

OPUNTIA 348

Late July 2016

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.

LISTEN TO THE MURMUR OF THE COTTONWOOD TREES

photos by Dale Speirs

The Bow River zigzags through the City of Calgary, flowing east-west past the downtown core, then suddenly making a righthand turn and flowing due south through the rest of the city. Where it makes the turn is a promontory that today is the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary. I moseyed on down there one idle Sunday but although I could hear lots of birds twittering away in the cottonwood trees, the only actual aviators I saw were some Canada geese, seen below at lower right on a backwater of the park.



The interpretation centre looks much like any other interpretation centre I've ever seen in any Alberta park. Out back were some weed-filled raised beds with murals of Alberta wildlife. The one below has an error; pronghorns are found throughout the southern Alberta shortgrass prairies but not within 100 km of Calgary. All the other species were or still are here.



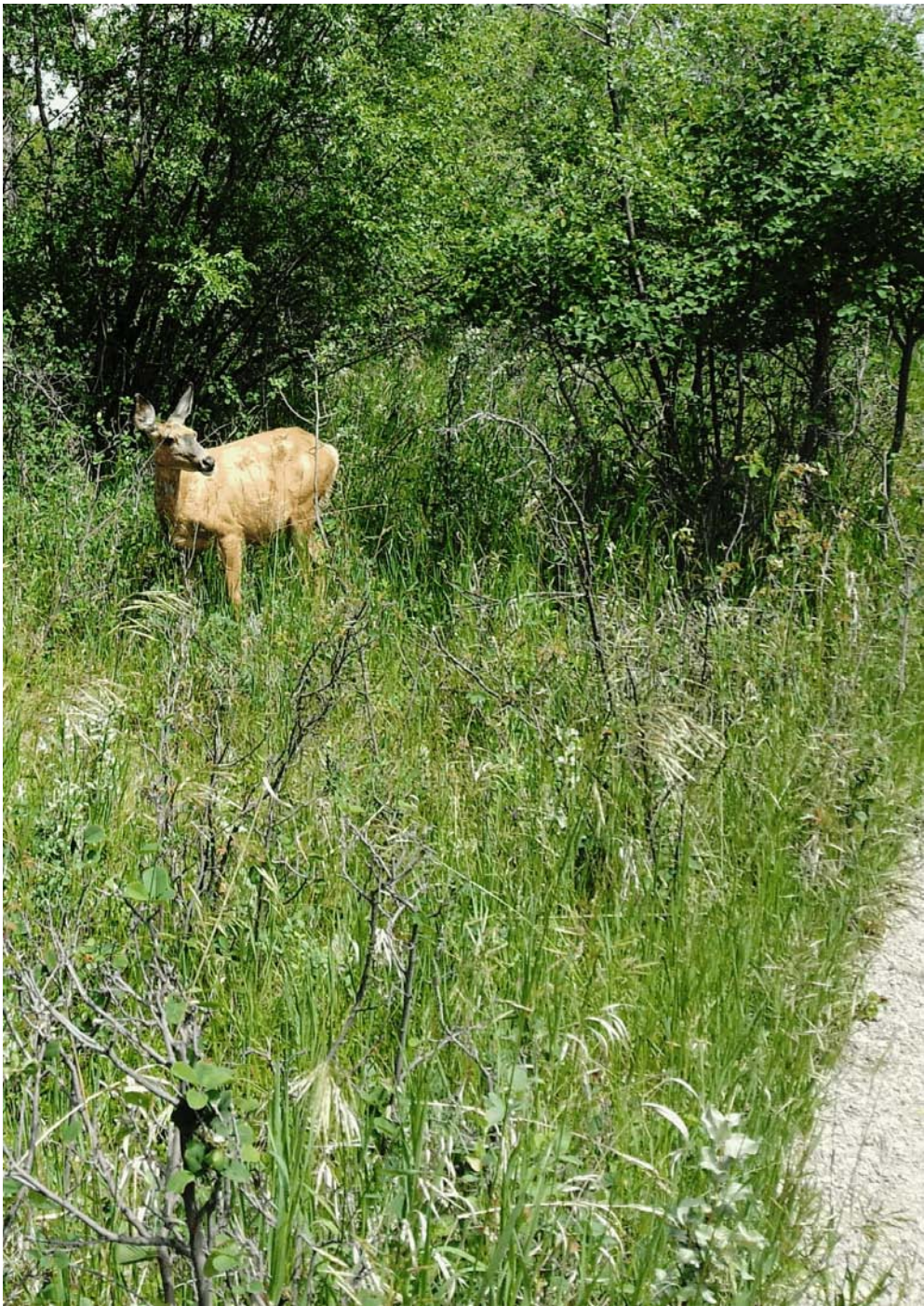
The Sanctuary was once the estate of Col. James Walker, one of the original NWMP personnel who helped found Fort Calgary in 1875. Below left is his manor house, still occupied, and immediately below is a view of it from across a backwater of the Bow River. At bottom right is another view of the backwater with a beaver dam.



