige. Time would then have been on his side because most Royalists were of the younger generation, while the Puritans were aging rapidly. Catholic imperialism was fading in Europe by the 1640s, so that would have calmed the populace a bit.

What would have an extended reign been like? Clericalization of the three Stuart kingdoms would have resulted, with bishops in temporal positions and greater official Catholic tolerance, although there would still be strong Protestant representation to avoid charges of a Popish plot. Scotland would remain troublesome: “*As earlier monarchists had learnt to their cost, defeating Scotland was one thing; holding the country down quite another.*” This would have sidetracked Charles I from other self-made troubles such as foreign wars. Taxes would have increased, not so bad as it sounds, since England was lightly taxed due to its quaint system of letting landowners declare the value of their land for assessment.

What would have been a significant change in history was the King’s right to tax without calling Parliament. County assizes would have usurped most of Parliament’s powers for the necessary governance of the kingdom, but they would be localized. The kingdom as a whole would become more centralized than it did in our timeline.

J.C.D. Clark considers the question “British America: What If There Had Been No American Revolution?” Clark mentions the belief of Americans that the revolution was providence, later elaborated into manifest destiny. Historians acknowledge that neither the British or the Americans had inspired military commanders. There are a multiplicity of hinge points in the Revolution, indeed, a positive embarrassment of riches, which makes it difficult to sustain a Tide of History view of the inevitability of American victory.

Clark traces a point of divergence back to 1688, when James II had to depart the throne, leaving in abeyance his plans to consolidate the American colonies into three Dominions and eliminate colonial assemblies. The anti-monarchical nature of the American Revolution was mostly after the fact. Many rebels were prepared to accept the pre-Confederation Canada style of independent but allied Dominions, holding only the monarch in common. (This still holds today with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.) Josiah Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester, proposed in 1775 that Britain declare each colony a dominion, which would have cut the ground out from underneath the republicans. Americans were still

generally pro-monarchy, and independence under a constitutional monarch would have been satisfactory. The British government was more interested in trade, so if such a thing had been done, Clark suggests, there would have been no war.

Traditionally, historians attributed the American Revolution to British happenstances, and based their counterfactuals on what King George III or Pitt might have done otherwise or have omitted. Clark suggests other counterfactuals, such as Canada not becoming a British possession, either because the British failed to take it in 1759 or because it was traded for Guadeloupe in 1763, as almost happened in our timeline. New France had scared the thirteen colonies, and when it was conquered, they were less willing to accept the protection of Britain.

A 1754 plan to unite was rejected because the colonies did not want to be dominated by a central government. Benjamin Franklin pointed out in 1760 that union between the colonies was unlikely, since even the threat of the French and the native tribes hadn't united them.

Had the thirteen colonies stayed in the Empire, the result would have been abolition of slavery much sooner, and slightly better treatment of aboriginal tribes. Britain would have eventually had most or all of North America. A point I hadn't realized was that the French Revolution was an outcome of its financial support for the USA, which strained the old order past the breaking point in 1789. France would not have had a revolution in 1789, since it did not beggar itself (50% of its national debt was incurred aiding the Americans) supporting the American rebels, which might have left more monarchies on the thrones of Europe in general without that bad example to inspire future revolutionaries.

“British Ireland: What If Home Rule Had Been Enacted In 1912?” by Alvin Jackson ponders a question still very relevant today. The Home Rule bill of 1912 was the third attempt. Gladstone tried unsuccessfully in 1886 and 1893. It might have succeeded since the House of Lords was emasculated in 1911 and could not block the bill as they had earlier.

The Ulster Volunteer Force, a Unionist paramilitary, was still largely unarmed in 1912, uncoordinated, and poorly trained. By the summer of 1914 they were ready to fight, although as it turned out the Germans diverted everyone's attention momentarily. Unionist political leaders talked hard in public but were

amenable to private compromise. The 1912 bill was financially complicated, with the British government collecting Irish taxes and then returning them to Ireland. There were also practical restrictions that prohibited an army or religious discrimination.

