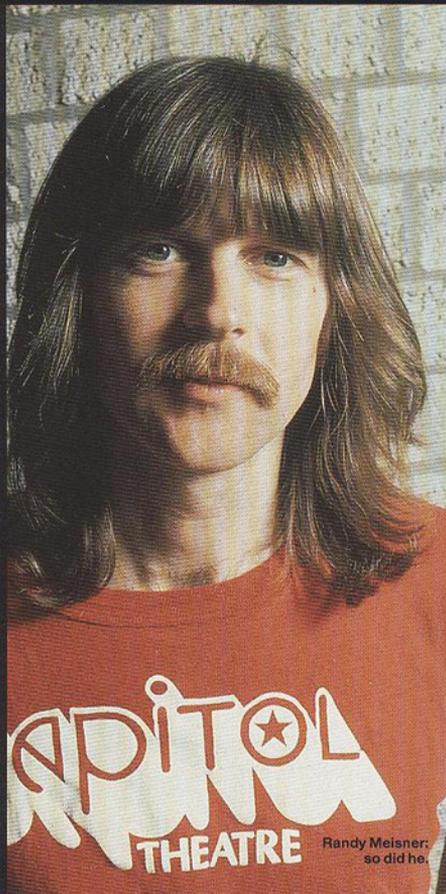
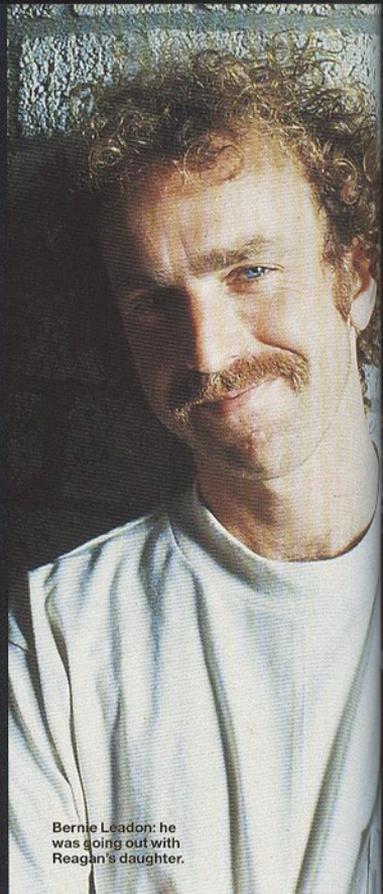




Don Felder: he had a droopy moustache.



Randy Meisner; so did he.



Bernie Leadon: he was going out with Reagan's daughter.

“We’re the f***in’

Thus, in 1972, spake Bernie Leadon, then guitarist with FM country rock’s Biggest Band Ever. As their Hell Freezes Over tour hits the UK, and fans “call up the Captain” at the H*t*I C*I*f*rn, Tom Hibbert declines the kind ass-kissing offer and gives the unit-shiftn’, “rip”-snortin’, cop-arousin’, barney-havin’ quintet-cum-legend what-for.**

Life in the fast lane, indeed. With their over-long hair/droopy moustache ensembles, lumberjack shirts, denim, songs all about deserts and “peaceful easy feelings”, album sleeves depicting outlaws of the Olde West, that sort of image, The Eagles were country rock taken to the laid-back limit. We may come from LA, man, but we’re just the same as you dudes in the Midwest and you guys in England with your “ladies” in the Laura Ashley print skirts, that was their “message”—one that sold galleons of records (that and the sheeny production and guitar solos—often twin guitar solos).

Take It Easy (co-written by Eagle Glenn Frey and folksy angstperson Jackson Browne), that was their catchphrase. In the post-Woodstock world of the mid-’70s, you could not escape The Eagles, ever on the radio with their special brand of soothe. The Eagles practically invented FM radio, gave first meaning to the term “stadium-friendly”. They were so, well, comforting . . .

The truth—and truth is a cruel mistress—was rather different. In the eighth year of their seemingly cosy existence, Eagles drummer/songwriter/

vocalperson Don Henley was apprehended in his home by the “law” and charged with possession of cocaine, Quaaludes, marijuana and a 16-year-old girl with no clothes on. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor was the fruitsome charge. God knows how he escaped with but a \$2,500 dollar fine (plus two years probation). Roman Polanski had not been so fortunate.