The island is actually a beaver lodge. These are all backwaters.



This deer was grazing beside the pathway without any concern about us bipeds. No sign of the rest of the herd.



The saskatoon berries were just beginning to ripen. Notice the red clump.



SHERLOCKIANA: PART 20

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 19 appeared in OPUNTIA's #63.1B, 63.1C, 63.1D, 67.1D, 68.1C, 69.1E, 70.1A, 71.1B, 251, 253, 256, 261, 269, 270, 276, 288, 309, 333, and 340.]

The original Sherlock Holmes stories are referred to as the canon, while stories written by other authors in the Holmesian setting are called pastiches. Short-story pastiches compiled into a book are a collection if they are all done by one author, and an anthology if done by several authors.

Pastiches: Collections.

THE PERILS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (2012) by Loren D. Estleman is a collection of his pastiches gathered from various sources. Most of them I previously reviewed when they appeared elsewhere. The one new item in this collection, previously unpublished, is “The Serpent’s Egg”. It was the first chapter of an unfinished round-robin novel that was to have included chapters written by Ruth Rendell and Isaac Asimov, among others. In the foreword, Estleman writes that the title and first chapter were his. One wonders why he didn’t just go ahead and write the rest of the novel himself.

The chapter begins with Watson visiting Holmes after a long absence. It being a beautiful day, they go out for an aimless stroll. As they go down Marylebone Lane, they observe a fistfight in front of the British Retrospective Society (BRS) building. The combatants are dressed as gentlemen, even if they aren’t behaving as such, and fighting over a leather portfolio. Holmes and Watson break up the fight.

The rightful owner of the portfolio received the worst of it, so they take him back to 221B where Watson can patch him up. He is Dr H. Quicksilver Carlyle, a scholar of ancient Britain, and the papers are his record of an ancient religion. The other combatant, who departed from the scene in a different direction, is Junius Ridpath, the President of the BRS, and who disputes the authenticity of Carlyle’s research on Stonehenge.

Then follows an infodump by Carlyle on his research. He thinks Stonehenge is the fount of Druidism and that magic goes on there. Not much different from a modern New Ager actually. He tells of seeing a mystical light and a hooded man standing in the centre and chanting a curse at Carlyle. Since then, the

professor has been plagued by near-miss accidents that could have killed him. Holmes disparages the story but Carlyle then shows him an item he took from the ground where the figure had been standing. It appears to be a fossilized egg. At that point, the chapter ends.

Estleman also includes a critical essay “On The Significance Of Boswells”, a look at how Watson has been misrepresented by movies. The blame can be laid on Nigel Bruce, who played Watson as a middle-aged overweight duffer who was a complete fool. He played it so well that ever since him the public image of Watson has been fixed. The canon was never so unkind to Watson. Estleman makes the point that recent movies with Jude Law as Watson are far more accurate in portraying the good doctor.

THE LOST CHRONICLES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (2014) by Denis O. Smith is a collection of his short story pastiches. “The Adventure Of The Crimson Arrow” leads off the book. It is a manor house murder where the deceased got an arrow in the back while wandering in the woods after an archery competition on the lower lawn. (You don’t have a real manor without an upper and lower lawn, and a patch of woods.)

The victim was a guest at a weekend party. Scotland Yard makes a quick arrest but obviously got the wrong man, otherwise there would be no story. The fiancée of the accused hires Holmes, and the rest is obvious. The likely suspect turned up by Holmes then follows the ancient tradition and becomes the second corpse. Holmes tracks down the clues, the real culprit flees, and there is an exciting chase to the railway station before justice is served. A standard plot but reads well.

