

BUM STEER*(continued from page 19)*

progressively pushed farther upriver. Nowhere is there a mention of any cattle tunnel. As I walked from the library, I stopped to look at an exhibit on Manhattan archeological digs. Would an urban archeologist have any leads?

After protracted chit-chat with Diana Wall, noted City College archeologist, about our respective adventures ferreting around under the City, I asked her for any pointers.

"A cattle tunnel sounds pretty unlikely," she said. "A large cross-island civic project like this would have taken quite some time to build by hand, and I would think 'Stokes' Iconography' would have some mention of it." That got me to thinking about how the slaughterhouses kept burning down and moving, and about how such a passage might have connected two non-existent slaughterhouses by the time it was completed. "More than likely," she concluded, "what they've found is an old foundation or pier. Not knowing what it is, they assume it's this rumored cattle tunnel."

Skepticism building, I got to

pondering whether cows would actually let themselves be herded through such a tunnel. As it happens, I'm acquainted with esteemed dairyman Don Duncan out in Robesonia, Pa. Time to ask a cow expert what he thinks about the plausibility of a shore-to-shore cattle tunnel. I mean, would cows go blindly into a long, dark tunnel?

"The real danger is that there'd be a pile-up, some cows would panic, turn around and make the herdsman into a doormat."

Mightn't they be startled into a stampede by a stray rat? Don thought a moment.

"Problem is, cows aren't so much skittish as they are clumsy, not to mention stump stupid. They might go into a dark tunnel, but the beasts are known to stumble and fall down on dry concrete if they blink too hard, for Pete's sake. Now in a dark, wet, slippery and relatively narrow tunnel, well, one cow might just fall and the others would trip right over each other in a pile-up. Happens in branding chutes. Real danger is that this tunnel sounds

wide enough that there'd be a pile-up, some cows would panic, turn around and make the herdsman into a doormat."

Don was onto something, not just about the clumsy factor, but about the tunnel being wet. At 10 feet or more down, ground water seepage would make it a passage as much for fish as cows unless there

were pumps and drainage. And this tunnel would require lights, which if you spaced them 50 feet apart over a mile of tunnel, would require a hundred-some lanterns.

Deep in my mind there still stood the sniffling lost child of hope. Maybe the tunnel didn't go shore to shore, just building to building? Maybe it was not only much shorter but built much later than I supposed? O.K., so maybe it wasn't a cattle tunnel at all, but the up-turned hull of a ship? The lost "Bazzini Nut Tunnel" constructed entirely of spent pecan shells?

The means to finding the tunnel were soon at hand as the utility companies mobilized test-pitting programs to positively locate what they have in the street, a little insurance to make sure nobody gets any ideas about planting a tree on top of their ducts or running a water main through their conduits. We dug the full width of the street, albeit piecemeal, and found lots of interesting stuff: old walls, vaulted brick basement roofs, foundations, buried manholes, abandoned pipes, trolley yokes, discarded granite vault roofs. In many places we dug quite deep, up to 14 feet. Zero moo-moo tubes.

And on the last day of test-pitting, who do you think I ran into? Fred, the guy whose story was the catalyst for my quest.

"Oh, yeah," Fred assured with a wave. "The Cattle Tunnel. Sure. It's uptown. Gansevoort Street.

I seen it. Well, a buddy of mine did. Putting in a catch basin."

Uh huh. I'll bet it's made entirely of Popsicle sticks and Silly Putty, too. I questioned Fred's source, and he looked confused.

"Whaddaya mean, 'Did he lose an Armani jacket?'"

dudley's paw



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