

Hi Patricia - some answers below...

How did you decide to become a GoatMan, what inspired you?

I have read somewhere that you were looking after your niece's dog, and that somehow inspired you?

It's a common dream from childhood, to become an animal so you don't have to go to school or whatever. I guess it just lingered in my mind, and then as an adult, I was at a low ebb, feeling a bit dissatisfied with myself and where I was going (or not) in the world, the idea came back. I was looking after my niece's dog, and he was just joyously running around barking, and I thought, wouldn't it be nice to have a holiday from being human? And then I thought some more, and decided this raised interesting questions: Could you ever adopt the perspective of another creature? What can contemporary science and technology do currently to achieve this dream... A dream that is as old as humanity itself really: The earliest piece of figurative art, carved out of mammoth tusk 40,000 years ago is a human with a lion's head. It was a shaman who pointed out that this idea is very old. I'd gone to see her as I wasn't sure which animal to be. She told me I should be a goat.

Did you have a hard time being a goat? What was most challenging for you?

Well on the first day the goat farmer was herding his goats from the high alpine pastures down in to the valley where they would spend the winter. This was a painful and scary experience. I felt very fragile, very human when faced with a cliff edge, heading head first down steep rocky paths, with no hands to stop myself from falling. The others in my herd flowed down the mountain like a stream.

But when I caught up with them in the valley pastures, where everyone was more relaxed... Nothing to do except eat grass... It was meditative in the pastures.

It was much more painful to be on four legs than I imagined... In fact becoming a goat was much tougher physically than I thought. If you look at the skeletal anatomy of many mammals, they seem so similar to humans: there are homologous structures, because we evolved from a common ancestor. However, there are obviously differences too, and these quickly make themselves known as pain!

Where did you draw the line?

Good question! I slept in the barn with the goats, but on a bit above the actual goat floor so I wasn't sleeping in goat poo... The temperature at night outside was below freezing. I ate quite a lot of grass (and got intestinal worms - easily dealt with with worming tablets though), but really I drew the line in a pretty soft way: the project isn't a piece of endurance art for which I need to bleed (though my prosthetics did cause me to bleed after 6 days!), because being in pain etc. is not conducive to a sense of freedom: I wanted to feel at home in my environment and goatman body, not uncomfortable in it.

Afterwards, you wrote a book, "GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday From Being Human". You've said that you wanted to live totally at the moment, with no worries about what you've done, what you're doing, or what you should do. Did you succeed?

No... Well maybe for a few moments I forgot myself. What I have realised as a result of this project was that I found it difficult to be humble, and to reject the future: to accept that I/we are not somehow special, that we aren't part of some grand narrative of technological progress and so on. It's difficult losing your faith, and that's what happened to me: I lost my faith in the future through realising that it would be better to aim to be like a humble goat rather than an astronaut or whatever.

How did you choose the place, Swiss alps, how did you choose the goats that you going to hang with?

There is a sport called goat packing - which means hiking with a herd of goats carrying your packs. The goatherd I stayed with liked to go goat packing with his goats and I thought that sounded good - to explore as part of a herd of goats.

Did the goats attacked you or did they excepted you at the firs place?

The day we arrived the goatherd said he was herding the goats down the mountain to the valley pastures where they spend the winter. I wasn't successful keeping up with the goats going head first down the mountain, and they were nervous/scared of me, as I huffed and puffed and clanked along. But when I finally caught up with them at the pasture, they became curious, and I think I even made friends with a particular goat (at least we seemed to follow each other around as we grazed). There was a moment where I looked up and saw I was in the middle of the herd, and everyone else had stopped chewing and was staring at me... It was like I'd inadvertently committed some sort of goat faux-pas. Their horns suddenly looked pretty sharp. This was a scary moment really. But then, a single goat, possibly my goat friend, walked right through the centre of the silent staring herd and sort of diffused the tension, and we all moved off along the hill together.

When I was leaving the goatherd said that he thought that the herd had accepted me in to their social group. He even put a goat bell round my neck.

How did you solve some major engineering challenges, for example prosthetics and orthotics, or eating thing and so on?

I made the back legs and other pieces, but the front legs were made by a Dr. Heath at a prosthetics clinic. He usually makes prosthetics for amputees/people with body disabilities, but he agreed to make me some front legs because he'd started out as a Zoologist. It was extremely tiring and sometimes painful being on four legs, as Dr. Heath had warned me. Going up hill was fine, but going downhill needed a lot of strength.

I ate quite a lot of grass, from the pasture, but mammals don't produce the enzyme that digests the cellulose in grass. Goats and other ruminants have a rumen which is filled with microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, etc) which can break down grass, then the goat actually digests the microorganisms. So it's a bit like goats have an internal farm. I tried to make an external artificial rumen, by getting a sample of the microorganisms from inside a goat, but the scientists I visited who actually use artificial rumens in their research, strongly warned

me that I shouldn't eat the product of an artificial rumen, in case I caught a long term incurable gut infection.

You also attempted to achieve a goat-like mind-set with the help of hallucinogens and transcranial magnetic stimulation. Did you succeed?

I temporarily turned off my ability to speak using transcranial magnetic stimulation, and hallucinogens, well... perhaps. Really the change in posture - from 2 legs to 4 - had the biggest effect on my mental state and behaviour. Suddenly I had to use my head to push things, my teeth and lips rather than my hands to manipulate objects and so on... Mind follows body in some sense.

Did your experience in The Toaster Project, helped in GoatMan project?

Do you feel like this project gave you a better sense of this question you started out looking to answer what really defines a human versus an animal?

I guess the goal, as well as escaping from all the ridiculous trauma of being such a self-conscious animal as a human, is to obliquely explore this idea of the post-human / trans-human. It's always pitched as about becoming a super intelligent human, well what if that's not actually all that pleasant? There's intellectual intelligence but also emotional intelligence and one doesn't necessarily follow the other. Maybe we should aspire to enjoying life eating fresh green grass instead. Maybe our idea of the future we should be creating with all this technology should be less about flying cars and more about using technology to enable less destructive/stressful ways of living.

And I was also interested in forcing myself to think of nonhuman animals as individuals, with their own perspective on the world, rather than as just 'animals'.

Any plans to return to being a goat, or some other animal?