

LONG WALKS

& ANARCHO-

PRIMITIVISM

## a blog about change

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Available free on-line at:  
<http://www.fraw.org.uk/lwap/>

View the video for this post here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrI3MLGgzUA>

**Our modern, convenient, technological society is like a helium balloon, that people happily cling-to as they ever so slowly rise into the skies of affluence, consumption, and pleasure: At first it's exhilarating, as you are lifted higher and higher; problem is, no one thought to install a valve to release the gas to let you slowly descend when the ride is over; the longer you cling-on, the higher and the more painful the [inevitable fall](#) will be – when the balloon finally bursts as it expands, or when you can't hang on any longer.**

**What you have to ask yourself is, 'how can I most easily let go of all of this?' – before you are [forced to](#).**

Perhaps that seems a bit dramatic; but it's a good summary of where many people are these days. If the 'Covid Crisis' has got people rattled, that's more about the way it exposed the insecurity of their daily lives, rather than the direct risk of the virus.

People need options; but all 'popular' options take today's technological dependency as a given; something not to be questioned. In this blog people's dependence on technology will not only be criticised, we will also explore the alternatives to that lifestyle.

Rather than deal with big bold ideas, in each post I will outline a small part of the overall problem – hopefully with a video to explain what it is I am talking about. All this information is open for you to share, for free.

## Part 3: 'Wild tea making and the revolt against the machine'

I live in two worlds: Simple, as is my desired lifestyle; and technological, as is my enforced existence. [Walking](#), camping, and foraging, are the last 'natural' refuges outside technological society – the last '[commons](#)' open to all irrespective of wealth; albeit one that's always [under threat](#).

I know I'm [not alone](#) in that position. More importantly, I know there are [many more](#) who want to '[downshift](#)' into "something else" – other than where they are now – but have not the first clue how. Perversely, *the poorer you are, the harder "having less" is*. Getting past these obstacles to change is the purpose of this blog.

At the root of this discussion is a simple question: **"What if, one day, everything just stopped; could you live happily?"**

The reality of mass consumption is that the lifestyle it supports is dependent upon the ability to consume. Losing your economic status, or if the system falls into crisis, will quickly mark the end of that lifestyle.

Every 'ordinary' person in the system secretly knows this; and a lot of political and media fodder, from fashion to election messages, exploit that fear to get attention.

Generally though we just don't think about it; except as apocalyptic disaster films, or mind-numbing TV documentaries. Society doesn't like to address that reality, and when people 'seriously' try to, don't expect that to appear in the mainstream media.

The moment you raise the question seriously, you invalidate the daily, mindless, care-free consumer existence that affluence projects. And even when TV shows or newspapers occasionally open this box of horrors, there's always an, "and finally", at the end – when they give some abstract and unlikely techno-fix that will 'save you', enabling you to go back to sleep once more.

This same unspoken insecurity is the starting-point for this blog. That vexed reality we can't acknowledge: How it is possible to learn to live, "*when the lights go out*", and do that very easily and cheaply. Better still, learn how those same ideas can create a safer route outside of this absurd system, before that crash happens.

**Most ecological issues can be solved with “less”: Less consumption; less pollution; less extraction; less waste; and combining all of those, less technology.**

This consumption- and technology-critical argument was at the core of early environmentalism from the 1960s; but as the leaders of the environment movement sought to take ‘green’ into the political mainstream, from the late 1980s that radical core was dropped – in favour of more consumption-friendly slogans.

Now anyone could be ‘green’... *if they could afford buy the right products.*

### Why ‘anarcho-primitivism’?

If there is a path out of technological society, then it must rely on the tools or solutions which can work outside of that system. The only formal criticism of today’s way of life which does that is ‘anarcho-primitivism’ (or ‘A/P’) – the idea that society can be best organised along simple, low-tech., land-based lifestyles, where people have a direct connection to the land and natural systems.

Though people talk of ‘going back’ to some idealised existence, the reality is that any future without technology has to take the best of past lifestyles, and make them work within today’s resource-stripped, low-biodiversity world.

Unfortunately, A/P has become so ensnared by the affluent society that many advocates for it are themselves deeply compromised by that system. Put “anarcho-primitivism” in a search engine and what you get is Powerpoint presentations, or earnest academics looking at utopian worlds that can’t exist today. Everything, it seems, but a workable, practical way to map a path outside of the maze of present-day technological society.

At the same time though there are permaculturists, or bushcraft enthusiasts, or simple living advocates, who are employing techniques outside of ‘complex’ technology, and living very simply and cheaply in the process; but their work avoids any critical view of modern society and technology, and thus why their activities are so relevant to people’s futures ‘beyond technology’.

This blog tries to map a point between these two worlds: Between practical action to change the way you live; alongside a discussion of the political theories surrounding this – and looking at past writers who saw today’s crises coming, long ago, who we might look to for explanations.

There isn’t space here to look at the history of A/P, but it’s a subject that will be examined in future editions – alongside the practical actions that give those ideas real-world meaning today.

