

'Didn't we have a luvverly time the day we all went camping

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Arrival - Happy Gary

To some people, a welcome smile comes naturally. To others not so (the author amongst them, quite a bit of the time). However, a grimace accompanied by muttering probably is the more extreme way of making it clear that hospitality ain't your thing. And so it is with Gary.

Born the second son of the Lord of Orcaber and Austwick, Gary is second fiddle to the heir to the throne (or portalo, take your pick) after his brother Neil.

And Gary bears this burden throughout his dealings with the visitors to his fiefdom. Arrival is dealt with by much pursing of lips, perusing of lists, exchange of phrases such as 'Chris Scott - you're not here until tomorrow' - which clearly my presence in front of him contradicted even if I wasn't said Mr Stott, and then, mysteriously, all waved aside as he clambers on board his Quad and zooms off across the field. Which, according to the fair maiden stood in a state of mild bewilderment at his side (presumably his Lordship's daughter) meant he was onto something, and I should follow him.

Gary didn't get any more customer friendly over the forthcoming period, either. Every morning he'd do his rounds - 'you leavin' today ??' being his favourite greeting and every evening he'd do his firepit tour - 'have you paid for your logs and kindling?? - you leavin' tomorrow ?'. Listening and taking note also not the 2nd son of Orcaber's forte.

We'll leave Gary to his second fiddle world and move on. He'll be back.

Camp Scott

As we climbed the Mount of Orcaber, the site (or sight, take your pick) of Camp Scott hove into view. Slightly masked by a row of vehicles and what appeared to be a golden Dung Beetle glistening at one end, this was the destination and home for the weekend.

Beyond the grey monolith that was 'main tent', and nestled cheekily beyond the picnic tables, a llama and a pink dragon, stood the Narnia that was the abode of a bacon free, taxidermy lover and her page in attendance and to the left of that, a spare plot of unsullied Yorkshire grass. My home to be.

Tent up, coffee had, and a first round of bingo, engineered to deliver a victory to the smaller of the players by the Queen of Shuffle (and the keeper of the Dung Beetle). An eclectic mix of campers, it is fair to say - and those two characters happen to be one and the same.

It wasn't long before gin was produced, and that's the only way to settle into a Friday evening, in my humble opinion. Who cares how long it'll take to cook dinner - we're out in the fresh air, good company is available, the llama and the dragon were, seemingly, teasing one another with some polymeric foreplay and all was well with the world.

And then Gary re-appeared - 'you paid for those logs ? you goin' tomorrow ?' You get the gist. And then he sodded off on his quad, and peace was restored.

For a short while, Cpt Scott wrestled with his bowl of fire, until a brief intense burst of blowing sorted him out, and then Nurse Gladys and the author of this merry tale settled down for a spot of Southerner watching. The poor souls adjacent arrived after a 9 hr journey from goodness knows where, attempted to erect a tent they'd never seen in their life, were gifted a beer each by Nursey (presumably to addle their weary brains yet further in the vain hope of extended comedy) and eventually succeeded, with help from fellow travellers from Narnia, or wherever they hailed from.

Chicken and burgers consumed (save for the vegan one), wine opened and it's time for the sacrificing of the logs. Expertly kindled, the fire crackled, the conversation flowed and, a little later on, the dulcet tones of Club 18-32 wafted (Nssss Nssss Nssss) across the Mount of Orcaber.

A word of explanation might be required here - unlike the mainstream Club 18-30, the slightly extended Orcaber branch caters for the more discerning of the humans in their early 4th decade. Meeting only in very specific corners of fields, and huddled together for protection, these holidaymakers are only ever seen on rare occasions. And, miraculously, they have an unerring ability to fall into complete silence on the stroke of 11pm. Weird.

Brenda Luc(h)arini

An unusual appearance around the campfire that Friday night was the 'virtual' Brenda Luc(h)arini. Brenda (to her friends), is clearly a lady with an air of mystery and magic. After a rather unfortunate start to her introduction, which involved the description of the melding of her neck skin and a rather personal part of her anatomy, and which thankfully has subsequently been attended to (the neck!), Brenda continued to make several appearances throughout the evening as Nurse G regaled the crowd with her varied and humorous escapades across the Pond.

I for one can't wait to meet our Brenda. Indeed I may have to stalk the book of Face in order to put a face to a name. I fear we may be beyond Club 18-32, but there's bound to be another way. The ground you cover around a campfire.....

*** Stop Press ***.

Brenda is without an 'h', and hangs around phone boxes. Other than that, she looks quite normal. Wonder if she knows how famous she really is in the land of Orcaber?



It's a little bit early

Camping brings you into the world of fresh air, stories shared, games played, laughs laughed. You have the sounds of zippers, zipping and unzipping in the early morning, the melodic rhythm of doves cooing, the hoarse retort of the sorethroat bird (no idea what the hell that was at 0330 but it sounded in pain).