Suppose that Home Rule was granted in 1912 with six Ulster counties as a “temporary partition”. The Irish political leaders of the time were careful to avoid sectarian dispute since they wanted to encourage Ulster to join them. A follow-through was that the Irish supported Britain in WW1 on the expectation of further constitutional freedom after the Armistice.

Alternatively, if full Home Rule, then the Ulster provisional government (Unionist) would move out into the open. The UVF would attempt to neutralize the Royal Irish Constabulary but would meet up against the Irish Volunteers (Nationalist). The British would have to intervene and the result would be a three-way civil war. However, the UVF had trained for set-piece conventional war, not guerilla war, and was inefficiently equipped with a variety of incompatible guns and ammunition. They would have been slaughtered in a fixed battle with the British Army.

Jackson points out the main problem is the same then as now, an indigestible lump of Protestants who will not accept Catholic government. The failure to solve Home Rule meant that 90 years later the squaddies were still in Ulster.

“The Kaiser's European Union: What If Britain Had Stood Aside In August 1914?” by Niall Ferguson has a somewhat misleading title. The author spends most of his time discussing the events leading up to Britain's intervention on behalf of Belgian neutrality. His what-ifs are about whether or not Britain joins in the war, as opposed to the question of the title which assumes it did not.

Both sides in World War One felt it was inevitable, a great Tide of History, but between 1898 and 1901, Germany and Britain were actually discussing an alliance. There were opportunities up to 1914 to change course. Germany was financially weak from the expense of the arms race. Its leadership preferred more to have economic hegemony over continental Europe instead of war. The British cabinet was divided between neutrality and France/Russia alliances.

Ferguson finally gets down to the question at hand when he notes that if the British Expeditionary Force had not been sent, then the Germans would have won the war. The result would have been a European Community 75 years



ahead of our timeline. It would have been dominated by Germany, but there would have been no Nazis or World War Two. Britain would not have been left so exhausted and bankrupt in 1919 that a political vacuum would be created for the USA to rush in and fill, taking over as the world's policeman.

“Hitler's England: What If Germany Had Invaded Britain In May 1940?” by Andrew Roberts diverted too much from the question but eventually got to it. Pre-WW2 Britain was militarily weak due to budget cuts. Part of this was a reaction against the senseless slaughter of WW1 and part was caused by the debt load left over from that earlier war. Roberts discusses the various counterfactuals by others about how WW2 could have been prevented or delayed, noting that this has long been a popular sport among historians and pundits. Strangely enough, Edward VIII counterfactuals also come into it since he was sympathetic to the Germans.

The point of divergence for a successful invasion of England was May 24, 1940, when the 1st Panzers trapped 400,000 Allied troops on the beaches of Flanders. As the Panzers were about to move in, Hitler stopped them. Over the next nine days, the Allies managed to evacuate, and the BEF lived to fight another day.

If the Germans had planned for a May or June 1940 invasion, rather than autumn of that year, they would have found Britain unprepared, poorly armed, and minus the 400,000 troops taken prisoner at Flanders. The Germans were trained for the mustard gas left over from WW1 which the British were prepared to use, and would have needed only a half-day to get their invasion force across the channel.

Once the Germans were across, the British would have resisted, more so than the Channel Islanders or Vichy France. Britain was a more stable society, while France had 35 governments between 1924 and 1940. Britain thus had more to fight for. The Royal Family would have sailed into exile in Canada or perhaps Bermuda. The Bank of England's gold would go to Montreal as it did in our timeline. Lord Halifax would be the most probable Prime Minister in exile.

The Germans had plans to ship all able-bodied British men to the continent as forced labour, strip Britain of its factories and equipment, and secure its raw materials. Very likely Edward VIII would have been restored to the British throne. Lloyd George as Prime Minister would be the British Quisling but not Oswald Mosley, since the Germans wanted an aura of legitimacy and didn't particularly like Mosley anyway.

Lord Beaverbrook said of Lloyd George that: “ ... *the public are divided into two camps; there are the people who think Winston should bring him in and others who think Hitler will put him in.*”

Britain, if successfully invaded, would have been occupied for a long time. The USA would be unlikely to enter the European war because it would be unable to fight without British ports for its shipping. It seems probable that Britain and Europe would still be under German domination even today.

