

A broken twig

What would you do, if you found a time-machine?

Yes, that's right. You would keep it for yourself, which is exactly what Geoffrey Maitland did up in the far north of Scotland, when he was receiving a walk from Shegra to Keoldale across the rocky mountainous regions where it was easy to get lost.

Well it wasn't exactly a machine, more of a swirling void.

Trouble was, he was an experienced hiker and rambler of thirty plus years and could read a map like the back of his hand, but he still found himself off the route he was intending to take, and wandering aimlessly around, trying to find his bearings.

Near the top of a craggy hill which he had climbed in order to see his surroundings, he came across what he thought was a pond. It was surrounded by shrubbery and tall grasses and he guessed he could rest here and take stock of just where he was going.

When he looked into the pond itself he found not water, but a swirling vortex. Like a miniature black-hole, except it was more white and blue, spinning around like a hurricane. He could feel a kind of pull, where gravity was stronger, and had to step back in order to resist its effect.

However, it seemed the weather had other ideas, and as he stepped away further, a gust of wind suddenly pushed him off balance, pushed him forwards, and the gravitational effect took its grip on him and he could do nothing but fall into the void.

It wasn't long before he was thrown out of it. Out of the reach of its effect, and he lay on the ground wondering just what on earth had happened.

After he had gathered his bearings, tried to make a note of how to find it so he could tell his friends, he continued on his way to find a route back to some sort of civilisation, only to find in the distance, in the middle of a valley where he had come from, a small village.

That was definitely not there before, he had thought, as his route had taken him through the same place, so he decided to go down to it, only to find some movement, people, dressed differently. He could see them clear enough to know that something wasn't right. The atmosphere was different, and he guessed these people weren't dressed this way for the fun of it, for some historical festival. There were several thatched roof stone cottages, a hay-barn and a couple of wooden tenements.

If it was film set, or a recreation, it looked too realistic, and there was nothing there to suggest it was modern day. It looked medieval.

He saw a few more people and they were all dressed in similar attire, and that was when he decided not to approach, because something in the back of his mind came straight to the front. Even his watch told a different time than what he was sure it was.

He turned and headed back to the vortex.

When he went through school and university, Geoffrey had a penchant for things scientific. He studied chemistry, but still there was always part of his psyche reserved for the unknown, the spiritual. He believed in powers much greater than what science had discovered. Yet he guessed when such things were revealed, science would claim it. If you told a person five-hundred years ago that there would be such a thing as television, or aeroplanes which can take you anywhere in the world, they would have thought you mad, but science is a slow process, and probably needs to be, because where would we be if the cavemen had had computers?

People are shaped by their beliefs, and Geoffrey quickly came to the conclusion, as he headed back up to the vortex, that he had gone back in time.

He stood before the swirling void, feeling its pull, and could just about see the edge of the village from his vantage point.

He allowed himself to go with the gravitational pull and fell in.

Only to be ejected as before a few seconds later. He quickly stood up and ran to where he could properly see the village. To find it gone. He made his way back down there and after five minutes was walking amongst the ruins which nature slowly seemed to claim back. If your mind was elsewhere as was Geoffrey's when he passed through earlier, they hardly warranted a second glance, but now here they were, overgrown with grass and soil, reclaimed by the ground.

The same village he had just seen.

Yet he had to make sure, so made his way back up the vortex and jumped inside.

He was soon on a rocky outcrop, looking down at the village, as it was, the same as before. People milling around. Daily life. Activity.

He realised that he could be spotted, so climbed back to the vortex where he knew he could not be seen.

I must have gone back a few hundred years, he thought, and jumped back into the void.

When he came out he wrote as best he could the location of it, and tried his best to get back on to what he was originally doing.

Clambering his way down, through a valley and along a ridgeway, he came across a path, a pathway that led to a narrow road which cut its way through the region. He knew that from here he could find his way back on track.

He found where he was on his map and continued to make his way to Keoldale.

What would his friends think? he thought. He'd found a way into the past. A link into Scotland however many years ago it was. They won't believe me, he thought, but some of them may be convinced. They certainly will be when I show them.

However, the closer he got to Keoldale, the more he came to understand that it was probably best he tell nobody, for the reason he turned and ran back to the vortex when he realised he was in the past.

Should he have spoken to anyone in the village, or should they have even seen him at all, then such actions will have repercussions for the future. Things will change, may not happen. Like the butterfly flapping its wings really can affect tornados in America, even if someone had looked at him sat on the hillside, and wondered who it was, those few seconds could be precious, could maybe effect something in the future that could well have happened had they not been spotted at all. If he brought attention to himself simply by treading on and breaking a twig, then the timeline could well start to veer in a different direction.

A broken twig, could indeed, change the world.

So talking to somebody then was out of the question, because in the future he may not then exist, as it could have affected his parents Doreen and Charlie meeting up.

