

WeberWoman's Wrevenge

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Weberwoman's Wrevenge 51

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Aussiecon Three

The 57th World Science Fiction Convention

Thursday 2 September thru Monday 6 September 1999

Melbourne, Australia

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PO Box 266, Prospect Heights, IL 60070-0266, USA

Guests of Honour

Gregory Benford

George Turner (in memoriam)

Bruce Gillespie

This fanzine supports the Toronto in 2003 WorldCon bid!
(Eric Lindsay and I are Australian agents)

Cape York Trip

In September 1996 I took a 15-day 4WD camping tour of the Cape York Peninsula.

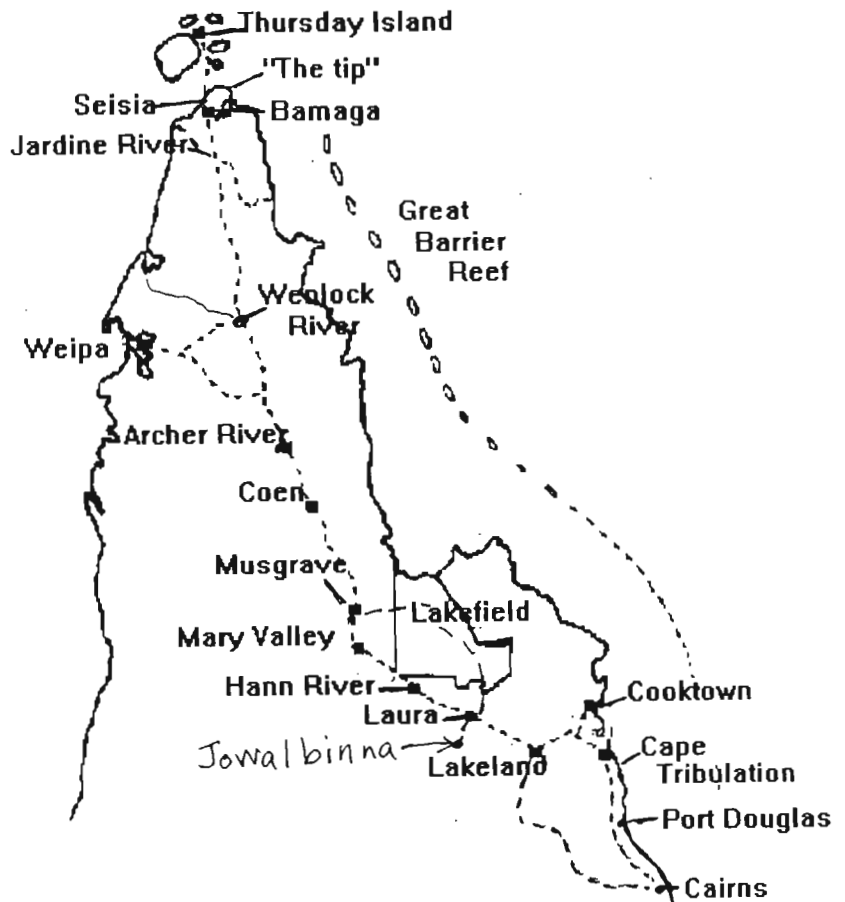
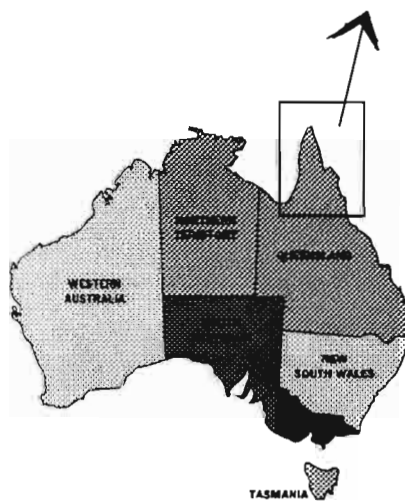
The trip started in Cairns, early on Saturday, 31 August. I flew to Cairns a couple days before, because I wanted to do some other things while I was there.

The flight from Sydney arrived in mid-afternoon, and I took a taxi to my hotel, a pleasant bed-and-breakfast place only a couple of blocks from the new casino. It was also only a block from the cheap (but good) eateries Eric and I had found on our last trip.

After dropping off my bags, I set out to the wharf, to organise a trip to the Tjapukai Aboriginal Culture Park for Friday, then wandered about re-acquainting myself with the shops and arcades. I do enjoy that part of Cairns.

Tjapukai

Tjapukai turned out to be quite impressive. The local Aboriginal people had developed a very successful dance theatre in a town on the Atherton Tablelands above Cairns, and only in July had moved to a new "culture park" which they had built a few miles from the city, next to the lower terminus of the "skyway" that takes people on a skilift-gondola up the mountainside.



This group has put considerable effort into preserving and reviving their cultural heritage, language, and so on. The culture park features 2 indoor theatres, an outdoor dance stage, and small shelters featuring bush foods, didgeridoo making, spear and boomerang throwing, etc. The outdoor stuff was fairly standard, though well-done tourist stuff, but I was most impressed with the indoor theatres.

One theatre showed a film of the impact of white immigration on the local indigenous people. It was partly taken from old still photos and partly done in reenactment.

In the second theatre, two narrators (a man and a woman) told the group's dreamtime story, while others reenacted parts of it onstage. The impressive part was the laser and hologram show that was interwoven with the acting.

The narration in both theatres was in the group's own language. Earphones provided translations in a choice of 6 or more European and other languages.

