

People and Places:

De'Ath drops in on Canada

Toronto and Marshall McLuhan, Montreal and Mordecai Richler, the Rockies, Vancouver, Niagara Falls — how do they strike an itinerant English writer, dropping in from London?

An interview with Jenny Pearson

Wilfred De'Ath, freelance journalist and broadcaster, recently went on a three-week tour of Canada sponsored by the Canadian Government. Something of a maverick, known for his personalized and highly idiosyncratic reactions to people and places, it goes without saying that De'Ath's views, as we say in the front of this magazine, "are not necessarily those of the Canadian Government". They are the independent reactions of a British intellectual who has travelled quite extensively in America and Europe and who wanted to see Canada for himself. The interview is published in two

parts; beginning here, it concludes in our March - April issue.

Wilfred De'Ath. Canada is, as I rather expected, a less aggressive version of America. There are great similarities, but Canada lacks the extremism of America. It's less hysterical. Canadians have slightly less drive than Americans. I thought probably I would like this: in fact, I didn't — I don't know whether this means I'm a natural extremist, but I prefer America. I love America.

When I talk about America, I have only been in the cities, — New York, San Francisco, Washington, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Philadelphia, places like that. I like the American get-up-and-go, I like the pulsating feel of the great cities — and this, apart from Toronto, I found missing in Canada.

Toronto

Toronto is the only one of the cities I visited that would compare with the great cities of America. It reminded me of Chicago, or even New York. I remember John Lennon once saying when I interviewed him in New York that if he couldn't live there he would live in Toronto and I can understand why. It's the only Canadian city, for my money, that has real sophistication. It's a place where things are happening. I could live in Toronto.

Jenny Pearson. What sort of things are happening?

W.D. Speaking as a media man, everything's happening there in terms of journalism and broadcasting, in terms of pop music and rock music. For instance, I watched a nationwide radio programme called *As it happens*, which is an hour and a half of instant, telephoned news. A girl sits in front of a telephone in Toronto taking calls from reporters all over Canada. She is called Barbara Fromm, a Canadian Jewess, and she is the best lady interviewer I have ever heard on radio or television anywhere. I think I hit a particularly good night. It was an hour and a half of solid news coming over in a telephone interview form with reporters or with people involved in a news situation. It doesn't let up for a minute, except for very brief snatches of records between the interviews. It's a very fast, pacey programme.

J.P. How does it come over technically?

W.D. That's one of the things that impressed me; technically, it's superb. Not

like telephone interviews in this country, which come over so muffled they sound as if they're being recorded 300 feet under water.

Most of all I was impressed with the polish of the show. It was so very alive. They cover anything that's happening in Canada — like, if there's a murder in some remote hamlet in Saskatchewan, they immediately get telephone lines to the village post mistress or someone who will tell them about it. But coverage is also international: they can speak to Paris or Rome or London. It is a better news programme than anything I've heard in Britain.

Against that, the home-based Canadian television programmes are terrible, just fumbling and amateur. Luckily they can pick up American television stations and everyone seems to watch these.

Marshall McLuhan

The best thing about Toronto is the kind of people one meets there. For example, I spent a day with Marshall McLuhan, probably the most interesting single day in the three weeks I was in Canada. I also met some of the people from his "Centre for Culture and Technology" at the University of Toronto — and they introduced me to other people, the way things happen in a city.

McLuhan has a weekly seminar for PhD students and I sat in on one of these. The people I met there were not only charming and friendly, they were also extremely bright. They were into communications in a way which, again, would leave us far behind. I can't imagine that there is a nucleus of people in Britain who are into this particular subject in the way his group are.

J.P. What is Marshall McLuhan saying and doing now?

W.D. McLuhan is very strange. His reputation is in decline in Europe, he was at his peak about 10 years ago when he was an international celebrity, a guru of our times. There are still parts of Canada where he is, along with Pierre Trudeau, the most well-known Canadian. In other parts disenchantment has set in already, as it has in Europe.

With his immediate group at the University of Toronto he works on very humbly. He was totally different from what I had imagined. I expected a kind of flash

Arctic wind power

An Arctic weather station using wind power to maintain the charge in its batteries has recently been set up in the Beaufort Sea, 400 miles north of the Mackenzie River Delta. The first of its kind, the unmanned station could, if it functions as planned, revolutionize monitoring and power systems in remote areas.

Manufactured by Bristol Aerospace of Winnipeg, the vertical-axis wind turbine is believed to be the first of its kind to be used commercially. Bristol's marketing manager, Bob Bevis, says that larger versions of the turbine could be used to generate power for lighting or radio transmission, but wind power is insufficient to supply heat at reasonable cost.

The Beaufort Sea Turbine, as the system is called, looks like an inverted egg beater thrust through the ice. The blades turn when the wind reaches 10 m.p.h. and emit a sound similar to a helicopter rotor — so perhaps it is as well nobody lives there. When the generator reaches a speed of 90 revolutions a minute, an attached alternator begins charging the bank of batteries.

Bristol designed and made the weather station with a C\$50,000 contract with the federal Atmospheric Environmental Service. Funds came mainly from Arctic petroleum operators, who need up-to-the-minute weather information to ensure safe drilling on rigs located on ships and man-made islands off the Arctic coast.