“The Adventure Of Kendal Terrace” is about a man who returns home unexpectedly and finds his house occupied by strangers and his wife missing. In company with Holmes, Watson, and the police, they visit the house to find the strangers gone. There is a dead man in the dining room, and another in the garden sleeping off a drugged cup of tea. The plot is very elaborate, a revenge by the housekeeper and her sister against the dead man for what he did years ago. The confession takes up the second half of the story, and Holmes’s additional explanation another few pages. Basically an extended infodump outlining the plot instead of making it part of the story.

“A Hair’s Breadth” has Holmes investigating the murder of a rich widow. The main suspect is a religious fanatic named Quinliven, who visited her weekly.

The vital clue is a strand of hair found by Holmes. In the meantime, the hue and cry by the police stretches from Leicester to Glasgow and back to London. Quinliven turns out to be the widow's nephew in disguise, carrying out a too, too elaborate scheme to inherit her wealth.

It is said she was nearly blind and thus could not penetrate his disguise, but it is difficult to believe she wouldn't recognize his voice, especially since he was a repeat visitor. It might be possible to fool a friend or family once or twice, but not regularly. Some of the information comes out of nowhere near the end of the story. In particular, railway clerks identify the nephew when he is out of disguise and just an ordinary man, looking like the tens of thousands of other ordinary men they see every day.

"The Adventure Of The Smiling Face" has the usual young woman in distress calling at 221B for help. Georgina Calloway is an assistant to her distant relative Prof. James Palfreyman (ret.) who lives in the wilds of North Kent. He begins to lose his mind after receiving strange letters and packages, and she is attacked once while walking home in the fog. Calloway's narration to Holmes at 221B goes on for 27 pages (I counted) before Holmes and Watson leave Baker Street.

On arrival at the big house, they find the Professor gone but not before leaving a letter. The contents of that letter take up nine pages in the story, another massive infodump. The action finally begins when two bodies are found, the Professor, and Calloway's boyfriend Martin. The investigation suddenly hurries to a close. On the basis of facts not known to the reader, Holmes concludes that the two men killed each other for good and sufficient reason. Way too much telling and not enough showing.

"The Adventure Of The Fourth Glove" is about the theft of the Latchmere Diamond, a gem that attracted the attention of many thieves over the years. Holmes is summoned to the manor house, and suspicion is thrown about like road salt. The vital clue is a glove of Lady Latchmere, but where is the other one?

Holmes quickly narrows down the suspects, and identifies the thief as a distant elderly relation living on the charity of others. It wasn't until after she stole the diamond that she realized it was impossible for her to dispose of it. She doesn't have any contacts with fences, and the diamond is too well known to sell to a legitimate jeweler. She surrenders it to Holmes and he lets her be, rather than

condemn her for a momentary lapse of judgement. A standard plot but with better characterization and not so much infodumping.

"The Adventure Of The Richmond Recluse" begins with British diplomat David Boldero, recently returned from a European posting, approaching Holmes about the disappearance of his brother Simon. He thinks their cousin Silas, a reclusive miser, might have done him in. David hasn't any evidence to take to the police, so he asks Holmes to investigate.

It turns out that the Boldero fortune went to Silas alone instead of being shared with David and Simon because of sharp practice with the real will of their grandfather. Silas is an amateur herpetologist who keeps, among other species, a full-grown crocodile. He sends it after Holmes, Watson, and David when they visit the manor house. After much excitement, the three men escape and in turn Silas is fed to the beast. An action-adventure story, ending with David finally coming into his true inheritance.

"The Adventure Of The English Scholar" starts with Rhodes Harte consulting with Holmes about a strange occurrence at the railway station of Little Gissingham. (Even Holmes has to look up that one in a British gazetteer.) Harte made a casual acquaintance on the train with a Dickens fan, Dr Kennett, who had forgotten his satchel on leaving the train. Harte tried to track him down to return it, and thereby becomes involved in a mystery.