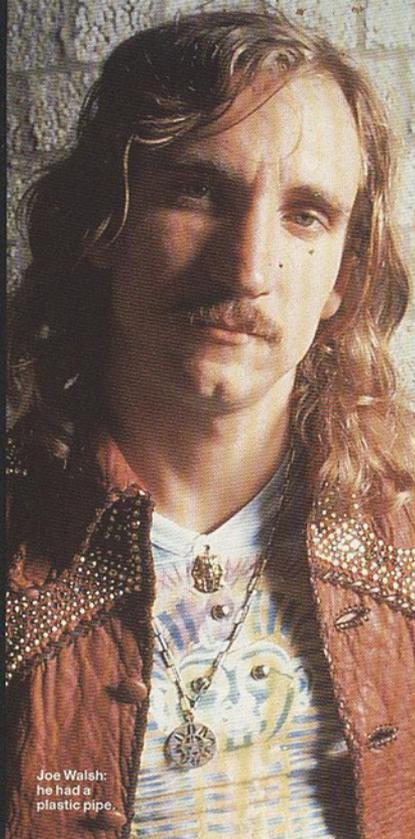
Shortly after this delightful state of affairs, the group were performing at a Democratic Party benefit gig for Senator Alan Cransten in Long Beach when the tensions within that had been fizzling for years came to a head.

“We were on stage,” commented guitarist Glenn Frey “and Felder (*Don, another guitarist, there were thousands of them*) looks back at me and says, ‘Only three more songs until I kick your ass, pal.’ And I’m saying, ‘Great! I can’t wait.’ We were out there singing Best Of My Love but inside both of us were thinking ‘As soon as this is over, I’m gonna kill him . . .’”

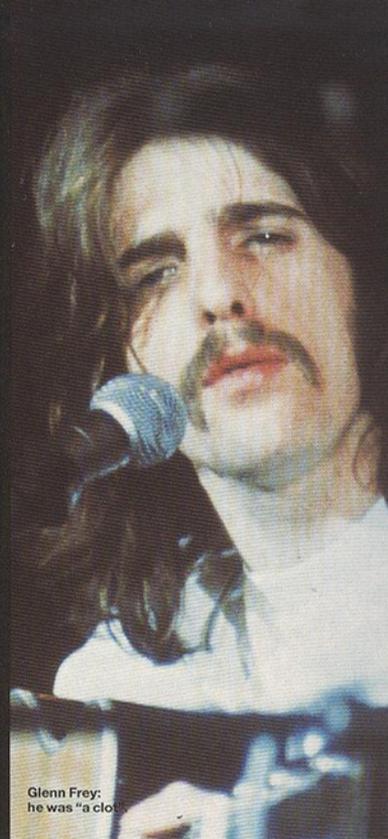
As soon as that was over, a backstage screaming match ensued, an enraged Don Felder smashed his guitar against the wall, and that wasn’t all that splintered. That, to all intents and purposes, was that for The Eagles.



Don Henley: he wasn't going out with a child.



Joe Walsh: he had a plastic pipe.



Glenn Frey: he was "a clown."

Eagles. Kiss my ass!"

GLENN FREY, DON HENLEY, RANDY Meisner, Bernie Leadon – we name the guilty men who came together as The Eagles in 1972 with the intention of taking the country rock of Gram Parsons's Flying Burrito Brothers and polishing it up and watering it down and transforming it into a commercial proposition. Their first album, *The Eagles*, with its cover shot at dawn in the Joshua Tree desert (wow!) was very laid-back and mellow and weedy indeed. It was in the Top 30 by the summer. Already the band was becoming, in the words of Glenn Frey, "the symbol for that laid-back, rich, don't-give-a-shit lifestyle". They would denounce the New York Dolls from the stage of Madison Square Gardens (the Dolls were not a "proper" group – why, they couldn't even play their instruments) and drift around in T-shirts bearing the smug phrase "SONG POWER".

"We were looking for a vocal stamp, so that when an Eagles song comes on the radio, you know it's The Eagles. The same way you know it's the Beach Boys, The Beatles or the Stones," said Frey. Their harmonies were certainly pretty (well, they'd put in a lot of dues-paying hours with various outfits like Linda Ronstadt's backing band, Shiloh, The Corvettes, The Dynamics, and, ahem,

Longbranch Pennywhistle), and The Eagles – well, guess where the name came from. An extension of The Byrds, country rock pioneers, perhaps? No – some nonsense about Hopi Indian mythology, apparently. "In the Hopi mythology, the eagle is considered a most sacred animal," said Bernie Leadon. "It symbolises the highest spirituality and morals. I would hope that the music would

soar... Everybody was reading Castaneda then and we wanted a name that would have mythological connotations. We're the fuckin' Eagles. Kiss my ass!"

