

Standing Down

Table of Contents

Credits and Thanks.....	1
Prologue, May 3086 AD	2
1. Taking stock	3
2. Travis Air Force Base, 38°16'N 121°56'W	14
Map 1	15
3. Bearing Due North, June 3086 AD.....	28
Map 2.....	29
4. Redding, 40°35'N, 122°22'W	39
5. Slope and Elevation, July 3086 AD	43
Map 3.....	61
6. Grant's Pass, 42°26'N, 123°19'W	62
7. North to the Willamette River Valley, September 3086 AD	71
Map 4.....	81
Eugene stockade	82
Salem township	86
Map 5.....	89
8. Road's End at Stempelton, 45°02'N, 124°01'W.....	90
Epilogue May 3091 AD.....	94

Credits and Thanks

Thanks to the late **Dian Fossey, Dr Birute Galdikas and Dame Jane Goodall** for their initial research into the great apes, which stimulated the more detailed research that I have referred to herein.

All maps are satellite images derived from <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-mx9zs/North-America/>. Those that are sepia have been processed through IrfanView 4.41.

Site photos of current locations were sourced from Google Earth.

Photos from CBS TV series **Planet of the Apes** 1974 as per photo labels. Thanks to Brian Brady who enhanced one of the images, as noted. Photo from Here Come The Brides as per label.

Special thanks to Charlene Premru Kaye for the cover art.

Prologue, May 3086 AD

It had been a very, very long day and they were all exhausted. In fact, it had been a very, very, very long and exhausting week.

First there was the excitement of seeing the ruins of a city, followed by the discovery of the Oakland Science Institute and the promise of access to advanced knowledge and technology. There'd been injury and two days and nights of captivity for Alan, while Pete and Galen tried to get the battery working and find the knowledge store. There'd been an escape by Alan, a reunion with Pete and Galen and a horse-ridden pursuit by the apes through the crumbled remains of Oakland. Finally they had escaped with Arn and Kraik and escorted them out to Durlin's farm a day's walk and one overnight camp south of Oakland. Then Alan, Pete and Galen kept travelling south, to avoid the search parties led by Urko. On the fifth day they had been forced to take out the gorilla on the heliograph, and send a message to Urko to detour the search parties, walked on to Numai, then north again to San Francisco. After the events in the ruins and the subway, and then the fear of immediate and summary execution, all three had finally limped away under Zako's watchful eye as he discharged three shots into the air. It had indeed been a very, very long day at the end of a very, very, very long week.

It was late Spring so they had almost 14 hours of daylight, hence as exhausted as they were they still had a little daylight to find somewhere nearby to camp. About a third of a mile to the northwest, in between the ruins of buildings, they found a large open space that had once been Lafayette Park on a small hill. Alan and Pete sank to the ground to rest while Galen stood sentry for a time to be sure they weren't followed. After a while Galen joined Alan and Pete.

"All clear?" Alan asked.

"Nothing around."

"Good. We can stop and rest a while."

An earthquake rattled the ground.

"Not again" groaned Pete.

"That wasn't much. Sort of one-for-the-road to remind us."

"I don't want to be reminded. When Pete fell down that hole with Urko, I ... I thought ... well you know what I thought."

Alan and Pete both smiled at the young chimp. Once earnest and naïve, he had shown military cool during the negotiations at gunpoint and proven himself adept at taking command when necessary.

Pete turned to Alan and asked "Alan, the gorilla who let us go, the one who didn't shoot us – how come he disobeyed Urko?"



CBS TV 1974

Galen spoke up. "Let me answer that. You wouldn't obey an order that you knew was wrong, would you?"

"I guess not".

"You don't think you are any better than a gorilla, do you?"

1. Taking stock

Alan sat up for a while by the fire after Pete and Galen stretched out to sleep. Pete tossed and turned and slept fitfully; his body was bruised and sore and he couldn't get comfortable on the ground. Galen slept but he occasionally tossed and mumbled or called out. Alan sat with his back against the trunk of a small shrub under the loose canopy and reflected on the events of the last week.

He reached three conclusions. The first was that Urko and Zaius were actively hunting them. There was no way Urko and Zaius had been in the area coincidentally, nor had they travelled up that quickly from Central City. Presumably Urko had taken Aboro back to Central City a month ago and then brought Zaius and a detachment of soldiers north in pursuit. For months Galen had advocated they move north into the less populated rural areas where settlements and farms were more widely spaced, wild food and clean water were easy to find and there were fewer soldiers to avoid. Clearly they had not moved far enough north yet.

The second conclusion – and it twisted his gut to admit it – was how quickly and easily he had fallen into old feelings and old habits with Arn and Kraik, after only a very short time. He missed his family so very much; he had not truly realised how quickly those suppressed feelings could pull him into a new family situation until a fake family was created and presented to him. He had to guard against that. It was a vulnerability that could be exploited and the apes knew it.

The third conclusion was how important Pete and Galen really were to him. The momentary fear when Galen told him he thought Pete was dead – that had struck sharply at his heart. Pete was the only person left from his real life, the only one who shared pre-ape memories, the only one who had met Sally and Chris, and certainly the only one who could help him when they did find pre-ape technologies. Pete still good naturedly followed him on every wild goose chase and he was grateful for the young Major's loyalty.

As for Galen, he was worth his weight in gold. They were ever blessed to have had Galen throw in his lot with them. The naïve young chimp didn't know what he was getting into when he intervened to save them from summary execution by Urko beside Probe 6, and later to shout a warning about the guard waiting to shoot them outside the jail. Galen could have chosen to part ways with them at any of many points along their journey. Galen could have chosen to settle somewhere, or contact Zaius and try to negotiate a pardon. Instead, he stayed with them, actively trying to help them, getting involved with helping other humans, and going against his own better judgement, on occasions even putting his own life on the line for them. Galen had sacrificed a lot – his family, his friends, the life he had built and planned, his comfort and safety – to run with them. They were both indebted to Galen.

Alan squirmed a little and felt deeply ashamed to recall that just a few days earlier he had told them both

“Anybody not there within 24 hours, we figure that they've had it. Just get that projector rolling and find the film. Top priority. That's more important than any one of us.”

He had been so focussed on his own longing to get home that he had been cavalier about their expectations of teamwork and safety. Had either of them been captured, based on his comment they should have expected no rescue, no help. Yet Pete had followed that order calmly and diligently and Galen – a civilian no less, a volunteer to the team – had also followed the order, without either one questioning why the projector should be more important than them. As mission leader he should be making their safety the top priority.

In fact the only thing they really had going for them, right now, was that the three of them stuck together, watched each other's backs and worked so well as a team. He would be lost without them and he really needed to sort his head out soon, get his act together and start acting like a true mission leader.

The next morning at breakfast Alan cleared his throat and announced:

“Guys, I've made an important decision.”

Pete and Galen looked at each other. This should be interesting.

“First I want to apologise to you both. I've not been the best leader I could be but that will change going forward. I shouldn't have prioritised the projector or indeed any technology

over our safety and I won't do that again. We need to find somewhere safe, and that will be our priority mission objective, starting today. Right now. First we need to see if the Golden Gate Bridge is still standing because we need to go further north. If the bridge is down, we'll have to find a safe way south around the gorillas but first step is to check the bridge."

There were several seconds of silence while they took this in.

"Really? You giving up on finding a way home?"

"No, I'm not. I'm just saying that in the short term we need to find somewhere safe to rest and recover. We can't keep going the way we have been recently. Urko will be back and we need to find somewhere safe to rest up."

They didn't have to walk far to see that while the Golden Gate Bridge towers still stood, nothing else was left. The cables and the decking were gone. However, to the west of the bridge outside the bay, they could see a new land bridge that had been built up over the centuries. Between the San Andreas Fault¹, incoming coastal sand², cessation of sand mining inside the Bay, debris from the collapsed Golden Gate Bridge and erosion from the Sierra Nevada carried down the rivers and deposited on the landward side, the Bay had been turned into an inland lake. The land bridge of mainly sand and pulverized San Andreas fault gouge (powdery, crumbled rock) stood exposed on a NW-SE line, with pioneering coastal vegetation holding it together against the wind and waves of the Pacific Ocean. However the south eastern extent of the land bridge was miles south west from where they'd camped.

They made slow progress through the rubble of the streets of San Francisco so it was almost midday when at last they reached the land bridge. They refilled their waterskins from Lake Merced and set off along the land bridge. Their intent was to cross it by nightfall but the deep powdery substrate made walking slow and tedious. In the end they made it halfway and crashed on the windward slope. Galen had little to eat but was too tired to care. Alan and Pete caught jacksmelt off the ocean shore line and cooked them over a low open fire. The ocean breeze was gentle but the fire was not visible to any watchers on shore.

The following morning they trudged the remainder of the length to where a rocky point was met by a small freshwater creek tumbling down a steep ravine, and stopped for a midday rest. After almost 20 miles of travel since yesterday morning they were now on the northern shore of the Bay. They stretched flat out to sleep on the sandy beach north of the freshwater stream and woke late in the afternoon to gaze around and discuss their situation.

They were weary when they made camp that night. Bone tired and fatigued.

The land bridge sheltered the beach from the sea winds. The trees provided firewood and Alan and Pete caught Sacramento perch off the inshore beach. They built a fire on the sand up in the old dunes, where it was protected from wind and obscured from watchers across

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Andreas_Fault#/media/File:Eq-prob.jpg

² https://pubs.usgs.gov/sim/2006/2944/SIM-2944_sheet4.pdf

the bay or on the land bridge. Galen foraged for food in the surrounding vegetation and was pleased with what it provided. They slept comfortably on the flat above the beach under the trees, using pine needles to pad the ground.

They were so comfortable camped there and so fatigued from the last week's efforts that they stayed a day and a second night, and then a second day and a third night. The weather was fine, cool at night 50°F and mild during the day 65°F. A gentle breeze blew from the Pacific Ocean but behind the land bridge the air was mostly still. They slept or dozed, and found food and ate, and topped up the fire.

Finally they moved on, trekking east to the south of Mt Tamalpais, then north east 17 miles to camp the next night at a lake near the remains of a highway. They went on the next day, trekking another 16 miles north this time. Galen's need to stay dry drove them upstream so they kept moving north until each watercourse was narrow enough for him to jump or clamber across on a log. That second night they camped in a grain silo on the edge of an abandoned town, once called Petaluma according to the plaque in the old town square. The silo had one large crack on the west side, and the roof and some of the lower wall had caved in. They could squeeze in and out, so they built a fire there out of sight of any prying eyes, foraged for wild foods and settled down for the night.

Lieutenant-Colonel Virdon³ had slept deeply. He woke just at dawn, from a strange dream where some woman had handed him a memo, the contents of which had alarmed him. He cleaned a space off the wall of the old broken grain silo where they'd spent the night and quickly drew what he remembered from the memo with charred twigs from their campfire. He hoped he'd captured the important points. When Pete and Galen woke, he'd ask what they made of his hurried notes.

When at last they did stir, he already had the fire stoked and what they called 'the stew' from last night was warmed.

"Have a look on the wall" he gestured.

"What's that? Where'd it come from?" asked Pete.

"Well funny you should ask. I had a weird dream, and that's all I remember from it. Pretty sure she said she was from ANSA and this is important."

"Oh buddy, you gotta settle down. If your dreams about women end with a map you need more R n R".

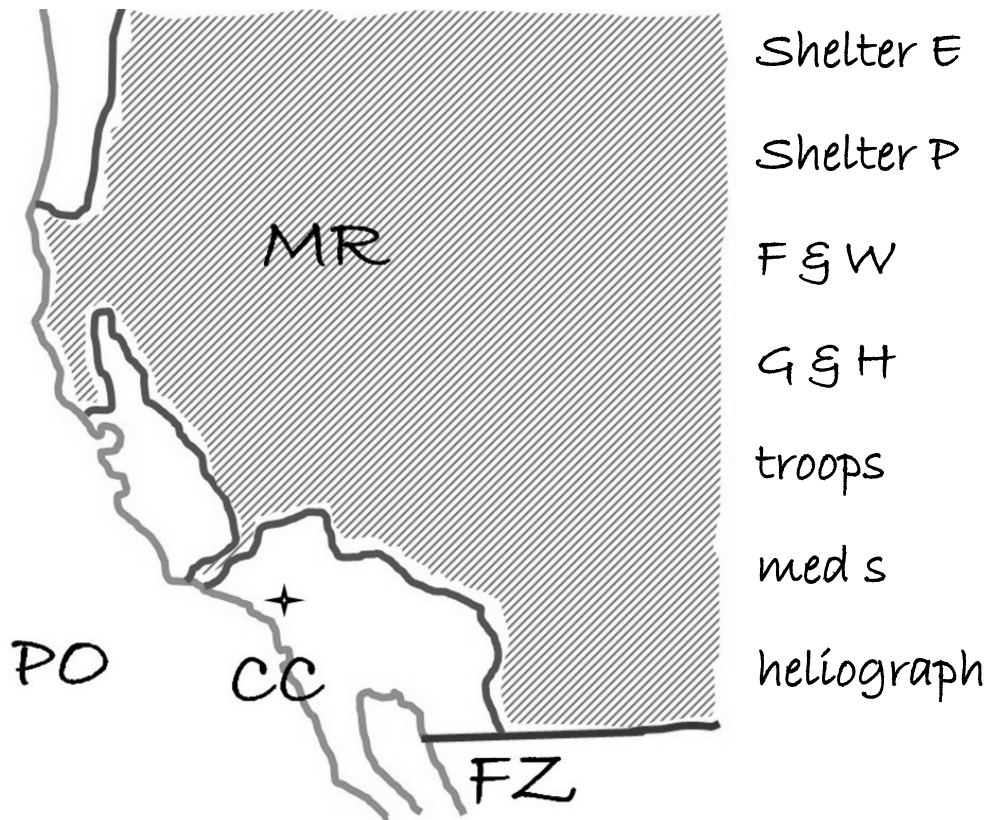
"So the FZ is the Forbidden Zone and the CC is Central City" Galen said.

³ The rank of lieutenant colonel is often shortened to simply "colonel" in conversation and in unofficial correspondence. In the United States Air Force, the term 'light bird' or 'light bird colonel' (as opposed to a 'full bird colonel') is an acceptable casual reference to the rank. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lieutenant_colonel

"Yeah and there's the Pacific Ocean and the cordillera. The big mountain range to the east. She said we're there and we should go east and then north and keep going north, over this narrow part and down into the next basin." Alan gestured generally across to the map.

Pete rubbed his eyes. "What was her name?"

"What? Oh I don't know, she said she was from the carto unit."



"What's a carto unit?"

"They draw maps and stuff. So this woman whose name you didn't get, why do you think she's visiting you in your sleep, giving you maps and directions on which way we should go? I mean, women can't even read maps. If I'm gonna take directions from a woman who draws maps and follow it, I wanna be sure she's legit. Try and remember what she said her name was, this is serious."

"Yes Pete, I know it's serious but she didn't give me her name, she just said this was important. She had a long memo for me but this"

he gestured again

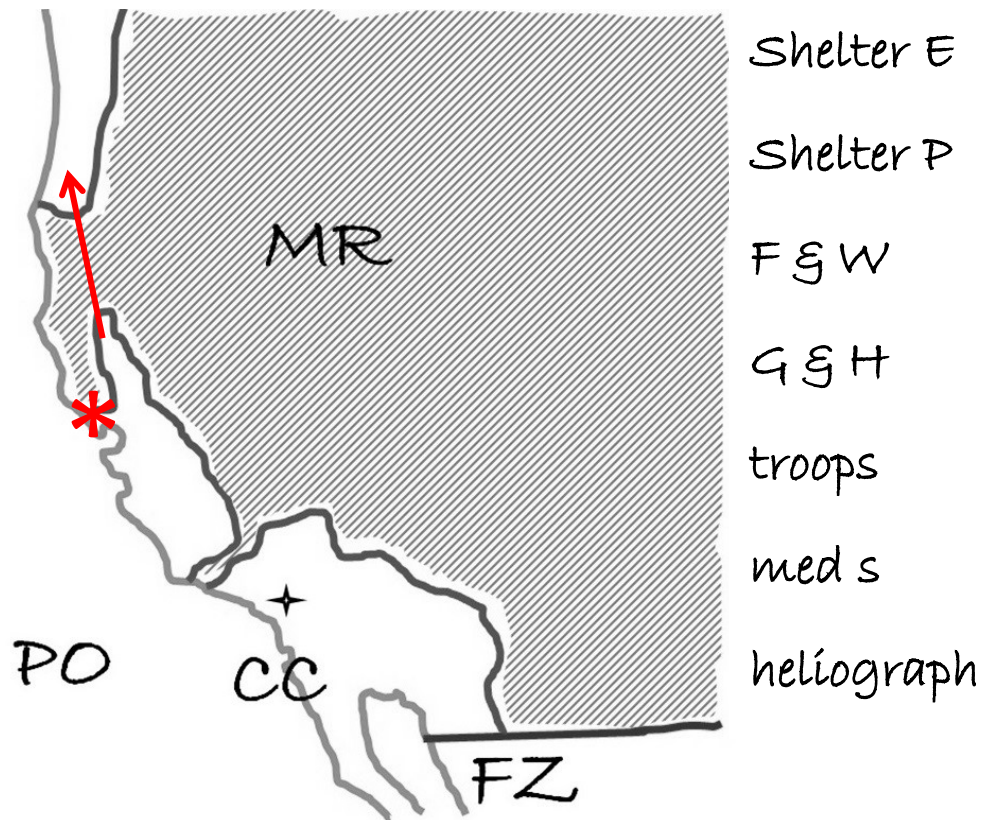
"is all I remember from it. What do you think of the map?"

"Well it looks about right, from what I remember. But I don't know the west coast very well."

"The bottom part is as I remember it, from our maps." Galen offered. "To the north, I don't know. We don't go up that way, that's wild country with big dangerous animals and a long way from help if something goes wrong."

Alan got up and walked over to the drawing. He added two marks to it.

“So she said we’re here, and we need to go over this part of the range and down into this basin. She said the apes won’t follow us, so we’ll be safe from Urko and Zaius there. She said it’s softer country with more wild foods we can forage.”



“Oh goodie, more scavenging things you claim are edible.” Pete lay back down and stretched.

“Oh and she also said the odds are stacked against us if we stay right here. That’s what this list is but I don’t remember what they mean.”

“That’s easy. They are all the advantages Urko and Zaius have that we lack. Shelter, food and water, probably guns and horses. Troops, medical supplies and the heliograph network. All the things that give them the edge.” Galen as usual spoke the ape reality, simply and clearly.

Pete sat up, and he and Alan looked at each other.

“Sure, so how high is this mountain your unnamed lady friend wants us to climb and how much of Galen’s ‘wild country’ do we have to cover?”

“Travis Air Force Base is about 30 miles due east of here so let’s head over and see if we can find something useful there. This part of the country has some swamps along the bay, or had some swamps along the bay, so we’ll stay up in the foot hills a bit away from mosquitoes. We don’t want anyone picking up malaria. All ready? Let’s move out.”

They covered 10 miles the first day, up and down slopes and through a low saddle in the range and camped that night below a flat topped peak. The next day they moved on, still heading east until mid morning when they were stopped by a watercourse about 100 yards wide and easily a mile long. South they could see it expanded into a wide swamp, and north it also broke into another wide swamp. Galen was going to get his feet wet.

A simple narrow raft was constructed, by lashing three fallen logs together and then stabilised by shorter branches across the narrow ends. Pete and Alan stripped off their shirts and emptied their pockets for the crossing and stacked them on the raft. They were grateful that at least it was freshwater, as this would once have been a tidal watercourse, probably with a lot of silt and mud. Galen gingerly climbed on board, alternately complaining and apologising, and the raft was pushed off the sloped bank. Pete and Alan swam and pushed and pulled it towards the eastern bank, with Galen looking anxious and chattering away about his fears. Progress was slow but steady until about three quarters of the way across, when the raft unexpectedly tipped precariously, probably on a submerged log. Galen started forward in fear, shifting his weight and tipping the raft further on the side.

“No, no, Galen, sit back down!”

Galen grabbed the edges of the raft and tried to shift his weight back but it was past the point of balance. The raft flipped over and the chimp and the shirts and their other possessions all tumbled into the water. Now there was a desperate effort to keep the panicked Galen from drowning and salvage what could be retrieved of their belongings. They combined to tip Galen on his back and Alan secured him below the chin with his arm and began floating him to the east bank while Pete retrieved their belongings. By the time they reached the bank they, and all their clothes, were soaked through. Pete had salvaged their clothes, firestarter kit, and the few cooking items tied together but the compass was lost.

The substrate and lower bank were deep with thick black mud but further up the ground was dry. They stripped off and rinsed the mud out of their clothing and foot coverings, then hauled out to dry, sitting on the grassy bank above the creek, and leaving their clothes draped across branches and logs above the waterline.

Pete looked at Galen, seeing the chimp’s naked body for the first time, and cleared his throat. “Um ... Galen ... buddy ... no offense or anything, but where’s your dick?”

“My what?” Galen looked baffled.

Pete grasped his and wiggled it. “This. You don’t have one.”

Galen looked insulted. “Of course I do.” He pointed at a thin short tapered tube, about 3 inches in length.

“Where?”

“THERE!”

It was Pete’s turn to look baffled. “Galen, um how do you, um satisfy a lovely lady chimp with that? I mean, it’s too short and too, well, skinny.”

“It extends when it’s needed. The rest of the time it’s safely tucked away.”⁴ Galen smirked. He’d been practicing his smirk; Pete was so good at smirking and Galen wanted to outdo him.

“So you’re telling me you have a short skinny dick?”

“No, I have normal organs. Everyone knows it’s humans who have peculiar organs.”⁵ It’s even a minor note in the Lawgiver’s teachings. *Humans are the only primates with a thick exposed penis.* And also humans don’t have a bone in the penis.⁶ We have a bone in the tip.”⁷

“Bone? You get a boner with an actual bone? Alan, did you know this?”

Alan had been listening in restrained silence but at this point he spoke up.

“Major Burke, I think you should be respectful of your team member’s ... um ... member. No I didn’t study ape anatomy, I didn’t know we were going to end up on a planet run by apes and I’m not sure why we’re having this conversation.”

“So how big is this boner you get? I mean, mine nearly doubles in length ...”

“Oh about this long” Galen indicated 7 inches “but it’s still very refined in shape. Only humans have a thick chunky penis, exposed to injury.” Galen smirked again.

“Well what about gorillas and oranges then? What are theirs like?”

“They have normal organs too.” Another smirk by Galen.

Pete looked downcast. “So their penis is safe from injury most of the time, then when needed it has an actual bone and it’s even longer than ours. Great. No wonder they took over the planet.”

Alan changed the subject to their future travel and the conversation carried on for a few more minutes. After a while Galen leaned over towards Pete and stage whispered

“I’ll let you in on a secret. Gorillas and oranges have a tiny penis and scrotum”⁸

he indicated the size of a small oper

“and theirs never extend very much.”

Pete’s face creased into a wide grin. “I knew it!!” They both began whooping.

Alan grinned, rolled his eyes and asked “How old are you two boys again?”

⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/mrd.22026>

⁵ <https://traditionsofconflict.com/blog/2018/6/7/the-human-penis-is-remarkably-boring>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/dec/14/why-dont-humans-have-a-penis-bone-scientists-may-now-know-baculum>

⁷ <https://carta.anthropogeny.org/moca/topics/baculum-penis-bone>

⁸ <https://carta.anthropogeny.org/moca/topics/penis-size-and-morphology>

Sometimes he felt like the lone father of two teenage boys. Yes, they were adults but they also sometimes behaved like kids. Like now, leaping around naked, crazy as loons, whooping and hollering. When he was Pete's age, he and Sally were married and Chris was a toddler.



CBS TV 1974

Sally and Chris, he sighed. He didn't even have a photo to remember them by. Just his memory and so much had happened more recently, he didn't trust his mind to retain those memories without a crutch. Never mind, Pete and Galen normally had little time or excuse for enjoyment so this was a welcome break. They'd all be back to the hard slog soon enough.

Mid afternoon when their clothes had dried sufficiently to be worn, they dressed and headed east again. Alan was a little annoyed that his compass was lost but he'd manage somehow. Finding east wasn't a problem right now and north wouldn't be a problem either but at some point he'd need a compass again.

Another camp that night, 200m up on a wooded ridgeline. They'd only made 5 miles that day but it couldn't be helped. There was food (mainly fruits) and firewood and from where they were they could see the glow of fires far off to the east. Galen speculated that the fires might be the new agricultural areas, either settlements or perhaps vegetation heaps being burnt. Alan estimated the fires would be on the other side of the Sacramento River. None of them wanted to deal with gorillas again any time soon, so if the new crop areas were on the east bank, they could remain on the western side and avoid any interactions.

Next morning they still had a good day's walk ahead so they broke camp early and set off.

As Alan trudged east towards Travis Air Force Base his thoughts went back to that strange dream in the grain silo and what the carto lady had said. He knew she was right of course but what to do about it? They had been on the run for over twelve months. They had all been fit and well fed at the start but the months and the deprivations had taken a heavy toll.

They were always at least partly on edge, never knowing when or where a threat might appear or even what sort of threat it might be. Those constant elevated levels of cortisol weren't good for either physical or mental health. The soles of the foot coverings they wore

had already been replaced a couple of times with rough animal hides. Their clothes were wearing thinner and they had nothing for extra warmth in cooler weather. They could not always find shelter out of inclement weather and getting a good night's sleep was out of the question. Between the rough ground, the weather and the need for eternal vigilance, none of them slept soundly for a full night.



CBS TV 1974

Their food supplies were patchy to say the least. Without adequate nutrition, the long days of hiking and sometimes running, would eventually lead to loss of muscle and bone so that was a factor they must address. Galen could eat vegetation where he and Pete sometimes went hungry, but sometimes Galen went hungry while he and Pete lived on animal protein. They had tried to convince Galen to ditch the ape cultural taboo against eating animal protein to no avail. Further, the vegetation Galen assured them was okay to eat sometimes played merry hell with their digestive systems or was hard to digest. A day or two of diarrhoea or constipation was not only unpleasant and debilitating, it slowed their travel.

Drinking water supply was a concern; sometimes water looked clean but contained disease microbes which caused ill-health, and sometimes it was putrid with organic contaminants. A day without drinking water could impair them all for 3 or 4 days and not just by slowing their travel time; it had once resulted in Galen fainting and Pete being struck down by a severe headache and muscle cramps. They could neither fight nor flee in that condition.

Sometimes they had found hospitality and shelter with friendly humans but those occasions were few and far between, and up here in the uninhabited north they could expect none. In any event, they never stayed long in one place as they would draw the attention of the apes and thus endanger their human benefactors. They invariably said Goodbye to those friends and moved on, never to see them again. This lack of social connection was another stressor. The three of them were now basically each other's only family, only community. Galen was unable to remain in contact with his family and friends, even those who had not rejected him totally. Alan and Pete literally had no-one, other than each other and Galen. Even Prefect

Barlow, whom they had crossed paths with twice and were on good terms with, could be better described as a political ally, not a friend.

He'd flicked through all these factors several times and still could think of no solution, apart from fleeing north as the carto lady had suggested. They basically needed to find a safe, established settlement somewhere that would accept both ape and human immigrants. They had found no such place in the southern California apelands, under Zaius and Urko.

Alan wondered though, if a solution could be found in the north. Might they not be walking into a worse situation? If there were no apes there, as Galen said, what might they find in the north?

