

The Disappearing Duck

As Liz came to put the ducks away on Monday night, one was missing. She walked round shouting and looking, but still no duck. As they stay pretty well together all day, it seemed unlikely that she had wandered off, so the most likely explanation, unhappy though it was, was that Reynard (the fox) had got her. Liz was remarkably self controlled in the circumstances.

We both spent a bad night worrying about her in different ways. Liz was just worried, but I reckoned our best bet was with drain rods. Unfortunately, I didn't have any, so I would need



The next day, however, as evening came and she started to get them in again a faint disembodied quacking was heard. Where was it coming from? Nowhere obvious, and no duck to be seen. After an anxious few minutes the noise was finally located coming from down the pond drain! The missing duck had gone down the drain! The level in the pond had been rather high, and we have to assume that she got a bit too close and was swept down with the current.

Anyway, that was academic at this point - what were we going to do? There was no way we could extract her back up the drain, but there was a man-hole about 10 feet away. In the end we had to leave her there overnight (she wasn't short of water after all) while we came up with an idea. We lifted the top off the man hole just in case.

to get some, and a chimney sweep's brush to push her out. I was fairly sure I could get the rods but the sweep's brush? Was there one to be had in Derbyshire? What would happen if I couldn't get one? Could we use that corkscrew thing that you use down drains? Would it get caught in her bottom? No wonder I spent a bad night.

In the event, we got up the next morning and there she was, in the man hole, quacking away. We lifted her out and she has been as right as rain ever since. And her name is, predictably, Drainsy Duck, and the drain now



Sheep Out Again

Six o'clock in the morning. You know what's coming don't you? Yes - sheep blahting far too close to the bedroom window. Yes - they were out again. Some were on the front lawn and some were already in the road.

I tore down stairs, not even stopping to put on a dressing gown, threw on an anorak, tore out and started gathering those who were still inside the gates. Meanwhile Liz shot out the gate where some kind motorist was blithely driving them further down the road. What did he think he was doing? You come down the road to find sheep on it, so you just keep going, driving

the sheep in front of you. That's sensible isn't it?

Anyway Liz screamed at him to stop, and she tore across the fields to next door, hoping to get to their gate before the sheep did, so she could drive them back up the road. If we missed them there, we would have a real problem because we can't then get past them (to bring them back) until they get to the main road at the bottom.

Meanwhile I am still running round the front lawn in my pyjamas and not much else. So I am trying to shoo sheep with one hand, and stop certain parts of my anatomy popping out with the other. Only partly successfully on both counts I am afraid, but

Plonker

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auctioneer, and off went the bidding. Stuck around £75 (per head) and up went my £10 luck money. The bidding finished at £77. Not good, but not too bad.

In came the second pen. "These haven't lambed" I told the auctioneer. A quick aside to his colleague and then "Are you sure?". Of course I was sure, this was pen 2, pen 1 had been the lambers. Off the bidding went, stalled around £68, up went the £10 luck, and we were all done at £70. The same with the third pen - all done at £71. And off I went, feeling great relief.

There was a call from behind me - "Hang on, there is another pen". Eh? What? How can there be another pen? So I looked over the side, and sure enough, the lot coming in looked like mine. So, with a red face, and no luck money left, I reluctantly stayed through it, and then turned to go. No such luck - the next lot were mine as well. And the next. And, to make my

embarrassment complete, on the way out, the buyer of pen 5 asked where his luck money was!

What had happened was that the physical pens at Bakewell only hold a maximum of 20 ewes, so they had divided each of Andy's conceptual pens into two physical pens. Andy would have known that. Liz would have known that pen 2 had lambed because they had a red mark that she and Andy had put on the new mums. Me, though, I didn't. And, in the heat of the moment it never occurred to me to count. What a plonker.

At the end of the day though, all that really happened was that we sold 16 ewes for £71 that should have fetched £77 - around £100. Not good, but hardly a

Friends

One of the year's happy events was a gathering of all the old school friends at the farm in May this year. Fourteen of us gathered, and by generous use of a shoe horn, we were all squeezed into the available accommodation.



eventually we got them all back in.

How had they got out? Well, I had a slight slip of the memory. I had driven the tractor back in from the fields, and left the gate open thinking I would save myself climbing out and back in again, by coming back to close it after I had put the tractor away. But of course, forgot the last, important, bit.