Alarums and excursions follow each other in turn, and Harte decides to consult Holmes. They then all head back to Little Gissingham, giving Holmes a chance to theorize at great length on the train trip. From a few threadbare clues, he elaborates that Kennett is really a former Prime Minister of Bohemia, deposed and now hiding in the English countryside, fearing for his life.

Assassins are on his trail for good and sufficient reason to punish him for his past sins. They are foiled at the last moment. An interesting story, although the theoretical construct woven by Holmes from a few strands is difficult to believe, even if it is bolstered by subsequent events.

"The Adventure Of The Amethyst Ring" begins with Holmes lecturing Watson about a stolen goods caper he was investigating, which smuggled stolen British valuables to France and vice versa to make for easier disposal. Much of it is past history, until the landlord of a pub associated with the smugglers is murdered. The history is nothing more than a bushel basket of red herrings, for

the true killer is a barmaid. She thought the landlord was her father who skipped out when she was born.

“The Adventure Of The Willow Pool” is about a compatriot of Watson who also fought at the Battle of Maiwand, Capt. John Reid. After his return to England, Reid finds himself ostracized by family and villagers for no apparent reason. He brings Holmes and Watson to the manor house to fight the slander and find the perpetrator. A dead body soon shows up and matters are worsened by forgeries and breach of trust by the private secretary of Reid’s father. The story drags in the middle and could have been tightened up a bit. It reminds me of Internet bloggers who libel others from the safety of anonymity. Whispering campaigns are no new thing.

“The Adventure Of Queen Hippolyta” opens with the problem of Godfrey Townsend, who was kidnapped by foreigners and held captive before being released unharmed. He was the victim of mistaken identity, and the kidnappers had really been after Mr Smith, a tenant who lived adjacent to Townsend. Smith disappears and the kidnappers make a run for the boat train at Dover. Alas for them, Holmes is on the job and they are caught. It was for revenge that they were after Smith, real name Schmidt, a German confidence man who bilked their people of a large sum. The story is a steady read.

“The Adventure Of Dedstone Mill” begins with a letter from a frightened teenage orphan who fears foul play from her guardians. She and her brother are at risk from an evil uncle-by-marriage. The plot can be seen coming several pages in advance, and since the resolution of the story is obvious, there is no suspense.

“An Incident In Society” puts Army Capt. Walter Armstrong in a difficult position because he was responsible for secret military codes that have been copied by an unknown agent while they were in his office. It will be the ruin of the nation but Holmes comes to the rescue. Evidence makes it clear that the papers will be passed at a high society dinner party, so Holmes and Watson wrangle invitations and attend it to intercept the package. All ends well, as the traitor is detained and England may once again sleep secure.

This collection is, on the whole, about average for pastiches. The author has problems with too many infodumps instead of working the narrative into the story, much like movies which have actors explaining the plot to each other on cellphones.

TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 13
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 12 appeared in OPUNTIA #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, and 341.]

Fiction: Trans-Continental Buses.

As a young man, I occasionally rode Greyhound between one Alberta town and the next when I couldn’t afford to fix my car, but not since then. They were nice buses and the company kept them clean, but just the same it wasn’t easy sitting in a narrow chair for three or four hours. The inter-urban bus companies have cross-country routes for the truly desperate, but I can’t imagine why people would ride in them except for poverty. I don’t mean scenic tours through the Rockies, I mean traveling across 1,500 km of flatlands from Calgary to Winnipeg, or the same distance again through endless spruce forests from Winnipeg to Toronto.

“Classified Secret” is a 1955 episode of the old-time radio (OTR) mystery series SUSPENSE, written by Antony Ellis. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.) The story begins in Los Angeles where Charlie, the narrator, is in a park trying to do a deal with spies from an unnamed country. He wants \$20,000 for the plans of a new aircraft he stole from a factory but the enemy agents only offer \$10,000. The deal is off, he tells them. His controller is in New York City, and Charlie was to return by train. He doesn’t feel safe though, so he buys a cross-country ticket on a bus, sending a telegram to Mr Big about the change in plans.

A young woman named Julie has the seat next to his, so naturally they begin talking since they will be together for the next several days. A day later, two new passengers get on in Arizona, and Charlie recognizes them as the spies. He realizes they are going to get those plans from him, if not for \$10,000, then by killing him. In Colorado, events come to a head. The bus is delayed by a landslide blocking the highway, so the passengers get out and stretch their legs. Charlie and Julie wander up onto a ridge to admire the view, and the spies follow them. It is all very friendly and casual until the gunfight erupts.