Would they be on their own, just the three of them, with no-one and nothing to fall back on?

Or might there be humans only. And what sort of human society might that be? How might those humans react to Galen?

Or perhaps there might be apes but in another type of ape society. And if so, might they be friendly, or even more dangerous to humans?

It was late afternoon when they approached the gates of Travis Air Force Base. The concrete lower halves of the security gate cabins were still in evidence but nothing else marked the once-high-security facility. Travis Air Force Base had been the principal military airlift hub in the western United States. After World War II it handled more cargo and passenger traffic through its airport than any other military air terminal in the United States⁹. Now derelict, the skeleton of the boundary fence was barely visible and there was no signage standing.

They walked through parking lot remains, large open spaces laid out in forms that were familiar to Alan and Pete but wasteful and confusing to Galen. What had once been the runway with turn-arounds was mostly still open, though with a few scattered shrubs; the dry climate discouraged the growth of much vegetation. At the other end of the runway was a set of buildings that were both unfamiliar and out of place. Why would the runway be truncated with a complex of buildings? It was an Air Force Base, so the runway was essential.

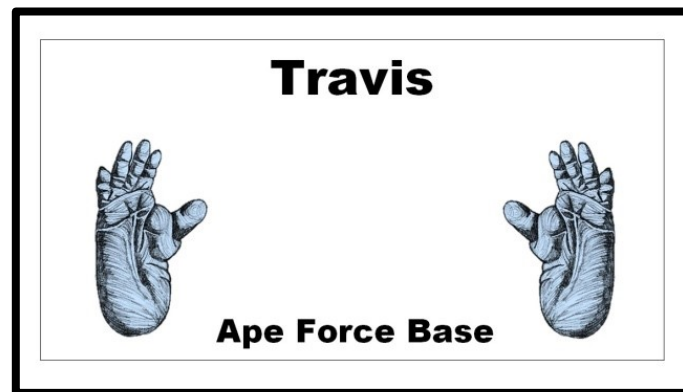
A block and bar compound was still apparent, though not intact, around a four storey building that commanded attention on the site. Alan approached the front entrance of this building as he had others in their travels, hoping to find information that would help them.

It could very well have information to help him get home; he clung on to that hope with every fibre of his being. Or maybe information of other locations they could travel to, maybe communications that could help them find out if any other advanced human societies still survived. Maybe technology that could help them stay alive and ahead of the apes, say, medical supplies or clothing to replace the rags they were finding more holes in. Maybe sturdy clothes for the trek north into the mountain country. Maybe some sort of advanced

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travis_Air_Force_Base

transport that would allow them to travel faster and more comfortably. What about solar powered golf buggies he thought ruefully, they'd be handy about now. Or boots that cushioned the feet and legs and would not need re-soleing for a long time. His right knee still throbbed sometimes from the fall in Oakland nearly 2 weeks ago and he wasn't getting any younger. Heck, even maps and navigational gear would be welcome.

He rubbed the caked dust off the plaque beside the front door and read the inscription. Oh, great ...



2. Travis Air Force Base, 38°16'N 121°56'W

They made camp that first night in an ex meeting room on the western side, down the left corridor. It was large enough to be comfortable, still had piles of papers that could be used for fuel if nothing else, and the remains of the chair cushions could be pulled off the chairs and used in various ways to make bedding. A seat cushion served as a pillow, back cushions could be laid end to end to cradle the body (sort of, with some repeated rearrangement through the night) and the remainder could be pulled apart and the stuffing used as padding. In the restroom next door, the trough urinals still stood – this was luxury accommodation!

On the first day they started by walking through the building they were in. It had apparently been a combined admin and interpretative centre at one time, and housed meeting rooms as well as offices. On the second floor they found a visitor's information gallery. There were archaic storyboards there that seemed to be very old, as if they had been out of date and abandoned long before the building fell into disuse. They looked as if they'd been set up and mothballed almost immediately. It seemed the visitor's gallery had never had a visitor.

Travis Air Force Base became Travis Ape Force Base in 2055. The great apes were being brought into use as workers after an air-borne virus complex emerged in Africa in 2020. That virus complex sent all cats extinct (including all the big cats) and severely limited reproductive output for mammals including humans, dogs and livestock. As a result, the human population worldwide stopped expanding and began to collapse. With that population implosion, the economies of the world also began imploding. Reduced numbers of mammal

livestock led to their dietary protein products (meat, milk) becoming scarce and hence expensive, and that further slowed human reproduction and fed back into economic collapse. That fed civil unrest domestically and increasing conflict in more areas around the world.

Further, with dogs and horses being available only in limited numbers, both the military and the police looked to other species to assist with crowd control, prison security and pursuit of fugitives. All three great ape species were identified as being possibly suitable for filling the gaps left by reduced numbers of humans and dogs. Meanwhile assisted reproductive technologies (ART) for humans had been and continued to be researched and developed. While there were ethical considerations, the government of the day had decided that the human ART could be put to use in breeding up larger numbers of the endangered great apes.



Map 1 : Locations of the features and night camps mentioned in the Epilogue and Chapter 1, Taking Stock. Route taken in white. Watercourses in light blue. Wetlands outlined in light blue. Freshwater lake (Lake Merced) in green.

Galen was thrilled to read along these storyboards. He puffed himself up and made approving noises as he read about the surviving great ape populations being 'saved from poachers' and evacuated to the United States. Premium Ape Facilities were being brought into use and no expense would be spared to breed up large numbers of the great apes. He was impressed to think his kind had been instrumental in assisting in a time of crisis.

Alan and Pete looked at each other several times over his head and silently mused
What does that really mean? Does he know what they are planning?
Oh really? A likely story. Is that even legal?

It became apparent that a number of military bases around the country had been repurposed to house the ape progeny of these breeding programs and to train them up in their new roles as military and police, admin and domestic, and possibly medical and hospital helpers.

The ethical considerations seemed to Alan and Pete to be brushed over by reference to the cognitive and intelligence levels of the apes. As chimpanzees had been studied the most, they were used as proxies for the other species. Chimpanzees estimated IQ was between 20 and 25 and they had the intelligence levels of four year old humans. Hence the government of the day decided that it was ethical to use ART to breed up large numbers of apes, and train them, and place them to do jobs under the direction of humans.

Galen was less impressed by this part of the story. He grumbled about the alleged low intelligence but was mollified to learn more information was available at the Premium Ape Facility, constructed at the end of the runway with 'all the leading technologies'.

Late morning they set off, checking the other buildings to see what they held. The supply store was what Alan really wanted to find and he located it early afternoon. Clothing and boots, that was what they needed, and the military always had the best designed clothing for field expeditions and also used the best textiles available. The supply store was an interesting place to trawl through. Both human and ape uniforms had been stocked and despite their age, they surprisingly didn't crumble when handled. According to the tags, they were **water-repellant, flame-retardant, mould-resilient, damage-resistant, no melt, no drop textiles**.

"Miracle stuff. Wonder if it's actually safe to put near your skin?" Pete mused.

Boots in both human foot and ape foot configurations were also stocked, and these were tagged as **waterproof**. They were **lace up, with comfortable ankle support, a deep rugged outsole and premium insole of air mesh foam providing full foot air circulation for maximum comfort and a breathable liner**. Everything Alan remembered and wanted in his footwear.

"Oil- and slip-resistant rubber outsole for excellent traction and impact absorption" he read.

"This is what we need! Guys, pick your preferred clothing and foot wear, the US military is picking up the bill. In fact get two sets, we'll take spares with us. We'll also get bedrolls,

cookware and the like and take them too. And we'll need decent backpacks to carry it all. We mightn't move so fast during the day but we'll sleep comfortably at night."

Alan hadn't felt so positive and enthusiastic about the future in a long time. Pete and Galen looked at each other and chuckled. The Commander rarely looked or sounded so happy.

*** None of them knew enough about the great ape parent species to notice anything odd about the uniforms or boots. If Alan had studied ape anatomy or indeed anything at all about the great apes in his time, he might have been alarmed by the uniformity of their uniforms.

That night they had a celebratory bonfire outdoors. Dressed in their new clothing and footwear, they ceremoniously burnt the old clothing and foot coverings that they'd lived in for over a year. Alan and Pete deposited each item one at a time into the fire, each time thanking someone who had saved their life starting with Farrow, or helped them in some way. Galen also deposited his former attire into the fire, one item at a time, thanking Gregor for saving his life, Augustus and Kira for their help, and his mother and father for their love. The worn and chipped ceramic mugs and pot went in the bonfire too.



Pete now wore multi-blue waves print camos in a human-cut uniform, Alan wore a pebble print human-cut uniform in desert/beige camos, and Galen was in green/black camos forest print in an ape-cut uniform. These were all Hot Weather Combat Uniforms (**performance and safety in hot and wet weather environments**) while their boots were all Wolf Tan, ape- and human-cut as appropriate. They intended to wear the new uniforms and boots for a few days to see if there were any problems before departing the AFB.



On the second day they split up. Pete and Galen headed off to the Premium Ape Facility (PAF) at the end of the runway. Alan accessed the cartographic unit and spent most of the day plotting a course through the northern mountains from Redding to the Willamette River Basin. He couldn't take all the old, hard copy maps with them; they barely held together long enough for him to transfer them to the map tables.

First he had to identify a likely route and for this the topo maps were excellent as he could use the roads and rail lines to chart through the mountains. He identified a course between landscape markers¹⁰. He noted the heights of the landscape markers they'd be orienting by

¹⁰ https://www.moore.army.mil/Infantry/DoctrineSupplement/ATP3-21.8/chapter_07/RouteSelectionandNavigation/NavigationAids/index.html

and the two watersheds they'd cross. He read off the contours to determine heights of the track to make sure they wouldn't trek too high for comfortable breathing. 2000 feet or 600 meters was classed as low altitude so it would be comfortable walking up to that elevation. If they had to, they could go as high as 7000 feet or 2100 meters and cope but it would be a struggle at those higher elevations. This would be especially so for Galen who lacked the complex nasal turbinates of the human nose¹¹. He would need to find a way to record all these details but the absence of paper, and something to write with, had him stymied.

The California Central Valley was no problem, they'd just stick to the western foothills, he thought. Then he discovered there was tectonic strike ridge country of about 100 miles length along those western foothills. A close inspection revealed a narrow valley between the strike ridge and the coast range – this would be protected from view if apes had crossed the Sacramento River. It would also allow them to harvest water flowing out of the coast ranges. At one point he located an M shaped route through the strike ridges that would take them from the open river plains back into the narrow valley behind the strike ridges. This breakthrough needed to be charted too, if they were to find it on the ground.

Alan also searched through the mapping supplies and found lensatic compasses. Excellent! Lensatics could be so much more use than a simple compass and were also more durable. He would make sure to take multiples as losing one or two along the way might be expected. North of Redding they would be heading into incised mountain country of varying elevations and getting lost up a blind valley could quickly turn into a tragedy. The combination of isolation, restricted food supply, possibly wide temperature variations and wildfires would be obstacles enough, without getting lost as well.

Mid afternoon Galen and Pete returned from their excursion to the Premium Ape Facility. Galen was loping along ahead looking flustered and distressed. He loped past Alan, ignoring his greeting, turned right and disappeared down the long corridor in the opposite direction from their camp room. Pete followed Galen looking dejected.

"Well that was a disaster." Pete motioned for Alan to step away from the door.

"So you guys didn't find anything positive then. What is the Premium Ape Facility like?"

"House of Horrors more like. They use the term 'shock and awe' a lot but it's not spelt like that. Shock means Simian Habitat On Camp and awe means Artificial Womb Environment. They weren't bringing gorillas here for training, they were bringing embryos here *en masse* and setting them up in like little wombs, all connected into like a giant vat. Nutrients in, waste products out."

"Oh great."

¹¹ <https://anatomypubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ar.24790>

“That’s not the worst of it. Female embryos were terminated as soon as identified because the females weren’t wanted for military use and they weren’t suited for breeding either because their genetics were unreliable. This went on for 10 years, so a whole half a generation of male gorillas grew up with no chance of ever settling with a female. Then when the males were ready to be born, they’d be extracted and put in a giant industrial style crèche to be raised by a roster of humans. No one-on-one parenting. I tell ya, Alan, this was almost like setting gorillas up to hate humans. Like it was bred into them. Coached into them almost.”

Alan thought for a few moments.

“What about the chimps and oranges?”

“There was an office with details of what happened to them. They’d be incubated – is that the right word? – here and then once extracted – they didn’t even call it born – they’d be taken to a crèche over in Sacramento to be raised. They were destined for admin and house work so they were kept separate from the gorillas because they were supposed to be socialised differently. Only they didn’t worry about terminating female embryos because either sex could do that work. So I guess at least those guys had hopes of settling down.”

“Right. Well after what we read on those storyboards yesterday, I can’t say I’m surprised. We should probably go and apologise to Galen for all the cruelty our species inflicted on his. Theirs. That’s the least we can do, I guess.”

“Right behind you Commander. He’s not happy so just be careful, he’s a bit snappy.”

A bit snappy was an understatement. Alan entered the room where Galen squatted and was met with a glare. They both stopped and Alan cleared his throat.

“Galen, we just want to say –.”

“Get out! I don’t want to hear it. Get out and leave me alone.”

“- we’re very sorry and –.”

Galen leapt up, his hair rising on end all over his body, something they’d never seen before.

“GET OUT!! I DON’T WANT TO HEAR ANYTHING FROM HUMANS!! EVER AGAIN!!!”

Pete and Alan beat a hasty retreat down the corridor and out the front door. Possibly a walk around the base while it was still daylight would be a nice way to end the day.

Cautiously they re-entered the building before nightfall and started the campfire. It was mid evening when Galen tentatively entered their camp room. He looked shamefaced and they didn’t say anything. He sat down, uncomfortably, on one of the remaining chairs near the door. After a minute Pete spoke up.

"You feeling better buddy?"

"No. I don't think I will ever feel better again."

"Galen we're really very sorry. We had no idea. There's nothing else we can do except apologise. On behalf of our species to yours."

Galen nodded but said nothing. They offered him food but he did not want to eat. He sat looking miserable on the chair for a while and then moved to the bed he'd made the night before and settled in to sleep. Sleep, however, eluded him and he tossed and turned, and kept them awake. Eventually Pete asked

"Would you like to yell at us some more? Would that help you settle? I mean, if it would, go ahead. Just maybe not the hair thing, that's really scary."

"No. It wouldn't help. I know it's not your fault. And I have no control over the hair thing."

On the third day Alan took Galen with him to help chart the course he'd planned for them to travel. They would have to painstakingly transcribe all the relevant details and he had no idea yet how they'd do that or what materials they could use. Clearly not paper and there were no pens that still worked.

Alan asked Pete to go and check out the Science and Technology building, another out-of-place construction to the north of the central four storey one they camped in. He had a bad feeling about the S&T building. He wanted Galen to be occupied usefully away from anything distressing and he also needed someone to help him scribe the directions for their trek. So Pete was tasked to go alone to check out the S&T and let them know what he found.

Pete found another 'house of horrors', only this time it struck to the very heart of what it meant to be a great ape. The government in its efforts to 'save the endangered species' had set out to modify them to be more useful and uniform as a slave labour force.

Gorillas were quadrupedal ground dwelling herbivores with an opposable hallux (thumb) situated a short distance from the toes along the length of the foot. They were peaceable and lived in stable family groups of one male with several females.¹² Males had a short penis and low scrotal volume, which reflected their stable relationships within the family. If they had been able to stand upright they would have been about 1.6m tall but they had heavy skeletal structure and strong muscles.

Chimps were usually quadrupedal but opportunistically bipedal and split their time between the ground and the trees. They had an opposable hallux half way along the length of their foot. They were usually herbivorous but happy to hunt and consume live prey if the opportunity arose. If they'd been able to stand upright, they'd stand about 1.6m tall. They

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorilla>

lived in groups and their breeding strategy was promiscuous. Males had a short penis but scrotal volumes fully 3 to 4 times that of human males. Females had a sexual swelling of impressive proportions when in season and the theory was the male scrotal volume was to give each male optimum chance to flush out his competitor's semen. Additionally, chimp groups were unstable and they were prone to violence at times of internal group conflict.¹³

Orangs were smaller, males only about 1.4m high when they stood upright. They were herbivorous tree dwellers with an opposable hallux almost at the ankle joint. They tended to be solitary, though they sometimes moved together in pairs.¹⁴ Each male overlapped ranges with several females who in turn overlapped ranges with several males. Like gorillas, the lack of aggression and mating competition had resulted in males with a small penis and low scrotal volume.¹⁵ Males who had established a home range developed cheek flanges and throat pouches. However adult males who had not established such home ranges did not develop the throat pouch and cheek flanges and were prone to wandering nomadically and reported to rape both orang females and on occasions human females¹⁶.

Clearly, the government decided, this would not do. The great apes would need to be gene edited¹⁷ to make them similar in size and build, more suitable to be used as human substitutes and safe to work with.

- Chimp males had to have their scrotal volume reduced to one-quarter original and chimp females had have their oestral swelling removed. They needed their skeletal structure altered to allow them to walk nearly upright. The species also needed to be made less aggressive.
- Gorillas had to have their bone and muscle mass reduced. They needed their skeletal structure altered to allow them to walk nearly upright and to have their hallux moved to half way along the length of the foot. Gorillas also needed to be modified to become more aggressive and less family focussed.
- Orangutan males had to have their cheek flanges and throat pouches removed. However they also needed to be modified to be less sexually aggressive. Interestingly they did not need their skeletal structure altered to allow them to walk nearly upright as orangs already walked with straight-legged bipedalism if they walked in the trees¹⁸. They did need to have their hallux moved to half way along the length of the foot and they needed their height increased.
- In the end it had been decided that all 3 species groups should have their adult male heights increased to about 1.7m/5'7", on a par with human male heights.

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimpanzee>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orangutan#Reproduction_and_development

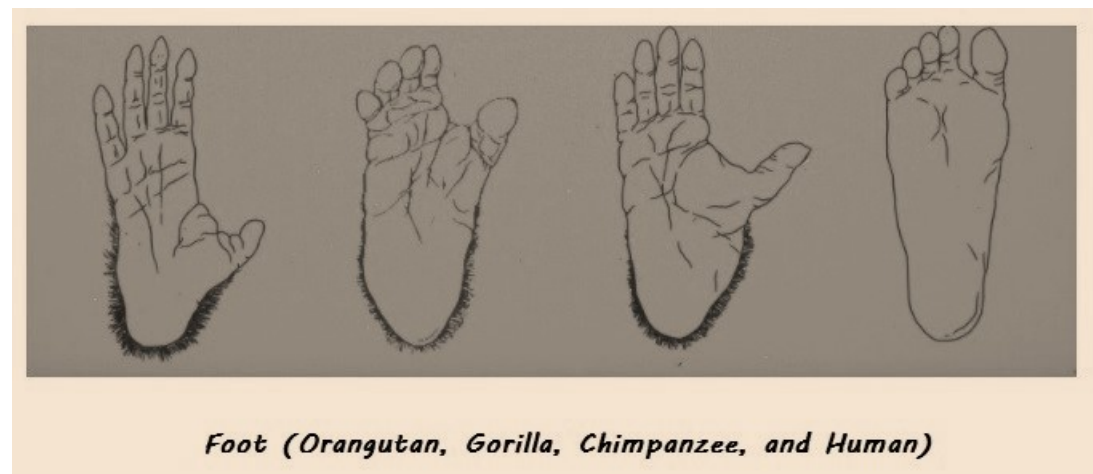
¹⁵ https://pictures.butlernature.com/indonesia/images/kalimantan_0363.html

¹⁶ "Reflections of Eden: My Years with the Orangutans of Borneo", Biruté M.F. Galdikas, January 1, 1995, p. 294

¹⁷ Gene editing: change the DNA of an organism, by cutting the DNA at a specific spot; then delete, add, or replace the DNA where it was cut.

¹⁸ <https://www.science.org/content/article/walk-orangutan>

Some of the parent populations were already highly inbred. Given that the starting populations were so low numerically and the numbers of genetically edited progeny needed would be high, it was obvious that a significant level of inbreeding in later generations would be unavoidable. This preponderance of inbreeding in later generations was considered and deemed to be not an ethical issue because they were after all, only livestock. In any event, if only the superior progeny were bred from, later inbreeding would simply enhance uniformity of the workforce and that would simplify management and resourcing, and lower costs.



Bearing in mind that the virus complex limited the ape reproductive output as it did that of humans and many other mammals, the government decided to put funds into developing large scale gestators to grow embryos, thus stepping outside the limits of natural gestation. A major breeding program was started on the east coast to gene-edit and create so-called 'superior' individuals, and then use IVF techniques to multiply the embryos created from those gene edited individuals. The embryos would then be brought to places like Travis Ape Force Base for gestation and the progeny put into training from a young age.

Pete was feeling quite unwell by the time he exited the S&T building later that afternoon. So they'd turned endangered species into a slave labour force, by making major changes to their anatomy (using technology) and behaviour (how? he wondered). Probably there'd been 'wastage', a polite term for those individuals who'd not made the grade and needed to be terminated. That happened with other species in lab and farm settings. They'd allowed careless inbreeding among sentient individuals *albeit* of low intelligence species.

How would Galen react to all this new, disturbing information?

CBS TV,
1974



“So how was it?” Alan asked when Pete returned to their camp room.

“Um, well ... let’s see ...”

“That bad huh?”

Galen looked at Pete and then Alan and then back to Pete, but said nothing.

Pete pursed his lips and sucked his cheeks in. “Well, I don’t think we need dwell on what I found. The apes are here and some of them are great folks like Galen and his family and other friends we’ve met, and the rest, well they’re no worse than us humans. So really we don’t need to know anymore.”

There was silence for a few moments until finally Galen spoke up solemnly. “Pete I think you should tell us what you found.”

“No I don’t think so. Leave it. We don’t need to know all the details. You are here, and how chimps got from what they were over a thousand years ago to you and your family, it doesn’t matter. It was a quick evolutionary change, leave it at that.”

“But I want to know. It’s my species. My family. I want to know. What were my ancestors like, and what was the quick change? What caused it?”

“No I don’t think you do. You know what we found at the PAF? Well that was what they did to individual apes. But this was what they did to each species and it’s not a happier story.”

Alan spoke up. He could see both perspectives and he wanted to keep the dialogue calm.

“Pete, really, is it so bad that Galen shouldn’t be allowed to see it for himself?”

“Yeah I think it is. I wouldn’t want to know that about my ancestors. I mean, we know enough about human evolution to know it wasn’t a great story but that was individuals surviving as best they could under difficult circumstances. This is one species doing things to other species for less-than-noble reasons. Think slavery and industrial livestock, Alan.”

Alan looked taken aback. Yes, he knew about both slavery and industrial livestock.

“But I have a right to know! You can’t just treat me like a child and tell me you’re protecting me for my own good. I have a right to know, I’m not a child.”

“Well I don’t want to be there when you find out. You won’t be happy and I wouldn’t blame you, but I don’t want to be in the room when you do. Or even under the same roof.”

After several more exchanges, each more heated, Alan put his hands up in a Stop motion.

“Alright. Galen we’ll go with you tomorrow to the S&T building. We’ll wait outside – is that alright Pete? – while you go in. We’ll wait for you to come out. We’ll let you go in on your own, since Pete doesn’t want to be there, and that way you can explore the details in private.

If you find things you don't like, we won't know about it and you won't feel insulted or humiliated in front of us. Is that alright?"

Galen and Pete both nodded and mumbled agreement.

"And while I'm about it, I just want to acknowledge that you're both trying to do the right thing under difficult circumstances. This isn't easy for any of us, it's confronting stuff, but neither of you are shirking. Pete doesn't want Galen to be distressed, and Galen doesn't want special treatment. I understand you are both trying to be respectful of each other, in different ways. Now let's settle down and get ready for the night. Food and a fire, hey?"

Next morning they walked across to the S&T building.

"Now when you go in, ignore the first two doors, one on each side of the corridor. I wasted a lot of time there, nothing to see. The next two rooms, one on either side of the corridor are where the details are. Now they are history displays from a much later time, showing all the stuff that was considered and talked about in the planning stages, and then what actually happened. Lots of images and pictures, with explanations. Then the big room down the end, well it has a lot of paper records of the individual apes. Those that contributed genetics, those that were born here and those that went over to Sacramento. Then later details, babies born to later generations, that sort of thing. Until the collapse, I guess."

Galen nodded but looked slightly seedy.

"Are you sure you wanna do this buddy? I mean we could just turn around here and walk away. I wouldn't want to know all this stuff, no reason you should."

"Pete, he's thought about it, if he wants to know just let him go and find out. Galen, we'll wait out here, Ok? You come out whenever you're ready. Five minutes or five hours, it doesn't matter. We'll be waiting here for you. Come on Pete, I want to talk you through the route we're going to take through the northern mountains and how it's been recorded."

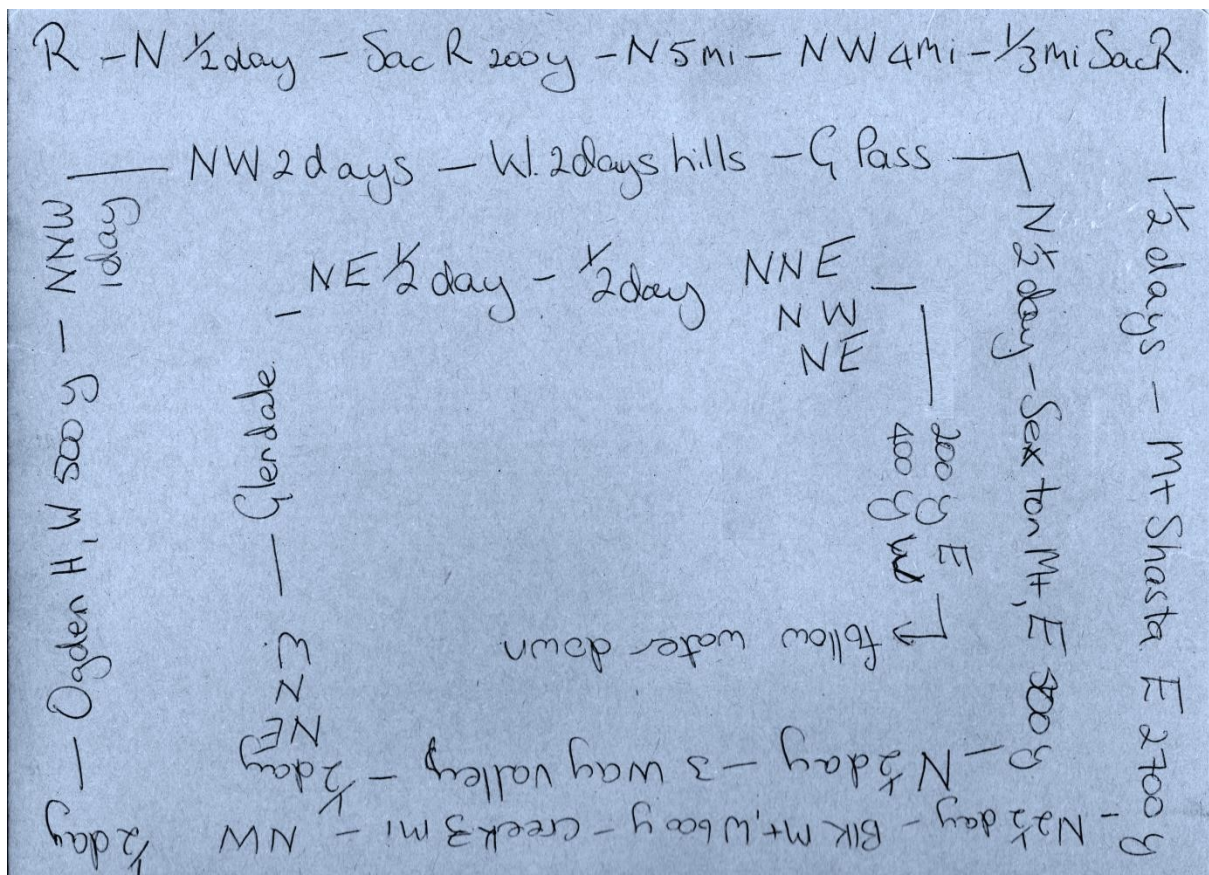
They moved to the shade of the three trees nearby in a *cantero elevado* and sat crosslegged on the raised bed. Alan put the sheet of metal he'd pulled off the wall the day before on the ground between them and began to explain the way he'd recorded the route.

