

Posthistoric Travel Advisory

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 10 Oct 1999

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Ori Kowarsky — 10 Oct 1999, 17:20

For those of you who wish to study first-hand the posthistoric world and to visit and photograph the era's few extant buildings, but lack the time or the resources to travel up and down the seven continents or to tinker with clumsy mechanisms, this writer whole-heartedly recommends that you pay a call to Bute, Montana.

Bute, Montana -- whose civic forefathers considered, in its heyday, changing its name to the wonderful "Copperopolis" -- was once the most densely populated urban centre between the two coasts. For about a century Bute sat on top of a deposit of cupric wealth such as would give Dr. Talos pause. The combination of massive, short-term wealth, extreme environmental degradation, mechanisation of tasks once performed by humans and the mass exodus of the subject population in a condensed space of time has had the effect of creating a small pocket of space where the aesthetic and environmental conditions of the Commonwealth apply, down to the chilly weather and gorgeous sunsets. The Bute airport, a small landing strip, is considered an "international" airport because it is a destination, appositely enough, for Argentinian and Chilean flyers carrying South American mining executives eager to see the future awaiting their part of the globe.

The centrepiece of the posthistoric experience at Bute is the Anaconda Copper Mine. One guides one's vehicle up the empty asphalt into the deserted hills. In the lonely distance, one can see what appear to be dump-trucks of such enormous size that a single tire's diameter exceeds the height of an average man widing up and down a single hill in a monotonous caravan.

One parks one's car in an empty lot, and enters a circular tunnel which was bored through about ten feet of concrete. On the other side is an observation deck made of rotting wood, with rusted chickenwire and razor wire fencing cordoning you off from the pit below. This is the Anaconda. The pit, one hundred years ago, was a mountain. In the course of a century it has been literally inverted into a circular depression a mile deep and a mile across. Twenty years ago the bottom of the pit was accessible and had another mile of mining shafts dug underneath it, with pumps siphoning off the ground water. Then the mine closed, and the pumps were shut off. The pit is now filled with a reddish-ochre water which is so concentrated with arsenic and mercury that any bird which alights on its surface dies within minutes. At twilight, the water turns black. It is currently rising at a rate of a foot per year. There is a prominently displayed iron box with a fat black button on it. If you press the button, a recorded audio history of the pit will crackle out of the hanging speakers in an unidentifiable language.

Presiding over the pit is a top an adjacent mountain is a fifty-foot tall aluminum and copper statue of the Virgin Mary done in the art deco style. It did not turn to follow me with its gaze as I walked around. Despite the enormous value it would have had in resolving certain thorny issues being discussed on this newsgroup from time to time, I did not ask the locals whether they knew the identity or religious provenance of the structure.

As the name "Bute" implies the town is situated in the mountains of Montana. At its birth the

town was a klepocracy; at its zeinith it was an oligarchy. As a result, the town planning is an anarchic mess, bordering on the organic. I shall discuss the poorer quarters first: the homes of mining labourers past and present are ramshackle, single storied, built of brick and concrete, repaired with plaster and plastic. The workers' neighborhoods stretch up the northeastern face of a mountain. They are currently 60% deserted.

The houses of the wealthy are closer to the Main Street core. They were built by men with enormous but transient fortunes, unimpeded by any urban planning or concessions to taste. They are architecturally grandiose, made of brick, shod in copper, borrowing from many styles, bizarre. Some are museums; some are still privately owned; one is a caravansary.

The latter, where one may stay for the night, is the colorfully named "Copper King Mansion". Everything from its glory days that hasn't been bolted down has been carted off, and been replaced by three generations' worth of bric-a-brac. The house contains secret passageways, a servant's house inside the walls of the master house, and hidden doorways. A 10 foot by 17 foot gilded mirror troubles the depths of a corridor on the ground floor; travellers who have a tight schedule for their return back home are advised not to stand too close to it.

Ori Kowarsky

Jim Henley — 10 Oct 1999, 23:48 · follows Ori Kowarsky

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On
Behalf Of Ori Kowarsky

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Oh, you mean Poisonville! Excuse me, _Personville_!

Very nice travelogue, Ori. Thanks muchly.

Best,

Jim

"There will always be Costello/
a little larceny Bacharach,
in everyone" "My Thief"