Just as the pressures of consumerism made environmentalists abandon their core values, so, in the affluent states, the response of the mainstream left has been to abandon their principles too – *the British Labour Party being a perfect example.*

Today, what remains of leftist politics, and anti-capitalism, has retreated to the on-line world – ensuring its digital ghettoisation by the algorithms of social media platforms.

In fact, by accommodating affluence and consumption as a given, all radical movements have struggled to make any meaningful change in the last few decades.

From modern slavery to climate change, too many campaigns focus on the ‘bad’ results of the global technocratic economy; ignorant of how the ‘positive’ effects of consumerism, and especially the screen-based digital world, warps people’s perceptions in order to protect and perpetuate itself.

For example, take the simplistic phrase, often-repeated by [Deep Ecologists](#) and [Neo-Luddites](#): **“Turn it off”**.

OK... *turn it off and do what exactly?*

Let’s say I turn-off the power and gadgets in my life; *now what?* How does the average person work, travel, or buy and cook food?

The idea of ‘dropping out’ of today’s technologically-enabled society represents a [‘double-bind’](#); you can’t exclude yourself from society because the way it functions prevents you from doing so safely. Rather like a closed religious sect, turning off the technology in your life creates an automatic ‘social death’, that cuts you off from everything else in your life that you value.

For that same reason, the opponents of environmentalists or anarchists always use this argument [as an attack](#); that ‘turning-back progress’ is impossible, and so continuing [with ever-more](#) technology is the only viable option for all humanity.

The very naïveté of the ‘turn it off’ statement, the assumption people can just put down the gadgets and walk away, embodies the reasons for its failure. On the positive side though, by solving that failure, we might begin to make deep ecology, or anarcho-primitivism (see box), a practical option for the average person to seriously adopt.

**Technology is not neutral. Technology reinforces the economic and political culture of the present-day, by allowing the corporate economic system to operate in the way it does:**

Convenience food and ready-meals were not a conscious consumer choice – *no one lobbied for them!* They were designed to free people from food preparation, due to the excess of time most people (primarily women) were made to work outside the home – which made traditional food preparation from raw ingredients impossible.

Likewise, on-line banking isn't a means to free people from a physical bank to manage their money (or realistically, their debt). It's designed to allow [finance corporations](#) to cheaply manage people's participation in the economic system – and in a way which gives them greater surveillance capabilities over people's lives, to more easily algorithmically exploit them as a resource for profit.

The ['gig economy'](#) is not simply the result of large employers conspiring to casualise employment practices. The more precarious nature of employment isn't just the result of governments and corporations manipulating the laws and practices of employment. It's the technologies behind ['platforms'](#) and ['human resource management'](#), often based upon greater surveillance and data collection, which created the ability for those changes to take place – and which trap people into an ever-more precarious jobs market managed by technology.

Just as many people on the 'political right' dismiss poverty or unemployment as a "lifestyle choice", so those on the left dismiss economic exploitation or polluting industries as a 'choice' of capital.

The fact is all sides are trapped within this system because – by its nature – you can't disengage the unwelcome side of the modern economy without disavowing its benefits too. Again, it's a 'double-bind' for them too; anyone who doesn't act like a 'good' businessman or capitalist will be put out of business by the ones who do.

You can't leave the system, even though your prospects in it [are dire](#). What you must do is [replace it](#) with something else; something that you can maintain yourself.

## **Let's take tea... *literally!***

A perfect example of the domination of society by consumer actions, which in turn reinforce the economic interests which created them, is Britain's 'favourite drink': *Tea*.

[Tea consumption](#) isn't just the result of colonial trade; it's intrinsically tied to the urbanisation of the British people alongside industrialisation.

[Black tea](#) was once an exclusive product, imported in small quantities from distant lands; it was symbolically a drink of the wealthy.

The [Agricultural Revolution](#) forced people from the land in step with the [Industrial Revolution](#). That's because as industrial urbanisation created a market for bulk food commodities in towns, it allowed agricultural estates to modernise production with the machines produced by industry.

In the same way, the plant-based flavours people added to boiling water – *which at its simplest is what tea is* – would have traditionally been harvested for free in the landscape surrounding rural communities. As land clearance and [inclosure](#) took hold, the new populations in cities had to buy their tea, and that gave rise to a mass market for imported teas from the growing empire – which in turn reinforced the economic power of empire, promoting the evils it inflicted upon the world.

Today, this historic process has turned full circle: Most 'ordinary' people drink imported black tea; affluent consumers are more likely to drink herbal teas made from specially-produced herbs.

*How to escape this situation?*

The anarcho-primitivist solution: *Do what our ancestors did and collect your own wild teas!*

In order to preserve ancient common rights, paragraph 3 of [section 4](#) of *The Theft Act 1968* grants an exemption for the picking of wild plants – *foraging is not stealing, it is your ancient right!*

With access by a public road or right of way, you can [pick what grows](#) by the highway and make tea; or take it home to dry and keep (*drying simply involves hanging bunches of stems from a hook so they air dry over a few weeks, after which they can be stored in air-tight containers*).