"This is the route from Redding north. Now what I've done is assume a walking speed of 20 miles a day. So rather than try and measure distances off the map and then guesstimate our walking distance each day I've plotted by day and half day, which is a very rough measure but it should work out. This is basic field navigation¹⁹, using linear and point features. You remember basic field navigation, yeah? You would have done enough of it early on."

"Yeah. I remember it alright. It was a pain in the butt but yeah I can do it."

¹⁹ https://www.moore.army.mil/Infantry/DoctrineSupplement/ATP3-21.8/chapter_07/RouteSelectionandNavigation/NavigationAids/index.html

"It'll be more of a pain if we get up there and get lost. That's what worries me. The central valley will be ok, it's visually open and basically one direction, north-south. The mountains are different; if we get lost there we won't be able to see far enough or have enough clear landmarks to orient by and walk out, and the valleys twist and turn and there's a lot of blind valleys. We can't afford to waste energy or time hitting dead ends and backtracking. So we need to keep our heads switched on. Now by my reckoning, and if all goes well, there should be only 14 days of actual walking. Even with 14 days of rest, a month max. Have a look."



Pete turned it around, reading as he went.

"So we've got to get Galen across 3 rivers? That should be fun, not."

"Well the Sacramento at Shasta Lake shouldn't be more than 200 yards wide because by now the Shasta Dam wall will have collapsed and it'll be back to natural width. A raft should do it. We might even be able to clamber across using the ruins of the bridge supports. The Sacramento up at Lake Head should not be very wide either with the dam wall gone. And the creek near Black Mountain was never very wide. It had 2 road crossings on it but even apart from those, there were sediment slugs and vegetated islands so we can probably hop him across if we have to. I don't think we'd want to put a raft in there, it could be fast water, I'm not sure. The two Sacramento crossings will be slow flows I think."

"And what are these measurements? Ogden H W 500m, what is that?"

“OK there are two important passes we need to find. Ogden Hill and the unnamed one at the very end. So Ogden Hill should be to the west of us when we pass it and it is about 1500 feet higher than the track we’ll be walking. The unnamed one at the end will be identified when we walk between two hills, one on the west being about 1200 feet higher than the track and the one on the east being about 600 feet higher. When we leave Glendale we need to be particular about following these directions because it would be easy to miss that pass, it’s not readily visible. Mount Shasta, Black Mountain, and Sexton Mountain will be easy to identify but those other important points need to be identified. Once we cross that second point, it’s all downhill toward the Willamette River Basin. We just keep going north.

Well that’s not entirely true. At one point about 4-5 days after we’ve exited the mountains, the river swings west but we head north east over a low ridge. If we’re lucky there are the remains of the highway to follow. And down here, not far into the strike ridge country, there’s a breakthrough that will take us to the hidden valley over the back. It won’t be hard to find though if we stick to the western edge of the valley. It’s a few days in and then we’re out of sight when we make camp.”

When Galen emerged after about 3 hours they were stretched out dozing in the late morning shade. They were pretty much all talked out about the map and the details of what Pete had found the day before, and it was pleasant lying in the shade, just waiting. Galen looked rather like he’d been put through a clothes dryer, he was disoriented and blinking in the bright sunlight, and also looked somehow crumpled. He sat on the edge of the *cantero elevado* and said nothing. Pete and Alan sat up and waited silently for him to speak. After a few minutes he said simply that he needed water and they walked back to the central admin building in silence. After a long drink from one waterskin and then another long drink from another one, he lay down on his bed and closed his eyes, still not speaking.

“Okay, well if you want to stay here for a while, we’ll go refill the waterskins. And we might see if we can find some food as well. Will you be alright now Galen?”

He nodded but said nothing. Really, what could he say? Pete had been right, maybe. Maybe he didn’t want to know what he’d read. But maybe if he hadn’t, he’d always wonder. Maybe knowing was better than always wondering.

“Galen, make sure you pack plenty of socks and jocks in your pack. You’ll need them.”

Galen nodded. He had said and done nothing for the past day. He was feeling quite flat and withdrawn and had nothing to say. Alan and Pete looked at each other in resigned silence.

“Alright let’s go and check out that Comms building.”

Sadly the Comms building had been thoroughly trashed a long time ago. Not just dilapidated and neglected. Actively trashed. It reminded them of the sort of destruction wreaked by the gorillas at Urko’s command.

“What do you think happened here? The gorillas rose up and overthrew the humans?”

“Yeah maybe. Sure looks like the damage they do now. Might be they started a tradition here. I can’t say I blame them now, with everything we’ve learnt.”

“Let’s see if any of these controls still work.”

“After all this time and all this damage? Have I told you lately that you’re out of your mind?”

Alan ignored him and began going through the controls, trying each one separately and then in various combinations. Pete sighed and went to help. They systematically tried each control, and in every combination they could think of. Nothing.

There’d been lots of satellites and lots of ground comms but none were responding. Either they were now non-existent, or they were non-responsive. Alan was again disappointed. This is why he tried not to get his hopes up anymore, he thought. It was easier than dealing with the disappointment. Of everything humans had had in his own time - if only some of it was still here and still working. But no, it was all either destroyed or not functioning.

Late that afternoon they regrouped outside the central admin building. Galen was looking and feeling better though still not the best.

“Well we have all new clothing and boots and bedding for the trek north. I have field navs to find our way from Redding through the mountains, and finding our way up to Redding shouldn’t be difficult. There are three river crossings from Redding north – yes I know Galen but Pete and I have discussed it and we have ideas to get you across safely, you’ve got the poly rope Pete? – and getting to Redding shouldn’t be too difficult. We’re going to cross back into the valley behind the strike ridges and that will take us out of sight of any stray gorillas from the new crop lands.”

“You feeling better buddy?”

“Oh, I feel stupid, I’m sorry, I am being punished for my sins. I should have taken your advice but then again, at least I know now. The imagination can be awful too, it’s better to know.”

“Don’t feel bad buddy, human history is not nice either. Just that we don’t know all the ugly details. And human behaviour for that matter, it can be pretty ugly too. Heck it was our people that did all that ugly stuff to your people.”

“Galen, you are not just the product of your genetics or your species history. You are you, who you are today is more than just genetic selection. It’s the influence of your parents and the choices and decisions you’ve made. Genetics only creates the body, it doesn’t create the whole person. You’ve chosen to search for truth, instead of accepting what the authorities tell you. You’re brave and you’re willing to learn. You’re loyal and honourable – all those things count for more than whatever genetics you carry.”

“Yeah that’s right buddy, don’t let history define you. It’s what you do now you’re here that counts, not what happened in the past that brought you here.”

3. Bearing Due North, June 3086 AD

Departing Travis Air Force Base, or Ape Force Base perhaps more correctly, Alan led them due north. He didn't really need the lensatic but he took a reading anyway, on principle. Always good to have good habits, he thought. Almost due north of them, at the top of the valley below the mountains, there should be the remains of Redding, a small city. That seemed like the best place to aim for, since north of it there had been a bridge over the Sacramento River and then a highway cut through the Cascade Range to the Shasta Valley. The bridge was probably long gone but that would be the best place to try and cross the river. Redding itself might hold treasures too. They could but hope.

It was the best part of 200 miles in a straight line but the country was dry, so they'd need to find and follow water sources. It was now June so winter rains were over and the daytime temperatures were high. When they moved further up the valley, he'd turn them west through the strike ridge country and hope to pick up some east draining streams coming out of the coast ranges. Nothing east draining out of the strike ridges would carry water now and they wanted to stay back off the Sacramento River in case the gorillas and the new crop lands had crossed over and were on the west bank. Alan estimated a good month of walking to get to Redding. They could do it quicker if they really pushed but he didn't feel like pushing them and Galen probably wasn't up to it anyway. Galen would need nursing for a bit, his mental state wasn't the best after all that they'd learned at Travis.

After their midday break Alan asked them to get out a lensatic compass each so he could instruct Galen in its use and remind Pete how to use it. Pete looked fidgety and advised

"Now you know I'm not good with all that direction and navigating stuff, hey?"

"Well you'd better apply yourself. It's not hard to use and we all need to be able to navigate. I'll walk you through it, it's not difficult."

Galen learned while Pete struggled and complained. He kept insisting it made no sense.

"Is this the same Pete Burke who said women can't read maps? You can't read a compass?"

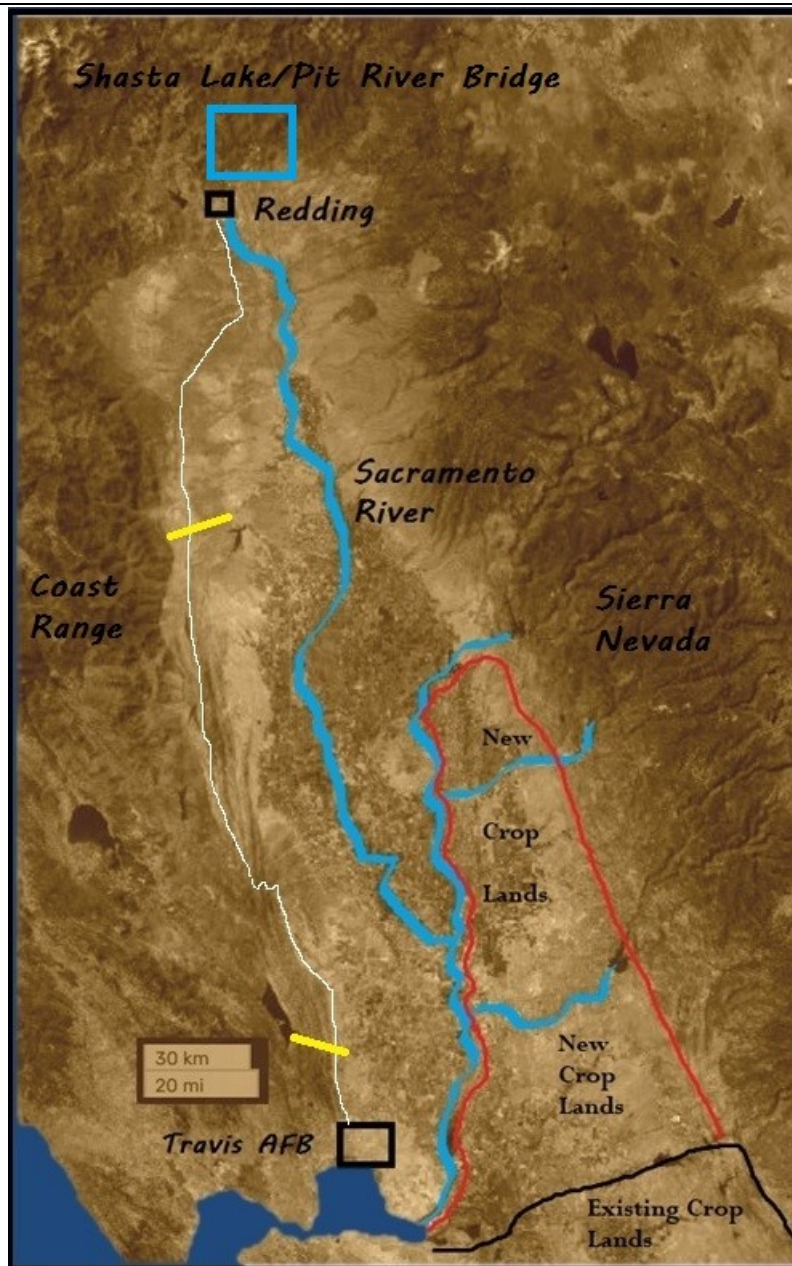
"Yeah well I didn't say I could read a compass. Just that women can't read maps."

"Most of the officers in the carto unit were women, Pete. Come on, it's not that difficult. And anyway this is only 2 dimensional, it's not like juggling star sightings, and precision timing of radio signals. It's just the four cardinal points, some landscape features and very rough distance estimations."

Eventually Alan decided that every day he'd convene a brief navigational update, at a random time, and give them both a run down on some aspect or other. Maybe if Galen and Pete were being instructed side by side, Pete would learn more easily.

Alan was starting to feel more like a Commander again, with purpose and direction, instead of rudderless and drifting. They had a mission now, again, at last. Not just staying one step ahead of gorillas and out of sight but actually going in a direction with a purpose. He had a

mission, to navigate, to lead them, to mentor his team and make sure they had the skills and resources they needed. Tomorrow, going north, always going north.



Map 2: Locations of the features in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, Travis Air Force Base to Redding. Route taken in white. Rivers in light blue. Strike ridge country north and south extents marked in yellow. Ape crop lands as outlined and labelled. Shasta Lake and Pit River Bridge in blue, to show location w.r.t. Redding.

Galen was struggling to keep up. He'd always struggled to keep up walking and running. They were taller than he was with straight legs that articulated vertically with their pelvis, while he had angled lumbar/pelvic/femoral ²⁰joints. He couldn't lope on all fours because he just wasn't built that way but he sure couldn't walk upright either. However now he knew more about the 20th century chimpanzee anatomy and what changes had been wrought by human interference, he found the situation almost intolerable. If humans hadn't interfered he would be able to lope along on all fours and keep up easily. On the other hand if they'd made the chimp skeletal change to completely upright, he'd be able to walk upright with them and keep up much more easily. Instead, they'd interfered to make enough of a change for chimps to be 'useful' as human substitutes but not enough to make them a threat.

He'd always wondered why orangs were able to stand upright and the info from the S&T building had explained that but also fuelled further resentment. Their modified hallux enhanced their upright posture further. The gorillas of course, well, who would want to be a gorilla? They had all the worst of it. Modified from quadrupedal to almost bipedal, but their feet at the same time modified to be less useful for standing upright.

The information about the sexual behaviours of his ancestors and his own genetic history just didn't bear thinking about. He cringed whenever he thought of it so he tried to ignore it. Better to just grumble to himself about the injustice of the anatomical changes and how they were impacting on him in the here and now.

"Galen, are you alright? You want to take a break?" Alan was looking concerned.

"No I'm alright. I just wish your people hadn't interfered with my people. Or that they'd gone the whole way and made us fully bipedal. This halfway stance, where I can't lope on all fours but I can't walk upright either, is exhausting on long walks."

Alan noted this observation. A lot of walking was exhausting for Galen. He knew of course that it was tiring for him and Pete, and they'd always known Galen had struggled to keep up with their walking speed. They'd seen that before; Galen's slower walking speed slowed them all down and the chimp knew it. Once before, Galen's efforts to not slow them down had led to him falling and breaking his leg. Human evolution had progressed through upright bipedalism, while both 20th century and 31st century apes lacked upright bipedalism²¹. Humans were long distance walkers, but apes were not.

Uncharacteristically Pete stepped forward and hugged the chimp.

"I hear you brother. They gave you guys a rough deal alright."

Both Galen and Alan were startled at this expression of brotherhood.

"Well I guess they didn't expect any of us to be constantly walking or running. None of the ape jobs required a lot of walking and they wouldn't have wanted us to be a threat."

²⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877056810000563>

²¹ <https://australian.museum/learn/science/human-evolution/walking-on-two-legs-bipedalism/>

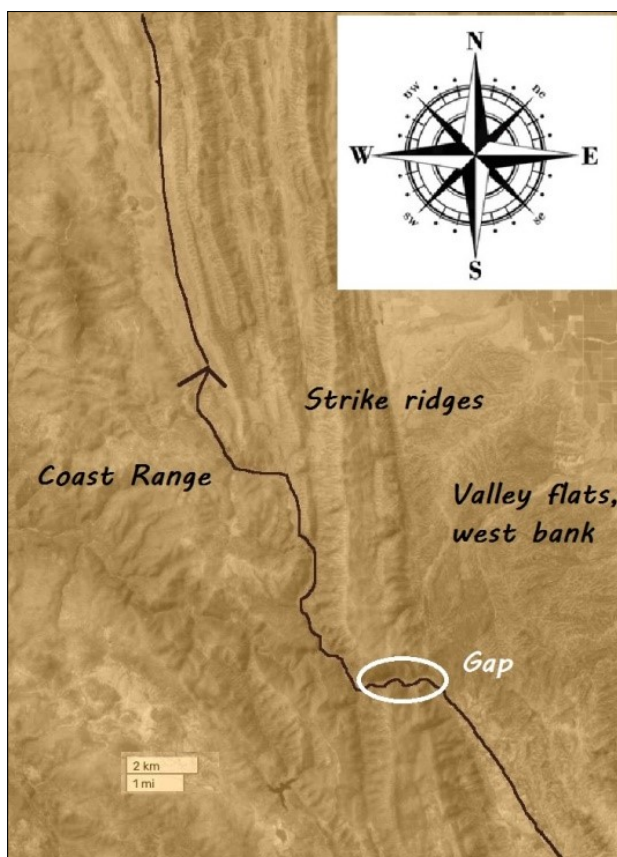
Alan noted further that he would need to be more mindful of the limits of Galen's walking abilities. The chimp was not built for many long days of walking. Again, he felt a pang of guilt for not having been more considerate in the past. As Commander he had to accept and work around the real limits of his team.

Nemo resideo, Latin for 'leave no one behind'. And Galen was one of his team.

"We'll take a break here. We're making good time but either way Galen needs to rest."



(photo from Google Earth: side of the M shaped gap through the strike ridge country)



They found the M shaped gap that provided the breakthrough to the west on the fourth afternoon and by next morning they were tracking north up the narrow valley between the strike ridges and the western foothills of the coast ranges.

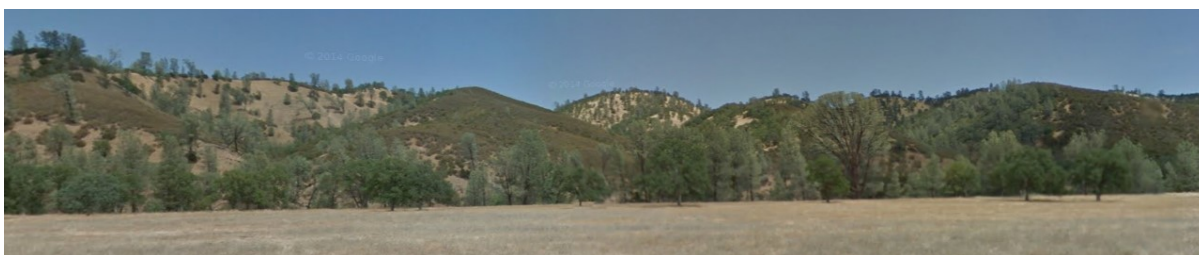
Every few miles, there was a stream out of the coast ranges and even in mid Summer the streams carried freshwater flows. Some of the deeper waterholes held fish and the streamside vegetation bore flowers and fruit.



(photos from Google Earth:
streams from the coast ranges on the west,
strike ridges on the east)



The valley between the strike ridges and the coast ranges was well grassed with lots of small game and ground birds.



Over the next three weeks they travelled easily, ate well and had plenty of water for drinking, bathing, food processing and even for laundry. Early starts, midday siestas, and trekking into the cool of evening - as long as they'd stopped in time to get a fire started before last light, they were good for the night. Plenty of fuel for the camp fire to be found, and the bed rolls made for comfortable sleeping. They set up in a triangle around the fire, sat cross-legged and discussed the day's events and tomorrow's plans. Living was easy, more or less.

“Man, socks and jocks, never thought I’d love ‘em so much. This is your best idea ever Alan.”

“No, the boots were the best idea. My knee is finally coming good.”

Pete inspected the sole of his right foot.

“Do the calluses go away over time or are we stuck with them for life?”

“They’ll go away in time. I hope. So whose turn is it to do laundry tonight?”

“I don’t care whose turn it is, I’ll do all our laundry every day for the rest of my life. Bring out your smelly, sweaty socks and jocks, I’ll go rinse them out now. Galen, where’s yours?”

Galen was resting on a fallen tree.

“These boots, what are they made of again? They’re wonderful.”

“Just call it ‘space age materials’ Galen, that covers it all.”

“Yeah, while our people were doing unspeakable things to your people, they were also inventing all sorts of useful materials and designing very good boots. Your socks and jocks, you want them washed out tonight or not?”

“Oh yes, here, thank you. I suppose the space materials cancel out all the other things.”

“Well we’d hope you’d cut us some slack at least on account of all the good stuff our people did. Doesn’t cancel out all the other things though. Don’t be too forgiving.”



(photo from Google Earth: western foothills of the coast range)



Lensatic compasses

There were small herds of game in the valley; no large herds as the virus kept numbers down. There was also a small wolf pack and a few black bears but no other predators. There were no signs of settlements, either ape or human. Alan decided to teach Pete to kill and butcher game mammals. The ground birds weren't hard to catch, but they wanted a change of taste. Initially Alan selected a small mob of feral goats and asked Pete to run one of them down. Pete protested their military boots weren't running boots but Alan pointed out that the meat would go well in a stew and the more practice Pete had, the easier the catch would be. They fashioned a short loop of poly rope to use as a lasso at close quarters. It took several days but eventually Pete succeeded in running down a herd buck.

Alan showed him how to kill quickly and cleanly, hang and bleed the carcass, skin and then butcher it. They carried only neck and shank cuts back to the campfire. A mature buck feral goat did not produce tender tasty cuts of meat but it stewed up alright. They had no way of keeping meat or skin so the wolves ate easy that night. Unimpressed with the task of running a goat down, Pete set about reinventing the bow and arrow.

It was Summer so both the valley oak and California sycamore were bearing acorns and fruits respectively. Alan asked Galen to climb and harvest, given his superior climbing skills. Galen dropped fruits and acorns to the ground where Alan and Pete collected them as they fell.

Their diet was diversifying, they were learning new skills and they were gaining experience. Alan was pleased with both their geographic progress and their progress in team building. He was feeling more and more like the Commander Alan Virdon of old. Putting greater distance between themselves and the Zaius/Urko apelands had been a great idea. If he ever met that unnamed lady from the ANSA carto unit, he'd have to thank her.

Sitting cross-legged around the campfire one night, Pete had a question.

"If I'm the runner and Galen is the climber, what are you?"

A smile tugged at the corners of Alan's mouth.

"I'm the good looking one with the air of authority."

Galen chortled in mirth and Pete arched one eyebrow and turned his head to one side.

"Do you hear that Galen? The Commander has a sense of humour after all."

"Well I can't be the brains of the outfit because we've all got brains, so that only leaves good looks and the air of authority."

"You know plenty of women thought I was good looking, right? How come you get that tag?"

"You can have that tag if you want it. It must have been your looks that attracted them because we all know your chat-up lines fall flat."

Galen laughed again and Pete's face flushed but he let it pass. It was true enough, but he was embarrassed Alan had picked up on that detail.

Alan glanced over his shoulder. Pete was right there as always, three paces behind, head down, still stoically following him, with Galen another 3 or 4 paces further back.

Pete had really stepped up. Though Alan didn't remember much, he knew from later conversations that Pete had taken the lead when he'd been shot, making sure he got to the surgical hospital, got the best of care and got every chance at recovery. He also reflected on how much Pete's self regulation had improved.

When Alan had selected him as his third for this mission, there was a ripple of astonishment at the Space Corps. Major Burke was the black sheep of his cohort. Flaky, mouthy, impulsive, not a team player. Loose cannon was the other common descriptor used with his name. Barely scrapped a Pass on each one of his psych evals. The Commanders of his previous flights were less than enthused about him and said so in their reports.

His background was unusual – “who does pre-med and then switches to electronics?” someone had once asked. But when Alan flicked through the crew options, looking for someone to oversee, operate and maintain the latest electronics in the new starcraft, it was Major Burke who stood out. No-one else came close.

The Chief Astronaut had called Alan in to discuss his choice.

Pete Burke? Really? Major Peter Burke? Have you thought this through? You know his record? Are you really sure you want him? For this mission?

“Yes Sir” Alan had answered truthfully and dutifully to each question.

“Why? What do you think makes him the best choice for this mission?”

“Well he's the top electronics officer in the cohort. I don't want to lead a mission out there in this new bird without someone I can rely on if anything goes wrong with the electronics. I have a family to come home to and so does Eddie Jones. And this new bird is pricey. We don't want to be risking it all with someone who can't handle the electronics having a hissy fit.”

“The electronics are fine. Fully tested and those other glitches have been identified and sorted. Alan, you know the scuttlebutt. Is he really going to pull his weight? Is he really going to add to the team?”

“Sir, the new electronics are my biggest concern. Major Burke only needs to keep the electronics running and maybe find a work-around if something goes wrong. He's head and shoulders above everyone at that. Eddie and I can do everything else, if needs be. And anyway, he has pre-med and you never know when that might be a life-or-death matter.”

Truth to tell, Alan was grateful he'd stuck to his choice, and not just because it was his own life that had been saved. Eddie Jones was a great guy, great navigator, great team player, never put a foot wrong. But Alan reflected that two Alan Virdons would not have got them to where they were today. He and Pete had balanced each other's strengths and weaknesses,

and they worked smoothly together and improvised a treat. He honestly couldn't imagine Jonesy having been able to adapt so well or improvise so creatively.

Also Pete had really stepped up in his own skin. When they first exited Farrow's hidden cave it was because Pete insisted he wanted to know what their 'new home' looked like, despite Farrow's warning to stay inside. So Pete did a typical "Oh sure, apes!" against Alan's caution and charged off. But recently when Pete had been trapped underground with Urko, he'd controlled his own voice, the words he used and the activities he suggested, to soothe Urko and get the two of them working together. That Pete had actually learned this and was able to apply it, and then tell the story later in the jargon of emotional regulation, was mildly astonishing. The psych evals had suggested he wasn't able to apply the theory about emotional self regulation, but clearly he could. He'd been able to analyse and modify his own behaviour, and that of Urko, to keep the two of them alive.



CBS TV 1974

Alan winced when he thought that there would have been a memorial plaque to the three of them installed somewhere. Probably Pete had been blamed and cursed by later ANSA instructors as having been the one to cause Probe 6 to 'whatever in the hell happened to it' when in reality Pete had done a sterling job, before and after the crash. The electronics hadn't failed; in fact the electronics had held up beautifully and got them home. It was the time warp that had them disappear, and that wasn't Pete's fault.

Pete kept tracking after his CO, grateful to have some time to think his own thoughts. He thought back to that last family time before launch.

He'd leant against the wall and sipped OJ. There was no family to see him off; there never was. He had to be there because 'rules' but he'd have felt better if he'd been spared. A mom who was long gone, no idea where. A father who was probably still drinking himself stupid every night in Jersey City, or maybe dead by now. No other family.

