

I think I've mentioned before that much of the reason I don't do so much on my own website these days is that one of the major incentives has become less relevant and the old ego receives more padding from other projects than from the faint hopes that somebody somewhere may be reading my website here. The My Destination project is well underway and in truth getting more hits in a day than I do in probably a year, which means that the desire to get something down in public print, as it were, is less compelling than it used to be.

I think that for most writers, even those making a living from it, the greatest satisfaction is the feeling that people are reading your stuff. Therefore it is a better bet to be writing for a global travel website than for your own few pages of relatively insignificant personal history. And when you lose the habit, the rot sets in and it's sometimes weeks before you even think about the website at all, even the same site which used to occupy your every free time thought. Time to move on it never has been, but I have found other distractions.

First up, the dombra is quite nicely filling a few hours of my time, not perhaps quite as many as it should, but enough to keep me steadily improving. A few more TV appearances later and I've even toyed with the idea of getting an agent to find anybody who might be interested in including me in their show as a novelty feature. I have been in touch with somebody, although given that I think I should not be charging for my services at my current ability level, there would be less to interest an agent. However this is all a side issue, for me the nicest thing is to think I am getting good enough to even consider performing.

I have recently changed my teacher and now go to the Conservatoria (which for Brits is like the Royal College of Music) although not as a student of the actual institute. We just use the classroom space. My new teacher is not as accomplished a player as the previous lad but is a better teacher, in all truth, and is not afraid to shout at me without actually stopping me from playing. It has made a noticeable difference in the way I play, in precisely the area I needed to make that improvement in. Perhaps in turn why I think I might start to put myself about a bit on the local stage.

Another interesting event came about as a result of the very same instrument which I was carrying home one night when a local came over and asked me if I could play it. It turned out that he was a director at Kazakh Film, who invited me to casting for a new film the next day. I was there and although the dombra did not feature by design, it was nice to be offered (subject to final decision) a part in the next Kazakh film which it seems is going to be called Aral.

I don't know what the film is about, but the Aral Sea is famous across the region and there have been attempts to salvage the local environment, therefore it might make sense that the lake will feature in the film in one way or another. I don't know, and nor do I know if I will be in the film at all, but I have certainly accepted and hope they will not be put off by the fact I have said that I cannot partake in any scenes requiring me to eat any meat. I did suggest that stale brown bread can be made up to look like meat, and that I would deal with that side myself. Lots of western films are made with things made up to look like meat for the plethora of famous vegetarian stars that would not eat meat even to get their multi-million dollar fee. Nor would I.

The same singer who is dealing with my potential agent is also being wooed by Kazakhstan TV (which is not the same as Kazakh TV) to present programmes on the channel. He mentioned that I might be of interest to them and they phoned me yesterday and asked me to go to casting/audition on Monday for presenter, this time in Kazakh language, considering that Kazakhstan TV is a terrestrial channel and broadcast in the two local languages. I am not sure my Kazakh is quite as good as he told them, which is the sticking point, but for a non-live show it might be an interesting distraction for viewers, which is ultimately how he attempted to sell me to them. Again, nothing decided.

And yet another internet appearance in some promotion for Kazakh, the company's extensive research managed to unearth only one foreigner fluent in Kazakh (although there are some others) and contacted me via the school. It was a long interview and I was pleased to finish, but my strange desire to become quite famous does keep allowing me to get involved in these things, so I was equally pleased I went. I will try to post the link here some time, they have not informed me yet, which suggests that they have not published.

Away from the lotspight, the gym is becoming all the more enjoyable day by day as I have started actually studying proper bodybuilding technique and it has paid off already. The biggest mistake people make in the gym is trying to lift too much, weight they can't control. The idea is not to lift as much as possible, but to contract against tension, which all considered is the same, but the act of simply raising a weight is in fact not always conducive to muscle growth because it may mean that tension on the muscle is not constant. This is the key, and it actually means that people can gain far more using lower weights and therefore put less stress on their body and recover quicker.

