



Secrets of the ancients revealed

By Malcolm Draper, Managing Director of Rentalength.

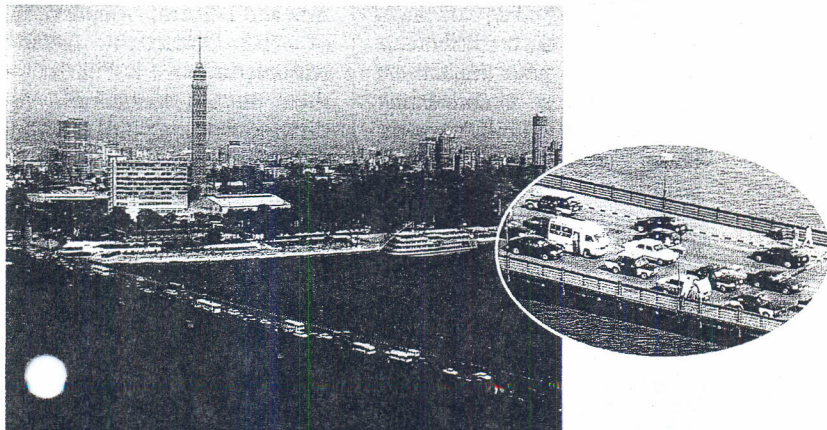
The lure of the orient finds your columnist grappling with endless traffic, mummies, whirling dervishes and more than a hint of the desert.

As long-standing (surely suffering? Ed.) readers of this column will know I am a regular visitor to FIG congresses. These four-yearly gatherings of surveyors from around the world are fantastic events; you get a chance to meet with surveyors from all over the world and to discover that most of your problems are theirs too. You also get to visit some interesting places. I am just back from Cairo where FIG held a "working week" ahead of its main congress next year in Munich.

I'd never been to Egypt but had heard plenty about it from my old Dad who served there during the war. So it took little persuasion from the Editor to join him on a visit to the city where the East seriously begins. Forewarned about security, suspicious characters and not parting with either cash or passports without explicit reason and receipts, within two minutes of landing at Cairo Airport we had given up our passports and a sizeable wedge of cash to someone called Osama. Fortunately he had been dispatched by our hotel to meet us and Osama proved extremely helpful and friendly, as indeed we found virtually all Egyptians to be, even if it did occasionally cost us rather more than we bargained for.

There are perhaps three enduring memories of Cairo: the traffic; the Museum and the Egyptians' always helpful, attentive and skilful sales pitch. The traffic is unbelievable. Mainly modern Japanese vehicles rub bumpers and wing mirrors with ancient Fiats and Peugeots bearing the scars of decades of wheel-to-wheel combat. In between them you will see the odd brave scooterist and cyclist, the even braver donkey cart (invariably travelling at night in the outer lane without a glimmer of light) and a flock or two of sheep. Cairo's traffic problem could be solved overnight by the introduction of a UK-style MoT test. The survivors would not be many.

Cairo's traffic stops only for break-downs. Fortunately for pedestrians this happens often.



Trials and tribulations

Comfortably settled in the luxurious Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel we were delighted to discover that we were in the company of plenty of good friends and acquaintances, there on the same mission. First of all a big, big G'day and hug to John Brock who arrived to deliver his brilliant paper (Four Surveyors of the Gods in the XVIII Dynasty of Egypt - New Kingdom c. 1400 BC) only to have to rush back to Sydney the next day following the sad news of his father's death. Others who fared better in Cairo included our Geomatics Faculty Chairman David Powell who only succumbed on the last night to the 'Tummy's Curse' while Ruth Adams suffered leg-eating mosquitoes. The worst Ed Danson and his wife experienced was a taxi which broke down half way across a bridge over the Nile, a familiar sight whenever I looked out from the balcony of my room.

Others who seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves included Adam Greenland, Rob Mahoney, Professor Ian Dowman, Muhammad Sulaiman, Gethin Roberts and David Sutherland (Canada and Jamaica), Alan Wright and Jim Smith (both veterans of many FIG events). Another stalwart who always seems one jump ahead of the rest of us in sussing out a good deal is David Wallis who was there with his charming wife Edna. They are both very good company and David's years of world travel are always worth mining for useful information.

When a museum is not a museum

The ancient Egyptians are of course what everyone visits the country to discover. The Pyramids and Sphinx are a must on everyone's tour but less advance warning is given of the statutory visit to the "Papyrus Museum". The word shop and museum seem to have become confused in Arabic because we ended up visiting an awful lot of papyrus museums. The day we visited the Pyramids seemed to be 15 minutes at the ancient world's great wonders and a 45-minute papyrus sales pitch. The visit included in our excellent tour of the Cairo Museum wherein is Tutankhamun's treasure, was also a "Government approved outlet for essential oils". Why quite the Editor and I ended up spending an absurdly large sum of money on Secret of the Desert, Rameses II and Queen of Egypt, I am not sure. I can only console readers who might think we're losing our marbles by revealing that we were not the only ones. David Powell was also seen clutching a bottle of something he was assured was Omar Sharif's aftershave. I can only put it all down to the modern Egyptians' fantastic sales and marketing skills. I



The Gala Dinner was a great night out at the opera house, from the mosquitoes and much enjoyed by yours truly, the Editor (left) and Alan Wright (centre).

with Michael Elfick (the surveyor who set out the Sydney Opera House – now that was a tricky job!) on managing a coordinated cadastral system with data from metes and bounds.

