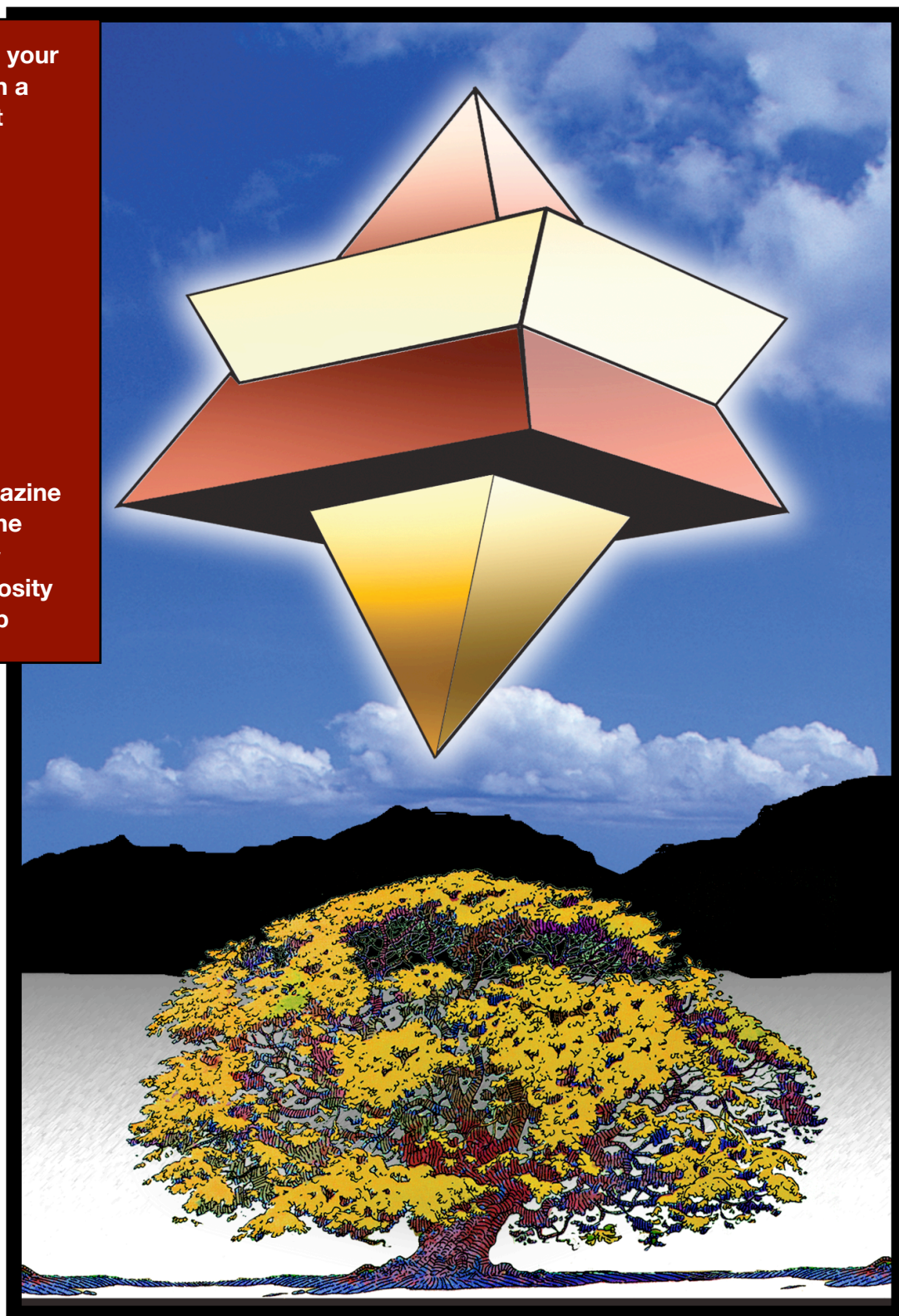


Issue 21 Autumn 2008

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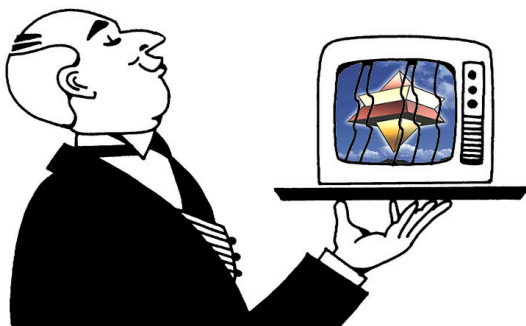
The
magazine
of The
New
Curiosity
Shop



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The Editor Speaks

**Mark Toner**

Well it looks like we had our summer back in May and we're now gently washing our way into autumn. Welcome to the autumn 2008 edition of Cloisters, our second in magazine format.