“Nazi Europe: What If Nazi Germany Had Defeated The Soviet Union?” is Michael Burleigh's counterfactual. He begins by summarizing Operation Barbarossa, which began on June 22, 1941, and despite colossal bungling by the Nazis almost succeeded in spite of itself. This is a very popular topic for writers. Novelists tend to emphasize economic and political alternative histories in a successful Germany, while military historians “ ... *merely shuffle armies around in the comfort of their studies.*” The extended war in the Eastern Front generated many plans among Nazi groups for what to do after victory, so unlike much alternative history speculation, we know what would have happened.

Even the Nazis had self-contradictory plans though, and alternative histories must take into account the confusion of factors such as racial policies (German versus Slavic), ideological (Nazi versus Bolshevik), national liberation (countries swallowed up by USSR), and economically (forced collectives versus re-privatized).

The Germans could have set up a line of independent puppet republics after smashing Moscow and pushing the Soviets behind the Urals. However, Hitler's table talk suggests that more likely there would have been close rule of the subjugated nations. Hitler himself stated it would be more like Britain's treatment of India. There was internal conflict between Nazi factions as to whether to re-privatize collectives or to convert them to landed estates for German overlords, as the SS preferred.

If the Nazis had won, Himmler's racial policies would have prevailed. Unsuitable peoples not being exterminated would have been treated as uneducated, illiterate serfs, denied education or property, and shuffled about the same way that the Polish were in our timeline. There would have been mass resettlement of Germans into occupied USSR over a planned 20 to 30 year period, and the current occupants largely evicted in their millions to Siberia.



Further afield, a successful Barbarossa that pushed the Russians behind the Urals would have allowed Hitler to return to the idea of a British invasion. This could have succeeded if Japan and Germany had exercised restraint and not brought the USA into the war. Equally important in Hitler's mind was rebuilding Berlin with massive public buildings, avenues, and bridges intended to make Berlin dwarf Rome or New York City. Even as Russian soldiers were clambering through the rubble of Berlin, Hitler was playing with architectural models in his bunker. His long-range plan, which even he admitted would have to be done by the next generation, was world domination and conquest of the USA.

"Stalin's War Or Peace: What If The Cold War Had Been Avoided?" by Jonathan Haslam stumbles out of the starting gate by denying any usefulness of counterfactuals. At least he was honest enough to say so up front. From there he gets to the subject at hand, noting that assumptions that the Cold War was based on fear of the atomic bomb are fatally flawed. The Soviets had no such fear in the early post-WW2 years because they were confident that the Allies had no will or ability to fight another war so soon. Stalin also had the luxury of having spies deep inside Allied intelligence, so he knew what they were thinking.

Haslam spends too much time discussing what Stalin knew and what his intentions were for a Cold War, and doesn't get to the counterfactual question until the last two pages of his essay. He then concludes that the Cold War might have been averted had Stalin accepted the idea of spheres of influence over buffer states rather than outright control. However, the last paragraph concludes that Stalin would have insisted on military occupation of Germany, which then requires control of Poland as an access route for the Red Army. This then negates the entire counterfactual as being impossible, for a Cold War would have been an unstoppable Tide of History. Altogether not a satisfactory essay.

"Camelot Continued: What If John F. Kennedy Had Lived?" has Diane Kunz coming straight to the point by writing: "*Had he obtained a second term, federal civil rights policy during the 1960s would have been substantially less productive, and U.S. actions in Vietnam no different from what actually occurred.*".

Kennedy had no principles, political or otherwise, and would not have spent capital trying to pass civil rights laws. Johnson did so because he was committed to such principles. Kennedy didn't want to be seen as soft on

Communism, especially after the Bay of Pigs, and thus used Vietnam as a line drawn in the sand. It was after his death that the Kennedy family created the myth that he would have withdrawn from Vietnam had he lived.

Kunz believes JFK would have won a second term but with a smaller majority. It would only occur if he maintained a Vietnam commitment, due to the prevalent anti-Communism of the American public. It must be noted that even at the height of anti-war demonstrations in 1968, the majority of Americans supported the war. What would have been different, and a greater tragedy, would be the failure of civil rights legislation.

