

## Find them — and make them sorry

**T**WO friends stand chatting on a street corner, enjoying the warm sunshine on a glorious May afternoon.

The women are in their eighties and they have known each other for years in the close-knit community of Henbury, Bristol.

And then, seemingly out of nowhere, a nightmare strikes.

A stolen car, driven by three young men, screams out of control across the road, ploughing into the friends and burying itself into a low wall.

The scene, which just moments earlier had been so ordinary, has suddenly turned into one of utter carnage.

The two women are dreadfully injured — and the culprits, as you would guess, turn on their heels and run for it, leaving their victims bleeding and in agony.

This is a crime of our time. It is about theft of property, the pursuit of cheap thrills, the cowardly bravado of driving at speed and the selfishness of abandoning responsibility.

Some call it joyriding.

To any decent person it is nothing of the sort. It is little short of attempted murder — and when the three fugitives are found as we desperately hope they are, they must be made to face up to the enormity of what they have done.

Some bright-eyed solicitor might try for a let-out. A story of deprivation to soften up the court... and hey presto, a sentence worthy of shoplifting.

They had a chance in the seconds after the crash to come to their senses. They chose to run.

Now, the running away must stop.

## Bags of style

**T**HE contents of a woman's handbag — so we are told — says a lot about the character of the woman herself.

Margaret Thatcher's bag was a metaphorical weapon with which she pummeled her political opponents. The contents, in her case, were irrelevant.

But, since the Iron Lady has elbowed her graceful way back into the political arena this week to bolster William Hague's faltering election campaign, it would not be unfair to speculate on what she might carry around with her these days.

Within that famous single clasp leather Excotec we suspect might lurk... a Michael Heseltine scalp, a school milk token (think about it), a photograph of the Belgrano, an unpaid Poll Tax bill and Arthur Scargill's current address (in case he needs chasing again).

But you have to admit, whatever it really contains, the bag is still bursting with style.

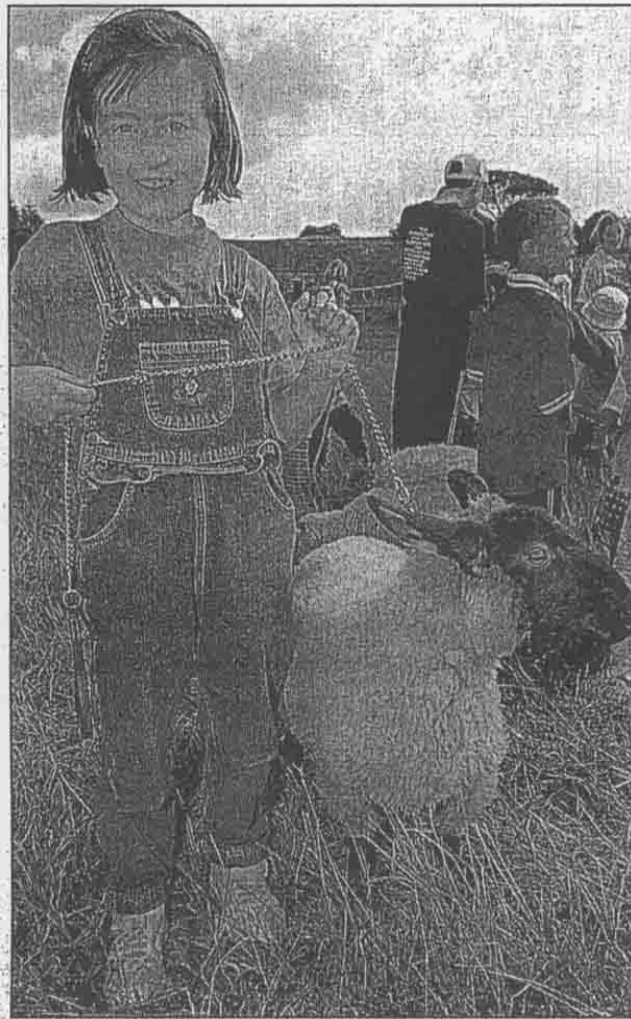
### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Correct your child, and he will give you peace of mind; He will delight your soul.

