

OPUNTIA 338

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Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

AROUND COWTOWN: BOWMONT PARK

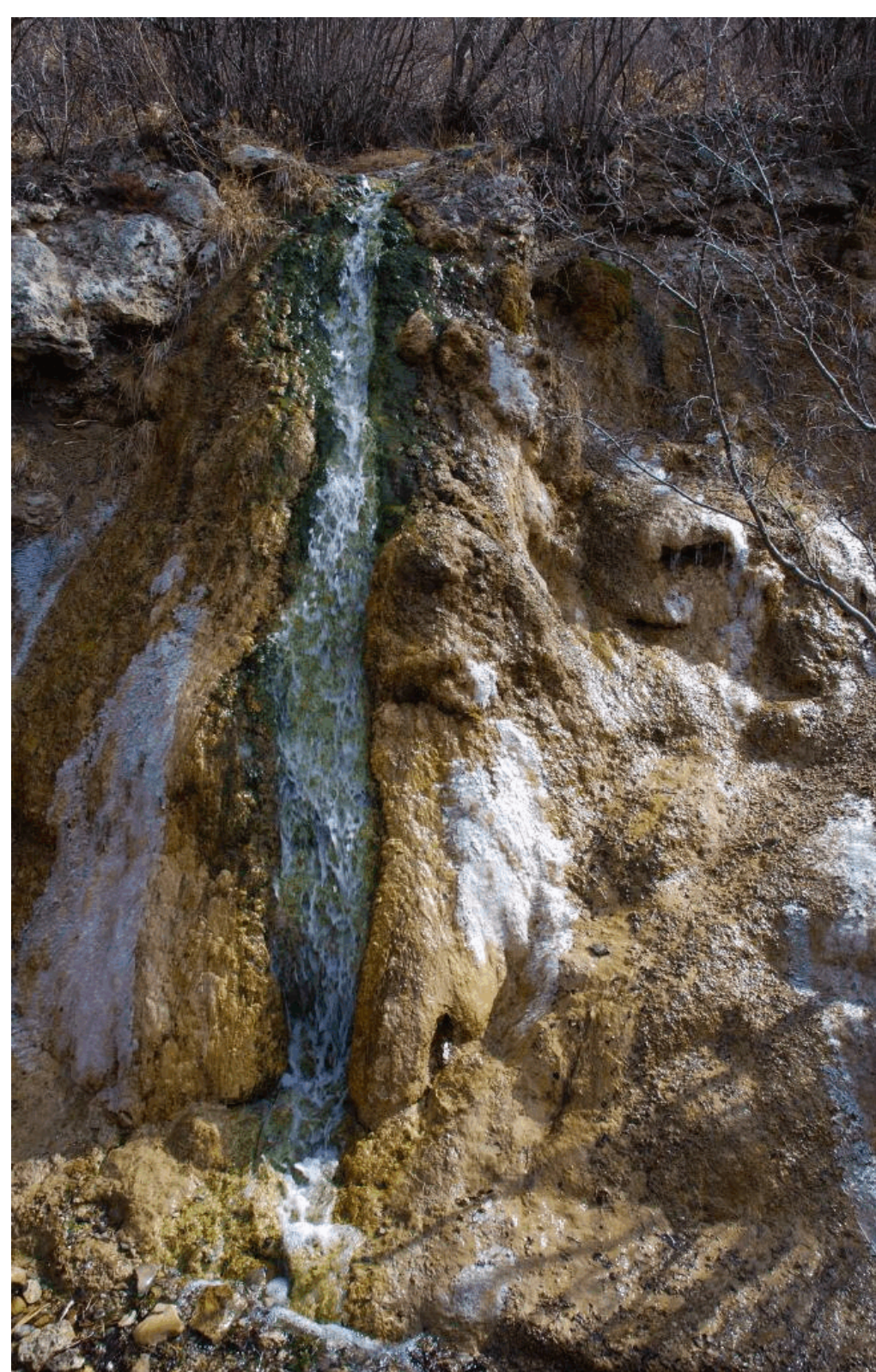
2016-03-27

photos by Dale Speirs

Bowmont Park in northwest Calgary is a natural area on the north bank of the Bow River between the suburbs of Bowness and Montgomery. They were once independent villages before being swallowed up by Calgary in 1961 and ceasing to have any independent existence.