After watching the outdoor dancing, I chatted for while with some of the dancers (all teenagers or young adults), then munched an emuburger with various condiments and wandered off to the didgeridoo demonstration. After explaining how to find a suitable tree and clean it out, the demonstrator said, "if you live in the city and can't get out to find yourself a tree, just go down to the hardware store and pick up a length of PVC pipe" (the stuff that's used for kitchen or bathroom plumbing). He then pulled out this 2-metre length of white plastic pipe and proceeded to play it. Sounded not all that different from the "real thing". Cracked me up.

That evening, back in town, I discovered that a restaurant I'd previously avoided because of its cost had a special if you ate before 6 PM: 30% off your food bill. Since I normally prefer to eat early anyway, I popped in and had a delicious dinner of "bugs" (a type of crayfish).

The trip begins

I was picked up by the tour driver at 7:15 AM outside the hotel. There were only five passengers on the tour, plus the driver, in a Toyota LandCruiser that seats eight people. A couple from Melbourne (mid-30's in age), Greg a salesman for a biotechnology company, Chris a PhD candidate in microbiology; Gary, a male computer jock (50-ish) from Wollongong, who works for the Department of Education and apparently does much the same sort of work as Eric; and a young Swiss woman, Yvonne, who was 4 months into a 6-month tour of Australia. She only went one way, being replaced by a Bruce, 45-year-old builder from Gosford.

I found the other people quite pleasant, though the men's conversation (not surprisingly) tended to be boring and occasionally tedious, given that I am not interested in any of the varieties of Australian football, nor any other sport. Bruce (the builder) was particularly tedious, as he rarely shut up except when asleep, and he was the biggest wanker I've had the misfortune to listen to in a long time. He's been everywhere, done everything, knows lots of famous people (and has worked on their houses, or coached their children in sport), and everything we saw or did reminded him of something that he had to tell us about, in great detail, with many digressions, and vast amounts of name-dropping. A fascinating performance for a few minutes each day, but otherwise a bit much. How I managed to get through 8 days with him without telling him to shut up, is beyond me.

But I get ahead of myself. After picking up the passengers, the driver collected the trailer with food supplies, tents and other camping gear and we set off up the highway to the Atherton Tablelands. We stopped at Split Rock to look at some Aboriginal rock paintings (in reasonably good condition), then on to the Quinkan pub for a drink. This old place has a row of huge mango trees out front, with tables and chairs in the shade beneath. Quite pleasant.

Then on to Mary Valley for our first night's camp outside a private homestead. Like many of the houses in this tropical country, most of it has no walls, only thick posts holding up a tin roof over a concrete floor. The kitchen is delineated by half-walls of cupboards and appliances. The resident (white) family served us a huge, tasty (but rather overcooked) meal.

At dusk we could clearly see a huge colony of flying foxes (otherwise known as fruit bats) setting off for their night's foraging. In the morning, anyone up at dawn (as I tend to be) could see them returning to their roosts in the trees somewhere nearby.

The toilets and showers at this camp were in tin sheds, but there was hot water. I forget if there were electric lights in the facilities, but if

so, they were turned off early (being run off a noisy generator). Many such damp shower areas are home to little green frogs; this one had small cane toads. Small cane toads are kinda cute, unlike the big ones.

We have individual tents, the igloo-shaped ones with the poles on the outside, quite easy to put up and take down. The insect screens do a good job against the mosquitoes as well as flies. We had dense foam mattresses, quite comfortable, to lie on. I had my own sleeping bag, but (as expected) mostly slept on it, not in it, because of the warm nights.

Mary Valley was once a telegraph station on the line that ran up Cape York (now long superseded by wireless telecommunications). Its fences are constructed almost entirely of recycled steel telegraph poles.

Our lunch spot at the Coen River.



On to Archer River

Sunday we drove through the bush to a river where we did some crocodile-spotting (we saw lots of eyes and nostrils sticking above the water, but no crocs out sunning themselves), passed through Musgrave (another former telegraph station, now a roadhouse and camping spot with an airstrip), where we stopped for morning tea. At that point I first began to realise that there is a *lot* of tourist traffic on the Cape York road.

We ate lunch at a pleasant spot on a riverbank near Coen, which is actually a small town. We swam in the river, which boasted a rope hanging from a tree over a deep spot, so the adventurous could swing out, let go and plunge in. In fact, we swam in almost every river we crossed, except a couple of very muddy ones. Hot, sweaty driving (the air conditioning in the LandCruiser didn't penetrate into the back real well) was punctuated with quick dips in a river, then back into the vehicle dripping wet, where the evaporation as our clothes dried helped to cool us off.

Overnight was at Archer River, which has a roadhouse, some motel rooms, and a large camping area. The river was quite low at that time of year, so one had to walk a ways down the road to get to the water.

Broken radiator

Monday's excitement was a broken radiator. We had passed the turnoff to Weipa (a large mine on the west coast of the Cape) and the turnoff for the road that bypassed the worst of the old Overland Telegraph Road, and had continued up the old road.

At my request, we had stopped to take some photos. At that point, by coincidence (though I got teased about it for days) the radiator sprung a major leak and water poured out. After wandering about inspecting termite mounds and various plant life, we sat in the shade of the trailer (there wasn't much in the way of natural shade at that point) and waited for the radiator to cool down enough for the driver to attempt to

fix it. Which he eventually did. At that point we discovered (to the passengers' disgust) that the vehicle wasn't carrying enough spare water to fill the radiator again. So out came the ice from the coolers, and all our drinking water... fortunately about this time another tour vehicle — only the third vehicle we'd seen in two hours (so much for lots of traffic; everybody else must have taken the bypass road) — came along and gave us some water.