Now I can relate to the idea that reducing our loads can seem like a retrograde step, but when your ego gets round the notion that you are weaker, you actually find that lower weights, when lifted properly, get better results because they enable you to keep the muscle under tension. Granted, there are other approaches to bulking and they often involve huge loads and low repetitions. I do these too. But overall, my training has improved massively since I started to; A do rehab exercises for my shoulders, B train with lower weights and constant tension, and C when I ordered some vegan protein supplements from Pulsin, a UK company.

I would have preferred to have gone with hemp protein but I understand it to be illegal where I live in spite of being fully legal in countries elsewhere, even those with very strong drugs laws. Hemp is not a drug, period! It is very high in protein with an excellent amino acid chain. It was therefore nice to find an alternative, brown rice protein, and pea protein which are obviously not going to be illegal anywhere. They are themselves 82% protein and although not that nice when mixed with water, a very nice addition to my approach to training.

Another nice addition has to have been the advice I have received from a UK-based vegan bodybuilder called John Machin who used to be one of the writers on The Two Ronnies



[here](#)

Which already makes him a hero as far as I am concerned. He knows more about training than any coach I have ever met, although to be fair to one or two of them, there was the language barrier to contend with. He was one of the people (and the only one not training me via You Tube) who changed my understanding of effective lifting and prompted me to move to lighter weights.

Yesterday saw a trip to a birds of prey zoo, and although I am not much for animals in captivity, these falcons etc did seem well looked after and quite healthy looking. There were other animals there too, horses of course, but also some wolves and vultures, which fascinate many people. Here are a few photos, watch out for the link on My Destination soon.

PHOTOS TO FOLLOW

27 May 2013

When I started the website I think a lot of the reason for doing so was to give myself excuses to write. Not even because I enjoy writing, for as a matter of fact I don't so much, surprisingly. What I enjoy, is reading my own stuff and at least believing I am good at it. But however you look at it, I needed to motivate myself to turn some pixels black, and the free website did seem to fill this void.

For a good three years I would religiously add and update stuff, feeling a sense of undying guilt when the blogge went unwritten for any more than a few days. I needed an outlet for what latent creativity I can be accused of having.

These days, however, it's different. As I now make a living as a writer, in one way or another, it is scarcely a requirement to come home and start filling pages with more introspective dronings. For a while this spring, I had even forgotten I had this website, such was the absence of enthusiasm I had for anything while up in the windswept capital.

Now back in Almaty, I plan to get to it more often, not just because I have more to say, but because Almaty is the home of not only the site itself, but most of that which drives it.

On the back of a disappointing few months in Astana it's nice to be back in Almaty having quickly found a flat in a place I have always wanted to live. Astana is not bad, I cannot put it down, but it simply cannot compete with its southern brother.

I was invited there to work in TV and although my CV will not rightly say, Newsreader on Kazakh TV, it was not quite what I expected. Three months later, being told there was no TV show until 2014 was insulting (after I relocated so far for a job which didn't exist) but not desperately tragic because it meant that I had the chance to come back home. The audio news will still need doing and as there is a studio in Almaty it is quite possible they will retain my services for the time being, and I hope they do. But there was no reason to stay north any more, not after they strangely decided that they could not provide what they had offered.

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This is a lot of what greeted me when leaving home and the office this spring. There is more to Astana than ice and wind, but they are difficult to ignore, and the lack of things to do means there is less reason to want to go out and brave the freezing gales.

Almaty has everything, and it is a joy to be back home.

Finally managed to get over to Charyn Canyon this weekend.



[Here](#)

The page will follow, for now, here's a collage of tiny photos just to tempt you to log back on again.

8 March 2013

The new traditional Chinese medicine place came along in the nick of time. It's a place I've seen before and I always said that if I ever had cause to move to Astana, I would go there as priority. So obviously one of my priorities this time was checking it out at the very least. I admit that just knowing the doctor was from China is hardly enough in itself, but I made sure to ask, really only because I wanted to be sure it was Chinese medicine, not something that was clear on walking into the reception area. And that one out of the way, I went for the diagnosis yet with an open mind, hoping for the same positive vibes I'd had in other such centres over the years.

I was not to be disappointed. It was even better to discover not only that they do traditional herbs but that they actually prepare them for you. I remember times in the past trying to boil them myself and ending up with next to nothing. This said, I've never known Chinese herbs not make me feel considerably better, so to be able to get some this time was a pleasant surprise. The centre in Almaty seemed to suggest they were not legal, although plainly it could have been my misunderstanding.