The park is about ten kilometres long and a hundred metres wide, bounded on its north side by the suburbs of Silver Springs and Varsity Estates. Those two are developer-built suburbs dating from the 1970s. Varsity is adjacent on its far boundary to the University of Calgary, hence its name. Although Silver Springs sounds like a made-up developer name, it was actually the pioneer name when it was cattle ranches, a reference to numerous springs along what is now Bowmont Park. The photo at right shows one of the springs.

We are having an early spring after a record warm winter. My lilacs began budding out on March 18 and the lawn started greening up a few days later. I went out to Bowmont Park on Easter Sunday, where the prairie anemones were starting to bloom. The section of the park I visited was Silver Springs Coulee.



Anemone patens in bloom on the slope of Silver Springs Coulee.



The springs at the bottom of the coulee, where they flow into the Bow River.

On the next page is a view looking down the Bow River to the east.





Turning the camera around 180°, the next few views look upstream to the west.

On the next page, the view is from the top of the cliff, with the mountains on the skyline and the suburb of Silver Springs at right.





The twin bridges in the foreground are part of the transcontinental railroad, which came through Calgary in 1883. The middle bridge is a local street connecting Silver Springs and Bowness. The far bridge is Stoney Trail, a ring road around the city.

I worked 31 years for the Calgary Parks Dept., beginning as Weed Inspector in 1979, Gardener in 1980, then Pest Control Foreman in 1982, and up to District Foreman in 1984. Parks Dept. was divided into eighteen Districts. It was policy to move District Foremen around every few years so they would get to know the entire city, so I was in charge of just about every park at one time or another.

In 1999, I was promoted to Trouble Calls Supervisor, covering the whole city, and finished my career in that position when I retired in 2010.

Bowmont Park was in my remit quite often during my career. A perk of being foreman or supervisor was that when things got stressful in the office, or just because it was too beautiful a day to sit at a desk and stare at a computer screen, I could go out on an “inspection tour”. Officially I would be checking up on the work of the maintenance crews, but unofficially it was nice to stand on a cliff at Bowmont Park and admire the Rocky Mountains adjacent to the city or watch a ground squirrel foraging.



Looking across Silver Springs Coulee to the south. Several kilometres away on the far side of the Bow River valley is the Paskapoo Ski Hill, kept going only by artificial snow. The ski jumps were used when Calgary hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics. Bowness is in the middle distance.

The Bow River can't be seen from this angle; it is at the base of the cliffs in the foreground.



VANISHED WORLDS: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #320]

Extinct Monsters.

“The Hole” by B.K. Filer (1967 May, WORLDS OF IF) is about a fossil dig that is penetrating deep down underground to where the origins of man lie. Someone is sabotaging the excavations, but only the animal and human skulls. The saboteur is caught and demonstrates his reason; the skulls provide proof that vertebrates were bio-engineered by aliens to be ultimately under their control. The aliens, whoever they may have been, are long gone. But if they come back, will they just have to flip a switch and take charge of human society?



“Dunderbird” by Harlan Ellison and Keith Laumer (1969 January, GALAXY) begins with a giant pteranodon suddenly materializing over Manhattan and falling dead onto the street, crushing 87 people in the process. Later in the story

the suggestion is made that this appearance was due to a momentary crack between parallel universes, but that is only a minor point of the plot.

