

THE ROCKS IN OUR HEADS

Complete

Table of Contents

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Introduction

What Rocks?

What Happened: The Boring Documentarian's Version

The Rocks in Our Heads

1991-05: Intimations

1994-03: A Theme Emerging

1997-09: Another Beautiful House

1999-05: Too Much, Too Late

2000-05: A Long Time in One Place

2002-09: Places and Friends

2002-11: Places

2004-05: The Quick and the Dead

2005-07: Ars gratia artis?

2007-05: Living on the Land

2007-09: Rocking Your Head

2009-04: Noble Experiments

2011-09: They're Everywhere, Different

2012-07: Pushed Into the Past

2013-03: Ahead of the Curve

2013-05: Way Back

2014-05: Rocks, People

2016-03: It's Not About the Stones

Cover page background: stone alignments in Carnac, Brittany. Title background: Tomba di Gigante ("Giant's tomb") Li Lolghi, Sardinia.

Dedication



At certain periods it becomes the dearest ambition of a man to keep a faithful record of his performances in a book; and he dashes at this work with an enthusiasm that imposes on him the notion that keeping a journal is the veriest pastime in the world, and the pleasantest.

But if he only lives twenty-one days, he will find out that only those rare natures that are made up of pluck, endurance, devotion to duty for duty's sake, and invincible determination may hope to venture upon so tremendous an enterprise as the keeping of a journal and not sustain a shameful defeat.

—Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*



For Loie
(A woman of rare nature)

Acknowledgements



To my Mother, who raised me to be crazy; and Father, who didn't...

To all our Travel Companions: Kinley and Paul; Elizabeth; Friedrun (and Father); Mary and Ed; Dana and Michael; Terrie, Peter and Alyssa; Hilary, Mark and Nathan; Laura and Paul; Thelma and Paul; Debra; Amy and Dave...

To all the friends we have made: Fernanda and Mario; Jimitt, Nigel and Pete G; all the Modern Antiquarians; Marie Françoise and Lucile; Antonio; Toti; Paola and Diego; Amy and Jamie; Himmet...

To everyone mentioned in these Diaries...

Thank you from the depths of our hearts for teaching us that it's not about the stones, it's about the people.



What Rocks?

A LONG TIME AGO, in the days of my misspent youth, I had the privilege of visiting friends in Europe, taking the obligatory *Europe on Five Dollars a Day* backpacking trip. After the visit, I continued traveling and landed, quite without planning, in Amsterdam. While there, I met a group of youngsters like myself: several American women, two Australian guys, a Dutch fellow who was working as a clerk in the hostel at which we were all lodging. This convivial group toured around the city and some of us went out on day trips to local countryside sights. (It's interesting to me remembering that one of those trips was to see dolmens in a field below huge electricity-generating windmills.)

Those were the waning days of the hippy era, and we all felt very liberated as footloose young adults in cosmopolitan Amsterdam. One of the sillier sights we took in was the huge flea market, where I bought a handful of glass crystals, scavenged from an old chandelier. We had a good time for a while playing at looking at sights of the old city through the crystal lenses. Until, that is, the Dutch fellow, who was our self appointed and happily accepted informal tour leader, had enough of that. He took the crystals from my hand and threw them into the canal by which we were walking.

"You don't need those rocks," he said. "Use the rocks in your head." There was a little moment of tension as our group waited to see how I might react to having my souvenirs so cavalierly disposed of. I burst out laughing, and I might—although memory serves me poorly, for reasons anyone who spent time in Amsterdam in 1972 can well imagine—even have shook his hand. His pronouncement was one of the most profound things I had ever heard.

Everyone laughed to have the tension broken and we all appreciated his wisdom. Perhaps one had to have been there?

At any rate, the marvelous ambiguity of his somewhat challenged English has stuck with me to this day. I'm sure he didn't realize, at least at the moment, that having rocks in one's head is a euphemism for stupidity. He probably meant little more than to make a clever play on "Just use your eyes," eyes being transparent, as were my crystals.

But as it turns out, his showing us those dolmens, and his pronouncement, have turned out to be the pluperfectly paradigmatic statement of a realization which has taken thirty years to grow and finally be put into words. I will be forever grateful to that young fellow, whose name I am ashamed to admit I cannot remember, for handing me the key it has taken so long to fit into a lock.

It was Loie, though, who lead me to the lock: the true realization of what having rocks in our heads really means. This project is the story of how she did it.

What Happened: The Boring Documentarian's Version

IT BEGAN with living in the city.

There is, of course, no way to decide what *begins* anything; there are so many influences, so many of which may be forgotten or overlooked that beginnings become a muddle. But for Loie and I, living in Baltimore, and wanting to get out of it now and then, is a good enough place to begin the story of how the Travel Diaries I'm calling *The Rocks in Our Heads* came to be.

Traveling, At First

I have a very long history of taking beach vacations with my family. At first Loie, who had gotten a very bad impression of the beach on a school trip, wouldn't go to the beach. I promised her that if she came to the beach with us, she would enjoy herself. Eventually she graciously agreed to spend a weekend at Bethany Beach in 1984, not too long after we met, and loved it. We were off traveling!

For a few years, beach vacations and trips to the Brandywine Valley and a beautiful bed and breakfast in Luray, Virginia were as far as we went. The main idea was to get out in the fresh air, beaching, bird watching and walking in the woods. On some of the later of these little trips, we managed to persuade friends to join us, inaugurating a tradition of travel with friends. We also took up bicycling. We were taking our bicycles out into the country to ride 'round in the fresh air.

So for some years, we were bemoaning our fate to have to drive, after a lovely week or two in the country or at the beach, or a bicycle ride, back into stifling hot and stinky Baltimore. We discussed buying a retirement property in the mountains of western Maryland, looking forward to the day we could get out of the city.

When by a strange coincidence, we both ended up working in

Westminster, kind of out in the countryside of central Maryland, we said, "Why not just move now?" We spent three years looking at houses all over central Maryland. None could compare to the first one we saw, which we felt was too expensive. And while we spent every available weekend house-hunting, bicycling and hiking fell by the way-side.

Then came our honeymoon. In 1991 I finally saw the light that had been glaring in my face for years, and asked Loie to marry me. We took a two-week trip out west, as you can read in *Intimations I, "Honeymoon"* (Northern California; Flagstaff, AZ). The first week of it was spent in northern California, visiting friends and seeing various natural wonders, scenic places and tourist sights. Our second week plunged deep into the past, visiting lots of Native American ruins.

The year of our honeymoon was also the year we moved to Lake Drive in Westminster, Maryland; into that first house we had seen. We were finally out of the city!

Traveling, For Real

Loie and I have both been long fascinated with the ancient megalithic monuments of the Americas and Europe. One of the many things that attracted me to Loie when we were first getting to know each other was her saying she wanted to visit Stonehenge. So did I, and had since childhood. How many beautiful women a guy might meet have Stonehenge on their minds?

We've all been taught that a great change occurred when prehistoric people discovered farming. Our school lessons called this change the Neolithic (New Stone Age) Revolution. It was these Neolithic peoples who erected the stones Loie and I wanted to visit.

We've been taught that this farming revolution was the beginning of our modern culture, and Loie and I have always felt that by studying these beginnings—which would include going to see Neolithic monuments and villages—we could better understand how and why our culture has become what it is. Kind of a “deep background” approach for the terminally curious.

Way back when we were still bicycling, we thought it would be fun to do a bicycle tour to see some of the old stones in Scotland. The distances between the sites seemed not *too* great for us to manage. We put together a folder of photocopied pages from guide- and coffee table books and plotted possible itineraries. The plan was for Loie to take a month off between jobs—whenever she might be able to find a more congenial and challenging position than her work at the Pratt Library System. And spend that month *Biking the Stone Age*. She did eventually change jobs, but there wasn't time off between. *Biking the Stone Age* languished.

With us, things move slowly, and we took a few more local-style trips, and had beach vacations, but over the course of five or six years gradually expanded our horizons to Hawaii (with friends), New England (visiting friends), Cancun, and back out west.

Without specifically meaning to rummage around in prehistory, we seemed to end up at stones. On our honeymoon we visited Anasazi petroglyph sites and ruins. We saw petroglyphs in Hawaii, Mayan ruins in Cancun, and more petroglyphs and ancient ruins on another trip out west. We hadn't forgotten the Stone Age, but we weren't biking it particularly.

Then, as you will read in *Driving the Stone Age I, “Highlands & Islands” (Scotland)*, we finally *did* go see the truly old stones. Driving, yes, because of course biking had always been a pipe dream, but nonetheless, the truly ancient stones.

After we went to Tuscany the next year, we got the Europe bug,

so continued to go to Italy and France and the UK, sometimes on trips that were mainly *Driving the Stone Age*, sometimes not.

The Diaries

Loie has always written diaries of our trips. Up until 2011, she wrote them out longhand in notebooks. I used to lug around a lot of 35mm film gear and took pictures. At some point Loie got a small camera and took over the photography, still on film. We made picture albums for some of our trips, with prints of the photos and little bits of Loie's written diaries laboriously typeset in my computer to intersperse with the photos.

Our 2004 trip to Wiltshire and Brittany turned up over 800 picture prints for the album. We got as far as sorting them into date-labeled envelopes, and realized we'd have to make a half-dozen albums. We gave up. For a while albums languished; the *Driving the Stone Age III, “Friends & Stones”* photos sat in a post-office tote gathering dust bunnies for years.

In 2005 Loie bought a digital camera. I began to experiment with making digital documents incorporating diary text and digital pictures to print out as albums. We knew online services could make picture albums, but none of them had templates that I, as a graphic designer, wanted in our house. And text was problematic. I wanted a real book, with all of Loie's diary and perhaps maps and so forth, not a little album with a few captions. Due to the cost of decent quality digital printing, nothing came of that, although considering the cost of film, developing and prints in the old days, a \$300 book was probably very reasonable.

In 2011, for our trip to Turkey, Loie got a notebook computer and wrote the trip diary on it. She took many hundreds of pictures.

In the meantime, I had been working on several projects involving small-scale digital publishing with interactive PDFs, and

lo-and-behold, with the purchase of an iPad, there was no longer any excuse for *not* converting, formatting, and presenting our picture albums (which pretty much no one ever had time to page through) in a handy-dandy portable format. There was no cost, other than time, and the digital albums could be formatted so that the pictures were the size of an iPad screen; much larger than the 6x4 prints we used to get, and zoomable! We could take dozens of albums to parties—without a wheelbarrow—and torture our friends with our interminable reminiscences no matter where they were.

As all of my projects do, this one expanded beyond any reasonable bounds. Once I had a few of the Travel Diaries formatted from digital materials, I thought, “Why not go back and do the old picture albums, too?” By this time, there were reasonably priced scanning services online. We could hire a transcription service to type up Loie’s handwritten trip diaries.

It turned out having handwritten notes transcribed was hideously expensive. We did hire a young woman—the daughter of a work colleague—to transcribe a few. That didn’t work well. The French and Italian language names of towns and sites flummoxed the poor girl, and although Loie’s handwriting is very neat, some abbreviations and short-hand-type symbols she uses were also problematic. I had to spend days correcting the diaries.

I knew my hunt-and-peck typing would never do for the amount of material we had to transcribe, so bought dictation software for my computer and was quickly hoist on my own petard. The same problems occurred with my dictating: every other paragraph had words I had to laboriously spell out to the software.

There were trips for which no albums had been made. So we spent days rooting through boxes and chests of old photographs looking for trip pictures, to have them scanned as well.

The scanning service turned out to be an incompetent nightmare—a harddrive failure delayed our job by months, then pictures were scanned upside down, not trimmed to proper size, just you name it, it went wrong.

But eventually dictation and scanning got done. It just took years to do!

My Essay

Traveling with Loie had been making me think. And talking with her about my murky ideas got me started on writing an essay.

The oldest version I have of it is from 2006, but I have a copy of a post I made to a web forum dated 2003 that shows the ideas Loie was making me hammer into semi-coherent form were well on their way to what you can read in this project.

Originally, the essay was supposed to explicate...I’m not sure what. The older versions are embarrassing to read. I’m pretty sure it was just an attempt to rationalize and justify my inability to accommodate to the modern world after our readings about and explorations of the old. But Loie encouraged me; seemed to have faith that the idea struggling so agonizingly slowly to be articulated was worth the time and effort to bring forth.

Loie convinced me the essay needed a less curmudgeonly, insulting title than my original, and eventually I came up with *The Rocks in Our Heads* as the new essay title.

Now there was no limit to what could be done. I thought my essay should—because it was the way the ideas had been refined—be parceled out as additions to her trip diaries. That made sense to me because that’s just the way it happened.

The Rocks in Our Heads

Back when we had been making our original photo albums, I

had been giving them trip titles, just for fun, and as we began to transcribe and format all our trips, I kept that convention.

When I began munging my essay into Loie's trip diaries, I realized that an overall title of *The Rocks in Our Heads* for the project was a bit misleading—not all our trips were Driving the Stone Age.

I came up with the Classification System of *Intimations* (trips before Driving the Stone Age started, but having some prehistoric visits), *Driving the Stone Age* proper, and *Interludes* (trips that were not strictly Driving the Stone Age, but had some influence on my essay, and a site or two thrown in) to distinguish those different types of trips in the titles of the trip diaries. That system served us well until 2016, when a new category was introduced: *Leisure*. For an explanation of that, please see the Preparation page of *Leisure I*, “*Low Country*.”

And That's That

The chapter title warned you that this was going to be a Documentarian's Explication!

And That's That

The chapter title warned you that this was going to be a Documentarian's Explication!

Any questions?

Intimations

It was on this trip that two travel principles were established. The first was what's now come to be known, decades later, as [Slow Travel](#).

You may remember that early on in this diary, Loie noted I was coming down with a cold. We had spent weeks hustling around setting up our wedding at Stronghold mansion. We left for the honeymoon the day after the wedding, pretty much wrung-out exhausted and exhilarated all at once. We packed camping gear, photo equipment, clothes for warm and cold weather, spotting scope and tripod for birding all in carry-by-handle huge old fashioned suitcases. Pilot style rolling bags hadn't yet come to be ubiquitous, and we weren't seasoned travelers.