But when I say, the nick of time, I don't mean anything serious. It's just that settling in to Astana and the new job has come at a price, and I've been even more moody recently than ever. Easily upset and offended is actually one of the patterns associated with the pattern of disharmony I won't go into, but am being treated for. And with the course having taken very positive effect, I am a lot more settled and not taking offence at everything and anything that moves. Still planning to ask them to extend the treatment programme, but overall, feeling five years younger after a few days.

Workwise, well nobody should expect to see me on TV just yet but those who can tune into Kazakh TV can hear me on the bulletin at 2100 Astana time six days a week. I edit for quality, and then read stories uncomfortably fast into a microphone and leave the sound engineers to do the rest. I am open enough to admit, even on the blogge, that I am not sure I have the best voice for news. For meditation maybe, but news. Well, they've obviously decided they think something I am not aware of. It's quite interesting trying to BBCify texts written in good English but obviously not by native speakers and certainly not trained English journalists, but it might be nice now to do the online journalism course I've always fancied.

Cohesion, avoiding repetition, varying vocabulary and presenting a clear message... I could almost be taking IELTS.

On the subject of IELTS, examiner re-certification is due so I am heading back down to Almaty next week for a few days of Gabriel's excellent training followed by my (hopefully single) attempts to grade some exams in order to retain my status. In some ways I am happy for the break from teaching but the IELTS income is too much to turn down considering also it is relatively straightforward to go and assess candidates. It will be interesting staying in a hotel in Almaty, and potentially so staying in the Kazakhstan Hotel which is one of the iconic landmarks of the city. May however opt for something a bit dingier.

I don't know how proper it is to express reservations about your new employer on the public internet but today they informed me that they are checking my application and we can discuss the future on Monday. One might feel that my application should be checked before being offered the job and relocating some considerable

distance. I accept it's a formality and one applied to everybody, but the timing is a little strange. Perhaps they have every confidence in the result.

While Almaty now basks in the springtime sunshine and those deprived for five or so months can now go running, Astana is refusing to let go of the conditions associated more readily with January than March, and the last few days have seen blizzards and a widespread re-freezing of the early meltwaters across the city. The ice is sheet, the snow is packed thick and walking round town is actually quite a trial. I had some of these



[here](#)

But whatever happened to them I really do not know, and I would order some more except for the fact that when they come I expect spring will have arrived and they will sit idle until next October or so. The cold does not really bother me that much, and when it's really windy, I just wear some skiing glasses (not the full goggles I add) which do make it more bearable. But what should be a ten minute walk to work is now a half an hour of precariously picking my way through the labyrinth of skip hazards.

Loose snow on ice actually increases traction but also masks the surface of the ice which means you could easily put your foot on an uneven surface, upon which no amount of snow will prevent slipping. Not that many people seem to fall over here, but it still amazes me that they don't sell things like Yaktrax in the shops. How could they not sell by the bucketload? Ex-pats are known to wear them, locals seem to think they are funny. They are very much on my 'to buy' list. As for running, probably another month to wait yet.

This should not really be a footnote, because we should not underestimate the importance of International Women's Day, but given that most people reading are from countries where it is of scant relevance, I don't have all that much to say about it. But it featured heavily in the news yesterday and is likely to get a mention again today. So to anybody who shares the view of millions that it is a very serious celebration, Happy Women's Day.

27 February 2013

On the proverbial scale of one to ten, where ten = monumental, this last few days might well pass as a nine or so, allowing for the fact I haven't actually got married. Today has seen me wake up in a new flat in Astana, having moved from Almaty where I planned to spend as close to a hundred more years as possible. It was not a personal desire to move away from the city which has been my home for half a decade or so and I had never really considered moving to Astana in spite of being very fond of it. This has got nothing to do with the cold. Yes, it's chilly here, but what of it, we just wear more layers.

