

HighBeam Research

Title: Freeze a jolly good fellow.(Review)

Date: 9/26/2002; **Publication:** The Daily Mail (London, England); **Author:** Paterson, Peter

Byline: PETER PATERSON

Steve Leonard's Extreme Animals (BBC1); Flesh And Blood (BBC2) NATURAL history has always occupied an important place in the TV schedules, simply because people love to see nature in the raw from the comfort of their own living rooms and want something more sophisticated than old Tarzan films.

But these things can be overdone, and BBC1 went a little mad last night by running Steve Leonard's Extreme Animals and Donal Mac-Intyre's Wild Weather back to back.

In fact, both turned out to be more about the respective presenters than nature itself, and although Leonard's show was ostensibly about animals surviving in unusually hot and cold places, it really had much in common with MacIntyre's animal-free programme about the winds.

There's not really room in town for both of these show-offs, so I concentrated on Steve Leonard, an interesting example of the BBC's transition from old stagers such as Sir David Attenborough to as yet untitled young comperes like the delightful Charlotte Uhlenbroek.

Indeed, in one segment of Leonard's wide-ranging essay on heat and cold, he did have to share the screen with an attractive young elephant expert called Saba Douglas-Hamilton. Were we being given a glimpse of the next presenter of red-in-tooth-and-claw animal programmes?

But first we had to suppress our giggles while Leonard did a striptease, standing in the freezing cold of a place called Shiga Kogen in Japan and throwing every item of his clothing, piece by piece, down on the snow. He advised us that in that nude state he would be dead in 30 minutes, but this was no snuff movie and he simply ran off to a stream warmed by a volcano to join a troop of macaque snow monkeys.

Then he was off to South Georgia in the South Atlantic, 'the maddest, baddest, most violent seas on earth' - Leonard loves superlatives - to explain how king penguin cubs stay warm by huddling together when left to cope for five months on their own without food while their parents go to sea.

Does he know, I wonder, why human parties warm up so quickly, even in a cold room, if there's a good crowd in attendance? It's because, like the king penguin clubs, we give off

a communal warmth - three people, I believe, exude the equivalent heat of a one-bar electric fire.

But before I could give him this fascinating piece of information, Leonard was off again, swimming in the North Pacific at minus 60c (though not nude) to find the giant octopus.

HE SWIFTLY trumped my electric fire factoid by telling us that if a human baby grew as fast as the young of the giant octopus, they would reach a weight of 27 stone by the time they were three. But isn't that precisely what's worrying health experts about our young already?

Before switching over from The Big Chill to The Heat Is On (I think these were two programmes rolled into one) Steve disappeared into his own icehole, Nanook of the Northstyle, to explore the underwater realm of the bearded seal.

This gave him a chance to demonstrate what risks he runs to entertain-and inform us (don't they have a health and safety department at the BBC?), for within half an hour his icehole - should he be able to find it again - would freeze over and leave him trapped for ever.

As it was, he had to head-butt himself free, before heading for warmer climes.

Hot proved to be less fascinating in terms of adventure than cold, with the exception of Ms Douglas-Hamilton's cameo appearance with Steve and the 'well-digger' elephants of the Namibian desert.

For the umpteenth time in my years of watching TV, we saw that the old Indian fire-walking trick is not at all difficult so long as you keep moving (though I shouldn't want to try it), and our familiar friend, the African lungfish, was exhibited once more, with his ability to lie doggo for four years until a drought ends, his water hole fills up and he can swim again.

Steve and Donal, and Charlotte and Saba, are treading in the footprints of Sir David. But none of them has his learned air of gravitas.

FLESH And Blood was a piece of agitprop designed to make us all more aware of the handicapped - or people with learning difficulties, as it is now polite to call them.

Christopher Eccleston, as woodworker Joe Broughton, adopted as a baby, had to come to terms with the discovery that his real, or birth, parents had been inmates of a mental institution and had no awareness of his existence.

The name of the mother on his birth certificate was in fact a mental health nurse helping to cover up a care scandal.

When Joe's wife, Cath (Emma Cunniffe), gives birth to their first child, a girl, he begins to wonder about his parentage and goes in search of his mother and father. And he is shocked, angry and frightened to find that Harry and Janet, living separately in sheltered accommodation, will never know what role they played in his existence, nor whether the situation has any hereditary implications for his own child.

The central scene in Peter Bowker's drama was a family party to which Joe defiantly invites his birth parents, along with his adoptive mother, and his two best friends from work.

No one would have been surprised that the party didn't go too well - not because of the Neanderthal attitudes of his politically incorrect friend, Eddie (Stephen Graham), nor the bemusement of Harry and Janet - but because of Joe's own inbuilt prejudices.

Propaganda seldom makes for good drama.

This document provided by HighBeam Research at <http://www.highbeam.com>