

OPUNTIA 381

World Wide Party 2017

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.

BUSY DAYS IN COWTOWN

photos by Dale Speirs

Now the crunch comes for Cowtown partygoers. I'm almost certainly the only one in Calgary to observe the World Wide Party on June 21, save Theo Nelson, but Canada Day will have shoulder-to-shoulder crowds downtown. The Friday after, on July 7, is the big parade that opens ten days of Stampeding. Yeehaw! Below is the wading pool in Olympic Plaza, decorated with the official symbol of Canada 150. The mirrored building behind is New City Hall. Look closely at Old City Hall on the left before going to the next page.





Old City Hall was completed in 1911, built of Paskapoo sandstone from a nearby quarry on the Bow River.

Unfortunately after a century of weathering, it turned out that the sandstone doesn't stand up well to the test of time. The building is undergoing a complete replacement of the facade, which will take four years.



2017-05-12



I took the above photo from the fourth floor of the Central Branch of the Calgary Public Library. Because the project will take so long to do, the scaffolding was covered with an image of the building, as it was and as it will be again. The new sandstone will come from Oregon because it is harder and more weatherproof.

Canada 150, as this year's Canada Day is officially known, created a tremendous surge in business for window dressers and event planners.



These photos were taken in Bow Valley Square, a skyscraper complex downtown. I eat regularly in their food court but didn't spot any hidden bottles of maple syrup.



Below: Bow River Promenade in East Village. I'm not sure if these are just installation art or if they are actually supposed to be benches. If the latter, then they are very uncomfortable seating.



Suburban Calgary is getting into the act. At bottom is a vendor on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall downtown.



DRIVING AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

There is a never-ending struggle in Calgary to fine-tune traffic flows through the streets. People want restricted traffic through their own neighbourhoods but easy access through other districts. The latest traffic calming took place in the Mount Royal district on 8 Street SW at Royal Avenue, which closed off big chunks of the intersection with temporary concrete barriers. Seeing all that empty space, the arts class of a nearby high school asked for and received permission to set up installation art.

That touched off a furore from residents who didn't like the project. Mount Royal is where \$3 million is considered a starter home, and everyone keeps their manors well back from the road and screened by tall caragana hedges so they don't have to look at others. Since they could only see the art if they got out of their yards, their complaints fell on deaf ears at City Hall. There are too few of them to swing an election vote, and far more commuters that use 8 Street.

Below is a general view of the installation project. The other photos are close-ups of individual sections.







LIFE AT CHEZ OPUNTIA

by Dale Speirs

June 21 was, of course, the World Wide Party. Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year with a toast to fellow zinesters at 21h00 local time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. 2017 was the 24th year of the WWP.