Only a few kilometers further on we crossed a river and were able to fill up every available container with water. Soon we reached some of the famous river crossings, including Gunshot Creek.

It's not that the old road is so bad (though there are places one could bog down in the sand), but it makes some quite dramatic river crossings, going down and up steep, muddy banks and fording the water. Many vehicles have to be winched out of the mud. In September the water level was low, but some of the banks were pretty chewed up.

Crossing Gunshot Creek.



We got through okay and arrived at our intended camp at Elliot Falls just before sundown and had time for a dip in the delightful river before it got too dark.

A bit of juvenile humour on the road: because it followed the natural contours of the land, there were a lot of "dips", each carefully marked with a sign. Many of these signs had been altered to read "onion dip", "salmon dip", "skinny dip", "sheep dip" and so on. The driver declined to stop to let us add our own witticisms to the unmarked signs.

We cross the Jardine

The Jardine River is the last big river before the tip of the Cape. It used to be a major problem for tourists, as it is deeper and wider than the other rivers and often could not be crossed at all, or only with considerable difficulty.

These days there is a ferry. North of the Jardine is Aboriginal land, which one must have a permit to enter. The permit includes the cost of the ferry crossing (both ways).

On Tuesday we crossed the river and went on through the town of Bamaga (inhabited mostly by the descendants of Torres Straits Islanders displaced to the mainland during WWII) to our campsite on the beach at Umagico on the western side of the Cape.

After a relaxed afternoon (and much laundry-washing), we went out on a fishing boat for a cruise around some nearby islands. I turned a bit green, being out of practice at this. We also didn't catch any fish, and the driver burnt the dinner we did cook. Not the best day. Later everybody except Yvonne and I went into town to the Aboriginal "canteen" (pub) for a bit of carousing.

I make it to the tip

On Wednesday we drove as close as one can get to the tip of Cape York, then walked about a kilometre over rocky, uneven ground (and up and down rocky hills) to the tip itself. My right knee had been giving me trouble all trip, and on this hike I wasn't sure I was going to make it back, but I did. The track provided some spectacular views, and the rocky tip itself is pretty impressive.



Jean at the tip ↑

We then drove to Somerset, once a provincial (white) government centre, abandoned after too many raids by Aborigines; one of the few times the indigenous people won. The government centre was moved to Thursday Island, where it remains today.

There's a nice beach there, with some rock carvings some distance down past a lot of mangrove and rocks. My knee wasn't up to climbing over rocks, so I sat in the shade of the mangroves and read a book while the others made the trek.

Thursday Island

I'm not sure if this was a coincidence or not, but this was the day we visited Thursday Island. We took a bus tour of the historic sites, including some impressive anti-aircraft gun emplacements from WWII. TI (as it's called) has a hospital and other government facilities, mainly to cater for the Torres Strait islands that are part of

Jardine River Ferry.



Australia. The views of other islands from the heights are excellent.

The airstrip for TI is actually on another island, and one must take a ferry from one to the other. Our driver left us here and was replaced by Gary, the tour company's owner, who would be our driver on the way back to Cairns.

Bush camping

After another leisurely morning on the beach, we set off, stopping at the wreck of a WWII DC3 (which had missed the runway when attempting to land), then turning off the road to go on a very sandy track out to a camping spot near the mouth of the Jardine River.

The river is quite wide and shallow at this point, and we were warned not to swim except when the tide was running strongly out, and then only if someone was watching, because of the threat of saltwater crocodiles.

My notes say that Gary believes in more vegetables with meals than Andy, our first driver, did. As a person who likes more than potatoes with my meat, I appreciated this.



Fishing and other sports

On Saturday the blokes went barramunda fishing in a hired boat. They didn't catch any barra, but they came back with more of some tasty fish than we could all eat. Chris and I decided to walk along the beach and generally goof off.

↑ Jardine R. camp

We were camped on both sides of a track that led to other campsites, strung out along the (sand) cliff top, so we tended to get some traffic during the early and late parts of the day. Everybody passing through would stop and exchange news about good fishing spots, places to avoid on the track because of the probability of getting bogged in the sand, mechanical problems with vehicles, and so on.

This spot, being a bush camp, had no showers and only pit toilets. So one washed in the river and kept an eye out for crocodiles.

More radiator trouble

We were up and on the road early, stopping at another WWII site on the coast, which had concrete bunkers (the anti-aircraft guns long since removed), a large radar installation (much rusted), the pilings of a long pier, and a cleared area where supplies were landed.

The whole Cape is full of old war relics, and many of the communities are linked to the rest of the world by boat, 4WD over a long dirt track, and an airstrip. (These airstrips are rumoured to be used quite a bit by drug-runners, too.)

We then headed south, crossing the Jardine at the ferry. A few

Campsite at Umazico.



Elliott Falls



was taking the boat back). We shared our leftover food with him, to his obvious delight. He was especially happy to get fresh salad, since he couldn't carry much except dried food with him. A day or so later we met another New Zealander on a bicycle and gave him some food too.

Driving down the river bed

Monday, 9 September. We left Bamaga around noon, after fixing the vehicle and doing some shopping (mainly replenishing the beer supply). Back across the Jardine River ferry. Stopped at Fruit Bat Falls for a refreshing dip in the river. When we reached Bertie Creek, the driver turned right and drove up the creek bed for about a kilometre to a secluded camping spot. The river bed was stone, and surprisingly smooth. The water level was well up the wheels but didn't flood into the passenger section.

We haven't seen much wildlife on this trip, even at dawn and dusk when one might spot the occasional kangaroo. There's been some birds, though not a great variety.