The Eagles was recorded in distinctly non-mythological Barnes, London. And, for the record, its eighth track



The Eagles, 1994: (from left) Don Felder, Joe Walsh, Timothy B. Schmit, Glenn Frey, Don Henley.

Witchy Woman, remains one of the most frankly appalling songs ever invented. The album went to Number 22 in the American chart. "We" were not yet ready for The Eagles.

The 1973 follow-up, *Desperado*, was – gasp! – a "concept" album. "We had a gunfighter's photo album in the house," said Frey, "and one night we just started writing a song about the Doolin' Dalton gang". Yes, *Desperado* was a sort of musical all about the antics of an olde time Oklahoma gun-toter. We are outlaws, too, the Eagles were trying to say, just four good ol' cowboys against corporate America and everything. "Desperado was a reaction to our initial success," said Don Henley. "We would have these conversations about whether we were just banging our heads against the wall, going on stage and singing these songs. People seemed to want to see things that would take them away from their everyday lives. But our feeling was that you can escape too much."

Desperado was recorded in distinctly non-cowboy Notting Hill, London. And, for the record, fourth track *Tequila Sunrise* remains one of the most frankly appalling songs ever invented.

The band were quite pleased with it. "The whole thread between outlaw and rock star that we were trying to get across was working," said Frey. But it didn't work terribly well for the public. Sometimes you can escape too much, and the point of this cowpoke opus escaped record buyers everywhere. (Well, to start with, anyway – it reached a crap Number 59 in the American charts. Eventually, it went platinum. Very eventually.)

OF COURSE THESE OUTLAW ROCK stars resented their own success and despised the rock star lifestyle (Randy Meisner: "We always had our fun on the road but we never took it over the line. We were a lot more gentle than most touring rock bands."). The hell they did.

Irving Azoff, who worked for David Geffen (upon whose Asylum Records the Eagle oeuvre were released), and who ended up managing the band, once recalled his first encounter with a fuming Eagle: "I was in the office one day and the secretary tells me I have to take a call from this raving madman, Glenn Frey. It turns out that The Eagles were leaving for the airport and they

"We went on the road, got crazy, got drunk, got high, had girls, played music and made money."

GLENN FREY, 1975.



The Hotel California tour, 1977. Departing guitarist meant extra neck purchase for Don Felder.

were upset because we didn't send limos. So my first experience with The Eagles was being yelled at for 15 minutes about limos."

How very childish. But how very rock 'n' roll.

In 1974, for a third LP, *On The Border*, a new guitarist was recruited, ex-sessioneer, Flow member and – unique to the Hotel Californians – a Californian, Don Felder. He was jolly excited. At first, "I was blown away that a great band like The Eagles would ask me to join in with them. I was thinking, 'This is terrific!' Then I got into the studio for *On The Border*. Bernie was bouncing off the walls. Randy was threatening to quit every week. They had just fired their manager and their producer. I thought, 'What have I done? Being in the studio was like walking around with a keg of dynamite on your back with the fuse lit and not knowing how long the fuse is."

On The Border was, according to Frey, "almost like life and death in Hollywood. It's like a

reporter's frame of reference. But it's not an opinionated work as such. In the love songs, it's nobody's fault. Everything is just straight down the centre of the street." (Hmmm, what are you jabbering about, man?)

On The Border was recorded in Los Angeles and London. Here was a turn up for the books. And, would you credit it, the opening track, *Already Gone*, was actually quite good (although it was written not by any Eagles but by some blokes called J Tempchin and R Strandlund what nobody's ever heard of) and *The Best Of My Love* (Henley/Frey/their old bearded pal J.D. Souther) was... horrible. (And as for Frey and Jackson Browne's song *James Dean* – unspeakable.)

First UK "hit" (28, anyway), this record sold huge (not massive, that would come later) quantities. The Eagles had landed. "We went on the road, got crazy, got drunk, got high, had girls, played music and made money," said Glenn Frey in 1975. Success is a terrible thing, readers. It was all too much for Bernie Leaden, the country-lovin' boy from Minnesota who had once been in a bluegrass band called *The Squirrel Barkers* (and who had once had the great fortune to record with the late, great Gene Clark, fear-of-flying Byrd).

