

Every year new discoveries! It seems that each year Nana and I come to West Palm we hear about another interesting bird or animal that's indigenous to this area. Last year as you undoubtedly remember we learned about the Soar-Sewer. I think it was the year before that we discovered that the famed Whiffle-flooo-bird was a native of Florida and migrated North following the Goofen-goffers. They thought they were really flying further South because, as you know, Goofen-goffers fly backwards so these dumb Whiffle-flooo-birds were following heads instead of tails and thought they were the ones flying backwards! I suppose it was an easy mistake to make if you're working with a bird-brain.

Well this year we heard about willets and cumpers. A willet (or is it won't it?) is a name given to any of many long-legged, snipe-like wading birds. You can check that out with either Mr. Funk or Mr. Webster. We see a lot of them down here. The ibis is a member of that family. But the cumber, we found out, was on the endangered species list hundreds of years ago and endangered itself to extinction even before I was born. Cumpers sounded much more interesting to Nana and I than Willets so we have been digging up all the information we can on them. Our painstaking research has been long and exhausting, but fascinating. Let me tell you what we've learned so far.

Somewhere between the time that dinosaurs disappeared and man began walking upright cumpers came into being. Obese, clumsy and lethargic, they were constantly getting in the way of every creature that roamed the earth in those days. Why, they even got in their own way! An example. A Neanderthal man, first name of Nookoo, might be staggering down a narrow path in the rain forest under the burden of a mammoth mammoth's tusk which he was lugging to the jungle equivalent of our 7-11 - they used ivory as money in those days - and there sound asleep and blocking the path would be a cumber with his rolls of blubbersome fat overflowing the right or way. Or Neekee Neanderthal, Nookoo's girlfriend, after rinsing out her grape leaf undies would reach up to hang them on the nearest liana and blocking her way would be a smelly, fat, green, wart-covered recumbent cumber. You couldn't climb over the lazy beasts. They were too squishy-soft and slippery...and MOUNTAINOUS! Their natural slimy-ness was attributed to the fact that they spent a great deal of time in the water. They were amphibious, you see. And ugly??? Man, they were ugly UGLY! They were so ugly their faces would stop clocks, and that will explain why clocks weren't invented until hundreds of years later.

I think if cumpers were lying around in our world today they would most resemble manatees. Manatees don't have that dark green wart-dotted hide, of course, and aren't nearly as large, but they do seem to have the cumber's personality. They're rather dim-witted and fat and even though they never venture ashore they do manage to get in the way of boats quite often. So if you picture a manatee - or sea cow - or sea elephant, if you prefer - then in your mind multiply its size by $1\frac{1}{2}$, color it green and dot on plenty of wart-like bumps, add four short squatty legs - one on each corner - with big fat flat webbed feet, lengthen its bulbous nose until it resembles a short version of an elephant's trunk on either side of which are tiny black beady heavy-lidded eyes, then finally add a wide blade of a fish-like tail which the cumber used not only for propulsion and stability in the water but also to drag on the ground when he came out of the water to obliterate his footprints, and then you have a fairly

accurate picture of a cumber. Sort of like a mammoth malformed cucumber with legs and a tail. Come to think of it, that could be how the cucumber got its name! ("Cue the cumber, Pierre. It's time to toss the salad.")

As the eons flew by a radical change took place in the cumber's physical appearance. Some cumpers were born* with larger tails than others and those cumpers developed superior swimming skills. As a result, these big-tailed benemoths tended to stay under water for longer and longer periods and this caused a radical change in their appearance. Their legs became smaller and weaker from dis-use and after awhile they used these thinner legs as fins to help steer as they swam. But the biggest change was their color. Their dark green hides got lighter and lighter until they were nearly gamboge. (So, look it up.) This was the result of their getting so little sunlight, you see. You can imagine what happened as a result of this change can't you? Of course. This group with the steotopygic rears tended to band together - sort of a 'cumpers-of-a-feather' syndrome. The remaining cumpers with more svelte rear anatomy were shunned and made to feel inferior to their more generously endowed relatives. They couldn't swim as well for one thing and their shiny dark green iridescent hide contrasted sharply with the pale sea-bound cumpers. Prejudice! Just because the land cumpers' skin was a different color from the sea cumpers!!

