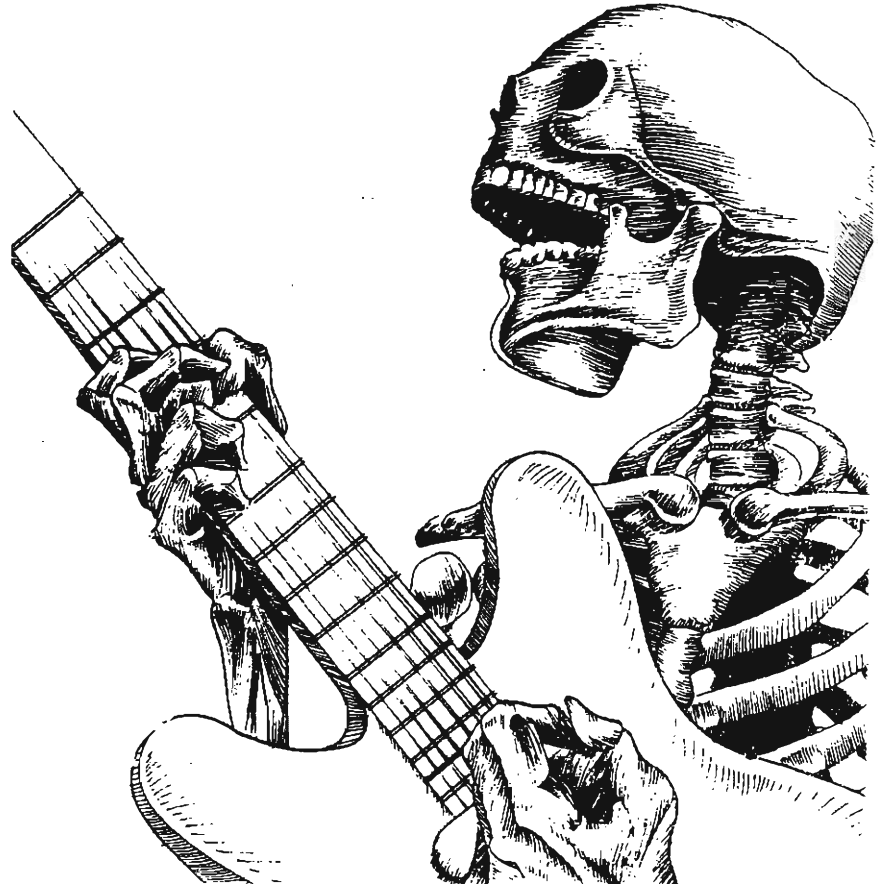


Dpuntia 3.5



OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 5830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It can be had for \$1 cash per issue, a letter of comment, or trade for your zine. All back issues are available at \$1 per copy.

EDITORIAL: OPUNTIA is a serconzine, and will remain one. At least, those issues with whole numbers. I've always wanted to publish a perszine but never had the courage until now. Rather than start another zine, I will continue to use OPUNTIA. To separate the two zine types, however, I'll number the perszine as [].5, and the sercon part as whole numbers. The .5 issues won't be sent to everyone, just those who loc or trade.

Going to decimal fractions will allow me some future flexibility. If I should decide to start running reviews, I can number such issues as .1, fiction issues as .2, and so on. It might be a bit confusing for bibliographers, but if you line up the issues in numerical order, then they'll fall naturally into chronological order.

I mentioned earlier that I lacked courage to try out a perszine. I enjoy reading those put out by others, but am not so sure that parks maintenance will be particularly interesting to others. I'll give it a try, and if the loccers are negative about it, will abandon the project.

Writing a perszine is in a way a form of release for me. My job as a City of Calgary district foreman can be pretty aggravating at times. Just the act of typing down anecdotes seems to be soothing, and lets out some of the tension. Hopefully what seems routine to me might be interesting to others.

The Parks district I look after has about 600 hectare of parks and freeway boulevards, about average size. Foremen are transferred every few years. My previous district was in a newly-developed part of Calgary, and the parks were open, windblown land with broomsticks for trees. My present district includes a bit of new suburbs but is mostly the older part of Calgary. I am headquartered at Bowness Park, one of the oldest parks in the city. In fact, it existed a number of decades before the city actually got out that far, and the surrounding neighbourhood of Bowness is named after the park, not the other way round as many Calgarians think. The park was operated for decades by a streetcar company which ran cheap excursions from Calgary. It was immensely popular during the Depression, as it was one of the few affordable places of entertainment.

Most of my workers report to the park, but some are stationed out at other depots to cut down on travelling time. The outlying parks are looked after by roving crews or stationed people. Bowness Park is a Class A park, which means it gets high priority for maintenance. It has stationed and shift people throughout the year. Five picnic pavillions are rented out to groups, there is a concession and boat rentals (for the lagoon and river channel), and on hot summer weekends the park is solid with sunbathers and young mums watching their kids play in the spray pool. In winter, the lagoon and channel are converted into a skating rink. If I spend a lot of time talking about Bowness Park, it is because it is my favourite park in the entire city. I can leave the paperwork on my desk and go out for a stroll along the channel, under the huge cottonwoods, and still be on official city business. I feel sorry for office workers who sit under fluorescents all day instead of seeing sunlight and listen to the rumble of air ventilators instead of the rustling of tree leaves.