In 1974, Leaden lost his rag in a *Holiday Inn*, the tantrum witnessed by a writer from *Crawdaddy* magazine, who observed, "Perhaps the waitress forgot to bring the cream for his coffee. Overcome with exhaustion, depression and confusion, Leaden began yelling, raving, screaming." These things happen. To add insult to injury, Bernie started a "relationship" with Patti Reagan, madcap daughter of madcap Ronald "Mad Dog McDonald" Reagan. And the woman insisted on helping Bernie to write songs for The Eagles. One of these, *I Give You Peace*, appeared on the band's fourth album *One Of The Nights* (1975). It wasn't very good. And neither was the LP: "I sort of resented her (*Reagan*) being around at the time," said Don Henley. "She co-wrote one song with Bernie and he insisted the song go on the album. Nobody else wanted it. ☹"

Life In The Slow Lane

The Eagles split, officially, in 1982 (unofficially in 1980). They reformed in 1994. So how, then, did they "busy" themselves in the Eagle-free interim?



Don Henley (drums, vocals; born 1947, Linden, Texas)
Attends drug counselling, at behest of LAPD. Duets with Stevie Nicks. Does soundtrack for "snooker film" *The Color Of Money*. Dabbles in conservation, specifically woods in New England. Gets Clinton in.



Glenn Frey (guitar, vocals; born 1948, Detroit)
Spends more time with family: wife and choreographer Cindy and two kids. Makes solo albums and soundtracks for Beverly Hills Cop, Miami Vice (prompting Top Of The Pops stint) and *Thelma & Louise*



Joe Walsh (guitar; born 1947, Wichita, Kansas)
Gets divorced. Goes soundtrack mental (*The Warriors*, *Fast Times At Ridgmont High*, *Great Outdoors*) and "enjoys" session work. Nominates himself for US Vice President. Twice. Is unsuccessful. Twice



Don Felder (guitar; born 1947, Topanga, CA)
More wife/kid respite. Statutory soundtrack action: *Heavy Metal* (a cartoon) and *Fast Times At Ridgmont High*. One solo album hits Billboard summit of Number 178. Quits heady rock world for real estate. Does OK



Timothy B. Schmit (bass; born 1947, Sacramento, CA)
Back to wife and kids (four). Soundtrack co-excursions include that blasted *Fast Times At Ridgmont High*. Plus two solo albums, one called *Timothy B*, a Number 106 smash

Picking up an assortment of UK gold discs: Walsh (in hat) especially pleased.



Photo: Zined

“We were just a bunch of skinny guys with long hair and patched pants.”

☞ We didn't feel it was up to the band's standards. But we put it on anyway as a gesture to keep the band together. Then she did an interview in which she said, 'I write songs for The Eagles.'"

Another famous Eagle "affair" was Don Henley and Stevie Nicks out of Fleetwood Mac. Calamity! Catastrophe! What a stinker. Henley, patently bloated by success, thought it a fine wheeze to charter Lear jets to fly him to Fleetwood Mac concerts or fly her to Eagles concerts, whichever was the most expensive. "Love 'em and Lear 'em," – this was the joke that circulated amongst the Eagles entourage. Henley's excuse for such extravagant behaviour: "This was simply our way of coping with the absurdity of making so much money and being so famous at such an early age."

A further famous "affair": The Eagles and Madame Drugs ("It's fair to say that cocaine may have brought out the worst in us," said Frey, later). In 1985, some time after The Eagles had split up, Frey was in London promoting a rather useless solo single, *The Heat Is On* and it was my solemn duty to interview him in a London hotel room. All he appeared able to say was, "Ever done a little night-skiing, Tom, hur hur?" Um, no I haven't Mr Frey, was my reply. It sounds awfully dangerous. I haven't even done *day* ski-ing. Night skiing, why you'd probably hit your head on a Christmas tree or fall over a precipice, wouldn't you?

"Hur, hur hur."

Oh, I get it! Night-skiing is an amusing reference to the ingestion of cocaine. What a clot.

Anyway. Back to the past. 1975: Bernie Leadon was replaced by Joe Walsh, guitar pioneer of that plastic pipe thing you used to stick in your mouth in the 1970s and make your guitar noise all groany and witless. By 1976, just four years into their tour of duty, every member of The Eagles hates every other member of The Eagles. Randy Meisner is sobbing. Don Henley and Glenn Frey, still living together in Dorothy Lamour's old house

in Beverly Hills, are squabbling. They have a tiff. Henley moves out to Irving Azoff's place. "There was so much turbulence about," said Frey. "Perhaps a lot of it was bluff, because we were really just a bunch of skinny little guys with long hair and patched pants and turquoise."