Proverbs 29.17

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# How can we save the safe image of the English farm holiday?



The wholesome face of farms as a place for family holidays has been badly damaged.

**J**UST a year ago, the words "English Farmhouse" conjured up wholesome and pleasurable holiday images. Farm holidays enabled you to have contact with real animals, experience peace and quiet (apart from the crowing of the farmyard cock) and to understand how farmers tended our green and pleasant land.

Tourists from the towns and cities of this country and from abroad left their urban drudgery to visit farms.

The English farm was the perfect tourism brand. It meant escape, serenity, harmony with nature and a way of learning about the world. Farm tourism was good business and a meaningful flagship for the nation.

Not any more. The words "English Farm" are now associated with foot-and-mouth disease, swine fever, mad cow disease, fuel protesters, animal exploitation, suicide and depression. Visit an English farm and all this can be yours!

Foot and mouth has devastated farm tourism in this country. While we are already seeing city-based cultural tourism recover as the world stops over-reacting, countryside tourism remains badly damaged and farm tourism is as much contaminated as the poor beasts in the fields.

## By PHILIP COOKE

Travel consultant

Pity the farmers who switched from food production to tourism. Farm-based tourist accommodation and countryside attractions are the most difficult for the tourist boards to help, because they are small and cannot afford marketing departments and advertising budgets, and they have one short summer season in which to earn enough money to keep them going for the dark winter months ahead.

*Unfortunately, summer will not happen for most of them this year and many will probably go under.*

Tourist attractions and accommodation with the word "farm" in their address are in the worst long-term trouble, because the public has lost faith in farms.

We have all seen how farm animals are treated; how they are fed to each other; how they are trucked around the country and how they are slaughtered. We have seen too much of all this. Farms are no longer nice places; they are bad news.

**F**armers are the latest victims of our national habit of turning problems into disasters. England is gaining a reputation for over-reacting to situations that are best dealt with by containment, not crisis.

We panic bought ourselves into a fuel crisis because part of the tanker delivery fleet stayed put for a few days and we spent countless millions on solving the Millennium bug problem that also never happened.

Even worse — and nearer to home — is the way in which the West country scared away the biggest potential tourism bonanza of the century when it told the world that the total eclipse of the sun would jam every motorway and fill every campsite in Devon and Cornwall. Not.

This tendency to panic shapes how the world sees us. I have just returned from America, where I was asked whether it was safe to eat meat yet in the UK, whether you could really catch mad cow disease by breathing the air and whether we had to burn our clothes and walk about in the white boilersuits they had seen Tony Blair wear on the TV! They weren't joking.

At the airport, there was a special customs channel for anyone who had recently stayed on a farm or walked on English farmland (they probably did burn your clothes if you went through that door) and I had to constantly explain that I lived in one of the most rural parts of the UK but had never seen a funeral pyre. Nor had I seen an animal being shot, except on TV. I felt a responsibility to talk

down the problem, serious as it is, if only to counteract the way in which so many others were talking it up.

Experts have to help the farmers who have turned to tourism to re-market and re-brand themselves, so that when this is all over they will be able to attract visitors back to the country.

And perhaps this is not an impossible challenge — the language of the countryside is rich and evocative — city dwellers will once again be attracted to the idea of the rural, the natural, the rustic and the pastoral, once the full blast of the foot-and-mouth stigma is forgotten.

**B**ut the word farm must be temporarily culled from the dictionary of countryside tourism until confidence returns. There is a future for farm tourism, because farms are the essential infrastructure of the countryside and, eventually, they will recover.

But crisis management is required at this point and it is not good tactics to use a brand that is reeling from negative images currently being shown on every TV screen and newspaper in the world.

The UK's countryside tourist industry must create positive, not defensive, marketing campaigns. Foot-and-mouth is a devastation, but it will not be devastating. West Country tourism will survive and, eventually, even farm tourism will be brought back from the dead.

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