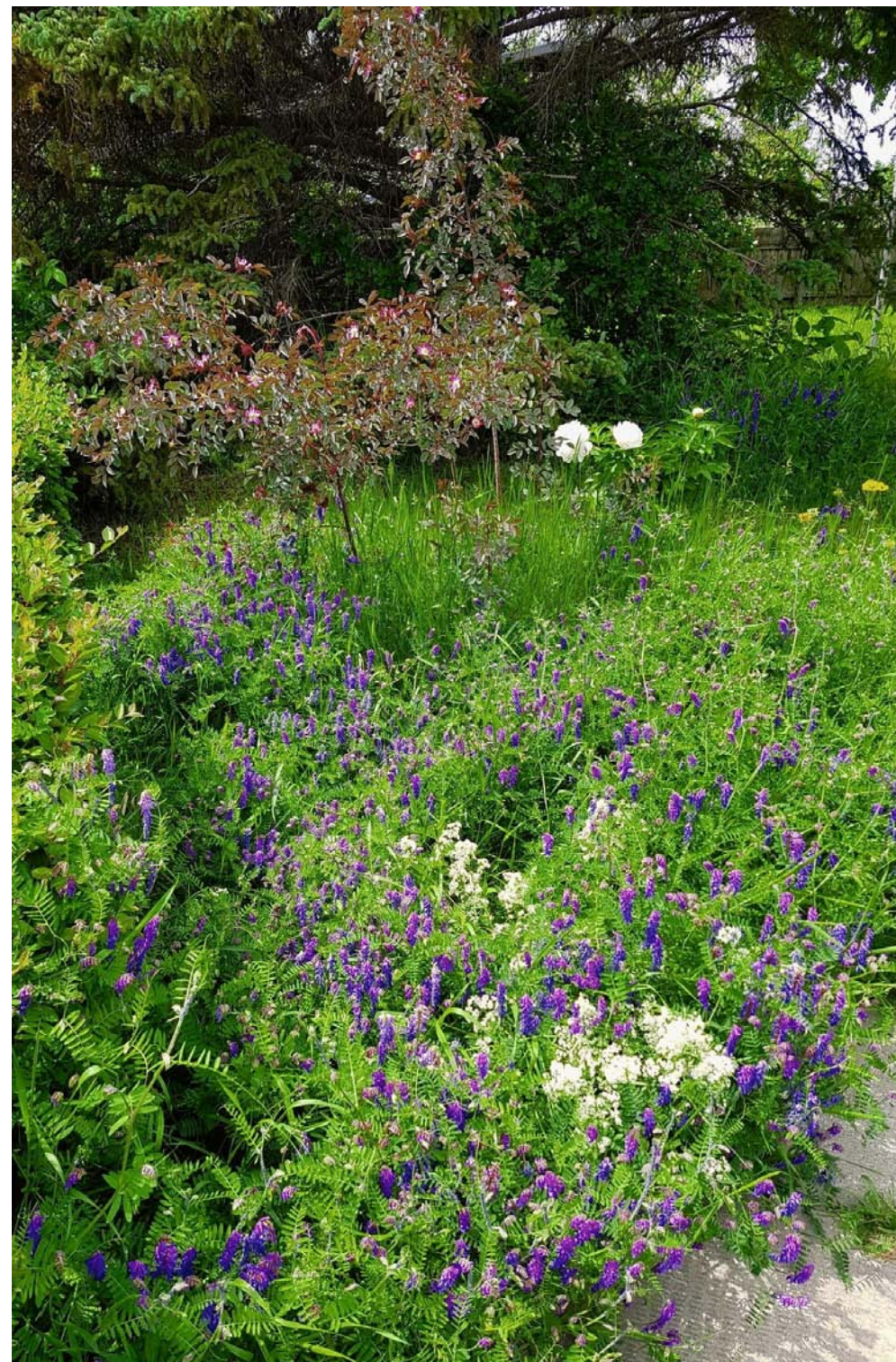
This year, the WWP was on a Wednesday, which made it awkward for me since Wednesday nights are philatelic for me. Calgary has a very large and active group of stamp collectors, of which I have been one for decades. First Wednesdays are the general meetings of the Calgary Philatelic Society, second Wednesdays are for a study group that specializes in Canada, third Wednesdays are CPS auctions, and fourth Wednesdays are a study group for exhibitors.

I went along to the auction night, but as it happens I was able to get home before 21h00. I did my usual salute to fellow zinesters. Firstly, I faced to the east and toasted those who had already celebrated the WWP. Then in quick succession I faced south and north for those in my time zone. Next I faced west, and toasted those yet to celebrate.

Finally, I turned back to the east and made a deep bow towards Nova Scotia, in memory of Rodney Leighton, who just missed this year's WWP. See the next page for further details.

At right: My front yard is doing very well. This photo shows a mass of purple vetch (native to Alberta). Behind it, towering above, are several stems of *Rosa rubrifolia*. The white flowers in the foreground are *Achillea millefolium* (also native to Alberta). Beside the roses are some big white peonies that came with the house when I bought it in 1982; the clump is probably sixty years old.