In 1973, I bought a life membership in the Calgary Zoological Society for \$100, entitling me to unlimited admissions and a subscription to their magazine. Annual dues were \$8 at the time. I figured that allowing for inflation and dues increases, I would probably break even after ten years. In actual fact, it only took an eight year period to break even. In 1991, annual dues are \$40, so I'm laughing all the way to the zoo. I have started to buy life memberships in other societies as well, on the grounds that they are an investment that the taxman cannot reach. I am now a life member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America, two philatelic societies, and an aquarium society. Besides the money-saving advantages, it saves the annual trouble of making out cheques and posting them off.

A few years ago, I was wandering around the zoo, and wrote the following vignette. For lack of any better place to publish it, I'll run it here.

§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§§

As the peacock approaches the food, it eyes the woodchuck with suspicion. Carrots, lettuce, grain pellets, and banana chunks are apportioned onto a tray and set into the pen for the woodchucks. Having a sweet tooth like any human, the woodchucks make short work of the bananas, ignoring the main course in favour of dessert. Climbing in with the food, rooting around for any banana chunks that might have been missed, they eventually conclude that all are gone, and so begin on the rest of the meal. The peacock had wandered in from elsewhere in the zoo and gravitated directly to the food of its fellow prisoners. Shorn of tail plumage so that tourists might have something to remember the Zoo by (for a price at the gift shop), the peacock still presented a spectacular sight. It wore an iridescent blue turtleneck, and carried on its back the proverbial Golden Fleece.

Most pens used to confine small, herbivorous mammals such as woodchucks are no more than waist-high, only a small barrier to the peacock. It goes travelling amongst the tourists, strolling down the zoo pathways as if it were out from the city for a pleasant afternoon. With a hop up onto the fence, and another down to the ground on the other side, the peacock burgles the homes of zoo inmates, begs popcorn from tourists, and surveys the kingdom in general. The Calgary Zoo is on an island in the Bow River, so the Zoo staff take a relaxed attitude to peacocks wandering about, there being little likelihood of an escape from the Zoo.

But back to the woodchucks. As they work their way through the dinner table, a black squirrel comes into the pen. This squirrel has a grain pellet in mind. It takes a quick nibble to ensure that the prize is edible, then hops out of the pen and is off to a distant clump of poplars. A few minutes later it makes the return trip; another grain pellet, and away again.

The woodchucks stuff themselves, turning the carrots and grain pellets around in their hands, and nibble the morsels down to nothing. The peacock is there, going after the lettuce but torn between the desire for food and the fear of the woodchucks sitting in the midst of it. The latter seem aware of the bird looming over them, but have more important things to think about. Each movement of a woodchuck, however innocent, causes the peacock to hesitate. The bird quickly grabs a piece of lettuce: it is too big to swallow, but a sudden flurry of the head results in a small piece shaken loose, and down the gullet it goes. The woodchucks amble off into their burrows, and the black squirrel has not yet returned for another theft, so the peacock stands alone. A grain pellet looks interesting; easily picked up with the beak but too big to swallow in one piece, so the bird

drops it to the ground. Pecking at it seems to produce no results, and eyeing it from all sides gives no useful information on how to proceed. The peacock tries a different grain pellet but with no better success, so it goes back to the lettuce.

In a nearby duck pond, seagulls have made themselves at home, intruding into feeding troughs meant for more exotic denizens. A Muscovy duck shares one small pond with turtles and seagulls. The pond water is perfectly transparent, and the birds paddling through it appear to be floating in midair. Eleven fist-sized bundles of yellow and brown fluff can be seen propelling themselves along. They are the most recent progeny of the Muscovy duck. A few gulls eye the ducklings with mixed feelings, for the latter would be food but for the presence of Mother. Adult Muscovy ducks waddle quite slowly, even for a duck, but outweigh the gulls enough to make them run. Several gulls stumble over the ducklings in haste, getting away from Mother. The young ones seem unconcerned, perhaps unaware of the threat. One gull is limping because of an injured foot, and has difficulty maneuvering amongst the ducklings scattered about.

On the other side of the zoo, at the bear cages, the peacock is at it again. The bear cages are barred like any prisoner's cell, but the animals can still reach out so a waist-high fence keeps the crowds back at a safe distance. In between fence and cage is the panhandler, oblivious to the grizzly pawing thin air, reaching through the bars and trying to grab the bird. The peacock works the crowd like a politician during an election campaign.

Across from the bear cages is the children's zoo, in name only, as quite a few adults also enjoy the opportunity to scratch a goat on the head or pat a llama. The peacock is appealing, but it does not allow anyone to get close to it, and consequently loses part of the audience to the competition across the way.

Goats and sheep are kept in a walk-through pen at the children's zoo. As each visitor enters, the four-footed garbage disposals gather around for popcorn, poplar leaves, and an occasional try at a purse or hemline. Some children are hesitant at approaching the animals, but with the encouragement of parents or older siblings, the timid ones are soon vigorously patting the animals. During lulls, the animals will stand about quietly digesting their meals. Some of the goats are munching on wool, taking it directly off the sheep's back. The sheep do not care for this tugging and yanking, and dart about the pen in irregular bursts trying to evade the goats.

Next door is a pen filled with a noisy, active group of chickens, guinea pigs, rabbits, and two recently-added young deer. When the zookeeper sets food trays into the pen, a mad rush ensues. Truly it can be said that push comes to shove, as the animals pile into the food. Smaller denizens climb into the tray and on top of the food, while others grab whatever presents itself and haul it elsewhere, to be nibbled on in leisure. Later, only a few animals remain near the trays, searching for remnants.

Two of the chickens begin to fight, each seeking to assert dominance. Their feathers are ruffled, and the mops on their heads flare out. The battle is ritualized. Each tries to get in a peck, then suddenly one will flutter overtop the other, who immediately turns about to protect the rear. A rush by one ends with the other backing away. The defeated bird moves off to another corner of the pen in a nonchalant "it really isn't that important, anyway" attitude.