What tempted me here was a career in television. The coincidences stack up, Caspionet, the erstwhile Kazakh satellite channel has re-branded and is due to launch on 1st March under the new name of Kazakh TV, with broadcasting planned to be in Kazakh and English only. The number of Kazakh speaking presenters and choices thereof means they have little call for foreigners to take that role, but the need for a native English speaker with fluent Kazakh, Russian and TV experience really meant that they were left with only one choice. Not being of a mind to scour the jobs market, I would not have known about it were it not for a friend working in the media centre who brought me to their attention. So today I went for induction and am excited by the prospects.

For the time being, I will do voice over while the project for TV news brings us to the stage that we are ready to go on camera. And of course my job is to edit the content so that it meets journalistic standards. Has to be good enough for the BBC themselves, which also means perhaps a little research into those very journalistic standards.

A decade in the classroom arguably prepared me for the trials of being observed while doing my job, not this time by twelve or so people but by potentially, millions. I am not sure what viewing figures are, but Kazakh TV is a global thing and I dare say watched by more than the many Kazakhstani students studying abroad on Bolashak scholarship programmes.

Moving house is considered to be stressful and I can relate to that, but those finding it a bind should consider how it would be when removal services are unavailable. I had to get my entire life's belongings down into a selection of bags I would be able to carry myself on the train. I prepared a pile of stuff to give to charity, but countless attempts to get rid of it came to nothing, largely because (and I hope they read this) the people who claim to collect for charity in Almaty are, er, rather less organised than they believe and missed out on about \$1,000 of good stuff which I would have been happy to see go to good homes. Instead, my landlord came round for the final rent and on offering him a few things found him happy to take the whole lot. He was not my first choice, but it was better than binning things, and after all once I don't own it I don't suppose it matters too much who does.

In the end, I was extremely lucky when Thomas my French friend agreed to come with me on the 20-hour train

journey to help me get past the 50 kilogram baggage limit and of course to help me shift the stuff. So as I said, moving house is a bit unnerving in some ways, but when everything you own is with you on the train, it adds a pinch of extra tension.

One of the things I got rid of was the old PC, which was not so good and I was glad to smash it against the neighbourhood bin and be rid of it. I did some good work and started my writing career on it so perhaps this way of thinking is a little harsh, but I also had headaches with its go-slows and spent quite a lot of time just waiting for it to work. When in Astana I established two priorities one of which was joining a good gym and the other buying a better computer. As my dad would often say, 'middle for diddle', which in this context meant not buying cheap to avoid low quality and not paying too much to avoid wasting money. The word 'diddle', as it happens, could be given to mean anything within a range from 'OK' to 'let's start'. It also means 'do', when we greet somebody by asking how they are diddling.

The idea was to join the gym in Khan Shatyr which is the world's biggest tent, but on arrival I found it was closed for refurb, and nobody knew when it would open again. So I found one quite near my flat in a shopping centre called Asia Park which seems OK although not better than some of the other many many shopping centres in Astana. I like it anyway. The gym is mid-range in terms of price and quality, and will do considering the free weights room is the best I've ever seen even though in some ways the other facilities are not quite as good. Was supposed to go training this morning but still recovering from train lag.

Astana does not get the respect it deserves from people in Almaty who are proud of their city and I do not need any explanation as to this latter matter. But I might need somebody to tell me what's wrong with Astana. It might not quite have the range of leisure options Almaty has and certainly no mountains, but it's a growing capital with a cityscape which most lay people in ignorant western countries would scarcely believe to be in Kazakhstan. I walked round today and looked across the skyscrapers and into the distance where there were more skyscrapers, as well as cranes in the process of erecting even more. The streets are clean and orderly and the people seem just as friendly as down south, in most cases. Apart from one woman working in a kiosk at the railway station.

As I said, I would not have left Almaty for anything less, certainly not just for another ordinary or teaching job, no matter what the salary. To be working in TV now is hardly what I could say is a dream come true because I had never really considered it until very recently, but I won't shy from saying it is my dream job. As Bart Simpson said once when, I think, an episode portrayed him as a demolition man. "so they're finally paying me to do this", (also something my brother-in-law said when accepting work as a virus analyst). A mix of TV, journalism, writing, rubbing shoulders and working in a multi-lingual environment. And knowing this should leave nobody in any doubt why I made the unexpected move away from Almaty.