Charlie wins, and tells a horrified Julie that he is a government agent. They leave the bodies at the bottom of a ravine and continue the bus trip. At the next stop, Charlie is met by FBI agents, and the jig is up. Julie was also an FBI agent. The plans were fakes, designed to sniff out spies, what today we call

honeypots. The FBI intercepted the telegram and their New York City branch took Mr Big into custody. On that note, the orchestra cues up and Charlie is marched off to his fate.

THE BIG BUS (1976) is a comedy movie that parodied the flood of box office success disaster films of the early 1970s. It is about a two-story-tall, 32-wheel articulated bus built by Coyote Bus Lines for the non-stop New York to Denver run. The joke of course is that anyone who needs to go non-stop will take a passenger jet and get there in a fraction of the time. And why Denver?

The chief driver is under a cloud because he was accused of cannibalism on a previous bus route, eating 110 passengers when the bus was stranded by a blizzard in the mountains for weeks. His co-pilot driver is narcoleptic and drives on the shoulder of the road because of an inner-ear problem.

The Cyclops machine is nuclear-powered, and equipped like a cruise ship, including a piano lounge, bowling lane, and a swimming pool about the size of a boardroom table.



There is an all-star cast whose stories are introduced as they load onto the bus one by one, or two by two as the case may be. Their problems are further elucidated when they dine at the Captain’s Table, a narrow room with just enough space to push back a chair.

There is an extended scene where the bus dangles over the edge of a cliff whilst various alarms and excursions are played out. This was before CGI, so the studio built an actual bus over two semi-trailer chassis, with engines that could only be run briefly because it was so heavy they caught fire when under load.

For the cliffhanger scene, the bus was actually dangled off a canyon road with out-of-camera cables holding it back.

There are the subplots that every disaster movie uses to space out the exciting parts. Enemies are trying to sabotage Cyclops and successfully plant a bomb on board. The granny who sneaks on board the bus without a ticket. The grizzled chief mechanic who knows the bus inside and out. The squabbling couple. Various passengers with something to hide. The command post monitoring Cyclops as it tears its way across America non-stop.

The countryside all the way from New York to Denver bears more than a passing resemblance to the southern California hills. A Volkswagen Beetle keeps reappearing in traffic scenes. This is a subtle homage to the famous continuity error in the movie BULLIT, where the cars chasing each other through the streets of San Francisco keep passing the same green Beetle in the streets.

The comedy is broad and uncouth. It will be funnier to Boomers who know all the previous serious movies about burning skyscrapers, capsized cruise ships, airplanes that can’t land, and the original earthquake movie. Nonetheless it is still good viewing on DVD for even the Millennials.

Fiction: Urban Transit.

“The Terminus” (1985 Winter, FANTASY TALES) by Kim Newman is about a rookie police officer in London, England, whose first posting is the nutcase detail. He takes statements from people who see aliens, complain about noisy children in public playgrounds, and anything else the regular uniforms don’t want to waste time on. He gets a missing persons complaint about someone who went into an Underground train station and vanished.

A Transit officer tells him that since the Underground began operating in the 1800s, almost 16,000 people had been reported missing in the subway system. The rookie goes down into the tunnels for a look, and finds a forgotten chamber filled with hundreds of undead, just sitting and waiting. A cute idea but an indeterminate ending.

ON THE BUSES was a British sitcom, now on DVD, that ran from 1969 to 1973. It was about a bus driver in Luxton and his family and friends. Three spin-off feature films were made and a stage play. It was critically panned but

nonetheless popular with the general public. I bought a set of the first four seasons from the bargain bin, but was not inspired to buy the rest of the series. I can't quite place it, but most of it was only mildly amusing to me, although a few episodes were quite funny. The comedy is often broad and slapdash, and didn't age well.

Stan Butler drives a double-decker bus and his best friend Jack Harper is usually his conductor. Their joint nemesis is Inspector Blake, a tall thin man with a Hitler mustache and hair style. The series was filmed during the height of Britain's industrial disease, and the bus employees go on strike at the drop of a hat for trivial reasons. There are assorted clippies, as pretty young female conductors are called, who come and go as recurring or supporting characters. Sexism is rampant.

