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Grand Canyon gets a birthday makeover

Terry McConnell, The Edmonton Journal

Published: Sunday, January 07, 2007

Earth's history may be as old as the dirt on the planet itself, but the rewrites continue to this day.

From Arizona's Grand Canyon National Park comes this news: park employees have been told by officials from the Bush administration not to mention the canyon's actual geological age to visitors, reports the Chicago Sun-Times.

According to Wikipedia, geological evidence suggests the canyon was created over millions of years, the result of the Colorado River cutting a channel through the two-billion-year-old rock formations. However, a book that's on sale at the park's bookstore suggests the Grand Canyon was instead created 4,500 years ago by Noah's biblical flood.

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Elsewhere on the faith front, over 1,000 Turks spent the first day of the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha in emergency wards after accidentally stabbing themselves or suffering other injuries while sacrificing animals.

Wiped off the map

The Grand Canyon -- one of the modern seven wonders of the world -- is not the only geographic feature facing revisionist fervour. So, too, were the hundreds of small communities in Georgia that were wiped off state highway maps.

Georgia's transportation department exorcised 519 villages and hamlets from the maps given free to tourists, reports the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The idea was to make the maps clearer and more legible. Not surprisingly, however, small-town officials reacted with considerable hostility, state bureaucrats quickly retreated, and the slighted burghs will be restored to the maps. "These communities are part of the fabric of our state..." blah, blah and blah proclaimed a department spokesflak.

Among the towns restored: Po Biddy Crossroads, Hopeulikit, Doctortown, Climax and Poetry Tulip -- which, as everyone knows, is halfway between Chattoogaville and Due West.

Life in the sticks

"I come from a small town whose population never changed. Every time a woman got pregnant, someone left town."

-- Michael Prichard

Pint-size delinquents

Speaking of small towns, a kindergarten pupil in the Maryland burg of Hagerstown has been suspended for sexually harassing a classmate, reports the Baltimore Sun. The five-year-old boy apparently pinched the girl's bottom.

The lad's father says he's at a loss to explain to his son what exactly sexual harassment means. "He knows nothing about sex," said the dad, Charles Vallance. Apparently, he's not alone. Fourteen other Maryland kindergarten pupils were suspended last year for the same transgression.

Sniff, sniff

This story makes even less sense. In Sacramento, Calif., a bank robber who was suffering a cold declared his plans for robbing the institution, then asked the teller for a tissue. However, reports the Sacramento Bee, since there was no tissue, he left the bank and went to a nearby drugstore to buy some, then returned to pick up where he had left off. An arrest quickly followed.

Sense and sensible

"Firefighters Douse Flames at Crematorium"

-- Headline on edmontonjournal.com

Win by losing

Winners of the 2006 Darwin Awards have been announced.

That's the honour posthumously awarded to people who inadvertently manage to off themselves in creative, albeit idiotic, ways -- thereby, in the words of Darwin

organizers, improving humanity's gene pool by removing themselves from it.

According to the New York Post, the top prize went to two students who climbed into a huge helium-filled balloon in Florida in order to get a "buzz" by inhaling the gas. Jason Ackerman and Sara Rydman, both 21, were discovered with their feet sticking out of the deflated balloon. They died of oxygen starvation.

Ananova.com reports the runner-up was a man who flew his copper wire-bound kite during a thunderstorm. The 26-year-old, from Belize, died after the kite sent a fatal bolt of lightning through his body. He was an electrician.

In third was a Brazilian who tried to dismantle a rocket-propelled grenade by driving back and forth over it with his car. When the weapon failed to break apart, he attacked it with a sledgehammer. The resulting explosion killed him and destroyed six cars and the place where he worked.

Speaking of explosions

"Inmate's Flatulence Sparks Jail Fight"

-- Headline in the Arizona Republic

Out on a limb

You might want to check back in a year's time, but a Mexican warlock -- yeah, you read that right -- has made his fearless predictions for 2007.

Topping the list, reports the Houston Chronicle, is the prediction that Fidel Castro will be dead by May. If that seems like a safe bet, then how about this: once the 80-year-old Castro is dead, Cuba will have closer ties to the U.S. Eventually, even the casinos will be back.

Lest you think our warlock, a.k.a. Antonio Vazquez, is playing it safe, you should know he divined his predictions by reading Mayan tarot cards. What else did they tell him? The anti-immigration wall between the U.S. and Mexico will not be built. So there.

Last year, the warlock correctly predicted the outcome of Mexico's federal election -- but he also said Germany would win the World Cup. It didn't.

Year in review

"Hey 2006, You Sucked!"

-- Headline in the Toronto Star

On the job

Mice are being recruited as taste testers for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Well, "recruited" is not really the right word. In keeping with Chinese custom, they're just told they have the job. According to the A&A Economic Digest, mice will exhibit adverse reactions to toxic food in about 17 hours. Laboratory tests take much longer.

Suck it up

If you're looking for birthday gift ideas for the work-averse members in your family, consider this latest product from the folks at Electrolux. It's called the Sh Hoover. It's a vacuum that sucks up dust as you walk. According to Daily Mirror, "As you walk, the base of the shoes collect dust on the floor without requiring any effort."

Telescope's kids say they will take two.

Science of humour

Kids have been a goldmine of comic material for generations, a reality that has been shamelessly exploited on the Internet to much merriment. The premise for the following, submitted by astute Telescope reader Linda Logan, is that these are children's answers on a science exam.

w Q: Explain one of the processes by which water can be made safe enough to drink.

A: Flirtation makes water safe to drink because it removes large pollutants like grit, sand, dead sheep and canoeists.

w Q: How is dew formed?

A: The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

w Q: How can you delay milk turning sour?

A: Keep it in the cow.

w Q: What causes the tides in the oceans?

A: The tides are a fight between the Earth and the moon. All water tends to flow towards the moon, because there is no water on the moon, and nature hates a vacuum. I forget where the sun joins in this fight.

w Q: What are steroids?

A: Things for keeping carpets still on the stairs.

w Q: What happens to your body as you age?

A: When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.

w Q: What happens to a boy when he reaches puberty?

A: He says goodbye to his boyhood and looks forward to his adultery.

w Q: Name a major disease associated with cigarettes.

A: Premature death.

w Q: How are the main parts of the body categorized? (e.g., abdomen.)

A: The body is consisted into three parts -- the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain; the borax contains the heart and lungs; and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels, A, E, I, O, and U.

w Q: What is the fibula?

A: A small lie.

w Q: Give the meaning of the term "caesarean section."

A: The caesarean section is a district in Rome.

And finally...

w Q: What does "varicose" mean?

A: Nearby.

Contributions to Telescope are always welcome. You can reach Terry at 498-5842, fax him at 498-5677 or e-mail him at tmccconnell@thejournal.canwest.com.

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