This time we continue the story of our Desert Archaeologist Howard Middleton-Jones as he finds his way to the hermit caves of Wadi el Rayan. Howard and his team have had many years of experience getting to these remote locations. So I'll reiterate his warning. Don't try to find the Wadi el Rayan hermitage next time you're on an Egyptian package tour. The Western Desert is a very dangerous place. However, you could satisfy your curiosity by joining Howard on one of his online courses at the New Curiosity Shop and hear from the Desert Archaeologist himself.

Due to a technology upgrade in our cartoon department, Olly the Online Learner has a new look this issue. We are presenting him in fabulous 3D Cloistervision.

Unfortunately we're missing a contribution from NCS founder Arthur Chapman. However, he is working busily on the next phase of NCS development. Fellow founder Noel Chidwick presents the NCS Learning Pledge in this issue as a first step. Watch this space and our NCS News blog (blog.newcurioshop.com) for more exciting announcements soon. So I'll leave you with Paul Holmes and his Puzzle and Olly and his latest adventure in cyberspace until Arthur returns next time.

If you'd like to join our writing team, we are open to your ideas. Contact me at our email address, below.

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Desert Archaeology

Desert Forage, or; 'weird and wonderful discoveries' in the desert.



**Howard
Middleton-Jones**

Disclaimer!

If our experiences fuel you for desert journeys of discovery, please bear in mind the following should only be undertaken with permissions of the relevant authorities, desert survival experience, desert driving and the use of a respectable and experienced guide.

That said – now experience an ‘appetiser’ of one of our several forages in the deserts of Egypt!

Always up for an excuse to head into the remoter parts of Egypt, I was interested to hear that a colleague had received a ‘tip off’ from one of our reliable contacts, that something of great interest was awaiting us in the Western desert of Egypt.

Within a few months our little group, all with his own speciality and experience (mine is desert archaeology and desert survival) had carefully pre-planned and organised our trip to Egypt. The following account is a much-scaled down version for this

summer newsletter, and in the winter newsletter I will provide full details of our exciting account – one of many!

Upon arriving in Egypt, we contacted our local guide (essential) picked up our two pre-arranged 4X4 vehicles in Cairo and headed south to the Fayyum region and ultimately the loneliness and meditative aspect of the Western desert.

Driving through and out of Cairo is quite a feat and somewhat of a legendary experience, but this tale must be told at another time! For now, we head south.

One of the reasons why I jumped at the chance at this particular journey was to visit a few of the isolated desert Coptic monasteries, and with my colleague from Switzerland, a professional cameraman and documentary maker, in order to film and document the wonderful wall paintings and architectural elements.



Prior to arriving at our first, of three, monasteries, we made our first ‘error’! Well, not actually an error, more like bad timing or judgement on our half. As we were in the vicinity of several pyramid fields, Dashur, where the bent and red pyramids of Snofru are located, and the Meidum pyramid area, known by locals as el-haram el-kaddab, meaning "false pyramid" we wished to make accurate GPS readings of the pyramids.

It was here that we encountered our first ‘trial’ that of the police authorities and military, who since the reported terrorist activities, had stepped up on their security for ‘foreign nationals’. Whilst the usual baksheesh (tipping/ contributions etc) was arranged, they were stickier than Teflon, and hence our way forward was somewhat ‘hindered’

They insisted on ‘escorting’ and ‘guarding’ us until we reached our first monastery on the edge of the Fayyum near the desert, St Ibrahim – where we stayed for one night.



Upon arising at first light, lo, the military escort was waiting for us as they had heard we wanted to go to St Gabriel’s monastery on the edge of the desert, where we were supposed to pick up vital information from the monks on where our next location would be.

To cut a very long story extremely short, with the assistance of one of the fathers at the monastery we eventually parted company with

our ‘escort’ on the edge of the desert of Wadi el- rayan.



From here, there was no road or track to our next location that of the cave hermitage of Wadi el Rayan. Thus it was ‘simply’ picking up a local Bedouin guide who guided us through the desert in our 4X4’s for about 30 minutes- whereupon we reached our final goal, the small Coptic monk community of St Merkarios.

These monks live an ascetic existence utilising carved out caves for sleeping and living, and surviving off the produce of a small garden growing basically in the middle of nowhere.



We were welcomed with open arms and they were keen to hear our individual stories, more of that experience in a later *Cloisters*.

We were accommodated in a cosy cave, with six bunks carved out of rock, and which was our home for a week.



We explained our mission to the Father, that being we were interested in the location of a long lost monastic site in the area and the possibility of Biblical artefacts they may have been buried aeons ago.

Naturally we were non too pleased at the situation, and neither were the monks – however, as it turned out they were only seen in the evenings, and during the day we were left to our own devices.



I am capping this story extremely short for the time being, however, suffice to say, we found our ruinous monastic site, a site that has never been recorded and where in the 5th century over 4000 monks lived and worshipped. Not only that, but we also discovered a few amazing finds, and that as they say is for another day!