On the next page is a close-up of the peonies, along with two other Alberta wildflowers in my yard, *Gaillardia aristata* (the yellow and red daisies) and a hedge of *Rosa acicularis* (Alberta's provincial emblem).





IN MEMORIAM: RODNEY LEIGHTON (1948-2017)

by Dale Speirs

Canada lost one of its few remaining zinesters on June 18, when Rodney Leighton died of complications after open-heart surgery. He had not been well lately, and didn't have the strength for the final obstacle in his life. He is survived by his sister Sharon and other family members, and is remembered by zine publishers around the world.

Rodney lived near Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, where he had been a lumberjack. He published numerous perzines over decades, and was a frequent letterhack. I traded OPUNTIA for his zines, and he had many letters of comment here over the years. He was not on the Internet except through the courtesy of a few other fans, particularly Chuck Connor, and was probably the last Canadian zinester exclusively on the Papernet.

VENUS IN HER GLIMMERING SPHERE: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #324, 329, 368, and 373.]

Old Venus.

The vast majority of Old Venus stories are Bat Durston stories, those which could just as easily have been set in a mundane Earth setting. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, African and South American jungles had been explored well enough that it was difficult to set stories of lost tribes and dinosaurs there anymore. The alternative was to re-cast the setting to the Carboniferous swamps and jungles of Old Venus.

A TRIP TO VENUS is an 1897 novel by John Munro, available as a free download from www.gutenberg.org. It begins slowly and with many digressions, firstly an observation of coded light messages coming from Mars, and then an extended discussion about interplanetary space travel.

The narrator next goes off to visit Prof. Nasmyth Carmichael, an inventor who has built a model spaceship in his back yard. Like all respectable mad scientists, he has a beautiful young daughter moping about the house. Carmichael demonstrates how the spaceship can move about with a reactionless drive. Because he hasn't yet patented it, he refuses to explain the method, which certainly saves the author the trouble of coming up with a handwaving explanation for the reader.

Carmichael wants the narrator to invest in a full-sized spaceship, to which the latter agrees. At this point, the story then digresses to allow an explanation of an electric orrery in more detail than we need to know. The author was one of those who were bound and determined to use every bit of research he did as infodumps. Most of it is wrong by today's knowledge.

“It is certain that the Earth is still growing a little from the fall of meteoric stones, and that part of the Sun's heat comes from meteoric fuel. Most of it, however, arises from the shrinkage of his bulk. Five or ten million years ago the Sun was double the size he is now. Twenty or thirty million years ago he was rather a nebula than a sun. In five or ten million more he will probably be as Jupiter is now, a smoking cinder.”

“And the Earth, how long is it since she was crusted over?”

“Anything from ten to several hundred million years. In that time the stratified rocks have been deposited under water, the land and sea have taken their present configurations; the atmosphere has been purified; plants and animals have spread all over the surface. Man has probably been from twenty to a hundred thousand years or more on the earth, but his civilization is a thing of yesterday.”

“How long will the Earth continue fit for life?”

“Perhaps five or ten million years. The entire solar system is gradually losing its internal heat, and must inevitably die of sheer inanition. The time is coming when the Sun will drift through space, a black star in the midst of dead worlds. Perhaps the system will fall together, perhaps it will run against a star. In either case there would probably be a “new Heaven and a new Earth.””

And so a trip is planned to Venus. What about those Martian lights? Well you may ask, for they are forgotten, and it is off to Earth's other neighbour. Away the exploring party goes, a voyage that is made long and tedious not by the passage of time but by lengthy infodumps about the stars, interspersed with philosophical musings about the meaning of life.

Finally they reach Venus. As they descend through the clouds, the Professor determines if the atmosphere is breathable by the simple expedient of opening a hatch and taking a deep breath. Why waste money on scientific instruments?