Lakeland Park ↓

We then headed south, crossing the Jardine at the ferry. A few kilometres further on, the radiator warning light came on and we discovered that the hole had opened up again. (I earlier left out a long boring bit about the alleged repair of this thing while we tourists were on Thursday Island, and the decision not to fly in a replacement radiator.)

We had enough water this time to refill it, but Gary decided to turn back to Bamaga for repairs, as that town was a lot closer than the next place south which could do that sort of work. This was a slow, tedious trip, involving stops every few km to pour more water into the radiator.

This time we camped at a much less pleasant (and more crowded) campground in the town of Seisia, near the Thursday Island ferry wharf. We shared a kitchen shelter with a young man from New Zealand who had ridden a bicycle from Cairns (he





Quinkan art

and Lakefield. We stopped at several lagoons to look at birds, and saw wallabies, emus and a dingo pup. This area is much less dry than the rest of the Cape at this season, and was the only spot where we saw much bird or mammal life. We camped somewhere in the park.

← **Jowalbinna**

Thursday, 12 September. After a detour into Laura for more beer, a short drive took us to Jowalbinna Homestead, the home of Percy Tresize, a well-known artist. He was in Cairns that day, receiving an Order of Australia award, so we missed meeting him in person.

His home is quite impressive. The peaked corrugated-metal roof is held up by tall timber posts the thickness of telephone poles. The exterior walls are made up mainly of louvers which can be opened to let in every bit of breeze, and they don't quite meet the roof, which overhangs them to form wide verandahs on all sides. The only interior walls are around the bathroom. Other "walls" are either curtains or various pieces of furniture that delineate "rooms". Gives a whole new meaning to the term "open plan". It's very practical for the climate, but it must be rather exciting in a cyclone. And utterly without security, obviously not a concern. (Another artist, Mary, was

Back to Archer River

Tuesday, 10 September. Because of losing a day getting the radiator fixed (or replaced; I'm not sure which), we skipped a side trip to the mining town of Weipa. I didn't mind this at all. I had expected us to take the bypass road past the difficult river crossings, but we went down the old road again. Possibly this was for Bruce's benefit, as he hadn't been on the trip up. Whatever the reason, I didn't mind this either.

We ate lunch by the Wenlock River, then went on to Archer River for the night.

Lakefield National Park

Wednesday, 11 September. Back through Coen and Musgrave, then off to the east into Lakefield National Park, which was formed from 3 cattle stations: Bizant, Laura

Coen - service station & store



in residence, keeping an eye on the place and on a dingo bitch with pups.)

We camped a few kilometres down the road at a camping area run by Percy's son Steve, who led us on an exhausting walk up a steep escarpment to view some excellent examples of Quinkan Aboriginal rock paintings. The views from the trail were impressive, too. My knee again almost gave out completely on me, and I would have really slowed down the others, had anybody except our guide bothered to pay any attention.

Cooktown

Friday, 13 September. Drove to Cooktown, diverting to The Red Lion Inn, a leftover from the Palmer River Gold Rush last century.

Cooktown is a reasonably-sized town, which has suffered from lack of tourism due to the difficulty of getting there (only recently has the road become passable for non-4WD vehicles, though it's also accessible by sea and air). It's a beautiful spot, and the view from a high hill in town, looking over the winding Endeavour River, is impressive.

We dressed up to eat in the town's best restaurant, and had a delicious seafood meal. Most of the others went pub-crawling afterwards, but I went back to the campground and turned in early.

The Bloomfield Track

Saturday, 14 September. Leaving Cooktown, we headed south along the coast past Bloomfield, then down the infamous Bloomfield Track to Cape Tribulation. The Track was strongly opposed by conservationists in the mid-80s, with people chaining themselves to trees, lying in front of bulldozers, and getting lots of media coverage. They eventually lost the battle and the road went through. It's a bit of a mess, with the dust from the road coating all the visible vegetation in some spots, but how much damage has been caused beyond the obvious, I don't know.

From Cape Tribulation on south, the road is generally passable by ordinary vehicles (I've done it in a

rental car, before I discovered that the rental car companies don't allow it), having been significantly upgraded around the same time that the track went in. Hence Cape Trib is over-run with tourists. It's a beautiful spot, and has a well-designed educational boardwalk through the mangroves.

Then across the Daintree River on the ferry, a quick rip around Port Douglas (the old part of which I really like), and on down the beautiful coast and back to Cairns.

Cairns Casino

Sunday, 15 September. I had been unable to get a seat on a flight before late afternoon, so I had plenty of time after checking out of the hotel to wander around some more. I discovered that the Cairns Casino was having an Open Day, in an attempt to lure some of the local citizens into gambling, I assume.

So I wandered along, in the interests of comparing it to Las Vegas casinos. While there I took the opportunity to practice what I could

remember of the blackjack lessons that Linda Bushyager had given me, and I did quite well. This was, however, at the "practice" tables so I didn't actually win any money.

Then I wandered about as much of the gaming floors as I could see, which was two levels. It was generally as gaudy as Vegas, but not as noisy as they didn't seem to have many customers. (The place is not doing at all well financially, I have since read.) I didn't see the "interior rainforest" that I'd seen in photos, so I assume that's on a higher level, that one is only allowed into if one is wagering rather more money than I ever would.

An interesting note on which to end the trip, and quite a contrast to tent camping!

View of Endeavour River, Cooktown



Diary notes

Big news #1 - new eyes!

