

The Town Drunk

Presents

One Million Years B.F.E.: Diary of an Anthropologist in Exile

Merrie Haskell

Copyright © 2006 Merrie Haskell

Day One:

I have been exiled to the early or perhaps middle Pleistocene by the Temporal Crimes Tribunal. I'm vastly displeased by this turn of events, though I'm certain that this hardship will only serve to make me a greater woman. By the end of my lonely pre-historic life, I will be most knowledgeable authority on lifestyle of early man (and woman). Unfortunate that publishing opportunities here are so slim.

I am determined to become strong, lithe, deadly, noble cave-woman type figure, á la Ayla of *Clan of the Cave Bear*. I will fashion stone tools, hunt and gather food, and live pristine, pure life of *Homo Erectus*-type person, at one with nature. Ah. The air is *so* fresh. Quite lovely.

Day Two:

Bushmen of the South African desert in my home-time were—are?—*will be* able to subsist on a mere twenty hours of work per week. By the principle of uniformitarianism, I shall be able to do the same. Fabulous! Life in the Pleistocene will leave plenty of time for relaxation and deep thoughts, and getting over the loss of Philmore the Physicist. And plenty of time to come to terms with all bad habits of codependency, “women who love too much,” “women who do too much,” “women who mess around with time-stream continuum in order to repair non-reparable relationships,” etc.

Only problem is, once I've solved all psychological problems, I will not have anyone to share daily triumphs and travails with. I will certainly die alone, eaten by hyenas.

Day Three:

Tomorrow I run out of matches. Must re-invent fire. Good thing I am expert, top-notch anthropologist with six months of training—I can't imagine attempting this lifestyle without my

vast anthropological knowledge.

Day Four:

No fire yet. Fortunate that it is summer, and I have jerky left.

Day Five:

No fire yet. Tom Hanks in *Castaway* had fire by now.

Day Six:

No fire yet. Boys in *Lord of the Flies* had fire by now.

Day Seven:

No fire yet. *Gilligan* had fire by now.

Day Eight:

Success! I have fire!

Though I no longer have eyebrows. Nor eyelashes. *Gilligan* had both brows and lashes. Damn you, *Gilligan*.

Day Nine:

I'm very sad to be missing anthropologists' bar night back home. I considered drinking the small stash of NyQuil that I was permitted by the Tribunal, in an effort to get smashed. I have reconsidered. Hyenas howl close by tonight. I must not encourage them.

Day Ten:

I have not found a good bathing spot. I have found only a haven of leeches. The two kilos of grease and oil on my head make my hair look fat.

Day Eleven:

Foodstores granted by the Tribunal are running low. I must fashion tools in order to hunt and gather. Perhaps a digging stick, á la Kalahari bushwomen.

Day Twelve:

Have not found good food source. Could not bring self to consume grubs, which were only items uncovered by digging stick. Digging stick technology not all it's cracked up to be.

Day Thirteen:

No good food source again today. I have put in far more than twenty hours this week. Not certain, exactly, where time is going. Tomorrow I shall perform a small time study, in order to see where I can pare out unnecessary activities from daily schedule.

Day Fourteen:

Time Study

Dawn: Awaken. Roll over, pull covers back over head. Sleep.

Some time after dawn: Awaken. Day is cloudy, fire is low. Hyenas yipping outside cave. Damn hyenas.

Some time after that: Stumble out of bed to privy hole in back of cave. Spend long moments sorting through box of leaves, looking for softest, most absorbent leaves. Am not pleased by bathroom facilities in the Pleistocene.

Nearing noon: Hungry! Break into last stash of chocolate ration. Consume entire ration. Ah, well. Better to make new start on the morrow with chocolate clean out of mind, and no prospect of getting more for several thousand years.

Noon: Head out to look for chert, flint, or other stone with excellent cleavage properties appropriate for knapping stone tools. Must make stone-tipped spear and kill large, high-utility meat animal.

A bit after noon: No chert, no flint, no obsidian. Why did Tribunal deposit me here in stone-tool-making waste-land? Was all their ranting and raving about not wishing to kill me just so much politically correct baloney? Oh, of course it was. I will die alone, starving and unloved in a chertless wasteland, eaten by hyenas, with only my fat hair to mark my passing.

