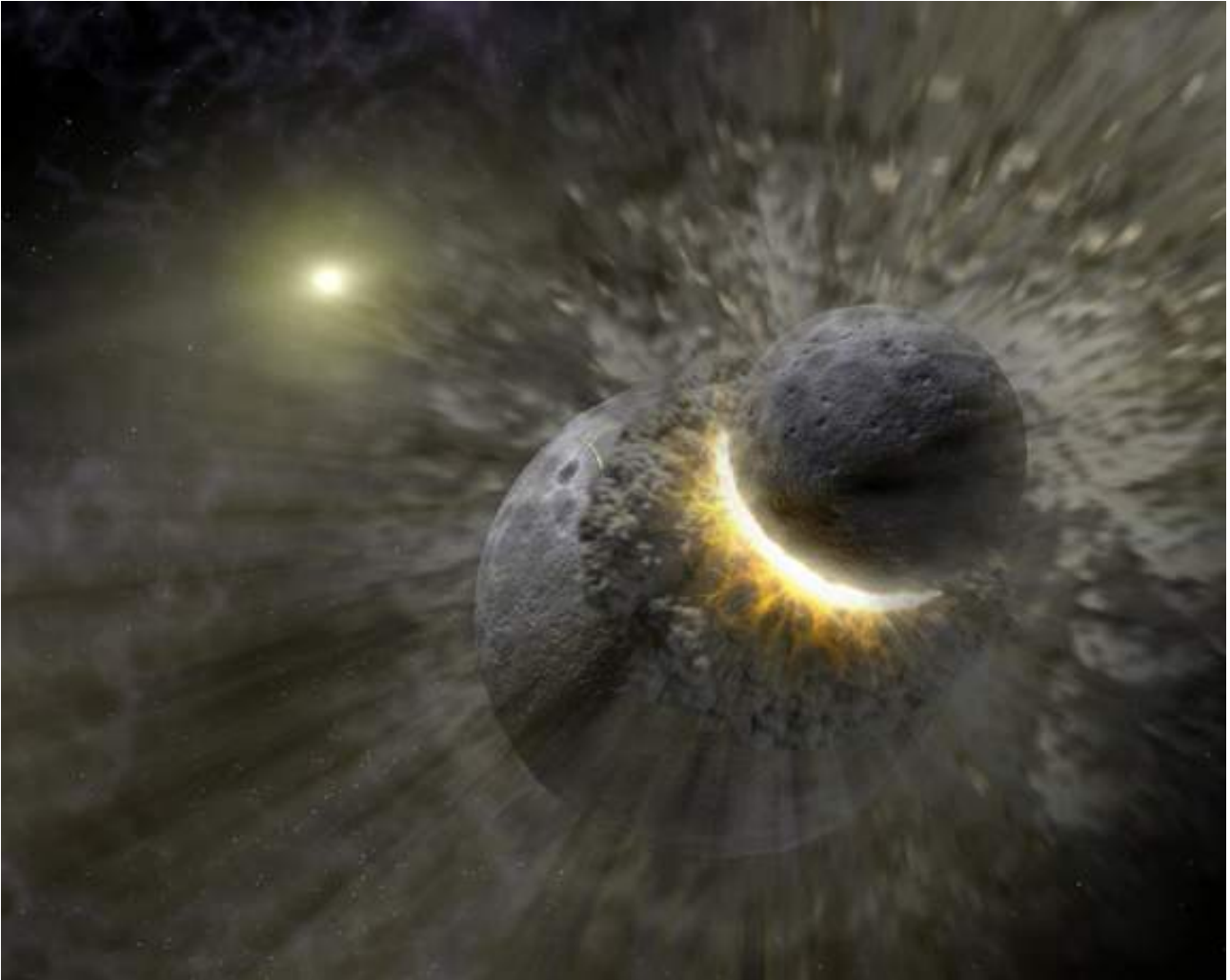


Tie in the Dots



Around 4.5 Billion years ago, an incident occurred. Two pieces of real estate in the universe tried to occupy the same space. The result of this is that our planet continued on it's journey to becoming the only known planet in the year 2016 to have intelligent life, as well as a moon orbiting the planet and having an influence on the life on the planet below.