Well, not quite, but I have had laser surgery to correct my vision. The latest type of surgery is suitable for people of my age and/or my degree of nearsightedness. The left eye was done on March 27 and the right eye on April 10. The procedure is fairly expensive (A\$2,300 per eye) and is not covered by any health insurance in Australia.

The good news is that the surgery was even more successful than expected. However, my sight is still settling down and I'm getting a lot of double vision. This doesn't affect my distance vision (which is quite good now) but makes reading an adventure. The ophthalmologist says it could be several months before it's completely settled down. This is because of the large amount of correction I needed. Someone with less bad vision would have required a less serious operation and their vision would sort itself out afterwards much more quickly. I will probably still need reading glasses for close work, but that's to be expected in someone of my age.

Although both eyes can be done on the same day, mine were done two weeks apart. Just as well, as it took nearly two weeks for me to be able to see reasonably well out of the first eye. People with lesser corrections recover more quickly.

I was told to expect "discomfort" for around 24 hours after surgery. What I experienced was *pain*. The panadol-plus-codeine tablets were barely adequate to deal with it. After the first night, however, I was pretty much okay.

Ah, technology! I never believed my eyes could be fixed. It's such an amazing change. I'm now ready to believe in almost anything. Maybe I *will* live long enough (and have enough money) to take a trip into space. Who knows?

Somewhere in this issue should be some information from the laser surgery brochure.

Big news #2 - we're moving!

We're not moving immediately, but we're seriously getting ready. After years of saying "I've got to get out of Sydney," Eric and I are buying an investment unit in Airlie Beach, Queensland (just north of Mackay).

We'll rent it out for a year or so until we can get rid of two houses' worth of junk and sell both houses, then it's farewell (and good riddance) to the big city. More details soon.

Travels

As if all that weren't enough, we're doing our usual travelling.

In addition to the Cape York trip (covered elsewhere in this issue), Eric and I went to the USA once again in November 1996 (Las Vegas for Comdex, then Seattle and Thanks giving with my parents, plus a short stop in the San Francisco Bay Area).

In January this year I took advantage of cheap domestic airfares to go to Adelaide for 6 days to visit my friend Joanne (with whom I worked in Canberra). I had a great time there, and the weather was mostly pleasant though sometimes warm. While there I visited John Foyster and Yvonne Rousseau, Roman Orszanski and Dianne de Bellis.

In May I was off to this year's STC (Society for Technical Communication) conference, held in Toronto. While there, I finally met various correspondents, including Lloyd & Yvonne Penney and Mike & Susan Glicksohn. After the conference, I traveled around for a bit in the area, but my eyes were annoying me sufficiently (mostly the double vision) that I came home early from the trip. Still, I had a good time, including a dinner cruise in the Thousand Islands and a tour of Ottawa, courtesy of some internet friends first met on this trip.

Then in June Eric and I were off to Mackay, Queensland to visit Leanne Frahm and look at some investment properties in the area. As you can see, we were successful.

A death in the family

Eric's mother died on 17 January after collapsed on Monday the 13th at a bus stop near her house and being taken by ambulance to the hospital. She was 83.

Eric's mother's cat Tinka has settled in well at my place, after the usual few days of hiding under the furniture, and I have discovered that I'd forgotten how energetic a young cat can be!

Tinka is a desexed female, about 4 years old, black with brown/red underfur and no markings. Carole Nomarhas says she is part Angora, then had to assure Eric that cats as well as goats are known as Angora.

Tinka can't go with us to Queensland, so if any Australian residents would like a lovely, affectionate cat, please let us know!

Work stuff

I've been really busy most of this year on a series of jobs, after last year's drought. Meanwhile I've bought a new computer and a bunch of software, and am frantically learning lots of new stuff to help me in putting my editing business on the internet. More news as that develops.

The new computer, for you techie fans, is a Pentium 166, 32 MB RAM, 2.1 GB hard disk, 17" monitor, Windows 95 — in other words, a fairly "entry level" machine these days. I've put Office 97 on it as well as a bunch of other stuff I've been collecting.

While I was at it, I bought a new corner desk with adjustable keyboard, to replace the door-on-top-of-two-filing cabinets that I've been using for over ten years. Nice!

Giant garage sale

As part of the kipple-reduction efforts, Eric and I are selling books, computers, darkroom and camera gear, our fanzine collection, book-cases, tables, a mimeo and more. Ask and we'll send you lists.

Laser vision correction

This information is taken from a brochure provided by the Sydney Refractive Surgery Centre. The hype is theirs. — JHW

Laser vision correction is an exciting development in ophthalmology which has revolutionised the management of refractive errors.

It is the safest and most accurate method of correcting myopia (short sightedness), hyperopia (long sightedness), astigmatism and a variety of corneal scarring disorders.

Over one million eyes have been treated world wide of which over 4,000 have been performed at the Sydney Refractive Surgery Centre.

Who may have laser vision correction?

1. You should have a glasses prescription that has been stable for approximately 12 months. Therefore it is preferable to be at least 18 years of age. There is no upper age limit.
2. People with low or moderate degrees of refractive error should have predictably very good results. Those with very high degrees of refractive error may still need a reduced correction for certain activities.

Photo Refractive Keratectomy (PRK)

The excimer laser is a precise device utilising the laser beam to recontour the cornea with submicron accuracy. This means that it can remove corneal tissue in a controlled manner not possible with conventional ocular microsurgery.

To correct low refractive errors the excimer laser reprofiles the corneal surface. This allows images to focus on the retina.

Laser In-Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK)

While photorefractive keratectomy (surface ablation) is accurate in low refractive errors, for the majority LASIK is preferable. An automated microkeratome allows a thin cap of corneal tissue to be lifted and the laser is applied to the corneal bed. The cap is then repositioned.

