



Alive, alive-o: Kyle, Brooke and Mandy serve fresh seafood. Photo by John Lawrence

Change young lives in Nepal

John Dixon, who lives in the High Road, makes an annual visit to Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries, and collects funds for disadvantaged Nepali school children. Here he explains why money is desperately needed.

One Nepali village I visit called Katunje does not have a school so the villagers have banded together and built a pre-school classroom in local stone. Given their willingness to help themselves, I arranged for the school to be equipped with coloured and leaded pencils, rubbers, copy books, two writing slabs and a school bell. The bell made the children feel really special.

Now there is a need for materials for a children's toilet which the villagers will build. Materials are expensive, beyond the reach of the villagers. A bag of cement costs £10, more than a good day's wages, and has to be carried on a villager's back up the mountain from the river. The present toilet is primitive and unhygienic. The nearest school for the older children is in the next village. They have a tough climb and descent which takes about one and a half hours. That is bad enough but on the way they must negotiate a narrow dangerous mountain pass. I am looking for help in raising money for the children's toilet and hopefully for a small classroom for the older children to spare them the long, daily trek to the nearest school, also for small children's clothes and toys for my next visit. If you can help in any way please contact me at johndixon1902@hotmail.co.uk

Whelk-ome to a taste of the seaside

A new business has musseled its way into a small corner off the High Road. The Fresh Shellfish stall is selling cockles and winkles next door to the Alexandra pub in Church Lane. Jellied eels, prawns, crayfish, oysters, whelks, lobster tails and mussels are all chalked up on the blackboard at the stall set up by market trader Mark O'Dwyer.

Shellfish are bought fresh from Billingsgate Market at 4am on a Friday morning and they're on sale in Church Lane on Friday evenings from 4pm and during the day on Saturdays and Sundays.

Mandy Longcluse, of Font Hills, is behind the counter along with her son Kyle and daughter Brooke. Mandy said: "Shellfish stalls are few and far between around here, and people are surprised to see us the first time. We've had a really positive response and a lot of passing trade."

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

No fly zone

The skies had fallen quiet, no one was heading off into the wide blue yonder for a fortnight on the Costa del Living, no Sleazy Jets were landing and bar owners from Riga to Prague were in shock. Yes, the great green dream had come true and the only cloud on the horizon was Icelandic.

Why? Because thanks to the double eruption from Eyjafjallajökull, Iceland had done something that no striking air traffic controller could ever do, it had ended air travel.

In the weird world of weird places there is no place as weird as Iceland.

It's not just that in Iceland Bjork is seen as normal. It's not that it only has two seasons: winter, when it's dark all the time and everyone stays in and gets drunk; and summer, when it's light all the time and everyone goes out and gets drunk. No, what makes Iceland seriously weird is that it's volcano central, and, with 130 of the things, volcanoes are to Iceland what acne is to the average teenager.

Iceland has tried hard to stop people thinking about volcanoes or Bjork. The country even tried to bankrupt itself and everyone else before the American banks started collapsing. They did try to make it up to everyone and had a referendum on giving the money back, but everyone came out of the pub and voted. The polite answer was 'no'. The less polite answer is not printable, but involved volcanoes.

Even Iceland's contribution to world economic meltdown is just a post-modern joke compared to the big one back in 1783 when Laki, another of Iceland's rabid volcanoes, kicked off the French Revolution. It started erupting in June 1783 and kept going until February 1784. A full eight months of belching fire, ash and sulphur into the air. There was a dark cloud across northern Europe, ships were stuck in harbour and the Asian monsoon didn't happen. No rain, no rice, no food, not good.

In England the crops failed, the temperature soared and meat rotted as soon as it was butchered. Naturally, starving people get pretty restless, something that the French king didn't spot, so when, in 1789, he called the first parliament in a long time he got a bit more than he bargained for; he got a revolution and an appointment with death.

Like I said, pretty weird things come out of Iceland and a few cancelled flights might just be the start of something. And if it's not, I'm sure that some coke-crazed Hollywood movie magnate can be relied upon to invent it.

Thrilling reading

By Diana Cormack

Despite the inclement March weather, there was a good gathering at the Black Gull Bookshop to hear local author Jeff Robson reading extracts from his first novel *Racing to Armageddon*. Drinks and nibbles helped with the ambience as did relaxing in the cosy corner set aside at the back of the shop surrounded by hundreds of books.



Jeff Robson reading extracts from his novel. Photo by Diana Cormack

Jeff describes his novel as "a combination of World War Two yarn and Cold War espionage thriller." It certainly put me in mind of both genres and before long I was wondering who would play the lead in the film of the book. The sub-

sequent question and answer session proved that I wasn't the only one thinking that way and also revealed the depth of the author's historical knowledge and interest. Other similar events are planned for the bookshop at 121 High Road.

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