Harper, who is also Stan's next-door neighbour, is the shop steward. He wears his hat pushed back in a way that reminds me of a Gestapo officer, and carries a clipboard as if it were a riding crop. Stan lives at home with his mother Mabel, his sister Olive, and her husband Arthur, who is a railway clerk. Olive is an overweight hypochondriac, Arthur is always giving Stan bad advice, and Mabel is a dear old lady not entirely competent. Stan has a frustrated love life. Every time he gets close to some action with a clippie, something interferes, usually his mother.

Most of the plots could be staged in any type of sitcom, but there are a number of episodes that do make use of the busman's way of life. It was interesting to see how the British operated their bus systems. The double-deckers had a driver who was isolated in a compartment, and a conductor who accepted cash fares at various rates. I don't know if they still use the system, but it seems like overmanning to me, compared to Canadian transit systems where tickets or passes must be purchased in advance and shown to the driver on boarding, with no conductor.

Some of the episodes may give modern viewers the fits. Hindu and Caribbean drivers and conductors are common in the series. They are casually referred to as darkies by the whites, but they in their turn refer to chalkies. Blake served in the Indian Army and speaks Hindi, getting along well with them, while Stan and his fellows are boors with no respect for other cultures. Indeed, although Blake is intended to be a rigid doctrinaire authority figure constantly made into a fool, he instead comes across as a compassionate man who is the only non-racist and non-sexist male in the bus depot.

The war between employees and their inspectors seems about evenly matched. Blake is a subtle man, and if Stan and Harper annoy him, he gets back at them in other ways, which often provide the conflict in the stories. He has many hidden talents. In the 1969 episode "Self Defence", the bus drivers complain about being set upon by football hooligans on late Saturday night routes. Blake sets up a judo training course and when they scoff at him as a trainer, he reduces Stan to jelly with a few seconds of chop-chop. He then brings in a clippie to help demonstrate, and she too is an expert, dropping men like flies.

The series hasn't aged well, and I will not bother to complete my set of DVDs.

LIFE ON THE SMARTPHONE

I occasionally watch Youtube videos on my smartphone, only on public Wifi to save on data charges, and mainly to relax. One of my favourites is titled "Acrobatic Hereford Calf", a video of a spring calf playing around its mother and trying to jump over her while she is on the ground chewing her cud. Like any loving mother, she tolerates her baby's foolishness.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Kolanowska, M., et al (2016) *Telipogon diabolicus* (Orchidaceae, Oncidiinae), a new species from southern Colombia. PHYTOKEYS 65:113-124

Photos are from the article. Only about 30 plants of this new species are known, in an area where road building is underway. You can see why the species was described as “diabolicus”.



Buatois, L.A., et al (2016) **Decoupled evolution of soft and hard substrate communities during the Cambrian Explosion and Great Ordovician Biodiversification Event.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:6945–6948

Speirs: I'd better explain this ahead of the abstract instead of after because of the jargon. 542 to 488 megayears ago during the Cambrian period there was an abrupt increase in the number of fossil species, indicating that life was rapidly expanding into new forms and habitats. Then followed a plateau, with another burst of diversification in the next period, called the Ordovician. During the Cambrian, the basic major groups of animals were established, while during the Ordovician those groups each began evolving large numbers of species.

Bioturbation is the disturbance of soft sediments by burrowing animals drilling through the mud for food. Bioerosion was when they were capable of attacking harder sediments for minerals by grinding or dissolving with acid bodily fluids.

Authors' abstract: "*Contrasts between the Cambrian Explosion (CE) and the Great Ordovician Biodiversification Event (GOBE) have long been recognized. Whereas the vast majority of body plans were established as a result of the CE, taxonomic increases during the GOBE were manifested at lower taxonomic levels. ... The early Cambrian (series 1 and 2) displayed a dramatic increase in ichnodiversity and ichnodisparity in softground communities. In contrast to this evolutionary explosion in bioturbation structures, only a few Cambrian bioerosion structures are known.*"