They might not have met at the local discoteque. While Charlie was out on the dancefloor with his flares, multi-coloured shirt and droopy moustache, busting moves out to the new sensation of rock 'n roll, and Doreen watching him from the side with hearts in her eyes falling smitten at that instant, unable to do anything but go over there and join him, then perhaps the resultant Geoffery may not have been born had they not have met.

When Doreen badgered her friend to come with her to the disco to hear this new fangled music, this bad influence according to her friend's father, and depending on how dominant he was in keeping her behaved in the way he thinks was best for her, where his way of thinking, his opinions and values were the only ones of any merit, where nothing else would do and alternative thoughts discouraged. It's my way or no way at all, then where would society be if everybody kept order? If they obeyed the rules.

Society gradually changes and twists around to new ways of thinking partially because children rebel against their parents.

If Doreen's friend had obeyed her father and stayed in and not gone out to listen to this rock 'n roll, this scourge of society corrupting the nation's youth. If she had obeyed and not rebelled like so many other children, just 'became' their parents, then society would stagnate. Whatever influence Doreen's friend's father had, he was losing as she grew older. He and the mother were slowly unlocking their grip, as were thousands of other parents, watching as their children took up the influences of the day, and civilisation gradually changed, leaving those behind who were set in their ways and wanted their offspring to be like them, because their way was the 'right' way to be. It's my way or nothing, and you will be the same.

Thankfully children disobey their parents like Doreen's friend, who went to the disco anyway leaving her father sitting in his armchair with his arms folded, a sour expression on his face, because if he wasn't sat there like that, Geoffery would not exist.

Even if those parents had not met. If an appointment was missed, or cancelled, or they were late, where time was a major factor as to whether or not life changing events happened. If the milkman had not seduced Mrs Bramble from number 46, then little Bobby would not have been born. Little Bobby who went on to found a shoe factory creating hundreds of jobs. Jobs that affected the lives of the employees where the pay would give them a standard of living that improved their lives, where new friends would form and babies born. People coming in to give their ideas and opinions. Shall we expand? Shall we raise the prices? Shall we advertise more?

A person who sees one of those adverts by a road-side in the south of the country and stops to look at it for a few moments which makes him late for the bus to go and play in an important football match, which means the bus whose driver has no patience, 'Oh I'm not waiting any longer', left without him, meaning his replacement in defence may go on to bigger and better things, changing his life, all because of an eye-catching advert for a shoe factory that would not exist, where it not for the glint in the milkman's eye.

If an asteroid was heading straight for Earth, then anything that could knock it slightly, even a millimetre, could change its trajectory, and it would miss, changing everybody's life in the process, and they wouldn't even know it.

It was hard for Geoffery not to tell his friends, not to tell anyone. The temptation was strong, and he told his ramblers group that the walk he was receiving was not viable. The route needed would be much longer than anticipated, more of a round trip, and they reluctantly agreed and sent him on another one from Kearvaig to Achimore.

At his home, in a caravan park near Oldshoremore beach, he lived with a community of others who had similar lifestyles, the caravans embedded permanently with permanent residents. There were several on the other side of the car-park where tourists could stay but whether they did or not it didn't matter because money was not too much of an issue. He was fifty-seven years old, lived alone, although divorced three times he decided to just accept the fact he would be a singleton and thought that even if another opportunity came around to walk back down the aisle, he would probably not take it. Old age beckoned, and he was set in his ways, in his routine, and he was happy with it. With dark, floppy hair, he always wore the same jacket most days despite the weather. He was quite 'weathered', as though he'd been down-trodden for years.

In the days after discovering the vortex, he couldn't get it out of his mind, and with the notes he had taken, he tried to find it again. This time driving as close as he could get in his beat-up little Honda civic.

From where he parked, on a lonely desolate road, it was a five mile trek over hills across fields, through mountainous regions, but he found it. There it was, swirling around and he felt no fear as he jumped inside.

He was thrown out again, rolling over and standing up. He stood on an outcrop, surveying the village in the distance, sure no-one there could see him, but everything was the same as it was in the past and he did a quick overview of his surroundings to make sure nobody was around, would not chance upon him, but the nearest person it seemed was down in the village. It was the only place of any activity for miles around.

This must be anywhere from the 12th to the 19th century, he thought. It was a nice sunny day and a few birds circled in the sky, and he wondered that he should not even be seen by animals, as maybe somewhere down the line even they could have some sort of effect.

After around two hours he made his way back to the void, and back to his own civilisation.

He stayed for a few days in his present, at his ramblers meetings, and caravan park barbecues, trying to be normal, but still the vortex had invaded his mind, and when he parked up at the same place to walk the five miles, he took from under the passenger side seat a good pair of binoculars, and was soon trekking his way through the hills and into the past.

Sat upon the rock, he surveyed the village below through his binoculars, having made sure nobody was near and saw exactly what he had suspected, and it reinforced his belief that he really was in the past. There was nothing modern anywhere. People milled

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