

Looking At ...How'd We

We, in the modern world, spend countless hours in pursuit of our hobby--obtaining, organizing, and housing the fruits of our passions. And, all the while, we're surrounded by amazing technology to aid us in that pursuit--electronic data basing, instant communications, faxing, scanning, and so on. Boy, our predecessors in the past didn't know what they were missing!

On the other hand, our lives, today, are incredibly complex...the goals we set for ourselves, the goals our societies set, the pressures from a hundred and one sources each day, just living amidst thousands, hundreds of thousands, and, in some case, *millions*, of our peers sometimes present seemingly insurmountable problems. Even the collector's most precious commodity--spare time--brings headaches...“I'm bored!” “There's nothing to do!” “I've lost that sense of accomplishment!” “Who am I, and what am I here for?”...to...“There's *too much* to do!” “There aren't enough hours in the day!” “I'm getting further and further behind!” ...There just may be something to the old adage, “Ignorance is bliss!” It wasn't always this way, you know...

Way back towards the early Paleolithic, our ancestors didn't have any of these concerns. Ah, life was so simple then...often deadly, and always short...but so simple. People merely lived to eat and procreate. A full belly and the next generation assured...What else was there? Nothing! Every person on earth was a hunter-gatherer. You went out to see what the land had to offer and just hoped it would be enough that day. And if you couldn't meet that goal...procreating was a mute point! And, people lived and traveled in very small groups...Less mouths to feed, less people to worry about, less intra-group conflicts. Thus, life was simple. You survived, or you didn't. No collectors back then. No spare time for any pursuits that didn't directly contribute to survival. Then, from one perspective, the evil serpent appeared, or, from another perspective, our hero arrived...*progress!*

Some long-lost Da Vinci picked up a branch, flaked a rock, sharpened a bone...*tools!* The odds of successfully hunting, and surviving, increased. Of course, now we had all the burdens that come with using tools...making them, carrying them, finding the right materials. Still, life was quite uncluttered. Ah, but progress didn't stop! In the second half of the Paleolithic came clothes, fire, shelters...and, one of the building blocks of civilization...living together in large groups. The latter necessitated much more complex patterns of behavior, socializing, traditions and customs, laws, punishments, leadership, etc.

Plus, also at this general point, people came upon the idea that the supernatural (gods, spirits, etc.), the belief in which probably went back much earlier, could now be managed, directed, and generally used to people's advantage. Thus, we see many of the prehistoric cave art scenes at Lascaux, France, and Alta Mira, Spain, depicting hunting scenes...which anthropologists interpret as attempts to *make* such successes happen.

Still, though, everyone was still a hunter-gatherer, no specialized jobs. Life was still simple. Life still offered no spare time. But now life offered a little better chance at...eating and procreating!

Then around 20,000 BC, the Mesolithic began, as at least some people in the world learned to make better stone tools than the previous models. And in was here that the next giant step forward was accomplished...probably by a woman. “Hey! Look at this! I can grow my own food!” and the world of

Collecting *Get Here?*

Mankind was forever changed. True, this was only horticulture, or small-scale growing...no plow, no going out to work on the south 40 acres, just gardening. A huge advance, to be sure, especially in light of what was to follow, but at this point growing your own food was much too haphazard to base your survival on it. The men still went out to hunt, but now the women had an extra chore (more housework, *groan!*)...tending those little garden plots, and, perhaps the next time the group came back to that spot, there would be some edible plants that wouldn't have otherwise been there. A little extra was certainly welcome under any circumstances. Still, though, there was no spare time; still nomadic; still no hobbies!

Somewhere in here, yet another economy was born--herding. This *was*, at the time, a much more tangible improvement in getting food. Now, we didn't have to worry about going out and finding food; it was always *right there* in our herds! All we had to do was take care of the animals, and our food intake would be assured...which also meant...more food, more procreating!

It was in the Neolithic, though, starting at about 10,000 BC., that the basics of life, as we know it today, began. That's when horticulture turned into agriculture--full-scale farming, plow, irrigation. Agriculture precipitated a radically different life-style: no more being nomadic, people had to stay in one place and tend the crops; food surpluses, if all went well; permanent buildings (interesting what the apparent first real buildings were...not people's homes...not even bars (!)...*temples!* And these early temples also acted as granaries). From the food surpluses, some people could now have specialized jobs: priests, soldiers, artists, etc. They didn't have to get their own food; they could be fed from the surplus.

All of these results of agriculture are also requirements for eventually becoming civilized. Plus, here, for the first time, was an economy that resulted in a significant amount of spare time. Farming was long, back-breaking labor, to be sure, but when the harvests finally came in, there was a period where people could kick back for awhile. Spare time was another requirement for civilization, and, of course, for hobbies!

Thus, not surprisingly, right at the end of the Neolithic, some people begin to make their tools from metal (goodbye, Stone Ages!) and invent writing...and the first civilization appears--Sumeria! So, did hobbling start with the Sumerians? You probably think I have an answer for that, don't you?...I don't! I don't if we'll ever know. We *do* know that such ancient civilizations as the Egyptians, Chinese, Greeks, and Romans certainly had individuals who collected items. The great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, for example, collected literature and scholarly works from all over the known world and amassed a huge library.

Personally, I'd plunk for a Sumerian or someone just before the appearance of the first civilization. Perhaps someone putting together a collection of seeds...or pots...or lizards! Who knows? But without that spare time...no collecting...no hobbies at all. So, the next time you find yourself lamenting a lack of spare time for your collecting, remember all we've had to go through to get what we have! Besides, there *are* solutions for using your time more efficiently. I've found, for example, that since I've shed a wife I have much more time to devote to my hobbies. You may not want to go that far...*but you can't tell me the thought has never crossed your mind!*