5 February 2013

Well I finally got round to doing the home page and as you can see decided to keep it relatively simple, no extensive linking to other pages on the site and very little more than the bare minimum in details. Even as somebody now able to make a living out of writing, it's amazing how slowly ideas can come at times and the content of the home page took a few months to even suggest coming to mind. As you can also see, there has been a change of policy regarding photographs with a few recent ones added on the About Me page, with a video too, and with permission I hope soon to follow a few clips from my TV show.

But which TV show? The one I presented in the latter months of 2012 has finished with the option of continuing later this year. In the meantime, a potential offer has arrived from state TV meaning I may get the chance to host and present 'my own' show, although I say this with reservation as I doubt the content will be massively controlled by me. I expect I will have to work on producing as well as presenting, it remains to be seen. What also remains to be seen is if I will have to move to Astana, even temporarily, which is where most media outlets are based these days. I asked if they could make it in Almaty, but it was not to be, and I quickly warmed to the idea of a spell in the colder north, all things to be decided and very much pending.

While renewing a lot of my site I managed to delete half of it. I had a page called Who Am I? which I renamed About Me to then delete its contents. In itself this was intentional, although then on applying new content I came to see it as a new page. I felt that having made a mess of it, it would be quicker to delete it all and start again. This was rather mistaken, as it hosted some three or more dozen sub-pages which were all lost with it. You can see via the About Me page



[here](#)

That most of the sub-pages are now empty, with only three or four containing any text. This is because I have not put it back in yet. I plan to get it done over the coming week or so. Not that anybody would really want to read all the old pages. I have removed a few redundancies and rewritten the odd thing, but by and large, you're

not missing anything new, if anything at all.

My gym has been closed for a week now, and I can only hope for a good reason. This would be them introducing new weights and equipment. If it's for painting I may politely remind them that I paid for a month, not three weeks, and would like to receive it. I didn't ever think it needed much Dulux, but the dumbbells were never heavy enough. Rest time is important although every month there seems to be a week when I don't get as much chance to go, and therefore progress is limited. I won't go into details now about training matters or my personal goals, but take it from me that a week's down-time is not helping at all.

This morning I dined off one of my protein power breakfasts, a tin of kidney beans with scrambled tofu, spinach and a handful of assorted beansprouts. My sprouter, which I think you see below (unless I deleted that too) is producing a batch of sprouts twice weekly and they keep nicely in the fridge for as long again. The best beans to sprout are undoubtedly mung beans, but lentils are good and fenugreek is handy for its B5 and D content which are the only two vitamins I was told to pay attention to following the test last month.

I would say that the sprouter is stained already with the brownish orange of constant duty, but not dirty with it and worth every penny of the \$25 spent on it. That is, if you can divide dollars into pennies. The irrigation system is its main plus, but I have to hold my hands up and admit that in the past, my sprouts have gone moldy because I soaked them for a day first. With this Vogel germinator it's not necessary, the whole process from soaking to sprouting happens in the same tray and requires nothing but twice-daily coverage of water. I don't know about how far they can cater for my protein requirements but on top of the tofu and spinach and they're a very useful extra.

Pity is, I can't get quinoa here, that I know of, which is nature's total protein, even more so than ANY kind of meat. But then again, so is tofu and probably sprouted mung beans too. Although even if I'm wrong and I happen to be protein deficient I would still not eat meat etc anyway. Some people don't.

STOP PRESS!!!!!!

Not writing a blogge today, just publishing something that speaks for itself. Enjoy!

1 February 2013

Some things are frustrating! I mean, they annoy me! And even without cause which I can express to anybody else. I've wondered time and time again how personally to take this, whether it is right to be offended and to a degree I can't even justify it to myself. But it troubles me and I have searched in vain for an effective strategy. And by now all I can do is cry mercy and hope that there's somebody out there who understands.

It may be hypocritical. I mean, my working life revolves round assisting the diffusion of the English language and a lot of my leisure time goes on creation or consumption of the same Latin Anglo-Saxon hybrid, that mass of over a million words which to some degree has found its way into the vernacular of most of the world. I can't exactly protest if people think I am given to using it, can I?

I wish to!

