



Revolutionary road: Bernal as Che Guevara

Walter Salles'

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

A Barry Sheen biopic?

Ha, no. This is based on the journal kept by one Ernesto Guevara, who journeyed through Latin America in the '50s with his best friend, Alberto Granada. You may know Ernesto better as the future poster boy for Marxist revolutionaries everywhere, Che Guevara.

Who plays the great man?

That poster boy for New Latin Cinema, Gael García Bernal, who bears an almost supernatural resemblance to the mighty Che. In fact, Gael has played Guevara before, in a 2002 US TV film called *Fidel*.

So tell us more about the film.

It's a classic buddies-on-the-road movie, through some of the world's most beautiful landscapes. Medical students Ernesto, then aged 23, and Alberto head

off from their home in Buenos Aires on a ball-breaking journey through South America, taking in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Peru, with the intention of hitting Venezuela in time for Alberto's 30th birthday. What starts off as pure larks – the lads doing their best Hope and Crosby, getting into scrapes, aspiring to be "sexual ambassadors for Argentina" – develops a darker hue as they encounter the extremes of poverty and despair. By the time they reach the isolated San Pablo leper colony in the Peruvian Amazon, the two friends are changed men, and Ernesto has developed his vision for a united South America.

Sounds very ambitious. Does it work?

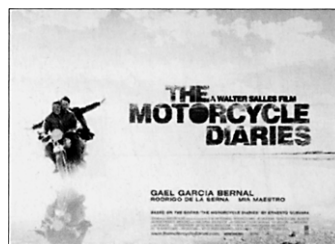
Absolutely. Despite the episodic nature of the story, Salles manages to make the film cohere. And at no point do he and screenwriter José Rivera turn the movie into a polemic; Ernesto's awakening to the suffering in the wider Latin world is played with subtlety by Gael, who reveals an astonishing maturity as an actor. It's also exquisitely shot.

Not to be confused with?

"Motorcycle Emptiness"; *Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance*; Black Rebel Motorcycle Club.

MICHAEL BONNER

The *Motorcycle Diaries* opens in the UK on August 27.



UNCUT



Remembering a Beatle ... guitarist Eric Clapton at the Royal Albert Hall

All things must pass

Pop

A Concert For George

Alexis Petridis

A huge portrait of George Harrison stares out over London's Royal Albert Hall. He looks a bit fed up. Never the sunniest Beatle, he often looked like that in photographs, but it is interesting to speculate what he would have made of this event. On one hand, he virtually invented the superstar charity gig with the 1971 Concert for Bangladesh. On the other, he was intensely private, suggesting the public mark his passing by meditating.

Harrison would certainly have enjoyed the

music specially composed by Ravi Shankar. A tiny, frail figure, Shankar sits onstage, nodding as his daughter Anoushka plays a sitar solo, and ELO's Jeff Lynne joins her for a gorgeous version of *The Inner Light*.

The second half features a band led by Lynne and Eric Clapton, bashing out his best-known songs with celebrity guests.

The ensemble rampage through a cacophonous *Wah Wah*, a bitter song, written after Harrison stormed out of a Beatles' rehearsal, accusing McCartney of patronising him by telling him how to play a solo. But now McCartney is pounding at a piano, stage right, a sideman on a Harrison masterpiece about how ghastly life in *The Beatles* was. It's hard to suppress the sort of sardonic chuckle that Harrison frequently used when discussing his "nightmare" time as a Fab – and conclude that's what George would have wanted.

Guardian Weekly

The following text is the beginning of Tunnel Vision, a novel by Sarah Paretsky, with a female detective as the main character

Power Failure

When the power went I was finishing a ten-page report. My office turned black; the computer groaned to a halt. Helpless, I watched my words fade to a ghostly outline that glowed on the screen before vanishing, like the mocking grin of a Cheshire cat.

I cursed myself and the building owners impartially. If I'd stuck with my mother's old Olivetti instead of going electronic I could have finished my work by candlelight and left. But if the Culpepper brothers weren't scuttling the Pulteney Building the power wouldn't have gone off.