The bulk of the narrative is how ordinary people react to the sudden and supposedly impossible happening. There are those who are angry that the giant carcass is blocking traffic and will make them late for an appointment. Others immediately think to make money from it with souvenirs or photographs for publicity purposes. Politicians show up and declare to the television cameras that Something Must Be Done. The firefighters say it’s not their job to clear the carcass, while the Sanitation union wants extra pay because it isn’t within their job demarcation.

The story is a realistic look at human behaviour. In my career as a Parks Dept. supervisor, I would have reacted the same way. If a dead pteranodon suddenly crashed into Olympic Plaza on my shift, my first thought would have been “How the hell are we going to clear this away?” My concern would have been the cost of hiring a crane and a low-boy trailer truck to haul it away, and what that would do to the budget.

Extant Monsters: Loch Ness.

Loch Ness has a thriving tourist industry based on a supposed plesiosaur-type critter. Fiction also makes use of it. “The Convenient Monster” is a 1966 episode of THE SAINT television series, about Simon Templar, a smarmy ladies man with no visible means of support. Once a week he finds himself in an investigation at whatever scenic place he was visiting. And thus to the not so bonny, bonny banks of Loch Ness.

A dog and several sheep have been found crushed to death, with deep tooth marks in their corpses. Large dinosaurian footprints are found on the adjacent beach, which convinces the villagers that it is the monster. Templar begins poking around and discovers the local Scots are nae too friendly, ye ken. It doesn’t help his popularity that he openly scoffs at the existence of the beast, which does, after all, help sustain the tourist trade.

The first human body shows up in the second act, apparently done in by the monster. A local believer in the beast sets up a hunting blind in the hopes of killing it. Templar does some skulking around and finds a cave with scuba diving equipment, a large club with teeth, and a device for stamping fake monster footprints.

After various alarums and excursions and melodramatic subplots, the murderer is exposed as the believer. She hated her husband, and hoped to kill him and have it blamed on the monster. This would not only get rid of a nuisance but also generate lots of publicity for her cause. The final twist in the plot is that when she escapes by boat out onto the lake, it turns out that there really is a monster and it's hungry.

The episode script and props are reasonably well done, but one glaring fault is in the difference between beach scenes filmed inside the studio and location shots. The colour balance and lighting are obviously different, which also makes the painted stage backdrops stick out. This matters because there were several sequences where the characters were in a field shot and then a second later came round a clump of trees onto a stage visibly distinct from location shot.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (1970) is one of the better pastiches, a comedy movie using younger actors in their thirties to portray Holmes and Watson as they were in the canon stories, not older men as most movies showed them. In this movie, Watson is particularly hilarious as a roisterer, fond of wine, women, and song, not the old duffer in the Nigel Bruce manner. Mycroft, unfortunately, was played by a thin man, when the canon made it clear that he was a corpulent fellow.

A number of unrelated subplots and passing mentions eventually thread together and bring the principal players to Loch Ness. Missing circus midgets, a Russian ballerina who wants Sherlock to breed her baby, and a woman whose husband went missing all lead to some sort of conspiracy. The woman is Gabrielle Valladon, and seduces Sherlock, so she couldn't have been that cut up about her husband.

Then a summons to the Diogenes Club by Sherlock's brother Mycroft, who warns him off the case of the missing husband. He tells Sherlock to be a good boy and leave matters to the Foreign Office, who know what they're doing. That is just waving a red flag at Sherlock. Mycroft accidentally mentions in passing a Scottish village, which turns out to be on the shores of Loch Ness.

Thus to the not so bonny banks, with Sherlock, Watson, and Valladon. A mysterious castle on the shore seems to be the centre of it all. The three observe it from land and then by water. While they are in the rowboat, Nessie swims by and brushes them into the water. It seems to be nesting in the castle, so a further

sortie is called for. That one culminates in success, for Nessie turns out to be a secret government project to build a submersible. The periscope is disguised as a plesiosaur head and neck so that if the natives happen to see it they won't know the truth.

