

## [Sun, Sap & Paleo Snacks](#)

04 March 2010 Richard Copeland

Another day of sun - the 3rd. Plenty of hot water, electricity and attitude. Look out maple syrup producers, the long range weather forecast is projecting high & low temperatures for our area that are perfectly alternating for about a week that will force the running of sap. I suspect every gatherer of maple sap has made a surprisingly early jump into the bush to get the taps & lines in. Normally this would happen later in the month, but things are so different this year (like thin river ice) that one should not take a chance on the weather being predictable & the runs being there later in the month. You don't want to miss it.

I spent yesterday on the couch with a headache and other symptoms the sunshine, which is now getting stretched out longer & longer each day, made all that somehow bearable. Today is a physical improvement but not one of personal high energy. The couch is still my pal and my book more readable through lesser headaches. It is *The Age of Persuasion* written by that sage of persuasion Terry O'Reilly. It is just like the CBC radio show. Informative, enjoyable & a good read.

Attention carnivores, omnivores and locavores. Trouble here for vegetarians and vegans. A new diet has emerged that appears to cure many of our ills from obesity to diabetes to acne. It is called the Paleo Diet and is based on a 1985 report by 2 doctors who did some serious study on diets & evolution. The theory is to eat what we were designed to eat.

Essentially one participates in this diet by living the lifestyle of a caveman. That's right – lifestyle – is the current word although the movement is too young to tell whether it's a movement based on eating or hunting & gathering, but it looks or approximates a bit of both. Complementing the diet is exercise by a type that approximated what we early humans did around the times when we lived in caves. So to participate in the program you need to eat lots of meat, seafood, eggs, veggies fruits and all things forage-able, while designing and implementing unique exercise programs that don't involve bow-flex or treadmills. One creative 72 year old guy pulls his 6000lb Range Rover up the driveway to simulate pulling logs. The guy looks terrific by the way. This simulated log pull is a great application for a sustainable lifestyle too, since the transportation now comes about without burning fossil fuels. There are success stories with the diet with the likes of obesity & diabetes getting cured. Even veggies, like the newer post paleo varieties: legumes, nightshades (e.g.: tomatoes), dairy, whole grains or oils, are taboo. Lard is in.

Remember though, the animal foods from 10,000 years ago were substantially different than today's. Meat would not have had the same % of fat & back then it was too dangerous to inject an animal with hormones or antibiotics, unless you were looking at being rather than serving dinner. If this diet catches on, the pressure on meat producers will be substantial. There is already not enough mastodon to go around.

richard

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[End of Feb and the Olympics](#)

01 March 2010 Richard Copeland

Beginning of month end of month. As I mentioned yesterday the month was not a disaster relative to gas consumption but it wasn't impressive either. The month consumed 17L in gasoline including an equalization charge. Just under an average Feb by a litre, but disappointing. Last was zero, 2008 was 20L. Propane was normal at 2% for the month. This day, like the past few and the predicted next few looked like it could end with some flare as blue sky appeared in the northwest, only to stay in the north west beyond sunset. Hrrmph!

The Olympics are over and I must admit I was definitely into it. Audrey away in St Kitts and me up until midnight, every night, glued to the TV screen. I didn't like the 'Own the Podium' stuff – too brash, too aggressive for a host nation, but understand the sentiment, the need for cash, focus & commitment. It just wasn't a Canadian value somehow. Must have picked the wrong marketing co. Gaylan Weston (Loblaws ads) actually expressed my take on it over & over during his commercial on feeding athletes the 'blue' check line of President's Choice healthy foods. He said something like – we will take some credit, not all of it, after all we are Canadian. Good stuff. The great stuff was in the athletes and spilled all over the games. The women, their sportsmanship was unparalleled. At times you couldn't tell who won amid the hugs and congrats. It was effort, much of it selfless, no fear but overloaded with the 'better emotions' & the courage of competition.. The close of the last couple of days, and the finale of such a historic hockey game, our goal from the up &

coming heir to hockey stardom, all that with the setting of a new record for the number of golds. And the Canadian people demonstrating their participation in this country, coast to coast, Wrapped in a flag? Well good on us. Really good on us. Thanks VANOC. Thanks folks of Vancouver. Much more I think than anyone had expected.

richard

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[Newsy Stuff](#)

28 February 2010 Richard Copeland

A little bit of newsy comment for today. A quick report on the weather is that it has been terrible for a number of consecutive days and I have made some minor generator runs. It is the end of the month tonight & I'll look back on the month & it will show things are not that bad.