I'd had my office there for ten years, so long I'd come to overlook its litany of ills. Decades of grime obscured the bas-reliefs on the brass doors and filled in missing chips in the lobby's marble floor; great chunks of plaster were missing from the cornices in the upper floors; three ladies' rooms served the whole building, and the toilets backed up more often than they worked. For that matter, I'd just about memorized the design on the elevator panels during the hours I'd been stuck in it.

All these evils were made palatable by the Pulteney's low rents. I should have realized long since that the Culpepper boys were waiting for the wave of Loop redevelopment to wash this far south, waiting for the day when the building would be worth more dead than alive. The dickering we did every fall, in which I walked away triumphant without a rent hike and they left without agreeing to put in new plumbing or wiring, should have been a warning to a detective like me who specializes in fraud, arson, and commercial misbehavior. But as with

many of my clients, cash flow was too insistent a problem for me to look beyond relief from my immediate woes.

The building had already been one-third empty when the Culpeppers handed out their notice at New Year's. They tried first to bribe, then to force, the rest of us into leaving. Some did, but tenants who could take the Pulteney couldn't easily afford new space. Hard times were pushing everyone who operates in the margins right off the page. As a private eye in a solo practice, I felt the pinch as much as anyone. Along with a hatmaker, a dealer in oriental health and beauty aids, someone who might have been a bookie, an addressing firm, and a few others, I was sticking it out to the bitter end.

I picked up my flashlight and moved with the speed of much practice through the dark hall to the stairwell. The report I'd been writing had to be in Darraugh Graham's hands by eight tomorrow. If I could find a faulty wire or blown fuse fast enough, I could pull in enough material from my data files to reconstruct the essentials. Otherwise I'd have to start from the beginning on the Olivetti.

I undid the locks on the stairwell door but left them open against my return. With Tom Czarnik gone I'd put padlocks on the doors that all worked to the same key. Czarnik, who'd been the super – alleged super – during my tenure in the building, had done nothing for the last two years but deliver angry tirades against the tenants, so it was no hardship to manage without him. In fact it had dawned on me lately that the Culpeppers probably paid him to speed the Pulteney's disintegration.

Medical experiments: any volunteers?

HEALTH CHECK



**JEREMY
LAURANCE**

1 WHAT WOULD have happened if the experimental treatment carried out on premature babies at North Staffordshire hospital had been a success?

2 This is a question worth asking, it seems to me, because it demonstrates our ambivalence towards new medical treatments. We want them if they work but there is hell to pay if they don't.

3 Yet even if they don't work there may still be good reasons for taking part in the research that demonstrates they don't. It is a fact, as Professor Simon Wessely of Kings College Hospital points out, that patients in trials tend to get better overall care. Events at North Staffordshire notwithstanding, they are generally looked after by enthusiastic, committed doctors who have a keen interest in what happens to them over and above the normal concern shown by doctors. If the outcome of the North Staffordshire debacle is that patients are deterred, it is not only medicine that will be the loser.

4 It is a truism, in medicine as in life, that no one ever expects the worst will happen to them. Even when the word "experimental" is attached to the word "treatment" I suspect most people would give it a go if their doctor was happy to.

5 So I wonder if, had the medical staff at North Staffordshire hospital who were heavily censured in the inquiry report published on

Monday, taken the proper care to explain the details of the research trial to the babies' parents, they would have ended up, as some parents claimed, with fewer takers.

6 The inquiry, chaired by Professor Rod Griffiths, director of public health for the West Midlands, concluded that parents had been misled. The new CNEP ventilator – Continuous Negative Extrathoracic Pressure – had been presented to them as the "gentler" option for the premature babies who had difficulty breathing, in contrast to the standard treatment of inserting a rigid plastic tube down their delicate windpipes, but they did not realise that the treatment was experimental.

7 Tragically, after five years (the trial ran from 1989 to 1993) it looked as if the new treatment was not working, even though the figures fell short of statistical proof.

