

That was the decade that was ... the Noughties in a nutshell

DECADES come and decades go, and the one just about to disappear into the rearview mirror of our still new century has been as enthralling and depressing as any other.

The Noughties saw astrophysicists give the universe the age of 13.7 billion years, so 10 years is the merest blink of an eyelid in the life of the cosmos.

It is difficult to comprehend how short a space of time a decade is in this context. Just imagine that the last 10 years is represented by a cuticle on your fingernail. It would take 1.3 billion more cuticles, one on top of the other, to reach the beginning of existence. In any man's language, that's a lot of nail.

It was during the Noughties that celebrities finally took their rightful place at the centre of this universe.

We also saw the internet boom explode worldwide, with China overtaking America with the most users. It was a decade of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and eventual indifference to pornography at the touch of a mouse key.

We had Sars and swine flu, foot and mouth, and several bad cases of the sniffles, but we soldiered on through it all and instead rang in sick when we were hungover.

Over on the 'Greatest Nation on The Earth', the decade began with a dope and ended with hope — but perhaps it is better to hold our judgement on such matters. It is too soon to attempt to rationalise the political decisions made or the potential repercussions of the same — such as whether humans and fish can continue to co-exist peacefully.

Instead, we purport here to offer you the facts; not always the most relevant ones from the past decade, but some you may not have known, may have forgotten or may never even have happened (see: Launch of wikipedia in 2001.)

Anyway, here it is:

2000

● THE beginning of the new millennium. Or so we thought. Remember all those boring people who insisted that January 1, 2001, was the real start as there was no year zero? And how the rest of us had 'zero' interest in what they were saying? Where are those losers now? Exactly.

● Well-paid experts who warned us that the Y2K bug would shut down companies, planes would fall from the sky, the economy might collapse and ATMs would send money floating into the wind, have to apologise for their flagrantly incorrect advice. Everything continues to work as normal.

● The survival of the technological world is little consolation for the pyrenean ibex (it looked like a deer). The last of whom is killed by a falling tree six days into the new century — the 21st Century's first animal extinction. Luckily, at the very end of the decade, in 2009, a clone of the ibex is born. It dies seven minutes later, because of breathing difficulties. Possibly after a tree fell on it.

● The Dotcom Bubble bursts. When will people realise that the only safe thing to invest in is bricks and mortar?

● In other financial news, as *America Online* announces the largest merger in history with Time Warner in exchange for AOL stock valued at \$160 billion, Microsoft is told by the American government it is too big and must divide in half, one half continuing to produce windows while the other half will move into wheelbarrow manufacturing.

● The Pacific island of Tuvalu, which has the same population as Mallow, joins the UN after Hans Blix confiscates some spears from the elders.

● Long Kesh (also called Maze Prison), scene of the hunger strikes in the Eighties, closes. We'll

This week we reach the end of the first decade of the 21st century, and all week ROBERT O'SHEA will cast an eye over some of the offbeat events of the last ten years that may have passed you by. He starts his series looking at the events that may, or may not, have made headlines in 2000 and 2001



BEST FOOT FORWARD: It was a decade full of health scares — for humans and animals. This carpet was laid in Paul Street, Cork, in 2001, in a bid to deter foot and mouth disease.

never forget you Jimmy Sands!

● Tiger Woods dominates the sporting world, winning, the USPGA, the British Open, the US Open (golf and tennis) the Grand National, the Derby and the SuperBowl.

● Charlie Haughey appears before the Moriarty Tribunal in the late summer. Investigators discovered he received substantial sums of money from prominent businesspeople when he was in office.

The former Taoiseach, who owns a mansion and an island, is unable to account for this, pleading loss of memory.

● In a wonderfully irritating year when every second question you ask anybody is answered with: "Can I phone a friend?"

Judith Keppel, pictured right, becomes the first millionaire on TV in the UK when correctly answering the final question from Chris Tarrant, which is: "Whasssuuuuup?"

● After a *News of the World* campaign to identify convicted and released paedophiles in communities in Britain, paediatrician Yvette Cloete has her home attacked by vigilantes and her front door daubed with the graffiti "paedo".