The advantages of LASIK include faster visual recovery, greater accuracy and less discomfort postoperatively.

The decision as to whether your eyes would be best treated with surface ablation or LASIK would need to be determined at your laser vision consultation.

The surgery is performed under high magnification with an operating microscope.

Local anaesthetic drops will be used to anaesthetise your eye.

The surgery takes about 15 minutes although you will need to be at the centre for approximately one hour.

After laser vision correction

Immediately following surgery a patch is placed on the operated eye.

The patch is removed the morning after surgery. Your vision will be blurred and the eye may be a little red and watery.

Some people feel more comfortable wearing sunglasses for a few days.

Vision may fluctuate for some weeks. This is a normal response.

1. No swimming for one week.
2. No eye makeup for one week.
3. Take extra care when bathing and washing your hair to avoid getting soap and water in the eye for one week.
4. Do not drive until your vision is adequate both day and night. This is usually about 4-5 days.
5. Do not use any eye drops other than those prescribed by your doctor.

Peanut allergy news

As most of you know, I have the peanut allergy. Here are two articles I've seen recently on the subject.

Peanut allergy found common and increasing

Science News, Vol. 150, September 7, 1996, p. 150.

An allergic sensitivity to peanuts may afflict 1 in 100 preschoolers—and the number of people plagued by this allergy seems to be rising, new studies indicate.

Researchers at St. Mary's Hospital in Newport, on the Isle of Wight, studied nearly all of the children born in 1989 or 1990 on this island off England's south central coast. They gave allergy tests to 981 of the children at age 4, making a special effort to include those with any family history of allergy or a previous reaction to eating peanuts (which are legumes) or tree nuts (such as cashews).

While six of the children had previously experienced a rash or other allergic symptom to peanuts, skin-prick tests demonstrated that another seven were also sensitive to the food. Tree nut sensitivity was discovered in eight of the children with peanut sensitivity and in another two children, noted M. Tariq and his colleagues in the Aug. 31 *British Medical Journal*.

Eczema—skin rashes that can be caused by many allergies—had occurred previously in 38 percent of the children who developed sensitivity to peanuts but in fewer than 10 percent of the children who didn't. "This is the only study which has shown that eczema starting in infancy is a predictor of peanut allergy in preschool children," Tariq observes, adding that the rashes probably serve as a marker for people generally predisposed to many allergies.

In a related study, Jonathan O'B. Hourihane and his colleagues at the University of Southampton in England used questionnaires to probe the incidence of allergy in the

families of 622 persons with reported peanut allergies. Their findings, reported in the same issue of the journal, indicate that the incidence of this allergy is increasing. For instance, 6.9 percent of the siblings of these allergic people were also allergic to peanuts, whereas just 1.6 percent of the parents shared the allergy. Among the grandparents for whom the researchers had data, only 0.1 percent were reported to have peanut allergies.

In fact, allergies of all types were less common in the parents' generation (including aunts and uncles) and still less common in the grandparents'. The same trend showed up when Hourihane's team interviewed and tested members of the families of 50 local individuals with peanut allergy.

The researchers observed that peanut allergy is developing at increasingly earlier ages, perhaps reflecting earlier initial exposures. -J. Raloff

Family allergies? Keep nuts away from baby

Science News, Vol. 149, May 4, 1996, page 279.

Allergies to nuts figure prominently in the growing number of potentially life-threatening sensitivities to foods. A study now suggests that much of the problem may stem from the recent trend of feeding peanut butter and other nutty foods to very young children.

What makes this practice particularly worrisome, notes Wesley Burks of Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock, is that unlike most childhood food allergies—to milk, eggs, soy or wheat, for example—allergies to peanuts (a legume) or to true nuts tend to persist into adulthood. Preventing these allergies in young children, therefore, may safeguard susceptible individuals from a lifetime of reactions.

In attempting to understand how and why these especially persistent sensitivities develop, Pamela W Ewan of the Medical Research Council Centre in Cambridge England, studied the backgrounds and allergies of all 62 nut-sensitive patients, age 11 months to 53 years, referred to her over a year.

Peanuts proved the commonest cause of nut allergy, occurring in 76 percent of the patients Ewan reports in the April 27 *British Medical Journal*. Brazil nuts, at 30 percent, provoked the second largest number of cases, followed by almonds, hazelnuts, and walnuts. Allergists had thought peanuts and true nuts are so far apart botanically that sensitivity to one would not increase the likelihood of sensitivity to the other. Ewan found, however, that among the 40 percent of patients sensitive to more than one type of nuts, most were sensitive to peanuts.

In 92 percent of the cases, nut allergies developed by age 7, and usually by age 3. Explains Hugh A. Sampson of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, "We think the maturation of the immune system and its ability [to tolerate novel substances] is not well established at a very young age.

That's why more food allergies occur in the first couple years of life."

Peanuts triggered all cases of nut allergies in children less than 12 months old and 82 percent of those in children under age 3. Ewan points out that "some children reacted to the first known exposure to peanuts, suggesting previous sensitization"—perhaps from breast milk or trace amounts of peanuts in cereals or other foods.

Finally, Ewan observed that among nut-allergy patients, almost all were allergic to other allergens, such as cat dander, pollen, or dust mites. She suggests that "peanut and nut allergy is occurring in a subpopulation with a strong propensity to develop allergies." She concludes that in families where allergies are common, keeping true nuts and peanuts from children, "possibly to the age of 7 years, would be justified."