Anyone interested in sustainability is interested in climate change. A disastrous year for countries in negotiation (Copenhagen), lack of policies (Canada) and the email thing that the deniers have jumped all over. But their may be even less hope in Canada, Maxime Bernier has entered the forum, with a pronouncement, that climate change may have been over estimated. The ex-foreign minister in a letter to LaPresse said:

"Environmental groups in Copenhagen criticized our government for blocking an agreement ... and again when Jim Prentice announced our targets at the end of January ... But with each passing week we see the wisdom of the government's moderate position ... since December, a debate has broken out in the media over the science of warming, a debate that had been stifled due to political correctness ... the numerous errors by the IPCC add to alternative theories of warming that have been put forward over the years.

He goes on of course, but you get the gist. He justifies the official Canadian 'skeptic' position as prudent. Now we may want to watch this one closely. We now do know where he stands & that Bernier had been a power broker in this current government. If he should move his eyes from cleavage to climate could he be given this file? If so, we must be vigilant for much could be learned by finding this file wherever he may forgetfully leave it.

Did you know that Canada imports queen bees from Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, Chile & California. That we get more than 100,000 from Hawaii and recently had to suspend the purchase due them having the parasitic mite 'Varroa', which the same mite killing off our bees. Queen bees go for \$20-\$23 apiece and lay 1500-2000 eggs a day! They are vital to the health of \$2Billion in Canadian crops.

The more I'm learning about today's cars, the more nervous I get. In a previous blog I expressed my satisfaction with gas pedals that link to directly to fuel inflow and brakes that mechanically (or fluid) stop the car. Turns out that an intermediate step of software has been introduced between the driver and the operational device on a lot of cars. A computer is looking at what you are doing, analysing it and then controlling your car. Yikes! I just quit using Explorer as my search engine in my new computer because it crashes. Double entendre could be happening here on computer crashes. And . . . Hot dogs. Yes I have heard the stories - they are made from unmentionable animal body parts, scraped up off the slaughter house floor, that they are made with nitrites, nitrates, sorbates, colour dyes all over the rainbow, loaded with salt and saved with preservatives & savoured by every North American kid. But they do resemble food and manage to recycle what would otherwise be dog food or garbage. Doesn't that count for conservation at least? But a Dr Smith (a likely alias), a paediatrician prof for Ohio State University, has tagged the iconic hot dog as a killer by choking. It appears the little tube steaks are the perfect plug for blocking the airways of children. In Canada alone, the statistics show that 45 children under the age of 14 die from choking, half of those from food and 17% of those foods are hot dogs. The quick math suggests 3.85 kids die from hot dog choking each year in this country. And the shape is indicative of being cautious with similar foods that could lead to choking as well. The carrot is one heck of a plug. Marshmallows are up there with popcorn. Jeeze.

What if Dalton McGuinty finds out. Will he ban them? Will the police checks include departures from No Frills as your cloth bags are rummaged for hot dogs? Would a Jay's game be worth attending?

And carrots. Will we approach Monsanto to splice water genes into carrots to cause them to melt in your mouth? I bet it would work for turnips. We could see Orville what's his name fade into snack oblivion.

It could mean a redesign for the tube steak. Perhaps a semi-tube steak slit down the middle, which has been suggested,

but will that thing fit on a open fire cooking stick?

I do wish my childhood on so many kids in Canada today. Mine was so uncomplicated, so loose and easy - free.

richard

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[Happy blog-a-versary](#)

26 February 2010 Richard Copeland

It has been exactly one year to the day when I first took fingertip to keyboard for this blog. The opening statement on Feb 26 2009, focused on our off-grid energy system, its components and how things work. The solar hot water system got a mention and the promise to keep everyone up to date on how the year would excitingly unravel with the off-grid life & with our attempts at growing our own food.

It wasn't as exciting as one might think. After all, living in an off-grid house is very similar to any other house, once you've set the lifestyle and consumption patterns. It would be like reporting on watching your hydro meter numbers go around when someone turns on the TV. But it is actually the sameness of it all that makes it workable. Perhaps when the Smart Meters get cranking with changing costs for a KWhr of electricity the real excitement of electricity consumption will start. The blog has run around a few issues over the year: food; climate change; pigs; farming & gardening; heating; MicroFit Program; wind; trees; & more – the stuff of country living. Sustainability as a goal is a good one but it is hard to reach, particularly when you hang on to the cultural remnants of your past history. Our lifestyle and our environment improve as we try to reach this goal of sustainability. Each attempt is one of those odd cases where a nice try equals a victory, a win if even in some instances so small.