8 But suppose the new CNEP ventilator had proved better than the standard one. It is unlikely that parents would have complained about lack of consent or that the inquiry would have been held. Indeed, protests might well have come from the parents whose babies were given the standard ventilator, complaining that they were getting second-rate care.

9 The best treatments in medicine can only be established in research trials which compare them with others – which means, by definition, that someone has to get the second best. The cavalier manner in which the research at North Staffordshire, led by Professor David Southall, was conducted is rightly criticised in the inquiry report. But the worst result would be if patients were no longer willing to participate in research.

10 A London director of public health told me recently about a trial of the drug beta interferon in multiple sclerosis which was oversubscribed with volunteers. Interestingly, many had already tried the drug and found it useless. What they were after was the extra care and attention they knew they would get as patients in the trial.

The Independent

Mike Marqusee on the hurdles faced by Louis and Owens

The great race

In Black and White: The Untold Story of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens by Donald McRae

1 In 1936, under the irritated gaze of Hitler and the Nazi high command, the sprinter and long jumper Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics. Two years later, at Yankee stadium in New York, the heavyweight boxer Joe Louis demolished the powerful German champion, Max Schmeling, in a single tumultuous round.

2 Both were stunning performances, displays of competitive prowess that would delight any sports fan anywhere. But they were much more than that. In the context of the rise of European fascism and America's own long-entrenched colour-coded caste system, the achievements of these African-Americans were seen as very significant. In the controlled environment of the sporting arena, their successes offered a laboratory-like refutation of theories of white supremacy. They were hailed at the time not only as victories over fascism and racism, but also as vindications of a despised race and of America itself.

3 Louis and Owens were the sons of sharecroppers and the grandsons of slaves. Born in rural Alabama, they both left the deep south at an early age when their families joined the great migration to the cities of the north (Owens to Cleveland and Louis to Detroit). There, they found outlets for their extraordinary talents – but only at a price.

4 In an America rigidly divided by colour, black champions like Owens and Louis served multiple and often painfully contradictory purposes. Their victories challenged racist assumptions about black inferiority – a challenge more important in the end for blacks than for whites, who quickly found ways to assimilate black excellence in sport within a racist world view. Their successes were also claimed as proof that blacks could make it in a white-dominated world, that the US was a land of unfettered opportunity – a message reassuring for the prosperous whites but double-edged for the disadvantaged black population.

5 Both Louis and Owens took great care to avoid giving offence to white people, while at the same time struggling to maintain their dignity and autonomy as black males. They

used every opportunity to reinforce their credentials as American patriots. As a result, both were routinely praised as credits to their race. And both were abysmally ill-rewarded for their service.

6 Within a fortnight of winning his fourth gold medal at Berlin, Owens was expelled from the track for life by the US athletics authorities. His crime was refusing to complete a tour of pointless exhibition races, a tour arranged without his permission and from which he was to derive zero financial benefit. Louis spent a number of his prime championship years in the army, boxing exhibition matches for which all proceeds were donated to soldiers' and sailors' relief funds. But after he retired, the government hounded him relentlessly for back taxes.

7 At times, both Owens and Louis had to descend to vaudeville to survive – Owens running races against horses, Louis hamming it up as a professional wrestler. No wonder, looking back at their careers, a later and more militant generation of African-Americans scoffed at their futile attempts to placate the white man. Joe and Jesse did everything that was asked of them, and more, and they still ended up short-changed and demeaned.



Victorious... Jesse Owens with the gold medal for long jump, flanked by Naoto Tajima of Japan and Germany's Lutz Long, at the Berlin Olympics, 1936

8 But three decades on, it is possible to see Louis and Owens for what they were – supreme sporting geniuses who were asked to

assume impossible social burdens. Donald McRae's account of their intertwined destinies presents a fair picture of two complex (and very different) individuals who sought to master their fates in a world that simply would not permit them that freedom. His book is clearly a labour of love. The volume and detail of research is impressive – and he makes particularly strong use of a thorough reading of the African-American press of the day.