● At the Sydney Olympics, the emotional high point sees Cathy Freeman win the 400m, just holding off Tiger Woods for gold. Sonia O'Sullivan finally wins an Olympic medal and everyone in Ireland wells up.

● George Bush beats Al Gore to the US presidency thanks to hanging chads, pregnant chads



and the state of Florida, ushering in a period where many American tourists abroad will eventually pretend to be Canadian, just to avoid the hassle.

● The International space station is made fully operational, meaning humans will now have permanent residence in space, or at least until Tuvalu develop long-range missile capability.

Three people who died in 2000 (the final one whom you may vaguely remember and didn't know was dead.)

Lola Ferrari, French porn star, billed as "the woman with the largest breasts in the world".

Reggie Kray, London underworld boss who was only half as scary after his twin Ronnie died in 1995.

David Tomlinson, The actor who played George Banks, the father in *Mary Poppins*.

2001

● A NEW millennium begins and we all have a laugh at the schmucks who celebrated it a year before.

● A year always to be associated with Tragedy. Pop band Steps finally break up, as do the Spice Girls, and the Backstreet Boys.

● Ireland rejects the Nice Treaty, thus ending its support of European political expansion. And we mean it. OK, ask us again.

● Dennis Tito becomes the first space tourist, but is bitterly disappointed to find out he has an aisle seat upon boarding.

● Jeffrey Archer goes to jail, though not for crimes against literature, but perjury.

● Fraizer and Ali fight for a final time. But this

time it's the *Dames with Names*, as the two heavyweight icons' daughters meet in the ring. Laila Ali defeats Jacqui Frazier-Lyde on a majority decision.

● The internet site wikipedia launches in January, making life a lot easier for lazy journalists who simply cut and paste copy last modified on 20 December 2009 at 15:44. See Terms of Use for details. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, a non-profit organisation — rather than do real research.

● Scientists in Tokyo grow square melons. This will make packing of the fruit easier worldwide, although the Japanese seem to have cornered the market.

● Good news on the extinction front after the ibex fiasco as scientists greet the discovery of the Brujins Brush Turkey on a small Indonesian island with great excitement, as the elusive beast had not been seen since 1938. Delight soon turns to dismay when it emerges that hunters who made the find have eaten the evidence.

● Better news for the animal kingdom as researchers at Leicester University in the UK discover playing songs such as Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, and popular Fifties standard *Moon River* to cows succeeds in relieving tension — and boosts milk yields. A good year for cows so...

● ... until foot and mouth disease breaks out in the UK and everybody has to remember to wipe their feet on the way back into Ireland. Cheltenham races are cancelled and funeral pyres smoulder across the British countryside. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* by The Animals is banned on farms.

● The Hindu Wash. 70 million people take a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers in Allahabad, India at the world's largest religious gathering...

● ...whereas in Australia, hundreds launch an impromptu mission to recover 1,000 cases of beer spilled in a New South Wales river. Police try to stop people helping themselves, but are overwhelmed by the sheer determination of the locals, some of whom hire scuba gear to go into the river and retrieve the bottles.

● "You are the Weakest Link" is the clever thing to insult people with this year. Anne

Robinson, pictured left, the irritating host of the BBC quiz programme, finds herself in hot water as she brands the Welsh 'irritating' during a TV performance.

● The first World Toilet Summit takes place in Singapore. One of the conference's key findings,

which it recommended urgent attention, was a major discrepancy between the size of men's and women's toilets. Talks break down, however, over whether to leave the lid up or down.

● The Provisional IRA commences disarmament. The RUC changes its name to the PSNI and two weeks later the GAA get rid of Rule 21, which prohibited members of the British security forces from playing the games.

● In September, one date etches itself on the decade and the New York skyline changes forever.

Three people who died in 2001

Christiaan Barnard, the South African cardiac surgeon, famous for performing the world's first successful human heart transplant.

Joe Lynch, from Mallow, who made walking with one hand behind the back popular in rural areas as Dinny Byrne in Glenroe.

King Dipendra of Nepal, was proclaimed king a few days after shooting himself — he later died from the wound — and 10 family members, including his father Birendra, whom he deposed.

TOMORROW: Robert O'Shea takes a sideways look back at 2002 and 2003