There is a lot of back blogs on this site that for one who is interested in off-grid info, sustainability &/or the fumbles through life in retirement should be able to find content of interest. Hopefully I have done some reasonable 'Titling' to help pick your way through.

The next year, now with each season of the year having had its blogging time, may move my blog toward more commentary and opinion on these topics, but always reporting in on anything interesting with the systems or property.

Looking forward . . .

richard

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[Clouds, MicroFit, food & Wal-Mart](#)

25 February 2010 Richard Copeland

Back into those too many days in a row of clouds. Ran the generator a couple of days ago for charging purposes and I might as well be resolved to do it again soon. The February blahs haven't caught on yet. The shortest-by-days but longest-by-patience month of the year is slipping by with abnormal speed. Perhaps it is the activities : got a cord of next year's firewood in last week with John K's help, lots of family activity – birthdays at the lake, and temperatures that seem to be amazingly warm and invite more living outdoors.

This has also been a month of intense activity around the micro fit program which is still happening for a few families in Matawatchan that have their micro fit requests in, quotes in, financing in place & soon to have site visitations by Hydro. Not looking good for Audrey & I since we still have the problem of becoming grid connected from our hydro-less property, the problem that originally got us off-grid in the first place. And that's okay, we're well into our 9th year of producing our power and the lacka hydro bills is a good thing. I heard that the HST is going to add \$225 of cost per year to the average Ontario household for electricity & heating – ouch!

Just how 'sustainable' our lives are going to be in terms of energy will be an interesting journey over time. A few days ago I joined the wayward old guys club for breakfast and those, almost a generation yet beyond me, were talking up the food supply in the days of their youth. Most do tend to view the food landscape of today as being an improvement. Yet they recall, with fondness, fresh trout from Colton Creek, cheese from the factory in downtown Matawatchan. Eggs from under the chickens in the lean-too & soup from the same place. Some households raised cows (a few still do for beef) and milk was available (organic but not certified) & if you were looking for cream or butter, well, you knew how to make those. The

cold cellars were stalked with potatoes that weren't from Idaho, squash, onions, garlic, carrots, beets, turnips and of course pickles of many varieties, canned tomatoes & even canned meats. Pressure canning was popular for meats and some veggies such as beans. No labels with mysterious words, no long lists of other things that might not be food – people knew what they were eating. I can't help but look at these people in their 90's and at least partly link the diets of their pasts to their present condition and longevity. Advancements in medicine have played a roll in longer living as well, but as medicine improves the health of our younger generations do not.

But back to energy & sustainability. We got an email from J&K about 2 companies that have rejected tar sands 'dirty oil'. The email encourages people to message other companies & encourage them to reject dirty oil as well. One of the companies is Wal-Mart. Interestingly, not a bad choice, and in some cases credit should given where due. Yes Wal-Mart has done some great things with their buildings – solar, wind generation, insulation & green energy purchasing, but sometimes it is those subtle things that can impact in a very large way and the mega company did leverage a mega reduction in energy consumption, almost globally. A decision was made to protect the environment through sales, specifically setting an objective of selling 100 million Compact Florescent Light bulbs (CFLs). By 2008 Wal-Mart had sold 130 million units, which works out to displace the equivalent output from 2 large coal fired electrical generating plants. So the price cutter/world class marketer turned its retail size and resources to save some serious CO2 output & other pollutants. Good on them.

This Wal-Mart story shows how addressing energy issues from different angles can make a serious difference in improving the life force of our planet. It is a bit like the Butterfly Effect, except with intent. What has taken the automotives so long? Why are energy efficient fridges of today disposable every 7-10 years – not 30-35 like they were? How can the energy going into building things make them life-cycle efficient? There are many opportunities within mass produced and consumed products that can yield great savings through energy conservation. We, as consumers (make that sustainers), really need to seek out those products that will use less energy & produce less pollution. We can have great effects with many small considerations.

richard

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[February Picnic & Liam's Birthday](#)

22 February 2010 Richard Copeland

It will soon be a year since I began this blog. At the time, it was to be both Audrey & I who wrote the blog, but somehow it defaulted to me. Today, after she wrote a letter to a friend describing our grandson Liam's birthday party, and failed to get all she had to say on her limiting Facebook wall, Audrey conceded her words to today's blog. I'm also attempting how to get photos on the page. Here's hoping. Over to Audrey.