This was the first Liberty III flight for this crew so everyone felt extra trepidation. They'd all been on longer duration, shorter distance flights on the older Liberty II models but this would be the first time for all of them in one of the new FTL (faster than light) Liberty III model starcraft. This would also be his first flight crewing with Jonesy and Virdon. Family time was so they could meet each other's families and be reassured about the crew who'd fly with their loved one. He'd been introduced to the two families and reassured both that he understood the electronics and it was a much superior system to the old Liberty II. Neither wife looked convinced by his speech.

Eddie Jones and his wife and son sat together, talking, looking tense but close. Their kid was about six, and well behaved if a bit overwhelmed. Then he'd looked across at the Virdon family. Word was the Virdons were tight and stable as a couple and their kid Chris was bright and well balanced. To be truthful, none of that was apparent to Pete. The kid looked confused and tired, and Mrs Virdon looked displeased.

Alan was making reassuring gestures to both of them, gestures which appeared to be making no impact. Pete heard him say

"I promise Sal, this will be the last, then I'll stay grounded. Promotion and a desk job, Ok?"

Pete looked at the kid again. At least he had a family and at least they seemed to be taking care of him. By the time Pete was eleven he'd been more or less on his own.

His mom had cleared out one day when he was at school in first grade and they'd never heard from her again. He didn't blame her anymore because he knew what life with his dad was like, but after she left things got worse. His dad spent most of his money on cheap booze and cheaper women, not so much on food for his hungry kid, or clothes, or school supplies. By the time he was thirteen he was making himself scarce when his dad brought women home because some were handsy with an inflated opinion of their allure. The gang he ran with at night mainly engaged in petty theft and mostly evaded police attention.

The sports scholarship to Michigan U didn't cover all his living costs but by then he'd learned that he could charm his way out of a tight situation or scrounge some cash using his looks.

So he'd taken the route used by many good-looking college and Uni students before him. A swish set of clothes and a \$50 bill to the bouncer to get past the door of one of the upmarket clubs. Park himself at the bar and wait. He never had to wait long; there was always a buyer and she always wanted discretion. Usually she had a recent divorce settlement to splash around; sometimes the husband was travelling out of town. A few hours with an older

woman – not really old, he had standards after all – and he went home with cash for the next week. And plenty of time to study.

One-on-one with a woman. False name and always a room, never his place or hers. Cash only. Keep it all untraceable. That had been the plan anyway. The college girls who worked this system all went on to live happy lives, he had reasoned. He wasn't ashamed, exactly, but he spun his stories because, well, no-one ever wanted to admit it. How could it go wrong?

Afterwards, he'd found out how it could go wrong. He'd lost his ability to trust women. He had aimed to settle with a woman who respected him, one day, but he no longer trusted any of them. He'd planned to be educated and employed with a happy home life, one day. A loving wife, a safe roof over his head, decent clothes, food on the table every day.

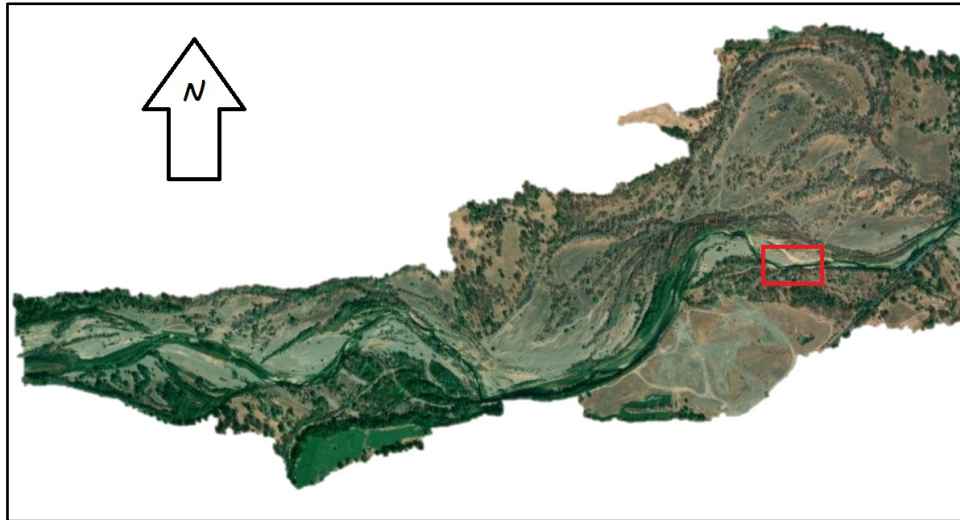
Yeah he thought, How's that plan working out for you buddy?



CBS TV 1974

4. Redding, 40°35'N, 122°22'W

Once they emerged from the strike ridge country they swung north east heading for the base of the mountains at the top of the valley. Two days walking brought them to the braided channel of the Hooker Creek system, south of what had once been Cottonwood.



Above: the braided channel of the Hooker Creek system

Below: narrow shallow ford, about 10 yards wide (21st Century images)



They camped up on the south bank for the night, not wanting to be sleeping in wet clothes. The following morning they walked along the creek until they found a narrow shallow ford, about 10 yards wide where the water ran fast but only to knee height. Alan and Pete walked Galen across, one on either side to keep him steady and reassure him.

Before nightfall they were camped up in Redding, sitting cross-legged again around their latest campfire, discussing the day's progress and tomorrow's plans.

A few days of searching the deserted ruins of Redding allowed them to patch together a thumbnail history of the place. In the face of climate change and increased tectonic activity along the west coast the human population began deserting cities to the south and increasingly moved to cities like Redding, boosting the population and economy.

From a modest city in the late 20th century, Redding had mushroomed into a dormitory city for the US Air Force and ANSA by the mid 21st century. With Houston, TX at only 8m above sea level²² and Cape Canaveral, FL at 5m both being decommissioned due to rising sea levels, and Vandenberg Space Force Base, CA compromised due to increased activity along the nearby major fault line²³, Redding at 150m above sea level and with no major fault lines in proximity became a major space exploration base. The east side of the Sacramento River valley had been developed for jet runways and space launch sites.

Galen commented that the new ape crop lands would be in the same general area of those facilities and it dawned on them that the larger fires they had seen light from at night had possibly been not so much vegetation being burnt after clearing but the remains of air force and space base ruins being torched. Of course, those ruins would need to be removed as their presence would likely trigger questions where no politically sanctioned answers would suffice. Alan felt like every bridge was being burnt under his feet. So close and yet so far. Every time they discovered something that might help him find a way home to Sally and Chris, it was snatched from his grasp as he reached for it.

By 2100 apes were not only being used in civilian roles but were also moving into military roles, especially being trained up as future soldiers. The modifications to their behaviour, particularly that of the gorillas, began paying off. Efforts were put into giving all three species speech²⁴, a physical limitation that needed to be overcome to further expand their utility. By the mid 22nd century this had been achieved and the declining human numbers and declining livestock numbers benefitted the now-talking apes whose numbers continued to rise.

On the fifth day they found ANSA archives, displayed on a touch screen powered by some unknown but still working power source. With some testing, they discovered a QWERTY keyboard in the lower left corner and began Boolean searching. Alan wanted to know what ANSA knew about their disappearance and what it had done to try and find "Probe 6".

There'd been a lot of press coverage of the loss and of the two wives and two children left to wonder, and many official sympathies, along with ANSA promises to make sure the families were taken care of. They soon learned that Probe 8, commanded by Lt-Col Tod Walter had been despatched three months after their launch, specifically to try and locate the lost Probe 6. However Probe 8 had also disappeared and according to contemporary news coverage the eventual fate of both missions was unknown.

²² <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-mx9zs/North-America/>

²³ <https://static.temblor.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CA-major-faults.jpg>

²⁴ <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/08/12/talk-like-you-scientists-discover-why-humans-evolved-to-talk-while-other-primates-cant>

“So in three months they lost 2 FTLs and 6 crew?”

“Yeah, looks like it. They probably iced the FTLs for a while until they sorted it out.”

“What’s an FTL?”

“FTL means faster than light. They were a new technology, we never did learn how ANSA came up with the technology. Lots of money went into them though.”

“Toddy would have had his 2-I-C Diego with him. Who else do you think?”

“Well he talked to me about why I picked you as my third and I told him I wanted the best electronics guy. I guess if he was being sent up to find us, he’d probably have gone to the next best electronics guy. Which would be ... who ... Lucas?”

“Yeah Luke. Toddy, Diego and Luke. You, me, Jonesy, Toddy, Diego and Luke. And 2 FTLs. In 3 months. Gee that must have generated a lot of bad press.”

A search for “Virdon” turned up news articles about the loss of Probe 6 in 1980 and then between 1995 and 2020, other articles about Christopher Virdon, first as Major Virdon, then Lt-Col and finally as Colonel Virdon. Chris had a distinguished career, having been an exemplary student at high school and University, and after he entered the Space Corps, as an astronaut. The year before his retirement Chris was quoted as saying in one news article that the failure to find out what had happened to his father was the biggest disappointment of his life. According to another news article written at the time of Chris’s retirement in 2020, his mother had always believed his father would return and she had remained at their home in Houston, a widow, until she passed away in 2019. That article about Chris included the names of his wife, two daughters and three grandchildren.

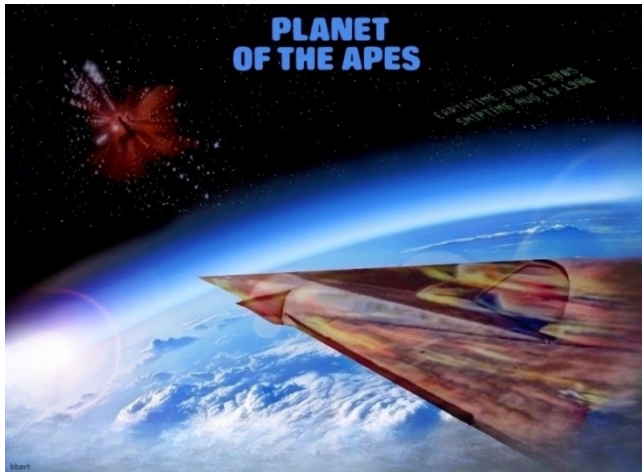
Alan was overwhelmed by all this information. His head pounded and his eyes throbbed. Sally had waited. Sally was still there, waiting for him. Only not, because he never got home and she had died as a 74 year old widow. He started dry retching.

Pete and Galen took him outside for fresh air and water. The stifling heat and the still air and the overbearing silence among the ruins didn’t help so they found a patch of shade and settled there for an hour or so. After his stomach settled, Alan was still looking decidedly seedy, but insisted on returning to keep searching the records.

Internal ANSA archives showed Chris had flown a number of missions in the classified ‘time warp location program’ trying to locate how and where four spacecraft had disappeared between 1972 and 1980 (Taylor, Maddox, Virdon and Walter), and once promoted to Colonel he had overseen a number of later missions to locate the time anomaly.

Another archival search for “time warp location program” confirmed that in 2020 on the cusp of Chris’ retirement, ANSA had discontinued the search for the lost missions. No further unexplained mission losses had occurred after 1980 because ANSA paused flying FTLs after Probe 8 disappeared and never restarted the program. Later, the agency had dropped the search from the list of priorities. Reading between the lines it became apparent that Chris

had lobbied hard for the search to continue while he stayed on board but his imminent retirement gave ANSA the 'out' they'd been looking for. Chris retired and ANSA stopped looking for the time anomaly. The lost missions became sad footnotes in the glorious history of space exploration.



CBS TV 1974, and Brian Brady

Pete and Galen prepared a meal that night, watching Alan who sat staring into the middle distance, running through 'what-ifs' in his head.

"I shouldn't have flown this mission. Sally wanted me to stand down and let someone else take it. I should have done what she wanted."

"Yeah well blaming yourself isn't going to help now. Anyway ANSA offered it to you, not to anyone else. It was to be your last mission before promotion, yeah? Your last chance to fly, your only chance to fly the FTL."

"Yeah. I should have stood down though. FTL. I thought I'd regret it if I passed on flying an FTL. The CA²⁵ said I'd earned the right but I could have passed on it."

Now he thought, he had the rest of his life to regret wanting to accept that honour. Faster Than Light. What had he done? Sally, alone for the rest of her life. Chris, growing up without a father. Chris, spending his life trying to find his father. All for the sake of him wanting to fly one FTL. What a mess.

Galen cleared his throat.

"I'm probably out of line for saying this but I think knowing is better than always wondering. If you didn't know, would you be happier? Or better off? All the time I've known you, you've been driven by wanting to go home, even though we all know that's not likely. And now you know. Would you be better living another 40 years here, never knowing?"

"I don't know Galen. I really don't know. I always think there's hope, I guess, even though the apes destroy everything they find that could help. Can I live another 40 years hoping to get home? Yes I think I can."

²⁵ Chief Astronaut

5. Slope and Elevation, July 3086 AD

Departing Redding a few days later, Alan could hear the theme song to the short lived TV series “The New Land”, sung by John Denver, even now in his head:

*As a dream is born in darkness, a seed begins to grow.
The land provides the shelter, the dream provides the glow.
We have this dream, America; a vision bright and clear.
In the freedom we are seeking, we have planted ourselves here.
In the space that we call living, we shall see what we can be.
In the space that we call sharing, we will raise a family.
In the rain and in the sunshine we will make this land our home.
This land is home, this is our home.*

His mother’s grandparents had been Danish immigrants²⁶ so the family and the farm in that pioneer story had meant a lot to her. Life for her grandparents had not been much different from that portrayed in the series, and she always told him he looked much like her mother’s father. It might have only aired 6 episodes but she was captivated by it and insisted he watch it so she could talk to him about it later.

By midday they’d reached the location where the Pit River Bridge had once stood. After siesta and a snack, they walked down to the river’s edge.

“Ok now Galen, come here, I’m going to tie this rope around your waist ok? So if something goes wrong we can haul you out. Just remember not to panic brother. It’s the panicking that’ll get you in the end.”

“Why are you calling me brother? I’m not your brother.”

“I dunno. Maybe because you’re like a brother to me. I never had a brother and I like the idea. And you never had a brother either, and your mom told me you always wanted one. So just suck it up, we’re brothers now, Ok.”

Alan grinned, shook his head and rolled his eyes.

“Don’t you two go getting all soppy on me, I don’t do group hugs.”

This comment elicited laughter all around. Pete continued:

“The dam wall is gone, that’s why the water level is down, and the rubble from the bridge gives us something to climb across on, most of the way. You’ll just have to get your feet wet, maybe, in a few places. But we’ll be with you and we’ll get you across, alright?”

Galen looked unconvinced but he was willing to go with them. The Sacramento River was about 180 yards wide where the Pit River Bridge had once been and the bridge decking, both road and rail, along with the trusses and pylons had collapsed *in situ*. As they clambered and climbed over the rubble, they were able to move some small pieces of rubble to make their progress easier and to fill in places so Galen actually, in the end, didn’t need to get his feet

²⁶ <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/partners/DHPS/>

wet. It took them a long time and a lot of effort, so they decided to make camp early, there and then, on the north bank. Fresh water and firewood, fish, leaf tips, fruit and flowers. It had been a good day, an easy start to the next leg of the journey and they all felt optimistic.

The next day they hiked another half day, stopping at the site of Antler's Bridge about midday. After a rest and shared food, they inspected the crossing point. The river was only about 50 yards wide there, and again it was the collapsed bridge rubble which provided a crossing. At one place they were 15 feet above the water, crawling along a section of handrail, and Galen with his superior climbing abilities assisted Alan and Pete on that elevated crossing. They hiked on for another hour or so and then made camp early. Ahead of them was another day and a half of hiking through mountains along the highway ruins.

That night, Pete and Galen were woken by Alan talking and crying out in his sleep. In the morning he remembered nothing of it, but it had woken them so he apologised. They hiked on, following the old highway, going north-west. Overall they were heading in the general direction of Mt Shasta which was their next field feature point. However it was not visible from their location among the trees in the valley floor and after their midday break the old highway turned north, and then north-east. Mt Shasta was actually to their north east but Alan became disoriented and then anxious. He had failed to make a note on the field navs as to which direction they should be travelling in from Antler's Bridge and his fears about becoming disoriented in the twisting valleys with no visual cues were crystallised. For a few minutes he was confused, couldn't recall what the original maps had looked like and couldn't work out what direction they should be going in. Discussion with Pete and Galen brought a resolution that they would continue generally north along the highway alignment for another day. In the event that did not yield a result, they would back track to Antler's Bridge.

Later that afternoon, they set up camp. Alan wanted to stay with the fire so Pete and Galen went down to get water from the river.

"What's wrong with him? First that dream and now he's confused and anxious." Galen asked when they reached the flowing water at the foot of the slope, out of earshot.

"I think he's run down and tired like we are. He's had the lion's share of the responsibility and he takes his responsibility very seriously. Heck, he takes responsibility for everyone we ever meet, that's why we end up in all the local politics. We all need a good long rest. Weeks and months of rest."

"Well what can we do? We can't rest here for months. We need to move on."

Pete paused for a couple of seconds to gather his thoughts.

"Well I know what we won't do. We won't undermine his confidence. We won't turn on him. We'll follow him when he leads and we'll stand beside him when he needs us to. I won't lead a mutiny and I won't join one either."

Galen blanched. "I wasn't suggesting a mutiny. I was asking what we can do."

“Yeah I know Galen. I’m trying to figure it out myself. For now, we don’t want him to lose face. Let him rest for a while. Maybe that’ll be enough for today.”

As luck would have it, by late afternoon the following day, they had cleared the mountains and Mt Shasta was visible to their east as expected. However, Alan had had a bad night in the interim, being unable to relax and get much sleep, so they decided once they had Mt Shasta in their sights, to take a break for a day and rest up.

Three more days of walking. From Mt Shasta north to Black Mountain. Taking it easy because Galen needed to be accommodated and heck all three of them were tired and there was no hurry right now. Always walking. Or running. Always walking or running.

Alan was tired of it, tired of the constant running, looking over their shoulders, never being sure where they were or what they’d find ahead, when they’d eat or how well they’d sleep. How he wished he could find a home for himself, Pete and Galen. They had run together, a long way for a long time, looking for safety and freedom and a place to call home. Some place they could settle, make homes, perhaps Pete and Galen could start families too if all the stars aligned. In recent days those two had been teasing each other about being brothers but under the teasing was genuine affection and camaraderie. Pete and Galen had fused into an exemplary team through all their tribulations. His bastard team - two species, wildly different backgrounds, but they had pulled together in ways that made the best matched, best trained teams in ANSA look insipid by comparison. They both deserved a chance at a home and family. His time was past, his home and family were gone, but he could at least try to get his team their place in the sun.

He wanted to stand down. There. He’d thought it. He’d put it out there, if only in his mind. He wanted to stand down. He had not signed up for this sort of mission and tenure. It was supposed to be short term, out and back, fully tracked, fully supplied and with full support in the event of the mission being compromised. Instead, it had turned into a fully lost mission with no end in sight, no supplies and no support, certainly no retrieval. He’d done it as long as he could, as well as he could. But now he really wanted to stand down.

“Not yet” he told himself. “Not until I find somewhere for us”. He would not abandon his duty. He would not cut his team loose. He was still responsible for them. But surely, there were limits to how long he was bound to this obligation?

It wasn’t as if they’d crashed on another planet in their own time and ANSA would be mounting a mission to rescue them. In that case, he would lead them to sit tight, be safe and await rescue. But there was no ANSA and no prospect of rescue. It wasn’t as if they were on their own planet in their own time and he could lead them on a long walk to an outpost or settlement where they could send word for retrieval. No. There was no such option. They were on their own planet but a good many centuries in the future. ANSA was non-existent so there would be no retrieval and there was no other help. They were on their own. For the rest of their lives.

Further, the planet was now run by hostile, well equipped, gorilla soldiers with orders to kill them on sight. The apes destroyed each and every piece of advanced technology they found. Both Probe 6 and the computer bank in Oakland had been reduced to ash. However long it had been since the fall of human domination, there was no sign of any group with advanced technology left anywhere. Not on this continent and probably not anywhere else on the planet. The ruins were old and no-one had come in the intervening centuries to restore human domination.

He was trapped forever in this nightmare. He would not see his wife or son again. He choked for a moment at the thought that he really was stranded here with no way back. This can't be happening, it can't be real. Again his head pounded and his eyes throbbed. He staggered and grabbed at the tree beside him. He caught his breath, closed his eyes and paused. Relax. No need to panic. He'd been living here 16 months now, without Sally and Chris. He'd coped so far. He could keep on coping. But Shakespeare had written "*uneasy is the head that wears a crown*" and Alan knew his head was weary with his obligation to this little team. He had to find sanctuary for the three of them. And soon.

They camped beside Black Mountain, a prominent landscape feature and an important field nav point. Next day they would have to cross the Klamath River, the one that Alan had said was not very wide, had sediment slugs and vegetated islands but could be fast water, so not suited to rafting across. They wanted to be able to cross it in the morning with no time pressures, so as to be dry before nightfall. After this crossing they would be moving into more mountainous country away from the open sightlines of the plains country.

Again during the night Pete and Galen were woken by Alan talking and crying out in his sleep. This time though, the disturbance culminated when he screamed and sat bolt upright.

"Alan, are you alright? What happened Commander?"

"Oh. Sorry guys. A nightmare. Sorry. I'll be alright. Sorry. Go back to sleep."

"Nah we're alright. We've been getting plenty of sleep lately, hey Galen?"

"Yes, I will warm the stew and you can have some of that, it will help you settle."

Alan pulled his legs under into the cross-legged position they often used around the fire. He felt like a fool, he was supposed to be modelling good behaviour and self-control to his team. Granted, a nightmare was not under his control but it was an indicator that his mental health and internal composure was less than ideal.

"You want to talk about it?"

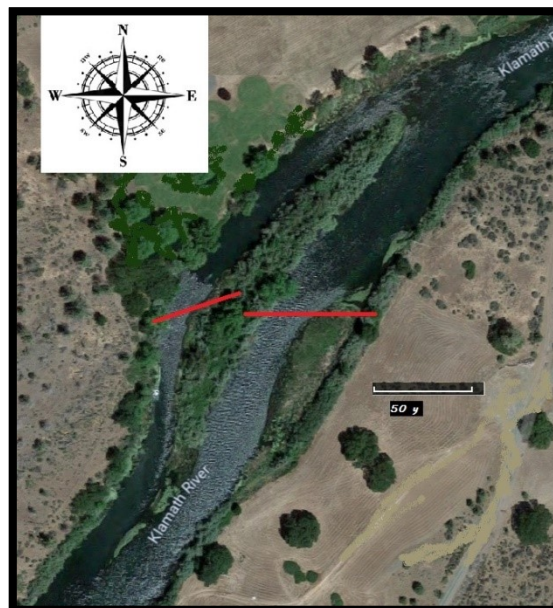
"No, I don't remember it anyway. Just a nightmare. I guess we're all getting run down and worn out. It'll be good when we're settled somewhere safe."

"We could just camp up here for a few days. There's food around, no sign of gorillas, we could just take it easy here for a few days."

"I guess we could but I'd like to be across that river before we do that. Any barriers we can put between us and any wandering gorillas have to be a good thing."

"Relax Commander, you're worrying too much. We've already crossed two rivers, either of which would stop gorillas in their tracks. Unless they want to follow us on foot and I can't see any of them wanting to do that. They don't like going far unless they're on horseback. And anyway, they don't know we're up here. They don't even know we're still alive. Heck we don't even know if Urko is alive. For all we know he might be dead and there might be new blood in the hot seat with a different focus. Relax Commander, stop worrying."

The next morning they walked the three miles to the Klamath River and surveyed up and downstream for a while trying to find a suitable crossing location. The water was indeed too fast to raft across and too deep to easily walk across as they had back at Cottonwood. At one point there was a low sand bar off the creek bank, a waterway about 25 yards wide, then a vegetated slug, almost an island, in the middle of the channel and apparently a narrower waterway on the other side. A plan was devised to walk across using a guide-rope over the river. They tied off the polyrope high on a solid tree trunk on the south (east) bank above the sand bar and Pete walked it across and tied off low to another solid trunk on the island, downstream across the broken water. Their packs were attached one at a time to the guide-rope and by both gravity and shaking the rope each pack was slid across and down to the island. The goat lasso was refashioned into a loop around Galen's chest under his arms and then tied off to the guide-rope. Alan found a stout stick for Galen to use as a prop and the two of them set off, Galen very anxiously, into the fast water.



Example from Google Earth current imagery.

Pete met them halfway across and helped them to complete the crossing. Galen was soaked up to his armpits from spray and splash, though the water had only reached his waist. He had ploughed across 25 linear yards of water and while very anxious he had not panicked. The water however was very cold, even in Summer, so they decided to make the second crossing as soon as possible so they had all afternoon to dry out. Pete went back to release the rope from the south bank and tied it round his waist to wade back to the island.

The second crossing should have been easier, as the waterway at 10 yards wasn't as wide nor as deep nor even as fast as the first one. In fact the packs crossed quickly and easily via the elevated guide-rope to Pete waiting on the north (west) bank. However partway on their walk across, Galen stumbled and fell into a hole in the gravel bed, then promptly panicked as he submerged in the cold fast water. He grabbed at Alan and inadvertently pulled him down as Pete rushed in to help. The guide-rope had too much slack and the three of them ended up immersed in the cold water. Alan got his feet under him and half stood up but Galen grabbed him again in desperation. Pete too was struggling to get his feet under him and the cold water shock was making all their breathing difficult. Pete grabbed the guide-rope and hauled Galen up by the neck of his shirt, telling him to calm down and hold the rope. Alan had disappeared under water again and it took a few moments for Pete to find him and haul him above the water surface. Galen was laying over the guide-rope which at least removed the slack from the line. Pete got Alan to the rope and told him to walk out, then grabbed Galen again and began pulling him along the guide-rope. By the time the three of them reached the bank they were all struggling to catch their breath and were grateful just to be alive and out of the water.

Needless to say there was no more travel that day. Galen apologised profusely until they both threw wet clothes and boots at him and told him good naturedly to shut up and forget about it. Pete stripped off later that afternoon and waded back across to release the rope from the island, using it to secure himself for the wade back again. They had a good sized log fire that night and ate well, of foraged vegetation and a couple of fish, species not known, hand-caught in the shallow edges of the broken water.

The following day's travel was not easy, upslope all day from about 2100 feet elevation to 4500 feet and they camped about a mile south of Ogden Hill that night. Thankfully tomorrow they'd drop back down into the next basin, Rogue River. A cool breeze blew from the north.

Another night, another nightmare. Again Alan felt a fool; actually he felt ashamed this time. First he'd miscalculated in the Klamath River, had a near miss himself and had to be rescued by Pete who also had to get Galen out. Now another nightmare, another disrupted sleep for all of them. This was becoming a habit and not a good one.

The following day they hiked past Ogden Hill and Alan was relieved that within a couple of hours they had dropped back down to 3100 feet. Their course was then straight and open

and easy to follow. A day bearing north-north-west and then another two days bearing north-west. Easy walking, even for Galen, and there was food to be foraged as they travelled.

They camped at the north west corner of what had been Medford that third afternoon and reviewed the field navs for the next day. It would be two days of solid walking or maybe three days of easy walking to follow the Rogue River down through the snaking valley to Grant's Pass. Alan would have felt better if he had maps with him but all he had was the field nav notes. He knew their overall direction would be west but he thought he recalled sections would vary from nearly south to nearly north so they needed to be really clued up about what they were doing. Otherwise they could get lost and never find their way out.