Everyone converges on the castle, including Mycroft, who is a bit put out at his brother. Queen Victoria even shows up for a secret christening ceremony, for the submarine is ready for duty. She is not amused when told it is a warship that can fire torpedoes without showing its colours. Most unsporting and not the British way, so she puts the kibosh on any further work.

Mycroft informs Sherlock that Valladon is actually the German spy Ilse von Hoffmanstal. Since the submersible is now useless, Mycroft deliberately leaves it unguarded so the henchmen of Ilse qua Gabrielle can steal it. The sub is booby trapped and blows apart, taking the henchmen to a deep watery grave. Ilse is arrested by Mycroft and later exchanged for a British spy.

The movie is quite good. The only jarring note was that the actor who played Sherlock wore exaggerated makeup more suited for the live stage than closeups in a movie.

Extant Monsters: New York City.

"How To Hatch A Dinosaur" is a 1967 episode of the television series BATMAN. The series was played very campy, with surrealistic sets and acting that was either wooden or over-the-top but nothing competent in between. Batman roamed freely around Gotham City with the Boy Wonder Robin, but no one thought to follow their exotic car back to their lair to find out who they are. Ridiculous acting but it's the only way a superhero can be played, since the idea of someone in brightly coloured tights prancing around trying to eliminate supervillains in equally silly costumes cannot be done seriously. Which is why the Dark Knight interpretation is even sillier.

Gotham City is a strange place. The establishing shots are Manhattan, but the countryside scenes are semi-desert, with nice warm beaches, not unlike the Los Angeles area. In our timeline, a Police Commissioner or Chief of Police do not personally involve themselves in investigating each individual case instead of letting the uniforms do the job. That is, however, standard practice in Gotham City. Batgirl is more like Bait Girl, always being kidnapped.

The supervillains make little effort to cover their tracks, and hole up in warehouses or shops with signs that are a pun on their name. Batman and Robin are repeatedly trussed up and left under strange death machines that never work, while the supervillain departs to do his or her evil deeds. Never do they simply shoot the heroes in the head. Not once does a supervillain take thirty seconds to rip off their masks and find out who they really are.

The episode at hand has the supervillains Egghead and Olga, Queen of the Cossacks, stealing two pounds of radium and a fossil *Neosaurus* egg. They will use radiation from the radium to hatch the egg and unleash a reign of terror upon Gotham City. A display sign in the museum said the egg was a dinosaur from 40 megayears ago, which is 25 megayears after dinosaurs became extinct in our timeline. The egg is about two metres high on its longitudinal axis, so Mama *Neosaurus* must have been one big dinosaur to squeeze out something like that. Bad science is a hallmark of Gotham City's timeline.

Be that as it may, Egghead and Olga set up the radium-powered superscience device that will hatch the giant egg. Out comes a critter in a very bad rubber suit. At first the viewer will attribute the cheap suit to the low budget of the SFX crew, but for once the show does something logical. After scaring Egghead, Olga, and their henchmen out the door into the waiting arms of the police, the man in the rubber suit takes off the head and reveals himself to be Batman. (Adam West must have been dying from heat exhaustion wearing a rubber suit on top of his regular costume.) Batman points out to Robin and Batgirl that it is impossible to hatch a 40-megayear-old (sic) dinosaur egg, so he used Egghead's delusion against him. And thus to the Batcave.

"Monster On Stage 4" by Henry Slesar (1957 August, AMAZING) is sheer awful pulp fiction, the magazine being in one of its periodic declines at that time. It begins in the jungles and swamps of Mars, which immediately puts the story at odds with every other SF writer who has written a Martian story, even more so because it is mentioned that Venus was settled by humans. Mars has a giant dinosaurian beast called the goofus, upon which a bounty has been placed by the United Nations, evidently not as ecologically concerned then as now. A movie studio, teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, hires a Great White Hunter to bring to Earth a live baby goofus.