Well, the cumpers with the smaller tails spent more and more time on land, partly to disassociate themselves from the big-tailed group who felt so la-dee-dah superior and partly to sharpen their skills (which were already annoyingly adequate) in obstructing progress. Man would have discovered fire generations earlier if there hadn't been a cumber draped over the fireplace. A crude wheel was invented but discarded as a useless toy after several accidents involving severe personal injury because happy unicycling neanderthals collided with recumbent cumpers on the wheel trails. One inventor of that period even had an idea for a steam engine but gave up in frustration because the cumpers had prevented the discovery of fire with which to cook the water.

Blessed with the warm year-round Florida climate and 27 hours of sunlight daily the cumpers' (land) hides darkened to a rich forest green. The sun didn't cure their warts, though, and they remained just as ugly and lethargic as ever - maybe even more so. They were always in the way... always all ways. For instance, one early evening Nookoo Neanderthal, the young man of whom we spoke earlier, invited his beautiful slope-headed girlfriend Neekee, the young lady of whom we spoke earlier, to walk with him to Ooops Point, the local lovers' hangout of the day...or night, for that matter. Naturally they couldn't get to Ooops Point any other way except walking since the cumpers had effectively obstructed the invention of any other means of transportation. Neekee grunted an enthusiastic affirmative. She was hoping Nookoo might at long last 'pop the question' and ask her to carve a cave for them to live in. She had sharpened her stone chisels and put new handles on all her pounders weeks before and was anxious to get to work. (Men were a great deal smarter in those days.)

So they shuffled up the trail with Neekee the respectful three paces

*Some historians believe cumpers were hatched like dinosaurs but Nana and I are convinced by our extensive research that they were mammals.

behind right where she should have been. As they rounded a bend in the trail Nookoo glanced back to be sure Neekee was maintaining the proper distance behind him and stumbled over the toe of a huge dozing lumber spread out across the trail right where it ended at Ooops Point.

"Ooops", he yelled as he stumbled. (Why else would they have called the place Ooops Point?)

This slumbering lumber was monstrous! Had to be at least 53 feet in diameter and sprawled out just beyond him were two somewhat smaller ones completely covering the whole Ooops Point clearing. Poor Nookoo fell head first onto - or more correctly, into - the soft, squishy, smelly (I didn't mention they smelled? An oversight. They did!) folds of flesh. As he fell he yelled "Neekee - there are some lumbars here!"

Neekee couldn't understand all of what Nookoo yelled since part of his words were smothered by the folds of lumber flesh into which he fell.

"Lumbars? Some?", she asked...and a new word was born. Lumber-some. We still use that word today. I'll bet that until now you never made the connection between the animal lumber and the word cumbersome. Right?

Well, by this time in history the division of the lumber species was complete. There was now a lumber(sea), the aquatic mammal and lumber(land), the earth bound variety. /The separation and prejudice felt by the two colors is as prevalent today with people as it was back then with lumbars. Colored lumbars don't mess with white lumbars much (and vice versa) and the responsibility for the prejudice must be shared by both. But I digress.

As the lumber numbers increased they were more and more in the way. Man felt himself en-lumbered, you might say. Some lumbars are merely cumbersome but many lumbars become impossible! There were so many lumbars lying about that every few months man would be forced to drive a herd of lumbars(land) along a route from the edge of the sea to a more primitive area farther inland. Early on a given morning a call would be heard "lumber(land) drive. lumber(land) drive." It was the signal for all the able bodied men to gather at the water's edge, each one carrying what was called a 'persuader'. These persuaders were quite different one from the other according to the personal preference of the carrier. It might be a short stout length of tree limb or a long stick with a sharp point called a 'prodder-persuader' or even a flexible rope-like length of vine called a 'whipper-persuader'. Anything that could catch the attention of the lumbars(land) and tickle them enough to make them move. One of our main streets here at Sandalwood Lakes South was laid out along the exact same trail over which our ancestors drove these lazy beasts. As a matter of fact the name of the street proves the truth of what I've been telling you here. The name of the street is Lumber(land) Drive, only the sign writer left off the parentheses.

The lumbars(sea) were pretty much left alone since they weren't as much in man's way in the ocean. Lumbars(sea) only lumbered fishermen by tangling up nets and lines. I suppose you might say that they prevented an earlier invention of submarines or outboard motors but it would be hard to prove.

When you come down to see us you'll have a little better knowledge of the area now and you know how one of our streets got its name. Several uninformed people - even some who live here year round - have the notion that the street was named for a family named Cumberland. Not so. You know the truth and I expect you to be properly respectful of this area where once the lumbars rested.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

En-cumbered; to be outnumbered by or surrounded by cumberers.

Cu-cumber; a vegetable so named because its general shape and color resembles a tiny miniature land cumber.