Though such a ban "has scientific validity, I'm not sure it's practical" says John W. Yunginger of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. It's because peanut butter is so tasty and nutritious, he notes, that "most American kids get fed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich long before they're a year old."

In an editorial accompanying Ewan's study, Sampson recommends that breast-feeding mothers in families with allergies should avoid eating peanuts. He argues that these families should also keep foods with true nuts or peanuts from their children until at least age 3. Unfortunately, he concedes, it's not easy identifying which foods contain nuts. Toward that end, he calls on the medical community to "put pressure on governmental agencies" for clear labeling of any foods that contain even traces of peanuts or true nuts. - J. Raloff.



Letters

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(Reprinted from *No Theory! Facts!!* #41, an apazine in FLAP 100.)

I'm not sure malpractice suits are really as common in the U.S. as insurance companies would have us believe. According to Ralph Nader, published research shows that only a small percentage of cases of medical malpractice draw even the threat of a lawsuit, that of those that go to trial the doctors win a convincing majority, and that even when they lose or settle the sums are rarely large.

It's a pity physicians don't effectively police themselves; in an ideal world other doctors would stop their incompetent colleagues from practicing and see to it that restitution was made to damaged parties, but I hardly think that's likely, given human nature, not to mention experience. In Wilmington NC (my old hometown) there's a brain surgeon who has a history of bizarre behavior, ordering nurses to close surgical openings even when they were reluctant to do so (and they're not supposed to anyway), leaving the operating room in mid-surgery to have a snack, all sorts of other things. After a national outcry (he was a regular topic in Ann Landers' advice column), the neurosurgery board suspended him, but then lifted his suspension. Heaven forbid this strange fellow should lose his source of income...

While I don't agree with everything he says, John Newman raises some interesting points on the subject of rape. I'm dubious of those who contend that rape is always a crime of violence or power rather than of lust. (For one thing, some people are sexually aroused by dominance and power; how can you strictly separate the two?) Of course, just as theft isn't caused by greed alone; rape requires a contempt for

the victim's humanity, or some notion that the victim somehow "deserves" to be raped.

I'm also bothered when I hear the term tossed about too carelessly. A friend once told me she'd read an article in which some supposed authority on rape had been asked about a case in which a woman had told her boyfriend that she didn't want to have sex, but after a great deal of consensual hugging and kissing and caressing had been persuaded to change her mind. The authority declared that this had indeed been a case of rape. My friend maintained, and I agree, that it's useful to distinguish between seduction and rape, if only not to trivialize the latter.

Newman loses me, however, in his analysis of the Melbourne case in which a man persuaded a woman to sleep with him by fraudulently promising to get her a role in a movie. While both might have had a questionable motive, only the guy got what he was after.



I think Lan Laskowski has a point about the salesman who had all that information about Lyn. Some quasi-public information, such as credit reports and employee and medical records, should be available to some people but not to others. I don't think a sales representative should be able to look over a credit report for someone before making a sales call, even if employed by a company that had legitimate access to a credit bureau database for other purposes.

While Pamela Boal is certainly correct that testing organizations make some effort to limit cultural bias, some biases are inherent in the testing style itself. Machine-scored multiple-choice tests are particularly unreliable in that the mechanics of the testing method is very artificial and people deal with that with different degrees of success. I personally find such tests very irritating because often no complete and correct answer can be found among the choices offered. Despite this I always get astronomical scores,

even in the case of CLEP exams I took in my college years on subjects about which I knew very little, because I know how such tests are put together and I know when to give the wrong answer.

Boal says that IQ tests can be OK when used properly but neglects to say when that might be. Some applications in clinical situations and in research might be justified, but use in employment ought to be done away with, along with graphology, astrology, and similar nonsense.

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August 1996

...John Newman's letter (in *Wrevenge* 48) pushes buttons for me: on the one hand, I think he's right that some flavours of feminism look like prudery. OTO, the 'casting couch' is and always was sexual exploitation, and to do it under false pretences adds insult to injury. And I'm curious: under what statutes can you obtain legal redress from someone who misrepresents themselves in order to have sex with you?

I'm not saying that women wouldn't abuse that sort of power if they had it, but the fact is they mostly don't. I think John Newman's position would be OK if women had equal! access to the top jobs, and if their employment in movies and TV did not depend on them looking sexually attractive and available to men. But they don't and it does, so what do we do about the existing unequal! situation while we're working to change it?

George Flynn is right that American ignorance about overseas phone calls has probably increased since the breakup of AT&T; in fact, it's a proof that the education system is working at least a little that anyone can manage to make an overseas call at all from the US. The so-called system entirely defeated the sixty Australian musicians in the group I visited the States with in 1993. We ended up phoning an exchange in Sydney on a number obtained

through someone who worked for Telecom (as it then was), rather than battle with it any more. My record was an hour and a half in New York dealing with operators who kept thanking me for using their service while telling me they couldn't do diddly-squat. And they tell us a monopoly is inefficient!

Early 1997

Buck Coulson's loc in WWW 50 pushed a few buttons.

First, I think prison is just a teeny bit harder than Buck Coulson seems to think. From what he says himself, American prisons are overcrowded, and that means cells the size of some people's walk-in wardrobes are shared between two and sometimes three inmates; your burglar is therefore rubbing shoulders with, perhaps, an armed robber and a gang member on drugs. Here and in Britain it's still routine for prisoners to be locked up at the end of the day with a bucket for their plumbing, because it's common for the more violent to break toilets if they're installed. Rape is common and prison authorities are reluctant to issue condoms; drugs are common and only a few prisons will provide clean needles. There is a culture of violence; prisoners routinely beat up on each other and it's pretty easy for prison officers to be drawn into the same culture. And the system also practices routine humiliations: public strip searches, for instance. What more deterrent does he want? The lash?

