



TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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LIVE (SWAT!) FROM AUSTRALIA...

Hand me a Cuban and Screw my Carbon Footprint...I'm an AMURKIN!

Cover the children's eyes. Avert your own, all you purist anti-smoking wankers. That's me puffing on a fine Havana cigar, courtesy of Fidel, Raul, the Ghost of Che and the Cuban Revolution. They're legal here in Australia (the Aussies have determined that the importation of a good cigar does not threaten their national security), so I am free to puff at will. As Rudyard Kipling once said, "A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke."

And sorry about all that pollution. My doctor told me, 1) I wasn't consuming enough carcinogens and 2) he insisted my carbon footprint was too small. So I'm doing my best to make people happier.

Again, here I am in this sunburnt, fly-ridden country, for reasons I cannot begin to explain. I have a love/hate relationship with Australia. Co-dependent. Dysfunctional. I come back like a heroin addict in dire need of a fix.

As I exited the Perth domestic terminal, I was greeted by about a hundred bush flies who have been with me ever since. I've given some of them names. One of them, I find curiously attractive.

This may be my last extended visit for a while. For more than a decade I have been trying to outrun the flies and Reality, but they and it finally caught up with me. Western Australia has entered the 21st Century with a bang, just as I was desperately seeking asylum in the 19th. I've known this for a while but have been in Denial.

When I first touched ground a decade ago, I thought I'd pulled off a coup. I really had found the Place that Time Forgot. But the world can turn over many times in ten years. It did double inverted flipflops with a counterclockwise twist here. I was shocked. Still am.

Then along came the "Global Economic Crisis" and I had such high hopes. I had even entertained the notion that our new leaders, both here in Oz and back in the States, might dare to re-define prosperity and wealth itself. I dreamed we might see true visionaries who had the courage to say: "All this...stuff...is destroying us. Happiness is not an iPod or a plasma tv....It's an empty promise that leaves us even hungrier for more."

But...nope...didn't happen. Here in WA (Western Australia), the economy dipped briefly, but I'm not sure most

even noticed. It has been business as usual. Home prices are still climbing and unemployment is barely 5% (just a bit lower than the Australian national average and HALF the rate in the USA). A story in this week's daily "West Australian" announced plans to dramatically expand the airline fleets to handle exploding demands from the "next resources boom."

Western Australia's "prosperity" is inextricably and forever tied (for as long as they last) to commodities...natural resources...money. GREED.

WA is a treasure house of natural resources—gold, silver, uranium, iron ore, nickel, copper, manganese...the stuff that China and India and other Asian nations destined to rule the world are buying up as fast as it can be mined. Australia's future is now tied to Asia, not America and Europe. We're history. Burnt toast. Shit on a shingle.

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And so the Australians open one new mine after another, one gas plant bigger than the one before and China buys all those commodities to fuel its massive and still expanding manufacturing base, creates products from those resources and sells them back to them. And to us in the USA. And everywhere.

Even during the Great Recession, the Chinese kept buying, stockpiling commodities at reduced prices. So unemployment only dipped a bit here and prices stayed high. The cost of living is extraordinary. While both the US and Australia can claim average annual family incomes of about \$50,000 to \$60,000, the price Aussies pay to live is staggering.

In 1999, an average home in Perth was \$147,000. Today it exceeds \$430,000. In the trendy parts of WA's capital city, an upscale home that fetched \$350,000 in 1999 now boasts a \$1.3 million price tag.

Consequently, many Aussies can't afford to buy. But the demand for rentals has sent that market through the roof as well. A modest three bedroom home routinely rents for \$350 to \$400 a week. Yes....a WEEK. Plus utilities.

It was just a few weeks ago, back home in Utah, that I was whining about the \$20 price tag on a Lexmark ink cartridge. That same dinky little piece of black plastic costs \$45 at your local Big W (Australia's Wal-Mart Evil Twin). I tried to have a house key duplicated at the local hardware store—\$16. "I don't want a dozen," I said. The guy just stared at me. "Sixteen, mate...take it or leave it."

A pint of exotic beer at the trendier Perth pubs" Twenty dollars. One beer.

And if you can find it, a can of Dr. Pepper costs \$3.95.

With the U.S. dollar in free fall, I'm learning to live without extra keys and specialty brews. The Aussies keep spending. But damn I miss my Dr. Peppers.

One worry though for the Land of "No Worries." Just last week, the government announced that Australians' personal debt now equals the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It means every Aussie adult owes an average of \$74,000. Down the road, sooner or later, the Real World may catch up after all.