Cumber-land; a land where cumberers once slept.
(Perhaps 'slumber-land' evolved from 'cumber-land')

Cumber-some; clumsy, unwieldy, bothersome. Originally meant a small group of cumberers.

Cumber-see; has no meaning today.

Cumber; to hinder by obstruction or interference; hamper.
Word was derived from the large clumsy animals from the post-dinosaurial period which were constantly in the way.

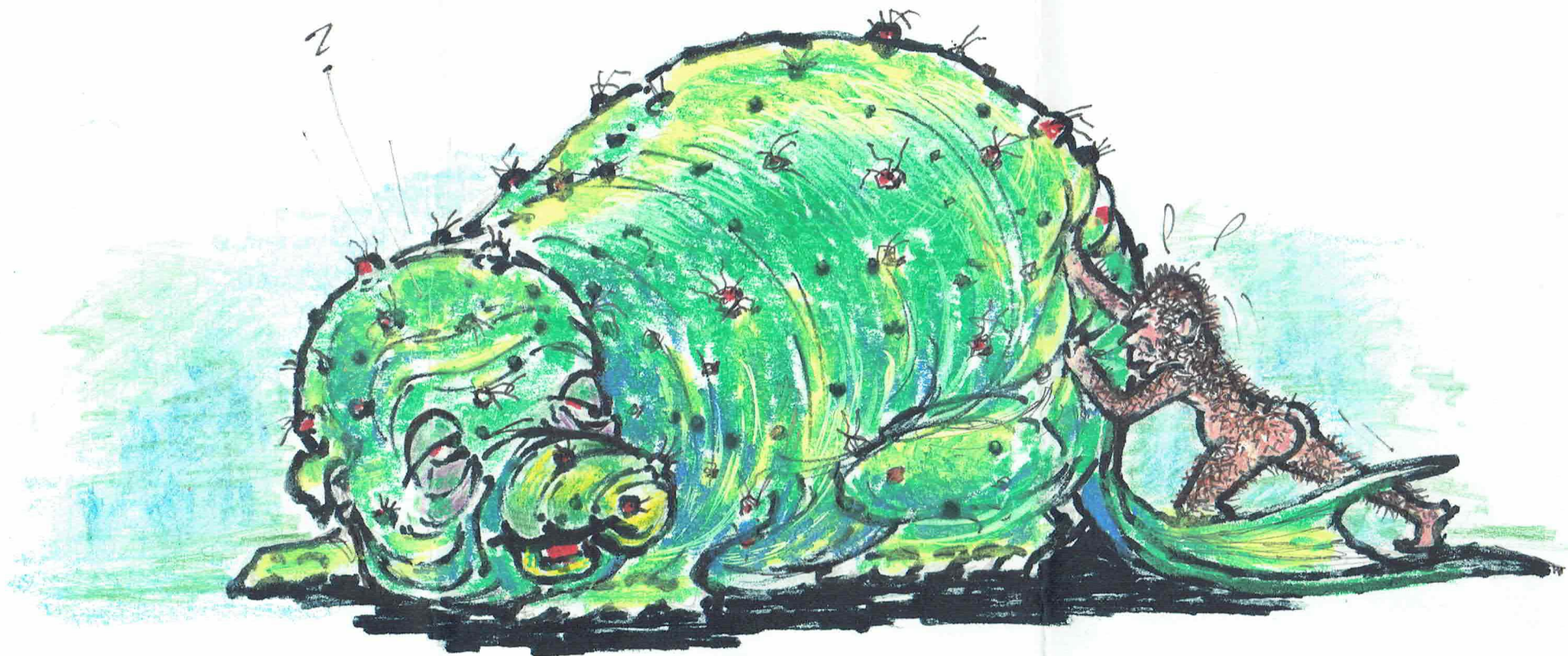
Hamper; synonym of 'cumber' (see above) as "I put clothes in a cumber".

De-cumber; an uncommon spelling of the winter month.

Re-cumber; to obstruct again.

Re-cumbent; lying down, reclining. Word was originally spelled re-cumber-ent from the lazy, post-dinosaurial beast who was usually found in a prone position

Mama and I are glad we can contribute to your education from time to time. If you have learned anything from this it will make our hours of research worth all of the effort. Remember, you should never stop learning. Learning is truth and VINCIT OMNIA VERITAS!



THE HANDSOME, HIRSUITE NOOKOO TRIES TO MOVE
A SMALL CUMBER OFF THE PATH TO OOOPS POINT.