Earth as we now it now has evolved many times to become the life bearing planet currently ruled by some strange mammals known as human kind that have colonised every corner of the globe and themselves evolved into an industrialised technologically advanced society.

This global society has yet to find universal peace and continues to consume Earth's resources and war between states is continual, shifting around the world as economy's rise and fall. In amongst all of this there are places where life for the humans is relatively peaceful and they are able to enjoy what the world has to offer. In the context of time, humankind is just the latest blip on the radar and only time will tell what further impact humans will have in the bigger scheme of the universe. This short story will attempt to impart some feeling of what life was like across two time frames and at one geographic point.

I doubt this story will last as long as human kind or the Earth, however, a unique characteristic of humans is that they like to be entertained. Some fact, some fiction, I will try my best.

Stranger

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Barberton mountains 1887.

Jock Mactavish was a big boned Scotsman that left his native land due to an altercation with another big boned Scotsman. Only one survived, and even though no charges were brought he was a pariah in his community. His father and grandfather were coal miners and digging was in his blood. He scraped enough money for his passage to Durban and his size and weight found him in demand for the heavy jobs. One of the best paying was getting supplies North of Durban through the Drakensberg mountains and up to the Lowveld. It was here that he got gold fever.

The lowveld was hellish country, the humidity and lush vegetation and forests made it ideal for mosquito's and Tsetse fly, but on a job to the top of Barberton mountain, Jock found the air to be clean with no sign of these plagues. His employer at the time needed him to get Ox drawn wagons up the side of the mountain to a settlement on the top. There were many miners there trying their luck. Tough grizzled men that had no claustrophobia would crawl into small holes and crevices where the gold veins had been found. Using simple pulley's and picks and shovels they would venture into these holes chasing the gold, often just getting enough to buy food and drink for the day, but each one chasing the dream of the big strike.

Salt, sugar, coffee and basic foodstuffs as well as rot gut alcohol were in big demand on top and top rates were charged to get it there. Jock saw this and compared his meagre wage with what his employer was charging and what the miners were paying. To pay those exorbitant prices meant that the miners must have being making the money from the gold to be able to pay those prices. His mind was made up. His employer of course had never made the trip to the top and back. It was dangerous hard back breaking work that involved doubling an Ox wagon team to get one wagon up the steep and rocky track. Sometimes taking days and involving sleeping under the wagon on rocks that continually poked you. Jock told his mate to tell his employer that he has taken his wages in goods and that if he wanted to speak to him, he was welcome to come up the mountain.

It took only half a day for Jock to find a partner for a 50% share in exchange for his broad back and strong hands on a claim that was producing good gold. Jock was more than pleased at the way life was turning out and determined to learn as much as he could from the miners in order for him to be successful. Each day he was up early and quick to work, his partner gave equal share of the work and they made a good team. His partner would work the this seams where Jock would not fit. Jock would create space by smashing rock around him in order to work and to follow the vein. Between them they were amongst the top producers and true to his Scottish heritage was miserly with his money choosing not to spend it on the booze and overpriced whores that also inhabited the mountain top.



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Barberton mountains Sept 2016

The man sat on a rock slightly higher than the gravel road. With a sigh he looked at the vehicles stopped in Indian file on the thin gravel road that traverses the Barberton mountain. Most of the vehicles were Mitsubishi Pajero's. This was a special trip as it was to be the last one of it's kind for the Pajero club owners.

Roelf Le Roux is a geologist and miner. He is also an expert on the geology of the Barberton area and on top of all of that has owned no less than 7 Pajero's to date.