Accepted at first is the reality that I depend on multi-lingualism for self-esteem and that it is only my own personal weakness that causes me to feel insanely insecure when somebody strips me of this. Even being handed an English menu is uncomfortable, the niggling apprehension that this person assumes me to be some at best ignorant and at worst plain stupid ex-patriate who is not capable of assimilating anything more than the odd smattering of a language very similar to his or her own. I am happy enough just to ask politely for a Russian menu and find this to be effective without causing offence in return. But it's not just menus. People in Kazakhstan are wonderful and very well-educated and I am proud of their ability to converse in good English (being partly responsible for it) and would not wish to subject them to a lifetime of not being able to use it. But I have some reservations...

I mean, first up, I am not some stupid ex-patriate who is not capable etc etc. There may be no conscious conclusion reached on anybody's part that I am, but the propensity to return my more than competent communication with English (of whatever quality) just seems to say they do think I am stupid. 'Oh, you speak Russian?' they may say, in English. 'Yes, I do. Care to show me that you do too?' is something I have occasionally been tempted to say, having yielded or not. Perhaps they think I had stood outside the café rehearsing that one line for an hour before I came in and could not manage to sustain any further kind of adult

conversation.

I know some establishments require their staff to have English and one or two require them to use it with foreigners. I can see that most ex-pats would appreciate this, meaning they come back with their (usually) fat wallets. But even if they don't think I'm an idiot, what is this intention to exclude me from their own language? OK, so I was born elsewhere, but then you hardly started out in Bognor Regis yourself, is this some 'Russian for the Russians' statement? Are we really not allowed to learn and speak your language? English may be the international language but then football is the international sport. And some people enjoy darts.

They sometimes tell me it's automatic. They just speak English with foreigners. OK, yes, when said foreigners are not conversant in their language. When they are, such automatic responses just tell me they're not listening. I speak language A, they reply in language B, even though they plainly understood language A. I might even get compliments, the typical one is 'Oh, your Russian is very good!' This might be after I simply say 'hello!' Wow! What an achievement!

On the occasions I do it, I am wrong to pretend I don't understand English but it's hardly offence of the century. I just want them to treat me as somebody who values their culture and language and has made the effort. The same people are never short to complain about the number of westerners who don't. I sometimes ask people how they would feel if they went to England with the intention of learning English and people kept speaking and writing to them in Russian. No, they wouldn't like it. Why should I? English may be more use to them than Russian is to me, anybody who wants a decent living wage here needs to speak it relatively well. But we all have our reasons and each has its validity. You don't even need to agree. Just try to understand.

I devote long hours to helping local people here improve their English and I am devoted to my job. I am proud to see my students get better and to learn that they have got that promotion or that place at university in England. If I meet a student, or a former student outside school it is a continued honour to help them with their English. Anybody who has studied with me can always count on my time and care, and can expect to get practice and advice any time. But do I not also need a little time away from the pressing matters of the workplace?

Even though I do not wish to, I cannot usually have a conversation with any non-native speaker without picking up on inconsistencies in their English. Busman's holiday. I am not of a mind to judge them or apply correction, but I still notice. It is my job, my working week of some 50 hours now taking root in my leisure time, when equally I want the same pleasure of confidently expressing myself in a foreign language and saying what I want to say in a way that I have taken it upon myself to learn although I have not been required to. It's been my choice, I've wanted to. And many people still see me as a free lesson.

Would the same people ask an off-duty Zara sales assistant to give them fashion tips? A doctor to have a look at their eczema? A policeman to come and remonstrate with their noisy neighbours? I guess it does happen, and I am sure the doctor means well. He or she may look at the eczema and have something helpful to say. But if called on in such a way every day, for a decade? Everybody has their limits, and work has its limits.

I wonder if any people think English should be not only the international language but the only language. If languages are to stay alive, then those who speak them cannot afford to isolate others wishing to join them. This especially applies to Kazakh which not even all Kazakhs speak fluently. Languages are not glorified semantic fields or lexical groups, they are cultural identities, the source of poetry, literature, inspiration, even revolution. They do not belong in boxes to be locked to which only certain ethnic groups have the key. Languages are to be celebrated, enjoyed and above all spoken and shared.

So if I want to speak your language, please respect that. I would be more willing to reciprocate if people did not close the door on me so often. I work hard to allow people to share my language, I only ask that people give a little back in return.