The essay "1989 Without Gorbachev: What If Communism Had Not Collapsed?" by Mark Almond, points out that the fall of the Soviet empire was completely unexpected in the form it took during 1989 to 1991. It has become clear that it was not due to the triumph of capitalism, since Communism still reigns in China, North Korea, and a few other places, one of which is not a million kilometres from the Florida coast. The surviving Communist states still crush dissent as Gorbachev did not, leading in part to Almond preferring the Great Man view of the collapse of the USSR, rather than the Tide of History.

Where there is no vision, then the people perish. In this case, as Almond notes: "*Endorsing the end of ideology was Gorbachev's big mistake*" since that was the glue holding together the millions of bureaucrats and sunshine Communists. Ending subsidies to buffer states around the periphery of the USSR cut the economic bonds that kept them in the Soviet bloc.

If Gorbachev had instead cracked down in the traditional manner, the West would have done what it usually did: nothing. There would be a bit of political rhetoric, just as with Tiananmen Square, but no substantive action would be taken.

There would be one major consequence in the Arabian Gulf, as Saddam Hussein would have succeeded in Kuwait with Big Brother Gorbachev to back him up. The USA never picks on anyone its own size, which is why it did nothing in Hungary 1956 or Czechoslovakia 1968, but readily invades small Caribbean islands. The Allies would suffer a more serious problem, for if the Soviets were still a strong, repressive power in Europe, the USA could not transfer forces from Europe to Kuwait.



An Iraqi success in Kuwait would boost oil prices, to the benefit of both the USSR and the USA (Canada wouldn't object either). The USSR could continue to trundle along with its massive but inefficient military, and not only keep the serfs in line but pay the cost more easily due to profits from its petroleum exports. Reagan's trillion-dollar deficits would be considered wasted money, and thus cripple Bush or any other Republican trying to succeed Reagan.

"Afterword: A Virtual History, 1646 - 1996" by Niall Ferguson is a counterfactual written as if the alternative history was fact, and our timeline was an unlikely alternative history. Ferguson compiles all the previous chapters into one grand unified counterfactual. Charles I defeats the Scottish Covenanters in 1639, and the Puritans and anti-Papists fade out over the next couple of decades from old age. The Stuart reign continues down to 1996, and seems an inevitable Tide of History.

After all, what could be so unlikely as our timeline, where Charles I was bluffed out by an inferior foe. Parliament was 'restored' in 1660, and religious toleration defused many nationalists. Quebec remained as New France after Wolfe's defeat, which meant that the American colonies stayed within the British Empire, huddled together under the protection of the Stuarts against the French. Some scattered colonial rebellions in 1776 were easily cleaned up by competent British generalship. The French also cleaned up, since they did not go bankrupt financing the American rebels, and they stayed a kingdom.

The late 1800s saw a few scattered bread riots in Europe that failed to achieve anything due to lack of coherency. There were religious revivals among many faiths, notably the Methodists, Catholics, Jews (led by Karl Marx, who spent most of his life in prison), and Russian Orthodox (led by the priest Vladimir Ulyanov). The American War Between The States ended in a British-led compromise that freed all Negroes but deprived them of any political rights. Home Rule for Ireland in 1912 led to the squaddies patrolling in Ulster.

Meanwhile, back at the continent, Austria and Prussia had settled their differences in an uneasy treaty concluded in 1863. The Hapsburg regime spread further than in our timeline, although there were still many of those tedious minor European wars, especially in the Balkans. The Russian-French alliance against the Hapsburg-Hohenzollern Reich broke out into war in August 1914. The Germans got a quick victory by 1915, leading to the formation of a European Union.

There was an economic boom after 1916, with a mild but brief downturn in September 1929. The anti-Semitic party NZDAP, under the control of Austrian demagogue Adolf Hitler, consolidated the European Union into a single German state, then invaded Britain in 1940. Churchill escaped overseas and established a government-in-exile in opposition to the puppet government under Edward VIII.

To the east, the Orthodox priest Joseph Djughashvili warned his people of the German threat but they paid no heed. The Germans rolled through in easy victories, assisted by non-Russian partisans. Hitler did not live long enough to enjoy his victories, having been killed by a bomb on 20 July 1944. The Reich did not survive him by many years, having overextended itself, and finally collapsing when the war ended in 1952.