He starts his speech by explaining that the rocks in this area are amongst the oldest known in the world and then indicates where they have been worn. Seen clearly are two grooves running from the top of the mountain, across the road and continuing to the bottom. We are told that these are in fact tracks made by the Ox wagons that were used to take supplies and mining equipment to the top in the 1800's when gold was found there. The spot at which we are parked has two names. The gates of paradise, so called as this is the altitude that the mosquito's do not go beyond and in times gone by, the humidity. Going up you crossed the gates of paradise, going down, that same gate become the gate to hell. Descending into the valley meant mosquito's, humidity, tsetse fly's, dirty water and unsanitary conditions in the settlements.

I can't help noticing that this is not the only junction, Roelf has done this for the past five years and has told us this is his last time. He plans to retire soon. His knowledge around the rocks is fascinating to say the least, he has a passion that is not often seen today as he tells us that where we are sitting was once a beach. Bloody hell, must have been a big pond. Big ponds mean big fish, this explains why we grew legs and got out of there.

We have travelled from our camp site to this spot with an interesting and diversified collection of people. Afrikaans, English and one guy with a broad Scots accent speaking Afrikaans plus some Europeans all add to the mix. Big guys, little guys and some in between, most of whom have brought spouses or family members with



have pitched camp on Friday night and are drawn into every word that Roelf utters. Friday night consisted of introductions and the usual pattern of atom like behaviour as we spin around like protons and neutrons finding our electromagnetic force that binds us to that side of the bonfire as opposed to the other. Like Neanderthal man the need for fire was paramount providing heat, a means to burn perfectly good meat and a social meeting place for everyone. Mix in some bad beer from SA breweries and some good red wine from SA's best wineries and you had the recipe for a great evening. Stories and jokes flowed alongside the alcohol and as usual, some people forgot to go to bed. Others like myself were forced to do the dishes.

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The weather was like a typical English day, wet and miserable, but the PAJERO crew are made of stern stuff. Wet weather jackets for the English, bare chests for the Afrikaners and for the other nationalities represented it ranged from a blue beanie to poncho's and wellies. The guys looked particularly sexy in their designer wellies with the orange logo.

I can report that there were no fights and the only harsh words were when I offered Mr Le Roux a chocolate beer. I was asked in the course of the evening if I missed England, yeah right, like I miss piles.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the camping set ups were as diversified as the group. Off road trailers and caravans to ground tents and roof top tents were all on show. One set up was so vast it was nicknamed the Taj Mahal. The ground tent guys were very clever as they left their wellies out all night so that they had rain water for coffee in the morning.



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Saturday morning was the same crappy English weather, but everyone was cheerful and looking forward to a day of adventure. Roelf led us out of the camp on bad roads that would have destroyed normal platkarre. It was 4llc up and down the ridges that criss cross over the mountain. There was literally miles of smiles from our little troop. Alongside the Pajero's there was also a Triton, a well kitted Prado and a wee Jimny. Being the kind and considerate group that we were, we stopped often to make sure the Triton nor the Prado had eaten the Jimny. Amongst the group there was not a single breakdown or report of damage. Roelf himself was driving an Isuzu (spit) but I promised I would not mention that.

Following the Isuzu (spit) we stopped at places of interest where we were shown old photographs, black and white and sepia that showed the old mine workings. One thinks of the 1800's like you would medieval times, but the fact is that there was technology. Proven by these old pictures that showed wire rope and pylons used to take ore from the dig point to the valley for processing. It took little imagination to see how difficult the conditions must have been. Hard manual labour and constant weather changes from boiling hot to freezing cold all had to be contended with.

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Roelf had identified an old working from the topography maps and one old picture that he found. At this site there was a terrifying hole that dropped straight down. You could see an old pylon and we were shown how that would have been used to get the ore to the valley floor below. There were sections of road that needed that 4x4 engaged and the surface was very rocky in places. The clouds were all around us and every one exercised caution



On our travels there are a number of old buildings and the remains of such. Sign boards indicate what once stood here. The Old Victoria hotel, the Post office and a cemetery are all still easily identified. Eureka City was a thriving community in the late 1800's even boasting it's own race course over the top of the mountain. Some bugger was really smart, what better way to get a miner to part with his gold than betting on the horses. Wonder who came off that mountain better off. The miners or the traders.

