

Truth is out there

December 21, 2012

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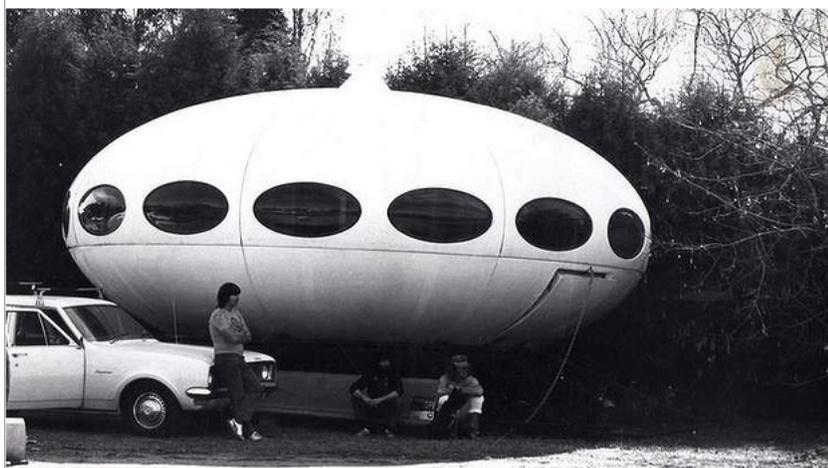


Tim the Yowie Man

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John 'Cooka' Campbell and his mates with the UFO that adorned their backyard in 1974.

- [Canberra's samurai-sword wielding Christmas tree grower](#)

'It was definitely a conversation starter,' recalls John "Cooka" Campbell about his post-high school days when a spaceship took pride of place in the backyard of his Canberra share house.

"The white flying saucer was there when I moved into 14 Currie Crescent, Kingston, in the early 1970s and still there when I left some six years or so later," the long-time Canberra resident explains.

Explore the Canberra region by clicking on Tim's hats

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"You'd go to parties and people would ask where you lived, and you'd reply 'oh in the house with a white UFO in the backyard', and everyone would want to come and see it," Cooka chuckles.

Regular readers of this column will identify the UFO as a futuro - a prefabricated Finnish-designed building of the late 1960s-early 1970s. The polyester plastic and fibreglass domed structures were initially intended for use as ski lodges in remote locations but due to their quirky appearance ended up being transformed for all sorts of uses, from cafes to brothels. "Just before I moved in it was used as a real estate office to help sell new developments in the area," recalls Cooka, who during his six years at Currie Crescent, embraced the striking structure for anything but business. "It was party central - we had many an all-nighter in the spaceship blaring some Jimi Hendrix and the Doors on our stereo while putting away a few cases of long necks."

"Those times back in the '70s were wild, it was party after party - it was the era of living free and easy."

Although the futuro didn't belong to them, Cooka and his housemates became quite protective of their out-of-this-world backyard feature. "One day I came home from work at lunch to find the hatch lowered and a bunch of boys from St Eddies (Edmund's) drinking and smoking inside," says Cooka, who promptly told the truant students that if it wasn't clean in an hour, he'd be "letting their teachers know". "They left it absolutely spotless," Cooka smirks, adding, "it was probably the best clean it ever had while it was in our yard."

Cooka and fellow housemate Walter Shafron believe "their" flying saucer is the very same futuro that ended up at the Dickson Planetarium and ultimately on the University of Canberra campus near Zierholz Brewery, where this column recently reported ([Beam Me Up, UC, September 8](#)) that a number of researchers are trying to determine its pedigree. "Given its history in Currie Crescent, I guess it's quite apt that it's ended up 'landing' outside a pub," Cooka muses.

Leo Vredendregt, formerly of Perth and now of Ngunnawal, recalls in the 1970s a similarly glossy white futuro located beside the Leach Highway in the Perth suburb of Willetton.

"It disappeared, but I just discovered that it's been rotting in a backyard somewhere in the hills of Perth for the last 20 years or so," Vredendregt laments.

"Apparently its now for sale for about \$10,000."

So if, like me, you like the idea of having your very own flying saucer, it may not be too late to put in an order with Santa. Although I'm not sure how well Rudolph and co will react when they find out they've got to haul it all the way across the Nullarbor. I guess it's not as far as sleighing it in from the North Pole!



