

Dr. Bones Investigates: Florida's Killer Pipeline

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Broken, bloodied, my stomach churned to pieces. I stumble to awaken, one eye open gathering at fragments of memories. What had happened? My phone is filled with late night calls to any writers I could think of and though the conversations are forgotten their urgent message snaps back to the forefront of my mind:

A pipeline is coming to Florida and it stands a damn good chance of killing all of us.

This was the strong, overriding assertion riding a memory smashed by drink, but how had I come to it? I reached for a notebook stained brown with liquor and went over the events of the day as I'd lived them, hoping to find some purpose behind this dreadful feeling.

The day began unusually. I had been notified by an accomplice of mine that a group of activists were gathering to discuss something called "The Sable Trail Pipeline." He wanted me to come along. Sure, I thought, why not? He arrived at my house in a red two-ton metal death trap with no ac, no back seats, and a bent wire maintaining the position of door handle. His girlfriend, an ex-Burner covered in a tattoos greeted me as I crawled into the back anticipating an adventure.

Tall, wearing goggles and a black metal t-shirt, my comrade is not the usual "protest-type" by any means. Death to him was no big deal, life even less of a concern. Many a drunken night I'd ranted and raved in a futile attempt to inspire him towards insurrection yet he'd always remain unfazed. His previous place of employment was picking up dead bodies for the local morgue, a grisly task that he's much more eager to talk about instead of activism. What manner of trouble had this pipeline brought to his mind?

"First the fucking Zika virus, then the contaminated water. Now this fucking pipeline. I mean, is this all planned?"

He's clearly angry, tight twists of the wheel sending the van across lanes of traffic. What was this contaminated water he spoke of? He needed no prodding from me and continued on his vehicular tirade.

"200 million fucking gallons of contaminated wastewater from a fertilizer plant got dropped into our aquafier, man. That's the main source of our goddamn drinking water! And they're trying to tell me it's safe?"

A complete and utter disregard for Florida ecology? How was this anything out of the ordinary?

There would be no time for further questions—I was desperately trying to stop from sliding across the back and slamming into a door I wasn't sure would stay closed. As I contemplated what would happen to my mortal coil if I hit the asphalt at 80 miles per hour my comrade had shifted gears to religion, talking of Cerberus and other keepers of the Dead. He describes visions of the Underworld he's had since he was a child, the weird shades that haunt him, and the possibility that he had, in fact, seen the Grim Reaper kiss a corpse with his own eyes.

The question still hung in the air: what was this pipeline business about?

It all depended on who you asked apparently. According to the company it was 515-mile interstate natural gas pipeline that would bring "affordable, clean natural gas supplies to Florida." Of course this was immediately suspicious because there is nothing "clean" about natural gas.

“Problematically, natural gas is prone to leaking from pipelines, wellheads, and the nooks and crannies of processing and storage facilities. ‘Accounting for methane leakage throughout the supply chain of natural gas, natural gas might actually be worse for the climate than coal,’ said Lena Moffitt, director of the Sierra Club’s Stop Dirty Fuels Campaign, at a panel on energy hosted by Politico.

As NOVA Next reported, it’s conceivable that leaked methane from the U.S. oil and gas sector is warming the atmosphere as much as America’s 557 coal-fired power plants.”

Do recall the same company that is building this “clean” pipeline was sold to Enbridge (the same company that is building the North Dakota pipeline) for \$28 Billion dollars, the same firm famous for dumping 1,100,000 gallons of heavy crude in Michigan’s Kalamazoo River.

Then of course there’s always the possibility of the pipeline exploding at any minute.

“A natural gas pipeline explosion in Westmoreland County Friday morning sent an injured man to the hospital, damaged two homes, charred trees and melted a road, with the intense blaze that followed triggering waves of sound, heat and panic through the surrounding area.”

Clearly this matter would warrant further investigation if I managed to survive the ride, a proposition increasingly becoming doubtful. We’d now picked up a third comrade, adding fresh body heat to our intolerable mobile coffin. Cigarette smoke blinded my eyes as I gasped and struggled for air, my shades and bandanna becoming make-shift filters.

To make matters worse I had been drinking whiskey all day and had nothing but beer and a notebook in my satchel; water, the stuff of life, was practically being screamed for by my body and I had not a drop to drink. As a weird techno-track intoned the Lord’s Prayer over and over I was sure it was an omen from higher powers that my expiration was drawing near. I shot a quick text to my wife as I peered deeply into the void:

“I have made a grave error. I die a true American.”