Feeding & Skating

Liam's birthday party picnic yesterday, turned 4 on Sat. the 20th, was held at a small lake(!) on Sunday (this is February) - a 20 min. walk through the bush on Adam's neighbour Bill's property along a logging trail Adam had carved out previously across the street from his driveway. Adam had constructed a hay wagon out of a car trailer that he hitched to Bill's ancient tractor, had pre-ploughed a section of the lake to make a skating surface, flooded it twice, and we carried bar-b-q, food, chairs, table, wine, coffee, juice, skates, jogging stroller,

Jerusha's family with little 7 month old Nev, included in the mix- being carted over hill and dale. In all, 7 adults, including neighbour Bill, and 5 children attended the party. Actually, the men walked, Fili drove the Jeep until it got stuck, so Jerusha, the children and I were on the hay wagon. There were hills and curves that the tractor couldn't quite negotiate, the special treads Adam had attached to the tractor wheels with chains kept dis-manteling and we feared for our lives at times, although in retrospect needlessly. Would we all topple over?



#### Adding Traction

The day was mild, (-1C), snow about a foot deep on the sidelines, a campfire to roast the marshmallows, chili, hamburgers, cakes, cookies, children's laughter skating with their dads, Amma, (me), Auntie Rue circling Nev in the stroller around on the ice made for a wonderful family day outdoors. No flies vying for their share of the food, no need to swat at the mosquitoes, black flies or deer flies, no worries about food spoiling in the hot sun. How perfect is that for a picnic? We women and smallest children decided to pass on the wagon ride home at the end of the day, for a time following it and I felt I was in another time or place, part of a caravan as we trudged with our belongings along the trail, among the trees. Great day! Thank you Adam and Fili for all the work that went into putting the day together.

Audrey

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[Good weather - good food](#)

19 February 2010 Richard Copeland

This day started off cloudy. The 3rd in a row I think, and the Weather Network and Accu-weather were both projecting a cloud covered day. Usually they don't agree, the Weather Network giving a forecast from Denbigh and Accu-weather from Griffith. both towns almost equidistant from Matawatchan and the triangle formed almost equilateral. One would think that weather would be the same on both, but not always, maybe not often. Usually Accu is the Dr. Jeckel with the clouds and The Weather Net is Mr. Hyde with sun glimpses. This morning they both carried clouds for the day. I hadn't started the generator last night since a bit of wind poked around in the evening and I figured it could wait until morning. During the night I could hear many times the forming up of a harmony of sound with the four turbines and would happily slip back into sleep. Come morning, the wind had helped the battery status, so I figured I would wait to put on the generator, and headed out to the Pine Valley Rest. for breakfast and the Friday morning social gathering for wayward old guys. I hadn't been there for a while but little had changed. The stories from the oldsters who got that way living here all their lives are always interesting. What's even more interesting is to put the 'tough' lives out-here-back-then into the context of the lives of today, and specifically the food supply those lives survived on. It is being considered now that the 'boomers' may be the longest living group in humanities' history due to the lousy diets of today. Back in the days of some of these breakfast companions, they ate trout - but from Colton Creek, not salmon from a fish farm, or cheese from the local Matawatchan factory, or potatoes & squash grown in the back yard and stored in a cold room for the winter. Eggs were what you found under the chickens in the lean-to attached to the shed and soup stock came from the same place. Milk was what one of the neighbours had for sale and when you needed butter you made it. Yes, they had to travel days to

Renfrew to get the dry goods not grown locally and made fresh bread when they got home. I have lived here for only about 9 years and have attended a few funerals of some those who have lived here for most of their lives. Very few of them were under 90 years of age. There are still those who remember and tell the stories. For ourselves we try to grow many things here and we shop carefully from the information on the labels on product or investigating levels of processing a item has undergone in its manufacture. Lots of processing - not to be our purchase. Garlic is lately the one that disturbs, we can't seem to buy garlic that isn't from China, having run out of our own. It is odd with Perth, Ontario's garlic capital so close by.

Anyway, this is about sun & weather & while heading home from Pine Valley the sun was in full force, stayed that way through noon when I checked the weather on the internet - they were sticking to their cloudy story. By 4 o'clock, sun still pretty strong I checked again and the weather forecasts acknowledged the sun at present but forecast clouds. Anyway, I was pleased I hadn't run the generator and hung in there looking for RE power.

richard

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[Feb RE & more coal](#)

16 February 2010 Richard Copeland

With January having been a bit of grunt for RE, February has to date, been a lot better for sun and even a bit of wind. The cloudy forecasts have fortunately been inaccurate, the sun has interspaced itself with periods of cloud cover providing some periodic charging of the batteries. This is in contrast to January where we had extended periods of sun & then of cloud. Great when sunny but generator time happens after several days of cloud in a row. The generator ran once so far in Feb, and this was to provide an equalization charge near the end of a sunny day. It becomes a cheap charge when the batteries are full and a charge time a little better than 2 hours will use only a couple of litres of gas. That has been it so far, but the large expanse of sunny enough days may be coming to an end. The past few days of predictions have been cloudy conditions but somehow the sun has managed to poke out enough to look after our needs. The next 4 days look tough on the forecast – we'll see.