9 However, McRae is led by his understandable admiration for Louis and Owens to overestimate their impact as catalysts for social change. (He exaggerates Louis's interventions against discrimination

in the military.) More worryingly, he switches without warning from carefully documented history to novel-like speculation, supplying detailed dialogue for scenes at which no living person was present, and assigning private thoughts and feelings to his protagonists in specific times and places for which there can be no sources. The reader begins to wonder what is established fact, what is hearsay and what is simply invented. It's a pity. The practice undermines a book noteworthy both for its compassion and for its vivid recreations of some of the most dramatic sporting encounters of modern times.

The Guardian

Trust me, I'm a patient



A few years ago, my friend Jack went home to Cornwall for his father's funeral. His father had been the local GP and the church was packed. Afterwards, the mourners queued to express their condolences to Jack and his sister: one man explained that he had come because the doctor had delivered his three children and four grandchildren; a woman told them that she owed their father her life because he'd made her stop drinking; a couple remembered how the doctor had climbed out of bed one Christmas Eve to rush to their infant's bedside because they feared a chest infection had turned into pneumonia.

Jack's father was 18. The once familiar figure of the beloved GP whose skills have cured generations and whose devotion to his patients (never clients) meant he spent his life rushing from housecall to housecall has become a memory. Equally, few GPs today would expect the respect and veneration which Jack's father enjoyed among his peers. Today's GP, and the relationship he or she has with their patients today, is altogether different.

A survey published last week by *Reader's Digest* casts some light on how doctors 19 their patients. Of the 200 GPs who took part, half said they would like to tell their patients to wash before coming to see them; two-thirds want to tell them that they're too fat and about half do not believe their patients take the medication they recommend.

It's not exactly heartwarming: GPs sound seriously frustrated and disillusioned in their dealings with us. Are we, the patients, to blame? Or are we finally reacting to centuries of their superior attitude towards the layman? Did the rot set in when the medical profession was forced into a marketplace mentality, with our health as the product, doctors the providers, ourselves the 20?

Commercialisation can go too far. A doctor's surgery is not a shop. When we buy a gizmo at Dixons, we give nothing more than our money. But when we visit a doctor, she cannot heal us unless we 21 about our symptoms (the embarrassing itch, the persistent cough) and our habits (how

much we smoke or drink and just how much butter we like to spread over our toast), nor can she help us unless we are committed to following the treatment she prescribes.

The consumer, 22, has obligations: politeness or at least civility, cleanliness, and the willingness to try the treatment administered. As one GP in an NHS practice in south London says: 'I am here to treat any patient on my list. But it is a lot easier to do it properly if they keep their side of the bargain. I expect them to be punctual, sober and clean, to answer my questions politely and honestly and then to take my advice seriously.'

Some patients take their health very seriously indeed. They step into the surgery armed with facts, figures, and Lancet articles. Few doctors can keep up with them. One woman I know, after her hysterectomy, asked her doctor about post-op treatments available. He shrugged and coughed and could think of nothing. That same day, she got onto the internet and found a self-help website, with post-op advice and treatments, and tips from other women who had had hysterectomies. One entry, she noticed, had been contributed by a nurse who worked in her GP's practice, and yet he had not so much as taken notice of 23.

This new breed of patient must prove daunting to GPs. When the doctor was seen as a wise paterfamilias, whose role was to scold and support the recalcitrant child-patient, too many of us dropped our intelligence and spirit of inquiry when we set foot in the surgery. The healers were sacrosanct, their prescriptions 24. Mute and docile as children cowed by father's caning, patients did their medic's bidding.

Today, this blind trust in authority has given way to wary suspicion. Whether it be the doctor, the teacher, the priest, we question those who 25 any aspect of our life. What right has my doctor to say my snoring is a result of heavy smoking and obesity?