The elaborate plan of the studio is to raise the goofus to full size in a secret location near Manhattan. When the time is ripe and the cameras are rolling, the studio will temporarily gas the New Yorkers with a sedative, then release the

goofus to go roaring down the streets to create the greatest movie ever filmed. Real blood! Real dinosaurs! Unfortunately the goofus, having been raised in captivity, has no blood thirst and is thoroughly domesticated. It playfully splashes about in the Hudson River as the New Yorkers revive from the gas. An interesting ending that saves this story, if only a bit, from the poor beginning.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario 2016-03-28

Re: OPUNTIA #336: The long walkway under the highway is a great idea. Here, there is always discussion about what happens or is built under the Gardiner Expressway in some areas, but people are always afraid that a chunk of concrete off the bottom of the Gardiner’s deck will rain down on unsuspecting people underneath. There are but a few pedestrian overpasses around Toronto, and I can think of one or two going across the Queen Elizabeth Way going through Mississauga.

[Calgary freeways have pedestrian overpasses as a matter of course. Since the City Roads Dept. uses life-cycle maintenance plans, chunks of concrete are not a concern. The photo on the cover of #336 shows the concrete all bright and shiny, because about five years ago the bridge had a major overhaul.]

Happy Anniversary [for OPUNTIA’s 25th year]. With the change in numbering system, I wouldn’t have known. The Web is indeed 25 years old, which makes me wonder about all the changes to it we’ll see, not in the next 25, but the next 10 years. At least here, there are still many paper boxes on most corners, with the STAR, SUN, GLOBE, NATIONAL POST, two free subway papers, one entertainment paper, various employment papers, and ethnic newspapers here and there. I think, though, we’re on the edge on some of these papers going away. We’re quite spoiled here.

[There are lots of free newspapers in Calgary, but other than METRO, few live more than a couple of years. I expect the Calgary SUN and the HERALD to be gone within a decade or else converted into free newspapers. Why pay money to read news that was on the Internet yesterday?]

Steampunk does indeed have many fathers, but those fathers, like K.W. Jeter, are too soon forgotten. Steampunk has given us a new group of friends, new places to travel to, more studies in fashion history, especially for men, and a chance for both of us [Lloyd and his wife Yvonne] to create new costumes, and show off our creations to appreciative audiences. I admit I do not read much

steampunk fiction, mostly because it can be extremely detailed, and a lot of it is written in a long, drawn-out Victorian-era style.

Re: OPUNTIA #337: Weather-wise, we’re supposed to be very cold next week, but I think that will be winter’s last gasp. As I write, the high winds are blowing our balcony furniture around, but at least we have no snow on the ground, and haven’t had any for most of the winter. We see the benefits of this, and the drawbacks, and there might not be enough water in the soil for local farmers to pull decent crops up.

Not, if the Flames win another Stanley Cup, it will not be the Apocalypse, but should the Leafs win. 1967 was a looooooong time ago.

We will keep our end of the World Wide Party, and hope there are enough observant fans for some good reports.

My letter re: Nero Wolfe: I did ask about shad roe being served at the Wolfe dinner, and also about trout. They knew what I was talking about, but didn’t go into further detail; just as well.

ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org, then I don’t mention it since you can read it directly.]

TRAP DOOR #32 (US\$5 from Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 94611-1948) Genzine with lengthy essays on various matters. Grant Canfield writes about his retirement and how it was hastened along by his employer, a familiar story when bosses think this is no place for old men. Andy Hooper writes about recently deceased SF fan Art Widner, who made it to 98 years. I never met Widner but exchanged zines with him via the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. Hooper’s biography of Widner’s hard times during the Great Depression living in work camps make one understand why Widner turned out the way he did, a fan who had four children but lived for SF conventions as a way of finding an alternative family. Some travel articles and an extended letter column. This is not a zine to be skimmed; it is an evening’s read.