Suddenly we’re there, and I leap out of the van to be greeted by the striking beauty of Wickham park. Fresh, clean air fills my lungs as I run headlong to the nearest fountain, greedily drinking the pure water like I’ve never tasted it before. I feel reborn, alive again, and thank the Good Spirits that delivered me from a man-made hell. I’d never considered just how precious the stuff was before, and now with pollution in the aquifer I wonder if I’m too late.

We’re the first to arrive so after cracking open a beer I take the place in. Huge pine trees jut into the air like sky-scrapers. Children at a birthday party are running on soft grass and splashing playfully in a nearby lake. There’s a drunk lady chasing a chihuahua around.

“Pebbles, Pebbles! Come here Pebbles!”

Energetically the place feels lived in, Land Spirits smiling as families return year after year to cook out, have fun, and relish the natural beauty of the Sunshine State. There is a harmony here, wild and cultivated existing side by side.

The folks stream in. First a few, then much more, until a solid group of about 16 people were huddled under a pavilion. A few faces I recognized, many I didn’t, and the aims and agendas each person shared came from different ideological grounds. Whatever our differences we were united in an utter contempt for anything that might despoil the beauty of our homes.

Carolina Griffith, an activist from the foreign forests of Mims, had called this meeting and carries a large basket of printed out documents. The case she will set out is nothing short of

horrifying and with a fresh beer pulled from my bag I listen in to what will surely be the first shot of a long and arduous battle against the Energy Cartels of Capitalism.

The Beast, as I thought of it, would haul freshly fracked gas across State lines and over 630 bodies of water in Florida alone. One of them, the Green Swamp, was one of the largest areas for clean drinking water in the State. The people of Georgia had voted against the project, but through a legal injunction, the company had continued construction anyway.

Question: did we need the natural gas? Was Florida in some kind of energy crises?

The answer? No.

“Since 2013 Florida Power & Light Co. has built new combined-cycle gas-fired power plants at Cape Canaveral, Riviera Beach and Port Everglades at roughly \$1 billion apiece, and a similar plant in Okeechobee is slated to go into service in 2019.

The company won’t need another major new power plant until 2024, and that will also be a combined-cycle plant that uses natural gas to produce power, FPL’s Steven Sim, senior manager of resource assessment & planning, told regulators.”

Followup: if Floridians didn’t need the natural gas, what purpose would this horrible, invasive pipeline serve?

It would increase profits for a tiny few looking to make a quick buck.

“The U.S. DoE official in charge of natural gas testified to FERC’s oversight committee that fracking provides ‘unprecedented opportunities’ for profit through LNG export. She, like FERC, says the opportunities are ‘for the United States’, and they’re both wrong. Pipelines to LNG export that would raise domestic natural gas prices and take local land and pollute local air and water is not for the U.S..they’re for profit by a few fossil fuel companies and utilities....

New pipelines have nothing to do with domestic need, by Florida or anywhere else in the U.S. They’re about finding lucrative markets for fracked methane (euphemism: “shale gas revolution”).”

What this woman was saying was nothing short of astonishing. By now I was seething in anger, a riotous rage boiling in my stomach and threatening to take hold. Our waterways would be poisoned, thousands of acres cleared, and vast amounts of wildlife killed or made homeless all for a tidy profit. These people didn’t live here, they didn’t care about this park or this air. We were nothing to them but in the way of “progress.” As someone who could feel the spirits in the land and speak with the trees this was an assault on my very way of life.

Yet it would be worse. This Sable Trail Pipeline was something connected to a much larger, much more national indecency.

None of these pipelines just end at the ocean. They would need something to carry the highly flammable, damn near-bomblike liquid natural gas and for now it’d been the duty of the nation’s publicly funded railways. Problem was many citizens weren’t too happy about this and the courts had forced the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue an emergency order: railroads carrying more than 1 million gallons of Bakken crude, or about 35 tank cars, were required to begin notifying state emergency-response commissions where and how often such shipments moved so that communities could prepare better in case of accidents.

A victory for the people! Hurrah! But much like Obama’s order to stop the North Dakota pipeline it was to be short lived.

The gas and oil companies were having none of it, and sued to keep such information quiet. After all, why let human lives get in the way when there’s money to be made?

Still, the jig was up and they knew it. A new plan would be needed. In what must of been the result of some diabolical pact between corporate interests and the lieges of Hell somebody had

an idea: what if a private company built it's own rail-line, one that they'd keep out of federal reach? Sure, that'd do the trick, allowing the companies to label all safety information as "trade secrets" and keep the law off their back! The only problem that remained was that private or not nobody wanted a big train filled with liquid death running through their town.

So they decided to disguise them as passenger trains.

