

OPUNTIA

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Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. Since you are reading this only online, my real-mail address doesn't matter. My eek-mail address (as the late Harry Warner Jr liked to call it) is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

THE RUBBISH I GET UP TO

by Dale Speirs

I've been doing my usual hikes in the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Calgary, as well as traveling elsewhere. I saw a man drown in Upper Kananaskis Lake, and I took a peaceful stroll on the northern edge of Calgary's downtown core by the Peace Bridge. I saw indignant homeowners put up their own traffic signs, and a sign to warn foreign tourists that Banff can be dangerous. I think I am the first person to notice something about a mountain that millions of people have admired and taken photos of.

Things to know as you look at the photos I took. Kananaskis is a provincial park contiguous on the eastern side of Banff National Park. It isn't as touristy as the national parks, doesn't charge an admission fee, and the scenery is just as good. It comprises the valleys of the Spray, Kananaskis, and Elbow rivers, which are separated by two chains of the Kananaskis mountains. My photos were mostly taken in the Kananaskis River valley.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: BARRIER MOUNTAIN

by Dale Speirs

Barrier Mountain is a short distance just inside the entrance to the Kananaskis River valley, and is so called because it is a choke point protruding across the valley, forcing the river into a narrow channel to get around it. I hiked up to the top in July 2014 and took these photos. On the next page is the view looking north to the mouth of the valley. At right is a bit of Mount Baldy. In the lower right corner you can see Highway 40 heading up the valley through a man-made gap blasted out in the 1970s.

Barrier Lake is actually a reservoir built during WW2 by German prisoners of war. In those days the highway didn't exist and the only access was a muddy forestry road. Prisoners were allowed free run on the honour system because they were in the middle of a wilderness with no place to go. Some of the Germans didn't understand the vastness of Canada, and on their recreational time would climb to the tops of the mountains thinking to map roads or spy out nearby villages. There were none until the 1970s (even today Kananaskis only has one village). Seeing the vast unending spruce forest from a mountain top made the POWs realize it was pointless to try and escape.

The photo on page 3 is from the same location looking south up the valley. The highway winds along the eastern side of the valley through the distant mountains. The footpath in the foreground abruptly ends in a vertical drop that will quickly eliminate from the gene pool any hikers who don't pay attention to their surroundings.

The mountain parks host hundred of thousands of tourists each year. Each year a dozen or so park visitors die in traffic accidents, about ten from avalanches while skiing, a half-dozen from falls while rock climbing, a half-dozen are killed by bears or cougars, and a half-dozen from drowning and hypothermia while attempting to swim the ice-cold lakes and rivers, which are fed by glaciers. These are not manicured parks. Some visitors are indignant because there is no cellphone service outside the villages, or shocked to find that it may take hours for first-responders to arrive at an accident scene. That's how it is, and even though I only do day hikes along well-traveled footpaths, I know what the consequences of carelessness might be.



Looking north from the top of Barrier Mountain, Kananaskis.



Looking south from the top of Barrier Mountain, Kananaskis.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: DEATH

by Dale Speirs

2014-07-26

Sarrail Falls. On the far side of the lake I saw an overturned kayak and a man floating beside it. There is no cellphone service there, so I couldn't call for help. But another kayaker and a couple of fishermen saw the tragedy and went to assist. I took this shot with a telephoto lens from about a kilometre away.

I was walking along the eastern shore of Upper Kananaskis Lake, heading to



It was about a half-hour before someone could get to a landline phone; they had to drive to a trading post back up the highway. I walked on to Sarrail Falls, and came back to my car about an hour later just as the medevac chopper arrived.

The parking lot exit was blocked off by first-responders so the chopper could land on the highway. The lot was filled with cars of hikers who were deep in the mountains, so the RCMP couldn't clear it for a landing.



The man was unconscious when the kayaker and fishermen pulled him from the water. The news reports later said they performed CPR on him during the long wait for help and tried to warm him up, but he died of hypothermia.