This rejection of authority can prove as harmful as blind obedience to every dictate issued by the doctor. If we discount everything our GPs tell us, if we treat them with dislike or disrespect, can we expect them to have our well-being at heart? Yes, we, the patients, need to take an active part in our health – we can no longer approach medical terms as if they were an obscure Cantonese dialect and our bodily functions as if they were obscenities at a tea party. But in establishing active interest in 26, we cannot elbow out those trained to safeguard it.

The Observer

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Chris Woodhead: Teachers must be allowed to teach

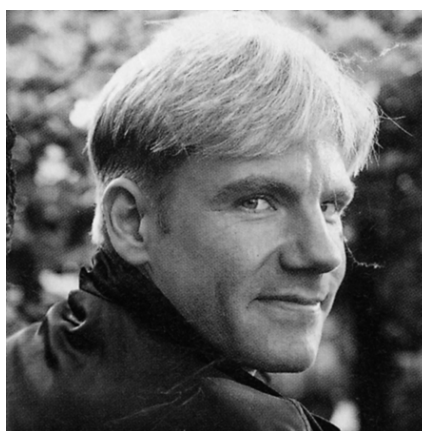
From the Institute of Ideas talk given by the former Chief Inspector of Schools at the Hay-on-Wye Literary Festival

- 1 Carol Adams, in an introduction of an IPPR pamphlet about information technology in teaching, dismisses “didactic exponents of information that stifle her students’ learning”. I wanted to seize upon that quotation because it illustrates the two fallacies we need to expose if education as it once was is to have any chance of surviving.
- 2 Now the first of these fallacies is the confusion of knowledge and information; these are two very different things. The second is that didactic teaching is boring, that it stifles learning. The caricature here is the teacher standing in front of the class dictating notes, pursuing his own agenda and failing to engage with his students.
- 3 Think back to your own days at school. The teachers I can remember who made a difference were people who had three characteristics, which I would put to you as the characteristics of good teaching in the 20th century, the 21st century, the 22nd century, or the 19th century for that matter.
- 4 Firstly the good teachers that I experienced, the good didactic teachers, were teachers who had a real love for their subject. Because they were personally engaged themselves, they could communicate that personal engagement to us, their pupils, and because of that we were inspired.
- 5 Second, high expectations, and the longer that I did the job of Chief Inspector, the more important the issue of expectations became to me. If the teacher had high expectations then the pupils learned, they made progress. If the expectation was, for whatever reason, that these particular children were not able to achieve, then, predictably, they didn’t achieve.
- 6 The third characteristic was that they could teach, which means they could engage with a class; they could explain complicated ideas in a way that was simple and straightforward; they had the skill of asking questions in a way that involved every single pupil in the class. Towards the end of my term as Chief Inspector I watched a lesson of eight-year-old primary school pupils, and the teacher was brilliant, because she knew every child in her class, she was able to ask the right question to the right child at the right time and, through that skill, orchestrate the whole lesson.
- 7 It was a didactic lesson in the sense that she was at the front of the lesson, she was in charge, she was the authority that knew, but she involved every child through her skill as a teacher. So my point is that didactic teaching can stifle. Of course it does if somebody just recites notes. However, good teaching is by definition didactic and it is not stifling: it is liberating.
- 8 Wandering around Hay-on-Wye I came across Tom Paulin’s recent biography of William Hazlitt. Hazlitt described himself as a damned inarticulate, helpless person, like a worm by the wayside, and it struck me that that is a wonderful description of our children if they are not exposed to teachers who are allowed to teach.
- 9 The notion that there is no point in teaching knowledge because the pace of scientific discovery is such that everything is immediately out of date before it’s been discovered and because all knowledge can be found on the web is deeply dangerous.
- 10 So too is the idea that children should be encouraged, and I quote from the new national curriculum, “to generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypotheses, to apply imagination, and to look for alternative outcomes”.
- 11 Of course, eventually, they should, but first they must be taught. They must be introduced to the forms of thought and experience that constitute our civilisation. They have to learn to think in concrete terms in specific subject areas. But the fashionable orthodoxy of the 21st century that we move beyond traditional concepts of teaching is a cruel deception designed to inflate the self-esteem of pupils and their learning managers by keeping them in ignorance of what already has been known and thought.

