

## More than meets the taste buds

In Scotland there has been a marked rise in drink related crime, nothing new you may say as since the relaxation of drinking hours to come in line with the European Union it is happening in many of our towns and cities in the UK. The one thing that does set it apart is the fact that one fortified wine is being blamed for it. Buckfast wine is the common denominator in a lot of the drink related cases brought before Scottish courts. It has been found to be laced with caffeine; in fact it has more than most so called high energy soft drinks. It is certainly fuelling hyper-activity in many a drunken Scot.

Is it a drug? It certainly acts like one and it is used in quite a few drug preparations; some premature babies with immature respiratory systems are helped by caffeine. Oddly enough it is not completely banned in competitive sport. Caffeine is in fact found in many plants although the main source is from tea, coffee and chocolate. Caffeine was discovered by a couple of German scientists in 1820. They found that it works the same way hormones do in the human body. You would probably be advised not to take more than four or five cups daily but Diabetic Associations are seriously thinking that caffeine can help protect against Type 2 Diabetes. However there's a real need for research to be done. Who knows it may not be too long before those that suffer from Type 2 Diabetes are advised to drink more coffee. We can only wait and see. Strangely, caffeine is not addictive though it does boost energy levels when one is tired; indeed drivers are told to take a coffee break when driving long distances to overcome drowsiness. I've often heard people say they need a caffeine fix when they are flagging, but it is nothing like being addicted as with heroin and the like, caffeine does not work in the same way as those street drugs. Nobody is addicted to it; you can stop drinking it at any time and feel no ill effects. However a word to the wise, my sister who is on thyroid medication mistakenly used my decaffeinated teabags for a short while when were away on holiday and suffered serious headaches. She proved the teabags were to blame as the headaches stopped when she no longer used them and went back to her usual tea. I remember her saying some time ago that she had tried my decaf tea and had the same result. I was sceptical at the time but take it from me it happened.

Surprisingly, tea leaves when dried contain more caffeine than coffee granules do, but the way we make our drinks means that a cup of coffee ends up with more caffeine than a cup of tea. The first coffee house opened in Oxford during Oliver Cromwell's `reign` in parliament in the 1600's. Two famous scientists, Robert Hook (he described the bloods capillary action) and Robert Boyle (Boyles Law on gas pressure) were frequent partakers of coffee. Anybody who was anybody in Oxford went to the coffee shop to meet up with like minded people.

*My thanks go to Dr John Stanley (Trinity College Oxford) without his article I would not have had this information.*

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## How to find north

Perhaps if you need to find your way when out and about walking, camping or doing other outdoor pursuits and have no compass, what do you do? Well you could make your own with a metal paper clip that you happen to have in your pocket and a handy puddle of water. First straighten the paperclip and draw it repeatedly through your hair (this could be a problem if you have no hair), check it is magnetized by holding it near a metal object (the can of pop you are carrying for instance). If the clip is drawn towards it then it is ready. Now find a puddle of water. No water around? Then use the drink you are carrying or if your can is empty there are other ways of making a puddle depending on how desperately you need to find north. Float a leaf on the liquid, place the straightened paperclip on the leaf and see it turn to the north. Hey presto you've made a compass. My thanks go to the magazine Country Walking for the basic information.

Page submitted by Audrey Goodwin