The medevac helicopter carried his body off to Calgary. He wasn't the first and he won't be the last.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: BOW FALLS, BANFF NATIONAL PARK
by Dale Speirs

The Bow River drops down a series of tremendous chutes as it leaves Banff

townsite. The Banff Springs Hotel is behind the camera, and the pathway along the embankment is shoulder-to-shoulder with tourists. Hidden by trees on the far side is the Banff School of Fine Arts, which my mother attended back in the late 1940s.





Embedded in the vertical face of the rocks along which the pathway goes is a sign that needs no translation. But there is always someone. Go back to the previous photo and look closely at the top of the far cliff on the righthand side. No, he didn't fall in, at least not while I was there. One thing I've noticed about the mountain parks is that natural selection uber alles.

Below is the stately pile that is the Banff Springs Hotel, seen from the opposite side of the falls.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: LAKE MINNEWANKA, BANFF

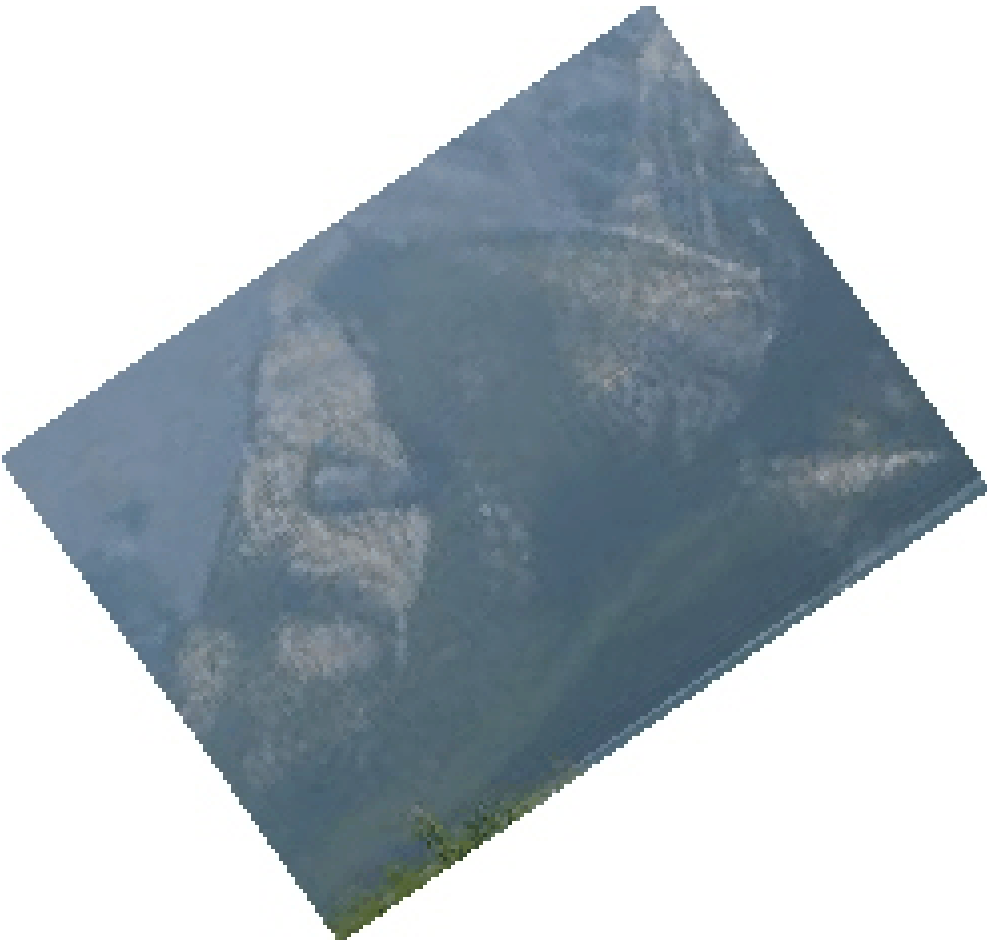
by Dale Speirs

I've seen this view countless times but it wasn't until this year that I suddenly

noticed something about Mount Inglismaldie on the far shore. Dead centre is what looks like a cowled man with droopy mustache and beard, eyes closed in sleep. I can't believe I'm the first to see it but I've never seen it mentioned anywhere.