Outside the children's zoo, the peacock is strolling past, homeward bound. The crowds have thinned as the day ends, and the peacock is hardly noticed by the few remaining visitors. A punk rocker and the peacock eye each other, amazed at what they see. Which one should be on display?

Bowness Park, where my office is located, is on the Bow River's south bank as it enters Calgary, just downstream from Bearspaw Dam. Across the way on the north bank are various institutes such as the Baker Centre (Down's Syndrome patients), the Water Treatment Plant, and the Shriners. The Shriner's place is the usual temple and banquet facility but also has stables and equestrian areas, where they practice their fancy horse riding (Arabians, of course) for parades. The Calgary Police rent part of the stables for the mounted patrol.

All of these places are between the river and the CPR mainline to Vancouver. There is a siding here where all the grain trains are made up for the west coast. On the north side of the tracks is the City of Calgary Bearspaw Maintenance Depot, shared by various departments, including Parks. The Parks office is on the second floor, and has a panoramic view across the railroad tracks towards the Shriner stables.

Assuming, that is, that the view isn't blocked by grain cars. In eleven years with the Parks Dept., only once have I ever seen the siding clear of grain cars, and was able to see the Shriners. Year after year, day upon day the grain cars are there. Over the last decade, the number of boxcars has dwindled, replaced by hopper cars, which are easier to unload. In Canada, export of grain is controlled by the government. As a form of subsidy, Ottawa and the provincial governments supply hopper cars to the railways in order to assure farmers of a method to get grain to the coast. I've never seen Province of Manitoba grain cars, presumably because they go east to the Great Lakes or north to Hudson Bay. There are a fair number of hopper cars painted with the logo of the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation. Government of Canada cars are bilingually emblazoned, despite the almost total non-existence of francophone farmers in western Canada. (French is not the second language here; Ukrainian,

German, and Chinese are ahead of it.). Saskatchewan or Canada grain cars are rather dull painted, mostly shades of brick red or brown. Probably chosen by a committee fearful of offending voters with a livelier colour.

Alberta cars are labelled "Alberta Heritage Trust Fund", a reference to the oil royalties that paid for them. These cars are painted a bright blue. We are assured that it is absolutely a coincidence that this colour is also the official colour of the governing Progressive Conservatives. Like Brutus, the Tories are honourable men.

After years of effort, Alberta's Minister of Tourism convinced his cabinet colleagues to allow advertising on these cars. Now the cars carry a slogan, "Visit [name of town]", thereby providing new interest for train spotters, since each car has the name of a different Alberta village or city. "Visit Plamonden" had me stumped; I pride myself on my knowledge of Alberta towns, but I never even heard of this one. I keep hoping to see "Visit Eckville" (my birthplace) or "Visit Red Deer" (where I spent most of my childhood), but no such luck. "Visit Calgary" would be an amusing one to see.

1991-9-30

I drove by Bearspaw siding this morning, and ah-hah!, there it was, a "Visit Calgary" hopper car. The grain cars have been moving intermittently, depending on whether or not the grain handlers are on strike. The federal civil servants are on/off/on strike, much as the posties, who were on/off/on/off strike. A joke is making the rounds as follows. The bad news is that the civil servants are on strike again. The good news is that nobody has noticed anything different.

JACKRABBIT VIGNETTE (WITH SQUIRRELS)

1991-9-17

Vardell Park is in a neighbourhood that was developed about twenty years ago, and is now ten kilometres inside city limits. To the south is the University of Calgary campus, part of which is a section of vacant land, the residuum of natural prairie. It's mostly grassland swept by wind that never stops. A bit of bush here and there provides some cover for wildlife.

Sixty years ago, black squirrels were introduced into Calgary, at the Zoo on St. George's Island, which is in the Bow River near the downtown core. The squirrels have spread as the city did, albeit slower, as they need mature trees to provide a reasonably continuous canopy. Their basic diet is peanuts supplied by residents. The squirrels reached Vardell Park a number of years ago.

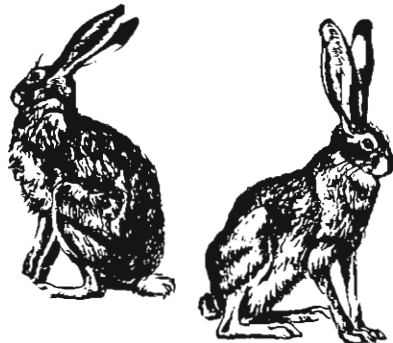
While checking Vardell Park, which is ringed by mature poplars, I noticed a black squirrel on the ground. As my pickup truck neared it, the animal did what squirrels usually do when they see a Parks vehicle driving on the grass instead of out on the road. It sat there until the truck was almost upon it, then suddenly dashed for the tree ahead. It waited at the base of the tree to see if the truck would come closer. This being the case it took off for the next tree, and repeated the process. Finally, it went up a tree, and watched me warily from a height as I drove by. Some squirrels I have herded the entire length of a park in this manner.

Like others of its species, this squirrel had peanuts buried all over the park. As I drove past a tot lot, I was startled to see a jackrabbit sniffing about the tot lot. Startled for two reasons; firstly because it was a fair distance from the University reserve lands (from whence it had undoubtedly come), and secondly because it was not particularly alarmed by my presence. Usually a jackrabbit takes off like a rocket if I even glance at it from the other side of a field. This one, however,

while aware of me, was more interested in searching out the peanuts buried by the squirrel. I've seen squirrels stealing from each other, but a jackrabbit taking from a squirrel was a new thing under my sun.