So who do you think finished up with chilly parts, and a frosty reception?

Liz cooked us breakfast, and dinner on the Saturday night was a huge takeaway. Sunday lunch was provided by all the visitors, four of whom had brought shepherd's pies with them, with desserts provided by the others.

We used the weekend to knock down a shed which was no longer needed, and great fun was had by all.

It is so good to be back in touch with them all again.

On Getting Older

This year's big travel story took place last January. Many years ago, when I was VERY young and living in Switzerland, my friend Mike came out to stay with us and we went skiing. It was about my fourth time and his first. Since then I have skied regularly, as has Mike, so when we met up again through Friends Reunited, it was exciting to arrange to go skiing together again. So, with Mike's wife, Gil, Liz, and our old ski companions Sally and John we started looking for somewhere new to ski.

At the same time, Vicki and Nash were organising a three month round-the-world trip, and were able to synchronise the penultimate week of their trip with the second week of ours. Our friends Phil and Anne (from France) were keen to join us, and it turned out that one of Vicki's bridesmaids (Kirstin) was living in Denver at the time, and that two more of her old school friends were over staying with her.

This promised to be a great ski holiday. Well, crowded anyway.

In the event the original six spent our first week in that Mecca for skiers, Jackson Hole. Not being a dedicated "Black Run" fan I felt I had skied in nicer places, but others enjoyed it, and for the second week all thirteen of us met up in Big Sky, Montana. What a week. We ate in most of the time, and despite nobody knowing anybody else, and the vast age difference, the conversation (and the beer and wine) flowed wonderfully.

There were lots of things to do, and usually someone else to do it with. Four of us went horse riding in the Montana



snow, and I doubt any of us will forget just being out in that vast emptiness in the snow. Genuinely awesome. Others took an unforgettable trip by snow-mobile or ski-do into Yellowstone National Park to see fantastic wild life and Old Faithful. Still others went for a dog sledge ride.

And we all went skiing. It was a fantastic resort, you pretty well had your own run for the day it was that empty. But I (Terry) met my Waterloo. The last time we went skiing with Vicki we were both 14 odd years younger, so she has got better and I have got worse. I was prepared to get thrashed, but I wasn't prepared for the degree of that thrashing. She wiped the floor with me. On one occasion I can remember following her and as this little pink dot reached the bottom of what was a very fast run thinking "That looks a bit dangerous". How much older can I get?

A fantastic time was had by all, and most agreed it was the best ski holiday ever. Which has a rather sad ending really, as John, companion to Sally for many years, and ski companion to Liz and me for several years, died in the middle of the year. Every time I think of booking

The Travel Section



Orlando

start of the hurricane season! But the rain didn't spoil our fun. We visited Discovery Cove where I fulfilled a lifelong ambition and swam with a dolphin (Rascal) - my birthday present from Terry - and we all went snorkelling and swam among all sorts of fish.

We also very much enjoyed Disney's Epcot. We went to some excellent shows in the evenings but the best was Cirque du Soleil - an acrobatic performance which was totally beyond belief. Terry got invited on stage at Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede and had a large lady (not Dolly herself, obviously) sitting on his knee - until she fell off!

Over the May Bank Holiday we took Jo's two girls - Bethan (10) and Sian (13) to Florida. It was an extremely busy week involving a great deal of fun and even more food, and we all enjoyed ourselves tremendously. We started each day with a HUGE American buffet breakfast which included everything you can think of, including ice cream!



The first day was hot. HOT. We were in Sea World and were all very keen to visit the penguins and polar bears to share their cool environment! It cooled down after that - mainly due to the

The girls are great company, but Terry was disappointed that his companions were more interested in shopping than white knuckle rides. He finally queued for one on his own, but it

Erratum

In last year's newsletter we mentioned several highlights of our trip across the States.

It has since been pointed out to us (via the Press Complaints Commission) that we omitted to thank Ian and Mandy Deakin, (with whom Liz was at school), for driving all the way down the pretty side of the border from Toronto, to meet us and slum it on the US side, at Niagara.

We had a truly wonderful evening, despite the meal (inevitably) not being as good as we would have had on their side. Nor the waiters. Nor the beer. Nor the wine. Nor the weather. Nor the car park etc., etc.

This omission was due to lack of editorial space, and we apologise unreservedly for any embarrassment it may have caused. This despite the fact that this apology has already taken up far more space than the original comment would have