I cropped and rotated a close-up as below. I also checked my photos from previous years and he is there. Can you see him?



MEANWHILE, BACK IN COWTOWN: UTILITY BOX ART
photos by Dale Speirs

Enmax and Telus continue their programme of painting their utility boxes as an anti-graffiti measure. There must be hundreds of painted boxes around the city by now. I try to photograph them when I can, but I'm not a completist.



This one is at the north end of Centre Street bridge over Memorial Drive. Colourful, but don't ask me what it means.



East Village is between City Hall and Fort Calgary. For years it was a wasteland but is now being redeveloped with numerous condo towers. The jazz clubs used to cluster here before redevelopment scattered them elsewhere.



The northern boundary of East Village is the Bow River. Some downtown executives like to spend their lunch hours fishing for trout, since the river is only a few minutes walk from the skyscrapers of the downtown core.



An appropriate box on Memorial Drive adjacent to the Calgary Zoo.



Magpies are very common in Calgary. This box on 4 Street SW in Mission.

SIGNS, SIGNS, EVERYWHERE A SIGN: CAN'T YOU READ

photo by Dale Speirs

Not an official sign, but the work of Altadore homeowners who live on a street that goes into a hockey arena and curling rink. The houses are screened by the elm trees; the arena is at left. I'm sure the next step will be a petition to install speed bumps.



THE PEACE BRIDGE
photos by Dale Speirs

Completed in 2012, this pedestrian bridge over the Bow River connects the downtown core with a residential suburb and Memorial Drive. I like to call it the world's largest Chinese fingertrap.







SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Appel, H.M., and R.B. Cocroft (2014) **Plants respond to leaf vibrations caused by insect herbivore chewing.** *OECOLOGIA* 175:1257–1266

Authors' abstract: "*Plant germination and growth can be influenced by sound, but the ecological significance of these responses is unclear. We asked whether acoustic energy generated by the feeding of insect herbivores was detected by plants. We report that the vibrations caused by insect feeding can elicit chemical defenses. Arabidopsis thaliana rosettes pre-treated with the vibrations caused by caterpillar feeding had higher levels of glucosinolate and anthocyanin defenses when subsequently fed upon by Pieris rapae caterpillars than did untreated plants. The plants also discriminated between the vibrations caused by chewing and those caused by wind or insect song. Plants thus respond to herbivore-generated vibrations in a selective and ecologically meaningful way. A vibration signaling pathway would complement the known signaling pathways that rely on volatile, electrical, or phloem-borne signals. We suggest that vibration may represent a new long distance signaling mechanism in plant–insect interactions that contributes to systemic induction of chemical defenses.*"

Pires, M.M., et al (2014) **Reconstructing past ecological networks: the reconfiguration of seed dispersal interactions after megafaunal extinction.** *OECOLOGIA* 175:1247-1256

Authors' abstract: "*The late Quaternary megafaunal extinction impacted ecological communities worldwide, and affected key ecological processes such as seed dispersal. The traits of several species of large-seeded plants are thought to have evolved in response to interactions with extinct megafauna, but how these extinctions affected the organization of interactions in seed-dispersal systems is poorly understood. Here, we combined ecological and paleontological data and network analyses to investigate how the structure of a species-rich seed-dispersal network could have changed from the Pleistocene to the present and examine the possible consequences of such changes. Our results indicate that the seed-dispersal network was organized into modules across the different time periods but has been reconfigured in different ways over time. The episode of megafaunal extinction and the arrival of humans changed how seed dispersers were distributed among network modules.*

However, the recent introduction of livestock into the seed dispersal system partially restored the original network organization by strengthening the modular configuration. Moreover, after megafaunal extinctions, introduced species and some smaller native mammals became key components for the structure of the seed-dispersal network. We hypothesize that such changes in network structure affected both animal and plant assemblages, potentially contributing to the shaping of modern ecological communities. The ongoing extinction of key large vertebrates will lead to a variety of context-dependent rearranged ecological networks, most certainly affecting ecological and evolutionary processes."

