

## Building an Ark in 2004



And the Lord spoke to Noah and said, 'In one year I am going to make it rain and the rain shall not stop until it submerges the entire earth and all living flesh is destroyed. Because of this I want you to save all the righteous people and two of every living species on earth. Therefore I am commanding you to build an Ark.' In a flash of lightning, God delivered the specifications for the Ark. Daunted by the task but respectful of God's wish, Noah took the plans and agreed to build the Ark. 'Remember,' said the Lord. 'You must complete the Ark and fill it in one year's time.'

A year later as storm clouds covered the earth and the seas were in tumult, the Lord saw Noah sitting on his doorstep weeping.

'Noah!' he shouted. 'Where is the Ark?'

'Forgive me, Lord, I did my best but there were big problems. First of all I had to get permission from the Council to build it on my land. I submitted the plans but the specifications were not acceptable. I had to hire a firm of architects to redraw them. Then I had problems over Fire Regulations. Was I installing a sprinkler system? Since I claimed it was eventually to be on water, the Health and Safety people wanted to know how many lifeboats or flotation rafts were included. When I'd got through all this bureaucracy, the neighbours objected that my building would obstruct the daylight to their dining room.

Then I had problems getting the wood you specified. The forestry commission said I could not cut down those particular trees, as there was a conservation order on them because it was the habitat of the rare greater spotted whifflewarbler. Eventually I overcame this but I was not to be allowed to take a pair of those birds into the Ark.

The carpenters complained to their union that there were not enough workmen employed on the contract to complete on time. So time was lost, as I had to negotiate a settlement through ACAS and employ twice as many as originally planned.

In order to be ready to board, I started rounding up the animals but an animal rights group sued me. They objected to allowing only two of each kind aboard. This suit is pending. Then the Environmental Agency said that before being allowed to complete the task, I must submit to them a statement on your proposed flood plan in order for them to assess the effect on the environment. They did not accept the argument that neither they nor I had any jurisdiction over the conduct of the Creator of the Universe. Next the Royal Engineers demanded a map of the proposed flood plain. I sent them a globe. Right now I am trying to resolve a complaint registered with the Equal Opportunities Board that I am practising discrimination in the way I am selecting the people to go on board.

The Inland Revenue have seized my assets, stating that I am obviously building the Ark in order to flee the country to avoid settling my tax bill. I have just received a notice saying that I had failed to register for VAT. I think it is going to take me another seven years to finish the job.' Noah waited. The sky was blue; the sun was shining; Noah looked up hopefully. 'Does this mean you are not going to destroy the earth, Lord?'

'No!' came the reply. 'I don't have to. You people down on earth are already doing it.'

*Mary Calvert*