The next day they began the hike west into the Rogue River Valley. Alan stayed close to the river because even more than his lensatic, the water course would give him direction. The walking was harder and slower than they'd expected; even though the highway remnants were obvious, the ground was littered with rocks and rubble. This was similar to what they'd experienced north of Antler's Bridge. A highway that had been clear enough on a map and in the real world when maintenance was being undertaken, had reverted to wilderness over the centuries of neglect. Forests had grown up and reclaimed the cleared land and highway, rocks and rubble had eroded and rolled or fallen down and obscured the appearance of the highway. The rocks and rubble and bitumen fragments provided obstacles to their progress.

Alan called a halt earlier than usual and focussed on getting a good log fire started. Foraged food wasn't hard to come by and they were all tired so they settled early and slept.

After midnight, the nightmare woke them all and this time Alan was sweating profusely when he sat up, breathing rapidly and shallowly and he couldn't settle. He got up and paced out to the edge of the campfire and then paced around the edge of the light. Pete got up and stood near the fire and spoke calmly and soothingly to him but it still took several minutes before he'd calmed down enough to go back and sit in his bed roll.

"Do you want to tell us what's going on Alan? I mean, you've had a few of these nightmares now. Is there something we should know?"

"No, it's alright."

"You sure? Because I'm not convinced and Galen's wondering too. If there's something ..."

"No I'm alright I tell you."

"Okay."

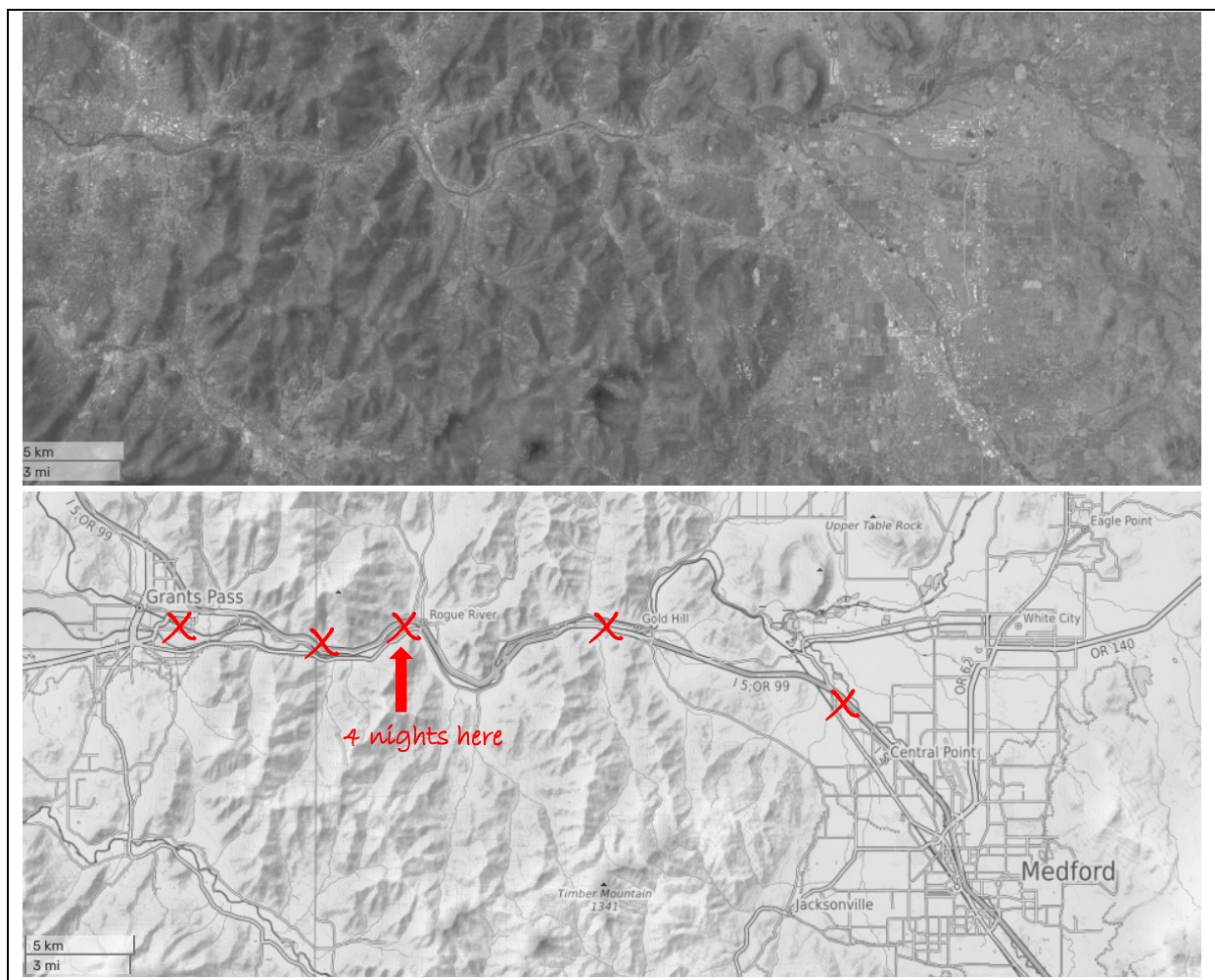
They settled back down to try and sleep. At least Pete and Galen did. Alan sat up by the fire for some time, staring into the flames. After a while he spoke. "Pete, you still awake?"

"Yep."

"I grew up on the plains of Texas where you can see to the horizon, these mountains give me the willies. That's all it is."

“Uh huh. We have the lensatic and the river though. It’s not like we’re going to get lost. We know where we’re going.”

The problem was that Alan didn’t know where he was going. He had no idea. Not really. He’d thought he knew what he was doing, commanding Probe 6, all the techs thought they knew, everyone in charge thought they knew and look how that had ended. They got lost and no-one could ever find them. Now he was leading another mission, thinking he knew where he was going – well no, not at all, just guessing really – and what if they got lost here? What if he led them astray? What if he got them killed? Like he’d got Jonesy killed. Jonesy, his 2-I-C. Jonesy had relied on him, trusted him. Jonesy was competent and confident but he’d still been killed following his Commander. What if he fouled up again? Sally and Chris had trusted him and he’d fouled up. They’d been left to live their lives without him. What if he fouled up again and this time Pete or Galen got killed? What-if, what-if?



Next day they set off again, south-west, then south-south-west, following the water with Alan trying not to look at the lensatic. Can you really trust any instrumentation? He wasn't sure anymore. He wasn't sure he could trust himself either.

After noon the river swung north-north-west. Was this the right way? It must be, the water was flowing that way. This was a full river with a distinct channel, it must be the right way.

Alan stopped and looked around. He was having trouble getting his breath; the route they were taking must be more strenuous than he had noticed. They weren't at a high enough elevation for it to be low oxygen, only about 950 feet. Pete and Galen pulled up beside him.

"Problems?"

"No I don't think so. No I think it's alright. I think we're on track."

Pete and Galen looked at each other and then back to Alan.

"Okay so we keep walking then."

Alan struggled to get his breath.

"I think we might stop here for a while. We aren't in a hurry. We can take a break here."

"Okay we'll rest up for a few minutes. You alright, your breathing seems laboured?"

"Old age. I'm getting past all this."

"All what?"

"All the walking Pete. All the walking and all the running. Can't you feel it? It's tiring."

"I can't say I'm noticing it right now, no. It is tiring and that's why we're looking for somewhere to settle, to rest. But I'm not tired right now. We've been eating and sleeping well. Let me feel your forehead, maybe you've got a bug."

"No, I'm alright, I just don't want us to get lost in here. This would be a terrible place to get lost in. We'd never get out." Alan was almost hyperventilating now.

"Hang on a minute Alan, just hang on a minute. Let's calm down and take some deep breaths. We're safe, we can find food, we're not in any danger from gorillas. The worst we are is lost and we can always go back if we need to. But we don't need to do that because we are just following the river, right? Downstream, right? So let's just take some deep breaths and take a few minutes to think this through."

Alan nodded and took a deep breath and nodded again and looked down at the ground.

"Yes, you're right Pete. We're not lost. I'm just tired and disoriented. That's all."

They sat for a little while, until Alan had his breathing under control and then moved on.

That afternoon they camped where the river had turned west again, back into more closed in country with mountains on either side. Pete expected another nightmare that night. Those mountains were triggering something in Alan, he just didn't know what.

It was about midnight again and Pete was awake almost before Alan sat up. Alan was wide-eyed and sweating again. He was shouting about being lost and sorry that he killed so many good men. He could barely catch his breath and it took several minutes of steady talking by Pete before he was breathing calmly again and looking composed and grounded.

"Are you sure you don't want to tell us what these nightmares are about?"

"No. There's no use in worrying the two of you. It's my issue, not yours."

"I dunno, it's looking to me like it's an issue for all of us about now. You're not getting sleep, we're not getting sleep, you're getting anxious during the day."

Alan shook his head and refused any further discussion. They settled down though sleep was hard to find. With Alan sleeping at last, Pete asked Galen to stay with Alan while he went to take a leak. After a few minutes Galen looked around to see where he'd gone. He could see the blue camos a short distance away in front of a tree. After another couple of minutes, he looked again and saw the same scene. Worried now, he stood up and checked Alan and once satisfied he was asleep Galen walked across to where Pete was. He walked around the other side of the tree so he could watch Alan over Pete's shoulder. Pete was leaning against the tree on his crossed arms. He looked up at Galen and his face was strained and drawn.

"Are you alright? You look terrible."

"Yeah no, I'm okay. You heard him, he's scared of getting lost and getting us killed. Are you here to tell me you're abandoning us and going back to throw yourself on the mercy of Zaius and Urko? I wouldn't blame you, stuck out here in the wilderness with just the two of us."

Galen looked shocked and was momentarily speechless.

"No. I'm not, I wouldn't. I'm staying with the two of you. We're all in this together. And I wouldn't have anything to go back to anyway. But I wanted to check on you because that's the longest leak ever. You must be deflated from losing so much fluid."

Pete chuckled. Galen was droll and sometimes droll was just what was needed. Galen motioned for him to step aside from the tree trunk and when he did so, Galen reached up with his hands and clasped the sides of Pete's head. He brought the human's forehead down and pressed it against his own forehead, closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Pete instinctively closed his eyes too and they stood sharing breath while time seemed suspended. Their breaths and smells intermingled and Pete was comforted by the smell and the touch of the male chimp. This was a gesture Galen's mother had used on him a couple of times when he was very young. Galen had forgotten it until now. It was an old, deep, instinctive comforting gesture that chimps had used since time immemorial until it had been trained or shamed out of them by humans. While it had never been recovered in their culture, occasionally in times of great distress, it would re-emerge as a gesture of reassurance.

This was one of those times.

Unexpectedly, the next day, Alan called a rest day. He decided here was a good place to stay. It made no sense to Pete and Galen but there they stayed, that day and into that night. Alan complained of being very tired and slept on and off during the day, and went to sleep early.

Pete and Galen were still sitting at the fire when the nightmare began. Alan tossed and threw his arms out, calling for Sally. Pete leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder "Al, wake up. C'mon Alan, wake up, hey."

"What? Oh, Pete, sorry I had a nightmare, a terrible, awful dream. We got lost, we crashlanded and the place was run by apes and we couldn't get home."

He sat up and looked around the campsite. "Where are we? Where's Jonesy?"

Pete's face fell at these questions and he turned white. He looked across to Galen. Alan followed his line of sight and jumped in horror when he saw the chimpanzee so close.

"Oh, no. No, no, no, no. No. It's not. No, I can't. It's not. No, no, no, no!" he shouted.

Pete jumped up, squatted in front of him and grasped Alan's shoulders firmly "Alan, it's alright. We're alright. We're ok. Galen is our friend. You remember Galen, he's our friend. He's helping us. You're alright and I'm alright. We're ok. We're all ok. You and me and Galen."

"No, no, no, no. No, I can't do this anymore. Let me out. I want to go home!" he began sobbing. Great gulping sobs, punctuated with wails, as he flipped between the last desperate vestiges of denial and the horrible reality. His mind was trying to escape his body, to escape the truth, the inescapable future, from which he could no longer hide.

Now the denial he'd clung to for so long had been stripped away, the full horror of the nightmare was manifest. There was no going home. Chris had grown up and gone looking for him, had dedicated his career to finding him, but retired no closer to knowing what had happened to his father. His beloved Sally had lived out her life as a widow and died never knowing what happened to him. He didn't get to go home, he'd just disappeared and never been heard from again. The space program had been wound down as Chris retired and no-one had ever come to rescue them. No-one was ever coming to rescue them. They had been cut loose, abandoned. Adrift in space and time.

Alan pulled his legs in and crossed them, put his head down in his hands and wailed. Pete moved to sit beside him and rub his back. He'd never seen a person suffer a breakdown but he was pretty sure this was what he was seeing now. His Commander had always been strong-minded, focussed and analytical, able to quickly assess any situation and just as quickly find a route or at least a step forward, something to keep moving, to break any impasse. This emotional collapse was not at all like Lt-Col Virdon and frankly it was terrifying to witness. The last 16 months had been full of uncertainty and life-or-death threats. He'd always had his Commander there, to look to for guidance in uncertainty, or organise an extraction in a life-or-death situation. Having his Commander crumble like this was not a scenario he knew how to handle. Who would lead them now?

Alan continued to sob long into the night. After about a half hour of sitting beside him, rubbing his back, Pete gave up and moved around in front of him, sitting cross-legged, knees touching Alan's knees. He put his right hand up on Alan's left shoulder, under the shirt on his skin. This served two purposes – skin contact provided at least minimal comfort to Alan and it put Pete's hand where he could, hopefully surreptitiously, check on Alan's carotid pulse occasionally. The rate was elevated of course; distress did that to the heart. He continued to monitor the carotid pulse intermittently as the night wore on. Worryingly, it didn't drop back to normal but stayed elevated. Alan's distress remained high.

Galen moved out to the edge of the camp light when Alan started wailing and for some time he stayed out there, unwilling to further distress the human with his presence. He fetched water to Pete a couple of times who tried to get Alan to take it but Alan would have none. After a while Pete motioned to Galen to sit down behind Alan, and the chimp did so, eventually, tentatively beginning to rub his back. Alan didn't flinch though he must have known it could only be the chimpanzee.

Then Pete used the head press gesture on Alan that Galen had first used on him the day before. He clasped Alan's head and pressed his forehead to Alan's forehead and held that position for thirty seconds. Alan's sobbing lessened for the duration but increased again after release. Periodically through the night Pete continued to apply the head press gesture but while it gave temporary respite, there was nothing that modulated Alan's distress.

Everything Alan held dear, every concept of himself and his place in time and space was gone. His beloved wife and son, his role in the enterprise that was ANSA, his very person and who he was or thought he was at his core, was gone. He knew he was not going home, he knew ANSA wasn't going to rescue them and he knew Sally and Chris had lived long lives without him. Instead, he was left leading a ghost mission in a hellish place with no support, no knowledge of where refuge might be found and alone in his responsibility to his team. He was completely bereft of self, of hope, of any confidence that he could go on. If he wasn't Commander Lt-Col Alan Viridon, mission leader under orders from ANSA, collecting data and returning to report to his superior officers and then go home to his wife and son, who was he? If he wasn't confident and competent and in command of his team, what was left?

At the same time he bore the heavy burden of knowing he had to go on for the sake of his team. He might have been abandoned but he couldn't stand down and abandon his obligation to them. That would be cowardice, desertion, dereliction of duty.

So they sat there that night beside the fire – Alan distressed beyond words and beyond comfort, Pete and Galen trying to calm and reassure him. Neither had ever witnessed or even heard of this sort of distress, and they were at a loss to know how to console or support him. Neither could think of anything else so being present, all night long if necessary, was all they had to give.

As dawn broke Alan began unbuttoning his shirt.

“Alan, what are you doing? No, leave that on. What are you doing?” Pete began rebuttoning the shirt, following Alan’s fingers down the buttons.

“Disgrace to the uniform” Alan mumbled.

“Not to this uniform Commander. This is the Ape Force uniform, remember? We stole them. You stole them for us. These are Ape Force uniforms, we’re not a disgrace to them. We were desperate for good clothing, that’s why we’re wearing these.”

“Court martial ... dereliction of duty.”

“No you’re not going to be court martialled and you’ve not been derelict in your duty.”

Pete choked up a bit as he said it; Alan as the Commander had been honourable and meticulous in his duty. If Alan really thought he’d been derelict and a disgrace, he was broken in ways Pete couldn’t comprehend. Alan had held himself together, held them all together, for well over twelve months in hostile territory under a hostile regime, with no chain of command above him to provide strategic direction, no supplies and no other support. No help coming from anywhere, at any time, and now staring down the barrel of a whole lifetime living like this. More likely his CO was overwhelmed by the situation.

“If the fight-or-flight response is not a viable option, the freeze response is activated and the person can experience dissociation.”

The words rang in Pete’s head. He remembered it now. From the emotional regulation training. He’d wondered at the time how awful things would have to be for someone to be that unhinged. How weak you’d have to be to get that unbalanced. Well now he knew. He could see it with his own eyes. His Commander was now unhinged, unbalanced, dissociated.

About midday Pete sat in front of Alan and spoke with him.

“Alan, I want to talk to you about what you said this morning. You’re not a disgrace to any uniform, not this one and certainly not our own uniform. I don’t want to hear you saying that again. You’ve been an exemplary commander and you’ve stood up longer under more difficult conditions than was ever expected of us. Our chain of command abandoned us. They left us with no supplies and no support and no anything, really. I don’t wanna hear you say you’re a disgrace again. It’s not true and no-one thinks it. You’re just tired. Really tired.”

Galen stood off to one side quietly and listened closely. He knew enough to know that Pete was now assuming a role he’d not been trained for. Pete had no advanced leadership training, no leadership training except for what he’d experienced from his own leader. Despite that, the young Major was stepping up quite well, doing his best to model calm, collected and organised behaviour, even though Galen suspected he didn’t feel it at all.

Pete waffled on for another minute or so, repeating the same words and phrases over and over again, while he repeatedly smoothed the collar, shoulder patches and shoulder sleeve pockets of his erstwhile Commander. Clearly this repetition was a form of reassurance and cognitive direction but Alan had the thousand yard stare and didn't respond.

Pete left him and walked over to Galen, sighing when he stopped in front of the chimp.

"I don't know what to do. I don't know what else to do Galen."

Galen reached up and repeated the head press gesture. He'd seen Pete use it repeatedly during the long night. Perhaps the giver needed to receive the gesture again? Galen had never seen it used frequently before, but it seemed to him that repeated giving could drain the giver. He held Pete's head and they pressed foreheads and exchanged breath. Pete was reminded again that the pungent smell of the male chimp could be somehow reassuring. They held the position for some time, maybe half a minute.

"You are doing very well. You are calm and kind and you inspire us all to be confident."

"I don't feel confident. I'm so glad you stayed with us. I'd hate to try to get through this on my own. You've got no idea how glad I am that you're here Galen."

The next morning with still no improvement in Alan's condition, they agreed to stay put again. Apart from sourcing food there was no pressure on them to move from where they were and there was no way Alan was going to be walking anywhere.

Mid morning, Galen sat down next to Pete, who was sitting some distance behind Alan.

"What are you doing?"

"Hmm? Oh I'm trying to work out what's wrong with him and how to handle it."

"Isn't he just tired? That's what you said."

"Yeah, I don't think so. That's the polite way to say it to him, so he doesn't feel bad. I think it's much worse than that. You see that look on his face?"

"Where he looks like he's looking at something a long way away, out of sight?"

"Yeah. That's called the thousand yard stare. Now it was common in guys in war, especially those that had been in the thick of it for long periods of time. They dissociate from their body, like their mind can't deal with what their body is having to live with, so their mind goes wandering. Sort of like daydreaming. Daydreaming is a very mild harmless version of dissociation.

But what happens in combat is guys have to live in that place for long periods of time, hearing and seeing things no-one should have to hear or see. Friends being killed. All sorts of distress and overwhelming emotions. So, in the end, many of those guys dissociate to cope, become emotionally detached. It's not something they do deliberately, they just can't

help it. They're emotionally overwhelmed for so long, and they can't get out of the situation, so they dissociate."

"I've heard of war, and it sounds terrible, but we aren't in any war. We haven't been in any war. In fact it's very much more peaceful here than anywhere else we've been."

"Yeah but he's been living in a war zone. A warzone in his head. See, Alan is the sort of guy who is very methodical and rational. Every problem can be dealt with by applying logic and reason and working through until you find a solution and implement it. He works within a structure and knows his part in it. He was trained and so was everyone around him. They all had tasks to carry out. He had a task, to lead the mission, and get us home safely. His team had a task. His superior officers had a task. Now what happened? We had an accident. Basically that's what happened – we had an accident. The team couldn't retrieve us, couldn't even find us, not their fault but that expectation he had of them wasn't fulfilled.

We're basically stuck, living under a hostile regime, with no way out. He feels responsible for me, and also for you. He's big on responsibility, our Alan. So he's living in a combat zone in his head, responsible for our safety, trying to get us home, and now in Redding he reads that he never gets home. He's lost all hope of getting out of this combat zone in his head. He's stuck being the Commander for what – the rest of his life? That must be pretty scary. Probably while he thought he could find a solution one day, he could go on coping but now ... he knows there's no solution. Bingo, dissociation.

On top of that, he's a family guy through and through. He and Sally loved each other, though she wasn't happy about him taking on this mission and he feels guilty about that too. He loved being a dad, that was clear to anyone who knew him. You've seen that here, families, parents and kids, he'll do anything to keep them together. He had responsibilities to his wife and his kid, and now he knows they had to go on without him.

So as well as feeling abandoned by the chain of command, he feels guilty that he let his wife and kid down and abandoned them. And he's lonely without them, without his family. And knowing him, he won't re-marry because that would be finally giving up, betraying Sally. So he's grieving and also he's overwhelmed by his responsibilities. So he's in a pretty dark place right now. And I don't know how to get him out of it."

"How was it treated in your time? Can we do whatever that treatment was?"

"No, treatment was various sorts of therapy, some behavioural and some medical and we've got none of that. I mean, some of these guys come out of it in their own good time, and I think he's a chance at that. It's not like he's being repeatedly assaulted or anything. And as you say, up here it's peaceful. He might just recover with time and company and some peaceful living. I dunno Galen. I just dunno."

"So anyway I've been thinking. At least you know Sally and Chris had good long lives, yeah? That's something, right? I mean Sally never remarried, so clearly she never found anyone as good as you. She would have been free to marry again but she never did. She was an attractive woman, and young, so she would have had interest and maybe even offers, but she never did remarry. So that tells you a lot about what she thought of you, that no-one came close. She waited for you, even though she could have just moved on."

"Sally."

"Yeah Sally, think of Sally. You must have been a great husband because she never found anyone to replace you. And you must have been a great father because you were only there for what, 11 years of Chris' life? And he would have been really cut up losing you but he stayed on the straight and narrow, did well in school, didn't get into drugs or anything like that, went to University, joined the Space Corps, had a top career. Man, you must have really been a great father to shape him like that. Most kids, if that happened to them, they would have peeled off into drugs, crime, homelessness. But not Chris. Not your kid."

"Chris."

"I know it's sad that you won't ever see them again, but at least you know they had long and happy lives, well relatively happy anyway, and that was due in large part to you and who you are. How good a husband you were for Sally, how great a father you were to Chris."

"Pete, may I speak with you please? Over here."

They moved away from the fire and left Alan still staring into the distance.

"What are you doing? Do you think reminding him of what he's lost will help?"

"Look I'm trying to build a life raft around him. He's drowning in that dark place. I'm trying to give him something to cling to. If I can build a life raft around him, help him keep his head above water, maybe we can pull him out of wherever he is. It's the best I can think of Galen."

Galen considered for a few moments. Life raft vs drowning : a concept he understood.

"How are you going to build this life raft?"

"I thought if I can throw anything that's buoyant at him, and ... then ... lash the pieces together ..." Pete's voice trailed off "... it was just an idea."

"Perhaps we need to find a way to build a bridge rather than a life raft. A bridge from what he had and has lost, to what he might still be able to achieve in future."

"Okay, well how do we do that?"

"I'm not sure. But it has to be something he really wants to do, not another responsibility."

“How far do you think it is to the next stop? Grant’s Pass.”

“Alan told me he worked on 20 miles per day walking. But that was before we knew you struggled with so much walking and then he cut it back a bit. This section he predicted to have taken 2 days. We did two days already so I guess maybe another half day. But that’s at normal walking pace, not like he is now. Why?”

“What if I go on ahead and see how far it is and come back and we discuss what to do?”

“You want to risk that? What if something happens to you out there on your own?”

“What’s going to happen? There are no gorillas. I can take care of myself. If I get to midday and haven’t found anything I’ll turn round and come back anyway.”

“I don’t know Galen, you’d be taking a big risk, I think we should stay together.”

“Pete, we don’t know how far away this next stop is and we don’t know how long it will be before he can walk or how far he can walk. If we know how far there is to go and what is there when we get there, we can make plans. If I find nothing there of use, we know to stay here. But if I get there and find buildings we can use, or even people who can help, we know to make the effort to move him there. Even if it takes days for him to walk to it.”

“I dunno, I don’t want to lose you too.”

Early next day Galen set out to walk down to Grant’s Pass. Pete watched him go with mixed feelings of hope, loss and anxiety, but he stayed with Alan as agreed. He was startled when Galen returned mid afternoon, happily reporting that the ruins of Grant’s Pass were only about 5 miles down river. Galen had inspected the ruins and reported there seemed to be options for housing, and there was river water easily available and no inhabitants except for wildlife, and various edible vegetation grew all along the track and around the town.

“Okay, so tomorrow we break camp and start walking, yeah?”

“Yes! I think it’s worth the effort, especially if Alan doesn’t recover. We need protection from weather, wildfires, snow. Even just this heat is dangerous when we’re exposed.”

Next morning, they broke camp and prepared to walk out.

“You ready to navigate Galen? I mean, I know there’s nothing to it but still I’m going to be focussed on Alan and not on navigating.”

“Yes, I will navigate and you two just follow along behind.”

“Okay. Come on Commander, up you get. Come on, we’re moving out. You gotta get up now. Here, give me your hand. Come on, up you get, that’s right, up we get. Now all we do is follow Galen, ok? That’s all we have to do, no this way, we follow Galen.”

As it turned out they made very slow progress. About two miles that day, two very slow, very tiring miles. Alan was walking but not really aware of his surroundings so he needed a lot of supervision and micromanaging which consumed Pete's thinking and time. Pete was also carrying Alan's pack. It quickly became obvious that Galen walking ahead was pointless so they settled for walking three abreast. By the time they made camp Pete was weary so Galen did all the meal preparation, such as it was.

Next day was much the same – an effort to get Alan on his feet and moving. Galen went on ahead to check the track, hoping they might make Grant's Pass that day and intending to return to report later that morning.

Pete kept Alan moving, slowly but still moving. He kept up a line of chatter, hoping to engage some part of Alan's consciousness at some point, hoping to pull him out of the blankness.

"So Galen thinks if we keep moving we could make it to Grant's Pass by nightfall and then we can find somewhere to settle for a few weeks. He's worried about heat and wildfires and I agree we need shelter. Hey watch that rock, don't stumble, we don't want you to get injured. Galen is doing a really good job, I reckon we should give him an honorary rank, we'd be stuffed without Galen. Lieutenant Galen, what do you think?"

"Galen."

"Yeah Galen. You remember Galen. Short guy. Hairy arms. Walks a bit funny."

"Galen." Alan slowly turned his head towards Pete.

"Yeah Galen. You remember Galen?"

