

Article on coffee from

24, 'STUFF', This Place on Earth by Alan Stein

Dunning
(See title
writes)

It is 7:00. I have showered. The children are dressed. The oatmeal is cooking, and while Gary plays with Peter on the floor Kathryn is "helping" me brew coffee. We measure the beans into the grinder, then grind and dump the coffee into the filter.

We fill the carafe from the spigot and pour it into the coffee-maker I point to the switch, and Kathryn turns it on. She flips it back and forth four times, watching the little red light go on and off. We get out a mug and spoon in some sugar and creamer. Kathryn steals some sugar for herself, then notices the coffee dripping into the carafe.

"Cottee! Yay! Cottee!" I suspect Kathryn was a coffee roaster in a past life. She claps. Peter imitates her. Gary tries to teach him how to "high-five."

The coffee finishes brewing. I pour it into the cup and sit down to drink it on the floor beside Peter and Gary. Kathryn climbs into my lap. Leaning back against the dishwasher, I am content. The children are happy. The oatmeal is making little plopping sounds in the pan. I take a sip of coffee.

My sleep-deprived mind reflexively reconstructs the events that led up to the cup of coffee I hold in my hand. The beans, I know, came from a mountain farm in the watershed of Colombia's Cauca River, a place once cloaked with cloud forests—now among the most endangered types of tropical forest. The farm workers probably sprayed the beans three times with insecticides, some of which were synthesized in Europe's Rhine River valley. I know that long stretches of the Rhine are now deprived of aquatic life because of toxic releases from chemical plants. I know the beans were picked by hand—I've seen it done—and removed from the fruit that encased them by a crusher fueled with diesel oil.

"My turn," demands Kathryn. I give her a tiny sip. "Mmm. Cottee." Her impish smile suggests she knows it's "not for children." I take another swallow.

1

The beans crossed the Caribbean on a freighter made in Japan. And the Japanese shipyard likely used Korean steel. The Korean steel mill used iron ingots mined in Australia, I speculate. And the ship was fueled with petroleum from Venezuela, probably pumped from the ground in the humid basin of the Orinoco River. At New Orleans, above the mouth of the Mississippi, the beans were roasted for thirteen minutes over four-hundred-degree flames of Oklahoma natural gas. The cooling beans were packaged in a four-ply bag made of aluminum foil from the Columbia Basin and nylon, polyester, and polyethylene—all plastic resins synthesized in New Jersey and Missouri from Mexican oil.

"My turn," demands Kathryn. I give her another sip. Peter is now trying to pull himself upright by clinging to his brother's ears. "Peter," Gary giggles, "let go!" I drink again.

From the Mississippi watershed, the beans traveled to the Northwest in an eighteen-wheeler fueled with Middle Eastern petroleum. I bought them in the grocery store and brought them home in a brown bag made of unbleached paper from the Willamette Valley of western Oregon. On the five-mile round-trip to the market, our car burned one-sixth of a gallon of gasoline—refined at Cherry Point in northwestern Washington.

Amy comes down from her shower. Gary asks her, "What are we going to do today? Can we do something fun?"

"Like what?"

"Let's go to Discovery Park and look for eagles!"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm so tired," Amy says.

"We could stop and get you a mocha." Gary's got Amy's number. I drink again.

In the kitchen, we had pulverized the beans in a grinder assembled in China from imported steel, aluminum, copper, and plastic parts. The coffeemaker was assembled in Taiwan, also from imported parts. Our filter is a reusable gold-plated mesh made in

Switzerland, probably from Russian ore. The grinder and the coffee-maker were powered by electricity generated at Ross Dam, on the Skagit River near the Canadian border. The water came by pipe from the Cedar River, on the west slope of the Cascade Mountains. Gary, his wits about him, draws Kathryn to his cause. "Kathryn, do you want to go to a big park?"

"Big pa-ark!" beams Kathryn. "Big pa-ark!" She toddles toward the door asking, "Where my coat go?"

Amy sighs, "Not yet, Kathryn. Later. We'll go to the park later." "Yessss!" says Gary.

"First," I say, "I want you to go through your toys and decide which ones to send to the consignment store. There's no reason to keep the stuff you don't play with anymore. Do a good job and we'll go look for eagles."

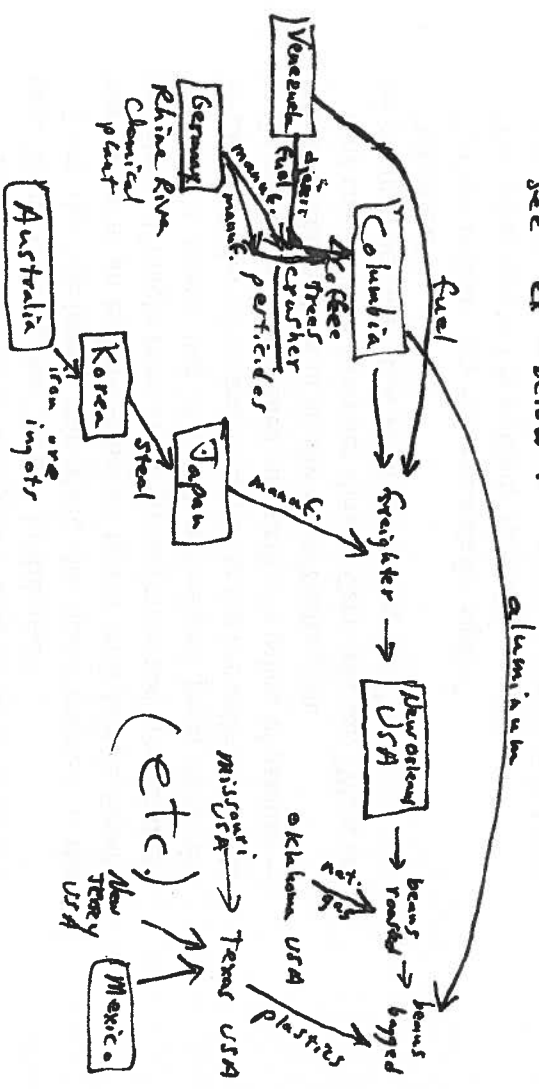
I drink again, draining the cup.

My morning libation took about a hundred beans to brew. At one cup a day, I go through the harvest of a coffee tree every six weeks. I am also responsible for the dozens of direct and indirect uses of fossil fuels, metals, and chemicals that brought the beverage to my lips. I think of these effects rippling out across the globe like the wake of a boat—an ecological wake. It isn't just coffee. Everything has an ecological wake. The T-shirt I bought yesterday on sale. The newspaper on the doorstep that I won't get to read until after the kids are in bed tonight. The burgers and fries we got Gary for dinner last night. The oatmeal on the stove. The stove. The floor I'm sitting on. Everything. Some wakes are big; others are small. Coffee's, I suspect, is medium-sized.

- 7. Comment on the energy use involved in moving materials in today's world economy and contrast this with the trend of eating local and buying locally-made products.
- 8. What are the benefits and harmful effects of today's world economy?

A World economy - interrelationships

1. Read Article.
2. Carefully construct a web showing the relationships indicated in the article. Note countries of origin, raw materials and processing of these materials. When source countries are not named, invent likely source countries (Ex: for the coffee crusher, Venezuela as the fuel source and Germany as the machine source) See ex below:



3. Use the web above to construct a poster that depicts the relationships with pictures (drawings, magazines, etc.) Be colourful.
4. Title the poster The Ecological Wake of Coffee as an example of the economic interrelationships of today's world economy.
5. Poster is worth 50 pts
6. Extra Credit: Choose another consumer product. Research it and make a similar poster on it.