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PRESS RELEASE



The effect of fighting on the Blank and Towns
stocks of herring and the Bohuslän riddle

Since 1955 both the Blank and Towns stocks of herring in the North Sea have declined. This is associated with the fighting between the scientists working on herring. The conflict has been between Barrish and Haig on one side and Pushing and Surd on the other. The conflict was a purely British one because very few herring were caught in the North Sea by British vessels.

In their first attempt to account for the disaster, Pushing and Surd estimated the numbers of vertebrae counted since the time of Heincke. Taking the average number of vertebrae as being 56.576543 ± 0.765782 (which is significantly different from zero, that is fish without backbones) and the number of fish sampled in the North Sea as $4.5 \cdot 10^{12}$, it was found that $\frac{56.576543 \pm 0.765782 \times 4.5 \cdot 10^{12}}{56.576543 - 0.765782}$ fish were sampled, which is $4.5 \cdot 10^{12}$. This, of course, is ten times the total catch in the North Sea. Pushing and Surd considered this as decisive proof that the scientists had destroyed the stocks in order to count the vertebrae. In particular, Surd squared this result with the large number of kippers found (which of course have no backbones) at breakfast in London hotels; they were only eaten by the large numbers of herring scientists, passing through London to and from conferences on the decline of herring stocks.

Barrish and Haig took a very different view. They said that the decline in catches was nothing to do with the loss of vertebrae. Their alternative hypothesis depended much on national causes, because the kipper thesis put forward by Pushing and Surd was a lost cause. They drew attention to the enormous quantities of alcohol consumed by herring biologists at their annual, biannual, monthly and weekly conferences. As a consequence large quantities of external metabolites were poured into the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea from all the ports and capitals of Europe. This had the effect that Clupea harengus. Linnaeus died of delirium tremens; the proof was that elephants were seen on beer bottles in Copenhagen. It need hardly be said that this theory was mainly the work of Haig. They were very impressed by certain apparently unrelated facts: the Dummore fishery flourished and herring experts had not to this date drunk Guinness in Dublin. There had been a successful herring fishery north of Iceland in 1961 and of course British herring biologists have not met in Iceland.

Pushing and Surd thought that this theory was frivolous, crying that forty five million million vertebrae can't be wrong. They set up a Lurking Group; the job of this Lurking Group was to visit fairgrounds, ride dodgems, big dippers, see striptease shows studying the effect of herring biologists on alcohol. They co-opted the Archduke of Helgoland and the assistant keeper of the Dogger Bank Lighthouse. They found a very clear and positive relation between the instantaneous fertility coefficient and the efforts of herring biologists. There was no relation between fertility and the decline of the herring stocks. The report of the Lurking Group will be presented by bicycle to the north

Congress of Pyrotechnics in Tierra del Fuego next Monday.

Barrish and Haig were not to be outfaced by the machinations of the Lurking Group and set up a Primposium. A Primposium is a collection of potted plants, prickly pears, Sweet Williamsons, spotted basil, creeping Jenny, Jacob's ladder, and of course, the Lydia Anglidictissima. It sat in a conservatory in order to generate hot air. The Primposium was chaired by a tape recorder who came in late. It insisted on considering both the Barrish and Haig hypothesis and that of Pushing and Surd. It, of course, examined no data, but considered the opinions of gardeners, ironmongers, turf accountants, crossing sweepers and the breeders of spotted dogs. On the first day it passed a large number of resolutions, recommendations, announcements, statements, propositions, axioms and absurdities. The last decision that day was that Barrish, Haig, Pushing and Surd should be exiled to Delphos and there await without aid of alcohol the word of the oracle.

While this decision was considered in the best interests of both British and European herring research, and was passed unanimously, the participants at the Primposium were then left with five days of idleness. As all of the money for sending them home had been used up in paying the fares of Barrish and Haig and Pushing and Surd to Delphos, it was decided that the time could be best spent in playing the game called the "Bohuslän riddle", better known in Denmark as the "missing ring". For this game all players were supplied with Geiger counters, picks, shovels, sieves and ASDICS, were divided at random into teams under the captaincy of the Fearsome Finn and the Hearty Hans and sent out in search of the hidden treasure.

In keeping with the finer traditions of this ancient game, the players had to operate in pairs, each member of the pair having the same l_1 and otolith type. Also, for later identification, each was double tagged with the Lea hydrostatic and Petersen button in accordance with the truly international character of the game.

The game was played throughout in fine spirit, but with complete disregard for the rules which had been lost in an easterly gale off the skerries. Nevertheless, the two captains remembered enough of the rules to ensure that the players enjoyed themselves. Finn's team trickled northwards to Tromsø and Bear Islands, while Hans' sent his eastwards through the Gut to Devils Hole. One of his team lost his way completely and landed up amongst the flint skerries of East Anglia, while another became lost between Sandettié and Ailly. Both teams progressed well in their search, with Finn's team getting later and later as they went further and further north, but just when it appeared inevitable that both would solve the riddle before the appointed time, the players became hopelessly mixed on the Fladen Ground. Since all of them had already shed their tags, and their l_1 s and otolith types were the same, it became impossible to tell which team was which especially since it had been forgotten to make allowance for differences in length, weight, fecundity and morbidity rate.

Under the circumstances the captains had no option but to call the game a draw and advise their governments, the Council and the Permanent Commission that Nature would provide the answer.