American Prime Minister Dewey provided aid to Chinese rebel leader Mao Zedong, but the Japanese War dragged on for decades. Nixon was elected in 1968 on his promise to bring the boys home from Vietnam, where they had been fighting against the Japanese.

The Russians and Americans agreed on a 'spheres of influence' policy in Europe. The unexpected collapse of the West in 1989-90 occurred when the Americans finally split from the Stuart rule, which set off a chain reaction as other colonies and Dominions such as Scotland and Wales followed. As Ferguson mentions, this timeline was inevitable, not like the hypothetical timeline we live in.

Summing up: The essays in this anthology, as well written as they were, generally suffered from the same fault. The authors spent far too much time discussing the background before getting to the counterfactuals. While it was necessary to set the stage by explaining what came before, the result was that the actual counterfactual was too brief in most cases compared to the backgrounding. Most of the counterfactuals seemed rushed, as if the authors suddenly realized they only had a page or two left, and hurriedly jammed in their speculations.

Overall, I rank this about 3 stars out of 5, as the background information reviewed in light of counterfactuals was nonetheless interesting reading.



ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) or [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org), then I don't mention it since you can read them directly.]

[The Usual means \$5 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

[SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, and a genzine is a general zine.]

CHORRADA #7 (The Usual from Kris Mininger, Calvo Sotelo 13B, 4B, Plasencia 10600, Caceres, Spain) A few reviews and letters of comment but mostly commentary on life in Spain, including some of the unusual characters he has met.

FOR THE CLERISY #83 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviews of lesser-known books on a variety of subjects.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Dodds, P.S., et al (2015) **Human language reveals a universal positivity bias.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:2389–2394

Authors' abstract: "*Using human evaluation of 100,000 words spread across 24 corpora in 10 languages diverse in origin and culture, we present evidence of a deep imprint of human sociality in language, observing that (i) the words of natural human language possess a universal positivity bias, (ii) the estimated emotional content of words is consistent between languages under translation, and (iii) this positivity bias is strongly independent of frequency of word use. ... The most commonly used words of 24 corpora across 10 diverse human languages exhibit a clear positive bias, a big data confirmation of the Pollyanna*

*hypothesis. The study's findings are based on 5 million individual human scores and pave the way for the development of powerful language-based tools for measuring emotion.*"

Brown, S.G., et al (2015) **Health selection theory: An explanation for the paradox between perceived male well-being and mortality.** QUARTERLY REVIEW OF BIOLOGY 90:3-21

Authors' abstract: "*Paradoxically, men report better health and quality of life than women, but men experience higher mortality rates than women at most ages. One conclusion from these findings is that men have been selected to disregard signs of ill health, or even to deceive themselves about their health, to their detriment because presenting themselves as healthy has fitness benefits. We hypothesize that men have been sexually selected to present themselves to women as healthy but that the cost of not attending to their minor health problems results in earlier mortality than women. We present a review of the human and primate literature that supports health selection theory, the hypothesis that females have preferentially selected males who present themselves as healthy.*"

Smith, O., et al (2015) **Sedimentary DNA from a submerged site reveals wheat in the British Isles 8000 years ago.** SCIENCE 347:998-1001

Authors' abstract: "*The Mesolithic-to-Neolithic transition marked the time when a hunter-gatherer economy gave way to agriculture, coinciding with rising sea levels. Bouldnor Cliff is a submarine archaeological site off the Isle of Wight in the United Kingdom that has a well-preserved Mesolithic paleosol dated to 8000 years before the present. We analyzed a core obtained from sealed sediments, combining evidence from microgeomorphology and microfossils with sedimentary ancient DNA (sedaDNA) analyses to reconstruct floral and faunal changes during the occupation of this site, before it was submerged. In agreement with palynological analyses, the sedaDNA sequences suggest a mixed habitat of oak forest and herbaceous plants. However, they also provide evidence of wheat 2000 years earlier than mainland Britain and 400 years earlier than proximate European sites. These results suggest that sophisticated social networks linked the Neolithic front in southern Europe to the Mesolithic peoples of northern Europe.*"