"Galen." Alan slowly began to smile. It was like shopfront roller shutters being lifted, Pete thought. Alan's face relaxed and he nodded.

"Yeah, that's right, Galen. You do remember Galen!"

"Of course I remember Galen. Where is he? How is he?"

"Oh he's fine. He's on up ahead a way, he's navigating for us. He's a very good navigator."

"Oh is he? That's good. I always liked Galen. He's got lots of potential. A good man."

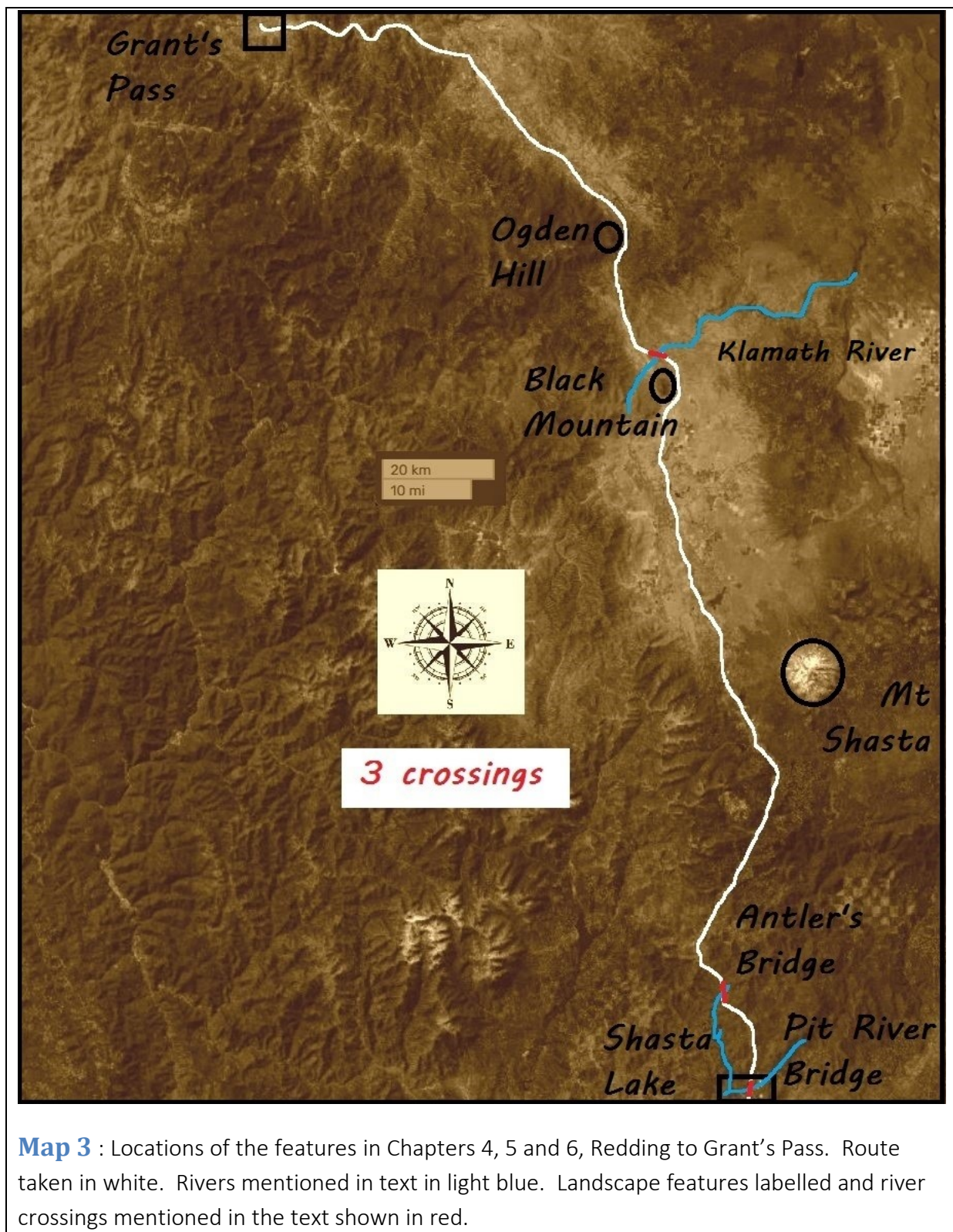
Half an hour later, Galen returning to meet them along the track, found Alan and Pete chatting away as they walked along, now moving at closer to a more normal walking pace. He stopped on the track and cocked his head on one side, looking wide-eyed at them.

"Hey, here he is. How are you Galen? I hear you're our navigator."

Pete flashed a grin at Galen and flicked his eyebrows up.

“Ah yes, I have been appointed to navigate. We are approaching Grant’s Pass, we’ll be there very soon. How are you feeling Alan?”

“I’m fine, I think, a bit groggy. I think I might have been asleep for a while.”



6. Grant's Pass, 42°26'N, 123°19'W

They pulled up for the night in the first structure they came to on the edge of town, a large warehouse that was still intact in one corner. Galen found berries and acorns in the surrounding blocks and the river wasn't far away so they were able to refill the waterskins. There was enough fuel around to make a fire for the night and they all slept better for the security they felt.

In the morning Alan was groggy still, and disoriented. He asked where they were and why they were there, and Pete kept his answers broad and open. Alan looked confused and slept some more. By midday he was awake again, looking less groggy and wanting to know more.

"So where are we again? And how do we contact Mission Control?"

"We don't. There is no Mission Control and we were stood down. There is no ANSA."

Alan ran his hand through his hair. This was very confusing and his memory was patchy.

"So what do we do next? What were the last orders we received? How do we get home?"

"We aren't going home. We're staying here. This is home now Alan."

"I don't understand. We were approaching Alpha Centauri. Where's Jonesy anyway?"

"Jonesy died on impact. You really don't remember anything since then?"

"No. I want to contact Mission Control. And I want to get a message to Sally."

"Sally's alright. ANSA is going to take care of her and Chris. We are going to find somewhere safe to settle down and live, somewhere north of where we landed. It wasn't safe for us to stay there. So we're walking north, like the lady from the carto unit told you. Remember, the lady from the carto unit told us to do this? The ANSA carto unit gave you a memo and said for us to walk north across this mountain range and we'd find safety north of the mountains. Do you remember that?"

"Um, sort of. We should have landed at Edwards Air Force Base. Why wasn't that safe?"

"Because of the apes."

"The apes?"

"Yeah, you know, the apes. Talking gorillas with guns. Urko and Zaius wanting to kill us."

"Talking apes? What are you babbling about, Pete? Have you lost your mind?"

"Um, have you had a good look at Galen?"

Pete pointed to Galen. Alan looked again at Galen and suddenly realised that the third member of the group was actually a chimpanzee, though not as he remembered chimps. His head spun again as memories started cascading back into his consciousness. He sat back and starting taking rapid shallow breaths as fear took hold. Those weren't nightmares, they'd been real. All this time, those were real things that happened. He began dry retching.

Over the next couple of days most of his memories returned, including painfully and shamefully the lead up to the period when he dissociated. The time of his dissociative break, between the night when he'd cried and the day walking when he remembered Galen, was mercifully still a blank but he certainly recalled how badly he'd failed as Commander in the lead up. The nightmares and the anxiety attacks – that was the sort of thing that led to loss of authority when commanding a team. The team had to have confidence their leader was capable and competent, and he felt badly that he'd undermined his own authority.

On the third day they moved camp to a hemi-spherical concreted natural rock building in the centre of the town ruins. According to the plaques on two opposite doorways it had been either been a tourist centre or a child care centre. The centre of the dome was about 2 storeys high and had a metal pipe frame from floor to ceiling, rather like a fixed monkey bar climbing play frame. One part of the dome's floor area had been hived off for separate bathroom and kitchen facilities. Because of the construction shape and materials, the building was still in surprisingly good order. The windows needed repair so they pulled aluminium siding off a nearby building and shaped it to fit in the gaps, wedging it in tightly.

Pete and Galen returned mid afternoon with filled waterskins and armfuls of acorns and berries and leaf tips. Alan was standing with his back against the wall inside the door. Pete and Galen unloaded their harvest on the kitchen bench and Alan cleared his throat. They turned and were pleased to see him looking alert and fully cognizant.

"So what actually happened? You'd better tell me the truth this time Pete, the whole truth."

Pete put his hands on his hips and looked at the floor for a moment, and then up at Alan.

"Ah. Alright. Yeah I guess I'd better. You had a break for a few days. No harm done, we coped. We did what the books say to do. We took care of you. We didn't expect anything of you and we didn't try to force you to accept reality. It was all good. You were Okay."

Alan thought about this and there were a couple of minutes of silence while he took it all in. "I see."

"And just by the way, so's you know, I said it then and I'll say it again now, you aren't a disgrace to the uniform and you weren't derelict in your duty and you shouldn't be court martialled, oh and you didn't get anyone killed. I still reckon you've been an exemplary Commander and I still reckon you've coped better than anyone could have been expected to under the circumstances."

"I see. I should stand down then."

"God no, don't do that. Who would lead us then? We're still happy for you to lead, aren't we Galen? You're not psychotic, you just dissociated for a few days. You haven't had a day off in almost 18 months, so we owed you a few days of AWOL in the head, I guess. Heck you even picked a good time to go AWOL. Anyone else would have picked the worst time but you were kind enough to pick a time and place that was convenient."

That night they sat around the campfire, concerned about Alan's breathing difficulty. It had become an issue again early that evening and seemed to worsen as the night wore on. Alan was trying but not for anything could he get a deep breath or feel comfortable breathing. Each breath was shallow, and rapidly followed by another as he struggled for air. Each breath felt like it might be his last.

"I would like to say something".

"Sure Galen, the floor's yours."

Galen paused and steeled himself; he did not know how his comments would be received.

"It seems to me that we are viewing our current situation all wrong." Galen looked across at Alan, who was only half listening. Despite his shortness of breath though, Alan looked up at Galen when he realised he was the focus of attention.

"I mean, we are all assuming we are waiting for Alan to feel better so he can lead us again. But maybe that's not the solution. Maybe we need to rethink how we operate. Alan has been the leader for so long because when you arrived you were on a mission and he was the mission leader. Now the mission has changed but Alan keeps bearing the heaviest part of the burden because he's always been 'the leader'. Being leader is a very heavy burden, maybe we should not expect any one of us to carry that weight in future."

A loud involuntary exhalation came from Alan, soon followed by a deep inhalation. Pete and Galen looked at him intently and then at each other. Alan's breathing slowed and softened.

"Ok, well you might be on to something there. You think a rotating roster of leader, maybe limited duration? And step down if called out? Lead by consent, instead of rank."

Galen shrugged. "Do we even need a leader now? Mostly it seems to be navigating. We could sit at night as we always do anyway, and discuss plans and agree on a course of action, and then just do that the next day. We don't need any one of us to tell the other two what to do. Or even to plot a course. Any of us can read the lensatic if it's needed."

"Uh huh. So democratic decision making then? No command structure but consensus? Alan, what do you think? Should we drop the leader role and move to a more democratic structure? Would that be ok, under the circumstances, do you think, Commander?"

Pete couched his words so they were deferential and respectful; he didn't want to sound like he was making decisions that were far above his rank to make.

"I think that would be alright. Under the circumstances."

Over the next few days they walked around Grant's Pass to see what stood that was useful and what other resources were there. Apparently at some point one or more wildfires had gone through the town and many of the timber structures were badly charred or burned down to stumps and outline. Trees were returning to the streets, not just where they'd once been planted in traffic islands and along footpaths but erupting through what was left of the bitumen roadways. Some were edible species such as Salmonberry and Thimbleberry, and some were forage trees for game such as the black tailed deer wandering the streets.

The concreted natural rock building style, either domed or hemi-spherical, was visually prominent because of the loss of timber buildings. These were scattered around town in different sizes : a couple of 1 storey versions built as public toilets, a very large one on the western edge and about half a dozen the size of the one they were camped in. Those hemi-spherical of moderate size had the central narrow diameter pipe frame 'monkey bars' which seemed to serve no real purpose but may have been integral to the interior fittings. The domed building with the very large footprint on the western fringe was three storeys high in the centre and it had a similar 'monkey bars' frame, *albeit* of wider diameter pipe. This building had had a wide entrance of timber doors, little of which remained except for charred stubs attached to ornate hinges, and a single personnel door at the opposite side of the building. Alan theorised it may have been a government administration building.

One hemi-spherical public toilet was located a half mile south of the river and not very far from the building where their new campsite was. It was a pit latrine (long drop) and easily made functional again with little effort so they agreed to make that their toilet.

Pete began going out with his bow and arrows in the mornings, trying to improve both the technology and his skill set. Sometimes he returned empty-handed, sometimes with small game like jack rabbits and sometimes with cuts off larger game like black tail deer. He kept improving the bow construction, finding better timber for the bow and the arrows, and improving the bowstring as he made more kills.

Galen set out to inventory the local vegetation, for both edible and medicinal purposes. He already knew a lot of species and how to use them from his childhood visits adventuring with various cousins on various relatives farms. He'd augmented that knowledge over the previous 18 months with trial and error, plus Alan had brought knowledge from his farming and family background. Galen's ethnobotany²⁷ had been and was critical to their survival.

Alan meanwhile began searching the ruins of Grant's Pass for any useful artefacts from human occupation. In the remains of a hardware retail business he found some powder coated heat treated steel garden implements and nearby the same items in childrens 'toy' scale. The toy garden rake made an excellent grill plate over the campfire. He also found a couple of foldable stainless steel pruning knives and added them to his kit.

²⁷ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/ethnobotany/index.shtml>

“So Galen, when we get settled somewhere what are you doing with the rest of your life?”

“Oh I have no idea. I was going to be a bureaucrat but unless wherever we settle is large enough and complex enough to need a bureaucrat, I guess I will have to do something else. What work will you find, do you think? Will there be much use for astronauts?”

“Well I’m qualified in advanced electronics so I guess there’ll be heaps of work out there for me.” Pete grimaced. “No idea, like you. Alan, what are you going to do when we settle wherever?”

“First, I intend to have you two married off.”

“What if I don’t want to marry my brother?” Pete deadpanned.

Galen did a horrified double take. “Pete! I’m insulted! Why don’t you want to marry me?”

The two of them broke up into peals of laughter. Alan rolled his eyes heavenward and grinned; this silliness was a safety valve. The last couple of months had been heavy going and they all needed some levity.

“Well I don’t care who you marry as long as someone else has the pleasure of listening to the two of you snoring and farting in your sleep. I’m over it.”

This further comment sent Pete and Galen into near hysterics and they threw acorns at him, until he got up and moved away from the campfire. They were all still chortling and trading ‘snore and fart’ insults as they dozed off about an hour later.

The following morning Pete revisited the question of future plans.

“So Alan, you didn’t answer the question. What are you going to do with the rest of your life when we settle somewhere? Any ideas?”

“I told you, my first objective is to get the two of you married off. That’s my priority.”

“No changing the subject, this is about you. What are you going to do? With the rest of your life. Not us. You.”

“I don’t know.” He sighed and was silent for a few moments. “Maybe a farm. I’d like a farm again. Sally and I always talked about getting a farm one day, when we retired. A hobby farm. We wouldn’t have needed to make a living off it but it would be a nice lifestyle. Maybe I could get a farm anyway.”

“Uh huh. Well that’s a plan then, better than Galen and I have got.”

Alan smiled. “A farm can always use a couple of laborers. Board and keep and Sundays off.”

“Well that’s a better offer than Pete has made me!” Galen chuckled.

“It sounds a lot like Polar’s farm. Not sure I want to go through that again.”

“Oh quit whining, I’ll deliver the calves! You just build the fences and windmills.”

Over the next few weeks they settled into a relaxed life without even discussing whether to stay put or move on. Galen began processing acorns in larger numbers now he had a bench and a reliable water supply nearby. Acorns are filled with B vitamins, protein, little fat, and are a decent complex carbohydrate, so they make an excellent winter food staple. He also collected other food species with special focus on the Thimbleberries and Salmonberries.

One day they returned to find a black bear had been attracted by the berries and had not only devoured what they had collected but had then pulled their bedrolls apart and made a nest of them, eventually going to sleep there. When they attempted to move the bear on, it proceeded to chase them up the climbing frame but it was unable to scale the narrow pipes.

A few more days of sporadic berry collecting followed and then they returned home one midday to find the bear had returned and started again on devouring their new berry collection. This time they saw the bear off, fuelled by outrage at more wasted effort, armed with a steel garden fork and accompanied by raucous hollering. It was no use - most of what had not already been devoured had been damaged by the bear's efforts at seeking the berries. Exasperated, they let off steam with a food fight, which was probably the best use for the damaged berries, and it was also accompanied by raucous hollering. By the time they were done, the berries were distributed across the floor and their camos were berry-smeared but they all felt much better.

"Right well, we should get this mess cleaned up and get these camos washed out I guess."

"Is that an order Commander?"

"No it's not, it's just a suggestion Major Burke."

"Is that an insult now?"

"Some people would say it's always been an insult." Alan ducked Pete's playful swing. "Hey, get out of it!"

They collected everything that needed washing and trooped down to the river, to the shallow rock bar and stripped off. Alan and Pete waded in and began systematically rinsing out the various items – clothing and bedding – then squeezing out the excess water and passing them back to Galen to hang in tree branches or spread on the exposed rock.

After the work had been completed, they began splashing each other. It was now late Summer and early afternoon temperatures were still high. They had plenty of time to let off more steam and still have dry clothes and bedding by nightfall.

Alan had always maintained the decorum expected of the senior officer. He understood the importance of leading from the front, that confidence and self composure in the leader imbued confidence and composure in those who looked to him for guidance. Without those attributes it was easy for the others to lose confidence and for the unit to fracture in times of high stress. That was basically all of the last 18 months. That they were all still alive, all still together in a cohesive unit, was due in no small measure to his leadership skills.

Pete, for his part had always observed the respect and deference due to his leader. Even when he disagreed, and he usually expressed his disagreement forcefully, he never disrespected Alan nor refused to obey his orders. Even when it required managing Galen's anxiety and keeping a lid on his own anxiety in Oakland, he respected Alan's orders to work on getting power to the projector. The cockiness he'd had when they first arrived had been frightened out of him by the first close shot from horse-mounted gorillas and he'd never quite regained it. That incident had given him a salient lesson in respecting the caution shown by Alan, and ever since he'd appreciated Alan's guarded approach in new situations. It turned out 'the old man' did know a thing or two after all.

Now though, they were just two guys mucking around in the river, splash fighting, laughing and trying to out-do each other in making the biggest splash or getting the most water on each other. A few gentle insults were traded, mostly about looks, good or otherwise.

Galen on the bank was whooping and hollering and jumping up and down on the spot. An ape or human observer would have wondered at the sight, but the black tail deer didn't care.

Alan was enjoying the fun until he thought back to "the last time I did this was when—" and he remembered a couple of months before launch, he and Chris splashing in the San Antonio River while Sally sat on the bank and watched them, laughing at their antics. He stopped suddenly and Pete soon stopped too.

"What's the matter? What'd I do wrong?"

"I was just thinking about the last time I did this ... Chris and Sal and me ..."

"Oh I'm sorry Al, I didn't know."

"It's not your fault Pete. I've got to get used to it, some time, I guess. They're gone and I'm still here. I've just got to get on with living, somehow."

A few days later Alan asked of them "Are we staying here over Winter or moving north? If we stay here too long we won't be able to move north until Spring. What should we do?"

Pete and Galen looked at each other. "What'd the carto lady say?"

"Well she said we'd be better off crossing these mountains and going down into the next basin. But she didn't say we had to do it by a certain time. We can stay here until Spring."

"I have prepared plenty of acorns so we can carry food with us. And there will probably be many other foods to harvest along the way. But if we stay here, depending on how the Winter is, we might end up living on acorns all Winter. I vote for moving north now."

"We've had a good rest. We could move out tomorrow. Suits me."

"Ok, so we move on tomorrow? Yes? Good, let's get some sleep."

Next morning Pete approached Alan with some trepidation in his voice. Alan was at the kitchen bench packing his bedroll and gear in prep for the next step of their expedition.

“Um, I’ve been thinking Commander. I reckon –”

“You’d better stop calling me Commander. If we’re doing democracy instead of rank, you’d better get out of that habit. Better to help us both adjust to the new order.”

“Oh, well, sure. But before I do that, I just wanted to say that if we were back, or if we could get back, to ANSA, you’d be entitled to mental health assistance. You know, what you’ve been through has been full-on, you’re coping with two really stressful situations and each one would entitle you to full-on assistance. I mean, we’ve basically been deployed and under combat conditions for much of this time and you’ve worn the worst of that. And also you’re grieving the loss of your family and that is the number one stressor on the scale.”

“Sure, Pete, I know.”

“All those symptoms you’ve been having - the nightmares, the anxiety, confusion, sweating, breathlessness, disrupted sleep – they’re all either grief or combat fatigue or both.”

“Sure, I know.”

“Well I just wanted to say that. Because you know, sometimes I think you expect too much of yourself. You said you should stand down because you dissociated for a few days but under the circumstances, I think you’ve done really well. I mean, you can talk to me if it’d help. Or you can talk to Galen if you’d rather.”

Alan glanced up sideways at him with an unusually sharp expression. “Or we could just throw my mental health open for public discussion around the campfire.”

“No, that’s not what I meant! Come on, I don’t mean that, I’m just saying, I don’t have any training but if I can help, or if Galen could, either of us would. If talking might help. I mean, there’s no-one trained for you to talk to, but you don’t have to keep it all to yourself either, we’re not going to think less of you. Hey that’s packed now, you can stop fiddling with it.”

Alan sighed and let the pack go and looked up straight ahead and closed his eyes and rubbed them. Then he dropped his head back down on to his chest. After a few seconds of standing silently he straightened up and turned to face Pete.

“Thank you Pete. I appreciate that. Very much. I might take you up on it. Now, before we head out. You’re right, you and Galen both. It has been ... tiring. Let’s sit down.”

They settled on the floor in the kitchen area, backs against the wall.

“I keep thinking back to the training and trying to think of some other situation like ours that I can use as a model going forward. The only one I can think of that even comes close to what we’re experiencing is Shackleton in the Antarctic²⁸ and while he had more people with him

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Shackleton#Imperial_Trans-Antarctic_Expedition,_1914%E2%80%931917

and he knew where they were and what they needed to do to be rescued, he must have felt like I do. He's the only one I can think of who compares."

Alan paused for a moment.

"I mean there was Franklin²⁹ in the Arctic but we don't want to end up like that."

"but we don't want to be another Franklin."

they chorused.

"Although I guess that's what we are, really. Another Franklin. Lost. No way back. No one knows where we are, or how to rescue us if they did."

"When you look at it that way, you've coped really well. Better than Franklin did, you haven't lost any crew, except Jonesy and that was on impact in a crash."

"I try not to think of Franklin. I try to focus on Shackleton. At least I haven't had anyone mutiny and put me overboard, like Henry Hudson.³⁰"

Pete chuckled. "Yeah, that's not happening. That's the last thing we'd do. Look, Shackleton and Franklin were at the poles. Hudson was on a ship in remote Canada with a crew that were fed up with the cold and hunger. None of those are anything like our situation."

"Ludwig Leichhardt³¹ and his men disappeared somewhere in Australia."

"Desert. A really big desert. Again, nothing like us. Those are all extreme conditions."

"Well there were Japanese holdouts³² after World War 2 ended, they lived off grid, off the land for decades. But that's hardly what I want for us. I go over it in my head and I don't know what to do. Or where we're going to find help. Or even what help might look like. Getting away from Urko and Zaius is fine, but then what?"

"You're going to drive yourself crazy, overthinking it, that's what. We get up each day and we put one foot after the other. We're getting further away from Urko and Zaius, that's good. We're warm, we're fed, that's good. Galen knows the local vegetation and I've got a bow and a bundle of arrows. We've got the lensatics and good bedrolls and indestructible uniforms. And changes of underwear and socks!"

Pete gently slapped the back of Alan's hand with the back of his. "What more do you want?"

"You know, I think what I'd like is someone who could see how I'm doing and give me some feedback, someone with about 20 years more experience than me."

"You know, no-one has any better idea than you how to cope with this. ANSA had no-one who could advise you, and none of the military branches had anyone who could advise you. You're looking for historical role models when there are none. And if you want feedback, just ask me and Galen. We're highly motivated and we think you're doing just fine."

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin%27s_lost_expedition

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hudson#Mutiny

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Leichhardt#Disappearance

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_holdout

7. North to the Willamette River Valley, September 3086 AD

“Ok, so does everyone have their bedrolls packed? Including the lensatics. Pete, bow and arrows? We all have acorns, thanks Galen. Poly rope? I have the two new knives, and the grill fork. All waterskins full? So we’re all good to go, yes? Galen, are you ready to lead off?”

Equipped with a lensatic and having checked the field navs Galen led out and they set off, due north towards Sexton Mountain. With Galen in the lead the pace was a bit slower so there was a lively conversation, at least early in the trek. After a while they spread out into single file, as several weeks of reduced walking and better eating had impeded their fitness somewhat. Sexton Mountain was easy to identify and they rested for a while beside it around noon and then set off, still due north. They were aiming for a three way valley for that night’s camping spot and found it easily enough before nightfall. They had a choice the next day between a half day walk to a small town named Glendale off the main track which Alan had previously identified as a possible rest stop or to keep going generally north east for the whole day towards the hidden pass that was the final step before exiting the mountains. That first night they discussed it and agreed to push on the next day. They didn’t need a day’s rest and they all felt it was important at this point to exit the mountains. The weather was hot and dry, and they wanted to stay within easy reach of water and hopefully get into lower, softer country. The east wind had picked up that day and it was a drying wind.

The following day Pete took the lead, north east at first and later in the morning north, uphill over a low ridgeline. Alan and Galen followed behind him.

“Thanks Galen.”

“For what?”

“For what you said back there. About the burden of leadership. I’m sorry I let the two of you down.”

“Nonsense!”

“It’s not nonsense, I let the two of you down, I’m sorry, I did my best but I failed. But you’re right, leadership is a burden and it needs to be managed. That’s what I’ve been lacking, someone to watch and give me feedback on how I’m doing.”

“You didn’t fail and we know you always do your best. Do you think we’d follow you if we thought otherwise? The burden is real. I’ve watched you and I’ve wondered how you coped as well and as long as you have. I couldn’t. And I know the burden was heavy on Pete when you were ... unwell. He told me he didn’t know what to do. He coped very well but it was a strain. He felt it, and that was only for a few days.”

“Was it?” Alan looked concerned. “He hasn’t had that advanced leadership training, it would have been tough on him.”

“Of course it was.” Then Galen brightened up. “But we managed! He took care of you and I took care of the food and water, and I scouted out the path and navigated when we moved.”

"I'm really glad. That's a relief. I'm pleased to know you two would be Ok if anything happened to me."

"I know that rank is important to the two of you. But for me, I think it's more important that we all cope, long term. We don't want to lose you. We don't want you to become unwell from the weight of responsibility. We need to spread the burden so all three of us survive. The three of us together will do better than any two of us could."

"Well we sure don't want to have to test that concept."

"Pete is relieved you are here, and so am I. We need your experience, both of us."

Alan smiled. "Pete's a good man. He's a bit of a hot head and he likes everyone to think he's a rebel but deep down he's a team player and he's very loyal. I don't know how I'd have coped this long without him. He's always had my back. And you too, you're a great team player too. Thank you Galen."

The afternoon's walk to the north east was on level flat ground and they camped that night near a stream below a small hill to the north, about 450 feet high.