Moving on we made our way down into the valley and entered the mine itself through security. The aim here was to do a road on the other side of the mine. However when we got there we found the road blocked and we were unable to pass. The decision was made to go to the pub. Good decision I thought.



The pub was a festive affair and The Pajero club guys came to the party with a draw for some prizes. Anything from a cap to a service and a tyre pressure monitor system. No one left empty handed. There was a presentation for Roelf in

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appreciation for his efforts. He is going to look so dumb in that Pajero jacket driving an Isuzu (spit).

After a strict one beer each (cross fingers) we went back up the mountain via the Sheba mine rd. Stopping at an excavation, the testosterone came out and the guys went to play. This is the thing with driving a Pajero, you see a hole, you just got to drive in it.



After some of the vehicles had conquered the hole, the mound was the next challenge. The shorty Pajero had the first go but even after trying TC, no TC, and difflock it was not to be done on the high side. The lower side however was no challenge for the shorty and the break over allowed the shorty to clear the peak and go down the other side. The Prado had a turn and looked impressive on the way up, not so impressive when it got hooked on the top and no amount of wheel spinning or swearing would move it.

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The snatch ropes were rolled out. At this time I had walked down the road a short way for a nature call. It was a close call as I jumped out of my skin at the loud bang I heard. My Swambo buys me Viagra, not because I need it, but because it stops me pissing on my slippers in the morning. Did it's job here too.

The snatch strap parted ways with itself and another was needed to get the behemoth of the mound.

Time to go back to camp and get that burning pile of wood going again. I like going camping with younger people, it's wonderful, they do all the hard work like getting wood and shovelling coals for your braai. This was basic bush camping except fore the guys who had a full setup inclusive of showers and porta potties. Our camp did come with a thing though. To call it a toilet would perhaps be kind. This was more of a plastic torture chamber the kind fire departments use. You know that one where they toss you in and you have to see how long you could hold your breath for. One of the guys connected a long hose to the roof and the other end the braai poker, this was used to start the big bonfire every night. Soaking wet wood was alight in seconds.

Once again the evening was filled with camaraderie and stories. There was myself and one other guy who had the ORRA frequencies on the radio's, we eventually took up positions in front and the rear of the convoy. The best chip of the day was.

“Pajero group, there are goats in the rd, goats in the rd.
Reply” copy that, we will let the wellie boys know”

He he he he,

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So now you want to know what happened to Jock Mactavish. I have always been open to psychic connections and Jock came to me in a dream and told me his story.

Some people thought that he just disappeared off the mountain one night taking his gold with him. His partner told the same story, but the truth is that after not seeing him for three days, his partner burnt his clothes, stole his gold and kept the story going.

Jock could not sleep one night, this was after a day of horse racing on the mountain top. Jock was a little dour and never bothered with the gambling and heavy drinking, so he got up while still dark and wandered off looking for new ground to mine. He was several kilometres away when he spotted a small waterway and tell tale iron oxide on the surface. The water disappeared under the ground and Jock just had to explore where it went. Taking his pick he first scraped away the plant life along the watercourse, he saw the water went under a rock and decided he would try to move it. He pushed and it would not move, he pulled, it would not move. Finally he took a swing with his pick axe. As he hit it a mighty blow, the earth under the rock and where Jock was standing gave way.

Both the rock and Jock fell 30 feet before getting wedged in the crevice as it got narrower. Jock broke his pelvis in the fall and was wedged by his big chest against both sides of the walls. His pick was gone and Jock hung suspended with no use of his legs and nothing for him to grip with his hands to haul him up.

It took three days for life to finally leave him.

Over the years his clothes rotted and the flesh fell from his bones and finally they fell in a heap another hundred feet down the crevice leaving no visible evidence on the surface.

He is still there on that mountain and if you are so inclined, he will come to you to tell his story