So we are getting a new coal mine in Cape Breton. 200 jobs are to be gained. These 200 employees are going into a mine that just had \$20 Million spent on it to pump out the water. That's a reassuring prospect for employment, if you're a fish. The mine will produce 2.75 million tonnes of coal annually to be shipped overseas. Prices are up & I guess that means consumption is up too. Since a kilogram of coal burned produces about 2.93 kg of CO2 this new mine will provide a means to put another 8 million tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere each year. But that's peanuts on a global scale. Numbers for 2006 show China leading global coal production at 2380 million tonnes per year and the USA a distant 2nd at 1053.6. Canada doesn't make the top 8 list. China exported only 79M tonnes that year and has been looking for more to feed the fires for their tremendous economic growth. China is buying and we're all there for the sale. Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal, even though it only has about 6% of the world's reserves and it occupies 4th place in global coal production. In terms of proved recoverable coal reserves (end 2006) the USA was first with 27.6% of the world reserves. China was 3rd at 12.6% and has the biggest thirst for the black stuff. Maybe the USA gets to pay off their Chinese debt with coal. There's a scary thought.

richard

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[Greener with\(out\) Toyota](#)

11 February 2010 Richard Copeland

With Copenhagen over and fizzled into failure, we will now set the issues of climate aside, and pick them up again when the next climate conference rolls around or the USA decides to tell our government what to do about climate change in North America. We are on record of waiting for that, a North American solution is needed and it is claimed that it is not our place to propose that solution. The Canadian success of the Montreal Protocol on CFC's or the global banning of land mines, 2 examples of Canadian led initiatives, were somehow different in that we did show our leadership abilities. We have lost the credibility to lead.

But Toyota has stepped up to the bar. Finally, reality strikes for the real time equivalent of taking cars off the road. Sure we have heard that the implementation of replacing incandescent light bulbs with vast amounts of compact fluorescents have a CO2 displacement equivalent of taking so many cars off the road or that shutting down a coal fired electricity generating plant will give an equivalent CO2 reduction for taking many more cars off the road. But this the first time that a company has finally taken the steps to globally get a very large number of real cars off the road. Even a US senator is suggesting that drivers of Toyotas 'step away from the wheel'. Abstinence! Cars that sit idle don't idle & pollute, nor do they move. Emissions are being greatly reduced through this recall innovation.

And, it may be that the solution for getting the Toyotas back on the road (only a brief respite of fresh air) could be having an electronic control installed that senses when both the brake and gas pedals are depressed at the same time and when that situation occurs, the engine will be automatically shut off. I have a couple of issues with that. First, I kinda like the aspect of the gas pedal being able to speed up or allow the vehicle to slow down depending on whether I depress it or not or that the brake can stop the car at my will. Some of you may call me a control freak, but somehow these concepts that have been built into cars for about a century have really made sense to me. Not depending on a computer program to figure out whether or not to stop or go has been a key safety element in my driving experience. A driver that hasn't figured out that the car engine has to be running to go and that there is a key that starts and stops it, and that they can turn it off at will – well should they driving at all? Second, if this electronic fix is implemented very many cars will be shut down daily as both pedals are depressed. That of course can reduce emissions. On the other hand, when I think back to my Toronto heavy traffic commuting days, I recall a large number of numbskulls who drive with both feet – one on the gas the other on the brake. 'Two feeters' have a nasty habit of touching the brake at breakneck speeds on the highway, giving a false braking signal to car behind who alertly hits his brake and that brake hitting hot potato is passed down the line until there is a traffic pile up or a rear ender. If these guys do this after the electronic fix is in, the car will shutdown, almost guaranteeing the rear-ender. But in any case, emissions will fall & natural selection will be demonstrated as the two-foot driver disappears from the highways. As this two-foot driver disappears we will all burn less fossil fuel, since each time we depress the brake heat is created at the brake rotors or drums and that heat naturally comes from the vehicles motion which of course is caused by an engine burning fuel. Less braking – less fuel. Maybe it is a good change, but I'm nervous on this one.