Speirs: Prior to humans, many plants evolved seed dispersal systems that depended on a now-extinct large animal to spread the seeds about. The most common system was to have thick-walled seeds inside fruits. The animals ate the fruit, and the seeds survived passage through the acidic gut with just enough of the seed wall dissolved to allow easy germination after excretion, with the added benefit that the seeds surviving the trip would germinate in a readymade batch of fertile ground. As humans spread across the planet, they wiped out almost all large animal species, which in turn disrupted the plants that depended on the extinct animals for propagation. As this paper explains, sometimes there were substitutes, whether large or small size, which continued the propagation of the plants. For example, it has long been accepted that European breeds of cattle are a substitute for the massive herds of bison that once roamed North America, which is why so many rangelands still support wildflowers and native berries.



Reuven, O., et al (2014) **The effect of physical cleaning on threatened morality in individuals with obsessive-compulsive disorder.** CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE 2:224–229

Authors' abstract: *"The association between morality and physical cleansing has been demonstrated in a series of studies ... We predicted that this association would be especially prominent in people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Participants with OCD and matched control participants wrote about an immoral deed they had committed, after which half of the participants in each group cleaned their hands with a wipe. All participants were then offered an opportunity to help a fictitious graduate student by taking part in her experiment. Replicating previous findings, physical cleaning reduced the willingness to help and relieved moral emotions. As predicted, this effect was particularly prominent among participants with OCD. We discuss two processes that may account for the association between morality and cleanliness in general and particularly in the context of OCD: embodiment of morality in terms of physical cleanliness and assigning abstract meaning to the physical actions of cleaning."*

Speirs: This is the Lady Macbeth syndrome. And why was I looking at the literature for this? I was re-reading Nero Wolfe, and the syndrome appears as the opening element in PLEASE PASS THE GUILT.

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

2014-07-25

I had to smile when you said that a large group of people come to Calgary to dress up in funny costumes, and party hearty. No, not an SF convention... Well, looks like us SF fans are fairly normal after all. I do like the fact that some people will paint themselves in team colours, or wear large plastic chunks of cheese on their heads, but somehow, the fans are weird if they put on a Star Trek pajama top.

[For non-Canadian readers, the funniest sports fans in the Great White North are the Saskatchewan Roughriders supporters in the Canadian Football League. They slice watermelons in half longitudinally, scoop out the interior, and then wear the watermelon as a helmet to the games. (Hint: line the inside with plastic so it doesn't drip.) The team wear green helmets in case you're wondering why. Supermarket produce managers love these people.]

Too many companies offer almost too much support of local events, and it does get to the point that the ads saying they are the official bank/supermarket/restaurant/etc. of the big event are completely ignored by the public. For me, I still remember a fast-food joint in the small town of Perth, Ontario, which advertised that it was finally time for summer at the beach, and used Star Trek: The Next Generation characters to prove their point.

I did see Bill Shatner as the parade marshal, and some local press made light of his unwillingness to ride a horse in the parade, but when he gave his reasons (different horse, stress on the horse, he's more equestrian than anything else), they made perfect sense. Also, he's not a young man any more, and there's no seat belts on the saddle. I can only imagine what he thought of the Stormtroopers or Star Fleet officers in the parade.

[I don't think he saw them because they were behind him in the parade. The problem with being in a parade is that you don't see it. As for not riding a horse, I didn't hear any criticism from Calgarians. The man is 83 years old, after all.]

Tomorrow starts a huge weekend for us here. First of all is a set tour of Murdoch Mysteries, the CBC Victorian/Edwardian police procedural, up in the midst of Scarborough. On Sunday, there is the Murdoch Mysteries Experience at the Old Mill, where you will see us, but definitely not as we usually are. We introduced costumes to the event a couple of years ago. I will have my camera at the ready.

[Keep a careful eye out for football fans and other people who dress funny.]