"*After the middle to late Cambrian diversity plateau, ichnodiversity in softground communities shows a continuous increase during the Ordovician in both shallow- and deep-marine environments. This Ordovician increase in bioturbation diversity was not paralleled by an equally significant increase in ichnodisparity as it was during the CE. However, hard substrate communities were significantly different during the GOBE, with an increase in ichnodiversity and ichnodisparity. Innovations in macrobioerosion clearly lagged behind animal-substrate interactions in unconsolidated sediment. The underlying causes of this evolutionary decoupling are unclear but may have involved three interrelated factors: (i) a Middle to Late Ordovician increase in available hard substrates for bioerosion, (ii) increased predation, and (iii) higher energetic requirements for bioerosion compared with bioturbation.*"

Simonová, J., et al (2016) **Medium-sized forest snails survive passage through birds' digestive tract and adhere strongly to birds' legs: more evidence for passive dispersal mechanisms.** JOURNAL OF MOLLUSCAN STUDIES 82:422-426

Authors' abstract: "*It is well known that land snails can be dispersed by birds, both by attachment to the body (ectozoochory) and by passing intact and alive through the bird's digestive tract (endozoochory). Endozoochory has, however, only been recorded for very small species. We examined the possibility that larger species (up to c. 17 mm in maximum shell dimension) could survive passage through a bird's digestive system. Live Alinda biplicata, Cochlodina laminata (both Clausiliidae) and Discus rotundatus (Discidae) were fed to 10 bird species (Corvidae, Turdidae, Sturnidae and Columbidae) in 14 experimental trials. Of 720 snails offered, 14 passed intact through the birds, of which nine were alive (eight clausiliids and one D. rotundatus); thus more than 1% of all snails offered survived ingestion. In an additional experiment, some A. biplicata and C. laminata remained attached to birds' legs by pedal adhesion in simulated flight trials where the birds' legs oscillated at the maximum rate achieved during flight.*"

Sutton, G.P., et al (2016) **Mechanosensory hairs in bumblebees (Bombus terrestris) detect weak electric fields.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:7261–7265

Authors' abstract: "*Bumblebees (Bombus terrestris) use information from surrounding electric fields to make foraging decisions. Electoreception in air, a nonconductive medium, is a recently discovered sensory capacity of insects, yet the sensory mechanisms remain elusive. Here, we investigate two putative electric field sensors: antennae and mechanosensory hairs. Examining their mechanical and neural response, we show that electric fields cause deflections in both antennae and hairs. Hairs respond with a greater median velocity, displacement, and angular displacement than antennae. Extracellular recordings from the antennae do not show any electrophysiological correlates to these mechanical deflections. In contrast, hair deflections in response to an electric field elicited neural activity. Mechanical deflections of both hairs and antennae increase with the electric charge carried by the bumblebee. From this evidence, we conclude that sensory hairs are a site of electoreception in the bumblebee.*"

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: Milt Stevens
Simi Valley, Calidornia

2016-07-20

OPUNTIA #341: I think I've always known that some things were created specifically for people to collect. The people who create such things know you have to be more than a little bit compulsive to be a collector. This is the place where I stand up and say "Hi, my name is Milt, and I am a collector." Even as a collector, I still have a few brain cells in working order, so I always avoid intentional collectibles.

I started collecting SF magazines in the fifties. Nobody told me to do it. In fact, most people thought it was a bit odd. When I started collecting there had only been a couple of thousand issues of SF magazines published. Collecting all of them was possible. Things got worse later. Fortunately, I encountered the first step of the program of Collectors Anonymous which states, "We have come to believe that only a Higher Power could relieve our collectorism. That power is bankruptcy."

[I'm a stamp collector and not ashamed to say it. Completism is impossible in philately since millions of stamps have been issued since Britain put out the Penny Black on 1840-05-06. Many stamps exist only as a single or less than ten copies, so it is impossible even in theory to have a complete collection.]

OPUNTIA #342: I suppose the town of Vulcan in Canada could be described as a collectible tourist attraction. I've never been much of a tourist. I travel to get from point A to point B. I don't put any particular stock in seeing things personally rather than just knowing about them.

