

The Sreleehw Tribe

Anthropologist R T Mottoc has been studying the primitive Sreleehw tribe for five years. Here he reports on one of its key rituals, the Saturday Club Run (Road).

The Sreleehw tribe's Saturday Club Run (Road) is built around a complex system of hierarchies, supporting a social structure founded on personal inequality. Faster riders are accorded higher status, while adolescents, regardless of speed, are low status members, on the basis that they are unfairly lightweight, being unencumbered with years of cake eating duties. The tribe invariably loses its younger riders when they go 'walkabout' around the age of 17. During his walkabout the young rider will pursue interests that are antithetical to the tribe, such as cars, and others that are no more than a memory to their tribal elders, such as girls.

Riders with the rare qualities of both speed and age are much venerated, this combination reaching its apotheosis in a rider known as the Walker, a slight and shadowy figure, his identity masked by dark glasses regardless of the weather. The Walker may sometimes be glimpsed slipping off into the gloaming to ride home solo over the hills just as lesser riders arrive at the tribe's halfway house, the tea stop.

Although club run authority is nominally centralised on an overlord known as the Shepherd, this is in fact a thankless role, subject to abuse from riders whose skills are inadequate for any bumpy surface to which the Shepherd may lead them, such routes being regarded as suitable only for the much derided sub-tribe, the Mountain People or 'Muddies'.

Paradoxically, the Shepherd's dual role as Shaman is highly respected. Grateful riders may kneel in homage after the Shaman has anointed their stricken steeds with precious relics pulled from a cavernous medicine bag. These, known as 'tools' and 'parts', have quasi-mystical restorative properties and are so revered that the Shaman rides, hen like, sitting on them.

New members are integrated into the tribe through the achievement of two tasks: 'keeping up' (although the definition of this is uncertain and will have to be the subject of further research) and the successful conclusion of a mysterious barter process with the Shepherd, known as 'subs', the precise destination of which remains unclear.

The tribe's language skills are poorly developed. For example, the Walker never walks, even up the steepest hill, the club run involves no running, and the Shepherd's commands can be contradictory ('easy up', for example, meaning that the going up is anything but easy). Similarly, many riders share the same name, which they emblazon proudly on their ceremonial tunics. Even here, hierarchy dominates, with high status enjoyed by the several riders called Assos and low status suffered by those known as Crane.

While linguistically limited, the Sreleehw tribe is obsessed with numbers. Members can be seen nodding sagely over remarks such as 'On my 22 36 10 I was at 90 percent doing 29.5 on a 53 12 before dropping to 39 21 for the 1 in 6'. The tribe is equally fond of gestures. Indeed, the longer a motorist sounds his horn, the greater the number of the tribe that will wave back, and the greater the range of hand signals they will deploy.

The tribe reinforces its strong cultural identity by celebrating achievement based on the notion of a collective journey. Believed to be originally nomadic, but still notionally hunter-gatherers, the Sreleehw tribe is now sadly reduced to weekly circular journeys that achieve no more than delivering its members back to the very town that they left hours earlier, following a pilgrimage to worship the tribe's defining cultural artefact, the steaming tea pot.

Simple though they may be, I believe that we have much to learn from these primitive folk, aimlessly circling the Cheshire countryside in all weathers. Don't forget to sound your horn as they pass by.