Fortunately for the plot, it is suitable. Below the cloud deck, they find an ocean, and make for a tropical island. There are all sorts of creatures both great and small, flying and walking.

Even better, the explorers find a city of humans. They don't speak English, but you can't have everything. There follows long descriptive passages about the city and the Venusians, the process of learning their language, and all the usual work of exploring a new world. The Venusians are vegetarian utopians, with a perfect society, no war, and all that.

The narrator marries a Venusian beauty, which surprised me because I thought he'd go after the scientist's daughter as per standard procedure. This annoys the rest of the group, so they sedate him and take off for the planet Mercury, which

has dragons and no utopia. This time, instead of lengthy philosophizing, there are assorted alarums and adventures to speed up the pace of the story.

They make it back home eventually. Since they neglected to bring back any evidence, no one believes them and they are scorned. We are surrounded by Philistines.

Even in 1930, vampire stories set in Transylvania were done to death (pardon the expression), so some writers innovated by moving them off the planet. “Vampires Of Venus” by Anthony Pelcher (1930 April, ASTOUNDING) unfortunately needs no explaining. The title says it all.

The hero is Leslie Larner, entomologist and man of action. The story begins slowly, as apparently the author had been on a fishing trip to Colorado and wanted to work that in to pad out the word count. Humanoids from Venus also enjoyed the beautiful scenery of the Rocky Mountains, thus keeping the editor satisfied that this wasn’t a Bat Durston story that should have appeared in FIELD AND STREAM. The Venusians want Larner to come with them to help eradicate flying vampires on their planet. They even help cook his trout that he had just caught, while talking to him about the proposed trip.

The narrative of the Venusians is constantly slowed by infodumps about their utopian society. 900,000,000 of them living in peace and prosperity until giant insects suddenly began appearing out of nowhere and sucking the blood out of them. I was Pest Control Foreman for part of my 31-year career with Calgary Parks Dept., and dealt with mosquito control, so I can sympathize with them.

Eventually the Venusians temporarily run out of infodumps and there being nothing else to do, head back to Venus with Larner along for the ride as a consultant. Larner determines that the vampires came from the planet Mercury as grubs in contaminated loads of Venusian freighters. The trick, therefore, is to find the initial infestation on Venus and wipe it out at the source.

The plot is then pepped up with some action-adventure and a fair damsel in distress. Simply tracking the critters back to their lair would hardly run up the word count. More extended infodumps extol the Venusian utopia and how they lived in peace, but when it comes time to eradicate the vampires, they suddenly have an army and ray guns. If murder and war were unknown, then where did the shock troops come from?

The ending is a foregone conclusion, and the boys at Pest Control can stand down, having eradicated the vampires with ray guns. Not mentioned, but one hopes it happened, is more careful phytosanitary procedures for incoming space freighters and the implementation of Customs quarantines.

THE REVOLT ON VENUS (1954) by Carey Rockwell is a Tom Corbett Space Cadet novel. Willy Ley is listed as a technical advisor. Rockwell was the publisher’s house name. The books in this series were written by one or more ghostwriters, real names unknown. Since these were juveniles, not too much should be expected of them, but they are an interesting view of that genre.

Tom and his chums have just finished a test cruise in cis-lunar space, and are now on leave. They have decided to go to Venus to hunt tyrannosaurs, so right away you know this is the classical steamy jungle planet. Unbeknownst to them, their High Command officers are mulling over reports that independence-seeking traitors are planning a coup on Venus. They don’t seem to appreciate the beneficence and kindly guidance of Earth and the Solar Guard.

The jungle is as steamy as expected. *“We have to go deep into the thicket,” Astro explained, using the local term for the jungle, “so that at high noon we can make camp and take a break. You can’t move out there at noon. It gets so hot you’d fall on your face after fifteen minutes of fighting the creepers.”*

“Everything stops at noon,” added Sinclair. “Even the tyrannosaurus. You have to do your traveling in the cool of the day, early and late. Six hours or so will take you far enough away from the plantation to find tracks, if there are any.”

