

THE COMMITTEE MEETING



How the Wapiti wallahs finally made it through the night—to Winton

Two Acts of treason from Tony Pearse (names changed to protect the unwitting and the unwary)

ACT 1
Scene 1

Somewhere in Southland, 6.30 am Sunday. An unofficially deputised organiser (UDO) makes random phone calls to all parts of Otago and Southland.

UDO (Speaking rapidly to save costs) Giddy TP it's mumble mumble speaking, is it raining? Pissing down here. There's a committee

meeting on Thursday. M wants one to discuss the field day, 'bout time. Bye. (click)

Scene 2

Invermay Tuesday pm. General air of MAFTech efficiency. Attractive secretary (AS), non-sexist personality-type of course, seen slightly off centre stage booking vehicles, rearranging meetings, collecting petty cash for spartan meal on journey, collat- ▶

HUMOUR

ing notes for meeting, ringing wives, arranging babysitters and rearranging bridge club partners, badminton games, etc, while phoning operations centre of well known Central Southland animal doctors.

AS Invermay here, could you confirm the time and venue of the NZ Wapiti Society meeting on Thursday, please.

Equally attractive vet sec, Winton Is there one? They never said anything to me. Just a minute, please. I'll call one of them on the RT and confirm.

Sounds of a minor electrostatic war and indecipherable noises — secretary has apparently contacted Dr Who and the Daleks.

EA Sec That seems to be right. 7.30 on Thursday evening in the surgery.

Scene 3

Thursday, 7.40 pm. Late dusk in Southland, 60 kph gusts laced with heavily pregnant raindrops sweep almost horizontally across the expanse of the veterinary car park. The invading cold insidiously saps the remaining body warmth (albeit buoyed up by barely passable chow mein and chips and coke, recently consumed in Gore) of the two committee members who, reason dictates, have travelled great distances at speed in an unsuccessful bid to arrive on time.

It is now 7.47 pm. Falling night has the blackness imagined inside a cow and the building and surrounding area, save for these two, is ABSOLUTELY DESERTED.

High overhead these two, a much travelled light aircraft descends in the gloom towards an unmoved and uncooperative Invercargill.

The conversation below is bitter. Full of reproach and self-doubt, tinged with the odd accusative and defamatory outburst and best left unreported.

After a mere 20 minutes, the vehicle resignedly heads towards Winton's nerve centre — the public phone booth.

Scene 4

Winton Post Office, 8.07 pm. The phone booth, still pristine red except for the entreatment — if you want it call Suzie at 395-143 — doorless and facing the south-west, with non-functional light and damp, yet surprisingly complete directory, takes a cue from the now legal gambling machines and embarks on a gluttonous diet of 20c pieces without conscience. Finally telecommunications triumph and M's wife, ever patient and understanding and with consideration to a fault, enlightens the confused travellers.

M's wife Yes, that's right, tonight at 7.30, but there's been a bit of a stuff-up, I mean confusion. T and M went to Queenstown yesterday for work in Wanaka and then to Te Anau tomorrow. They were due to land here tonight sometime for a meeting but it's too windy so they've gone to Invercargill, except M's car is here, and they would like you to come here and wait, that would probably be best, or you could ring W. Actually he'll be at the meeting by now.

TP Thanks, I'll talk to W. We couldn't find you in the dark, anyway. Besides, it's getting late.

The phone box belches in appreciation and yawns in anticipation of further silver supplication. Balancing the phone book at the end of an impossibly small bullet-proof cable, peering myopically at the increasingly sodden pages in the full headlight beam of the intricately manoeuvred vehicle, now apparently part of the booth. W's number is triumphantly found and duly dialled.

TP Hello, TP here. Will you be coming to the meeting tonight?

W Where are you?

TP In the phone box in Winton.

W *(Slowly with some bewilderment).* Oh, yeah, what are you doing there?

TP I'm down here for the Wapiti Society Meeting.

W When?

TP Tonight, 7.30 at the surgery, I think — I hope.

W *(More slowly and with more concern)* Well, nobody told me. I saw M yesterday and he didn't say anything and he usually does. Who organised it?