A block east of Vardell Park is Varsville Park, further into the suburb. A couple of days later, I went by this park. As I drove around it, I almost missed seeing the jackrabbit, sitting out in the open on the turf. Ears folded back, its body plumped up almost into a sphere, it sat there. Thinking perhaps, or digesting a meal of ill-gotten peanuts, but it simply sat there. I waited for a few minutes to see if it would do anything, but it apparently had nothing else planned, and continued to sit there. The day was mildly brisk, with a wind at 10°C, but the jackrabbit was very likely quite warm in its fur coat.

None of this is particularly exciting, but it makes me appreciate outdoor work. Better than a lot of my Parks colleagues who are desk workers, and shuffle paper all day long in an office.



The leaves are starting to drop more heavily now, and another fortnight or so will see the start of the autumn cleanup. Several batches of seasonal employees have already been laid off, and a number of them quit to return to school. I'm down to two maintenance crews. They are in Bowness Park exclusively, ignoring the outlying parks in this district for the time being. The park has about 80% continuous canopy of mature trees, so the leaves are already piling up in drifts, but they'll be left where they are for a while.

One crew is mapping irrigation lines in the park, something that has never been done in the park's eighty year history, incredibly. Until a few years ago, staff turnover in Bowness Park was relatively low, and there was always an oldtimer around who knew where everything was. Then a new labour union contract introduced citywide seniority. Ever since, there have been frequent staff shuffles, and people move around almost weekly. I've been foreman of Bowness Park only since the beginning of this year, although I had the small advantage of working here as a gardener a number of years ago. With no one around who knows the irrigation system, every line break or sprinkler leak is an adventure in discovery as we try to locate the shutoff valve.

Bowness Park was established in 1911 as a gift of two river islands to the city of Calgary. Over the decades the irrigation system has grown in random directions all over the park. The public washrooms are connected with the irrigation lines; both are controlled by a single valve. This means that if there is a broken sprinkler head, then we have to shut off all the washrooms in order to fix the irrigation line. I put in a request to management to get some isolation valves installed for each branch of the washroom and irrigation lines. If approved in the budget, then such valves would allow us to shut one segment of a line without closing the entire system.

Other irrigation lines, not connected to the washrooms, have their own shutoff valves. The difficulty is that some lines in the west end of the park are controlled by a valve at the east end, half a kilometre away. The only way to find out which valve controls what line is to turn on the sprinklers, then shut off valves until we find the one that controls the sprinklers. So far, the mapping crew has been two weeks trying to locate lines, valves, sprinkler heads (some have been buried under the grass for decades), and shutoffs.

Bowness Park is an archaeologist's delight. Old building foundations still stick out from the turf here and there. When the lagoon is drained in autumn for cleaning, timbers and concrete footings become visible. They are the remnants of the original road and bridge into the park; the current roadway is west of the old entrance into Bowness Park. Although this park was originally two islands, today it is only one island, the two having been merged sometime in the past by landfill. I knew this when I took over the park but was never able to figure out where the other island had been.

A couple of weeks ago, I stumbled on a 1960s topographical map of the park. At the west end of the park today is a large berm cutting off the western part of the park, a natural area, from the developed area. I thought it might have been a flood control dike, although I was mildly puzzled as to why it was well inside the park, instead of along the river's edge. Much to my surprise, the map indicated that the dike was the old channel that separated the two islands. When the channel was filled in, they kept going and built it up several metres above grade.

There used to be an outdoor swimming pool connected to the lagoon. I think I know where it is; if I can just find an old enough map (pre WW2), then I'll know for certain.

LYSOL PARK AND THE TRANSIENTS

1991-9-19

Shouldice Park, in northwest Calgary, is split down the middle by the Trans-Canada Highway, which is 16th Avenue North inside Calgary. If you've ever driven into Calgary from Banff, then you drove through this park. In the summer, one sees hitchhikers along here, most being probably unaware that it is illegal to hitchhike inside Calgary, not that the bylaw is ever enforced.

There is a transient who lives on Trans-Canada. He takes a couple of shopping carts and heads west, collecting in the ditch any pop cans or beer bottles. He keeps going west until he has filled one cart, camping in the bush along the way. Then he turns about and heads back to Calgary, filling the second cart. By the time he gets back into town, both carts are full, and shopping bags are hanging off the sides, not to mention his personal effects and a bright orange plastic ground sheet. East of Shouldice Park is a shopping plaza, with a liquor store, pharmacy, fast-food outlets, and various other such stores. Further east again is a strip of gas stations and a container depot. The transient cashes in all his bottles and cans at this depot.

He then sets up camp in Shouldice Park, laying the ground sheet over a few rows of seats on a baseball field bleacher, thereby making a tent. He stays under this tent for several days. I never see him moving about in the day when I am in Shouldice Park; I don't know if he just sleeps or if he buys alcohol at the liquor store and gets drunk. His makeshift home is there, always in the same bleacher, for a few days, but he eventually is back out on the road to repeat the cycle. While in the park, his shopping carts sit outside the fence, in the highway ditch. The ditch is quite deep, and a casual visitor to Calgary will probably whiz into town without noticing him. Some commuters must see him; I had one phone call this summer from a citizen complaining about the shopping carts. I told the citizen to phone Social

Services. The transient is still there, so I guess nothing was done. He seems quite harmless. The Parks staff have no trouble from him, although he is an affront to some citizens who would rather not be reminded that the homeless problem will not go away. I wonder how he survives the winters?