Needless to say, when a group of military cadets arrive and claim they are just camping and hunting big game, the Nationalist revolutionaries don’t believe them. The two plots quickly become intermixed, with shooting and alarums involving both the big critters and the guerillas. Revolutionaries and beasts don’t have a chance against the Space Cadets. It was a close run thing though, with plenty of action and excitement sprayed around the jungle.

Settling Old Venus.

“The Merchants Of Venus” by A.H. Phelps Jr (1954 March, GALAXY) should not be confused with a better known story of the same title by Frederik Pohl. In this one, Rod Workham is a benighted soul under pressure because colonists keep quitting the Venus project. He suggests that they be left there to finish out

their contracts, but is vetoed by management because then there wouldn't be a another batch of colonists once the word got around that they'd be trapped.

“But the majority of the people wouldn't move to an undeveloped planet. You couldn't send ordinary citizens as pioneers. For one thing, they wouldn't want to go. For another, the new community wouldn't last long if you forced them to go. The average person had neither the attitudes nor the physique needed to make over a wilderness.”

The project managers have a crisis on their hands. *“For six years, now, Rod had worked on the job of establishing a self-supporting colony on Venus. Three different colonies had been started, and each had died out in less than two years.”*

“Resignations would come in slowly at first, and then in a rush, until only twenty or thirty people would be left, of which the majority would be short-term scientific teams. By the terms of the colonists' contracts no man could be left on Venus more than a month after his resignation; so the bulk of two colonies had simply had to be shipped back to Earth, and plans made for another try.”

“And now the third colony was quitting, rushing home, leaving nothing on the jungle planet but a few small clearings soon to be taken over by the vegetation.”

Psychological evaluation wasn't working. No matter how carefully they screened candidates, there was no way to predict how they would do in the steamy jungles of Venus. Jamie, one of Workham's assistants has a wild and crazy idea that might work. The deserts of southwestern USA and the snowy mountains of Yukon weren't settled by respectable middle-class people; they were settled by get-rich-quick speculators looking for mother lodes.

The homesteaders themselves weren't the cream of the crop from Europe. As Jamie correctly noted, the farmers and ranchers who settled western USA and Canada weren't the sons of manor lords. They were the younger sons of serfs and peasants who would have nothing to inherit in the Old Country and no prospect of advancement. Many were criminals who were asked to leave their country for their country's sake.

The Venus problem is solved by spreading rumours of gold and uranium strikes. A conspiracy theory is started saying that those who came back unhappy were part of a plan to keep out average citizens and ensure only the insiders got the

gold mines. After that, it was just a matter of sitting back and waiting for the mobs demanding the right to colonize Venus.

I liked this story because I am the grandson or great-great-grandson of homesteaders on both sides of my family. No criminals in our family tree, but all the men in my family who came to the new lands were the youngest sons of farmers and had no chance of inheriting a farm in the Old Country.

The original Speirs settlers, my great-great-grandparents Alexander Sr and Janet, came to Rice Lake, Ontario, from the village of Houston, Scotland, in the early 1830s because they had nothing to look forward to in the Auld Sod except being farm hands and housemaids. Their grandson Harvey was the youngest of eleven children. By the time he was born, Ontario's farmland had all been taken up. For him, the future in 1912 was a homestead in southern Saskatchewan, where his son, my father, was born and raised.

My mother's ancestors in Finland were all farmers back to the early 1700s, which is as far as family records go. She was born in Alberta, but her male ancestors on both sides were Finns who came to Canada looking for homestead land because they were youngest sons.



Canada, the USA, and Australia were not settled by the cream of society from England. They were settled by lower classes who didn't have a hope in their birthplace.