THE NEXT LP, *HOTEL CALIFORNIA* (YOU may have heard of it), took absolutely ages to complete. For once, it was almost worth the wait. The title song, despite its wonky lyric ("So I called up the Captain/Please bring me my wine/He said, We haven't had that spirit here since 1969" – NB, Mr Henley, wine is *not* a spirit) and the fact that its magic chord sequence was borrowed from an old Jethro Tull song, was shiveringly super. What's more, it remains so to this day. "Duelling" twin guitars (Walsh and Felder) ahoy!

Checking in...

If you only own one Eagles album – exactly! We "salute" *Hotel California*.

By 1976 The Eagles were a decadent rock act on a behavioural par with Led Zeppelin. That March, they began recording their sixth album, an eventual 10 million seller that would yield two Number 1 singles in America. Produced by Bill Szymczyk (crazy name, crazy guy) and released in December 1976, it was the first Eagles album to feature Joe Walsh (guitar, keyboards), who managed to grab a couple of writing co-credits in the general melée.

The album was seen by many as a highly adult and literate report on the age-old Californian moral tussle between paradise (heat, girls, drugs) and hell (paranoia, burn-out). While that's certainly what The Eagles were aiming at – with titles like *Life In The Fast Lane* and *The Last Resort* – any hopes of sustaining listener fascination were barjaxed by the appearance of four consecutive dirges in the middle, most notably Randy Meisner's *Try And Love Again*.

It was once said that the first time a person takes cocaine they instantly understand why The Eagles sounded as dull as they did. *Hotel California*

Hotel California made The Eagles the most powerful band on the planet (67 weeks it spent on the UK charts in all, 32 over there, it won a Grammy for Record Of The Year and everything). Naturally, it was all downhill from there. 1979's *The Long Run*, featuring the horrible *The Greeks Don't Want No Freaks* and the even more pitiful *The Sad Cafe*, was a poor follow-up (it only sold four million copies in the US to its predecessor's nine!), and the rest was acrimony. For comic relief: in 1980, a nutter called Joseph Riviera held up Asylum's New York office demanding to see the Eagles but they weren't in (and they lived in LA).

Drug busts and blubbing – this is how all California bands seem to end (see also: The Byrds, Mamas And The Papas, The Doors). The Eagles had learned the lessons of history well... *too* well.

Don Henley broke silence on that sordid occasion featuring the drugs and the gurlie mentioned earlier, in 1981. He claimed that the Fire Department had been first on the scene to his LA pad (why?). "They flat out lied to me. They said, 'Well, by law we're supposed to take this little girl to the hospital but if you'll take care of her, we'll leave her here.' They said they were not here to get anybody busted. She was fine by the time they got there. I had no idea how old she was and I had no idea she was doing that many drugs. I didn't have sex with her. Yes, she was a hooker. Yes, I called a madam. Yes, there were roadies and guys at my house. We were having a farewell to The Eagles..."

So farewell to The Eagles. Except, of course, it wasn't. In 1993, they gathered to be in a video for Travis Tritt's cover of *Take It Easy*. But they said they'd never perform together until "hell freezes over". Hell froze over. In 1994, they were back on lucrative stage – Don and Glenn and Joe and Don and 1979's newboy Timothy B. Schmit (late of Poco). Peaceful Easy Feeling, they warbled, and the old beardies and their fading wives who have bought everything and *Hotel California* many times, went "whooh!" Outlaws, indeed. Hem hem. High time for another 14 year "vacation", if you don't mind me saying so.

With thanks and apologies to: *The Eagles: The Long Run* by Marc Shapiro (Omnibus Press), *Waiting For The Sun: The Story Of The Los Angeles Music Scene* by Barney Hoskyns (Viking), *The Eagles: California Outlaws* by Richard Marsh (Gonzo).



lives, eats, breathes and sleeps cocaine; there is simply nothing else happening on it. For some reason 10 million wished to pay vicarious homage.

On the other four tunes on this dismayingly unadventurous album, improvement can be

detected. The title track – it's Walsh and Don Felder splitting the guitar solos – became the band's signature; an unexpected smash hit (it's six and a half minutes long); and a strangely durable mix of the soothing and the exotic. Don Henley's fake Jamaican singing voice is one of at least five irritating factors, however. *New Kid In Town* and *Life In The Fast Lane* were the other singles – respectively, a turgid country number and a not-bad Doobie Brothers-type rocker – but it was the last song, *The Last Resort*, which saved the album's face. An embittered history of California with a nagging melody, it's The Eagles – and Henley – at their best, and should feature heavily at Wernibley.

David Cavanagh