



## Is this Cows Week? Or the return of a happy memory.

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on May 29, 2006 - 6:53pm

Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

Tags: [box stores](#), [commuting](#), [local butchers](#), [travel times](#) [[list all tags](#)]

One of the benefits of a full English Breakfast in a hotel is that it gives you time to explore more of the Telegraph, and so I found [David Millward's piece](#) on Roman travel, which turns out to be quite on topic. It appears, according to a study by Andreas Schäfer, that we spend as much time traveling on average, as they did in Roman times, about 5% (or 1.2 hours a day). And apparently this is an almost Universal truth. Which seemed somewhat relevant to note on a day that took me some 3 hours to return to the ancestral village in Scotland this morning, a total distance of not much more than a hundred miles.

But, to return to the article, since it reflects on several of our discussions on travel, and particularly where this might go. Although neither author seems to have heard of PO, the points made are interesting. Only the conclusions may be wrong.

The same rule also seems to apply to African villages and major American and Japanese cities.

As individuals and societies get richer, the distance changes but the time remains constant said Dr Schäfer, a lecturer in transportation systems at Cambridge University. . . . . Dr Schäfer said: "Nearly all the travel Romans did was below three miles, allowing them one trip from the city boundary to the centre and back.

"The cities were designed so that someone could get to the centre and back in about an hour - the five per cent time budget that we continue to live by today."

The arrival of the tram extended the daily return journey to about six miles, while the car extended this to around 12.

"Under average congested traffic conditions, a motor vehicle will allow you to travel to and from the city centre within 1.2 hours," Dr Schäfer said.

"A guess for 2050 could be that Rome's city radius extends to the Alps," he said.

Similarly, assuming that an ultra-high-speed rail link is created, the southern commuting boundary to Rome could be Sicily.

It is interesting to note that the article cites DoT studies that show that a similar story holds true in the United States over the past century, with the time staying roughly constant as the distance increases. Further, that as rail speeds have increased (did I hear a Yeah! from Alan?) the range of commute increases to maintain the limit of time. This was certainly evident in the UK where the

price of houses increased in a wave up the country as the lines got more efficient and it became economic to live further and further from London and still hold a day-job there. At present, the article notes, that wave has spread to York, which lies some 188 miles North of London.

Unfortunately, while that works for rail, the average speed of cars over here was definitely slower today, though in part this may have been since it was a Bank Holiday, but the traffic on the narrower highways going across the country (a mere 50 miles or so) and then up on the Stranraer road (to the main port for Ireland) meant staying in long lines behind lorries (trucks in the States). Turning off that road at Dumfries (where, last year, I learned the [price of UK gas](#). Back then "Well for 39.3 liters of gas I paid 36.12 English pounds. At today's exchange rate that is \$6.50 a gallon." Today I paid 25 pounds for 25.4 liters of petrol. At an exchange rate of [\\$1.858 to the pound](#) comes out to \$6.95/gal.

Talking to my Aunt over local lamb at lunch (she could name the farm, after talking to the waitress) this is currently apparently the saving grace down in Castle Douglas. Despite having a new Box Superstore they, in a relatively small market town, (Scottish small not US) still have 3 private butchers. The reason is that most of the meat comes from local growers. With the low costs of transport included, this allows them to maintain their existence against otherwise overwhelming pressure. It also gives a market to the growing herds of sheep, with lambs, and cows, with calves that now again, thankfully, dot the hillsides.

I was reminded by that of a comment of a colleague, who was pointing out that the likely next victim of the Box SuperStores (BS) in the US are likely to be smaller Supermarket chains. They will be killed because their demand has fallen due to the BS arrival and thus the transportation costs are being allocated to smaller and smaller volumes, forcing significantly higher prices against the BS. This is an increasingly vicious circle, and he expects that it will result in a number of the food supermarkets in our area slowly going to the wall within the next year. It was how the supermarkets killed the family grocery stores, and now the cycle continues. But with interests in specialized, local products (as Yankee and others have said before) there is some evidence, such as this, that competition can work.

And finally, to explain the title, for those not in the UK, and who can stand my puny attempts at word-play, Cowes is a boating festival in the UK, but what I am again talking about relates to a game my siblings and I would play as we drove the miles to "Grandma's House" it was to spot the fearsome Heilan' Coo. And I was delighted to spot some today, including a black one, which I don't recall seeing before, but here it is. (Different farm, same stretch of road, but then it has been 50 years).



And I also saw four "Belties", though not quick enough to get a photo, and, during the course of the day I only saw one mention of wind turbines.



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