"Whisking passengers from Orlando to Miami and back again, all on high speed rail. You've heard of All Aboard Florida and it's plans for rail service. What you haven't heard is that the parent company, Florida East Coast Railway has other plans for those tracks, namely highly explosive liquefied natural gas....the same rail All Aboard Florida plans on using for it's highspeed commuter service, rail that cuts right through highly populated cities and counties..."

Martin County's Fire Marshal issued this report showing a possible blast radius impacting 1200 residents."

Carolina made it clear Floridians had been lied to, told the rails would provide "green transportation" when in reality it would be the final step in a massive act of ecological devastation, but all I could think about was about an impending holocaust. **Nothing quite says "profits over people" like jamming passengers on the same rail-line with material so volatile it could potentially wipe out entire towns in the blink of an eye.** Visions of small schools scorched by rampaging infernos and human corpses being reduced to ash are not an imaginative enterprise but an eventual probability, all worth the risk as long as some asshole made a few bucks.

In an instant the world became a darker, much cheaper place and my hatred reached a climax. I concluded it must have been these thoughts that led me later that night to drink wildly, sharpen knives, and meticulously clean my pistol. I stopped reading for a moment and noticed I'd downloaded some very incendiary material from the folks at ELF in my drunken stupor.

Another watch list I'm sure to be on.

Returning back to the events of September 17th I'd made a note that a woman, fresh from the fields of North Dakota, had lifted her hand and spoke next. The grimness in her short statement was both unsettling and remarkable:

"We are in for a battle."

Even with pipeline spills in many states, even with hazardous materials being shipped into residential areas, the relentless pursuit of profit marched on. To our horror she made it clear that despite overtures from the government the North Dakota pipeline was still being built, with the courts firmly ruling in favor of man that seemed like a cartoon caricature of a capitalist.

"With business partner Ray Davis, co-owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team, Warren built Energy Transfer Equity into one of the nation's largest pipeline companies, which now owns about 71,000 miles of pipelines carrying natural gas, natural gas liquids, refined products and crude oil..."

Warren lives in a 27,200-square-foot castle in the Preston Hollow neighborhood of north Dallas, a community that had restrictive covenants in place until 2000 limiting it to white people only (except for domestic servants)."

As the crowd began to discuss what they could do to stop this interstate monstrosity a weird psychic event began to take place. My wizard eye perceived a change in the auras of those involved. Something had indeed shifted, a subtle *click* of multiple hearts brought together as one,

the same you'd see at a Heathen Blot or a Catholic mass. Something weird was afoot. This pipeline, an issue that extended far beyond North Dakota, was nothing short of a battle against corporate wealth and the nature-loving people who lived on the same land those companies sought to despoil.

In short, a spiritual one.

Why these folks perhaps had faiths much different than mine (such as the Wiccan and a Marxist-Leninist in attendance) all these people shared a love for the soil that went beyond mere agendas. These were people who knew Florida, hiked her trails and swam in her waters, folks who'd raised children on her beaches and camped amongst her trees. There was a love here, a deep and abiding one, for the Land in all its beauty.

Florida existed not as a patch of soil or a few trees but as a definite, living *Thing*.

Perhaps they didn't pray, perhaps they didn't believe in spirits, goddesses or the like, but that pure and gorgeous love of the Earth was the founding principle in the faiths of those that did. In the trenches of a new ecological combat lay a chance for that love to rise and be nurtured in chests who might never had felt it before.

I looked back at my comrade, wreathed in icons and totems of death, now quite willing to risk arrest to be a sworn protector of life. His eyes looked bright like torches and behind them his mind became a wandering dagger analyzing weak points in the pipeline's armor. As if a switch had been flicked he came to view Florida not as a State or some appendage of a wretched empire but as a caring mother that had to be protected.

I suddenly realized that switch lies within all of us.

These pipelines are not one state's issue, nor even one people's. We have one chance, one shot, at saving the forests and trees we all hold dear. This is not something far away and more likely than not happening in your back yard too.

Across state lines similar conversations like the one I witnessed are happening, other meetings being called, and we as spiritual folks in communion with the Land underneath us must join in this battle. Even in death we do not truly leave this globe, and if Charon himself could see the importance of stopping this pipeline I knew anybody could. Make no mistake: **if this pipeline rolls through Florida, or any place for that matter, people will die and wilderness will be turned into wasteland.**

We must rise to the challenge, we must work with our secular cousins and put a death hex on what stands to be a monolithic assault on everything we hold dear. **To allow these pipelines to be built would betray everything we consider holy.**

And that we shan't abide.

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