[VulCon 2016 was held on the weekend of July 9 and 10, but since that was also the start of the Stampede rodeo, I didn't drive down there. Adam Nimoy was there to unveil a plaque in honour of his father. Also there were three minor actors from the various series. Julie Cobb's claim to fame is that she is the only female Redshirt to have been killed in the original series. From the Voyager series was Rosemary Morgan, who played Piri, and from DS9 was Andrew J. Robinson, who played the Cardassian Garak.]

[I took the photo below at this year's Stampede parade on July 8.]



OPUNTIA #343: You mention a story about a labor dispute involving the workers at the Tower of Babel. I recall seeing a mention of a labor dispute at the Valley of Kings in Egypt. Apparently, the workers were paid with one amount of grain for food and a second amount of grain for beer. The grain shipments hadn't been arriving, so the workers stopped working. A scribe wrote a letter to pharaoh describing the situation. Pharaoh sent the grain.

OPUNTIA #344: Your mention of coyotes reminded me of the time fan artist Marc Schirmeister had a problem with coyotes. Marc lives in a wooded area near the hills north of Pasadena. Coyotes would wander down out of the hills and kill Marc's cats. So Marc got himself an akita. Akitas are big, strong dogs. It is fortunate that they are also good natured. The acquisition of the akita ended the coyote problem and possibly some number of coyotes as well.

FROM: Alexander Case
Portland, Oregon

2016-07-20

I can help a bit with identifying the characters [at Otafest] that people were cosplaying as, or the show or games they're from, in OPUNTIA #346.

Page 1: The woman in the foreground walking to the right of frame is in costume as Peral from Steven Universe. The woman in the background walking to the left is (IIRC) a troll from Homestuck.

Page 2, the one on the left: A character from League of Legends, though I can't identify the character's name.

Page 2, picture at right: Don't know (can't see the character's face), Hatsune Miku (a Vocaloid, I should probably do an article about them) and Ruby from RWBY (a US-Canadian co-produced web animation series).

[Pokemon Go has swept Calgary like everywhere else, so I'm expecting to see lots of Pokemon characters at next year's Otafest. Several people have already been arrested here in Cowtown for trespassing while hunting for PG sites. Calgary police have issued a warning about the hazards associated with it. I'm waiting to read in the news about the first terrorist to set up a PG site to conveniently target crowds.]

AFTER THE PARTY'S OVER, THE NEXT PARTY
photos by Dale Speirs

Once the Stampede rodeo is over, Calgary shifts into festival mode. Every weekend there are ethnic and music festivals. The weekend of July 22 to 24 was busy downtown. I stopped first at the Olympic Plaza, at the east end of the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall, for Fiestaval, the annual event of Calgary's Hispanic community. The usual sort of things, such as musical and dancing acts on stage, and food kiosks on the drained wading pool.



From there, I strolled west along the mall, catching up and passing the annual Krishna parade. Their devotees pulled a juggernaut along the mall, with music blaring out. These were Hindus, the genuine Krishna worshipers, not the fake ones with shaved heads and topknots, tapping bongos and begging for money in the streets. I've never seen any of the fake ones in Calgary. They were run out of town years ago by the Hindu community. The next page shows photos.



I walked to the end of the mall at 4 Street SW, then turned south and zigzagged my way into the Beltline district. Lougheed House, the only genuine manor house left in Calgary, was celebrating its 125th anniversary. At the time it was built, it was out on the lone prairie, a ten-minute horse ride from the village of Calgary. Now it is inner-city, at 14 Avenue SW and 6 Street, a ten-minute walk from the downtown core. It is a five-minute drive by car plus thirty minutes to find a parking space.

The manor belonged to Senator James Lougheed, whose grandson Peter was the Premier of Alberta from 1971 to 1982. It is now a museum and cultural society, surrounded by condominium skyscrapers. Like any good manor house, it has an upper and a lower lawn.



There was entertainment on the lower lawn to amuse the lumpenproletariat. The building was open for the day. The ground floor has an expensive restaurant where a cheese plate started at \$15, and the main dishes all had French names. I wasn't that hungry.



The grounds are beautifully maintained, and I imagine it is a popular park with the local condo residents.



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.]

THE FOSSIL #368 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This issue is devoted mainly to the history of the Library of Amateur Journalism, a collection of tens of thousands of zines dating back to the 1800s. The LAJ has had a chequered career, moving from one library to the next as it grew and grew. It is currently at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where hopefully it will be for a while.