25 January 2013

More of a visual blogge this week, significant firstly that I say 'this week' when the blogge is still supposed to be a daily affair. I may confess that the reason for starting it was liking the idea that many other people would read my writing on a regular basis, but since the inception of



[this](#)

The fact that thousands of people are reading there carries the torch for all my literary self-satisfaction, and when contrasted with the three people logging onto this page with the same regularity as I publish things on it, it might explain why when I get home, motivation to write anything is at a very low ebb. Maybe also why when I do write, my sentences are getting even longer.

Recently I have taken in a trip to the UK, see photos

and been skiing, see these pictures

and come home to dine on my home grown beansprouts, seen here at the outset of their emergence from the main body of the bean. Four or five days is all that's required to have shop quality sprouts of a variety comprising mung, lentil, chick and fenugreek, the latter containing all the vitamins I was tested as slightly deficient in over the New Year's break.

B5 and D are quite easily obtained for a vegan, but the good news was still being OK for the tricky B12 which some health care professionals say is impossible to ingest unless through animal ingredients. It's a debate I don't care much for and I trust the methods I have chosen as well as the test which regularly shows those methods to be working.

Another test of a plant-protein based diet is body-building. I joined a new gym recently and like the layout and the fact it does not go overboard on fees or unnecessary extras. It's not the best gym in many ways but if you know what you need, and know that this place has those things, then it's worth joining. At half the price of other gyms, paid monthly instead of up-front, it's really a no-brainer.

Some of the posters round the gym are supposed to motivate but actually repulse, I don't pretend my ambition to be to resemble the stereotypical body-builder given that some of them are disgusting to look at (especially when their veins stick out inches) but the fitness model figure is highly motivating and also more achievable for most in training, as the excessive bulge of those contesting things like Mr Olympia is often achieved by means which go further than lifting weights. Although I've decided to cheat, the idea of taking anything that doesn't grow naturally is as repulsive as the results seen at the more muscular end of the scale.

As for cheating, there are some natural protein supplements available, including sadly some not available in Kazakhstan but that I can get shipped over to me. It seems to be the next step. I always said that slow progress was better than no progress, but neither can possibly compete with impressive progress and I need results. At my age it's too early to start uttering the expression 'too old', even to myself, but when it comes to something like body-building, few can argue that men over 50 with massive muscle bulk often look absolutely ridiculous. Others may say that the 40-year old similarly blessed is not as attractive as he may purport to be, but then when have I ever purported to be attractive? I will keep training as intensively as possible and won't care what comments jealously may lead others to make.

I got the new(ish) Half Man Half Biscuit album while back in the UK.

I was interested to note that the critics said it was their best ever but only gave it three stars. But interested indeed, this is not a band that strikes a chord with everybody, you need to see the world in a certain way to identify with the messages they put out. Cynically, yes, negatively, no. The songwriter is a man who probably loves life but this for the chance it gives him to get annoyed with things, and people. His choice of expression is not of the same ilk as the outbursts of anger which lead people to hurt others, instead his cry of 'bastards!' is wittily and cunningly wrapped up in his satirical and extremely intelligent lyrics, accompanied by their competently written and performed music.

Yet not all of the songs are embittered protests, most of them are just fun. They take the mickey out of anything which breathes, walks and works. It's difficult to imagine foreigners understanding them thus liking them, but the recipe works among the disenfranchised English working class whose antidote to the life of drudgery imposed upon them by the system is to get back at it with irreverence. Nigel Blackwell, utter genius!

While most band are still singing sickening yet popular paraphrases of the expression, 'I love you!', this is an example of the way he sees life :)

Some people don't know how to walk on the pavement these days
It's not that difficult, there's hardly a whole host of ways
Here they come, love's young dream
Arm in arm, approaching me

Now I'm not looking for your smile
I'm just asking for some single file
But it's not forthcoming, so I have to assume
That this narrow path belongs to you
So therefore you must be, the Duke of Westminster and his good lady wife
So, I'll tell you what, I'll just walk in the road
How bout, I'll just walk in the road
You stay as you are, and I'll just walk in the road!

How to follow that, I know not, time to sign off.