Cairo was one of the most eventful weeks I've had at FIG events. A spectacular opening ceremony began with pipers and a really good first keynote session got

the week off to a great start. Thereafter it was fascinating events all the way – Gala Dinners, an Egyptian Night (Russian belly dancers these days I'm afraid) with whirling dervishes (what do they do at the end of the day to unwind?), trips down the Nile (yet another 'must do'). The Germans and Munich will have their time cut out to match Cairo.

Concentrate at breakfast

We continue to get some brilliant lecturers at the Royal Geographical Society. Two recent presenters left pithy comments ringing in my ears. Wong How Man, a leading explorer of western China who rarely bothered with details such as a visa and other travel documents, took the view that "It is better to beg forgiveness than ask permission!" Again, I don't think that strategy would work with my wife. The second lecture confirmed my worst fears about cannibalism in New Guinea. Michael Moran, an Aussie, told us all about the Coral Sea and Melanesian cultures. He related a tale about an anthropologist who was invited for breakfast with the locals. It was later reported that "with an uncustomary lapse of concentration he was eaten! Instead of going to breakfast he was breakfast!"

Steve Vickers from Thames Water tells me he was visiting the RAF Museum at Hendon recently and saw something which puzzled him. It was called a "cine-theodolite" and was apparently used by the Luftwaffe in WWII. A little research has revealed that these devices were used until quite

recent times by the US military to track missiles under test. Any more information will be gratefully received and if suitable, published.

Finally Pat Collins has sent me a short article from a US magazine entitled "The Trouble with the Meter". After reviewing the pros and cons of the metric system, especially its weakness in dealing with divisions such as thirds and how in the US states have reverted back to miles for highway signs, the writer concludes "The metric system has become the world's lingua franca, but traditional measures, rooted in the body and its crafts, are its tenacious vernacular". Can someone translate this for me please?

Miscellany

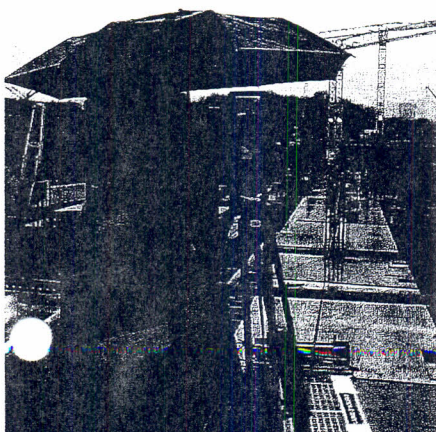
A woman who has attempted suicide four times has been banned from jumping into rivers, canals or on to railway lines. Well that will work, won't it?

Have you been bombarded with those spam emails promoting cut-price medicines? They come in with every download and all from people whose first language is obviously not English. The following is a typical example – it's English but not quite in the order we know it:

"What's a pity, the equivalent medicinal drug costs a lot of if it is brand named. Consequently for what should you waste much especially as you could obtain the equal doses at a much more low worth? Big option of our merchandise may assist you to overpass any of your infirmity. In Pharmoze, I give you the same doses, the generic variant – the equal caliber the equal prescription – in a greatly reasonable monetary value."

Keying words and acronyms into Google can often throw up some strange bedfellows. For instance, keying ICES (otherwise the Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors) reveals "The International Cake Exploration Society – dedicated to the sharing and caring of cake decoration around the world". And TSA (The Survey Association) is way down the list of Google's proposals and well behind "The Tourettes Association". Damn! Blast! S***! F***!

Just to prove that there are some survivors out there who are happy whatever the weather or life throws at them, I thought you'd all enjoy this photo of Tony Beagley hard at work.



Gary Covington has sent in this little item which he cut from his local paper in the Philippines. It purports to show many giant figures in the Peruvian desert, only identifiable if seen from the air. Made by people who lived before the time of Christ, they apparently used transit theodolites.

- 1. The Whale
- 2. Wing
- 3. Baby Condor
- 4. Bird
- 5. Animal
- 6. Spiral
- 7. Lizard
- 8. Tree
- 9. Hands
- 10. Spiral
- 11. Spider
- 12. Flower
- 13. Dog
- 14. Astronaut
- 15. Triangle
- 16. Whale
- 17. Trapezoids
- 18. Star
- 19. Pelican
- 20. Bird
- 21. Trapezoid
- 22. Hummingbird
- 23. Trapezoid
- 24. Monkey
- 25. Lame
- 26. Trapezoids