At the west end of the park, between the swimming pool and the Bow River, is an area known to us as Lysol Park. The maintenance staff are forever raking out empty liquor bottles or punctured spray cans of Lysol from the shrubbery. One sees the occasional transient sleeping it off on the riverbank. Those who can, get their booze from the liquor store at the other end of the park. Many of them have been banned from this store as known alcoholics, so they buy from the pharmacy next door cans of Lysol. When you drink Lysol, you are in the final stages; it is only a matter of time until the day when a paramedic pulls the sheet over your corpse.

The Lysol addicts (some drink Scope mouthwash) are sometimes troublemakers, ranting and raving in the park. I had one pruner who was scared away from a shrub bed she was working on. The swimming pool staff are used to patching up bloodied transients who were fighting, usually aboriginal women abused by their cohabitants.

By and large, Calgary doesn't have too many visible transients outside the downtown core. The few that are found in the suburbs, such as Shouldice Park, only come out at night, and spend their days hidden in shrub beds or underneath bridge abutments. City workers see them, but Average Taxpayer does not. Those who think that transients are found only downtown or in the poor side of town would be shocked if they knew how many lived out in those pristine, manicured suburbs.

It may be a long fall, but it's only a short step.

Every Sunday morning, I drive over to the University of Calgary Library to catch up on the current periodicals. I read mostly botanical and zoological ones, a few of the general ones like SCIENCE or NATURE, and some book related ones such as PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY or AMPHORA. On my way to the library, I always swing by a restaurant for breakfast. Going up the 10th Street hill by Riley Park, I passed a construction area (the shortest distance between two points in Calgary is always torn up for utility line installation). A sandbag used to hold down a sign was lying on the centre line, split open. As I approached it, a magpie fluttered down onto it, apparently under the impression that the sandbag was a road kill worth scavenging. Or perhaps it needed some grit for its gizzard. Magpies are everywhere in Calgary, feeding on squashed gophers or squirrels on the roads, or emptying out garbage cans in parks. It's a living, I suppose, and they are certainly filling their ecological niche very well.

The University library system has photocopiers which, besides coins, used to take debit cards. Until a few weeks ago, one could buy a debit card with a magnetic stripe on it that allowed so many copies to be made on the photocopier. For \$25, a debit card would make 250 copies, for \$10 it would do 100, and a \$5 card would do 50. The cards were reprogrammable; once you used up the amount, it could be taken back to Library Services and for the appropriate a new amount could be entered on the card. The debit card was inserted into the machine, and each time a copy was made, the machine deducted 10¢ from the magnetic stripe.

Unfortunately, someone figured out how to beat the system, and as a result the debit cards were withdrawn. I now have to use loonies, and if I'm photocopying a lot of material, it means running down to the Circulation Desk for change. There seems to be a law that every

library locates its change-making facilities far away from the photocopiers.

The September 5 issue of THE GAUNTLET, the University student newspaper, explained how the debit card scam worked. Buy a card with the full amount of copies on the magnetic stripe. Lay a piece of blank cassette tape over top the stripe; this duplicates the encoded information. Then use up the card in the normal way. Then blank the card with a magnet, and lay the tape on the stripe. This re-imprints the magnetic data on the stripe and the card is again good for copying.

The debit card system was installed on photocopiers in 1984, but it was only recently that the library staff noticed a discrepancy between photocopies made and revenue received. Considering that universities are a hotbed of computer phreaks and hackers, it is rather surprising that the debit card system lasted as long as it did before security was cracked. It'll be a lot harder for people to fake loonies than debit cards though.



CASTOR CANADENSIS

1991-9-24

Since Bowness Park is an island separated from the mainland only by a narrow channel (about the width of a two-lane road), it is not very surprising that we have problems with beavers. They come in from the Bow River and as fast as they are trapped, new ones move in. The channel is actually a property line between the park and private lots on the mainland, so while we can control beavers on our side, it isn't much good if the homeowners on the other side do nothing. The poplars in the park along the channel all have chicken wire wrapped around their bases to stop the beavers cutting them down. The spruces are safe from beavers because the animals don't like the resin in the trees; it gums up their teeth and tastes terrible. The homeowners who do nothing create a problem when the beavers drop a poplar across the narrow channel and start building a dam. We pull out the dams as fast as they are built, but sometimes the beaver just won't give up, and must be trapped and killed. Beavers are currently in a population explosion, so there is no use transplanting them after trapping, since there is no place to put them. The provincial Fish & Wildlife officer traps them for us. The trapping is done at night, using beaver droppings as bait. The officer lets me know of his success by cutting off the tip of the tail and leaving it on the gate. When I unlock in the morning, there is positive confirmation dripping body fluids.

Beavers get quite large, to the size of a medium dog. I have seen them in the dusk, paddling along the channel or waddling on the opposite bank in somebody's backyard. They also come overland through the park directly from the Bow River, madly humping along towards the laagoon or the channel.

RED SHALE

1991-9-25

Save for a bit of cleanup here and there, we finished shaling West #4 pavilion today, a fortnight's work. There are five picnic pavilions in Bowness Park, each surrounded by dozens of picnic tables, firepits, and barbecue racks. They are rented out to groups and are immensely popular. As a result, over the years the turf around them was destroyed by heavy pedestrian traffic. Each year, one or two pavilions were shaled as money permitted. West #4 was the last to be done. The turf, what is left if any, is scraped out by a bobcat (skid-steer loader) to a depth of 15 cm all around the pavilion, tables, etc.. Red shale is then dumped in and smoothed over. This visually unifies everything with the pavilion, and the shale can handle pedestrian traffic for decades. For West #4, we also discovered a fringe benefit. This pavilion is under a heavy stand of mature cottonwoods and was always very gloomy. The red shale is lighter in colour than the old turf, and thus brightens up the place.