DANISH DARTS

Reviled for sticking it to ecological dogma, Bjorn Lomborg laughs all the way to the bank

- 1 How did a lanky Danish vegetarian who wears T shirts to
important meetings and votes only for left-wing politicians
become the great Satan of environmentalism? By telling
everyone he is an environmentalist but sounding like the
5 opposite. "We are not running out of energy or natural
resources," writes Bjorn Lomborg, 37, an associate professor
of statistics at Denmark's University of Aarhus and a former
member of Greenpeace, in his 1998 book *The Skeptical
Environmentalist*. "Air and water around us are becoming less
10 and less polluted. Mankind's lot has actually improved in terms of practically
every measurable indicator."
- 2 The book, which was published in English last year, became a best-seller, and
conservatives worldwide use its ideas to justify inaction on such issues as
deforestation and global warming. "We should do something that actually does
15 good and not sounds good," he says of the expense of complying with the Kyoto
Protocol on global warming. "For the cost of Kyoto for one year, we could give
clean drinking water and sanitation to every human being on earth."
- 3 Some scientists say they initially hoped to ignore Lomborg but in the wake of
his book's popularity have reacted with a fury rarely seen in academia. Peter
20 Raven, chairman of the American Association for the Advancement of Science,
calls Lomborg "the prime example in our time of someone who distorts statistics
and statements to meet his own political end." A dozen esteemed environmental
scientists, including Raven and Harvard's Edward O. Wilson, are demanding that
Lomborg's publisher cut him loose. "We are deeply disturbed that Cambridge
25 University Press would publish and promote an error-filled, poorly referenced and
non-peer-reviewed work," they write in a letter calling on Cambridge to transfer
publishing rights to a popular, nonscholarly press.
- 4 The problem is, Lomborg gets many of his facts right— and provides 2,930
footnotes to make them easy to check. Some scientists and environmental
30 advocates have made exaggerated claims about environmental doom, and it's not
surprising that they have finally been catalogued. Yet Lomborg is as guilty of
exaggeration and selective use of data as those he criticizes. He is right that air
and water quality and agricultural productivity have improved in much of the
world. But to look at the data on global warming, biological diversity, marine
35 depletion and deforestation and still say
things are generally getting better takes a
willful blindness. That's why it's a shame
so many of the attacks on Lomborg rely
on name-calling. All that does is avoid
40 what could be a valuable debate on the
substance of environmental policy— and,
of course, help Lomborg sell books. "I'm
making a fair amount of money from the
book," says Lomborg. "A lot more than
45 Cambridge thought." **By Andrew
Goldstein. With reporting by Ulla
Plon/Copenhagen and Charles P.
Wallace/Berlin**



Time

A tsar in the soup

Winter approaches and a familiar debate reopens in Britain: do soup vans and free sleeping bags help or hinder the campaign to end street homelessness? Louise Casey, the homelessness tsar, found herself in hot water last weekend for bluntly suggesting the culture of kindness should be swept away. She said: "With soup runs and other kinds of charity help, well-meaning people are spending money servicing the problem on the street and keeping it there. Even the *Big Issue* is perpetuating the problem." But as CP Scott once wrote in these columns: it is well to be frank; it is even better to be fair.

The director of the *Big Issue*, a magazine sold by the homeless, noted that many of its sellers do not live on the streets, but in hostels or cheap accommodation. The aim of the magazine is to provide people with a legitimate income as an alternative to begging. Ms Casey was going over the top in attacking a social innovation that has helped lift people off the street and back into accommodation and work. The Salvation Army expressed concern at the ad hoc nature of soup runs, but concluded that "as long as there are people out there on the streets, we will go to them".