Shortly after that: Oooh, look—chert!

Shortly before dark: It was *completely* reprehensible for the Temporal Crimes Tribunal to exile me to the Stone Age without a pair of safety goggles. Have spent the last three hours trying to wash a small piece of chert from my eye. Utterly boorish of them.

Dark: Too dark to do much other than sit still on the pile of leaves I call my bed and listen to hyenas.

Small victory: I did manage to fashion crude hand-axe out of available chert. I will sleep with this splendid weapon under my pillow and dare the hyenas to come near now! Grrr!!!

Day Fifteen:

Uniformitarianism is a bust. If the San bushmen can spend less than 20 hours a week hunting and gathering to survive, then I'm a silver-backed gorilla. I have slaved from sunup to sundown, knapping stone and hafting tips. Just now spent several hours getting tar out of my hair after bad hafting incident. Clearly, ethnologists studying the bushmen were *not very observant*. Bushmen were clearly sneaking in extra work somehow.

As for Binford and his utility indices, I *hate* him. Why did he have to be right? Why? Am wishing that golden age of australopithecines as speculated by the Leakeys had been the more accurate. The only meat I've been able to acquire was the mangled haunch of some sort of antelope that I stole from hyenas using torches and yelling. Am not strong hunter-cavewoman. Am weak, shambling scavenger-cavewoman.

Day Sixteen:

Strange sort of hominid is spying on me from top of the hill, on and off. Very dirty and unattractive, though quite tall. *Homo erectus* or *homo ergaster*? He's very shy. Not altogether certain that he means me well, but I do have one or two evolutionary advantages over the poor thing, so I should be fine.

Day Seventeen:

Ergaster bastard has stolen my antelope jerky! I will kill proto-man ancestor if he comes near again, and damn the time-stream! I only hope that he is not a distant ancestor.

Day Eighteen:

Fancy this—*H. ergaster* is nothing of the sort! He is a physicist named Roger who was exiled by the Tribunal two weeks after me—though he was sent off ten years before my home time! He thought he'd gone completely mad when he saw me, but thought he would work with the hallucination and enjoy my food.

After I tried to break his head with my hand-axe, we both started shouting in English and realized that we were from the same time, more or less. What an amazing coincidence!

Day Nineteen:

Made the mistake of telling Roger that I was surprised a physicist could survive so long on his own in the Pleistocene with no anthropological training. Apparently he was in a wilderness club in school. He made fire on his first attempt. May have liked him better when he was just *Homo ergaster*. Bastard.

Day Twenty:

Hyenas broke into food stash today. Roger was very angry. We hunted them back to their den,

planning to enact ritual canicide on evil hyenas.

However, small, fluffy baby hyena survivors are too adorable to resist! I was unable to bash any baby hyenas in the head, and am now a hyena foster-mother instead. Am quite pleased. I believe I'm glowing with motherhood and satisfaction. Early domestication of canine species will be boon to human race, and my likeness will be etched onto small stones for all to wonder and marvel at in the distant future.

Roger is not as pleased, however, as there is a small potty-training problem with Spot.

Day Twenty-one:

Vile beast has chewed my leather footgear! I now wish to be rid of all hyenas. Fluffy baby scavengers have also caused domestic spat. Roger "ended" the spat by claiming to be surprised that someone in a "soft science" survived so long in a harsh and brutal climate.

We are considering separate caves.

Day Twenty-two:

I am wondering about self-destructive behavior patterns. I have noted many similarities between Philmore and Roger: both are type A, domineering physicists with messiah complexes and a lack of appreciation for personal hygiene.

However, Roger is currently the only fish in the sea.

I will *not* obsess about relationship flaws. I will accept Roger for who and what he is and not try to "fix" him. Cannot change men. Should not try. That is, after all, how one gets exiled to the Pleistocene.

Merrie Haskell is scrupulous yet given to hyperbole. She finds this paradox of idiosyncracies more suited to an annoying minor character in a Victorian novel than a science fiction writer, but nevertheless she forges on. Her fiction has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Fortean Bureau*, and *Escape Pod*.