"So, do you want to lead tomorrow Alan?"

"No. No, I forfeited that right. I'll tag along and not make any trouble."

"Geez we're not offering you the position as dictator-for-life. It's just that this is that section you told me we need to be careful about, and not to miss it. I thought you'd be better leading us, you know what you're looking for."

"I'll navigate, I can do that. But I don't expect either of you to accept me as leader."

"Ok so you navigate tomorrow. It's Galen's turn to be leader, we'll hang back and watch whether you get lost or not. Galen can decide then whether we follow or not. Right Galen?"

"Yes I am happy to make leadership decisions but I want the best navigational advice!"

Alan rolled his eyes heavenward – he did a lot of that these days, he thought – and sighed.

"Alright, I'll navigate tomorrow. Since it's important we exit the mountains and we don't want to get lost, I will navigate."

Pete and Galen beamed and they all settled down for a good night's sleep.

Next morning Alan looked again at his field nav notes. Since they hadn't detoured into the little town of Glendale to the west, the travel estimates were out a bit and they were probably further along than accorded with the notes. Basically they needed to go NNE, then NW and then NE, going between two high points, one 600 feet higher than the track on the east and the other 1200 feet higher than the track on the west.

"Right, let's see how we go." Alan led off.

A mile or so north east of where they'd camped, the valley split in two, one side continuing NE and the other going NNE. Alan chose the NNE branch. Another mile or so in, the NNE branch was clearly a dead end but there was a narrow gap off to the NW. Alan led them up and barely half a mile in, the track swung NE again. At that point they could clearly see two peaks, one to the SW about 1200 feet higher than their elevation and another to the NE about 600 feet higher than their elevation.

"Wow. So this is it, huh?"

"Looks like it. Little bit of a climb ahead and then it should be dropping down. And we're out of the mountains. That's it. If I'm right, if the field navs are right, this is it gentlemen. This is where the carto lady said we drop down into the next basin and Urko and Zaius won't follow us and we'll be safe."

They stood for a minute in silence, thinking about how far they'd come since the last time they'd seen, well anyone else really. Since Zako had let them go and fired 3 shots into the air. Across the landbridge west of the Golden Gate Bridge. Everything they'd learned at Travis about ape history, and at Redding about human history, and in particular Alan's long-dead family. Three rivers crossed, any one of which should by rights stop any pursuing gorillas, and all the wilderness country since then. The clothing they wore, the implements they'd acquired or made, the skills and knowledge they'd learned.

"So let's keep going, we should be down on the river flats by tonight."

To the east there was a smoke haze rising in the hot morning air.

By midday the smoke haze had turned into a high, thick smoke wall and it was barrelling west towards them. Alan decided they'd better run for it. They had already dropped about 600 feet in elevation since they'd made the pass that morning about 4 miles back but they were still at about 1200 feet elevation and he knew while the fire was at much higher elevations in the mountains, the east wind would push it down onto the lower slopes. While there were narrow drainage lines with small waterholes, there were no bodies of water they could immerse in. There was however a mature forest of conifers for miles all around them, a densely vegetated ecosystem containing substantial biomass, and an excellent fuel for a

wildfire. In other words, they were trapped in a giant firestack about to explode in the late Summer heat.³³

Alan instructed Galen and Pete to forget everything else and run downslope as fast as they could, as far as they could, looking for any substantial waterbody they could find. It then became a downhill run as the noise, flames and smoke bore down. The remains of the highway gave them direction and some open space between trees and clear of ground litter but the forest itself seemed intent on trapping them. They ran and ran and ran, downward, darting around trees and over fallen logs. Galen struggled, his running speed was never high, so Alan took his bed roll and carried it along with his own.

“Keep going Galen, as low as you can get before it gets here!”

The first mile was a straight run in a narrow ravine. After a mile the route turned from NNE to NW and still they ran on, but now the floor was wider and more drainage lines joined from the sides. The peaks around them weren't as high and Alan became more confident they would make it, though he still couldn't see a decent watercourse anywhere. Galen tripped and fell and rolled and they both turned back to help him to his feet and get him running again. After another two miles they came to a wider valley with a few low hills and a tree line marking the edge of a watercourse. The roar of the fire was deafening and Alan looked up to see flames on both the ridgeline behind them and the one ahead.

“There! The river, there!” He pointed. “Keep going. Get in there, quick.”

It was still a mile away and Pete stayed ahead of Galen scouting a safe track for them. The sound of trees exploding in the fire added to the noise and the terror. Galen was whimpering and breathing hard and he was having a hard time seeing as his eyes were now gumming up. Alan followed behind looking up regularly to plot the track of the fire in relation to their own track. It was moving much faster than they were and coming across at a right angle. It was luck of the draw whether they'd reach the river before the fire reached them. Between them and the river were the remains of a small town, and Pete used the remnants of the streets to pick a path for them to the river. He slid down the steep bank and in first, dropping his bedroll on the bank before he hit the water. At the edge of the steep bank Galen tried to stop, tripped, rolled and fell face down into the water, too exhausted to save himself. The pain of the water forced into his exposed nostrils was excruciating. Pete grabbed his head and held him up. He looked for Alan but there was no sight or sound of the Commander.

“Alan! Alan, where are you? ALAN!!”

Pete briefly considered his options – stay with Galen and let Alan take his chances, or let Galen take his chances and go back for Alan. Neither option appealed at all. Alan emerged

³³ Generic fire behaviour from here : <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ecs2.4070>

from the smoke, dropping the two bedrolls on the bank and sliding into the water himself clutching several pairs of undershorts in one hand.

“Here, soak these in water and hold them over your mouth and nose.”

Pete gave the first one to Galen who was trembling with terror and exhaustion. The chimp had never run so far, so fast, so desperately and his physical condition was stressed far beyond anything he’d thought he was capable of. He could barely hold his hand up so Pete soaked the cloth and held it for him with his right hand as well holding his own filter in place with his left hand looped under Galen’s right arm. Alan too held his filter in place with his left hand and with the right he held Galen under his left arm.

“I thought you said you don’t do group hugs.”

“This isn’t a group hug, this is a survival circle³⁴. We all need to stay together.”

The wild fire jumped through the canopy over them and a fire whirl scoured along the north bank. Galen almost fainted in fright at the noise and heat. Smoke and ash blackened the sky while light from the flames seared their eyes. This was some special hell for all of them but especially for Galen: heat and water, bright blinding light and pitch black, ear piercing noise and thick choking smoke, and everywhere a heavy grey fall of ash, much of it with thousands of embers. They immersed as low as they could in the water, trying to keep the heat at bay and stop the embers from alighting on their clothing. Pete dunked his head in the water to keep his hair wet and Alan followed his example. Galen was whimpering and shaking and neither had the heart to try and dunk him as well.

Trees nearby exploded as the wildfire front moved through at ground level. At one point a branch floated towards them, the vegetation above the waterline burning. Alan facing upstream saw it coming and motioned Pete and Galen towards the north bank to let it pass them by safely. The north bank, he noticed, had a gentle slope so they could use it to exit the river when they needed to. This would be especially important to Galen who looked like he was on the verge of collapse all the time they were in the river. Galen’s fear of water combined with the new terror of the wildfire had caught him between two horrors and the chimp literally was terrified almost to the point of collapse.

Pete regularly changed his filter with Galen’s, soaking his and swapping it for the one Galen had before soaking that one and applying back to his own face. At some point day must have transitioned to night but none of them noticed, the fire and smoke and ash and noise and scorched landscape around them combined to make it impossible to know time, either time of day or passage of time. How long they huddled in the river was indeterminate. Eventually at some point the noise diminished and the flames moved on, leaving smoke and ashfall and thousands of small fires in a black matrix all around them.

“Alan, are we going to get out of the water soon?”

³⁴ <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2001785364/>

Alan looked at the north bank with the gentle slope. “No, not yet, everything will still be very hot, even the ground. Better we stay in here for a while longer.”

He looked back to Pete, who gave him a pointed eye roll towards Galen. Alan looked across to the chimp, who was still trembling. He put his hand on Galen’s shoulder and Galen looked at him through half swollen, gummed eyes.

“Galen we’re safe now. It’s passed over us. We’ll be alright now.”

The chimp continued to tremble. After another minute, Alan moved his hand up to the hair on the back of Galen’s head, once sleek and shiny and smooth, now messy and tangled from where he’d run and fallen, and grey with ash. He moved closer, angling his elbow down Galen’s back. It was a surreptitious hug and they all knew it.

“Look, the fire has passed and there’s nothing left here to burn, but the ground will still be hot. We need to wait a bit longer until everything cools off. We avoided being burned in the fire, we don’t want to leave now and get burned on the ground.”

The night wore on and eventually Alan left the watercourse and tested the ground. He could brush away a layer with his boots and the ground under the hot ash was cooling. He brushed a larger area clear with his boots while Pete helped Galen up the bank and out of the watercourse. They all sat in the brushed area for a few minutes before first Galen, then Alan and finally Pete lay back exhausted on the ground.

The three of them lay motionless there for a long time. The ground continued cooling and the small burning stumps and embers provided some light but the night was thick with smoke. The filters over their noses and mouths dried but they still provided some filtering action. After a long time Alan called out “Pete?”

“Yes Commander.”

“Galen?”

There was a sputtering cough followed by a weak “Yes.”

“Oh good, we’re all still alive.”

Another long silence ensued. After another indeterminate length of time, Pete stirred, rolled on to his side and then pushed himself up into a sitting position. “Who’s got the waterskins?” There was no answer. He looked around and then remembered all the gear had been abandoned on the other bank. He crawled to the watercourse, slid down the bank and cupped his hands to drink from the flowing water. Then, noticing the landscape around him, he realised with a shock that dawn was breaking.

Mid morning, Pete decided to cross back to the other bank and retrieve what they’d dropped the afternoon before. It took several trips but in the end they had their bedrolls, two of the lensatics, cookware, knives and acorns. Anything not packed in the bedrolls was gone.

"The bow and arrows?"

"Nope, dropped them early in the run. Same with the poly rope."

"Waterskins?"

"Couldn't see any. Don't know. I guess they were optional when we were running."

"Ok, well we stick close to water from now on I guess. Galen, thanks to you we have something to eat. There won't be much to forage for a few days until we're out of the burn zone. How are you feeling today?"

Galen didn't answer but the look he gave them spoke volumes. His hair was unkempt, his face was gaunt and his eyes were still gummed. Dried blood half blocked his nostrils.

"Hey come down here and I'll wash your face, and get your eyes cleaned." Pete took one of the erstwhile filters, and washed Galen's face on the bank just above the waterline. "There you go. You did well, I'm proud of you. Scary stuff but you coped."

"I don't have much more coping in me. My nose ..." The chimp looked down at the ground.

"Yeah, we're all like that buddy. We're all running on empty today. I reckon we'll stay here today and rest. Alan's not going to want to push on after this."

Pete had never had a brother or a brother-like relationship but since he'd started calling Galen his brother, he'd begun to see the chimp in that way. Like a little brother. Sometimes he wished Alan would stop viewing the chimp as another crew member and treat him more like the smaller, untrained volunteer that he really was.

They stayed put that day. Alan found a badly injured deer and put it out of its misery, then took choice cuts off the carcass and brought them back to the brushed area. He laid the cuts on hot rocks and sliced them into strips. Galen looked at the sizzling meat and thought back to what he'd read at Travis AFB about chimps being omnivores who hunted live prey. He leaned across and took one strip, tilted his head back and channelled it down into his mouth. Alan and Pete stopped and watched this significant if small event. Galen found the taste and texture uncomfortable at first but he afterwards took a second strip and also routed it into his upturned mouth. Later, he ventured an opinion he knew might not be popular.

"I think we made a mistake, I think we should have stayed in Grant's Pass. There was food and water and shelter and we didn't need to cross rivers or avoid wildfires. That was an excellent shelter, even if it did need doors."

Alan nodded. "I want to find a community somewhere so we are part of a bigger group. On our own, we are too few in number with not enough skills to survive long term. I know you both want to stop and settle and so do I, but we need to find somewhere suitable."

The next day, they moved on, gingerly picking their way through the blackened and still-smoking landscape. The fire had burned across the mountain range and down into the valley, so even along the flats the walking was slow going with smoke stinging their eyes. The

second day they walked on through much the same, living on prepared acorns, slaughtering injured wildlife when necessary and taking cuts off a carcass to cook on hot rocks at night.

On the third day they were relieved to find themselves in unburnt country. They had only progressed about 20 miles from the river reach where they'd sought refuge from the wildfire but it had been a hard-going twenty miles. At the end of that third day they came to a river. It was wide and shallow across gravel beds so they waited until morning and walked Galen across. Their walking speed had picked up too, so they were covering more miles each day.

On the sixth day after the fire and still following the watercourse downstream along the east bank, they came to a point where the one they were following NNW joined one from the east and the resulting wider watercourse flowed due west. Located here were the ruins of a small town. Alan consulted his lensatic, looked around and observed a pass to the north east.

"This must be Elk Creek and the Umpqua River, where we turn north east and head up through the low pass instead of turning west with the river. There should be highway remains up there, if I'm right."

"And he's back." Pete spoke softly as Alan walked ahead. He and Galen smiled at each other.

Alan was indeed back from that dark place but he was not the same Alan Viridon. That person was gone. This Alan Viridon was wiser, and humbler, and more appreciative of the trust they gave him, and more informed about their abilities, and more sensitive to his own limits. Galen's vision of group decision making with a rotating leadership was a more restful place to be, where he felt less isolated and more supported and could step aside without losing face if he needed to, knowing one or the other could and would step up to the task.

Alan led them along the east bank upslope into the pass. Galen was pleased he did not have to cross the wider watercourse and they camped a mile or so north of the ruins that night. In the morning they continued north east along the valley floor. The vegetation this far north was unburnt so they kept eating as they travelled. It was easy walking, making about 15 miles a day with no reason to hurry – there was no-one behind them pursuing and no appointment to keep ahead.

On the second day the valley floor widened and they camped that night near a river flowing north along the remains of an old highway. The next day they searched for a suitable crossing place for Galen but found only the remains of an old railway bridge, collapsed into the river. This search and the crossing took much of that day. As it turned out Galen's fear was now of unbroken waters. He was happy to walk through broken water across gravel beds but the deep water below the metal bridge sections was terrifying. Unbroken water was painful to land in and a much greater threat than the broken water of the gravel beds. He needed lots of reassurance and even with his superior climbing skills, he was panic stricken several times and froze in place. The crossing was only about 100 yards wide but it might as well have been fifty miles by the fatigue they all felt when they were done. They camped there on the east bank, glad just to have completed the crossing.

They hiked on next day, through the remains of what was once Eugene in Oregon only to be confronted by another river about midday. It too was 100 yards wide, and to be crossed by crawling on the collapsed remains of a railway bridge. Galen balked at this point. There was no way, he said, that he was crossing any more rivers. Pushed by Alan, he bristled.

“WHY can’t we just settle here? There’s food and water and shelter. Why do we have to go on any further? How many rivers do you have to cross before you’re satisfied?”

“That’s not how a democracy works Galen. It’s a majority rule.”

“You didn’t call for a vote, you just decided!” and Galen stormed back the way they’d come.

“Just leave him for a while Alan, let him walk off some steam, he’s been pretty stressed. Let’s go and see if we can find a better crossing point.”

About a mile downstream where the river braided, they found shallow gravel beds where they could walk Galen across using a similar technique they’d used back at the Klamath River, with one of them on each side to keep him stable and calm. It was about 100 yards across in total, but split in 3 channels, so they could island hop across in shorter segments.

They walked back to where they’d last seen Galen but he had not returned.

“Ok let’s get a fire started. There’s some fish in that river, I’ll see if I can catch us a couple.”

Later, with night falling, Pete walked along the south bank to a point opposite the large prominence on the north bank and called Galen’s name several times, hoping the sound would bounce off the basalt and carry further. There was no reply.

“I fouled that up, good and proper. Should have put it to a vote.”

“Stoke the fire. If he’s looking for us, he’ll see the light. And when will you stop and settle?”

“Well, what do you think? Should we stop here or keep looking?”

“Honestly? How much longer, Alan? What if we don’t find anyone? What if there’s no-one to find? There’s no-one pursuing us so why do we have to keep moving?”

Next morning, with still no Galen, they set out to retrace their steps. They found him at their previous camp site, beside the collapsed railway bridge. He had made no attempt to move on and it seemed he had no real plan of action. Never one to mince words or evade responsibility Alan walked straight up to him and apologised.

“I’m sorry Galen. I really am. I should have respected your concern and put it to a vote.”

“I don’t know what I’m doing out here. I don’t know how my life ended up this way.”

“Oh well that’s easy. I blame the Commander. He’s in charge and that’s what he’s for – to blame when things go wrong. That’s why they pay him extra.”

Alan shot Pete a ‘thanks very much’ look. Pete shrugged and put his hands on his hips; like Galen he was tired and disillusioned.

“You know, a large part of Alan’s problem is that he’s a career military guy. They get trained that way, so they forget to be like real people. It’s a pity ‘cause he was probably a nice guy once but he can’t help it now and we just gotta feel sorry for him and cut him some slack when he fouls up.”

“I’m going to have you court martialled when we get home. Insubordination and insurrection.” Alan smiled to let Pete know he was joking, but they were all tired, and each of them felt their patience fraying.

“Hey, neat, there’s another motivating factor for you. As well as wanting to see Sally and Chris again, you also want to court martial me. Win-win-win. Come on Galen, cut the guy some slack will you? We found an easy crossing point too. Wait until you see it, you’ll love it. Lots of shallow gravel. Easy peasy. Just like the Klamath River and that one before Elk Creek.”

“The Klamath where I nearly got us all drowned?”

“No, not that part, the first part. Where you and Alan walked across easy. Come on, I want to show you. This way.” Pete turned and began walking in the direction of the basalt prominence which seemed like a good field nav point to him, now that he thought about it. Walking away also seemed like a good idea at that point, he thought. He kept walking.

Galen and Alan looked after him and then Alan looked back to Galen.

“I really am very sorry Galen. I should have known better, I seem to have forgotten some of that expensive training. Please come with us, you’re our friend, we’d miss you.”

“Oh alright. But this had better be an easy crossing point, you humans are such good liars.”

They didn’t cross the river that day or the next. Alan called a halt “for as long as we need” so they camped near the gravel beds, eating, sleeping, skimming stones and joking and laughing. The two humans swam and washed and when Galen felt settled and part of the team again, he ventured into the shallows with them, splashing but staying close to the edge.



After Grant’s Pass, it was becoming obvious that they all coped better with a settled home base. They were all relaxed and the living was easier with a roof and known surroundings. Or even without a roof, on a gravel bar when the nights were warm, with a fire to keep the bears and wolves away.

After a week, Alan asked them if they wanted to stay or move on. Discussions led to a compromise they could all live with. They agreed to move on but at a slower pace in future – a few days walking followed by a few days staying put.

On the tenth day they crossed the broken water on the gravel beds and hiked north.

They had walked just three miles through the mature coastal Douglas-fir forest when it opened onto an oak savanna³⁵. Alan stopped suddenly and Pete and Galen almost ran into him.

“Hello. What do we have here?”



Map 4: Locations of the features in Chapters 6 and 7, Grant's Pass to Eugene Stockade. Route taken in white. River mentioned in text in light blue. Landscape features as labelled.

³⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willamette_Valley_\(ecoregion\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willamette_Valley_(ecoregion))

Eugene stockade

From a distance they could see a timber stockade, about 45 feet high, made of redwood trunks, stood vertical, and each one coarsely hewn and spiked at the top. It stretched for a full half mile in width and seemed to have no entry gate. They walked towards the centre of the wall – there was no track - and a few ape faces appeared over the spikes. When they were about 20 yards out, a helmeted ape appeared to jump up and stand on a platform out of sight behind the spiked tops.

“Ok Commander, you’re the guy with the air of authority, this is your time to shine.”

“Halt. Who are you, where are you from and what do you want?”

“We are from the south, we seek a new home. We were told it might be found here.”

“What are your names?”

“I am Virdon, this is Burke and this is Galen.”

“Who is the chief of the high council?”

“Er, well when we last heard it was Zaius, but that was some months ago.”

“And the chief of security?”

“Again, when we left some months ago, it was Urko.”

“Yeah but he wasn’t feeling too good that day. He met with a little accident.”

This last comment caused some chatter among the apes on the wall.

“Galen, are they chimps?” Alan asked in a low voice.

“I think so. They aren’t oranges or gorillas so they must be chimps. I think.”

The helmeted chimp took a handgrip between two spikes and jumped over the wall. He swung there from the top of the wall for a few moments, looking at them, then dropped the full forty five feet to the ground. He landed in a squat, then knuckle walked over to them. His body was fully clothed from neck to ankles but his feet were bare and callused, as were his hands. He stood upright in front of them; at full height he met Alan and Pete at eye level. His arms were longer than Galen’s though his legs were the same length. He was more gracile than Galen in build though his proportions were much like those of 20th century chimps.

Eyeballing each of them, he walked slowly around the trio, scrutinising them up and down as he walked. Finally, he knuckle walked back over to the spiked trunks and gave a hand signal to those above. A hatch opened half way up, swinging out from the bottom. A rough rope ladder was dropped down and two men propped the hatch open with timber struts. The helmeted one made a scooping motion with his arm, from their direction to the rope ladder. They looked at each other and finally Alan stepped forward and walked to the ladder. He climbed up while the helmeted one held the bottom of the rope ladder, steadying it for him

with one foot. Pete climbed up next and when he had entered the hatch, Galen climbed as well. Finally the helmeted one climbed up, taking the end of the ladder up with him.

Once regrouped inside, the helmeted one signalled for them to follow him. A mix of chimps and humans watched them as they followed the helmeted one along the walk way, down the timber steps and across the compound. None of these chimps wore foot coverings and they used their feet as they used their hands. One chimp picked up a bucket in his left foot and passed to his right hand. No gorillas or orangs were anywhere to be seen.

On the far side of the compound was a low, wide, circular tower-like structure, also made of rough hewn trunks. A set of horizontal planks protruded from the sides in an upward clockwise spiral. There was no outer handrail but a rough rope fastened at intervals to the wall served as an inner grab-rope.

At the top a doorway led into an open round room.

“Graycap³⁶, here are three newcomers from the southland. Viridon, Burke and Galen. This is Graycap Fossey, he will deal with your request.”

The greybeard male squatted on a long bench. He turned and dropped down to the floor, then knuckle walked over to the trio, stood up and placed the long bony fingers of his right hand on Galen’s left shoulder.

“I’m so sorry, my young friend but there is nothing we can do for you. This body bears the Mark of The Machine and you are destined to suffer in it for your whole life. All I can say is that if you choose a wife from among our people, your children will at least be spared the worst of your infirmities.”

He dropped into a squat and looked up intently at the faces of Alan and Pete.

“Welcome to the Willamette River Valley, all of you. What do you ask of us?”

“Well sir, Graycap is it?, we are looking for a place to make our home. We’ve travelled a long way and we were told a home might be found here. If that’s true, we’d be very grateful.”

“And where are you from? Where have you travelled a long way from?”

“I am from far to the south, near the Forbidden Zone. The red caked plains where nothing grows.”

“Yeah and I’m from further to the east than him.” Pete jerked his thumb towards Alan.

“I see. Well we can give you the opportunity to make a home here in the valley. This is a garrison town. All our young males come here to serve a year when they come of age, before they may return and marry and settle. But as you’ve already travelled and survived the southern apelands, you are exempt from such service. Any sons you sire will be obligated to come and serve here though.

³⁶ Graycap was derived from Graukopf which means Grey Head in the Germanic languages.

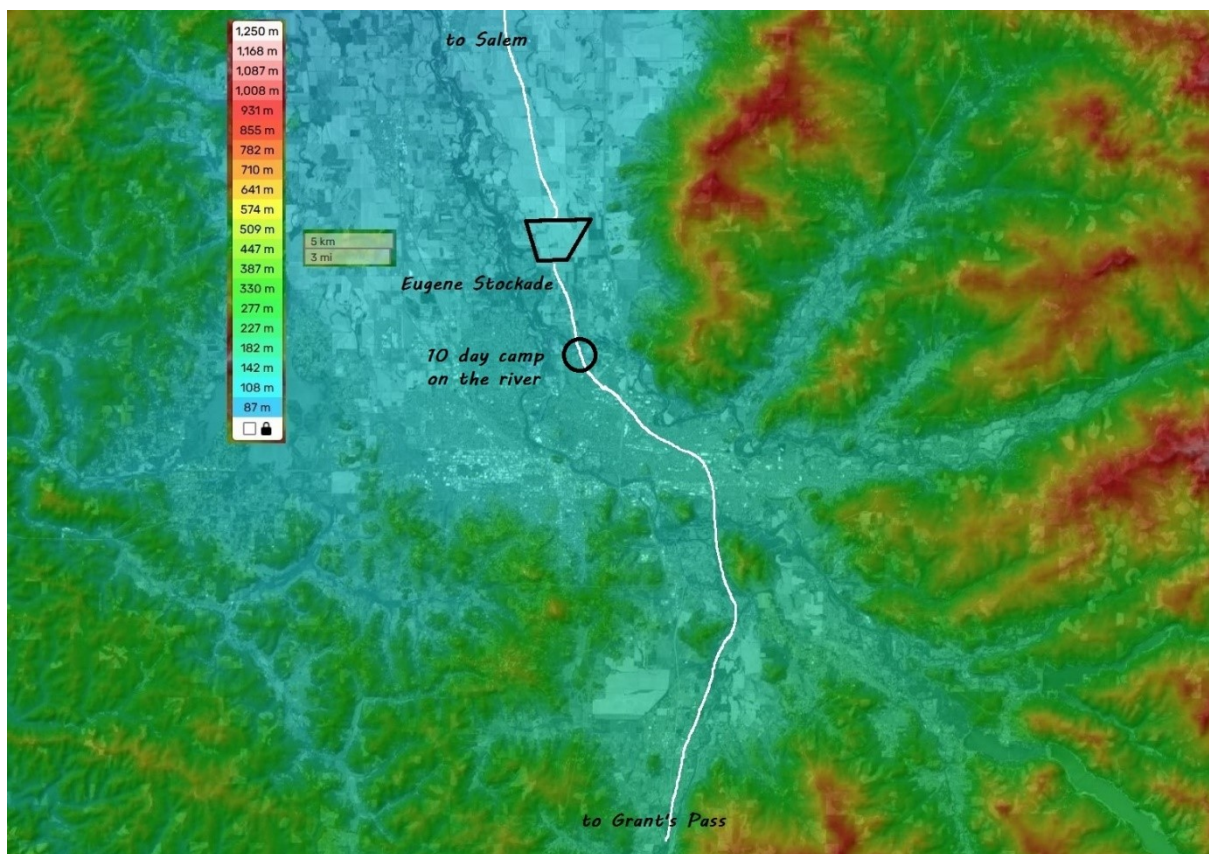
Further to the north there are bigger towns which go back to the time before the collapse. There are also many smaller settlements to choose from, in the mountains and along the coast."

"Thank you Graycap. That is great news. Tell us please, are there gorillas and oranges here?"

"No, they did not come here. They stayed in the apelands to the south. We - our ancestors, the humans and the blessed chimps - made our home here. Our ancestors were wise and worked together. The gorillas and the oranges combined to overpower the cursed chimps"

he looked at Galen

"and the humans who lived in their area, and they made a different society there. A society of suffering and misery. We have repelled their forces several times in the generations since so we know what they are like. Sometimes others like you come here seeking a new home, so we have heard many stories."