But Ms Casey found a friend in one of the longest-serving campaigners against homelessness. Chris Holmes, director of Shelter, said: "This story is not so new. Two years ago, Shelter was saying clearly and publicly that there needed to be a shift in emphasis from short-term to long-term work with homeless people. I believe that the voluntary sector as a whole, including Shelter, has sometimes got the balance wrong." On Monday Shelter joined Crisis, the other big homeless charity, to launch Millennium Plus. The aim is to help reduce the number of homeless by two-thirds. Soup on the street will still be served; but soup in the hostel remains a better way to rehabilitation.

Guardian Weekly

Tekst 10

Food tastes better when you're hungry

By David Derbyshire
Science Correspondent

- 1 CHOCOLATE, chips and hamburgers really do taste better when one is hungry, according to a study which could explain why dieting is so hard.
- 2 Simply skipping breakfast is enough to change our sense of taste, researchers report today. They suggest that people who do not eat between meals enjoy food more and those who “graze” all day are missing out.
- 3 Prof Yuriy Zverev, from Malawi University, persuaded 16 undergraduates to miss breakfast after having a set dinner at 6.30pm the day before. He then asked them to sip solutions of sugar, salt or quinine in different concentrations and report whether they were tasting sweet, salty or bitter drinks. An hour after lunch, the students repeated the test. Prof Zverev found that hungry students were more sensitive to sweet and salty drinks. However, their ability to detect bitterness did not change, he reports in the journal *BMC Neuroscience*.
- 4 This difference could be linked to the different roles of the sweet, salt and bitter tastes in our diets. “While sweet and salty tastes are indicators of edible substances and trigger consumption, a bitter taste indicates a substance which is not suitable for consumption and should be rejected,” says Prof Zverev. The role of bitterness as a warning sign could explain why the students recognised relatively dilute solutions of quinine. Salt or sugar solutions had to be more concentrated before they were detected.
- 5 Prof Zverev believes hunger could increase the sensitivity of tastebuds, or change the way the brain “listens” to tongue sensors.

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"Spud-u-lite" leads fightback against "Atkins effect"

By Maxine Frith Social Affairs Correspondent

The humble spud has seen its popularity slump in the face of the surging success of the Atkins diet, which demonises the vegetable as a fattening food.

Now the potato industry appears to have decided that if it cannot beat them, it had better join them. A Dutch seed company has developed a "low-carb" spud which it claims is "the future of the potato".

Potatoes are among the banned substances on the Atkins diet, which advocates a high-protein, low-carbohydrate food regime. The new variety has yet to be formally named but has already been called the "spud-u-lite" by its inventors. They claim it contains a third less carbohydrate than normal potatoes and has an "exceptional" flavour.

The new breed is believed to have reduced carbohydrate levels because it has a lower density of flesh and matures over a shorter time. It was developed as a result of cross-breeding, but its low-carbohydrate properties were discovered by chance by researchers at the HZPC seed firm. A co-operative of potato growers in Florida is planning to mass-produce the variety for the American market but it is not known when the vegetables could be on sale in Britain.

Atkins Nutritionals, the company behind the diet, was sceptical about the "spud-u-lite". A spokesman said: "Normally we wouldn't recommend potatoes. It sounds as if you could eat these potatoes during the later stages of the diet, once you have reached your target weight." The low-carb spud is the latest attempt by potato industry to fight back against the "Atkins effect". Sales fell by 4 per cent last year, with much of the loss blamed on the surging popularity of the Atkins regime. The British Potato Council is planning an anti-Atkins campaign this summer, with the slogan "fab not fad" in an attempt to lure people back to the vegetable.

More than three million people in the UK are thought to be following the diet. It allows people to eat as much protein as they want but bans carbohydrates for the first few weeks and restricts them thereafter.

Potatoes are not the only losers in the Atkins age: sales of bread and pasta have fallen, while profits for protein-rich foods such as red meat have increased. Nutritionists have criticised the diet and a Florida businessman last week said he was suing the company after his cholesterol levels soared while following the regime.

But recent medical studies published in respected academic journals have concluded that Atkins adherents lose weight more successfully than conventional dieters.

Einde