None of this immense wealth of baggage could be left in the cars overnight. And we were changing motels or houses almost every night of the first week. The suitcases had to be hauled in every night on arrival and out every morning. We were out walking in the magnificent air every day. By the time we got to Flagstaff, I was not just exhausted, I was ready to collapse with a truly rotten cold. It had already been a wonderful trip!

Local

Our second week wasn't supposed to have been spent only in Flagstaff. We had planned to be there a few nights, then go on to Canyon de Chelly. As Loie noted, we changed our minds over dinner. Or at least, I changed my mind, and she agreed.

"I can't do it," I said. "I'm really sorry, but I can't hump this luggage in and out one more time. I'm beat."

"Oh, I hate to miss Canyon de Chelly," she said. "But there are plenty of things to see around here. Maybe if we stay put a few days you'll feel better." In the event, I did of course feel better immedi-

ately once the weight of luggage dragging was off my mind, and especially so after a few nights in the same bed. And we came to enjoy very much having a more or less stable base of operations, the extra time gained each day by not having to pack up and move, and the feeling we were getting to know a particular area. By the end of that second week, we were discussing the merits of "a week in one place" and deciding we liked it very much.

So imagine our surprise when years later, we found the Slow Travel web site advocating exactly the kind of traveling we had come to find most congenial. Obviously something was in the air.

Ancient

The second principle was the lure of ancient stuff. I can't find any notes from our honeymoon planning. There was at some point a list of things we wanted to do, and one of the most important, I think the one that decided our destination, was "venerate the world's oldest living things." (There's a reference to "venerating from afar" in Loie's diary.) Now, I ask you, who plans a honeymoon around venerating the world's oldest living things? I know that was my idea, but can't now remember what ever put it in my head. I suppose Loie and I had both, and together, always enjoyed natural wonders and, in a very low key way, the outdoors in general. We went on short trips to do day hikes, and of course you have read about our bird watching. But whence this fascination with ancient trees, extinct volcanoes, the age of the rocks in the canyons, Native American ruins and dinosaur footprints? No idea, really.

Loie was enthusiastic about finding the oldest living things: the bristlecone pines. I didn't have to beg her to include them on our itinerary. She thought that was a great idea. We were pointing out

this old stuff to each other in the guide books while deciding what to visit around Flagstaff. We'll probably never really know what led us to this interest in the old, but luckily for me, certainly, as Mrs. Hammock, our B&B hostess in the Shenandoah said, "You two are so compatible."

Among many other things, we both liked ancient stuff.



A Theme Emerging

We didn't plan beforehand to visit many ancient sites in Hawaii, it just kind of happened. After the fascinating sites in the Southwest, seeing more of such was natural. At least for us!

There were superficial similarities in the petroglyphs and stone structures between Hawaii and the southwest, but that was easily attributable to their both being simple designs. If anything, Hawaii's antiquity was even more basic.

Yet even in this paradise of weather, abundant food sources and possible ease, there were war and places of sanctuary. A sobering thought.

Whatever it might mean, antiquity continued to call us.



Another Beautiful House

The Anasazi of North America may have been influenced by the great Mesoamerican cultures such as we had seen around Cancun. There was certainly trade in feathers and semiprecious stones, and aerial photographs show what seems to be an ancient road leading from Arizona down into Mexico.

Archaeologists are still arguing about the nature of the pueblos and cliff dwellings. Some see evidence of war. Some think the pueblos were food storage facilities for regimented societies trying to hold on in the face of drought. At Mesa Verde we learned that the remains of small pit houses have been identified all over the countryside, so perhaps the pueblos weren't used primarily as dwellings.

The Anasazi seemed to be a curious mixture of artistic impulse and practicality. Much of the stonework of the houses and pueblos was very refined, far more regular and precise than was necessary for simply building walls. The pueblos were masterpieces of technical knowledge obviously in the service of *some* practical end. Yet the houses of Hovenweep were as individualistic as could be, and someone devoted time to laboriously pecking the petroglyphs found all over the countryside.

When we traveled to our American west we weren't seeing the *beginnings* of any cultural change. The pueblos and kivas were really at the end of a long history of development, abandoned for reasons still unknown. But it was fun to see them.

We were just starting to stretch our legs.



Too Much, Too Late

As we traveled through Scotland, and certainly by the time we were looking at recumbent stone circles around Kennethmont, Loie and I were sure we were too late.

“These things are too different, and too...I don’t know...too regional to be a beginning,” I said.

“That’s just what I was thinking,” said Loie. “Each area has its own style. It’s like they all found out about making stone circles, then invented their own versions.”

“Exactly! Or maybe there was a family business in each area that made a certain kind, or something. Like each area had a different Obelix.” Loie looked at me quizzically.

“You know, the menhir delivery man in the Asterix comics.”

“No, I don’t know **Obelix**,” she said. “But even still, why would one stone circle family do it one way, and another do it another way?”

“Oh, yeah, you’re right. That’s just one step back in an infinite regress. How did the differences get started?”

“They were already here,” said Loie.

“You know what this makes me think of?” I said. “That little valley, with the tops of the hills covered in fog.”

“Yes, exactly,” said Loie. We had been driving through the highlands, in what in Scotland passes for mountains, and low clouds or high fog had been shrouding the tops of the hills. And I use the word “shrouding” very deliberately. There was a dismal, closed in feeling about the little valley, with its steep slopes bare of trees, the dim light casting no shadows, the gray sky so close. We had remarked at the time it was a perfect place to get clannish, to feel cut off from whatever was beyond the laborious climb up the hillsides. Well, we had probably been making too much of it all, but the impression stuck with us.

“OK, so by the time these people started putting up stones, they already had local societies, with different ways of doing things. They were already...I don’t know...civilized?”

“Something like that, yes,” said Loie. But we agreed that even if we might not be seeing the beginnings of modernity, it was fun to explore, to meet people while exploring, and to see the old stones about which we had read for so long.



A Long Time in One Place

All of Tuscany, and especially Volterra, had a feel of being lived in for forever. There was nothing wild about it at all. It was very different from being in the Highlands, which by contrast, even though we saw monuments much more ancient than the Etruscan gate and walls, seemed to have been lived in hardly at all. The old stones of Scotland were not part of a continuing tradition. In fact, we saw evidence people were trying to destroy them.

Of course, we didn't see anyone around Volterra pushing metal sticks in the ground to ensure fertility or some such. The *Shadow of the Evening* was in a museum, a curiosity of a past that was past. But the Etruscan Gate, the satellite dishes next to stones holding down roof tiles, the marvelous ancient old houses still proudly kept up, gave a *feeling* of continuity that was intriguing. How far back could any particular aspect of modernity be traced?

Loie wants to write a book about objects that have remained mostly unchanged over thousands of years: combs, pottery, shoes. Now umbrellas have to be added. We no longer build stone circles or cairns. But we build stone churches. How much does a comb have to change before we lose the sense it's of ancient vintage?



Places and Friends

After our return from the Languedoc, I was getting a feeling we had seen something special. The village of Cambous and the little statue menhirs particularly intrigued me. I wrote an essay called “Places,” discussing the significance of the Neolithic monuments as markers of territories or sites. There’s good reason to believe marking out Places was an important function of the stones, cairns and barrows. But if the Paleolithic people were marking Places with their painted art, as seems quite possible, then the change from paint to stone was a change of method, not of purpose. Our next trip was going to show me a much deeper meaning of the rocks.

In the meantime, I took the editors of the Cadogan Guide *South of France* at their word. The front matter of the guide claimed “We would be delighted to receive any comments concerning existing entries or omissions.” It was such a quirky book, so well written and with such a depth of knowledge, Loie and Elizabeth and I felt they might be serious. As it turned out, they both were and weren’t.

Loie and I thought back over our trip, and she helped me make some notes on a few items we thought needed some updating, and plenty of praise for the guide in general. I sent these notes in an email to the editors, and particularly expressed our gratitude for the many prehistoric sites included in the “White Guide.” (We probably found as many interesting sites through it as we did through Bruno Marc’s guide.)

To my surprise, I received a very prompt reply, and from one of the authors of the guide, Dana Facaros. She thanked us for our interest, and wrote that she and her husband and coauthor, Michael Pauls, were themselves very interested in prehistoric sites.

Over the course of the next few months, we corresponded about travel and particularly, of course, Driving the Stone Age. Dana and

Mike live in the Lot River valley of France, not far from the famous Paleolithic caves of the Dordogne area. They had explored many dolmens in their area, and Dana had funny stories to tell of finding and being shown local sites. They were American expatriates who had lived in Ireland and Italy and now France. Their children had been raised abroad. Loie and I were fascinated.

We all hit it off so well over this email conversation we soon, somehow, were discussing visiting them in the Lot and being shown their favorite Places. Dana was effusive about the Paleolithic caves, Mike about local stones. We had made new friends, friends we had not yet met.



Places

Loie and I were looking for megalithic monuments—ancient stone rings and standing stones. What we found were Places.

Yes, Places with a capital “P.” Places aren’t just places, and we’ve realized that we live in a place, not a Place. Nowadays, a lot of people, especially here in America, no longer live in a Place.

We’ve been to many places in Europe and the United States visiting old stone structures: megaliths and stone rings of course, but also smaller standing stones, cairns and dolmens, pueblos and ancient villages.

Most of these old things are in fairly out of the way places, so in the course of our travels we’ve also been enjoying little towns and wildernesses. It was when we were talking about our latest trip—to southern France—that I began to get an inkling of what the old stones might mean to us. What follows is a kind of story about how things dawned on me.

The landscape in the south of France is very different from ours. Of course the plants and geology were different, but so were the human aspects. There were no suburbs! There was a bit of urban sprawl around the larger cities, and there were many small towns. But between the towns, the land was rural, with thousands of little vineyard fields; or wild. We never expected to see so much wilderness in such a small area, especially one that has been settled for over 400,000 years! At night, from our house in a tiny hill town, we could see clusters of light marking other little towns. Between these spots of light, it was dark. Totally dark, with not one speck of light marking houses or shopping centers or gas stations sprawling across the land. There weren’t any.

The prehistoric village of Cambous is a cluster of clusters of stone house foundations, much like Scara Brae in Scotland. Each cluster

had four or five long huts built with common walls, as if there were rooms hooked together. But there was no evidence that the rooms connected: each hut had its own front door, and no connecting ones. Was each of the huts a house? A room? Probably impossible to know now. The clusters of huts were close together, with only a few dozen yards of space between. The ancient people *could* have spread out. So could the modern French villagers. They didn’t back then, and they don’t today.

Today, each little village has its wine cooperative, a tiny gas station and a church with a public square. Most have a grocery and bakery. You could easily live in such a little town without ever leaving it, and without ever having to walk more than a few blocks to buy anything you needed from day to day. You might have to travel a few miles, or maybe more, to buy a new television. But you could go by bus, and have it delivered.

Every village has a name and a history. There is never any confusion as to where you are. You are in Peret, or Gignac, or Aniane. Signs mark your entry into, and your exit from, every town, on every road.* In the south of France, in Italy, and I think in Scotland as well, you are always either in a particular place, or between some.

The landscape in southern France, as in Scotland, was also dotted with ancient structures: dolmens and standing stones. None that we saw were huge, although there are some pretty big stone rings that we didn’t see. Many were so small you would never notice them tucked away in scrubby woods or standing at a crossroads looking

* This has a very practical side. The signs designate the point at which speed limits change from those of the approach road to those of in-town. But the signs don’t say so. There’s a metaphor for you.

like natural stones. Some were more obvious, but most could have taken a good team of a half dozen people more than a few days to create.

“These are signs,” Loie said. “Like billboards or signs. They say ‘Marie’s Restaurant.’”

“Or the town, sure,” I said. “Like all the signs we see going in and out of every little town.”

We didn’t realize it right away, but Loie had expressed the basic idea that would grow into this essay. Perhaps it was just that we had finally seen enough old stones and stone age villages and little towns and road signs. We might well be reading too much, or too little, into the old stones. And we hadn’t yet come to a full understanding of just what Places were, but Loie had begun: the old stones were *markers*. In retrospect, this seems kind of obvious. But of course we had, on past trips, seen big stones in rings that were called “temples” and “ritual spaces;” we had seen burial mounds; little stones arranged over graves and lots of different kinds of stones.

Finding the common thread was an important beginning. It helped that not long before we had left for France, Loie and I read a book about a new discovery in England, called Seahenge. In it, the author described his mapping of the tracks between farm fields in the Iron Age settlement near Seahenge.* He was sure the pattern of the tracks matched the pattern of earlier barrows. He concluded the Bronze Age barrows marked property divisions that were maintained into the Iron Age, and respected by the farm tracks. So, even the cairns and dolmens we were seeing might be markers, too, not just burial sites.

* See *The Rocks in Our Heads; Driving the Stone Age XII*, “Art for Something’s Sake” for our trip to Seahenge!

Property divisions were an important clue, but we hadn’t quite yet realized just *what kind* of property was being marked. We had seen the curious resemblances between the ancient village of Cambous and the modern French towns. We were reminded, too, of how the Stone Age village of Scara Brae, in Scotland, was a row of rooms or houses with common walls. We had been struck by the difference between the tight little French villages—and the similar towns we saw in Italy and Scotland, and the ancient settlements—and the sprawl of our American towns and suburbs. The stone age signs and towns; the modern towns with their signs surrounded by farms and vineyards...

For most of human history, people needed the resources of their immediate landscapes—the game, fish, plants, natural shelter; the geography and ecology—to survive. They needed to know their territory: where the ground was slippery and might spill them over the cliff; where it was easiest to come by the best resources, when it was time to gather or hunt or plant.

They needed to know how to use the resources of their landscapes: how to dress game, cook gathered plants, grind the grain they grew. They needed *skills*.

They also needed to work together, as a pretty close group, sharing their resources and their skills. Someone was best at making stone tools, and those good tools made everyone’s work easier. Someone else was the best cook. Their good cooking made everyone’s life more pleasant. The cook and the tool maker hadn’t time to go out and hunt or forage, but they needed to eat. The hunters and gatherers had to share food, and the tool maker and the cook had to share their skills.

I’d like to invent a bit of shorthand, and call this knowledge—of resources, skills and cooperation that pertain to a certain geography and ecology—Rules, to emphasize the idea that people *had* to

live by their Rules. Capital “R” Rules aren’t just “a way of life.” In ancient times, if you didn’t live by the Rules, someone would die: starve or freeze or fall off a cliff. Then you’d all have been out a cook.