The red shale is delivered on site from a quarry near Lethbridge, a few hours drive south of Calgary. It is delivered in pup trailers hauling thirty tonnes in a load on the average. (A pup trailer is a semi-trailer truck with two trailers instead of one.) A few of the pup trailers were Super-B configurations, with three extra axles and a heavier load. These drivers hauled shale from Lethbridge to Calgary, then deadheaded to Golden, B.C., where they picked up a load of concentrated ore from the mines, then hauled it to a smelter in Lethbridge. A fifteen hour trip, one trip a day, every day.

Watching those pup trailers rumbling over the narrow, antique bridge into Bowness Park was too hard on my nerves. I've seen the underside of that bridge, the cracks and corrosion. Fortunately, the bridge survived in one piece.

Calgary's retail market differs from most cities in that a number of large department store chains have not been able to dominate the market the way they do in other cities. This is because of Calgary Co-op, the largest co-operative in North America, with about 200,000 members. It controls around one-third of the supermarket trade.

One reason for Co-op's success is in the wide variety of member services it offers. Long before day care became a fashionable thing, young mums could drop off their children at a child care facility free of charge, and go shopping in peace and quiet. Another service, of which I make frequent use, is the Book Exchange.

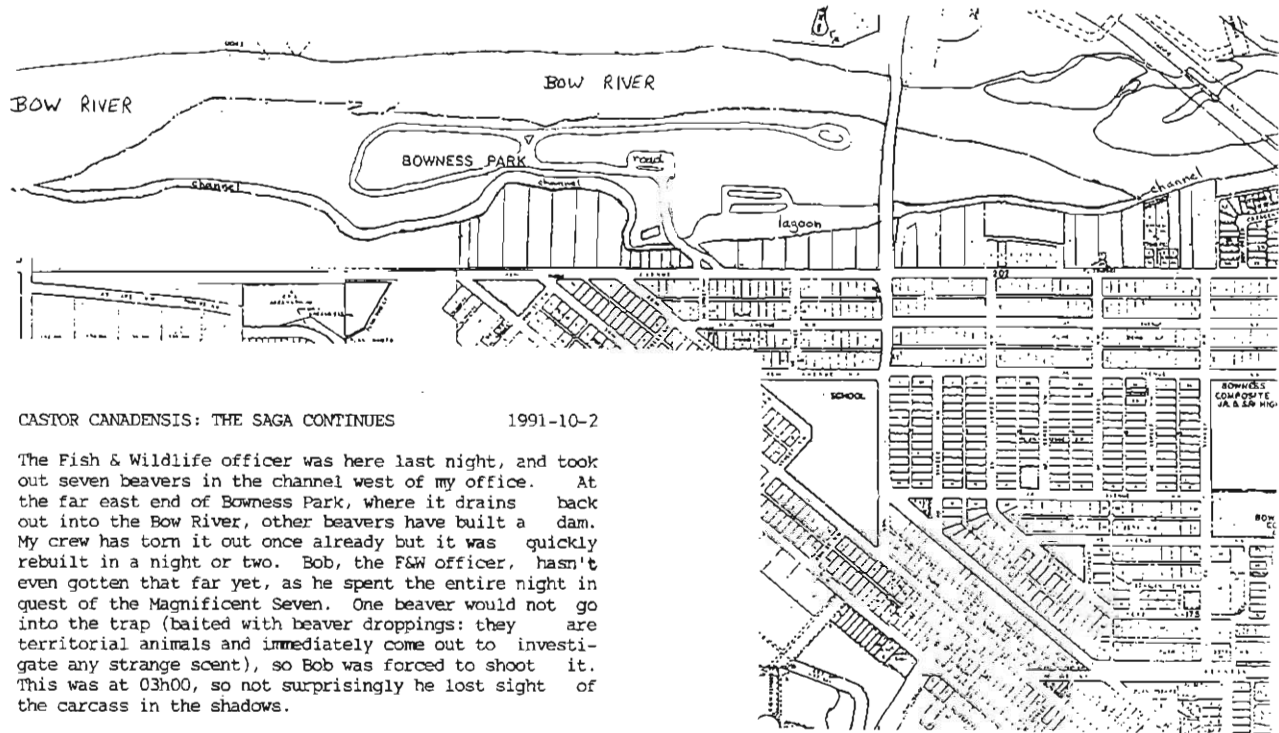
The Book Exchange is simply a set of shelves where you can drop off unwanted books and magazines. They can be used in trade for other material left by other people or one can take books or magazines and make a donation to a poor box on the honour system. Each year, Co-op makes large donations to local charities with money collected from the poor boxes. I seldom drop off any books but do frequently visit to pick up material, with a donation in the box of whatever small change I happen to have in my pockets at the time.

I've been doing this for a decade now, and have added a number of interesting items to my library, mostly magazines because I prefer them over books. I have about three metres of mystery magazines collected from the Book Exchange, mostly Ellery Queen or Alfred Hitchcock, but also some oddballs such as Two-Fisted Detective Stories and Manhunt. Not too many SF magazines make their way here, either because the general public doesn't read them as much as mystery magazines, or because those who do, hang on to them. By contrast, Reader's Digest, the newsmagazines such as Maclean's or Alberta Report, and romance paperbacks are abundant, so much so that the Co-

op staff have to weed them out every so often to save space for the better stuff. Not surprisingly, local fundamentalists view this as a golden opportunity to spread the Word, and as a result there are a lot of tracts to be cleared out as well.