The elephant tree.



Young Jamie Payne with the monster locust.



Pastor John Evans gets climbing.

SPOTTED

SODDEN CLAUS

During the week, this column's bushwalking correspondent, Pastor John Evans, did his best job at impersonating Mr Claus while attempting to scale 16 of Kosciuszko National Park's highest peaks in just two days. Unfortunately bad weather kept the red suit-clad Evans from accomplishing his feat.

"We got blown, rained and whited-out off the Main Range - got 10, but missed Kosciuszko and the Rams Head Range," reports a disappointed Evans, who adds, "the Santa pants ended down around me knees while pounding back the Summit Road to Charlotte Pass."

Wooden calf muzzle.

Oh dear, I can imagine Mrs Claus blushing at such a sight and more importantly, let's hope the real Santa doesn't balk at delivering the goodies if a bit of bad weather sets in this Monday evening.

CURTIN'S GIANT CICADAS

Even more common than sightings of the jolly old fella from the North Pole at this time of year are cicadas whose voluminous song this season seems to be more vociferous than in recent years. In fact, Sharyn Payne of Kambah reckons the loudest cicadas hang out in the old trees of Curtin. "We [my husband and I] were born and bred in Canberra and in our travels, we have not heard such loud cicadas as the ones in Curtin," Sharyn claims.

Although she doesn't mind listening to their calls, Sharyn was more than a little freaked-out, when during the week her sons, Jamie and Connor, found "two dead giant cicadas" and "plonked them in front of me" while we were enjoying an after-school ice-cream at the Curtin shops. Kids will be kids. But have a look at the cicada. It does seem on the large size.



SIMULACRA CORNER

As if sightings of giant cicadas and jolly red-suited men in our suburbs aren't enough to keep you on your toes this festive season, Jennie Gilchrist of Chifley suggests we also need to be on the watch-out for elephants. Yes - elephants. No, not pink ones, rather wooden ones. Jennie recently snapped this photo (top right) of a pruned tree, which "looks like a baby elephant climbing on the back of its mother," on a walking track on the north-west side of the Mount Majura. It's a cracker - thanks Jennie.

BEST HOLIDAY

COTTER SLEEP AND SWIM

During the week, I headed out to Cotter Avenue to check-out the latest summer craze. Just near the new pedestrian bridge across the Cotter River adjacent to the playground in Cotter Avenue is an old weir.

For the ultimate heat-wave cool-off, if you lie on your back in the water just upstream of here, the river will slowly carry you downstream before increasing pace and eventually jettisoning you over the weir and then under the footbridge (duck, or you'll hit your head)! Soon after the footbridge, the river flow decreases and it's easy to get out.

Apparently this water feature, nicknamed the "Play Wave" and is popular with kayakers. Please take care, for there are no lifeguards and as with any natural waterway, you swim at your own risk.

MAILBAG

MUZZLE PUZZLE

In this column's recent expose´ on the new shared track along the Thredbo River (Cracker Track, November 24), I revealed that muzzlewood swamp (located near the Bullocks Flat SkiTube terminal) was so-named after the term used by pioneering stock workers for the wood of Black Sallee trees (*Eucalyptus stellulata*), from which they carved muzzles used to wean calves from cows. A number of readers, including J. Jones of Kambah were intrigued as to what such a muzzle looks like.

During the week, I tracked down one of the few remaining wooden muzzles in the area - belonging to Phyl McKey of Garran.

McKey who fetched the wooden muzzle from a dusty box of family farm memorabilia under her home says, "My dad first used it on the Monaro in the 1920s but it had been passed onto him, so my best guess is that it dates back to the 1880s."

So how does the contraption work? "It was attached to the calf's nose and its simple design allowed the calf to graze, but when it put its head up to try and suckle from its mother the wooden flap would block the calf's mouth, thereby preventing it from drinking milk," McKey explains.

PS: This column won't be taking a break over the festive season, so if you have a perplexing mystery that needs investigating or encounter something unusual while on your holiday travels, please let me know. Merry Christmas!

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» «

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