Be sure to tune in next time when all, well most, will be revealed!

They were extremely interested, and assisted us in all our plans, however, one small ‘hiccup’ occurred the following day we arrived – that of the arrival of the ‘Galabaya police’ (plain clothes local police dressed in the traditional robed one piece). We were told they were here for our ‘protection’ and would stay in adjoining caves to ‘keep an eye on us’.



Learning at the NCS Online College



Noel Chidwick

It's nearly Autumn here in the UK and it's the start of a new year of learning. This is a good time to remind you, gentle reader, exactly how we approach the subject of learning here at the NCS College. Learning requires commitment from all sides - it requires commitment from the learner, and it requires commitment from the provider. Here is our pledge to our learners at the NCS Online College, our commitment to do the best we can to provide some top-notch online learning.

Access, Pace and Style

All our courses are available online and are accessible at any time, day or night. All you need is a computer linked to the Internet and you can access your course. That computer could be at home, a learning centre, a college, your workplace, a coffee shop - anywhere in the world.

You can learn at your own pace - take your time, or run through as quickly as you feel comfortable.

Words, pictures, videos, audio, websites, activities, discussions - as appropriate; our courses make wide use of the power of the Web to make their points. Your tutor will be available to support you all the way, and where feasible, offer alternative approaches.

Information

We provide full information about our courses on our web site - just visit the Course Catalogue Page to find out what's available. Need more information? Please contact us and we will be happy to answer all your questions. Visit our Contact Page to see how we can be contacted.

Learning Path

Each course comes with a suggested learning path, but you are free to choose your own way if that is appropriate - again, your ever-present tutor will guide you.

Relevant and Practical

As far as possible we encourage you to work away from the computer. Our astronomy courses, for example, get you out there under the night sky. And our courses are tightly focussed on their subjects.

Monitor Your Own Progress

Our learning environment (online classroom) lets you keep track of what you have done, and there are regular activities along the way to reinforce your learning as you progress through the course.

Specialist Support

All our courses are taught by subject specialists with teaching experience - you are in safe hands.

Technical Support

We provide support to ensure that the rare technical problems that do occur can be quickly sorted.

Develop Your Learning Skills

At the NCS Online College we pride ourselves in developing courses that encourage good learning skills. We also run a course - How to Learn Online - that will help you develop your learning skills - online or in a classroom.

Learning Ambitions

We aim to help you develop the self-confidence to take your newly awakened learning skills onwards and outwards.

Learning Community

You can join in our learning community and share your experience with other learners at the NCS Online College.

Learning Together

Study with friends or family at home, with colleagues at work, or link up with other learners anywhere in the world. Forget Bebo and Facebook - online learning is true social networking!

Value Learning

Learning should not be taken for granted, and its power for change should not be undervalued. At the NCS Online College we want you to develop your love of learning, and encourage that sense of curiosity you still have within you. Take a course, follow the learning path, ask questions and see where it takes you - you may be surprised.

Paul's Puzzles

James Lockchain

James Lockchain was a late, great rock star. He had 4 sons, born in 7 year intervals, but sadly, before the youngest attained his majority, James was nibbled to death by a llama. James had stipulated in his will that, on the occasion of his youngest son's 21st birthday, his fortune be divided up into 4 portions which depended upon his 4 sons ages.

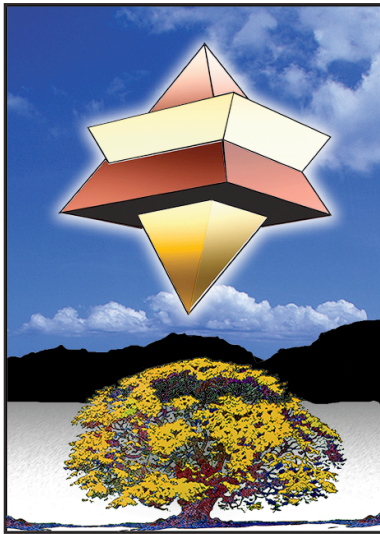
This involved finding the simplest ratio of the ages, and then taking the reciprocal of these numbers. (That is, the reciprocal of x is $1/x$). This would leave 4 simple fractions. The eldest would get the largest fraction of the estate, the second eldest would receive the next largest fraction, and so on.

His considerable fortune was divided up and distributed by a wily old accountant (who generously declined a fee for his services). But they did encounter some difficulty when it came to dividing up his herd of 59 llamas. James originally had a herd of 60 llamas, but forgot to amend his will when he lost one in a bet with his accountant. None of the sons were prepared to dissect a llama as they were worth more as live beasts.

Luckily, the wily old accountant had a suggestion!

Send all entries to cloisters@newcurioshop.com by 30th November 2008 and you could win a New Curiosity Shop course voucher.





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