Scene slowly fades as more investigative conversation unfolds with no apparent progress. The phone box would now make an adequate velvet freezer, if it had a door. K has left the vehicle and gone to the hotel in frustration.

Scene 5

Vehicle returns sedately to the inhospitable surrounds of the clinic. It's like crawling into a vacuum. Nothingness is absolute. The time is 8.23 pm.

K I thought that after the last two meetings, which started off like this, we'd decided on a new, efficient approach.

TP We have — this is Wapiti time.

HUMOUR

Further inane banter is interrupted by a major event — a lone vehicle with a lone occupant noses inquisitively into the car park, unsure whether to bolt or park with the surety that a confident committee member would command. Defying the elements, windows unwind and from the frosty interiors forced humour and conversation emerge.

J Must be on if you guys are here, isn't it?

Pandemonium now breaks out, a second vehicle clearly at home in these surrounds appears from latitude south (Invercargill), slews to a halt. Two out of three occupants are clearly identified as executive committee members. Hope springs eternal as the entrepreneurial and much respected figure of the boss — the master bull as it were — emerges, clutching battered aluminium brief cases, and addresses the waiting throng.

TW (Briskly and business-like) Hello. Amazing how we who have to travel furthest get here first. Anyone else coming?

A bearded figure races past the group, an integral part of the latest spring breeze, unlocks a door then, unbelievably clawing his way back into the night, regains the sanctuary of his vehicle and **DISAPPEARS!**

Stunned, but by this stage not really surprised, the nearest approximation to a quorum achievable by 8.37 pm troops inside to set up and begin the meeting — or to term it more properly . . .

ACT 11 Scene 1

8.40 pm. The same venue.

Chairman T has become inseparable from the phone as the complexities of a diverse business are over-viewed. TP, J and K arrange seating for who knows, and on the other phone call the Hon. Treasurer, W, to impart the glad tidings that the meeting is alive and well but poorer for his apparent unwitting absence.

Young voice Look, okay, I'll tell him, but Dad's in the shower and I think he's going to bed. . .

8.53 pm. The phone rings.

TP Vet surgery — or rather, Wapiti Society committee meeting.

N's Wife Is N there? Oh, that's okay, he's actually just left. Could you get him to ring home as soon as he gets there. It's urgent.

Scene 2

It is now 9.15 am. Small talk and the more honest dialogue typical of pre-and post-

meeting conversation cover all the issues to be raised, business of the day including industry gossip and the necessary social scandals.

The door now opens on a veritable procession of committee members. They stride purposefully yet retain that casual nonchalance of solid reliability characteristic of the committee.

N heads immediately for the phone and disappears behind a closed door. M adopts an administrative stance at the executive table and W reposes in conspiratorial and immensely clean and well-dressed pose amongst the body of the committee, eyes blissfully shut in an attitude of total concentration. Sleep eventually arrives.

The meeting is in total contrast to its assembly. During the next two hours a field day is organised, velvet pool and venison pool arrangements finalised, a major publication — the NZ Wapiti Society handbook — reviewed, tasks delegated, newsletter arranged, next meeting planned, sale season and prospects discussed, and in conclusion mutual congratulations on the worth of such meetings exchanged.

In salute, K offers all liquid refreshment purchased earlier — although this done in cavalier airborne fashion.

It is 11.15 pm as the first tear tab is released. As surplus foam engulfs the executive bench the doors open yet again. With mock innocence, Winton-based D, chief organiser and now field day chairman (voted in his absence), strolls through the door.

D Giddy! Did I miss anything? Sorry I'm a bit late. Got held up!

As the curtain slowly falls, TP and K head back for distant Invermay. A parting comment is lost on an increasing tide of relaxation and comradeship of those remaining.

K How come we travelled the most, got here first, appeared to get most of the work, supplied the supper and now have to drive two and a half hours to get home?

All Don't worry about it. Bye, see you next meeting. Thanks for coming.

And will they? You bet! Wouldn't miss it for quids — whenever it is!

CURTAIN

P.S. To intending committee members. The speeding infringement on the flood-free highway at 1.45 am costs \$165 and 35 demerit points. Bed and breakfast in the Winton Hotel for two is \$58 — no demerit points, but possibly a sore head.