However, it also throws up the challenge that is personal hygiene. That decision as to what passes as acceptable to your friends in terms of how far you can let things go. Unshavedness (chins, legs, whatever) is acceptable for a few days, of course. A dry tooth scrub - fine. The collection of morning dew as a way to tame the onset of tent hair - why not?

There comes a point, however, when a shower is needed.

And what you definitely don't need is a brain that takes a late night parting observation and goes 'hey, I know what, I'll take that nugget and whack it into the calendar, and better than that, I'll stick a notification on there as well to go with it'.

I have such a brain. It's the only one I've got - most of the time it works reasonably well, it can cope with love, adversity, joy, reasonable amounts of booze, but what it doesn't do too well with is the aforementioned process. It's a bugger for playing tricks like that.

Which is why, at 0430, I showered. Now, granted the facilities were as clean as an MP's conscience, there was no queue, there was in fact no sign of life. But you then have that strange time between the return to the tent and the stirring of life from your fellow pitchers. And it's ruddy bright in a tent at that time I can assure you.

However, I commend it to you, for one simple reason. When you return, and huddle back into your Hollofil cocoon, all nicely scrubbed and clean, something magical happens. Especially in sunny times. The tent starts to warm up. Slowly.

You start to feel a little tired ('cos it's only five past bloody five), and then the honest companions that are weariness and warmth cradle you in their collective arms, and you're carried off into the land of Nod. And you wake, a bit later, having had the best 2 hours kip for ages.

Just a word of caution though. Don't zip yourself up too well - leave plenty of airflow. Otherwise you'll be as sweaty as a Turk in a ziplock bag and you'll have to queue for an hour to have another wash.

THIS™ isn't Bacon

Everyone has a choice in life. And so it should be. Some choices are to be revered, some to be respected, and some are duty bound to be accompanied by gentle mockery. And so it is with 'not bacon'. I feel it is important to be clear - the need to hunt out humour in these things is most probably as a result of a personality defect in the mocker, rather than anything associated with the mockee. And it's directed at the item, rather than the consumer.

That said, any product that proudly announces 'I'm not Bacon', that looks initially like a bit of dried kipper, or an anchovy fillet that's recently returned from holidays and didn't use sun cream, and that ultimately, and amazingly, tastes quite a bit like bacon, does deserve to be sought out for special attention.

If you research 'THIS™', it turns out that TiB is a protein based product, brought to us by people who josh with our senses - they jokingly suggest that they'll sell your email address if you share it with them (oh, you kidders, you) - they playfully ask you to share your thoughts for them to read on the loo (presumably after downing too much TiB). They're a hoot, a wheeze, and a jolly nice bunch. They also do 'This isn't Chicken'.

Still, if it floats your boat, what's not to like. And it prompts a lot more breakfast time chatter than your average portion of sliced up porker. Gotta love it for that alone!

.... Woke

Apparently we are trendsetters. Not more than a handful of days after our campsite philosophies on life covered this very subject, the universe, THIS™, and everything, no other than Noel Gallagher jumped on the bandwagon of one of our other topics and labelled the Ginger Prince of Bel Air a 'woke f*****g snowflake'. Reasoned argument, logically put. You can't beat it.

If ever there was a word, recently, that seems to have awakened (groan!) debate on the matter, 'woke' seems to be it. Depending on your at-risk rating of becoming 'woke', I guess you'll see the idea in different ways. At one end of the spectrum (perhaps the short wave end) you have the 'woke is awareness of social injustice' - at the LW end, Radio Luxembourg if you will, you perhaps have the rather acerbic, grumpy point of view that 'woke is just a bunch of softies whingeing who need to grow up and get on with it'.

Personally, I like to think of 'Woke' as that thing I did just before thinking 'I need to go for a shower' (see above).

Life's a lot simpler if you take things at face value.

All you need in life is a packet of Doritos

Of course, the one time that Gary did his tour, and we ignored his sparkling repartee and mesmerising sales pitch (and informed him we were leaving the next day), we were low on kindling.

Which meant, of course, the Doritos moment had cometh.

Cometh the spark, cometh the flaming Dorito, cometh the roaring fire.

Of course, no-one believeth me initially, but it does work. But, for the record, only 3 out of around 2 dozen flavours of Doritos are vegan, but all flavours are highly flammable. Not something they write on the label.

And whilst we're on this burning topic, here's a top fire word tip. Inflammable means 'capable of burning without any assistance - ie. can burst into flame all on

its very lonesome. Flammable means you've got to give it a kick - for example with a rather lame gas stove lighter in our case - so Doritos are flammable. Non-flammable means 'ain't going to burn'. Which is the case with most campfires if experience is anything to go by. And now you can overtly or covertly correct everyone's misuse of flammable / inflammable. All from a packet of crisps.

In any case, our flammable Doritos did the job, wine was poured, the Frog's varied life history explored for those who didn't know it, Brenda made a welcome virtual re-appearance, this time in Vegas and everyone retired happy and sated.

And no need for a shower in the morning for some 😊