Co-op has quite a few stores spread throughout the city, and I used to put on quite a few kilometres as I made the rounds. I eventually noticed, however, that the best material was only in the older suburbs. Stores located in the newly-developed suburbs seldom have anything better than Reader's Digests or romances. In older parts of the city, there are a lot of empty nesters who clean house every so often and take in to the Book Exchange all those old magazines from thirty or forty years ago when the kids were young. I am always delighted to see such magazines; I've even started a special collection consisting only of magazines dated November 1955, the year of my birth.

Each year, the Calgary Public Library has a sale of all its discarded books. They use a hockey arena one block from my house for the sale. Those who lament the decline of reading in today's world should come by my house on this sale day. The sale starts at 09h00; by 07h00 there is no parking space left within ten blocks of the arena. I don't sleep in that morning due to the traffic noise. The lineup goes all the way around the parking lot, with about a two-hour wait. The CPL hires a band and children's entertainment to keep the lineup amused. I wait until noon or so before walking over to the sale; by then the lineup is gone. Granted, the books have been picked over as well, but my tastes are considerably different, so I usually find something that the masses missed. Anything that is marginal to my interest, I leave. Rather than pay \$1 for a hardcover or 25¢ per paperback that I am only mildly interested in, I'll wait to see if it shows up in the Co-op Book Exchange, which is where the CPL sends all its unsold discards. Then I can get it for even less money.



CASTOR CANADENSIS: THE SAGA CONTINUES

1991-10-2

The Fish & Wildlife officer was here last night, and took out seven beavers in the channel west of my office. At the far east end of Bowness Park, where it drains back out into the Bow River, other beavers have built a dam. My crew has torn it out once already but it was quickly rebuilt in a night or two. Bob, the F&W officer, hasn't even gotten that far yet, as he spent the entire night in quest of the Magnificent Seven. One beaver would not go into the trap (baited with beaver droppings: they are territorial animals and immediately come out to investigate any strange scent), so Bob was forced to shoot it. This was at 03h00, so not surprisingly he lost sight of the carcass in the shadows.

The next morning we found a note from Bob as follows.

"3 A.M. Oct 2 or 3rd - lost track. Dale - would you please check canal west of your shop for me - I lost a beaver in the dark and shadows ... if you find it just

put it out of sight somewhere".

I have two labourers stationed in the park, so at the

(continued next page)

dawn's early light (we start at 07h00 but it doesn't become light until 08h00 this time of year) they pushed out in a canoe and started paddling. They didn't have far to go before they found the deceased floating in the water. Even for a young beaver it was heavy; it took two hands to pull it out of the water. Bob came by later in the day and picked up the carcass. He'll try the east end of the park tonight if he can, but he has quite a backlog of complaints from around the city. We are but one of many having problems with the beaver explosion.

Why so many beavers? The anti-fur lobbyists have reduced the market for pelts, so many trappers no longer bother with beavers. With nothing to keep the animals in check, they are booming and not so incidentally destroying forested areas all over the countryside.

1991-10-3

The good news is that trapper Bob phoned me this morning and told me that he got the two beavers at the east outlet during the night. I'll leave a note in the logbook for the weekend shift to remove the dam.

The bad news is that a few hours after Bob phoned, one of my labourers reported that there were four beavers in the main lagoon. Seven in the west channel, two in the east channel, and four in the lagoon. How on earth can thirteen beavers make a living in such a crowded area? It's not as if park visitors were feeding them as they do the huge flocks of mallard ducks and Canada geese in the lagoon. Beavers are nocturnal or crepuscular, so most people don't even know they're in the park. All the park trees are wrapped with chicken wire, so the only food has to come from the private landowners on the other side of the channel, whose treed lots must be less treed by now.

MOWING THE YARD WITH GOPHERS

1991-10-3

I live about 15 km from Bowness Park, down in south-west Calgary by the army base. My yard is not a well manicured showpiece; when I get home from work, the last thing I want to think about is mowing the yard. I mow just often enough to keep the Weed Inspector away.

[Speaking of which, I must be the only person who, at one time or another (but never simultaneously), has been a Weed Inspector, a Weed Control Foreman (who enforces the Weed Inspector's notices), and a homeowner who has received a Notice to Control Weeds.]

Across the street from my house is a large open field which is relict virgin prairie, never developed in spite of the fact that it is well in the centre of Calgary. Citellus richardsoni, aka Richardson's ground squirrel, aka gopher, is abundant in this field. In 1990, one of them crossed the street and dug a burrow in my yard. I drowned it out by flooding the burrow with a garden hose. This year, another one dug a burrow under a maple, and in a change of heart I let it be. The only thing I did was rake out the mound it had thrown up at the burrow's entrance, but this didn't seem to bother it. A second gopher set up residence under a spruce tree nearby. This summer I watched them as they went about their business, which was mostly stuffing their faces with grass. They made runways through the tall grass, and even after I mowed the lawn, they would still follow the runways.

Lots of tree squirrels in my neighbourhood as well. I use both species of creatures as living garbage disposals. Any leftover food from my meals is tossed out onto the lawn. What the squirrels and gophers won't take, the magpies and English sparrows will. It is all very ecological.

WHMIS AND TDG: LIFE WITH ACRONYMS

1991-9-30

Before being promoted to District Foreman, I was a Pest Control Foreman. (And whenever someone asked me "What's the worst pest you deal with?", I always replied "Humans". That always got a laugh, but I always said it seriously. Pest control is easy; dealing with humans is not. 95% of my problems in Pest Control had absolutely nothing to do with technical matters such as identifying the pest or deciding how to control it. The problems were bureaucratic paperwork, hysterical taxpayers insisting that I saturate the neighbourhood with chemicals because they saw a wasp buzzing about, hysterical taxpayers insisting that their baby was poisoned by us because it had got the flu at the same time we sprayed a park five kilometres away.)