If Venus is ever terraformed, which is not entirely out of the question, albeit in the far distant future, it will be the losers who make the one-way trip.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Patterson, D.B., et al (2017) **Ecosystem evolution and hominin paleobiology at East Turkana, northern Kenya between 2.0 and 1.4 Ma.** PALAEOGEOGRAPHY, PALAEOCLIMATOLOGY, PALAEOECOLOGY 481:1-13

Authors’ abstract: *Over the past five decades, fossil deposits within the Upper Burgi, KBS and Okote members at East Turkana in northern Kenya have provided many important insights into hominin behavior and ecology during a critical period in hominin evolution between 2.0 and 1.4 Ma. In this study, we use a large compilation of faunal abundance data from paleontological and archaeological collections at East Turkana dating to this time interval to investigate temporal patterns in large mammal taxa, ecosystem evolution and hominin ecology. Our analyses indicate that although portions of the ecosystem were dominated by mesic [moist] grasslands, the relative proportion of mesic and arid grassland environments varied through time.*

We document a major transition in the family Suidae [pigs] with an increase in the abundance of fossils attributed to the Metridiochoerus lineage coeval with the local extinction of the Notochoerus lineage and decline in abundance of the Kolpochoerus lineage.

Finally, by comparing the proportional representation of mammalian taxa found in paleontological collections versus those found in archaeological collections, our data suggest that archaeological sites at East Turkana, particularly those circa 1.5 Ma, contain disproportionately large numbers of alcelaphin bovid [cattle] remains.

Our findings are consistent with interpretations that suggest the major transition in the diet of genus Homo during this period was potentially related to the increased ingestion of C4-grazing [dry plains plants] ungulates.

Speirs: The fluctuating climate in eastern Africa between mesic and arid conditions was one of the triggers for human evolution, as generalized species such as our ancestors were able to survive better. When the pig population declined, the apemen switched to beef. Humans evolved as omnivores, living on both plant and animal diets.

Mihrshahi, S., et al (2017) **Vegetarian diet and all-cause mortality: Evidence from a large population-based Australian cohort, the 45 and Up Study.** PREVENTIVE MEDICINE 81:99-107

Authors’ abstract: *“The vegetarian diet is thought to have health benefits including reductions in type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Evidence to date suggests that vegetarians tend to have lower mortality rates when compared with non-vegetarians, but most studies are not population-based and other healthy lifestyle factors may have confounded apparent protective effects. The aim of this study was to evaluate the association between categories of vegetarian diet (including complete, semi and pesco-vegetarian) and all-cause mortality in a large population-based Australian cohort.”*

“The 45 and Up Study is a cohort study of 267,180 men and women aged 45 years or greater in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Vegetarian diet status was assessed by baseline questionnaire and participants were categorized into complete vegetarians, semi-vegetarians (eat meat once or less/week), pescovegetarians and regular meat eaters. All-cause mortality was determined by linked registry data to mid-2014. Cox proportional hazards models quantified the association between vegetarian diet and all-cause mortality adjusting for a range of potential confounding factors.”

“Among 243,096 participants (mean age: 62.3 years, 46.7% men) there were 16,836 deaths over a mean 6.1 years of follow-up. Following extensive adjustment for potential confounding factors there was no significant difference in all-cause mortality for vegetarians versus non-vegetarians. There was also no significant difference in mortality risk between pesco-vegetarians or semi-vegetarians versus regular meat eaters. We found no evidence that following a vegetarian diet, semi-vegetarian diet, or a pesco-vegetarian diet has an independent protective effect on all-cause mortality.”

Sliwa, J., et al (2017) **A dedicated network for social interaction processing in the primate brain.** SCIENCE 356:745-749

Authors’ abstract: *Monkeys recognize social interactions and their meanings quickly and effortlessly. Little is known about the neural circuitry that underlies this understanding. Sliwa and Freiwald scanned monkey brains as the monkeys watched static or moving stimuli. A subset of brain areas was exclusively active during monkey-monkey interactions, as opposed to physical interactions*

between two objects. This network shares some of its components with the monkey mirror neuron system mapped previously by others and with a possible homolog of the human network involved in the theory of mind.