I love Australia. It's not where I "go on vacation." It's like a second home. Away from the coastal cities and away from the mines, there are still vast expanses of golden pastoral lands, gum tree forests, and dense wild country that Aussies just call The Bush. And it is a country dominated by good, decent people who continue to bestow their generosity and kindness upon me, even when I don't deserve it.

But the real wealth of this country was truly in its people and its land and its lifestyle. I think many Aussies would agree they were a lot richer before they discovered all this goddamn money.

CLIMATE CHANGE & COPENHAGEN & AUSTRALIA

While the carbon pollution from Australia rates among the highest per capita in the world, the media certainly does its job here reporting the facts. While Americans glued themselves to the Tiger Woods story, here, climate change is the issue of the decade and the comprehensive and balanced in depth reporting is remarkable. But it is no less controversial, on so many levels.

Its prime minister, Labour's Kevin Rudd, led the party to victory in 2007 with a promise to seriously address global warming and assured dramatic action if he were elected. But his rhetoric, like Obama's in the US has, so far, been eloquent and utterly worthless.

Rudd put together a Climate Change Scheme that excluded agriculture from the mix, gave subsidies to coal and, like the USA, depended heavily on a cap & trade program to meet watered down emissions reductions goals.

He was able to persuade the leader of the conservative opposition, Malcom Turnbull, to support his tepid bill, only to see Turnbull overthrown by climate change skeptics from his own party.

Here in Australia, where the Green party actually wields a bit of power, its leader Bob Brown and the Opposition's new leader, Tony Abbott, found themselves BOTH oppos-



PLANET EARTH EDITION

If "Ignorance is Bliss,"
then Awareness is
HELL.

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ing Rudd's plan, but for diametrically opposed reasons. Ultimately Rudd went to Copenhagen with nothing, just like Obama, and was castigated for it.

Lumumba Di-Aping, a Sudanese negotiator at Copenhagen and one of the most outspoken representatives of the developing nations called Rudd a fraud. In an interview with ABC Australia, he said, "It's puzzling...that here is a Prime Minister who actually won the elections because of his commitment to climate change... he was the only Prime Minister who came and clearly said we have to do something, we have to join Kyoto Protocol and all the rest.

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"And within a very short period of time he changes his mind, changes his position, he start acting as if he has been converted into climate change scepticism. All what Australia has done so far is simply not good enough."

When the ABC reporter told the Sudanese negotiator that Rudd "considers himself a world leader on the issue of climate change," he laughed.

"The message that the Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd is giving to his people, his citizens is a fabrication, it's fiction, it does not relate to the facts because his actions are climate change skepticism in action."

The ABC also interviewed NASA's climatologist James Hansen, who seems to get much more air time away from his own country. In a comprehensive interview on ABC's Lateline with Tony Jones, there was this exchange:

TONY JONES: *Now you're accusing governments of lying through their teeth even as they sign up to large emission reduction targets for Copenhagen. Why so pessimistic?*

JAMES HANSEN: *Well it's very easy to show that they are either lying or kidding themselves because all you have to do is look at the geophysical data. You know, the governments all around the world now agree that we're going to have to stabilize atmospheric composition, carbon dioxide in particular, at a relatively low level.*

And if you look at how much carbon there is in oil, gas and coal, what you quickly realize is that oil and gas is already going to be enough to get us up to approximately the dangerous level. The only way we can solve the problem is by phasing out coal emissions and prohibiting unconventional fossil fuels like tar sands and oil shale.

But in fact, if you look at what's happening, the United States just signed an agreement with Canada to make a pipeline to carry oil from tar sands to the United States, and Australia is expanding its port facilities to export more coal.

And coal fired power plants are built all around the world. Oil is even being squeezed out of coal. So there's absolutely no way that the world can meet the kind of targets that they're talking about for future decades. So they're just putting out numbers, you know, goals which absolutely cannot be met

To watch the video or read the entire transcript:
www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2008/s2764523.htm.

Ultimately, of course, Obama's 11th hour participation produced a toothless, non-binding "political agreement." In the states I could already detect, via the internet, the spin that "progressives" are attaching to the Copenhagen Debacle. But Bill McKibben got it right.

On his blog he wrote, in part:

"(Obama) formed a league of super-polluters, and would-be super-polluters. China, the U.S., and India don't want anyone controlling their use of coal in any meaningful way. It is a coalition of foxes who will together govern the henhouse. It is no accident that the targets are weak to nonexistent. We don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves with targets, he said. Indeed. And now imagine

what this agreement will look like with the next Republican president."

And more to my point...

"He demonstrated the kind of firmness and resolve that Americans like to see. It will play well politically at home and that will be the worst part of the deal. Having spurned Europe and the poor countries of the world, he will reap domestic political benefit. George Bush couldn't have done this—the reaction would have been too great. Obama has taken the mandate that progressives worked their hearts out to give him, and used it to gut the ideas that progressives have held most dear. The ice caps won't be the only things we lose with this deal."