Perhaps, instead of building even more prisons and putting more people in them for longer periods of time, we should admit that prison isn't a particularly good solution to the problem of repeat offending. Short prison sentences are a problem because prison turns small-time offenders into bigger-time offenders, and makes no difference to big-time offenders; if that weren't true more often than not, there wouldn't be so many repeat offenders. Perhaps we could look past punishment and revenge and start to think in terms of helping people to fix the things that

make them offend in the first place. And before anyone leaps in with the story of some five-time murderer, and what would I do with them, what I'm suggesting is that we start at the low end, with first-time and non-violent offenders — the very ones, in fact, the New Right wants to target on the "short, sharp shock" theory.

And I don't think he's being very realistic on the "What's in a name?" front, either. The political or personal issue that naming raises is not about whether the name is the object, but about who has the right to do the naming. If I changed my name tomorrow, it wouldn't mean I was a different person, though it might symbolise to me that I was intending to try to be different. But if someone else ordered me to accept a name of their choosing, I would have to be a very different person from the one I am to accept that they had a right to do that. And it would express a fundamental cultural change if it were to become the norm for one group to be able to order the naming of another group, a change in a direction that women would be familiar with and deservedly wary of.

My name is a self-chosen one, and when I first made the change there were some people who had trouble remembering. Hey, I of all people should criticise? But there were a few who persistently called me by my husband's name. Now, they'd known me ten years by my previous name, and they knew I'd changed to my current name; but when I reminded them, I got this line about "The name is not important". And finally I got around to asking "Well, if it's not important, why is it so important to you that I use my husband's name?" Because it seemed to me an odd kind of memory that substituted a name I'd never had for the one I chose. Perhaps the kind of memory that filed me under the name they thought I *should* have been using?

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December 30, 1996

Buck Coulson's statement that the US has "a huge shortage of jails and prisons" is rather croggling, since my impression was that the US has more prison space per capita than any other democratic country.

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February 1997

Re: Buck Coulson's comments—we seem to have similar problems in the Australian justice system. I don't know about the boring vacation with regular meals for inmates though. Our gaols have dedicated staff, decent food, and interesting rehabilitation programs — but the violence of other inmates is bound to make one's stay a little undesirable. And you'd be real lucky (or gifted in self defence) to leave gaol with your boots, sunglasses, virginity, or anything of value.

(Karen is a psychologist with the NSW prison system, providing staff counselling in six gaols. — JHW)

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I've moved house again. I've also got netted, and a new name. I merged my name with that of my partner, to get a new shared surname of Hilbert (formerly Joy Hibbert).

I remember reading this issue of WWW (48) but can't remember if I replied to it. I'd probably be too late now anyway.

One thing I will say, because I wouldn't have said it then (having not heard it) is that the IQ test was designed only to test those at the low end of the scale, and only to determine which legal category of stupidity they came into. So it's not really appropriate for defining tiny differences of high IQ.

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Re your remark about the change in medical practice, whereby the patient actually has some choice and input in decision-making. That's becoming common here, also; my own Dark Suspicion is that this enables more of the blame to be placed on the patient in case anything goes wrong... and I did notice that the important decisions I was allowed to make were explained in such a way that I could hardly make any other choices than the ones the Doctors obviously wanted. Well... the doctors or the Business Manager of the HMO.

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The Peruvian Congress has just voted to repeal a law dating from 1924 that allows rapists to go free if they persuade their victims to marry them. This law also allowed gang rapists to go free if just one of the group married the victim.

In Krygyzstan, it is very common for women to have to marry the man who has kidnapped them. It is an ancient practice, coming back into favour since the collapse of the Soviet Union and women have absolutely no choice in the matter. They are taken right off the street, in front of their own parents, in the disco, walking home from school, anywhere. In order to protect herself, one young college student was reported to have become a recluse just so that she won't be forced to marry a man she does not know. Another young woman, who had been educated in the US, had to pretend to be a prostitute just so that her would-be husband's family would tell him not to marry her and to return her home. Of course, because she did that, she no longer has a chance of marrying a man she does want.

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Paula Johanson's page on folk music (one concert's effect on one particular audience) was fascinating. Is the rest of this manuscript on *Modern Ritual* available anywhere?

I've recently been reading a book by the psychiatrist Anthony Storr, called *Music and the Mind*, a reflection on the origins, impact and significance of music. Unfortunately, Storr "has his head on backwards" (using the phrase as Le Guin does in *Always Coming Home*, to mean someone who thinks that Western Civilization is The One and Only True culture). He thinks "music" is Western Classical music, performed by professionals for other people to sit and listen to. Everything else is either a specialised taste [read: only subgroups of weirdos like this stuff], or Not Cultural (pop/ rock/jazz/etc.) or "primitive". I feel the opposite — that REAL music is tied in to the body's natural rhythms [heartbeat, breath, walking pace) and culturally-acquired patterns of movement. Real music is for singing along with, dancing to, working to, and playing. Real music raises power.

So what have I been doing? I'm in the British Trust for Ornithology's garden bird survey, which aims to record data about "common" garden birds — how common are they? Do the same bird species visit gardens all over the country? All year round? What do they prefer to eat? How far from "home" territory will they travel to visit a garden birdtable? Some "common" species have suffered massive declines in population over the last few years — song thrushes, for example, and skylarks. We need to know what's going wrong for them — lack of habitat? Pesticides getting into their food chain? Adverse effects of changing weather patterns? We don't know.