The people in the forests of Europe didn’t need to know how to live thousands of miles away on a tropical island. They might, if they had known about it, have *liked* to live there. But they didn’t. They needed to pay attention to their own landscape; to live by *their* Rules that suited them to *their* territory. Thus were born Places.

Let’s remember that the original groups of Rule Makers were probably pretty thinly scattered. They didn’t need to defend territory from invaders or robbers. Marking a territory with “No Trespassing” signs doesn’t make it a Place. It’s only when people live by Rules that pertain to a certain area that what we might think of as a territory becomes a Place.

A Place is understood by the people living by Rules to be different from other parts of the countryside or the world, where those Rules *don’t* pertain.

Old Stone Age people probably had Places. They had their tracks between these Places, and I’m sure had particular trees, stones or mountain peaks they used to help recognize paths and Places. They may well have had gods or spirits that lived in the trees and stones and peaks. We can’t recognize those markers, and so, with the possible exception of the decorated caves—fascinating in their own right—we know little or nothing about the Places of the Old Stone Age.

The attraction of the New Stone Age stones, be they large or small, is that they are the first easily recognized examples of humanly created—and Marked—Places. Just like the European towns that are still—some of them after being there for thousands of years—Places. Loie and I began by looking for stones, and we found Places.

Let me digress for a moment. Please don’t think that I’m envision-

ing some golden age of eco-peace when I talk about Places. Loie and I are aware of the arguments about whether or not Stone Age people killed off the mastodons and aurochs. We know that those ancient old European towns fouled their water and piled up their garbage. People in the little French villages drive cars that pollute the air, although they don’t drive nearly as much as we do in America. (And they drive *tiny* little cars!)

No Place has ever been a Utopia. What I want to emphasize is that Rules that make Places have *some* consideration of the landscape. Rules may have been, at different times in different Places, more or less exploitative of resources, or more or less respectful. But all Rules, by definition, attempt to suit life in a Place to the landscape of that Place. That’s why it *is* a Place.

Loie and I don’t pretend we know the purpose of every ancient stone we’ve ever seen. The Ring of Brogar is magnificent, and listening to a lone bagpiper, standing between two of its towering stones, pipe the sun down a limpidly clear evening sky while the biggest full moon we’ve ever seen rose behind him was impressive, even awesome. It was easy to imagine the Ring as a sacred site. But what Brogar’s *builders* did there we don’t know. Was it a church or temple? A grange hall? An auction house? A public market? All of these, at different times of the year?

Nor do we really think that the statue menhirs of southern France were *necessarily* signs for towns or restaurants. What’s important to us is that people were taking the time and expending the effort to put up some structure—even if it was a stone no bigger than a few feet across and a few inches thick—that was not purely food-clothing-shelter functional; to Mark a Place.

Joseph Campbell (following an idea of Ananda Coomaraswamy’s) talks about *lánd-nama*. Speaking about groups of people moving to new places, he says “The new land, and all the features of the new

land, are linked back as securely as possible to the archetypes—the spiritually, psychologically and socially significant archetypes—of whatever mythological system the people carry in their hearts. And through this process the land is spiritually validated, sanctified and assimilated to the image of the destiny that is the fashioning dynamism of the people’s lives.”

Which I think is at least partially a way of saying that those people were adapting their old Rules to a new Place.

We know from reading about the societies studied by anthropologists and ethnographers that many traditional peoples have some pretty harsh and scary initiation ceremonies for young adults. These ceremonies are intended to convince the kids that they are now adults, with the responsibilities and the privileges of adulthood. It’s not clear that modern societies are necessarily good models for imagining what ancient life was like. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most traditional people were living in marginal lands that may well not have been their homelands. We can’t assume that they were living the same way their ancestors had always lived. But so much of their material culture—tools, clothes, pottery, art—seems so similar to that of Stone Age peoples that it’s difficult not to at least consider that some elements of their Rules may be holdovers from an ancient past.

After all, we have initiations today into clubs and service organizations, and high school graduations. Our modern rites are but pale imitations of those held by “primitive” peoples, but we still have them.

Learning to live by Rules has that explicit, formally taught side, but it’s probably learned as much just by growing up with them. The Rules are just the way things are.

In Europe, there are myriads of Rules for when to eat, what to eat or drink with what, how to drive, what to wear, how to greet

strangers you pass in the street or meet in a shop. And people follow them. I’m sure that if we stayed long enough in any Place, we’d get to know the people and many more of the Rules. I’m also sure that ignorance of the Rules is what has given Americans such a bad reputation abroad. It’s uncivilized to break the Rules. If you don’t greet everyone you pass in the little towns with “Bonjour, madame,” or “Buongiorno,” you’re scowled at! Uncivilized tourists—pugh—breaking the Rules Of Meeting Strangers.

But just greet someone properly, and they’re all smiles and so happy you’re visiting their town. You’ve proved that you’re a civilized person who Knows The Rules. One drawback to living in Places must certainly be xenophobia: fear of strangers. It’s a cliché that newcomers to small towns are never accepted as natives, even though it may have been their grandparents who were the true newcomers. Part of living by Rules in Places is having gone through the proper initiations to prove that you are a member of the local group; part of it is following the Rules; part of it is having a history in a Place; part of it is trusting that other people will live by the Rules. How long does it take to earn that trust?

On a superficial level, no longer than it takes to follow the Rules Of Meeting Strangers. On the deepest, trust-you-with-the-family-secrets level, perhaps generations.

This implicit, learned-by-living aspect of Rules leads us to the realization that Rules are not laws. They aren’t codified into written regulations. Rules are ways that people behave. They’re learned like language, by participating in the life of a Place. In fact, people who live in modern Places seem to consider it more civilized to break the regulations—the written laws—than to break the Rules.

Traveling to the kinds of Places we do entails a lot of driving. There aren’t any “Twelve Megalithic Monuments of Southern France In Ten Days” package tours! We’ve found that in Europe, there is very

little enforcement of traffic regulations. Hardly anyone in France or Italy or Scotland obeyed the posted legal speed limits when they were driving. But everyone obeyed the Rules For Driving, which apparently state that one drives as far to the right as possible, except when passing. This system works wonderfully well. Everyone drives the speed with which they're comfortable and traffic zips along. We've driven thousands of miles in Europe on every kind of road from multilane highways to dirt tracks and never seen an accident or a traffic jam.

For a system like this to work, everyone must obey the Rules. It takes only one left lane grogger to screw up The Rules For Driving. There certainly could be regulations—laws—that forbade left lane grogging. But how are they going to be enforced? It would take armies of police driving day and night, making traffic worse than the very occasional grogger might. Living by Rules involves a lot of self restraint, and trust in each other. But when this system works, and the trust is mutual, it works more efficiently than law enforcement ever could.

Encounters on the back roads of Europe can be hair raising for Americans. Two cars barrel toward each other at sixty miles an hour down a narrow lane in the Scottish Highlands. Even in their compact cars, there's no way these two maniacs are going to have enough room to pass each other. You grip your wheel white-knuckled as visions of flaming wreckage erupting flood your brain, when, at the last possible moment, both drivers slow, each pulls over onto a little bit of gravel shoulder and they nod as they pass. After a few such scenes, Loie coined the term Scottish Driving for such daredevil feats.

Not long ago, we were driving on a narrow road not far from where we live in Maryland. We'd been on narrower before. As Loie saw a car approach, she slowed and pulled over a bit. The other

driver came to a halt beside us, and naturally Loie stopped too, thinking perhaps he needed directions. He rolled down his window and said, "Please slow down. This is a one lane road." Apparently he didn't *trust* us, or *himself*, to negotiate the passage safely. But of course he grew up in a place of regulations and laws, not Rules. A place where no one trusts anyone to behave decently and safely; a place where you trust that police will prevent trouble by arresting trouble makers.

When America had more Places, there must have been many more Rules. There wasn't any Unwritten Code of the North. It was "of the West." You've never heard of Northern Gentlemen, only Southern. So, at least in our mythology, the West and the South had Places, with at least some Rules. I bet a lot of northern and eastern places had their Rules, except that we just don't hear about them.

But as we lose the differences in Rules that help make Places, we lose our Places, too. Our culture turns into a big mush. Of course this was supposed to happen in the great Melting Pot of America.

Our American Founding Fathers imagined a country of law, in contrast to a country of hereditary privilege. That sounds like a good idea. But they didn't imagine a place where technology had so divorced people from their Places that Rules were breaking down, and regulations were expected to replace them. Thomas Jefferson was sure that the "yeoman farmer" would always be the backbone of American society. How many yeoman farmers do you know?

When the energy needed to perform most work comes from fossil fuels and not human muscle, when a farm of tens of thousands of acres can be run by a few people, when clothes can be churned out in huge factories, when those of us privileged to live in post-industrial societies enjoy huge surpluses of food and everything else there is to have, it seems we can break the old Rules with some impunity. Hmmm.

The people who live in a Place know that they depend on each other. That's part of what it means to live by Rules, and the dependence is obvious. For our first trip to France, Loie and I rented a house in Peret, a little town of five hundred inhabitants. Each morning we walked up the steps of our street—that's all our "street" was, a broad stairway—across the village square, and bought croissants at the bake shop: a little room not ten feet by ten feet on the street level of a corner house. We were never sure whether the two ladies who ran the bake shop actually baked the bread and croissants they sold. The croissants were always displayed in a low sided box like the ones bread is delivered in.

If the ladies who run Peret's bake shop don't put out the croissants and bread one morning, no one in town can eat their breakfast according to the Rules For Eating Breakfast. If the grocer doesn't open his shop in the evening, you can't buy anything to eat for supper. Of course, many folks in Peret have cars, and could drive to another town to get their croissants or groceries. Would that be *breaking* the Rules, or *stretching* them? How far can the Rules *be* stretched?

The people in Peret depend on each other less than did the people who lived in neolithic Cambous. But they depend on each other much more so than do the people who live in Glyndon, where I grew up. The Glyndonians never expected to buy their groceries from each other.

The Glyndonians were recently up in arms at the proposal to close their post office, and merge it with Reisterstown's, the town right next to Glyndon, but literally on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. They were so upset at the thought of losing their relatively prestigious Glyndon addresses that they bought the old train station that housed the post office and now lease it to the Postal Service for a dollar a year. They went to a lot of effort and expense

to maintain their sense of living in a Place. But how *is* Glyndon different from Reisterstown? The railroad tracks divide the two; Glyndon is greener and smaller than its neighbor. Other than that, if you walk or drive across the railroad tracks from one to the other, you'd hardly know you were in a supposedly different Place.

There is a small grocery in Glyndon, but there are larger ones in Reisterstown. No one in Glyndon *depends* on the little grocery. They regularly shop elsewhere. They clubbed together to save their Post Office because it gave them a *sense* of living in a Place, and that's nice. But here's another Glyndon story...

When my family first moved to Bellview Avenue in Glyndon, we had a septic tank, and was the grass green over that old thing! Everyone in Glyndon had a septic tank, or a drain field. I can remember how, after a hard or prolonged rain, the water in the little stream across the railroad tracks got pretty smelly. It made no particular impression on us when we played in it. That's just the way it was. It didn't happen often, and no adults ever said anything about it.

We had been in Glyndon a few years when the county government offered to hook up the houses in Glyndon to sewage treatment. Most of the Glyndonians turned down the offer. At \$600 a house, it was considered by most to be too expensive. Ten years later, the federal Congress passed the Clean Air and Water Act, mandating (among other things) that all watercourses in the country must be made "fishable and swimmable" by, I think, 1990. (That goal remains to be met.) But, as part of this effort, the Environmental Protection Agency forbade all new building in the Gwynns Falls watershed until sewage treatment was installed throughout it. Guess what? The little stream across the railroad tracks turned out to be the headwaters of the Gwynns Falls. Uh oh.

The Glyndonians were then required to spend thousands of

dollars apiece to do what they could have done voluntarily for hundreds, because the people living downstream from Glyndon depended on the Glyndonians to keep the public water clean. And the Glyndonians didn't. If we in Glyndon had been living by Rules, if Glyndon had truly been a Place, we would have been paying some attention to the state of the Gwynns Falls, and no one would have needed to impose regulations.

As technology divorces skills from the resources of a Place, Rules degenerate into regulations. Regulations can be ignored, Rules cannot. Peret is still surrounded by farms and vineyards. At least some of the local produce is sold locally at the wine co-op and big local farmer's markets. Peret has a fairly solid basis for maintaining Rules. Glyndon doesn't.

Glyndon, though, is a little town that's just eccentric enough to be bucking the trend. The Glyndonians saved their Post Office, and you should see their Fourth of July Parade. The architecture of Glyndon is a mix of Victorian, ranch houses and modern colonial. The streets are still lined with trees. When the county proposed widening Central Avenue to accommodate through traffic from Reisterstown, which would have meant chopping down all the trees and shortening front yards, the Glyndonians put the kibosh on *that*. They like their town just the way it is, and to their credit they realize that they have something many other towns lack: a sense of being a Place.

Reisterstown, though, could be anywhere. Shopping malls, cookie cutter housing and chain restaurants make it indistinguishable from towns we've seen in Massachusetts, Arizona and California. The suburbanites in Phoenix, who live in a desert, are draining ancient aquifers dry to create lawns and grow trees just like those on the green east coast. That won't last long, but in the meantime they'll have destroyed a resource that may never be replenished. On

the other hand, the Stone Age peoples of Europe wiped out their big game, just the way the denizens of Phoenix are wiping out their water. The ancient Europeans went on to create an agricultural economy that, on the whole, did very nicely. It still does.

But those ancient people were still living by Rules. The Rules had to be changed, and the new Rules had to respect a new environment that became, in many ways, richer and more productive as the glaciers retreated and the climate warmed. When the suburbanites of Phoenix have no water to drink, what are they going to do?

It's not always easy to live by Rules. I never eat on any kind of schedule. If I notice that I'm hungry, I eat. This wreaks havoc with our traveling in Places. Loie has decided that she has to be in charge of scheduling when we're traveling, at least in Europe. Because if she doesn't remind me constantly that restaurants are closing in an hour, we won't get to eat. The Rule in France, and it was true in Italy and somewhat in Scotland, is that one eats lunch at noon, and supper at eight or nine. And this Rule is followed so rigorously by so many people, that restaurants close at two, and don't reopen until seven thirty. Period, the end. If I'm hungry at five, I'm out of luck. You can't break this Rule. It isn't possible. They won't even answer the door if you try to knock them up at six to make a reservation. They might answer the phone, but then again they might not. Life is much more regimented by Rules than it is by regulations.