For his entire blog comments on Copenhagen check out: **"With climate agreement, Obama guts progressive values"**
www.grist.org/article/2009-12-18-with-climate-agreement-obama-guts-progressive-values/

The problem, as this publication noted last issue, is that "progressives" have no idea what it means to be one. And they haven't for many years. For most of them, they simply want to feel better. As McKibben notes, progressives can ONLY take comfort that it could have been worse with a Republican. And more succinctly, had Bush taken this route, the progressives would be erupting with outrage.

Again, rhetoric rules.

A TALE OF FOUR BRIDGES

Before I left for Australia, I needed to make one last journey to Colorado via Moab and the river road to get my quarterly haircut. I only trust my Follicles to Faye.

Faye Carpenter of Wavelength Salon on North Avenue has been trying to snip my lobes with her scissors for more than a decade. I am her most loyal but distant customer---in geographical terms, I travel 300 miles (round trip) to let Faye work her magic on my mop.

I don't visit Moab often and as I made the turn from US 191, I was reminded again how quickly the area is being transformed. A new multi-million dollar vehicle bridge is being constructed, just downstream from the current US 191 bridge. A hundred yards upstream, at the site of the original highway bridge, (see photo) is the new bike and pedestrian span, completed just a couple years ago.



A half hour later, I sadly confronted the gruesome remains of my beloved Dewey Bridge. It was burned to the water two years ago (human-caused of course) and while there have been some half-hearted attempts to rouse interest in restoring Dewey Bridge, nothing has come of it, that I know of. And Kevin Kitchen, a spokesman for UDOT, says the state has no plans to rebuild the bridge, nor does it even own what's left of the structure.

It would be impossible to "restore" the old Dewey Bridge. Only the memories of those whitewashed wooden planks survive. "Re-creating" the bridge is another matter but most interested parties believe such a project would cost \$1 million. Cost prohibitive, they say. There just isn't the money.

But it didn't have to be like that..

Again, UDOT's Kevin Kitchen is my source and I appreciate his assistance.

We all know that a new highway bridge has been a UDOT priority for years. When the money was available, the bridge would be built. Meanwhile, there was a concern for bicyclists trying to cross the river on the current US 191 bridge. The money was found to build the bike bridge which ultimately cost \$3.7 million. It was opened in 2007.

But as I was making my exit from the highway at the

Route 128 junction, I wondered what would happen to the old highway bridge. So I contacted UDOT yet again. Mr. Kitchen explained that once the new highway bridge is finished, the old highway bridge will be torn down at an estimated cost of...wait for it...one million dollars.



Now I know I am not the brightest light bulb in the room, but with a bit of foresight, why couldn't someone who makes a living at this have realized that the current highway bridge could have become the bike/pedestrian bridge, once the new US 191 edifice is completed? With a little imagination, some creative landscaping, some benches and picnic tables...why they could even install some of those quaint street lights that are becoming so fashionable in New West towns, the old highway bridge could easily have served the needs of future bikers. That would have saved us the \$3.7 million to build the new bicycle bridge

But it's a simple matter of common sense and fiscal responsibility. The million dollars being spent to tear down a bridge could have been used to re-build Dewey.

It is true that no one could have foreseen the death of Dewey when these plans were made. But it's a simple matter of common sense and fiscal responsibility. The million dollars being spent to tear down a bridge could have been used to re-build Dewey.

But then...what the hell do I know? I also think that the Copenhagen talks were a joke, that mainstream green groups should not have board members who also build coal fired power plants and that building a gazillion wind turbines in the American West will destroy the landscape in ways we never dreamed.

Yep...what the hell do I know?
Where's my vodka and Mrs. T?"

FINALLY...THANKS RICK.

Some of you watched me have a near breakdown in October as plans to "re-make" The Zephyr and create a more reader-friendly HTML version came apart at the seams. When I boarded my flight for Perth, I still didn't know if the "ace" I mentioned on this page last time would be able to perform a miracle.

Well, the Ace came through and it turned out he was practically living across the street from me. His name is Rick Richardson and he seems to be able to do anything, from re-building a V6 motor on a GMC pickup to constructing a computer from the ground up. Sometimes I think Rick may not be human...that he's "studying our species" and reporting back to his People.

In any case, you're reading this in HTML thanks to Rick.

Finally I have something (or someone) NOT to complain about.

Some excellent Aussie News Links

www.abc.net.au/newsradio/
www.abc.net.au/am/
<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/>

COVER PHOTO: www.treehugger.com