

BLOWING HOT AND COLD ON GLOBAL WARMING

Sean O'Meara has Green Thoughts in a "Green" Shade

Our well-meaning editor said he wanted to produce a "green" issue, so as I wander the streets of Highgate I wonder what we can do about saving the environment and holding off global warming. Some possible answers to the question present themselves even as I wait to cross the Archway Road to the Underground and watch the endless line of commuters headed for downtown. A lot of those drivers could take public transport thus saving the world's depleting oil reserves and cutting down on carbon dioxide output. The same goes for all those school-run drivers and if they must drive, then why not use economical cars rather than giant, show-off Chelsea chariots and the like. Or buy a second-hand milk float; now there's an idea; give it a prestigious paint job, install some stylish seats and the kids will love it.

I have to keep my own feet on the ground, of course, what with all the carbon that air travel produces, according to the latest vogue campaign. Someone suggested that the anti-smoking people, with victory in sight, need a new cause to keep them busy, so they've moved over to join the stop air-travel lobby. Now I'm feeling guilty flying to see the grandchildren without at least planting a tree or two. That's not so easy, but could I save the airline fuel if I lose weight and merely pack a toothbrush and a change of underwear in a paper bag?

The question facing all of us today is how big is my carbon footprint? Have I got a bigger carbon footprint than you? Normally size matters, but now we have to tread lightly when it comes to carbon. Working out how to shrink the footprint is complicated, much harder than getting to grips with recycling. And a lot of the people I talk too are not convinced about global warming anyway.

What I think is a much more convincing and achievable cause is the business of saving the world's resources. That fossil fuels are running out is a fact that anybody can understand. Turn down the central heating a notch or two; drive at sixty mph not seventy; switch off the standby function of computers and TVs. Boil a half kettle instead of a full one; walk rather than ride whenever possible. Do all these, we are told and we can make a real contribution to saving the world's fuel supply.

I was ready to stop at that when a vegetarian advocate on Radio 4 told us that the world's farmed animals produced more polluting and warming gases than all the world's transport combined. So now I have to give up steaks and lamb chops and watch our pastures and sheep-nibbled down lands being planted with endless beans and oilseed rape. That might please the anti-carnivores and the makers of bio-fuels, but it's not a pleasant prospect in any sense of the word. Where will I be able to buy a woollen sweater to compensate for lowering the heating or some decent leather shoes to make my increased walking more comfortable? Trying to lead today's good life is becoming ever more challenging.