Popular foraged teas, which are essentially leaves growing by the wayside, include: Dandelion leaves and/or flowers; stinging or dead nettles; members of the mint family (all edible) such as ground ivy; raspberry or blackberry leaf; yarrow leaves/flowers; rosehips (outer shell only, not the seeds); meadowsweet; or mugwort.

Even a small garden can produce herbs for tea, such as: sage; lemon balm; marjoram; mints; or just the edible weeds that grow there.

Black tea represents a single flavour. By collecting your own herbal tea you can experience a range of flavours, as well as the higher level of nutrition compared to [highly processed](#) black tea.

In my kitchen, or sat on a hill, the core of my 'simple' lifestyle revolves around the kinds of basic skills that can be learnt from walking, and camping, and foraging. That, with a little explanatory philosophy and history, is what I wish to share here:

Yes, there are lots of reasons for why getting outdoors is [good for you](#); but beyond all the [health](#) and [mental well-being](#) stuff, walking and camping creates a physical space in which you can learn the skills required for '[downshifting](#)' – exiting this high-tech., high-cost, dead-end 'modern' lifestyle.

It sounds absurd, but having the ability to go outside and brew a bowl of [rosehip tea](#) on a hill, is a gateway towards a lifestyle revolution (see below). It's not the literal tea-brewing (see box previous page); it's the mind-set created by regularly and enjoyably undertaking such '[uneconomic](#)' activities.

In a sense, walking and camping are the workable alternative to the simplistic 'turn it off' message. That's because walking and camping *comfortably* rely on developing skills through practical experience. Rather than a hard break, you are creating a space to '[decompress](#)' – to learn the skills to create

a parallel lifestyle outside of the consensual, economic restrictions of society.

That is what I will explore through the future editions of this blog: How, by spending time developing practical skills outdoors – outside of the restrictions of everyday 'economic normality' – there is a means to move beyond the expectations of that lifestyle. Even if that does not lead to you rethinking your lifestyle in the immediate future, as the inevitable breakdown of 'normality' grinds inexorably forward over the next 10 to 20 years, these skills will give you options to deal with those events as they arrive.

***Everything must change: 'Going with the flow' has [no viable future](#); as the extent of the ecological crisis becomes clear – that we are past the [point of 'no return'](#), and there is '[no going back](#)' to mainstream normality – people need to find a means [to progress](#) from the '[technology trap](#)' of modern lifestyles; consciously [avoiding the traps](#) of the past three centuries of [industrialisation](#), and the seven decades of the [consumer society](#), to find their [own alternatives](#).***

## Humanity's founding skill was the ability to apply heat to food

For the first time since its creation forty years ago, the English '[Countryside Code](#)' sought to prohibit lighting fires outdoors. Though in a contradictory statement, it says to '*take care with BBQs*'. In fact, learning to responsibly light fires outdoors, in all weathers, with the resources around you, is one of the cornerstones of learning how to live simply.

That's because, perhaps 1.7 to

2 million years ago, the control and use of fire is what created the first 'technology' that gave rise to modern humans – cooking.

Three years ago I published [a short video](#) on making a portable fire grate to cook outdoors. That video was the starting point for the discussion that became 'Long Walks & Anarcho-Primitivism'.

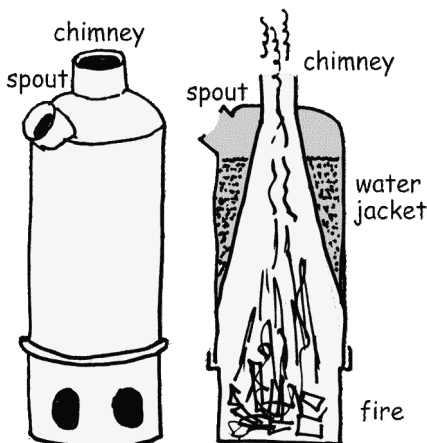
Why focus on lighting a fire? The means to cook food or heat water is the basis of a 'happy' existence. Of course, you don't have to make your own fire grate to do that. There are 'simple' tools available to help you.

For example, when walking outdoors, to save time finding somewhere suitable for a fire I take a

[storm kettle](#): It's basically a fire inside a metal tube (see diagram) – avoiding the risk of causing damage to the ground.

Compared to an open fire it's more efficient at heating water – boiling a pint in five minutes or so from just a handful of sticks; and though not as good a tool to cook a meal on, you can heat a small saucepan on top of the embers after boiling the water.

**This is where any human lifestyle begins; applying heat to food or water. It begins there because that's how humans first arose as 'technological' animals – and began on the path to where we are now.**



### Long Walks & A/P, Part 3: 'Wild tea making & revolt' (revision 1)

Note: The experiences described in this paper are to be performed at your own risk! No liability is accepted for any loss or damage to your illusory affluent consumer lifestyle.

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