"Well you probably need to know the apes down south are expanding their crop lands north. They are now three quarters of the way up the central valley towards the mountains. They were only half way up until recently but they're expanding this way."

Graycap Fossey nodded. This was news, not good news, but news that would be useful.

"Thank you. That is useful to know. Our stockade is located so we can defend when they arrive, as they will do, again, eventually. You can rest here for a few days. I will give you a letter of introduction to carry with you so the Graycaps in other towns will understand that I

have accepted you as refugees from the southern apelands, and that will obtain assistance for you as you select where to settle.”

Astonished, the three looked at each other. So the northern apelands were not only knowledgeable about the southern apelands but so well organised as to accept and settle refugees – news and an enormous relief. Much more than they had ever hoped for.

“Thank you Graycap, we’re very grateful. This is wonderful, truly wonderful.”

“Not at all, we are a civilised and cooperative people. Our society was built by refugees. First, the Machine chimps who were rejects but rescued and brought to Willamette Sanctuary. Later the humans who fled north after the great collapse and uprising. Our whole society began with refugees and even until today, some arrive occasionally who we welcome. They all have stories to tell but they all must learn our rules and obey. That is the only thing. You must be law abiding and cooperative. If so, you will find a place here and your lives will be much better here.”

Graycap Fossey took them to the refugee cabin that one of his predecessors had constructed many years before. He explained that while refugees did not arrive often, most of those who did arrive had what was known as ‘muddle head’, and when he described it, it sounded a lot like combat fatigue. Between what they’d experienced in the southlands under the apes and what they’d suffered on the long lonely trek north, most were not able to immediately settle into life in a strange new community. Some had even forgotten how to speak.

“You three seem not to be suffering that ailment though.” Graycap Fossey remarked. At this comment Pete smiled at Alan and gave him the thumbs up behind the Graycap’s back.

The communal wisdom was right. After about four months with no company other than each other, the presence of so many strangers was unnerving. The humans were a diverse lot, in a wide variety of heights, skin and hair colours, and hair types. They were a chatty confident people and they interacted frequently and comfortably with the chimps. The chimps were also unnerving, even to Galen. They were taller but more lightly built than those to the south, and their preferred mode of locomotion, knuckle-walking, was unsettling. Between themselves the trio agreed to call it ‘primitive’ because that was how it appeared to them, even though the chimps themselves were very intelligent and articulate. It was all unsettling and would take some adjustment.

They settled in for several days, not straying far from the cabin. Much of the time they spent resting physically and mentally, which mainly meant lying on bunk beds staring vacantly at the roof. It must have been an interesting roof, because it occupied much staring time, though no-one had anything to say about it. Otherwise they discussed their situation, and what they should do next. After several days rest in the refugee cabin, the three of them set out north along the roadway which led to Salem and then Portland. They had been provided with food supplies for the four day hike to Salem township, courtesy of Graycap Fossey.

They did not travel with others, though others would also have been heading north from the stockade on the same roadway. Occasionally they passed other groups heading south towards Eugene Stockade; those groups numbered from 6 individuals to almost 20. Those groups were single species and often the passersby looked with astonishment at the small mixed species group, one of whom was clearly a 'cursed chimp'.

It quickly became apparent that the single species travelling groups were that way because of different modes of travel. The bipedal humans walked consistently while the chimps often broke into loping for some distance before dropping back to knuckle walking. Height differences also would make it hard to hold a cross-species conversation while walking. They had already noticed that the chimps politely tried to make level eye contact when speaking with humans and that would be difficult while walking. Galen was intrigued to see his own species comfortably knuckle walking and he periodically expressed frustration that he was obligated to walk in his characteristic sloping-upright mode.

They passed small farms along the roadway, mostly mixed homesteads with small cropping areas and small herds of livestock. Clearly the virus complex was keeping the mammal reproduction rate down. Often the farms had a stall out the front with small volumes of produce available, using an honour system for payment. It seemed passersby could either leave payment using whatever currency they carried, or exchange for produce they themselves were taking to the garrison town.

Late on the fourth day they approached the hillslopes south of Salem township. A significant settlement on the hilltop became apparent as they topped the rise. This was surrounded by another timber stockade wall, about 45 feet high, made of redwood trunks, stood vertical, and each one coarsely hewn and spiked at the top. This one however had an obvious gate where the roadway entered. Inside there were buildings, outdoor fires and both humans and chimps moving freely around. It was getting late but the smell and sounds inside the stockade were overwhelming, so they retreated outside for the night and camped a hundred yards or so north of the gate, beside the wall.

Salem township

The next morning, they entered the East Gate and sought directions to Graycap Galdikas. The building was in the centre of the settlement and it was market day so there were lots of humans and chimps, some livestock and much produce being moved around. It took them a long time to move across the settlement, dodging people of both species and trying to stick together so as to not get separated in the crowds. The dust and noise and smell were overwhelming and they all felt anxious. They had lived in close proximity to each other for so long, smelt each other's breath and sweat and sometimes urine, that they no longer noticed their own group smell. This crowd however was a very different matter, humans and chimps and cattle and goats and animal dung and chickens and various fruits, a wild mixture of raw smells, topped off with a racket that assailed the eardrums and disoriented the mind.

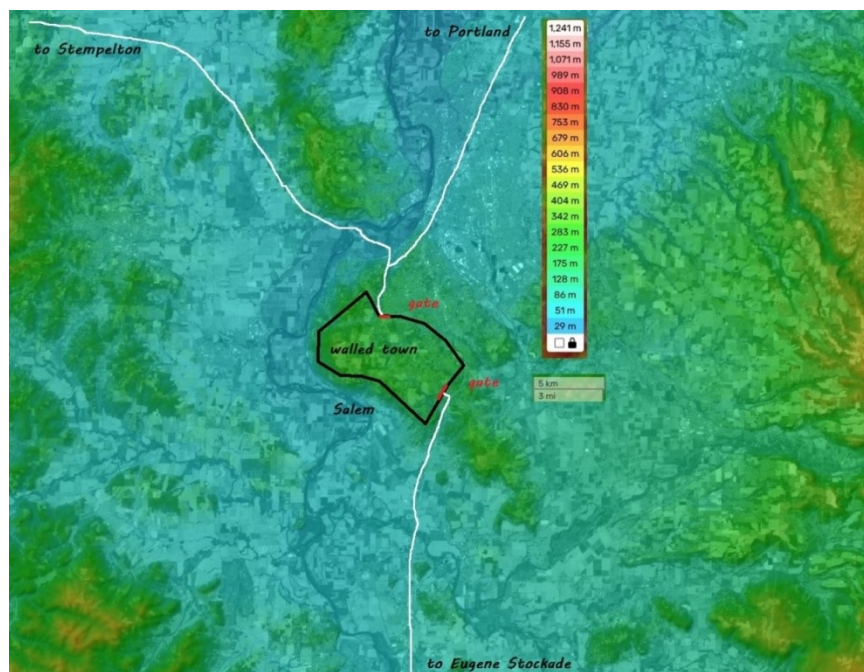
When they were shown into the Graycap's office they found an older grey haired man with a long braided beard. Having read Graycap Fossey's introductory letter and added his own note to it, he asked what type of area they were looking to settle in and what occupations they sought. This was an issue they had not yet really grappled with. After so long with no home and until recently no plans and no direction, the prospect of having to select somewhere to settle and determine their possible future occupations was confronting. Alan asked about possible locations and livelihoods, hoping this might guide their thinking.

"To our north there are the larger towns of Portland, and across the big river, Seattle. They are old towns, from before the collapse. They were not yet ruins when our ancestors reclaimed them, before the forests took over. They are much like Salem, a centre serving the surrounding farmlands.

To our east are the mountains and the deserts. The climate is more variable. Those mountains have wildfires some years and sometimes snow in Winter. You can stay down in the valleys, or you can settle up on higher ground if you prefer. Mostly humans hunt in the mountains, or harvest wild foods from the forest floor. Many chimps travel there seasonally, and return with harvests to sell in towns. Further east again is high desert.

To our west is the coast with small towns where the temperature is moderate and there is plenty of rainfall. To get there you need to walk a track through the ranges but then use boats to move between towns as there are no roads along the coast. People who live there fish or get timber from the forests. There are also the beachcombers, who make a living from the ocean's providence. Those towns always look for newcomers because they are small, and young people leave to go to the bigger towns or to go harvesting in the mountains. There are never enough young born to keep the numbers up."

"Thank you Graycap, we'll consider our options."



The trio moved away from the Graycap's office and found an out-of-the-way nook where they could talk above the racket of the market and the crowds.

"Well what do you think Galen? Bigger towns, mountains with wildfire, or the coast?"

"Well I think I want to avoid crowds and anything that involves fire. However, more importantly, we are all tired and need to not rush such an important decision. I think we should find somewhere to rest and consider it again when we're all clear thinking."

"Yeah I'm with Galen. No need to hurry Alan. And let's find somewhere quiet and away from the smell of all these people."

They eventually found a roofed, open sided public building on the northern edge of the town and rested there for the afternoon. The noise from the town was overwhelming after months of living mostly in quiet country or small settlements, and the smell of the inhabitants was nauseating. They had been living cheek to jowl with each other for so long, were so imbued with their own group's smell, that the odour from others – masses of strangers in close proximity – was actually stomach-churning. In the end they camped there for the night too. They hadn't accomplished much for the day but traversing the market town on market day was unexpectedly tiring.

"I think I'm never going to be civilised again. Too many people, too much smell. I think we should find somewhere small with lots of fresh air. I'd be happy to live by the sea. What do you think, brother?"

"He's out like a light Pete. I'm inclined to agree with you. I'd like a farm but it seems any farms around here are in the valley which means strangers going past all the time, plus if the gorillas and oranges came north, we'd be in the firing line. I'd like to have a buffer between us and them if they ever turn up, and I think those coast ranges would be good for that. Anyway let's turn in and see how we feel tomorrow."

"Well gentlemen, are we ready to decide? Or are we going to hang around here longer?"

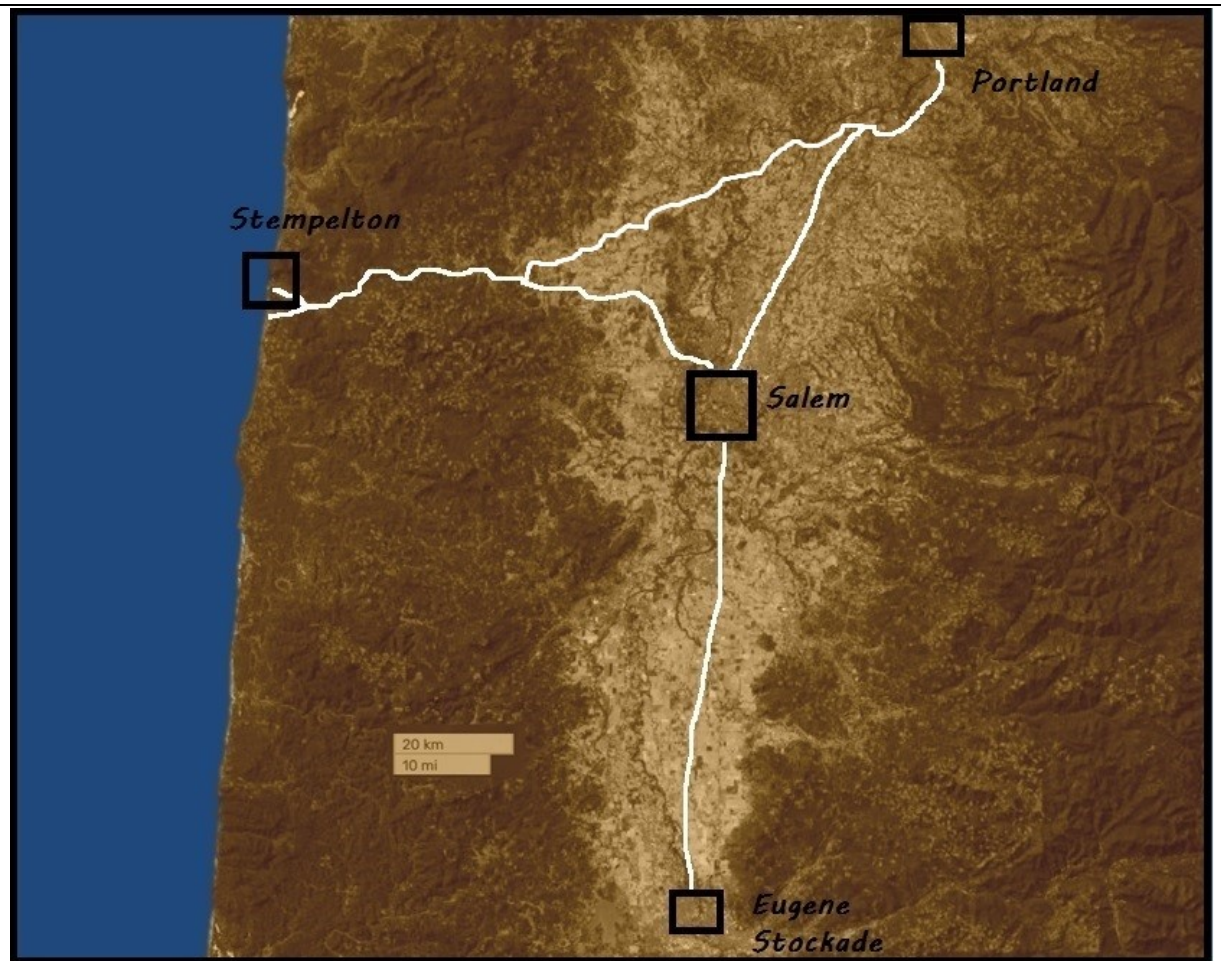
They'd spent some time that morning discussing the benefits and drawbacks of the four main options (towns, valley farm, mountains, coast), all of which were purely speculative. Unless they actually visited these places, they would remain speculative. Pete wrinkled up his nose.

"I don't want to hang around here any longer. Too much noise, too much smell. Maybe we hit the road for a bit and if we settle somewhere and don't like it, we can always move on."

"I agree with Pete, there's too much smell and too much noise here. For that reason, I don't see the towns as options and I don't want to go to the fire country. And you don't want to farm in the valley, so I vote for the coast."

"Ok well coast it is then. I'd like a farm, maybe I can get a farm on the coast. I just want to keep a buffer between us and any gorillas if they mount an offensive."

"Yep, coast suits me. Fresh air and quiet. Lead on Commander."



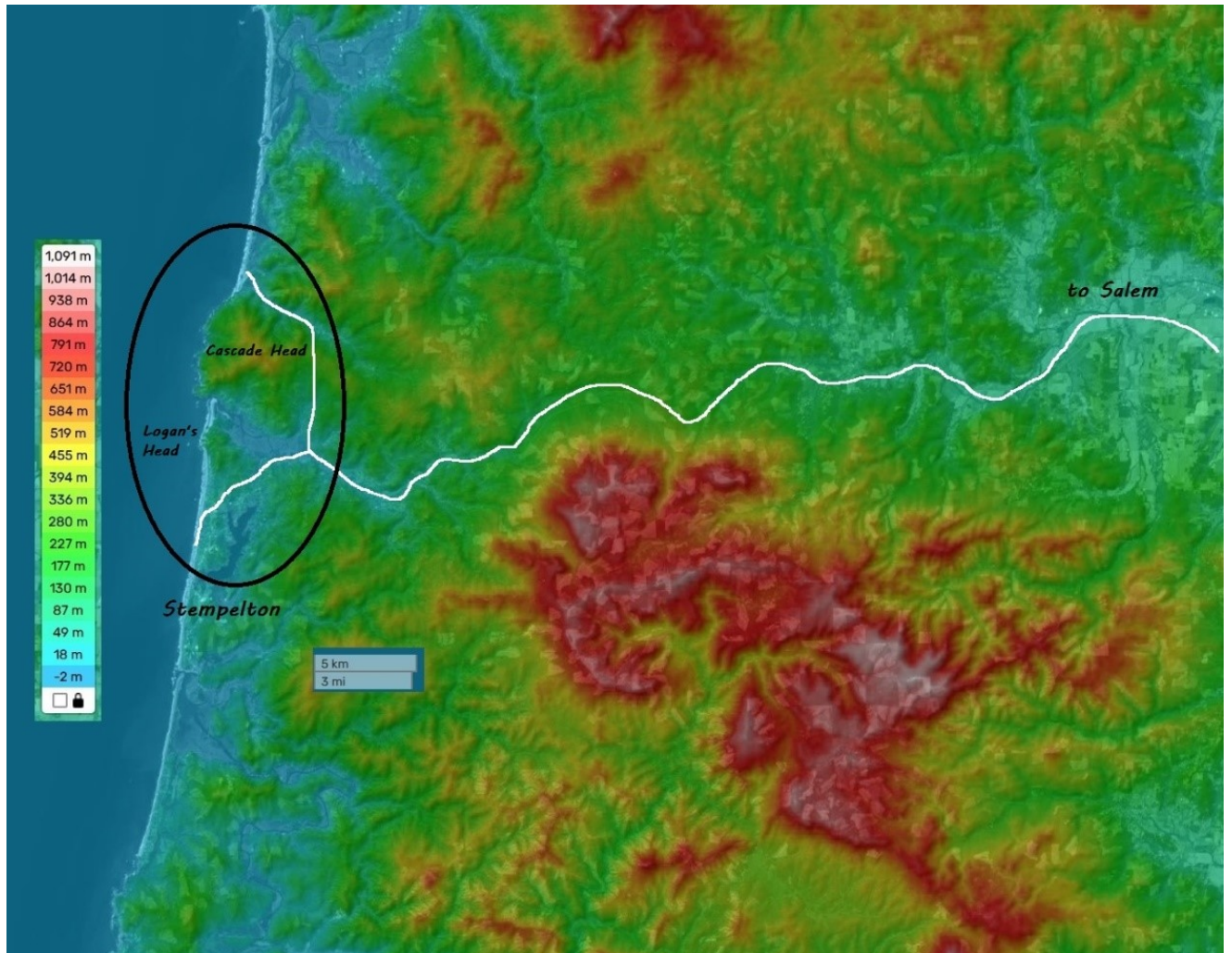
Map 5: Locations of the features in Chapters 7 and 8, Eugene Stockade to Stempelton. Roadways shown in white.

They hiked out of Salem North Gate by midday, turned north west and were across the river bridge and half way to the mountain pass in the foothills when they made camp that night. Midday the next day they came to the intersection where the track from the north of the valley met the track to the coast and from there they turned west into the mountains. Pete watched Alan keenly but there was no sign of hesitation or trepidation; possibly the wide valley floor and low peaks were not threatening. That night they camped where the mountains began to close around the track and the peaks were higher to the south. Alan was comfortable and relaxed and there were no nightmares.

The next morning the track climbed upwards on a low grade and snaked around some low hills. However it was defined and easy to follow and they made good time. After midday the track graded down again and soon they were on the more open flats along the Salmon River. They made camp early, back off the river a little ways between two low hills. Galen always appreciated these easy marches and early camps, and Alan was pleased and proud that the chimp was happy instead of tired at the campfire.

The following day they hiked the last few miles into Stempelton and took the north road which was signposted "To the Graycap."

8. Road's End at Stempelton, 45°02'N, 124°01'W



Graycap Goodall welcomed them to her office, built like a forest ranger's fire tower but on short legs, on the north slope of Cascade Head. She was a thin tall woman, with long straight grey hair tied back in a ponytail, and keen blue eyes. She read Graycap Fossey's letter and the annotation from Graycap Galdikas. Then she looked at them each, intently for a few moments and finally asked

"You two have the look of the Sky Man about you. Where did you come from?"

Alan replied as per usual: "I am from far to the south, near the caked red plains of the Forbidden Zone where nothing grows, Pete's from further east."

"Hmm, so you say. But you each have two names and the only other person I know with two names was here half a generation ago and he was looking for you two. He said his name was Tod Walter. Colonel Tod Walter. Do you know him?"

Alan and Pete were both shocked at this news and they could do nothing to conceal it. They both turned white, open mouthed and momentarily speechless.

"Tod Walter? Tod Walter is here?"

"No he was here. A large silver arrowhead flew low over the mountains and into the sea, about five miles out. We sent boats out but all they could find was Tod Walter. He said he had two others with him but we couldn't find them. The water out there is very deep and they must have died. He stayed here for some months, he and the box he would not let us touch. In the end he wanted to go south, towards a place called Edwards, so one of our boats took him south to the apelands. He said he would return but he never has."

"Wait a minute. When was this? A half generation ago?"

"Yes, it was about then. More than 10 years ago."

Alan turned to look at Pete who had already pieced the clues together.



CBS TV 1974

"So that was who brought the hand grenades into Central City. That was who Zaius had killed. Damn!" Pete turned and strode across the room, before stopping and slamming his right fist into his left palm. Pete had crewed under Tod Walter once and thought well of him.

"They killed him? He's dead? Oh he was such a polite and helpful man. We hoped he'd settle here."

"Zaius had a box which wasn't made locally and it held explosives. Zaius said the man he took it off was trying to sneak into the city, and he never got his name but he had him killed. That was more than 10 years ago. I doubt there'd be more than one man at that time sneaking around the southlands with a box of explosives that he didn't want people touching."

"He said he and the other two had been sent to find Alan Virdon, Peter Burke and Edward Jones. He seemed both excited and distressed that his arrowhead landed here but he did not say why, he was very secretive about that. But those were the names he gave me. I'm sorry, I had never heard of you and I told him so. Is there no Edward Jones with you?"

"No he died when ... some years ago."

A short way up the south slope of Logan's Head towards the patch of forest, there was a cabin that had been abandoned and was in disrepair. It was theirs for the taking according to the Graycap, who gave them directions. They hiked up the slope and levered the door open. It was dusty inside but solid. The big room held a table and chairs, and a kitchen of sorts along one wall. Off the big room were three doors, each one to a small room with a bed/storage box, a hanging rail and a small timber window. They went and inspected each room together. Then without further discussion, they went back into the big room, moved the table and chairs out of the way, used an old brush broom to sweep off the floor, and unrolled their bed rolls. In short order, they were sitting cross legged discussing that day's events and making plans for repairs and improvements to the cabin. The concept of sleeping alone, each in a separate room, didn't occur to any of them at that moment.

Out the back was a stone-floored separate washroom, with chain pull shower bucket and copper, and attached off one side through another door, a basic privy.

On the wall above the copper, Pete found a photo in an old metal frame and cleaned it and took it inside. He propped it up on the benchtop beside the wood stove and pointed it out to Alan and Galen.

"He must have been someone important at some point, I guess the town was named after him. We should keep it here to remember him by."



Mark Lenard,
Here Come The Brides
Screen Gems, 1968-70

Firewood was collected for both the wood stove in the kitchen and the fire under the copper, and water fetched from the creek at the bottom of the slope. A number of walks needed to be made to fetch water; this inconvenience would need to be addressed. However that night they had a good homecooked meal in their new kitchen and a wash in hot water in the washroom.

After washing Pete made an observation. "Hey Alan, I think that injection is finally wearing off. I can definitely feel a beard starting to grow. I guess it's been nearly 18 months now. We better ask around about what the guys here do in the way of shaving."

Pete was sitting on the slope in front of the cabin staring out to sea. Alan settled beside him and admired the view. The Pacific Ocean stretched to the horizon, sunlit in the morning.

"Toddy?"

"Yeah. He was alright. Not the worst I crewed under."

Alan chuckled. "That'd be me."

"What? No, don't put words in my mouth." Pete looked at him and scowled.

"You'd be entitled. I fouled up big time."

"Er, no you didn't. You held together exceptionally well under the circumstances."

"Yeah, we always come back to that qualifier 'under the circumstances'."

"Ha. I'd like to know how many of those full birds would've done any better under those circumstances. We're all still alive. We're all here, safe and out of Urko's reach, in one piece, like you promised. That counts for a lot, in the opinion of one who lived it, and walked it and knows what happened along the way. I'd put you up for a medal, if I could."

"You too. I'd put you up for a medal, or promotion, or both, if I could. You did a really fine job, great teamwork and really pulled your weight. Top marks to you."

"Have you got one of those questionnaires on you?" Pete grinned at him. "We could do the mission debrief now if you like."

"Questionnaires! I hated those questionnaires. No-one but the medics ever got anything out of them. Toileting schedules. Big deal. Big help they were." Alan lay back on the grass.

"Yeah if you want to do the debrief now, we can. What feedback do you want to give me?"

Pete lay back on the grass beside him. "I already gave you mine. You done good. Best CO I ever crewed under. Exemplary. Is that good enough? Or do you want details?"

"I think you should give details. If it's going to be a proper mission debrief, we need details."

Pete counted off on the fingers of his left hand. "Well you didn't get anyone killed, so HR should like that. You didn't cost ANSA any more money, so Finance should like that. You followed all the orders we got, so the brass should like that. Role model, check. Chain of command, check. Liaison with local communities, check. What else? Enforcing toileting schedule while inflight, check."

They both chuckled.

"Hey, you even recruited a new and very proficient crew member, Lieutenant Galen. That's eight. You done real good Commander. I'm proud to have served under you."

A short silence ensued while they both reflected.

"Ok Major Burke, stand down. Commander Virdon hereby stands down too. I declare Probe 6, August 1980, mission over."

Epilogue May 3091 AD

Three small boys played on an open patch of grass above the beach at Stempelton, under the watchful eyes of their parents picnicking nearby. Stempelton was one of a number of fishing and timber settlements scattered along the Pacific North West coast where access over land was only along narrow mountain trails. It was wedged between the heavily timbered and deeply incised coastal ranges and the great ocean that dominated the weather, and it had been named for the family that had first settled there. Every generation, at least one Stempel boy was named Aaron. But none of these little boys were named Aaron, or Stempel.

Davey was the eldest, and had just turned 3. Long limbed with dark brown wavy hair and hazel eyes, Davey was the runner of the three and usually set their direction of travel. He could be both solemn and sunny, often in short order, but he was never sour or silent.

Yalu was a few months younger, with facial skin that was still pink against his short black hair, and huge ears. He was their climber, able to reach fruits and flowers, and by loping on all four limbs he could keep up with Davey. His speech was slow to develop but he 'talked' very well with sign and body language. His father had recently been appointed Greycap.

Scotty was the youngest at only 18 months old. He was stocky and crowned with red-gold curls. Scotty was the miracle baby of the group, of the whole area. His mother had already had two sons with her first husband. Alan had been happy, if slow, to make a home with the red haired widow and her two fatherless sons. They had asked for his help sometimes on their farm and he was always happy to help. Some discreet nudging from his friends had been involved but in the end, the pull of family and fatherhood had proved too strong.

Neither had paid heed to the possibility of conceiving their own child as few mothers ever had a third baby. She was also thirty two years old when he was conceived and women of that age did not get with child. Alan had wept with joy when she told him of the pregnancy. So at the age of 43 and with all the odds stacked against him, he had a second son. Scotty had been delivered quickly, easily and in full health. After his birth others had wept in celebration with Alan. There might, perchance, have been a group hug.

The three boys were being raised as if brothers within a shifting mosaic of crèche care. Sometimes they stayed with their fathers in the workshop where machinery was maintained, or salvaged and repaired. Sometimes they were with one or other of the mothers. Life was safe and happy here, with food and shelter and warmth and extended family and love. They crumpled down together in a heap on the thick grass under the warm spring Sun and slept.

(ends)

Susan Cunningham
ABN 28 481 869 679
Creekholme Research and Reports