Primate cognition requires interaction processing. Interactions can reveal otherwise hidden properties of intentional agents, such as thoughts and feelings, and of inanimate objects, such as mass and material. Where and how interaction analyses are implemented in the brain is unknown.

Using whole-brain functional magnetic resonance imaging in macaque monkeys, we discovered a network centered in the medial and ventrolateral prefrontal cortex that is exclusively engaged in social interaction analysis. Exclusivity of specialization was found for no other function anywhere in the brain. Two additional networks, a parieto-premotor and a temporal one, exhibited both social and physical interaction preference, which, in the temporal lobe, mapped onto a fine-grain pattern of object, body, and face selectivity. Extent and location of a dedicated system for social interaction analysis suggest that this function is an evolutionary forerunner of human mind-reading capabilities.

Lavers, J.L., and A.L. Bond (2017) **Exceptional and rapid accumulation of anthropogenic debris on one of the world’s most remote and pristine islands.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 114:6052-6055

Authors’ abstract: *Here we document the amount of debris and rate of accumulation on Henderson Island, a remote, uninhabited island in the South Pacific. The density of debris was the highest reported anywhere in the world, up to 671.6 items/m² (mean \pm SD: 239.4 \pm 347.3 items/m²) on the surface of the beaches. Approximately 68% of debris (up to 4,496.9 pieces/m²) on the beach was buried <10 cm in the sediment.*

An estimated 37.7 million debris items weighing a total of 17.6 tons are currently present on Henderson, with up to 26.8 new items/m accumulating daily. Rarely visited by humans, Henderson Island and other remote islands may be sinks for some of the world’s increasing volume of waste.

Speirs: This is one of the most heartbreaking scientific reports ever published.

Santamaría-Gómez, A., et al (2017) **Uncertainty of the 20th century sea-level rise due to vertical land motion errors.** EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCE LETTERS 473:24-32

Authors’ abstract: *Assessing the vertical land motion (VLM) at tide gauges (TG) is crucial to understanding global and regional mean sea-level changes (SLC) over the last century. However, estimating VLM with accuracy better than a few tenths of a millimeter per year is not a trivial undertaking and many factors, including the reference frame uncertainty, must be considered.*

Using a novel reconstruction approach and updated geodetic VLM corrections, we found the terrestrial reference frame and the estimated VLM uncertainty may contribute to the global SLC rate error by plus or minus 0.2 mm per year. In addition, a spurious global SLC acceleration may be introduced. Regional SLC rate and acceleration errors may be inflated by a factor 3 compared to the global. The difference of VLM from two independent Glacio-Isostatic Adjustment models introduces global SLC rate and acceleration biases. Errors in VLM corrections need to be budgeted when considering past and future SLC scenarios.

Speirs: Despite alarmist predictions of sea levels rising and swamping coastlines around the world, it hasn’t happened yet. One reason has to do with post-glacial isostatic rebound. During the Pleistocene ice ages, the weight of continental ice sheets depressed continents. As the ice melted away, the land began to lift up. Because isostatic rebound works in geological time, it is still happening today even after the ice has gone, because the bedrock takes time to react. This means that deglaciated continental areas are lifting up faster than any sea level rise, thus negating any adverse effect.

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]

June 21 is, of course, the summer solstice. Theo Nelson, a Calgary mail artist, sent along this postcard. His art is a distinctive style. The view side of his postcard is on the next page.

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Summer Land,
Summer Light,
The Light falls
In Such a way,
It lands directly
Down at 23.5° latitude,
North and South
Once a year.

Our Seasons live
With this simple phase.

An act of elegant beauty,
What would our world
Be like without it?

"Seasonal
Greetings!"

Linear Prairie, Foothills,
Rockies & Summer Sky #1

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To:

Date -

Enjoy the Light!

