



BARBARIANS OF THE LONG PADDOCK

CIVILISATION has brought mankind many benefits, such as the internet, toilet paper and rotary nose hair clippers. But it has come at a cost – we can no longer live and travel independent of technology and society while relying only on a few possessions and some skills to feed and house ourselves from the raw earth.

The human body has evolved to be moving constantly at a moderate pace. Our stick-like posture and long bipedal stride enable us to cover great distances through open country with the minimum effort. The rhythmic pumping action of our legs drives the body's respiration, circulation and digestion.

The constant passing of the scenery stimulates the senses and occupies the mind. To chain this body to a desk, staring at a computer hour after hour, day by day, is to invite deformity, disease and madness. Think crib-biting horses or a jungle cat pacing the bars of its cage in a zoo.

Time has a different meaning on the trail. Instead of measuring the passing of the hours, we witness our progress through space, along a crooked line, following the track. It's pointless answering the question: "When will you arrive?" because it is as meaningless as: "When I get there." You will arrive when the trail ends. You don't hurry on the trail to meet a deadline, you go at a pace, you follow a routine, a rhythm that's calming and hypnotic.

Then something happens, a disaster looms, quick thinking and action are needed, all senses are sharp, there could be loss or pain!

But your skills and practice come to the fore, disaster is averted, there are breakages, but lessons too. One swings erratically from despair to exaltation, but is never bored.

There is no wealth on the trail, no status. Your property is limited to what you can carry comfortably. Instead of judging fellow travelers by their accumulated possessions or their bank balance, the reverse applies. Smart, skilled and experienced trekkers are lauded for their economy, frugality and ability to “make do”.

At the campground there is genuine egalitarian democracy – no lordship or serf, landlord or tenant, rich or poor – we are all homeless. Ours is the long paddock, you can't beat that.

Historians argue whether overpopulation necessitated the rise of civilisation, or if civilisation allowed us to proliferate. Whatever, it's certainly true that many of our achievements are actually responses to the problems of living together closely, such as vaccination, police and democracy, or Donald Trump.

Hunter-gatherers are prompted to move camp every few days. After day three the easy game has been snared, the grain, fruit and roots gathered, necessary maintenance has been carried out and the nitrogen content of the soil around the campsite reaches a critical level. There is no joy quite like hitting the road. So how about it, wanna go trekking? Then thumb your nose at the Romans and release your inner barbarian.