It's another cliché that in small towns, there's no privacy. That may well be true in the Places we've visited, but I don't really know. Loie and I have never spent enough time in any of the Places of Europe to get to know the people well. I know there wasn't much privacy in Glyndon when I was young. People walked into each other's houses, calling out "Yoo hoo," and asking if the coffee was on. How much gossiping went on I don't really know. It's easy to imagine that many of the people who left Europe for America were just sick and tired

of having people poke their noses in where they weren't welcome, and saw the wide open spaces of America as an escape.

But in my youth, the Glyndonians, hanging on to Rules that were on the way out, knew when someone was in trouble. A death in the family brought help from all over town. A kitchen could fill up with casseroles and roast chickens in an afternoon.

They regularly traded things, borrowed and distributed the out-grown or no longer needed to those who did. No child in Glyndon escaped hand-me-down clothes, and parents took great pride in their thrift and helpfulness. Kids hated it.

We've seen that there's a greater sense of dependence in Places. In America we take pride in independence. In some fairly trivial ways we *are* more independent. Restaurants are open longer hours, sure, so here I can go out to eat whenever I want to. In an odd way, though, I wonder if losing our Places doesn't lead to *more* dependence.

When the people in Peret go to the co-op to buy their wine, they depend on the co-op's being there and being open and on the wine being fit to drink. Well, they know it's there; they go by it every day. They grew up knowing when it's going to be open; they don't have to think about it. And if the wine isn't fit, the people running the co-op are going to be in a lot of trouble with their friends, relations and neighbors. I bet the wine is always reasonably good.

When I go to the store to buy a bottle of wine, I'm depending on the store owner not to fob me off with something terrible, on mass marketers to not have fobbed off the store owner, and on a lot of bureaucrats and inspectors to ensure that the wine isn't poisonous or contaminated. I know, from experience, that the wine's not always good. Of course if I don't like that store, I can go to another. Or another or another, all of which are pretty much the same, their owners having been convinced by the mass marketers that I will accept what the big businesses for whom the marketers work are

selling.

In Places, you do depend more directly on your neighbors, but you can trust them. Here at home, we depend on multinational corporations, mass marketers and bureaucrats, whom I *don't* trust because they've so often offered me stuff that was...not very good.

The big businesses on which we depend are trying to make the world over into one big mush, living by regulations instead of Rules. Who benefits from this? The theory is that we all do: that if businesses are free to locate their factories where ever is cheapest, and free to ship goods to whomever will pay the most, everyone wins. The reality is that shoddy goods are manufactured in sweatshops for slave wages; food becomes plastic junk; environments all over the world are destroyed and that no one lives in a nice Place. This is not a solution to anyone's problems.

We don't need to make the world a mush to solve the problems we see around us. What we need to do is make the world a bunch of better Places.

The Quick and the Dead

The Musée des Antiquités Nationales in Saint-Germain en Laye, outside of Paris, is a funny old place. It's housed in the chateau which was the home of French royalty before Versailles. You walk a bridge over the moat to get in. The exhibits inside are simple: wall cases of artifacts. There are no fancy dioramas or multi-media presentations. Just the stuff. And what stuff! Carvings, in stone and bone and ivory, of animals and people; all of it marvelously interpretive, and obviously done by people who had spent a lot of time studying their subjects. The artists had included just the details needed to portray what looks to us like the soul of their subjects. Or if not the soul, at least the essence of the power and attractiveness of all those vitally alive animals and people. Mixed in with the realistic art pieces are small examples of the finely made tools and a few abstract designs, as well. It's beautiful stuff. Then, you turn a corner into the Neolithic room, and it's all different.

Now you're looking at crudely formed clay pots, decorated with, at most, some chevrons or patterns of dots. There are huge pieces of unadorned stone jewelry, obviously painstakingly and perfectly formed, but without any indication of life about them. There are magnificent stone axe heads, ground and polished to a fare thee well, but that's it. They're axe heads. They may be the most perfectly symmetrical and balanced axe heads you'll ever see, but they are plain as a pike.

Everything has changed. There are no representations of people, except for a few totally crude, almost unrecognizably abstract "statue menhirs."

"Are these real?" Loie said. The ones we were examining were crisply carved.

"I don't know. I can't translate the little cards. It doesn't look like

either of them say reproduction." But they certainly looked too new to be of the vintage we saw in the fields: worn absolutely smooth.

All the artifacts in the Neolithic room are obviously utilitarian: pots, axe heads, jewelry. Some of them, particularly the best axe heads, may have been too finely made to actually have been used to chop wood. But nowhere in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales Neolithic room do you see any indication of living things.

This change struck Loie and I so forcibly that we had to walk back to the Paleolithic room, and look around again. Had we gotten a wrong impression? We walked back and forth between the rooms a couple of times. The impression was still there. The Paleolithic room certainly had its share of utilitarian objects, few of them as finely made as the Neolithic room's best examples. But the Paleolithic room teemed with life, and the Neolithic room was dead as a doornail.

Whatever hands had created all those things had very obviously been guided by some completely different ways of thinking. Had people gone from being artists to being technicians, or what?

This was a puzzler. We talked it over a lot, both on the trip and after we returned home. The impression definitely stuck with us, at least until I began to look over our home library reference materials, and to google around.

"OK," I said, "There's a problem here."

"Oh, I see," said Loie.

I was showing her a web site about the bull shrines and odd murals from the great Neolithic village of Çatal Huyuck in Anatolian Turkey. The Anatolian artifacts and paintings are not "life-like." They are abstract—or perhaps just crude—representations of animals and people, but they are pictures of living things.

There are, from the Middle East, Neolithic human skulls, plastered over with clay, whose eye sockets hold seashells which look like strange staring eyes. They also are crude things, at least to our sensibilities. But seeing pictures of these skulls reminded me of the Neolithic passage grave we saw in Scotland, where skulls had been arranged along the wall, and of the burial of skulls under the “beds” at Scara Brae, the amazingly well preserved Neolithic village only miles away from the passage grave. Of course, skulls can represent death, but they are also remnants of living things. The living and dead dichotomy was beginning to get little blurred.

Perhaps the Quick and the Dead wasn't the watershed it had appeared?



Rocks on the Land

Stonehenge, and Avebury and Silbury Hill were revelations. As far as I could see, they had nothing to do with “landscape,” at least not in the sense I think of that word. It takes some imagination to reconstruct in one’s mind the actual look of Stonehenge, so much of it is tumbled down and gone, but it wasn’t all that difficult to see that when it was finished, with its three concentric rings of giant blocks of stone, there was no view out. The stones would visually overlap, leaving at best glimpses as through slits in a solid stone wall. It was giant prison of stone. In much the same way, Avebury, surrounded by its mighty ditch and earth wall, divorced you almost entirely from the surrounding “landscape.” And Brittany was more of the same, and more.

The seaside town of Carnac and the little gulf of Morbihan are a trove of stones. Immense rows go on for miles; rings, cairns and passage graves litter the landscape; the tumulus of St. Michel looms over the rows; the impossibly immense Grand Menhir lies broken and enigmatic and the magnificent passage grave of Gavrinis crowns a small island in the gulf. (When most of the monuments were built, the gulf was a fertile valley just beginning to be drowned by the rising sea.) But in spite of many attempts by archaeologists to give some significance to the placement or orientation of this bewildering mish mosh of stones, we couldn’t see or feel any relation to the land. Perhaps there may have been some to the sky. With all the rainy or overcast days Brittany enjoys, it would be hard to tell. It seemed to us the haphazard rows—in many places, even when the rows were relatively undisturbed, it was difficult to see they *are* rows—might have been monuments to occasions: did a family add a stone every year, or at a birth or death?

During our first week in Brittany, in Carnac, we shared a house

with Dana and Mike, the French Guys; Mary and Ed had stayed behind to do some more English touring. It was during a late night conversation that I introduced our “Quick and the Dead” theory to our new friends. Mike pooh poohed it.

“There’s too many things going on,” he said. “You can’t make a change like that apply everywhere. And besides, there’s that long dark Mesolithic in between.” I was disappointed. I had been so sure we were on to something, that the change in art and style signified some important change in the way people were thinking and behaving. But it turned out it was Mike who was on to something.

Our second week in Brittany was spent in the north, with Mary and Ed; our new French friends returned to their home in the Lot when we left Carnac. Although the north wasn’t as spectacular for Neolithic sites, we saw plenty of intriguing rocks and more of the abstract carvings we had seen in the south. We also saw several places where ancient stones had been incorporated into modern settings: churches built near or over them, or Christian symbols carved on them. Someone had continued to consider them significant right up to modern times.

Comes The Dawn

After we returned home, I kept mulling over all the things we had seen on all our trips. It seemed to me, especially after seeing Stonehenge, that the Neolithic people weren’t concerned with the landscape as it is, but rather as they could manipulate it. I remembered the insight Loie and I had garnered on during DtSA Part II, in the Neolithic village of Cambous: how the people had clustered their houses so closely together. We thought then that the stones, in all their various configurations, had been much more place mark-

ers, dividing the landscape, marking it as human. Stonehenge and Avebury certainly seemed to do that. So in a sense, the Neolithic stones might be about “landscape,” as in our modern art of landscaping: shaping (or marking) the land and the plants on it to some human ideal of beauty or utility. But the Neolithic concern seemed to be with the artificial, not the natural. Were we still stuck with something like the Quick and the Dead?

I was intrigued by Mike’s remark about the Mesolithic era, and did some googling about Middle Stone Age art. Lo and behold, all of the vague, unsatisfactory ideas Loie and I had been discussing seemed to fall into place.

Here’s one thing I read.

The rich art of the Paleolithic is replaced by a Mesolithic art that is quite different. Upper Paleolithic cave art depicts colored drawings and expressive features of animals which appear to come alive upon the cave walls. A full range of color is used. Mesolithic art in contrast is monotonous, is schematic; no realistic figures are present and only the color red is used. This form is also found in north Africa and the northern Mediterranean. Neolithic art is also schematic.

Then, I stumbled upon a truly amazing find, for me at least: the cone-shaped, stick footed figures of Zaraut-Kamar in Uzbekistan are truly over the top of some oddness scale. And these figures weren’t Neolithic, they were Mesolithic.

I was seeing animals and human figures galore, but as in my memories of the bull shrines and plastered skulls of the Neolithic, everything was artificial and abstract. Some of the human figures in particular were quite lively, the animals much less so. And the animals were no longer the great wild beasts, they were sheep and goats. The difference wasn’t between living and dead, it was between natural, and artificial or human. And the change took place during the Mesolithic. It didn’t happen because of the Neolithic farming

“revolution.” It happened well before farming was developed.

The difference in the art of the two periods was absolutely clear to me. And it was not just art that was changing. The Mesolithic is associated with the end of the last great glacial period, when the climate of the earth changed completely. The great animals—mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, huge bears, gigantic elk—were gone. People now saw deer, elk, wild pig, rodents, birds, and fish. The intensity of this climatic change has been likened to trading the climate of Minneapolis for that of New Orleans, or of Moscow for Nice.

Their stone tools changed, becoming daintier. They used more bone tools. They probably lived a bit longer, too, an average of 25 or 26 years, rather than 20 years.

They began to bury their dead in cemeteries and pose them in flexed positions; to construct small stone-floored house-huts. They invented the bow and arrow, fish traps, harpoons.

The changes in art, despite what Mike had said, *are* seen all over the world. They happen earlier in some places than others, perhaps in response to the climate change that happened differently in different places. But the cultural change in both art and technology is pretty much—except for the remnants of peoples living in places whose climates remained cold and harsh—universal. Then, and only then, did people begin to farm.

The Blink of A Brain

A long process of accumulation had come to a turning point. For a few million years, proto people with small brains had been living not too differently from other animals. They substituted stone tools for teeth and claws, clothing for natural pelts, but did little else with their technology that was much different from animals. Most of the things they saw around them were of Nature: animals, trees,

weather, stars at night, other people. Perhaps a few percent of the things they saw or did were human artifacts. Slowly, so slowly that no individual could ever notice any particular change, the amount of time spent with human artifacts began to increase.

There's no doubt the technical changes were accumulating more quickly during the late Paleolithic. Any reference book on ancient life will tell you that. The times between different stone tool types were getting shorter, although they still measured thousands of years. But thousands of years are much shorter than hundreds of thousands of years. Brain anatomy had evolved to our modern type. Weaving and ceramics were known to the cave painters. They were producing portable objects, carvings. They were spending more time doing more technical things than ever before when the climate changed.

That's just a coincidence. I've read more than once our modern brains might have evolved due to the pressures of the often very rapid climate changes that occurred during the Ice Age. It's amazing to think of, but it now seems the warm periods interspersed through the glacial periods might have come on in hundreds, or even tens of years. Of course it would take much longer for the effects of the changed climate to fully change the landscape from, say, tundra to forest. But the temperature and rainfall and so forth could have changed within a generation.

Blinking Brains?

All the time between our driving the Stone Age trips, I've been reading about evolution and brain changes and culture. One of the themes that's come up in the last two decades or so is "plasticity:" the ability of the human brain to actually physically change. There is even a thought that this plasticity is an adaptation to the sometimes rapidly changing environment of the Ice Age. Back when I

was in school, the conventional wisdom was that we are born with brains that aren't going to change, just slowly die off. Apparently this isn't so.

Human brains go through several general stages of growth during our first few years and then our early teens, each one followed by a literal pruning away of much of the new growth. This growth occurs in the outer layers of the brain, those associated with what we think of as intelligence. You have a plastic, malleable brain. It can, and does, function *primarily* by learning.

Note that this learning does not affect your genetics; your learning is not passed physically to your children's brains. And also note that it's by no means clear *exactly* what happens in our brains when we learn.

The idea of plasticity has been around for a while, in a limited form. It's been known for a long time that many animals—and, by theoretical extension, people too—have specific periods in their brain development when specific stimuli must be encountered.

Cats who are raised in cylindrical cages without horizontal obstructions will literally never "learn" to see horizontal bars or edges. The period when they need to be presented with horizontal obstructions apparently only lasts a week or two in their very earliest kitten hood. Chimpanzees and gorillas raised in captivity need to see other chimps or gorillas tending babies to "learn" mothering skills: holding babies properly, nursing, etc. Some species of songbirds apparently learn their specific songs from older birds. So, there has long been evidence that brains often depend on learning even among animals we might think of as being pretty much driven by instinct. But newer experiments, especially with brain imaging, show that the learning and brain changing process can go on all your life.

They're Called "Plastic"

The newer brain theories hold that almost all of our individual human brain growth and development is plastic. How much of the development of other animal's brains is plastic is still to be discovered. And, even though specific parts of the human brain usually end up being the locale for specific mental tasks, your brain can, if it's damaged, somehow "learn" to perform those tasks elsewhere. This is much more difficult, and may never work as well, but it is possible.

The buzz word for this aspect of brains is "neuroplasticity." Scientists are all agog at how much our brains can change. But it's not easy. Your brain won't sprout new neural connections due to every little fleeting phenomenon. It takes concentrated attention, for hours a day, for weeks, to make specific new brain growth and therefore retention. Perhaps kind of like the attention people were giving more and more to tools and art as the Paleolithic wore on?

Indeed, I found an article online about, of all places, Orkney, that at least raised somewhat of the same idea.

Finally, conceptual evidence for the Mesolithic lies in the nature of the Neolithic of Orkney. Archaeologists are agreed upon the amazing sophistication of the Neolithic culture that flourished here (Ritchie (ed) 2000). So much so that a range of Neolithic monuments (from settlement to burial and ritual sites) have been identified as of World Heritage status (Foster & Linge 2002).

The stone circles, burial mounds and stone built villages (with their stone furnishings) of Neolithic Orkney are indeed amazing, but it is most unlikely that they developed suddenly and out of nothing. Evidence for the Early Neolithic of Orkney is scanty (Ritchie 1985) but increasing (Richards 2003).

How much of it was new (the introduction of domestic animals and crops, for example, must have taken place with boats) and how much of it developed out of the pre-existing ways of the indigenous

population? It is highly unlikely that monuments such as those of the later Neolithic could have arisen in a rootless society...

This is not just a question of physical ability: the building and organisation of the monuments; it is also a question of thought and feelings, of people's identification with the land.

Why, for example, was the area of the Ness of Brodgar so important to the local community? The great monuments that stride along the narrow isthmus here indicate a society that had a deep and long-lived identification with the land. It is most likely that this identification goes well back into the pre-Neolithic, Mesolithic, times. Evidence elsewhere increasingly emphasises the continuities between the Mesolithic and Neolithic in Scotland (Telford 2002; Finlayson 1999) and Orkney is unlikely to have been different. Indeed the flourish of Neolithic society here is such that it must have been based on a solid indigenous foundation: otherwise known as the Mesolithic.***

This little confirmation of Loie's thoughts in Scotland was encouraging. However, the question of what was conserved, and how, and what changed and how still remained.

* The time period during which a person, group, culture, etc. is at its peak. Or, the time during which something or someone is known to have existed, without being able to say exactly when it began or ended.

** "Searching for the First Settlers of Orkney," CR Wickham-Jones. in *Papers and Pictures In Honour of Daphne Home Lorimer, MBE*. Orkney Archaeological Trust, 2004.



Ars gratia artis?

The petroglyphs at Grimes Point were fascinating and as ambiguous as any cup and ring marks. They were completely abstract. In Hawaii, and at sites in the Four Corners, we could readily identify at least human figures, and often animals. Grimes Point was in a class of its own. Squiggles, concentric circles, odd organic shapes, rows of strokes, lollipop figures, one or two of which might have been human representations were scattered around seemingly at random. A sign at the park told us the glyphs might have been pecked at hunting stands along game trails, although it cited no reason for the conjecture.

And at that rate, so what? What could these glyphs have meant? For all we could see, they might have been doodles pecked by bored hunters, or by the bored child apprentices of hunters.

The Anasazi story glyphs in Mesa Verde—the cliff face that included the Whipping Kachina, seen on our Driving Yo trip of 1997—at least had anthropomorphic figures and an organized design. At Grimes Point, we could see nothing of that kind. If indeed the Grimes Point makers had intended their marks to communicate, the meaning is now long gone.

But let's not fool ourselves. When we saw the beautiful Paleolithic art in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales in Saint-Germain en Laye, it seemed to speak to us, of the power and beauty of the ancient animals, the grace of a human head. Did it? We have, really, no more idea of the meaning of that art *for the Paleolithic peoples* than we do of the Grimes Point petroglyphs. Ideas about the “meaning” of ancient art have been changing ever since it was first discovered. Any modern book about ancient art will say so, quite frankly, and admit we probably don't, and probably never will, understand exactly what any piece of “art” meant to its makers and viewers.

Art for Some Other Reason?

Even to call prehistoric art “art” may cast a kind of connotative slant on the discussion of it. After all, what do *we* mean when we say the word, or identify one thing as “art” and another as “not art”? Go ahead, try discussing this with your friends, or even just pondering it your own mind for a while. “Art” is a slippery concept, and trying to impose it on prehistoric objects is at best optimistic and at its potential worst just completely chauvinistic. I confess to having no idea at all what the Grimes Pointers may have had in mind when making those marks. Or let's say I have many ideas about what they *might* have meant, but no way to decide which possibility is more likely than the others. Decoration for the sake of beauty? Clan identifiers? Doodles?

Loie and I had seen so many kinds of art, stone arrangements and henges and hills that all this ancient stuff was becoming just a jumble. Its production spread over so many millenia, so much territory and so many kinds of things there were no themes any more. There was cacophony. Each individual site or object seemed to have possible meanings, but taken all together...well, you can't take it all together. At least I couldn't. There was just too much stuff.

Forget the Art

It was sometime between our Driving the Stone Age III, in the fall of 2004, and our next Driving the Stone Age trip, in the Fall of 2005, that I discovered Gobekli Tepe. Well, of course I didn't discover the place, that happened in 1963, although it wasn't excavated until 1995. The following is from the Web site of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut.

As early as 1963 Göbekli Tepe had been pinpointed as an archaeo-

logical site in the course of a Turkish-American survey, and in 1980 appeared Peter Benedict's report on the mound. The full significance of the site, however, was not yet apparent. The flanks of the rise, strewn with large cut blocks of masonry as well as countless implements of chipped stone, certainly did not bring to mind an establishment from mankind's earliest period of settlement, i.e. from the time the Paleolithic/Mesolithic hunters were first shifting to a sedentary life of farming. Only further investigation would reveal the special significance of this mound, which gradually rose layer upon layer like Schliemann's Troy, but dates at least five thousand years earlier than the "City of Priam."

The excavations of the Şanlıurfa Museum and the DAI in Istanbul begun in 1995 and since 2001 have continued in cooperation with the Orient-Abteilung of the German Archaeological Institute. The annual campaigns since 1995 have brought neither residences nor fortifications to light, but instead monumental and megalithic circular configurations previously unknown, beyond any shadow of a doubt religious in function. Monolithic pilasters, each weighing tons, were bound into a circle by segments of wall that enclosed them on the interior and the exterior as if to form a temenos. In the center, towering above all, stood a single pair of pillars. On these were large-scale reliefs of wild beasts: lions and bulls, wild boars, foxes and snakes. The sculpture provides a glimpse of a pictorial tongue [language], the meaning of which—like the overall significance of the structures—will continue to stimulate much scholarly controversy.

What has now become clear is that the earliest architectural forms yet known were by no means small and unpretentious, but astoundingly monumental in character. It is only in the upper building levels at Göbekli Tepe that we see a transformation of these circular structures into much smaller forms, some constructed with

quadrilateral plans as well.

This was a revelation like no other. What the Insitute's site was saying is that 12,000 years ago (the megalithic parts of Gobekli Tepe are that old, yes), people who were not yet farmers were making megalithic structures in places that weren't yet even towns. Dr. Klaus Schmidt, the director of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut's excavation, has said he feels, after exploring Gobekli Tepe for some years, that "First came the temple, then the city." What you have to wonder, then, was *why the temple?* Especially before the city. This wasn't just a revolution in thinking about chronology, it was a revolution in thinking about thinking.

If your society has become accustomed to building houses, lining wells with stone, making granaries and so forth, a temple might be a logical next step. Or at least an understandable one. The kivas Loie and I had seen in Aztec Ruins and Chaco Canyon seemed perfectly suited to those places.

Even Stonehenge, out on the plain as it is, makes sense as some kind of apotheosis of Four Posters and Recumbent Circles and Rings of Brogar and Callanish and some kind of "landscape"—in a very unnatural sense of the word—of barrows and cursuses. But how do you get from hide tents, even if, as at Terra Amata, they might have had stone rings to peg down the hides, and painted caves or rock scratching, to megaliths, seemingly in one go, with nothing in between? That's just weird. It's an immense leap of imagination. It's mind boggling, if you ask me.

Maybe, in time, some interim forms will be found. There may well be built sites older than Gobekli Tepe waiting to be discovered. Maybe the chronology of Gobekli Tepe will be revised. But the more I saw pictures of and read about Gobekli Tepe on the Internet, the more I felt the oddity of it: carved megalithic temples seemingly springing full blown in the imaginations of hunter gatherers. What

were they thinking?

Or, *How* Were They Thinking?

It occurred to me that art and design might not be the salient point in all this investigation. Ancient art and design were, after all, a cacophony of quite possibly conflicting ideas. In researching our DtSA III, I had run across a suggestion that the proliferation of megaliths around the Gulf of Morbihan in Brittany may have been a response to rising sea levels: a cry for help to the gods, or an attempt to force back the sea by magic. Now, if that were true (and why not?) how could we ever know?

But one thing we *had* seen—or least knew about; Loie and I hadn't yet been to the painted caves—was the great change from caves, or open air sites for art, to built Places. For a while I had thought this change had to do with “The Quick and the Dead.” That wasn't really the case. What had incontrovertibly happened—at least, the one common thread running through all the welter of artistic production—was *building*. Making. Marking, yes, but with durable stone, artificially worked or propped up. *Creating* sacred or ritual or public Places. *Making* them, not finding them in nature.



Echoes

The cat flap openings in the giant's tombs seemed truly bizarre. Yet after we returned, I remembered the Dolmen Gallardet in southern France. I got out our picture album of that trip, and sure enough, it had a carved entrance. A bit larger than the tiny ones in Sardinia, but there it was.

It took a few minutes to find a web site that claimed “[The temple wells] are reminiscent of similar Greek buildings with their long rectangular layout and doubled entrance “in antis” and testify to contacts with the Aegean World, which has been confirmed by the finding of Mycenaean ceramics in nuraghic contexts.”

Then I remembered the “breasts” on the betyls, on the Cycladic-type figure in the museum in Cagliari, and the “breasts” on the stones of the allés couverte in northern Brittany. It was beginning to seem like there just wasn't much new under the sun. All of these places and stone constructions and art were beautiful, and all a joy to find and see. The outlines of the entrances to the Temple wells were perhaps the most beautiful things I've ever seen.

But Sardinia confirmed the impression the prehistoric sites were a jumble, or a web, or Gordian knot or something whose concepts would never be straightened out. At least, not by a couple of amateurs.

Long Time Coming

It may be in another hundred years of archaeology will tease out the thoughts behind the stones. There's a lot of finely discriminated work going on. Ideas about the nature of Neolithic societies are changing all the time. When I was in school, the accepted wisdom was that the earliest were peaceful, matriarchial egalitarian Goddess worshippers. Now that's being argued, but I have no way

of evaluating the arguments. It's tough to keep up when you're not in school, with the resources of a good academic library at hand, surrounded by people who share an interest in this kind of esoteric stuff. It was an amazing coincidence to meet the young Germans who knew about Gobekli Tepe, and learn that we might be able to find someone to help us visit it.

The other amazing coincidence of the carved entrances, and reading about possible Mycenaean influences, made me sure the Neolithic was not the beginning Loie and I were seeking. To be fair, many of the sites we had seen in Sardinia were actually Bronze Age provenance. The cat flaps were early Bronze Age additions to Neolithic barrows. Yet they were firmly in a megalithic heritage. Some kind of ideas had been conserved in some places, discarded in others. But the proliferation of individual forms, of menhirs in all kinds of shapes and arrangements; of barrows of earth and stone; stone rings large and small, round and square; all this meant there must have been too many individual ideas for us to ever reliably disentangle any one of them as “the” beginning we had somewhat naively sought.

Somehow, though, lurking in the back of my mind, was the idea that none of that really mattered. Maybe I was rationalizing my own inability to disentangle it; sour grapes, if you will.

I had the thoughts of Place Making, seen on our trips to Wiltshire and the weird Grimes Point. We had the thoughts that the megalithic building in Scotland must have been based on earlier traditions. The odd new notion of plastic, learning brains kept intruding. All of these thoughts were beginning to add up to something deeper, something more fundamental. The breasts, cat flaps; big stones, carved stones, polished stones, stone houses; little

heads, sculpted and painted animals; all were blurring in my mind in a kind of museum fatigue.

It looked to me more like continuity than revolution.



Old Friends, but Strange

As mentioned earlier, our friend Michael Pauls makes much of the association of Saint Michael with the motif of the double tailed mermaid. And indeed we found examples of her all over Puglia, although not always in obviously “Saint Michael” places. He also maintains her origin is obscure and mysterious. I’ve found quite a few sources on the web ([Cultural History of Mermaids](#) is a good one, among others) that lay out the development at least in historical times.

The Greek “monster” Scylla, a mermaid often shown with double tail, was clearly associated even in ancient Greece with the [straits of Messina](#) in southern Italy. A [Roman era coin](#) shows her on one side (*on the right, below*), with the straits lighthouse on the other. So getting the mermaid into Italy was obviously no problem.



What significance she had for the folks who put her on every other wall and floor is less clear! But, there she is..

The floor at Otranto struck me forcibly. We’ve seen windows and portals with all kinds of crazy stuff, but for some reason the floor (with its own double-tailed mermaid) brought home the feeling of just how alien the older ways of thought might have been. Did Pantaleone *really believe* the things he portrayed? If so, his life would have been like one long hallucination compared to ours.

It was fun to see the prehistoric monuments in Puglia, mostly

because we were treated to such a wonderful tour by such a generous enthusiast. We were all struck by the dolmens’ resemblance to things we’d seen elsewhere in more northern Europe. The old stones were coming to seem like old friends. But Toti’s telling us about the consistent and mysterious east-west orientation of the menhirs just emphasized how little the stones themselves could tell us.

Then, thinking about the gulf between our understanding of the world compared to Father Pantaleone’s, who lived during what, compared to the builders of the megaliths were modern historical times, just added to the impression of deeply foreign thought in the Neolithic.

Even if we could recover the nuances of their thoughts, could we appreciate them? Would we believe they were our beginnings?



Courtesy of Ed

Living on the Land

Visiting Stourhead was a very nice lesson in how people can think about “the landscape.” Loie and I had been trying to reconcile the Modern Antiquarian’s wish to relate Avebury and Stonehenge to some putative “landscape” with our impressions of the places we’d been: Avebury, the White Horse, Wayland’s Smithy. Of course my experience of Stonehenge as a big stone prison did little to foster *that* idea. Driving through the Wiltshire countryside, farmed and managed for millenia, and then seeing Stourhead, manicured, with all its managed views and artificial embellishments, brought home the degree to which nature—in any sense of wild or working on its own, a *natural* landscape—had been eschewed in Britain since God knows when.

The Uffington White Horse had obviously been placed in the, or a, landscape. The perfect little dell, with its oddly flat topped Dragon Hill, the ridge along which the horse itself stretched, were a Place. Absolutely. But so was Stourhead a Place. Its little valley and wooded slopes were perfect for creating artificial Lakes, Settings and Views. None of which had anything to do with the real natural world. Even many of the plants and trees were imports from other ecologies.

Before we set off for the Megameet, Loie and I had watched a video about Stourhead, and I was particularly interested in several segments about how it had been allowed to become over grown for years and needed so much volunteer work to clean out many of the trees and woody shrubs that were now obscuring Views or interfering with important plantings. Those scenes of the volunteers whacking away with billhooks and dragging brush struck a chord with me.

When Loie and I moved to Lake Drive, now over fifteen years ago,

we had visions of landscaping: of making a walking path through our woods, of clearing and planting. Our hikes in the Shenk’s Ferry wildflower woods had filled our heads with thoughts of our stream-banks covered in trillium and rue anemone. It didn’t take long for me to get interested in trying to eradicate the invasive plants that smothered so many of our trees, and were threatening to take over our lawn.

All That D*mn Work

It also didn’t take long for us to learn how much damn work anything like that would have to be. We gathered some few little wildflowers from roadsides where they were relatively abundant, taking care not to remove too many, not to wipe out any stands. After a few years, we had no more wildflowers than we had planted. In some cases, we didn’t even have the ones we *had* planted: rabbits and groundhogs and deer saw to that. The few that did manage to survive weren’t spreading. A little more reading taught us that takes decades, perhaps hundreds of years.

After two years, we could no longer find the first path we cut through our woods: rampant tangles of brambles saw to *that*. We had just about broken our backs, and I did break my old truck, chopping and pulling the invasive plants. We had created burning piles that, in total, would have filled our house. (The last one is still rotting away, getting overgrown itself. The county won’t let us burn any more: EPA regulations.)

I spoke to several people from state agencies about creating a wildflower meadow on some of our land. It could be done, they told me. Then it would have to be burned off every couple of years to prevent the woody weeds from taking over. That’s succession, and

it's inexorable. No one could guarantee the state agencies would still be funding the help, and giving the permits, to burn a wildflower meadow in the future.

"If you've got a local farmer who wants to use the land, let him. That's the best use for this patch right now." So Farmer Neighbor Roger farms a little bit of our property, and saves me from having to mow it.

For a few years, I let some patches grow up all summer and mowed them once a year. They were soon full of brambles and invasive plants. True, each of these patches had some native trees beginning to sprout. The two or three acre "woody oldfield" area between our lawn and the woods has gone from an impenetrable mass of brambles and invasive plants to something that now looks like woods. But I've learned there's no in between. You either have woods, or you mow lawn.

Living with the Land

Nature doesn't behave. It's wild. You don't get what *you* want from Nature. You either take what it gives you, or break your back trying to make it do what you want. And in the long run, if what you want it to do isn't compatible with your natural landscape—your climate, your topography, the animals and birds that already live there or are willing to move in—Nature won't keep doing what you want, no matter how hard you work.

The ancient people must have known this, in spades. They were trying to get a living from nature without the—dubious, considering my wrecked truck—benefit of modern machines. They might have been interested in a "landscape" in the Stourhead sense. That is, a landscape that had been wrestled and beaten into submission. After millenia of labor chopping immense trees with stone axes, plowing or scratching seeds into the dirt with wooden sticks,

constant vigilance to keep off the animals and birds, how much respect could they have had for a *natural* landscape? Well, "respect" in the sense of wariness of an adversary. Fear, maybe. Distrust. Thankfulness for small favors, grudgingly granted. Awe of the power of the landscape, certainly, to make their lives miserable, and yes, all right, joy when Nature was bountiful.

It's not surprising to me that Stonehenge was abandoned. By that time, people had figured out that if they were going to live in a human world, they didn't need Stonehenge. They just needed to work.



Rocking Your Head

Not long after we had returned from viewing the caves and passages, Loie pointed out an article in one of the magazines we get. The article was about a maverick archaeologist who had been studying the Haitian zombie beliefs. One aspect of this cult is the alleged use of psychotropic drugs to convince either the cultists or the supposed zombies of the reality of the phenomenon. Loie seemed surprised at this, so I got out my old copy of Peter Furst's *Flesh of the Gods* for her to look over.

It turned out she wasn't so interested in reading those monographs, but I reread some of them, and wondered. Not too long ago we had read *The Mind in the Cave*.^{*} That was an interesting hypothesis, about the possibility the ancient cave painters were using drugs or trance practices. And of course in my school studies long ago I had read many books and articles about shamanism; about the shamans in the Amazon and their drugs, about Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan and dozens of other instances of older practices.

If you've never read or heard about all this stuff, it's difficult, especially in our current War on Drugs and Just Say No political climate, to imagine how important drugs and trance practices were in ancient times. Of course there's a big difference between modern drunken drugged out parties and the way drugs were—and still are—used for religious rituals. It sounds kind of silly to talk about Timothy Leary's dictum of “dosage, set and setting” nowadays. But he was absolutely correct. Drugs make you think differently, and if you're told things while under their influence, you can believe in—have what W. T. Stace called “veridical experiences” of—an entirely different way of thinking about the world.

^{*} David Lewis-Williams. Thames & Hudson; December 2002.

This doesn't mean that or those ways of thinking are necessarily correct. Panteleone, the creator of the marvelous mosaic floor in Otranto, obviously had some pretty weird ideas about the world and history. Ideas we'd probably want to say were just wrong.

Rocks and Rocks

But there are ideas, and ideas.

Some ideas are about physical things, such as whether the Earth goes around the Sun, or vice versa. Some ideas are about moral values: right and wrong. They are all ideas, sometimes amenable to testing in the physical world by science and experiment, sometimes amenable to testing in life by experiment: Did that work out the way I hoped?

By now, after we'd seen stones in many places, and cave art, Places in other countries and at home and strange medieval art, I'd come to think the *particular* ideas embodied in all this stuff weren't the point. Particular ideas can be wrong. Or be unprovable, arguable. Particular ideas can change. Stonehenge was changed. First it was built of earth, then earth and wood, then stone, then abandoned, given up on. Yet through all those centuries, the people making and using it were farming for a living. Their particular ideas about Stonehenge must have changed, but their basic ideas about getting a living didn't change nearly so drastically. They messed around with Stonehenge, but they didn't go back to hunting and gathering.

Of course we can think they didn't have that opportunity. The combination of changed climate from Ice Age to interglacial and human effort had changed the landscape so drastically there wasn't wild food to support the larger population. If there aren't any more woolly mammoths, you can't build your houses of mammoth bones.

And at that rate, why *would* they change their way of making a living? Well, in the event, they did change some. Metalworking and probably different types of farming, pottery styles, all made their way into the lives of Stonehenge's builders. It may be that the adoption of these new things came along with cultural changes that inspired new designs for Stonehenge, or perhaps had nothing to do with it. How, with the tiny amount we can surmise about the lives of these ancient people, can we ever know?

We can't know the intimate ins and outs of their daily thoughts. But we can see they were concerned to make Stonehenge bigger, more elaborate, more *built* as they went along.

Daniel Defoe, touring Britain in the 1720s, said of the standing stones in Boscawen, Cornwall, that "all that can be learn'd from them is, that here they are."* It's true. The stones may have represented ancestors, or been used to infuse water with healing properties. Circles of stones may have meant one thing, and rows another. Alignments to rising or setting sun may have meant one thing, to rising or setting moon another. Mounds may have had yet other significance. But they all had one thing in common: They were made, not found. It's vitally important that "they are," at all. That's the ancient idea that was beginning, above all else, to speak to me.

While taking a break from formatting and proofreading this essay in December of 2008, I came across this passage in the book *Superdove*, by Courtney Humphries.

...an ornithologist from Kansas named Richard Johnson made a comment about how we think about pigeons... 'The special qualities of feral pigeons are rarely recognized as special, which is a result

* Quoted by Rosemary Hill in *Stonehenge*; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; 2008

of the way humans perceive the natural world. Dominant western worldviews have taught that nature exists for human use and that humans are its custodians or curators, fundamentally apart from the natural world. This philosophic position has been unprofitable in many ways, one of which is important here: Because humans think of their activities as different from "nature," they are deemed artifacts, derived from human skills—not natural.'

Here was a bold statement. Perhaps pigeons were not inherently boring as I had assumed; instead, perhaps our blind spots keep us from appreciating them. Our disgust blinds us to any living thing so abundant as those birds in Venice, that fecundity we find so appalling. When something is everywhere, it paradoxically becomes invisible and its value diminishes in our minds.

It's interesting that other people are, in their own ways, bothered by something like the thoughts I've been exploring in this book. The idea that nature is worth less than human artifacts is surely the reason trees are cut when they begin to interfere with the wires. Trees are free, right? They sprout up everywhere. There's plenty more where they come from. But wires cost money. They're worth something. Trees aren't.

Grows on Trees

I'd argue that while Johnson's idea of the devaluation of nature led Humphries to some important insights, neither of them went far enough. Human activities *are* fundamentally different from those of plants and animals. Our lives have become completely dependent on things that *are* artifacts, *are* unnatural. It's no good saying, "Well, we're products of evolution. Nature made us, so what we do has to be natural." That may be true in some vague, technically correct way. But human made stuff isn't like natural stuff. Everyone knows money doesn't grow on trees, and neither does anything else

with which we humans surround ourselves. Wires sure don't.

For most of human existence, that wasn't true. Found stuff was as important as made stuff. Some time in the Mesolithic of the Near East, that balance changed, and found stuff became unsatisfying, insufficient, uninteresting or just somehow beneath notice. And so people began to make food: "Neolithic Revolution."

No big deal, conceptually. They had been making a lot of different kinds of stuff for a while, so why not food?



Noble Experiments

Poor Ed’s satnav—called “Gwen” because that was the name of the voice Ed had chosen for it—was getting a bad rap. For a long time, the navigation setting had unwittingly been “Avoid traffic” so it was routing us by gravel roads and goat paths. Once we figured that out, and set it to “Fastest Route,” everything was...better.

Except that by then, Loie and Mary had taken a bad imprint, and hated its voice instructions. Given that it was calling out French road names when there were no signs showing them, and it never did learn how to reliably navigate roundabouts, Ed and I sympathized. But we’re boys, and wanted to continue to experiment with it. The compromise was that we could look at it, but that Gwen couldn’t speak.

All the time and money Ed had spent trying to add to the group’s experience (adding a Western Europe map set to the satnav was *expensive!*), trying to help, were pretty much for naught. Or, well, maybe not for naught. After a while, we were using Gwen, but getting to that point was an uphill battle.

I’m reminded of a marvelous couple of panels in Larry Gonick’s [Cartoon History of the Universe](#). In the first panel, a caveman is lounging against a tree, playing cat’s cradle. The text reads, “If modern hunter-gather societies are any indication, the average Homo Erectus spent only **4-5 hours** a day at ‘work’ and the rest in ritual or creative loafing!” A younger cave-man is running out, holding a bow-and-arrow, saying “Look, I invent!”

In the next panel, the text says, “With such a life, they must have **frowned on progress...**” and the older man has leapt to his feet, slapped the bow out of the younger’s hand, shouting “**NO CHANGE!**”

“Eep, yes, Uncle!”

Now, those comics were published some time ago, and I’m pretty sure the figures on the “average” amount of time spent hunting and gathering have been challenged since then. But a kind of principle remains: the don’t-rock-the-boat-thing, right?

Loie and I had done a very good job of navigating around the U.S. and Europe using printed maps for decades. We knew how to do that. Certainly, there had been a few times when some combination of printed maps and indecipherable signs and who-knows-what had failed us. We got lost, or took way more time than we’d liked to have done, or messed about asking for directions and in a few cases ended up being led around by local angels of mercy. But in decades of traveling there hadn’t been more than two or three cases of “totally can’t find it” and none of those were really important. We *never* couldn’t get back to our gite! So, what was Ed’s Gwen supposed to be *getting us*? Why change?

The prehistoric art remained unchanged for tens of thousands of years. The toolkits changed a bit, but not radically. They got refined, but very gradually. Was this continuity and longevity by choice?

“Is this the only one?” Mary asked, when we had seen the magnificent sculpted horses of the Abri Cap Blanc.

“Well,” I said, “It’s the only one I’ve ever heard of with animals this big, life-sized.” Loie and I had seen some much smaller panels in the Musée Nationale des Antiquités, and there are lots of examples of what are called mobiliary or portable art: little sculptures in the round. But I think Cap Blanc may be unique. It’s quite possible there were others, lost through accident or just not yet discovered.

And I’m pretty sure there are arguments about whether putative arrowheads found in South Africa have been reliably dated to 70,000 BC. That would be a lot longer ago than they supposedly

“first” appeared, in Europe. Not everything—not Cap Blanc’s horses and not bows and arrows—immediately became the hot thing.

There are some very rock bottom practical considerations here. The human populations back then were thin on the ground. Population geneticists are talking about the possibility of African humans ancestral to us being reduced to a few thousands, scattered about, more than once a hundred thousand years ago or so. Exigencies of disease, who-knows-what-kind of natural disasters, geography could have kept groups of people isolated for generations. Knowledge and ideas can be lost, or at least not have a chance to propagate.

So between the possibility of No Change and the exigencies of circumstance, it’s no surprise that even with rocks in our heads, some of us might sometimes be stick-in-the-muds.

But even Loie, on our subsequent *Driving the Stone Age XI*, “*Megameet Blues*” in 2012 was quite enthusiastic about a rented TomTom satnav/GPS.

We rented it as part of a package deal with the rental car. We probably paid almost as much to rent it as it would have cost to buy it outright. But we were performing an experiment, not buying new stuff we might not want. Hah. It took us a while to figure it out, and when we did, and it zipped us into the exact parking lot we wanted for the Cathedral in Salisbury, by a combination of tiny little lanes and alleys, in half the time we would have spent wandering around with paper maps, Loie liked it.

In the correct circumstances, *when* she felt we needed it.

There’s a principle at work here. Bear with me, please, I think it’s important. Our experience so far with satnavs/GPS’s as compared to paper maps had an aesthetic/practical component. We had been navigating with Michelin and Italian Touring Club and French Series Blue maps for decades. We liked those maps. They had an

immense wealth (and when I say “wealth,” I mean “stuff worth having”) of information on them. They had shaded relief, showing the contours of the land. Loie would say, “Oh, now we’re going up into the mountains; now we’re going to be going down to a river,” and the map would tell her the name of the mountain range or river.

The maps would show viewpoints, indicate historic towns that might be of interest. If it was a local enough map, it might show Roman era bridges, Celtic oppida, who knows what? She could look at the maps and see all kinds of stuff that didn’t—back then—show up on the cheezy diagrams of roads on the satnavs. Navigating by maps was more *interesting* and informative and intriguing than navigating by satnav.

As we learned, both with Ed’s Gwen and with the TomTom, every now and then, satnav was way more convenient. The point is, usually *we preferred* informative over convenient. That was an aesthetic choice. And it made sense: We were Traveling, exploring, learning. We didn’t need, or for the most part even want, to be efficient-above-all. We wanted to have fun. To spend our time making Cat’s Cradles.

No Change.

This trip was in 2009, and the trip with the TomTom was in 2012. By 2013, for our *Driving the Stone Age XII*, “*Art for Something’s Sake*” trip to England, I had been working with the iPad app Pocket Earth, an off-line mapping app, long enough that we forwent paper maps altogether. Testing it out on local trips, Loie had become enthralled with watching the blue dot creep along the electronic map, zooming the map in and out to look around, and being able to zoom it in to street level, seeing the lanes on interchanges.

Pocket Earth’s maps aren’t as pretty, or as geographically informative as Michelin’s. But by 2013 all these systems had scads of Points of Interest contributed by users on what had become rather more

like maps than the original “diagrams of roads.” The combination of almost-as-informative, very much more convenient, and customizable (add your own Pins to the built-in POIs, etc.) was enough to make us converts, at least to [Pocket Earth](#). *Despite* the decades we had spent oohing and aahing over our paper maps. Some combination of increasing familiarity and better equipment sucked us in.

Even with don't-rock-the-boat No Change in force, eventually, the rocks in our heads prevail.



Courtesy of Ed

(Don't forget to use the Bookmarks!)

The Oldest Stones

Going all the way to the middle of Turkey to look at a ragged, messy archaeological site such as [Göbekli Tepe](#) probably seems pretty quixotic to most of our friends and relations. Now that, after years of discussing it, putting it off, meeting people who had a connection to it, we'd been there ourselves, it was more than quixotic: it was obsessed! And a lot of fun.

Göbekli Tepe has gone a fair way to knocking most of what we think about [human cultural development](#) into a cocked hat. And made Loie and I feel a lot better about the ideas we had been having when we began driving the Stone Age.

It had struck us in Scotland that the differences between the types of stone circles there must imply local *cultures*, with their own ideas about...something. Of course if we stop to really think it through, people have gone through a million-year history of “cultural development” of some kind: chipping stone; building fires; cooking food; making hunting weapons, weaving bags, painting on walls, sculpting; pushing rocks, planting crops, herding animals...etc. etc. That's all high school history.

The difference I had begun seeing—as far back as 2005, when after our trip to Sardinia I wrote, “It looked to me more like continuity than revolution”—was that all of this was all of a piece. It slides perfectly nicely from one “culture” to the next. The abstract signs—handprints, dots, lines, grids, tectiform symbols,—in the painted caves were a kind of writing, weren't they? Ideogrammatic of course, but still, people were writing in the Stone Age. Just like they were writing in Egyptian hieroglyphics millennia later.

Our friends Dana and Mike were sending us emails with links to news articles about how some new project was finding yet earlier evidence for everything: use of fire, painting, bows and arrows. It

was obvious our lingering-Victorian-style historical knowledge was biased by woefully incomplete evidence and some kind of cultural wish to make ourselves way more intellectually advanced than we're turning out to be.

Göbekli Tepe and the Balikli Gol Snowman were perfect examples of how Everything You Know Is Wrong.

Credit Where Due

I should say, and probably should have long before this, that Loie and I have had a running discussion—she calls it an argument—that began before we were driving the Stone Age.

I was dazzled many years ago by [Joseph Campbell](#)'s books on mythology. His discussions of Innate Releasing Mechanisms, Super-normal Sign Stimuli, the expression of these supposedly inherent traits in local, conditioned cultures—these to me were a revelation and a comfort. Human culture could have sense made of it, at least to some degree.

And so I argued—ahem—for the *lack of instinct* as an over-riding factor in human behavior. Humans have to learn how to behave. Sure, we may have drives and desires, they may even be for things outside the usual range of other animals' wants. But we never act on those desires without our learning brains first receiving a thorough conditioning in our local, randomly inherited culture.

Loie was having none of it. “People are all the same,” she would say. “The little bits of difference aren't important.” It was turning out that she had been right all along. As I should have known. Or, almost right. More correct than I had been, of course.

But looking back on my rather sophomoric understanding of Professor Campbell's work—after all, I was a sophomore when

I read it—it's apparent he was himself dazzled by the beauty and complexity of human art. And it wasn't art that was bugging me. It was the wires.

Sliding Whence to Where?

So if it's been a slide from one thing to the next, and if Professor Campbell thinks more about the art, myth, poetry; the costumes and rituals that supposedly guide our deepest reactions to life, are the wires just a little epiphenomenon that, as Loie says, "don't matter?"

I began this essay railing about the prevalence of the wires over art. And by now, seeing all these Places, these built Things, the creation of which was admittedly and of course driven by impulses to express ideas in works of the arts, it seemed to me that we, all of us at least in what we think of as the developed world, were sliding from *one particular kind of* thing to the next. Loie's desire to see people as all the same wasn't wrong, but it did miss one point.

It's all well and good for Professor Campbell to admonish us to "Follow your bliss." Over millenia that's worked to create a magnificent panoply of accomplishments. But if our bliss is conditioned, to some degree, by our circumstances, who really is in charge? Perhaps not us as individuals, not entirely and maybe not even at all. Is it really *our* bliss?

I was coming to believe that what was in charge was the wires.



They're Everywhere, Different

The Judacalla Rock was a fun stop in a trip filled with outdoor adventures. Loie and I hadn't beached, hiked and explored so much on a trip in a long time. From shore to falls was a great idea.

And there was that oddball rock. The carvings were not totally unlike anything we'd seen, but almost. Cups abounded, and there were long streaks between them. There were a few odd signs that seemed *vaguely* similar to some of the painted symbols from the Paleolithic caves.

Research says the latest thinking is that it might be a map of tribal territories. Of course we don't know anything about it, really, other than that it's old, but even that is vague: between Middle Woodland and Late Mississippian, which is a span of a thousand years? But the consensus seems to be that the Judaculla petroglyphs are pre-Columbian, or perhaps better said, pre-de-Sotoan. They didn't learn to do it from white folks.

They might have learned to do it from other Native Americans. The Mississippian culture had trade contacts with Native Americans in the southwest who had trade contacts with Meso-American cultures. So they might have been channeling the Mayans, or something.

The faint similarities were just enough to tease me into thinking that, although there are no known megalithic structures on our East Coast, those Native Americans were also concerned to make permanent markings, as had the Native Americans at Grimes Point and other petroglyph sites we'd seen out west. Building with big stones wasn't their strong point, but chiseling had some significance.

It's just everywhere, and everywhere just a little different.



Pushed Into the Past

After we had been home a while, Loie's Director at the library found a book in the Sale Table items and gave it to her. Barry Cunliffe's *Europe Between the Oceans (9,000 BC – AD 1,000)* was a much more complicated and thorough review than I'd ever read. But the maps were terrible: small and pretty crude.

Professor Cunliffe related the Paleo- and Mesolithic cultures of Europe to each other, and made some fascinating observations on how by the Mesolithic, sedentarism, social complexity and a degree of elitism were, at least to his thinking, firmly established along the Atlantic coasts all the way 'round.

One observation stood out for me. He wrote...

page 75: In the 1920s and 1930s extensive shell middens were located and excavated on the islands of Tévéc and Hoëdic, sited just off the coast of Morbihan. They can be dated to between 5500 and 4500 bc, and are a remnant of what must once have been an extensive pattern of coastal settlement. Both shell middens contained the graves of ancestors dug down into them—ten graves containing twenty-three individuals were found at Tévéc while at Hoëdic fourteen individuals were found in nine graves.

page 83: At Tévéc and Hoëdic a number of the graves had multiple interments, the later burials often disturbing the earlier. One of the Tévéc tombs was associated with a hearth that was used on a succession of occasions, possibly when each of the six bodies in the grave was laid to rest. This surprisingly sophisticated practice of collective burial lies at the beginning of a tradition that was to flourish in the region over the next two thousand years, later manifesting itself in monumental megalithic tombs.

Well, that was it for me. Don't need to read any further, just shut the book and consider the project done. Unfortunately, although I

did read the whole massive thing and Professor Cunliffe never did outline exactly how he thought T & H style collective burial led to the *megaliths*. But still. If nothing else, a possible reason to revisit the Morbihan and have some oysters!

And another instance of history and culture being pushed back further into the past; how the putative Revolution with its pushing the rocks and stringing the wires seems now to have been the almost logical and inevitable succession to what came before.



Entering the Vertical
Swamp. Find the little
speck that is Loie's
white hat.



Ahead of the Curve

When we returned from this trip, the March issue of *Scientific American* was waiting for us. The cover story was “[Evolution of Creativity, The rise of the innovative mind.](#)” What a coincidence to see this after just having been to an exhibit about “the arrival of the modern mind.” Something was in the air.

When we had read the article, Loie said, “As usual, you’re ahead of the curve.” How immensely flattering.

As far as I could make out, the gist of the article was that, to quote the web site, “Scientists long thought that early humans were stuck in a creative rut until some 40,000 years ago, when their powers of innovation seemed to explode.

“But archaeological discoveries made in recent years have shown that our ancestors had flashes of brilliance far earlier than that.

“These findings indicate that the human capacity for innovation emerged over hundreds of thousands of years, driven by both biological and social factors.”

Well, OK. Maybe our driving the stone age *has* put us ahead of the curve. If the idea that “the human capacity for innovation emerged over hundreds of thousands of years” is supposedly new, that’s what *The Rocks in Our Heads* has been stumbling towards, and in a lot of ways going beyond, for ten or fifteen years.

The article as published in print goes into detail about creativity, genius, innovation and so forth. The examples of “fermenting genius” range from 3.4 million year old “cut marked animal bones from Dikika, Ethiopia,” to “40–35,000 year old figurative art from Hohle Fels, Germany,” with Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and his invention of his *sfumato* painting technique thrown in for good measure.

The general conclusion seems to be that “our power of innovation

did not burst into existence fully formed late in our evolutionary history but rather gained steam over hundreds of thousands of years, fueled by a complex mix of biological and social factors.” OK, good. That’s what Driving the Stone Age taught us.

Except that, the “mix” isn’t really all that complex. Everything is complex, created by an infinite chain of circumstances stretching back to the beginning of everything. But here’s no way to analyze that. (Ring in the old saw about a computer as big as the universe.)

As a lay person, of course I don’t have—and for that matter, I don’t believe the sciences yet have—the knowledge to prize apart all the biochemistry of learning brains. No one has the archaeological evidence of the exact circumstances that allowed some tiny bunch of learning brains to survive predators and diseases and so forth until knowledge was sufficient to support generations of physically feeble humans through those perils. Undoubtedly there had to be some element of luck in there somewhere.

Behind the Eight Ball

But the general principle is now clear: people, relying on learning brains, freed thereby to a large degree from the constraints of pure instinct, invented new ways to make a living. That took a long time, because at first the new ways weren’t much different from the old ways.

Along the way, everything became subject to being analyzed in terms of technology: it was no longer acceptable/sufficient to address the ancestors/gods in a grove or a cave. That had to be done in something built. It seemed like a good idea to *make* food grow instead of just relying on finding it.

There’s an assumption in here that’s been bruited about by archae-

ologists and historians. The assumption is that ancient people and proto-people somehow knew what they were doing when they “adopted” new technologies. But how could they? It’s only in hindsight that we see success. At the moment, they could only have a kind of blind faith that trying to build and keep a fire (“There’s no way you’re going to do that around the children!”) is going to turn out to be both useful and reasonably safe.

They had to already have the rocks in their—guiding their—heads.

Eventually, when inventions and technology accumulated to the point they formed the majority of our ancestors’ experiences—that from which they learned—technology became the neuro-plastically self-justifying juggernaut we’re riding today.



Way Back

During the summer of 2013 Loie and I were contemplating a trip for the spring of 2014. I was doing the usual crazily enthusiastic trip research, reading about the Cave of Niaux, and remembering the quick look we had at a beautiful tectiform engraving in Rouffignac.

I was wondering if we could go back to Niaux with the specific idea of trying to see the cave painters' geometric symbols. Just for fun, of course, as my research was showing that little is known about them, still.

Then a wonderful bit of coincidence occurred. I ran across <http://www.nbcnews.com/science/prehistoric-kids-left-marks-caves-6C10402897>, where the claim was being made that "...the shapes of finger marks suggest that children as young as 2 years old made drawings on the walls of a Paleolithic cave dwelling, with an occasional boost from the grown-ups." The cave that had been studied was Rouffignac! Oh, how I wished we'd know about this before. Well, well, perhaps something else would come of it.

I emailed several researchers who were interested in the symbols; all were pleasant, but no one had any idea how to see the symbols particularly. Apparently the animals still rule.

After rummaging around a bit more, I sent this email. Never did get an answer, though.

From: bucky

Sent: Aug 8, 9:45 am

To: Leslie van Gelder

Dear Professor van Gelder,

I have just recently discovered the amazing work you and colleagues have been doing on the markings in Paleolithic caves. My wife and I have been amateur explorers of prehistory for some time (http://love-bunnies.luckypro.biz/01_stuff/05_other/drivingthestonea.html) and of

course most of the fascination is to wonder about those people, and how their thoughts and lives might have lead to ours.

So I hope you won't mind my shooting off my mouth about an idea that occurs to me. Not being in an academic environment, there are few folks for me to bounce ideas off! And perhaps I'm reinventing a wheel that's already been considered.

The idea that an adult might have been dancing or moving while holding a child up to make flutings suggests something vague but, to me, interesting. Is it possible the marking was a development/outgrowth of ritual gesture? I seem to remember reading anthropologists saying that, among oral cultures, the enacting of myths is important. Could we imagine an early form of that practice being symbolized by a particular gesture? I also think of similar modern practices: making the sign of the cross, gestures to ward off the evil eye, flipping the bird, etc. So perhaps an mythic enactment isn't even a necessary precursor! In either or both cases, some ritual movement came first, then was memorialized or made permanent and somehow a bit more significant by leaving marks. Maybe body painting enters into this as well.

Of course such thoughts are pure speculation based on no actual evidence, but I can't help myself!

Thank you for the excellent work you've been doing.

Yours truly,

Bucky Edgett

The fascinating thing about these speculations is that if true, our ancestors were—either deliberately or by example, or both!—inculcating a technological, literate practice, of some kind, in their *children* during the *Stone Age*.

A Deep End

There's no way to fight 13,000 years of history. That's way worse than city hall, which after all has only been around a fifth or sixth of that time.

This is not merely a matter of teaching the children well. Of course kids had to learn to make stone tools, cook with fire, all kinds of stuff for much longer than 13,000 years. Someone taught someone to paint the animals in the caves.

This is a matter of being taught to make abstract symbols while still a child. Being taught that making a permanent record—setting it in clay, so to speak—of some kind of activity, even if the activity was merely marking, was an important exercise.*

I may sound like I'm going off the deep end, but to me, this seemed a direct precursor to pushing the rocks. Göbekli Tepe was the next—almost inevitable—step. Already at Rouffignac, gesture—

* Another interesting coincidence occurred as I was polishing this Afterword. The day after I thought I had *finally* finished it, the January/February 2014 issue of *Archaeology* magazine arrived at our house. On pages 50 and 51 was a blurby article titled “Child’s Play,” about Leslie van Gelder’s work at Rouffignac, and her addition to the record of children’s fluting marks in Las Chimineas Cave in Cantabrian Spain.

“British archaeologist Paul Bahn” is quoted as saying that her work “has not provided major new insights into the role of children in Ice Age life.” The poor sod. He’s completely missed the point that it’s not the role of children that is critical. Of course it’s the role of the interaction between children and their teaching adults—parents, aunts and uncles, tribal elders or who-have-you—that is paramount.

Van Gelder says, “Finding the kids in Spain tells us that phenomenon [children making the adult-style marks] obviously was bigger.” Bigger is an understatement.

fleeting, impermanent—was no longer sufficient. Perhaps the *point* of the gesture had already become making a mark. OK, fine. Either the mark had to be a made, physical object in its own right, or it had to be a made, physical embodiment of some pre-existing gesture.

Either way, I can think of no better example of trading nature for technology. Gesture/Natural, Mark/Technological.

The train had definitely left the station, with children firmly on board.

“For 'tis sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar...”*

While formatting this diary, I was struck by the abundance of wires in so many of Loie's pictures. I have to admit the wires don't bother me nearly so much in Italy. The satellite dishes on the old pottery tile roofs seem almost quaint themselves; amusing, not a heinous desecration. I wasn't really *seeing* the wires, not the same way I do at home. Perhaps writing these little essays has made me a bit more tolerant? No, probably not.

When I'm being dazzled by the beautiful golden evening light on ancient stonework, or puzzling over the oddball light fixtures in the Seinese contrade, I can ignore along with the best of them.

**“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye,
but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”****

Isn't it obvious? I've got the same rocks in my head we all do. It's just unavoidable.

My mind/brain are conditioned just as thoroughly by my cultural environment as anyone else's. My conditioning may be a bit different from yours—I hope, for your sake—but it's still there. Perhaps, having gone off on this wild goose chase after the origin and meaning of the wires, I have a slight bit of awareness of the ubiquity of technology and our infatuation with it. But I can overlook it with the best of them.

* *Hamlet*, act III, scene 4

** *King James Bible*, Matthew, 7:3



Rocks, People

The news just continued to pile in. Dana and Amy both sent links to a block-buster discovery: Indonesian cave art comparable to that of France and Spain had been dated to 39,000 BC. Not only were the animal drawings of similar style, the art contained the *exact same kinds* of hand-stenciling found in Europe. There's no living way that is a parallel development, a coincidence.

This tradition must have been carried out of Africa long before its supposed revolutionary appearance in Europe. Now we just have to wait for the archaeologists to publish some pictures of the geometric symbols that are undoubtedly also there.

An interesting article was published in the November/December *Archaeology*. "The Neolithic Toolkit" described the discovery and analysis of a 7,000 year old wood lined well in Eastern Germany. The carpentry was fantastically advanced: "tusked mortise and tenon joints, a technique not seen again until the Roman Empire five millennia later." Well, not seen by us, because we haven't bothered to spend the time and money to find examples of it.

Apparently there's no longer any mystery about how or why the builders of Stonehenge used mortise and tenon joinery in their stonework.

In the same issue, "The Buffalo Chasers" detailed the workings of complicated stone alignments that helped the ancestral Blackfoot people of Montana organize buffalo drives over low cliffs. The new work locating and analyzing these structures, especially in the light of living Blackfeet oral tradition and continuing ritual practices, now supposedly casts the ancestors in a whole new light.

Instead of simple opportunistic foragers and light-duty hunters, the ancestors lives were "...complex and thought out in ways that reflected powerful social controls."

Or, socially and technologically sophisticated beyond our previous imagination.

Coming and Going

While we enjoyed working out how many Debras the enigmatic Malves menhir was tall, Michael told us most of the large menhirs we see today—as was the Malves—were reconstructed from pieces. And there were almost always three pieces, lying on the ground, waiting for some local history group or archaeology bureau to hoist them again.

As we saw in Brittany, the Grand Menhir Brisé had been deliberately toppled and broken. As we saw in Avebury, the megaliths had been toppled by Christians, but the Grand Menhir and its alignment had been broken in *prehistory*.

Competing beliefs have been around since, perhaps, forever. But pushing the rocks continued in some other form: the broken megaliths were used to build churches and cottages.

The rocks—the tools, the art, the social systems that use them and are structured by their use—come and go. We can use them or not, change them or see them changed around us willi-nilly. The kinds of rocks and wires don't really matter, although people do seem to get exercised about them. It's people that matter, people that endure, and what we're doing to each other with our rocks, especially the rocks in our heads.

The End

This will be the last Afterword for *The Rocks in Our Heads*.



It's Not About the Stones

Sure, understanding today's complex World of the Future is a little like having bees live in your head. But, there they are.
—The Firesign Theater, I Think We're All Bozos on This Bus

A while ago, Loie and I were, as we often do, reminiscing about our travels and how much fun it is to go traveling. One or the other of us said, “But you know, it's not about the stones, it's about the people.” Truer words were never spoke.

Way back in 2002, I wrote, “Loie and I were looking for megalithic monuments—ancient stone rings and standing stones. What we found were Places.” What I wasn't thinking about was that Places, Civilization, Society, Progress, Art, even the D*mn Wires are just stuff people do. But why do we do all that stuff?

Everything We Know Is Wrong

We have only the faintest idea of how we've come to be in this—what I consider to be—rocks-driven situation. I'm certainly not the expert on neuro-plasticity, evolution, sociobiology and all the other disciplines and sciences that have been dragged into this long exploration of the past. So I have at least a faint excuse for *my* ignorance.

There is certainly enough news packed into this essay to show how often *ideas about* beginnings, progress and processes have changed, and still are changing all the time. But a work in progress, is, by definition, not completed.

The issue

That's mostly because, the more we look, the more we learn. But overall, as a society, we barely bother to look. Imagine what might happen if we devoted, say, all the money spent on junk food and pro

sports to archaeology and brain research. Whoa! And let's throw in advertising budgets worldwide while we're at it. The mind boggles.

So it's not the scientist's fault they have to re-figure things all the time. It's amazing they get as much done as they do: It's a massively under-funded labor of love, sadly mostly ignored.

Perhaps my agonizing over it is foolish. The wires are there; they do good things for lots of people. They brought me the electricity I needed to accomplish this crazy Travel Diary project!

But I can't help thinking a lot more good could be done with not a whole lot more rocks.

What's the Problem?

Our ignorance* is the blind assumption the rocks—technology—will provide some kind of perfected system. But a system for what? What is all this technology—all these rocks—supposed to be doing?

When I was a teenager back in the nineteen sixties, all the magazines were telling me that by the turn of the century, which is now long past, no one would have to work. “Atomic” energy would be providing so much electricity it wouldn't be worth trying to measure: it would just be free. Robots would be doing all the factory work, people wouldn't have to do it anymore.

We would be living in some kind of Star Trek universe where all

* And here, as a footnote, I will record that the original, rejected title of my essay was *Why You're Ignorant*. Mea culpa. It's been *me* who was, and continues to be, ignorant.

people would be free to live lives of personal satisfaction, getting education, participating in the arts or making stuff to their heart's content. Well, obviously, *that* hasn't happened. All that stuff was, perhaps, depending on the particular author, well-meaning, or self-serving. All authors have always had patrons.

Oh well, the rocks might not have turned out to be all they seemed to be. Yet we go on pushing them, hoping for better and better. Which we sometimes achieve, and sometimes don't.

Tool Using Animals

And there were also, back in the sixties, alongside the folks singing paeans to Science and Technology, others wondering about it, rather more sceptically.

*The quote "We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us." is often mistakenly attributed to Marshall McLuhan. It does NOT appear in Understanding Media, as Wilson Miner confidently asserts in the presentation below, indeed it does not appear in any published work by McLuhan at all. The quote was actually written by Father John Culkin, SJ, a Professor of Communication at Fordham University in New York and friend of McLuhan. But though the quote is Culkin's, I would argue that the idea is McLuhan's, as it comes up in an article by Culkin about McLuhan: Culkin, J.M. . "A schoolman's guide to Marshall McLuhan," Saturday Review, March 18, 1967; pp. 51-53, 71-72. The idea presented in the quote is entirely consistent with McLuhan's thinking on technology in general.**

Back then I was underwhelmed by Marshall McLuhan's writings on media and technology: the hot media, the cold media, their sup-

* <https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/we-shape-our-tools-and-thereafter-our-tools-shape-us/>

posed effects. Obviously there was a plethora of media competing for attention. Some of them were gee-whiz new, some a bit old, and some so ancient they were older than I am now. We have friends who get together to sing around a campfire, much the same way the Neanderthals probably did a hundred thousand years ago. Except that we expect to have guitars and harmonicas added to the mix.

And at that rate, we expect to have a fire. When did that *expectation* arise? A [million years](#) ago?

There's no way to analyze, to really demonstrate, with any kind of certainty, what of all these media—rocks—might have been doing what to whom. People are arguing about whether the Internet and video games are dumbing us down or making us smarter. But the individual effects (if any) of any particular media aren't the point.

It's Always Been Us

As far as I can tell, the media/technology/rocks stuff has *always* pretty much been in charge; it's the way our most distant proto-human ancestors behaved and survived: by banging the rocks together; singing, dancing; holding their kids up to make marks in the clay on the cave walls. We *can't help* doing the techno-stuff, nor can we really analyze and critique it. It's just the way we began and the way we've ended up, given some bizarrely weird and wonderful neuro-plasticity that happened a very long time ago. The more techno-stuff there is, the less we *can* think about anything *but* it. Because, as I didn't really appreciate, and Marshall McLuhan never went deep and far enough to elucidate fully, we are *both* the medium *and* the message.

I was going to say we became the Human Culture Medium, but on second thought that seems a perhaps [infelicitous phrase](#).

We Did Find Something

Loie and I went out searching for the meaning of the Stones, wondering if we could find out what they meant for our—what we thought of as—modern lives. And we *did* find out.

Painted caves, petroglyphs, monoliths plain and carved, dolmens, mandorlas, mosaics, gargoyles, radiant colored glass—all fascinating—were all open to a myriad of confusing and conflicting interpretations; unless, of course, there were no interpretations we could make at all.

Well, OK

All of these things were shown to us and enjoyed by us with wonderful people: friends, family and strangers, many of whom have become friends and—God help them—honorary family. The people who *made* all those things have been gone long time, but we feel a kinship, feel that if we *had* known them, we *could* have been friends and family, just as our many guides and companions have become.

Don't Get Distracted

So Driving the Stone Age wasn't, it isn't, it never really will be—and don't try to kid yourself here, don't get all Marshall McLuhan distracted—about the stones; the media.

It's been about the people: then, and now.

It's been about us: with, for better or worse, Rocks in Our Heads. But, “there they are,” and we will always cherish the friends who helped us find them, perhaps particularly by throwing my crystals in the canal.

“It's not about the Stones, it's about the People.”

Resources

A few of the Travel Friends we've met have web sites you might enjoy and be able to use.

The Modern Antiquarians: [The Modern Antiquarian](#)

Dana Facaros and Michael Pauls: [Apps and Travel Guides by Dana Facaros and Michael Pauls](#)

Paola Arosio & Diego Meozzi: [Stone Pages](#)

Antonio Barbieri: [Concierge in Rome](#)

Himmet Özden (tourism driver in Turkey): contact through [Argeus Tourism](#)

Carla Antognoni (lodging in Tuscany): [Fattoria Antognoni](#)