Even though I no longer directly supervise Pest Control, I'm still on the committee responsible, the only non-P.C.F. there. My forte is the ability to check scientific journals at the University library and run off copies for the rest of the committee, keeping them informed about new advances in pest control.

At one time, anyone with a pickup truck, backpack sprayer, and an answering machine could put a magnetic sign on the door of the truck and call themselves professional pest control workers. Too many of them goofed up and sprayed herbicide on shrubs to control aphids or some other such stupidity, and as a result, all those earning a living in pest control must now write an exam and get a provincial pesticide applicator's licence. So, along with my B.Sc. in Horticulture and my Journeyman Landscape Gardener Certificate, I got my Pesticide Applicator's Licence.

Too many people put chemicals in unmarked containers, or had an accident and didn't know how to handle it because they had never been trained properly. Legislation was again brought in, this time for Workplace Hazardous Mat-

erials Information System (WHMIS). This one I ended up helping to teach.

Today I wrote my test for the Transport of Dangerous Goods certificate. I'll know the results in a few weeks but I figure that I passed. Some of my co-workers were a bit psyched out over this exam; they were under the impression that when they graduated from high school they wouldn't have to write any more exams.

Coming in the legislative pipeline is the Hazardous Materials certificate, if rumour is correct. There already are strict laws in Alberta re: hazmats, but the people handling such stuff only need their TDG certificates, and only if they are moving the stuff off the workplace. Right now, there are an awful lot of Grade 9 dropouts driving trucks filled with chemicals.

A lot of paperwork is involved in WHMIS, TDG, and the hazmats. It gets worse every year, because there is always someone who was in a hurry and had an accident that made the headlines. Each accident increases the public outrage, which pressures politicians to Do Something. That Something is usually legislation, be it good or bad. Whenever I hear a pest control worker grumbling about all that bureaucratic nonsense, I tell him to go look in the mirror if he wants to see who is responsible for the nonsense being enacted.

AS GOES DEUTSCHLAND, SO GOES SUOMI?

1991-10-3

Just a random thought here. If Germany can be reunited, what about Finland? My mother's family is Finnish, and at a family gathering last week we were wondering what the odds would be of getting back the lands Russia took away from Finland during WW2.

Not that it has any value, but those wishing to write the definitive history of Canadian SF are reminded that on April 19, 1867, Jules Verne crossed into Canada for one hour in order to admire the view of Niagara Falls. I have no report of anything he might have said.

And it was on November 14, 1606, that the first theatrical performance was staged in Canada, when the fantasy play "The Theatre of Neptune" was given before a Port Royal, Nova Scotia, audience. Sadly, the script has not been preserved, which may be just as well since the play was performed at sea on boats greeting a new governor to the colony. I have no report of anything he might have said upon being greeted in such a manner.

MOWING THE TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

1991-10-3

Coming into Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway out of the west from the Rocky Mountains, you will see, just past Canada Olympic Park, two large 'Welcome to Calgary' signs, one being in French. There are flower planters in front of each sign which we plant with red pelargoniums. This spring, as soon as the crew left after putting in the flowers, tourists began stopping to take pictures of themselves standing in front of the signs.

During the summer, the ditches are cut with flail mowers. We also cut the area in front of the Olympic Park, which is where the ski jumps, bobsleigh runs, and museum are. The Park dominates the skyline in northwest Calgary, and the top floors of the ski jump are popular with wedding receptions or awards banquets. I really must go have a look at the museum Real Soon Now, especially since I was a volunteer at the 1988 games and can get in free. Real Soon Now.

The Olympic Park overlooks the Bowness district, although you can't see the ski jumps from most of Bowness because of the urban forest. Few people use the Olympic Park; their big attraction this summer was bungee jumping (\$89 per jump plus GST).

We mow freeways such as Trans-Canada with flail mowers. A flail is a long roller with knives attached all around. The knives are loosely hinged; as the roller spins at high speed, the knives stand straight from centrifugal force and cut the grass. The private contractors use a single flail mounted behind the tractor, but Parks uses interstaters, which are triple flail units (one on the back and one wing flail on each side which folds up or down as required.) The interstaters cut a ten-metre wide strip at a time. We are the only ones who use them. Contractors cannot justify the cost of these machines because their customers don't have such huge areas to cut. My district has about 200 hectares of mowing to be done, both parks and freeway boulevards. What the big machines don't get is done by small ride-on mowers, and what they miss is cut by labourers with weed eaters or lawnmowers.

It takes about two weeks to cut my section of Trans-Canada, which goes from city limits to Shouldice Park for about ten kilometres. Much of it is steep slope or rough area. An interstater is an impressive sight as it rumbles along with its flails fully spread.

ART CREDIT

The cover of this ish was done by somebody named Gordon, whether first or last name I don't know. He drew it for a poster advertising a Calgary rock band known as Alchemy. I've never heard them play, but they use the best telephone poles in town for their posters, from whence this guitar picker came.

FROM: Dale Speirs
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CANADA, T2P 2E7

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- ___ You contributed (this ish).
- ___ You contributed (next ish).
- ___ We trade.
- ___ We should trade. Interested?
- ___ You sent money. Thanks.
- ___ How about a letter of comment?
- ___ This is the last issue you'll receive unless you Do Something.

TO: