



the quarterly journal of Desert Survivors • experience, share, protect • Spring 2002

Remembering fields of wildflowers

Using GPS on the Desert Trail

Fort Irwin update



Letter from the Editor

By Jessica Rothhaar, Communications Director

Welcome to the new Survivor. This beautiful new format was created by DS member Hall Newbegin, who says he has been itching to do it for years. Hall put his all into this redesign, and I think it really shows. Thank you Hall! Thanks also to Eric Rorer for providing many of the photographs that help give this issue its distinctive look, and to all those who contributed articles and additional photographs to this issue: Cathy Luchetti, Len Finegold, Chris Schiller, Jeff Comstock, Dave McMullen, George Huxtable, Dave Holten, Peter Ruddock, Janet Johnson, Paul Menkes, Bob Ellis, Bob Hallstrom and Steve Tabor.

I hope this new format will inspire you, too, to write, photograph or draw for the Survivor. The Survivor is always thirsty for original desert-related content: poetry, prose, issue updates, trip reports, nature writing, gear reviews, book reviews, music reviews, photographs and B&W line drawings. Whatever your special passion or expertise, I encourage you to share it with your fellow desert lovers in the Survivor. Share your opinions too; we will start printing and responding to letters to the Editor and to the DS Board. Let us know what you think.

What I really hope is that that this new-look Survivor will be the beginning of a renaissance in our unique and wonderful organization.

Since 1978, Desert Survivors has been at the forefront of desert protection advocacy in California. We lead more desert wilderness outings than any other organization in the United States. We introduce scores of people to the beauty and fragility of the desert every year. We teach people how to tread more lightly on the earth. We foster involvement and develop leadership. We are a community.

Yet, our membership is declining rather than growing. Since dues, trip donations and extraordinary donations from members account for virtually all of our income, this means that we are heading toward red ink. Extraordinary grants and donations have so far kept the wolf from the door, but we have to start looking at systemic solutions such as an increase in membership fees or trip donations, or an annual fundraising drive.

Our long-term survival depends on growing our membership. A Membership Survey and Task Force last year identified a variety of options. One of these was last month's Green Tortoise bus trip, which was organized by Dave Burch in response to survey findings that many members are discouraged from going on trips because of the long drives. Thirty four people participated on the trip, including six new members and several members who said they hadn't been on a trip in years. Everyone had a blast and we will definitely do it again.

Other priorities identified by the Task Force last year were to improve our communications (the Survivor and the website), and to do more outreach in Southern California and Nevada. Lacking paid staff to implement all of our great ideas, we haven't moved forward as quickly as we would have liked; nothing happens in Desert Survivors unless individual members give the time to make it happen. The bus trip and the Survivor redesign are a start. My next priority as Communications Director is to take up the long-stalled website redesign; please contact me if you would like to help out with that or the regional outreach.

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Submissions and Letters

Articles should be 1000 words or less and are subject to editing. Letters to the Editor should be 200 or fewer words and are subject to editing. Articles and letters should be emailed to JesseRoth@aol.com; please include your full name, city and state of residence and phone number. Photos, maps and line drawings should be mailed to Hall Newbegin, 3032 Tremont Street, Berkeley, CA 94703; they will be returned to you if you include your name and address. Please identify people and locations shown in your photographs.

Cover photo: Rupert and Christen Essinger enjoying the sunshine and views as they ascend Orocopia Peak
photo by Eric Rorer

Fields of Flowers, Fields of Sand

Remembering the Wildflower Years

by Steve Tabor, Alameda, CA



Dave McMullen

Wildflowers in the foothills of the Coso range, Spring 1998

My March 2002 trip to the Soda Mountains was a sobering experience. There were no forbs blooming, no wildflowers. Hardly any shrubs were leafed out. Only a single brittlebush showed blooms. Even the largest of the beavertail cactus were shriveled and dying. We picked up a chuckwalla lizard that barely moved. It had lost all body fat and its skin was turning black. Its eyes blinked, but it did not respond to touch. We poured water into my hand and tried to get it to drink, but it could not. Such were the results of a waterless winter. Virtually no rain had fallen in the past twelve months. This was drought, even for the desert.

Yet, all around us was evidence of a banner year for flowers, the winter of 2000-2001. That was a great flower year! The dry stalks of the previous year's brown-eyed primrose and sunflowers were everywhere. The dried flowers of last year's brittle brush still waved, a foot above the present year's meager offering. Everywhere in the California desert, 2001 had been a great spring season for flowers.

That year, good rains in February and March had brought a reliable bloom. On President's Day Weekend of that year, I led a group across the Sheephole Wilderness north of Joshua Tree. Flowers were sparse on the fans and in the open, but in one

canyon the blooms were everywhere. So dense was the growth that we found ourselves trampling flowers with every other step; they were impossible to avoid. Primroses of many kinds, sunflowers, Spanish needles, *Eriophyllum*, *Penstemon* and many others grew wall-to-wall across the wash. Trying to avoid trampling them was useless.

Later in March, we saw more flowers at Kelso Dunes on the last hike of our Spring Desert Trail Relay. The backside of the dunes and Cottonwood Wash had been soaked by late rains that had seeped into the sand. Kangaroo rats were active in the dunes, as were fringe-toed lizards, both benefiting from the insect bloom brought forth by the moisture. As we strode the water-compacted sand, we could see snow banks at high elevations in the nearby Granite and Providence Mountains, snow that would nourish the pinyon pine and juniper trees and cactus that grew there.

But the best wildflower year I've ever seen was the spring of 1998. That year, El Nino brought the rains early. It started raining in the desert on Thanksgiving the previous year and, from then on, rain came to the desert in the classic flower-year fashion, at least one good soaking rain per month, evenly spaced. In addition, many of the rains were warm ones, prompting an early bloom in February. Soil moisture slowly accumulated, and the subsurface never dried

out. Seeds that had been laying around in the desert for a generation now had a chance to sprout. And sprout they did, starting early and ending late.

In January 1998, in Maniobra Valley south of Joshua Tree, Marck Menke and I trailed behind the group on my Orocopia Mountains trip, doing a vegetation survey. At one point, I found Marck sprawled on the ground examining a host of sprouts barely an inch high. The whole wash was carpeted with them. We counted ten or a dozen per square foot, all vying for sunlight, glorying in the damp desert sand, sending down roots. All across the desert, it was like this. These were the sprouts that later produced "the greatest desert bloom in thirty-five years," in a flower year that even made the New York Times.

By President's Day in the Sheephole Wilderness, the desert was a carpet of green sprouts several inches high. The best blooms were in small patches of sand, which held moisture the longest, in the spaces between the grains. The Sheephole has a reputation for being some of the lowest, most barren, least sheltered of any of the Mojave Desert's Wilderness Areas, but in this year its wildflowers were superb.

March trips to the Marble and Granite Mountains, in the southern Mojave, also had great flowers. Coming out of the Granites in Bull Canyon, they were especially good. Blue Canterbury bells, yellow primroses and orange fiddlenecks grew on both terraces and hillsides. Below us in the gulch, a babbling brook ran out of the mountains toward Kelso Dunes. I've never seen the stream running that strong, or even leaving the mountains, before or since.

The best blooms I saw in 1998 were in Valjean Valley in early April. Here, the flowers were most developed. Individual plants had many blooms, and they were huge. The desert lilies were the most amazing - single plants three feet high with stalks as thick as my wrist. The little eight-inch spindly stalk shown in my flower

The desert lilies were the most amazing - single plants three feet high with stalks as thick as my wrist.

identification book did not look like the same plant. Most of the species mentioned previously were there, joined by pink masses of sand verbena trailing across the sand. Even where dune buggies did donuts at Dumont Dunes, wildflowers grew so large, even the jaded off-roaders couldn't help but notice.

Good wildflower years are usually followed by several poor years. 1984, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2001 were all good years. The years in between often showed no blooms at all, as rainfall swung on and off, going elsewhere or not even making it over the coastal ranges and the Sierra. The fields of flowers that we walked through in Valjean Valley in 1998 were dry as a bone in 1999. In March of that year, there were lots of dead dry stalks from the 1998 wildflower show, but there was no greenery, no forbs and not much in

the way of leafed-out shrubbery either. In 1999, after a year-long drought on Cima Dome, we'd seen a skinny, very hungry, somewhat dazed jackrabbit, emaciated from a lack of greenery, wounded by the ebb and flow of life and moisture.

It will likely be a long time before we again see flower years like 1998 and 2001. I tell my hikers not to go to the desert looking for wildflowers, but instead to look for good geology, good rock exposures and landforms, the inert stuff that will always be there. To experience the desert's sense of space and time and open possibility, to enjoy the lack of civilization's constraints and the absence of its phony propaganda and false values. To avoid its jaded self-importance and its lack of worthwhile goals. Go there to escape the "American Dream" and its programmed waste of time and effort and of life.

I urge desert hikers to let the wildflowers fend for themselves. If they're there, you can marvel when you find them. That way, they become even more valuable, like a hidden gem that you don't expect to find. Desert wildflowers are a rarity. They won't be there every year. But like that single brittlebush in this year's Soda Mountains, they will catch your eye enabling you to marvel. Don't worry, they'll be back. We just don't know when.



The Woman was Incredulous

By Bob Hallstrom, Pittsburg, CA

The woman was incredulous. "You went to the desert!?! What did you do for entertainment?" My wife and I had just returned from a few days spent burrowing as deep into the desert as we could manage. We marveled at the scenery, the colored rock, the sunrise and set, and the scattered silver-gray puffs of plants that looked like they hadn't done any useful photosynthesis in years. We tried to comprehend the silence and the star show at night, the solitude, and the subtle but persistent

hint of danger. We slept in the back of our pick-up, drank water from a jerry can, and cooked simple meals over a camp stove.

Both of us attempted to stretch our finite minds to absorb the infinite scale of the place. Then we returned home exhausted but enthralled and renewed.

My wife's friend doesn't do things like this. I admit I rarely understand the activities that excite her, but I don't remember asking her to explain her passion for these. However she was determined to get some justification from us for the week we had just expended.

Why did we go to the desert?

Where do I start?

Let me tell you of a man I met once. Some day you may cross paths with one like him, but don't be surprised if you are tempted to ignore him. Most everyone does.

He is an odd little man. He keeps to himself.

Like the stray cat that comes to your back door, you cannot just reach out to him or he will cut and run.

You may find he has a wall around him. If by chance he lets you through this wall you will find another, and perhaps a third. Like all walls, their purpose is to keep people away. This man has his reasons for the walls, for the protection they offer, but you probably will not learn of these.

His hands are rough and scarred, and his muscles taunt. He may be as old as he appears, but it is hard to tell. The wrinkles on his face tell their tale, and his eyes have a permanent squint from too many hours spent in the sun.

Look into those eyes and you will know someone lives in there. They speak of time and thought and finally, wisdom. Watch them transform from wary to warm without any other change in his features. From his perch at the periphery of the crowd he pretends to be somewhere else, but those eyes miss nothing.

He may have failed at everything, or he may have simply left success behind to be by himself. Never good at following directions, he can invent anything he needs. You cannot offer to pay him in order to gain some measure of control over him, for he doesn't

want your money.

He doesn't need you.

But if the time is right and the whiskey good, he just might decide to talk. If you are smart, you will shut up and listen.

You may have to sort through some strange stories, because a lone imagination can wander into some funny places. But be patient and he will begin to teach you some of the workings of man's mind.

He will know nothing of TV or recent movies, and he mostly reads old books. But since experience comes from things done wrong, he can speak from authority.

Let him talk. If you pay attention you will gain something important that the others always miss. Do not dismiss the man as they do, for he offers insight you cannot find anywhere else.

The Mojave Desert doesn't need you either.

Most people ignore the desert while passing through at 85 mph. They are going somewhere else and the desert is not a destination to them; it is just in the way.

Others come to the desert with their toys. They tear around on motorcycles or dune buggies. They gather in large groups, leave the lights on, and make lots of noise. They go into the desert without letting the desert into them.

A few lucky ones crawl away from the crowds and find solitude, darkness, and silence. They find colors and clouds, alien plants and stark beauty. They are not comfortable, for the desert is both too hot and too cold, and it certainly is not soft. But they are spell-bound. They shut up and listen, and learn things they cannot learn anywhere else.

Refreshed and infused with new perspective, they can go home to suburbs and cities, to jobs and tedious people. Perhaps they don't wish to spend all their time with this odd little man, but they are glad to have met him.

"What did you do for entertainment?"

Sorry, but if you have to ask...



Ever wonder what it would be like to be injured, alone and in the middle of nowhere? In September of 2001, veteran Desert Survivor trip leader Dave McMullen fell down a steep hillside and badly injured his ankle. He managed to hobble his way to an abandoned 19th century ranch site with shade and running water - what follows is the second installment of his story...

Peril In The Panamints: Part 2

By Dave McMullen, Berkeley, CA

Isolation. After a lousy night, a self evaluation first thing Sunday morning made it clear I was going nowhere in a hurry. My ankle would bear no weight without excruciating pain, and it was swelling prominently. Bruises were developing around the joint and down toward my toes. Between me and transportation was nine miles of steep rocky elevation. Standing told me all I needed to know: there was no way I could hike back to the car. I had planned to be home

Monday night, 36 hours away. Assuming a search and rescue call would be made either late Monday night or first thing Tuesday morning, I expected some sort of contact with Park Service personnel by Tuesday afternoon. That meant I would have to wait at least 56 hours before outside assistance would arrive.

Would they know where to look? Yes, because I left an itinerary behind with my wife, Diane, and several friends, with information about my intended routes, destinations, and return time. This incident shows how important it is to do that, and how important it is to stick to the plan.

56 hours didn't seem like a long time, especially in my condition. I was grateful to have sustained only a sprain in the fall. Besides, my supplies were in good stead. There was food for a day of strenuous activity, with some extra rations for just such an occasion. I had a fairly well stocked first aid kit containing painkillers, anti-inflammatory medications, and compression wrapping. I had a warm sleeping bag, with a pad to rest on, along with good rain gear and warm clothes in case cold weather set in. I had survival items as well, including a space blanket, matches, knife, flashlight, reflective surface, loud whistle, and water treatment gear.

The location was excellent too, being supplied with a good source of water and plenty of shade, courtesy of all the fruit trees surviving there.

But the constant throbbing pain, and the painkillers and anti-inflammatories on an empty stomach, left me nauseous in the morning. I drank some water and tried eating some crackers and sausage, but that only made it worse. I hoped that this wasn't a sign of some internal injury and monitored this closely. Soon however the call of nature overtook me, and I had to dig a cat

hole. I realized this was a good sign that my internal systems were working. The nausea went away, and I felt more clear headed, too. My appetite returned as well, so I drank heartily, nibbled on some trail mix and dried fruit, and rested in the shade of a fig tree.

Wilderness survival classes teach that, when lost and awaiting rescue, it's good to take steps to facilitate your own rescue through signaling or marking your location. That is why flashlights, mirrors, and whistles should be included in emergency kits. So I resolved to try and bring attention to myself. Every hour I blew my storm whistle as loudly as possible, pumping out three quick blasts, pausing to listen for a response, and repeating it two more times. I also located a clear space away from the trees and stretched out my space blanket with its reflective side up in bright sunshine to attract the attention of passing planes. Whenever I heard a small low-flying plane overhead, I came out from under the canopy of leaves and stood near the space blanket waving my t-shirt over my head.

This wasn't that effective. Only two low flying planes passed over the ranch in the three days I was there, and neither saw me. It turns out that my reflective tarp isn't that reflective after all. Having been folded and rolled innumerable times, the silver surface has become a mass of wrinkles and creases, and reflects light diffusely. Diffused light does not get the attention of people in airplanes; only a brightly reflected intense light will stand out from the surface enough for that.

Tranquility. That Sunday was a beautiful day at the ranch. The air was still, the sky cloudless, and the temperature was very warm. As I lay there, birds would come and go through the trees, picking at the fruit, scratching the ground for bugs to eat, and drinking from the stream. The tranquility was palpable.

I located my camp directly beneath the limbs of a large fig tree, where I would have plenty of shade all day. The tree's branches arched outward and downward, leaving open shady spaces beneath a canopy of leaves. After tossing out the twigs, small rocks, ripe figs and burro turds, I had enough space to stretch out completely.

By lunch time my spirits were high. I'd overcome the nausea, soaked my ankle in the creek again, applied a compression wrap, and made regular blasts on my whistle. I was enjoying the solitude and wishing I could get a better look at the birds winging about. As I rested contentedly, the steady drone of a low flying single engine plane pierced my dream.

I put on my boots and hobbled into the clearing. Shading my eyes, I spotted a plane, then took off my t-shirt and waved it back and forth over my head until the plane disappeared from view. Alone in the silence afterward, I wondered if the effort had been worth it. I later discovered that it's better to lie down if you want to be seen from a plane. A member of the Mountain Rescue Group told me that, from the air, standing people cast shadows and blend into the landscape, and so end up looking like rocks or trees.

First Storm. By late afternoon, large billowy clouds had formed along the peaks up canyon. Small clouds drifted along the ridge

lines, getting larger and darker as they began to stack up against the peaks. Around 5 p.m., thunder rumbled down the rocky mountain sides and the sky above was completely covered. Lightning flashes followed by thunder increased in frequency, and by 6 p.m. light rain began to fall at Hungry Bill's Ranch. I retrieved my tarp, put on rain gear, covered everything and waited it out.

My position under the tree wasn't the best for avoiding rain. A funnel effect seemed to direct water right to my bed. I moved some branches around but this only made matters worse, so I relocated to a more protected spot and waited it out. The rain stopped just after sunset and I was able to unwrap everything and rebuild my bedroom. Sleep that night was restful and unbroken.

Stuck in Paradise. Monday's routine was similar. I had another soak in the creek and rewrapped the compression tape. I nibbled a bit of food, though I wasn't hungry. I drank water regularly, and kept my leg elevated as much as possible. During the heat of the day, I placed a wet wash cloth over my elevated ankle to cool it through evaporation; that worked very well.

Between my fig tree and the creek were some grape vines with clusters of ripe fruit. I gathered a few grapes to eat and found



Before the fall: view from the Panamint Crest, Prickly Poppies in foreground

them very sweet indeed. The fig trees were loaded with fruit the size of large cherries and very flavorful. What a paradise to be stuck in! Fresh cool water, ripe fruit, peace and quiet, with shade and soft ground to rest on. The desert isn't always so accommodating.

Second Storm. Late that afternoon, clouds again started blowing from the southeast and piling up against the Panamint peaks. By 4 p.m. the sky was black with thunder heads, and lightning was again unleashed up canyon. The rain started, light at first, then heavier; the temperature dropped as a strong wind began pouring down the canyon. I slipped on my thermal underwear, donned rain clothes, and secured my gear by putting everything into the pack, wrapping it in the tarp and sitting on top of the bundle. A very uncomfortable position for a sprained ankle, but one I was forced to hold for several hours.

Soon large drops were falling through the leafy canopy and figs, knocked off by the rain, were dropping down on my head. I passed the time counting seconds between lightning flashes and thunder claps. At one mile for every five seconds, I calculated the strikes at two miles away. They got closer and then suddenly were right on top of me: less than one second between flash and clap. After a particularly loud one, the skies opened up and poured down hail.

Ripping through the leaves, bringing down small branches and more fruit, the hail storm lasted over ten minutes. It was followed by more heavy rain. Water began to puddle in my once cozy alcove. Strong gusts of wind, like ocean waves, charged down the canyon, making the fig tree bend and sway. After two hours of this, it began to get very dark. I had visions of staying up all night in the rain. Occasionally I could see through the branches and became aware the storm stretched completely across the valley. I saw lightning bolts striking all around the Black Mountains, cloud to cloud, and cloud to ground.

A dismal thought entered my head. What a pity it would be to have survived the fall and two days alone, only to be struck by lightning. The potential for a flash flood came to mind as well. I started to watch the creek and plan for a retreat. I stayed my ground, but checked the creek twice. It wasn't rising and, more importantly, it wasn't running muddy. At 7:30 p.m. the rain stopped and the lightning moved out to the east and north.

I lay down on my tarp again. Staring into the dark, I realized it was about the time my absence would be noticed. A sinking feeling crept up on me. My wife would be worried, as would Grant, whose 4WD I had borrowed. I wished I could somehow reassure them I was okay. Hoping the best for them, I dozed off, listening

to the wind as it blew though the trees and over the canyon walls.

Becoming Impatient. Tuesday morning broke fair and clear. By lunch time, I half expected Park Rangers to come walking up the canyon. Certain that search and rescue actions were taking place, I prepared all my gear for quick departure and spent the early afternoon watching small clouds drift by. No-one came, but around 4 p.m. I heard the drone of a single engine plane and again performed my rescue dance. The plane made a turn, doubled back over the canyon, and then turned and flew directly down canyon. I found out later it had indeed been searching for me, but had not spotted me.



Dave McMullen

Apple tree at Hungry Bill's ranch

The afternoon dragged on. I ambulated a bit and discovered that my ankle could bear a small amount of weight, but the uneven ground was brutal on it. I gathered up some apples that looked ripe and found some fallen walnuts as well. They were the worst apples I have ever tasted. Pithy and entirely without sweetness. The nuts were delicious but small and required great patience and labor to extract from the shells. My lunch consisted of these nuts, fresh grapes, fresh figs, cheese, and a bit of sausage.

Hoping company would arrive for dinner, I put off eating again until sunset. That's when it became clear to me there would be no rescuers hiking up the canyon that day. I prepared for another night and felt positive tomorrow would be my time to leave.

Rescue. At 2:00 a.m. the call of nature woke me. While watering a bush, I was treated to a most amazing sight. All clouds had evaporated, leaving a star studded sky naked from horizon to horizon. There wasn't the slightest breeze and a waning moon, just past full, illuminated the landscape in every direction through a freshly washed crystal clear atmosphere.

I stayed there for awhile drinking it all in. What a weekend it had been: injury, isolation, storms, anticipation of rescue, spotter plane flying overhead. And now this magnificent beauty. I sighed, trundled back to my bag and began to drift off to sleep.

In that half awake, half asleep limbo, a noise began to insinuate itself into my consciousness. "That's the sound you have to listen for in the morning when they come to get you," I heard a voice saying. "That's the sound I have to listen for in the morning when they come to get me," I repeated as the noise continued. "Yes, that's the sound you have to listen for when they come to get you in the morning," the voice confirmed. "OK, that's the sound I have to listen for...", I started to tell myself once more. Then it hit me. That's the sound. That's the sound!

I sat upright in the darkness under the tree and listened. Yes, that was the sound of a helicopter somewhere up canyon, and it was getting louder. I pulled my boots on, grabbed my headlamp and hobbled out into the moonlight. Looking west I saw the running lights of a helicopter in the air, with a comically dim spotlight making slow sweeps back and forth across the canyon floor.

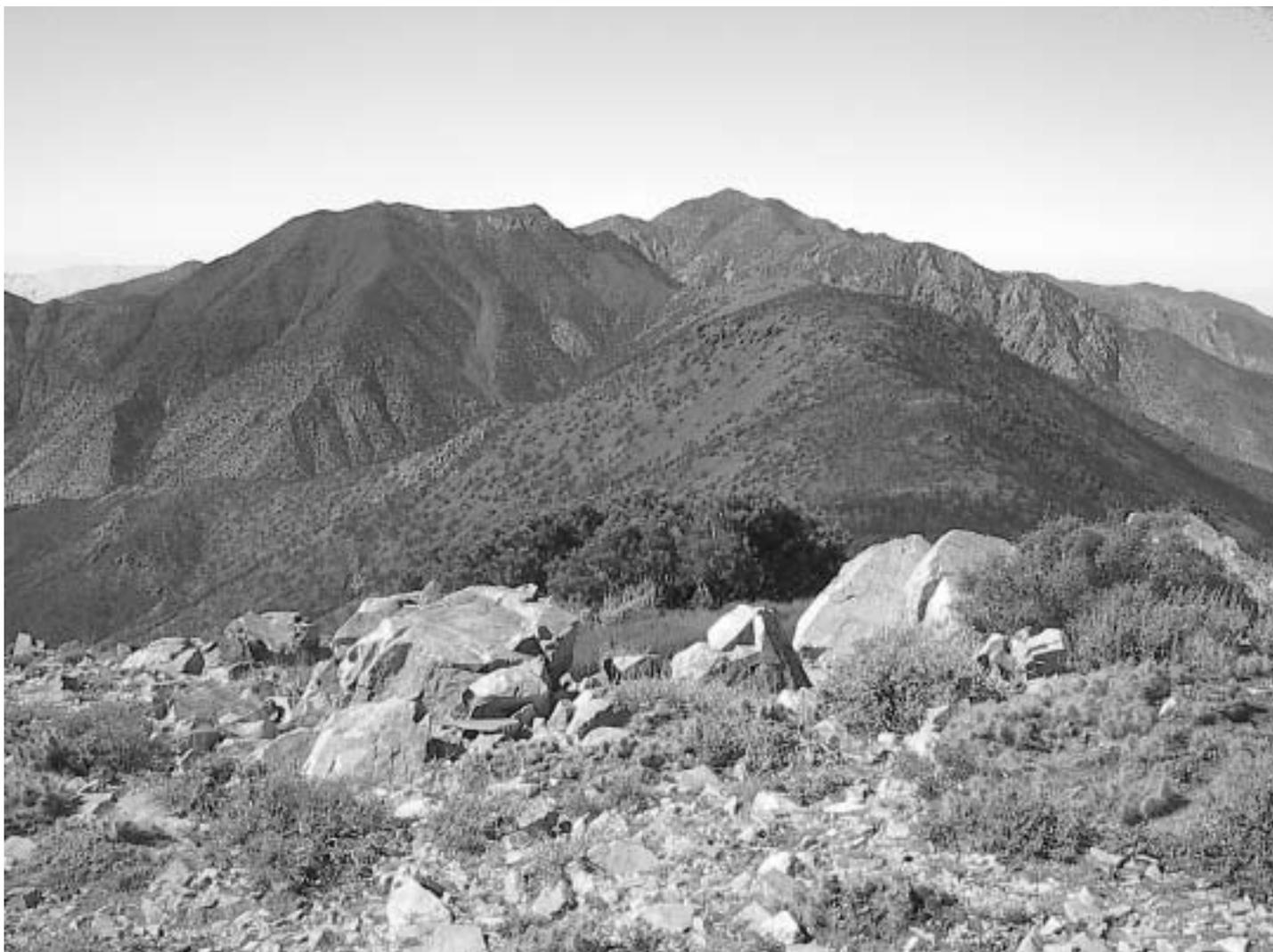
I turned on the head lamp and flashed a quick SOS in the copter's direction. It stopped sweeping and made a direct line toward me, flew over my head, then did a U-turn just down canyon and headed back more slowly. As it passed over again, someone threw out a red glow stick, then the copter turned around and headed down canyon once more. I wondered if they were leaving. But they turned around a third time and slowly began to descend. I hobbled back to my gear and prepared for departure.

Flight Out. The flight out of the canyon was remarkable. In the light of the near full moon I could see both walls of Johnson Canyon as we flew up and over Panamint Pass. The entire crest of the Panamint Mountains was lit up as we crossed over, and I could see Telescope Peak in the distance. The flight had a bittersweet quality for me. I was rescued, and that was good. But a helicopter was violating the remote and tranquil wilderness I love, and I was

the cause of it.

They took me to Ballarat, where Sgt. Randy Nixon of the Inyo County Sheriff's Search and Rescue team welcomed me and immediately set up a satellite phone for me to call my wife. It was around 3:30 a.m., but Sgt. Nixon knew Diane would be glad to get my call.

Epilogue. What you have read is only half the story. There's a whole other tale of people waiting for me to return, their fears, hopes, and decisions when I didn't. There's all the telephone calls, the waiting for news, and wondering what's happened. I am eternally grateful to those who came forward and helped Diane: Grant Blocher, my brother Sam, sister-in-law Penny, and my step son Aaron. Also, I am grateful to BLM ranger Ron Stormo, and DVNP ranger David Brenner for braving the washed out road up Pleasant Canyon to locate Grant's truck and initiate search and rescue efforts. Thanks also go out to the Inyo County Sheriff's Department search and rescue people, especially Sgt. Nixon, and to the helicopter crew from Vandenberg Air Force Base. Others helped too, in indirect ways. I am thankful to you all, and feel grateful to have discovered a wide base of support in my life.



Dave McMullen

View north from Porter Peak on the Panamint Crest

San Rafael Swell Carcamp

May 7-13, 2001; SE Utah



Dave Holten

By Cathy Luchetti, Oakland, CA

Ten people met at Justensen Flats, east of Salina, Utah. The weather was clear and brisk, the 7000-plus elevation just high enough for a scattering of snow atop the scattered scrub junipers. The last five hikers came from the Bay Area in a Ford Explorer, top-heavy as a Columbian bus under a tottering mass of duffels and packs. Camp that night was flooded by moonlight and a small herd of wild mustangs.

Day One: Leader Dave Holten woke us politely at 6 a.m. by fiddling around with his vehicle, then walked from tent to tent, making encouraging sounds. By 8 a.m., all were ready for the "moderate" day hike: a mere ten-mile warm-up into Coal Wash, followed by a steep, downhill scramble. To exit, we would orienteer back up a steep canyon wall using Steve Allen's guidebook, *The San Rafael Swell*.

We headed toward the western side of the Swell and eagerly tracked across the stone "blocks," threading our way through hoodoos, pinnacles, and spires to the lip of a steep talus slope. Awed silence ensued as we gazed down the vertical descent, until we finally spotted a narrow chimney that everyone could manage. Butts wedged and soles locked, we inched down the crusty sandstone. At the bottom, a water-cut gorge divided into the main

canyon. The guidebook called for an outcropping on a side canyon to point the way out, but which one? Outcroppings towered everywhere. Huge hoodoos threw goblin shadows. A dizzying array of miner's cairns prompted false starts.

"Up here!" someone cried.

"This way!"

"No, over here."

The route up quickly turned Class 5. Hikers clung like bees to the steep rocks, unable to advance, trying to edge back down, blinded by sweat and the first stirrings of anxiety. A rock like an anvil crashed down the cliff and crunched onto one hiker's knee. Exhausted but energized, we finally found a route out. This was adventure! Rugged, unexpected, and beautiful. If this hike was moderate, what, we wondered, would tomorrow bring? "Killer day!" one hiker exclaimed. "Yikes!" "Hot. Very hot."

Day Two: This day's hike took us down Devil's Canyon to the base of the impressive San Rafael Knob. An 1100-foot vertical summit with unsurpassed views, the Knob was scabble, scree, loose boulders and intense hiking, particularly toward the top.

En route, the group splashed into a slot canyon so dark the murky water looked too deep to cross. One hiker poked his walking stick

in, noting, "Really deep." We tried to inch around, and some started clambering up the canyon walls on rocks too slippery for traction. Finally, one hiker plunged in barefoot, expecting to sink, but landed ankle-deep in shallow water. A half hour lost, but prompting much, much laughter.

Toward the peak of the Knob, one person slid ten feet straight down a rock face while two climbers inched along a sheer sandstone cliff, heading for the top, searching delicately for footing and wondering if they could edge their way back down, or had they gone too far? Finally summiting, they were surprised to find an old mining road that wound its way to the top. We could have walked up the backside.

Day Three: Dave Holten's pickup coughed and grumbled, forcing him to drive to Price for repairs, leaving Steve, Lasta, and Dave as leaders. They devised a "Brunch Walk" to the Rochester petroglyphs, an amazing sandstone panel overlooking Muddy Creek, just past the Spanish Trail. Carved images danced over the soft, beige rock. Figures twined, hunted, jumped, gathered, capered, and stared out with haunting eyes. Far below, a van-sized rock near the Muddy River Canyon sported a 20th century glyph: images of children, carved to look like gingerbread cookies.

From the petroglyphs, we backtracked toward our camp at the foot of Capital Reef, which rose up like a dorsal fin from the ocean of gray sage that stretched from horizon to horizon. Part of the



Dave Holten

group hiked four miles down a steep gorge from Swasey's Cabin, stopping to admire a 120-foot arch that towered overhead, its graceful curves reflected in a glimmering pool of water. Suddenly, the sky clenched up. Thunder muttered and occasional lightning lit the clouds. A spatter of rain danced overhead, sprinkling us as well as the dead mice floating in Sulphur Spring's cattle tank. Carefully, Steve T. lowered a branch over the basin to provide an escape route for future trapped mice.

That night, camping on the Reef, the Ford Explorer group discovered that they were nearly out of gas. One hiker stood up and claimed responsibility.

"My name is J. I am a bad judge of travel distances and I am here to get better." Such honesty was deeply appreciated and the car returned--nearly to Moab--to fill up.

That night seemed magical, particularly the Gift of the Corral.

Our camp was off Highway 24 between Green River and Hanksville. To the east lay the snow covered La Sal Mountains behind Moab. Behind us rose the San Rafael Reef, the eastern edge of the San Rafael Swell, an explosion of vertically formed strata. Its miles of flatiron walls looked like giant reptilian backplates thrust up from the sand. Jannet, seated on a blue oil-cloth tarp, needed scissors to open a bag of Tasty Bites. "Scissors," she mused. "I wish I had scissors....." Suddenly Geri leaped up, pointing to the old corral. "Look!" There, stuck in the gate, was a brand new pair of pink-handled scissors! Jannet tried



Dave Holten

Lasta Tomasevich mugs for the camera

wishing for more useful items, but the moment had passed.

Yet magic hung in the air. A huge moon shone white over the desert, drawing out packs of coyotes on lonesome midnight prowls.

Day Four: A 12-mile loop walk through Iron Wash and Ernie Canyon, twisting down the backside of the reef, threading our way through towering walls of varnished Moenkope and Chinle rock formations. Cottonwood and tamarisk stood out vividly. House-sized boulders were flung down the sides of the mesas, undermined by the collapse of crumbling rock beneath. Buttery yellow carnetite talus shedded down from the huge mesas above, bearing little loads of uranium. A huge amphitheater loomed over the bottom of the canyon, an awesome sight. One hiker, speeding downhill, suddenly stumbled into what appeared to be a huge badger hole. Other holes appeared; no one else fell in.

Hoodoo Arch descended into a mini Grand Canyon, a tumble of monolithic ascents and steep cliffs. Cottonwoods rustled gently, bright green against the banded red and white rocks bordering the Muddy River.

Dave S.: "That Arch opening looks like the state of Nevada"

Dave H: "Well, I'm homesick."



Dave Holten

Day Five: Our hike wandered down Upper Knotted Rope Canyon, a narrow, beautiful canyon with a tremendous overlook. To the southwest we admired Wingate striped walls, buttes, and mesas. Recent mining activity dotted the cliffs with small black mine apertures, looking like Indian cliff dwellings cut into the Wingate. Ahead was Wayne's Wiggle, a steep chimney scramble that twisted through the rock. The canyon was named for a knotted rope that used to hang through the Wiggle. There was no rope left, but plenty of wiggle was still necessary to ascend. The top was partially blocked by a boulder and an overhang, but everyone managed to shinny up and, later, back down. From the top, we gazed out over the snow-covered Henry Mountains, the last "newly discovered" range in the country: a carnival of bright Navajo and Wingate, streaks of red and white, banded and layered.

Day 6: More beauty? More? On this day we circumnavigated the talus slopes of Temple Mountain on an 8-mile hike. "The sun is in heat," said David M. Huge core samples had been plucked out of the earth like hair follicles, using huge mining equipment that is no longer in evidence. On the backside are two cabins, still livable save for their caved-in roofs. Recent mineral sampling has gone on; patents can only be continued by demonstrating "improvements."

If you like weathered sandstone and granite, windblown hoodoos, outcrops of red sandstone, cactus studded vistas, great massifs, volcanic scree a hundred million years old and incredible vistas, this is the trip: Utah at its best. As Steve Thaw quoted John Muir: This is holy land, and you should saunter through it.

Afton Canyon Bike Trip

November 10-12, 2001; Mojave Preserve, CA

By Jeff Comstock, Stockton, CA

I caught a ride with my friend Steve Perry. After securing my bike and gear, we struck a course from Lathrop to Santa Nella. All travelers know that this can only mean one thing: Anderson's Split Pea Soup. I passed on the pea soup and contemplated what Jedediah Smith might have ordered. I went with the Cowboy Omelet, flapjacks and black coffee. Back in Steve's truck, we fueled up and headed south.

I have always liked the trip down I-5; I wondered how it would have looked one or two hundred years ago. We took Steve's top-secret short cut and were heading out across Highway 58 in no time. Just east of Tehachapi we passed Twenty Mule Team Borax. Steve says boron is used in rocket fuel, but it just reminds me of my Grandma's kitchen.

Looking at all the Joshua trees, it is easy to see where those Indian stick figures in the petroglyphs came from.

At Barstow we stopped at the local expedition outfitter, Von's Supermarket. Some things go without saying, like "M&M's melt in mouth, not in your hand." The M&M people have no obligation to tell you things like, "melts in your mouth, a hot oven, and the desert, not in your hand." I bought a big bag of trail mix, the kind

with M&M's.

Upon arrival at the Afton Canyon campground on Friday night, I was immediately struck with the fabulous turnout. Every spot was taken, the grills were busy, the beers were cold, but there was no talk of tackling the desert, nor anything that looked like a bicycle. People kept pointing up and talking about a meteor shower and Leo the Lion. We parked in a spot for day campers, popped up the camper and crashed out.

After a good night's sleep I was awakened by the roar of a locomotive – wow, it was really close. Looking around the campground, we could see the Mojave River and a big railroad trestle. Once across the river, the tracks ran out into the desert and gradually disappeared in the east.

Bob and Bill showed up; we were now a party of four.

In the sand, a bicycle is pretty much useless

Later, while waiting for the car shuttle, I noticed a group of Boy Scouts and a leader at the trestle. As a train roared by I was shocked to see the leader pick up a rock and bean a boxcar. I think the kids saw it the same way I did, because they all looked at him like he was an idiot.

I had wondered if a bicycle could cross a desert, and soon found the answer. In the sand, a bicycle is pretty much useless; we would travel to Kelso Station alongside the Union Pacific main track. All rail traffic between Las Vegas and California passes on this single track, including trains from Salt Lake City.

Over the next two days, I would spend a great deal of time looking at and thinking about trains.

Heading east from Barstow are two major tracks. One is the Burlington Northern Santa Fe; Interstate 40 was built next to this track and you can race the trains all the way past the Stateline. The other one splits northeast at Yermo and is all Union Pacific; this would be our route for the next 50 miles. We saw many of UP's "hot shots" ripping by at 75 mph. Hot shots are the high priority trains, usually double-stacked containers of surprising length. We even saw a train of empty car haulers go "in the hole" (onto a siding), while a hot shot "held the main." While the train of empties was parked on the siding, they chatted with Steve and even gave him one of the famous blue plastic water bottles that litter the tracks. I think Steve's bottle was the first in recorded history to be recycled.

The bike ride was primarily on the service road that was right next to the tracks. It was sort of paved, with lots of crushed rock, called ballast, that spilled over from the tracks. Most of the crushed rock was granite and looked very sharp, but no tires were punctured. Some of the rock was rich with ore and as black as coal; I wondered which mine it came from. Some sections of the road were sand and gravel washboard. I had long wondered what the railroads did with all that federal subsidy money, but in the desert, they spend plenty. The rails were converted into "ribbon rails," welded into one continuous rail. The rocks and ties were under constant care with numerous inspection markers only a month or two old. To keep the sand from burying the tracks,

there were pumps, generators and wells. The pumps fed numerous sprinklers that watered two endless rows of tamarisk trees. We passed a camp of tree trimmers keeping the trees neater than anything you will see on the banks of the Jordan.

We took turns tagging along in Steve's truck and near sundown, we made camp. Dinner was kicked off with some kind of chorizo weenies that added a smoky 40wt flavor to our excessive bounty of chicken. With full bellies, a Reeses cup and a bottle of wine, everyone was ready to take a nap.

Sometime around 1 a.m. the show began. It is hard to describe a meteor shower of this magnitude. Comet 55P/Tempel-Tuttle was sprinkling her dust, and this Leonid display was a good one. Four and five abreast streaking this way and that. Their speed was incredible and, against the clear desert sky, it was breathtaking. The finale was a very bright light shooting northwest and leaving what looked like a vapor trail across the night.

Before going back to bed we all acted like ten year olds and ran up to the tracks as a train blew past at full speed. It was thrilling. I was tired and slept like a stone.

Sunday was a day of perfect weather. We made excellent time and followed our indefatigable guide Bill Spreng into Kelso Station. Here we learned the railroad secret to making flat pennies. Put them on the track when the train is parked, rather than in the path of a speeding locomotive. (I never figured that out as a kid, so I figured I would pass it along.)

Packing the bikes, getting refreshed and harassing tourists, we left the station and drove to the old Kaiser Vulcan Mine. The road up to the mine was in pretty good shape and soon we were parked on a nice concrete slab that was once a building. The mine closed soon after WWII due to high amounts of sulfur in the ore. Even though it has been 50 years, the piles of tailings still look neat and tidy. Give this place another couple million years and it will look like new.

We took a hike to the bottom of the pit and checked it out. It was strange. The bottom was about the size of a football field: one end was swampy and wet, full of cattails; the other end was under a few feet of clear water with lots of green plants that looked like angel-hair pasta. The part we could walk on was blanketed with soft, thick, white stuff. Beats me what it was, but I kept my hands away from it and was glad I had my cheap boots on. It was no surprise to see tamarisk trees growing here. After some pictures, we hiked back to camp for bagels and coffee. I finished off my crushed, melted globs of M&M trail mix.

As the sun rose higher, we could see the ribbon of rail stretching across the horizon, past Kelso Station, heading west behind the Kelso dunes and back to Afton Canyon. Everyone quiet with his own thoughts, we packed up and headed home.

Thanks to trip leader Bob Lyon for a great weekend.

Escape From Trona Backpack

Feb 14-24, 2002; SE California, near Death Valley NP

11 day, 114 mile backpack across the unprotected wildlands threatened by Ft. Irwin's expansion (also see article on page 27)



Bob Ellis

At the peak of 5000' Quail Mountain with views of the Panamints and Telescope Peak

By Bob Ellis, Berkeley, CA

All but four Desert Survivor members refused to take part in the first Trona to Baker 114-mile relay backpack / day-hike extravaganza. Bill Harper, John Hiatt, Ingrid Crickmore and I didn't refuse. All the rest of you missed out on a great trip. At the end our feet were sore, but our minds, hearts and stomachs were full - especially after the date shakes and Greek salads at the Mad Greek in Baker.

This was a walking journey along a political and social borderland. At all times we were bounded on the south by military bases (first the Navy's China Lake Range B, then the Air Force-used Leach Lake bombing area and then the Army's Fort Irwin tank base). For the most part, where we stepped and to our north was wilderness (either proposed or protected BLM wilderness or Death Valley National Park wilderness). At times the peacefulness of the day was replaced with the aggressive sounds and antics of sky-warriors.

We crossed five mountain ranges: the Slates, the Panamints, the Quails, the Owlsheads, and the Avawatz. We hiked 17,000 feet uphill and 17,200 feet downhill. We started with a crossing of the Searles Lake playa and ended with a crossing of the Silver Lake playa. We encountered 9 burros, 5 humans, 1 gopher snake, and 1 golf ball. We watched airplanes swoop and dive while firing their guns, tanks trailing dust plumes, and the moon just missing Jupiter and Saturn. We joined a small group of those who have walked the entire length of the Bowling Alley, traversed over the top of the

Avawatz Peak with backpacks, and uttered the words "Trona" and "Baker" in the same sentence dozens of times (most often shortened as "T to B").

The desert is dry this Spring. Little or no rain has fallen there in a couple of months. As a result, we saw few annuals on our hike; no flowers and very little greenery even in the perennials and shrubs. Several times I was reminded of the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" with its landscape of sepia-tints. The desert was still hiber-

nating. O Spring, Where Art Thou?

Logistics: Our method worked well for us and may prove useful to others. We were not certain of water sources along the way and were worried about burros attacking cached food and water drops. We wanted to trade off carrying less weight in return for setting out more caches. We split the 114-mile route into eleven day-long sections, each from 8 to 14 miles long depending upon hiking conditions. The first five days would take us from Trona across the Slate and Panamint Ranges to the end of the Owlshead Road. Three days before the hike we cached water and food at the Newman Cabin in Golar Wash to be picked up the second night. The day before the hike we left two vehicles at the end of the Owlshead Road containing all food and water for the last six days of the trip. Then we drove a third car back to the Trona hospitality center, our point of departure.

We hiked faster than expected and, with the incentive of a dramatic rain shower, arrived at the Owlshead Road after only four days. A flat tire on one of the vehicles provoked a trip to Baker for a fix, after which we shuttled one of the cars two days down the road to Owl Lake Pass. Then we backpacked the length of the Quail Mountains, stopping above the burro-trashed Quail Springs. After looking at the next two sections, we decided to day-hike each one as they had some dirt road sections and we were ready for a break from carrying packs. We shuttled the cars in morning and evening and arrived at the base of the Avawatz at Sheep Creek cabin at the end of the eighth day.

We left a car at the powerline road by Silver Lake and started up Sheep Creek canyon for a two-day backpack up 4,500 feet over Avawatz Peak. We were accompanied the first day by Tom Budlong and Marty Dickes, who then shuttled our remaining car to the powerline road (thanks, guys). As we left the Avawatz Mountains on Saturday, we survived an afternoon of dust blowing directly out of Fort Irwin. By early evening we arrived at the shores of Silver Lake for our last camp. A day hike down the length of the playa past the old Tonopah and Tidewater railroad grade got us to the Mad Greek in time for lunch.

We wound up doing one four-day backpack with a midway cache, two two-day backpacks and three dayhikes. Our packs were never too heavy and we didn't have to carry much dried food. The downside was many hours spent shuttling the cars. At the end we were sorry we couldn't keep going.

Highlights:

- 1) Crossing the Slate Range - views of southern Panamint Valley and the unknown playa near Wingate Pass in China Lake Range B.
- 2) Crossing Wingate Wash - a vast open valley dappled with passing cloud shadows.
- 3) Crossing the Quail Mountains - Quail Peak, the surprising high-point, with views of the rock strewn Granite Mountains in Fort



Bob Ellis

Mysterious markings on the Silver Lake Playa

Irwin and the whole southern Death Valley area.

- 4) Crossing the Avawatz - two rugged canyons for approach and retreat, terrific 360 degree views on the peak and ridgeline, and an unknown spring and narrows.
- 5) Bill Harper's new mileage record for backpacking with flip-flops.

Letters to send:

- 1) BLM Ridgecrest Office - Quail Springs is trashed by burros. It is a mudhole with no remaining riparian vegetation. It needs to be fenced with a drinker outside for burros.

2) US Army, Fort Irwin - Excessive dust emissions for hours on Saturday February 23, 2002. Fort Irwin is the second largest source of particulate pollution in California.

3) US Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer - We traveled through three spectacular potential wilderness areas: the Slate Range proposed wilderness, the Death Valley Strip WSA, and the Avawatz Mountains WSA. Our on-the-ground experience convinced us these are worthy of permanent wilderness protection.

4) BLM Ridgecrest Office - Briggs Mine Exploration proposal. We viewed the impacts of the Briggs Mine from the top of the Slate Range. The tremendous



Bob Ellis

Wide open hiking down Wingate Wash

visual landscape of the Panamint Valley must be protected against further desecration.

"Or perhaps walking should be called movement, not travel, for one can walk in circles or travel around the world immobilized in a seat, and a certain kind of wanderlust can only be assuaged by the acts of the body itself in motion, not the motion of the car, boat, or plane. It is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile; it is both means and end, travel and destination."

-Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust - A History of Walking*

We feel mighty proud and mighty lucky to have walked our walk, thought our thoughts; now we are starting to talk it. Our connection with this land has been forged with our feet. We are designing our trip patch at this very moment. Look for possible future pedestrian adventures: Keeler to Bullfrog, Rhyolite to Rachael?



Bob Ellis

Bob Ellis at an old Miner's cabin in the Avawatz Mtns.

To view more pictures from this trip, visit Bob Ellis's website:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~bobellisds/TronaToBaker/TtoBMMainPage.htm>

Hiking Hunter Mountain Snow Pack

March 16, 2001; Death Valley National Park, CA

[Ed Note: On this trip George and friend were coming in from the west (Saline Valley Road) to connect up with the Desert Trail route in Marble and Cottonwood Canyons.]

by George "Grubstake" Huxtable, San Mateo, CA

Pete and I planned this spring trip to Death Valley NP as an 18 mile dayhike, knowing that it would require several hours of night hiking and more than a few thousand feet of elevation gain. The route would start along the Hunter Mountain Road, 5.8 miles north of the junction with Grapevine Canyon Road, and thread us around the backside of Hunter Mountain, down to the junction with the top of Dead Horse Canyon, into the Cottonwood drainage, over to Marble Canyon, up to Harris Hill, and then along the ridgeline back to where we

started.

We camped at Santa Rosa Flat, west of Panamint Valley, on March 16. Early next morning, we drove out in the dark toward Hunter Mountain and the starting point of our hike. We passed the Grapevine Canyon Road junction with the headlights still on and continued toward a much needed early start of the hike.

After a few curves, we came to a large two to three foot high frozen snow pack sprawled across the road. This clearly could not be crossed by the Jeep, but we could shovel it down, drive across it, and then continue on if no further drifts lay ahead. Leaving the vehicle idling, we walked ahead, initially encouraged by some clear areas of dry roadbed. Walking further, though, the snow pack reappeared in even higher drifts covering the landscape. We were discouraged by the fact that we had an important decision to make so early in the process; you expect to make the important decisions later in the day, not this soon!

Rather than abort the hike, we decided to back the Jeep down to the Grapevine Canyon Road junction and start the hike there. We knew this would add 11.6 miles to the hike (5.8 miles each way) for what would now be a 30 mile "day" hike. We had plenty of food and water, daytime temperatures were mild, and the weather forecast was clear. This initial foray had cost us some time, but it was just getting light and we were anxious to get our feet on the ground. It was a spectacular morning in the high desert. The sun was sparkling across the snow, the air was dry, and the sky was a blue dome. We moved quickly across the hard, crusted snow confident that we could quickly knock off the extra 5.8 miles along the road to where the hike was to have started.

The amount of snow on the ground increased as we went along, now well over four feet high and reflecting brightly in the morning sun. After about two hours, the crusted snow started to lose its strength and our footsteps became deeper. As we reached the originally planned starting point, we were pleased that we had averaged over two miles per hour, but the continued softening of the snow in only mid-morning sun was now laboring our stride. We crossed a barbed wire fence in a northeast direction down through the competing rounded tops of the Hunter Mountain complex. With 7.5 minute topos, compass, and GPS for fine tuning, we weaved up and down, taking in the views over Cottonwood Canyon and Panamint Butte to the east and the limestone walls above Sand Flat to the north. As we lost elevation the snow began to subside. It was now slushy, causing us to pull our feet directly up and out of deep footsteps before making the next step. Our feet were still dry, but our outer socks and pant legs were soaked from the calf down.

Just two miles from our planned starting point, 7.8 miles from the car, the elevation began to drop dramatically and another decision had to be made. Although we had made good time for the first 5.8 miles, we had lost time in the soft snow since then. We knew the snow would continue to subside and be absent completely at

lower elevations, but our route would regain that elevation and traverse the same snow pack back to the vehicle. Water was now seeping into our boots from our wet socks and lower pant legs. We tried to think of other ways to modify the route, but nothing made sense. We had no alternative but to head back to the car.

We knew the drill: just follow our route back. But the heavier snow near the road, warmed from the sun, was now much softer than it had been just a few hours earlier. Our steps became extremely labored and it was impossible to develop a stride. One step would sink to the knee, the next to the ankle, and the next one might sink to the waist! Each step was totally unpredictable. It was late afternoon and our feet were now completely wet and cold and our pants nearly soaked up to our thighs. We tried to figure out patterns in the snow drifts: perhaps a thicker top crust of snow if we stayed right...or left? What if we followed each other's footsteps? Nothing helped as the slow and tedious march bore on. At one point Pete's boot came off his foot as he was pulling out of a particularly deep footstep. He didn't realize he was one boot short for several steps, and had to go back and search his footsteps for the missing boot. On another of Pete's steps, his foot became stuck, as the snow at the bottom of his footstep quickly packed like a snowball, holding his foot under three feet of snow and ice. I didn't bother checking our average speed, as I knew we were barely moving.

We started to consider whether another decision might have to be made. We didn't have adequate clothing, particularly with wet feet and pants, to bivouac for the night. While we had matches and starter material for a fire, the available wood was scarce and damp at best. But if we kept a fire going, we could rest and keep warm, let the snow re-freeze, and continue on in the early morning. We decided to press on, but made this our "bail out" option if our energy failed. The road was a savior because at least we weren't maneuvering around rocks and trees over a cross-country route in addition to dealing with the snow. It was now dark and the half moon had not yet risen. Our headlamps reflected adequately, and I checked the map periodically with the GPS to be absolutely certain that we were still on the road, as it was disguised by the dim, snowy white landscape. We were very tired, physically and mentally, and we could not afford any off-route adventures at this point. We worried that by continuing we risked becoming too exhausted to get a fire going under any circumstances or that one of us could sprain an ankle.

The plodding seemed to go on for an eternity. At one point we had a brief 15 yard stretch of dirt that seemed like a freeway, we didn't mind having to push past thorned vegetation to keep our numb feet on firm ground. We just focused on not stopping. Finally, after it seemed like we didn't care anymore, we rounded a bend and our headlamps dimly illuminated the yellow, left front reflector of the Jeep. We were not in any mood for another disappointment, so we pressed closer still to be sure, and the left front headlight reflected back. I could have cared less whether or not the car started; we had made it back.

Fish Creek Mountains Carcamp

December 22-25, 2001; Anza-Borrego State Park, CA

By Steve Tabor, Alameda, CA



Steve Tabor

On the banks of San Felipe Creek

Whenever there's a four-day holiday weekend in winter, I try to lead a carcamp to a faraway place, way down south where it's warm. I try to make it a festive occasion, with good cheer and a campfire, to serve members like me, who cannot stand the falsity of "holiday cheer," the gruesome prospect of hanging out with relatives they cannot stand, eating stuff out of politeness that they'd never eat of their own volition, watching the same old football or basketball games on TV with canned cheering from the 1950s (no, it's not real). I thought long and hard to find a place that would fit for this Christmas.

The Fish Creek Mountains complex east of Anza-Borrego was the choice. I was intrigued by the description in the BLM's Wilderness guide, of "rugged outcrops of limestone." There's not much limestone in the southland, that's a Nevada thing, a Death Valley thing. But the prospect of numerous rock pools and dryfalls caught my attention, as well. I thought we might see some bighorn. And after a couple of days, we could branch off into Anza-Borrego and to San Sebastian Marsh, for a look at some different environments.

Nineteen of us met near State Route 86, then drove to the Fish Creek Mountains Wilderness. We parked at the mouth of a canyon that cut into the range from the north. I yelled "Prepare to hike!" and we were off.

We crossed the fan through nice ocotillo and creosote bush, then entered the rocky canyon and proceeded upstream between narrow walls. There was limestone, but not much of it, interspersed with bands of crystalline gneiss in an unpredictable hodgepodge.

At noon, we reached a two-level dryfall in the canyon. We hiked up the first short wall, using easy holds. It hid a huge rock pool that, when full, would be fourteen feet long by ten feet wide by seven feet deep. It was now dry, and had been for a long time, but it was the kind of pool that nourished bighorn sheep. We ate lunch here, then tried to scramble further. Above was a huge overhang; no hope of continuing further. We hiked back to the cars.

The camp I'd chosen had some problems. For one thing, we camped on both sides of the graded dirt road and found that off-roaders were prone to tear through without regard for what was there. George Breuning, one of the senior members on the trip, took it upon himself to confront one of the racers as he sped through. George did this with the forcefulness and self-assuredness of a man advanced in years, who'd seen a lot, and who knew a problem when he saw it. The young man raced off, none the less chastised.

The following morning, we drove west to Split Mountain Gorge in Anza-Borrego, a couple of miles away, and hiked southeast from there toward the Fish Creeks. This day's hike was a long one, on



Steve Tabor

San Sebastian Wash

terraces, up hill and down dale, in washes, and finally over the ubiquitous boulder jumbles that seem to fill every borderland canyon. This would be an all-day hike. I wanted us to get deep into the range where I hoped we would see some bighorns. We didn't find any, but we did get to experience a good deep trench, 100% gneiss this time, loaded with interesting flora like ocotillo, agave and Trixis, with barrel cactus and desert lavender, among others. There were a lot of little jumpups, but no real falls.

After a long hike, punishing to the knees and ankles, we reached the crest of the ridge, where we could look into the elusive "Red Rock Canyon" at the north edge of the fabled "Carrizo Impact Area." This fifty-square-mile tract of state land was used in the 1940s and afterward as a bombing range by the U.S. Navy. After a period of inactivity, the Navy decided to return it to the state of California for inclusion in Anza-Borrego. For two years, the Navy Seabees (or "C.B.s", short for "Construction Battalion") donated every other weekend for training exercises to remove unexploded ordnance (i.e. bombs) from the Impact Area, so it would be safe for tourists to enter. This was completed in 1960. Shortly after the Impact Area's inclusion in the State Park, a visitor was injured in an explosion of a live bomb, and the area was closed to entry again. It remains closed and is considered too dangerous to enter.

After peeking into the Impact Area, we headed back down-canyon in a mad rush to beat the darkness. We emerged from the roughest part of the canyon around sunset, then hiked down the sandy wash as twilight waned. We hiked out in the starlight, using our headlamps only to consult the map a couple of times. It can be exhilarating to hike in the dark in the desert under a wide canopy of stars, especially if you have little but sand and small stones to stub your toes on. Everybody got back in time for dinner and the campfire, but it had been an exhausting day.

And still no bighorn.

The following day, we drove west into Anza-Borrego and up Pinyon Wash for a stroll on Mescal Bajada and into Bighorn Canyon. This canyon actually had a spring in it. Maybe here we would see some bighorn.

Mescal Bajada was a beauty! Lots of huge ocotillo and barrels, big jojoba and agaves, all sorts of other cactus and shrubs. The elevation here is low, about 1600', but the plants have crept down from above and colonized almost every square yard of the fan. It was a vegetational wonderland. We hiked for two miles in this wide desert garden, then entered Bighorn Canyon itself, a deep trench in pure granite and marbled gneiss. The bottom was mostly granite sand. We followed the canyon all the way up to "Blue Spring," which turned out to not be a spring at all, but a series of water tanks feeding a game guzzler. The tanks were full.

We found a mountain lion kill behind the tanks, below a north-facing cliff, and signs of Native American occupation: obsidian chips, pot shards, hut foundations and "manos and metates." This had been a seasonal village site for sure, back when the water was more reliable.

On the last day, we drove out on Route 78 toward the Salton Sea, and stopped on the road opposite San Sebastian Marsh. I led us on a hike across the old bed of ancient Lake Cahuilla, which once extended this far west from the present Salton Sea, and toward the marsh on San Felipe Creek. Here and there, small sand dunes rose above the plain, stabilized by clumps of mesquite. Pieces of jasper and shell fragments lay on the ground. It was a open, airy cruise with wide horizons.

San Felipe Creek was entrenched in an arroyo. Along the slow stream were rows of low spindly tamarisk, turning orange with fall color. The water was a little saline, but the mud on both sides of the creek was impressed with animal tracks: foxes, coyotes, bobcats and deer. We saw some fish in the water, briefly. We bush-whacked downstream a short way, then came back up to eat lunch. We left shortly after, retracing our steps, and drove home.

Mecca Hills Service Trip

January 25-27, 2002; S.E. California near Palm Springs

By Steve Tabor

Eleven survivors participated in this service and dayhike trip in the Mecca Hills Wilderness near Palm Springs. Our objective was to build a length of cable fence along the boundary of the Wilderness to block off-roaders from doing "hill climbs." It's part of a much larger project to cordon off the entire southeast corner of the Wilderness from illegal vehicle entry. We managed to complete our 200 feet of fence in one day, leaving us two days to explore the badlands on dayhikes.

The Mecca Hills Wilderness, like others in the region, is beset at its borders by well-meaning vehicular hoodlums looking for a thrill. Since more nefarious off-roaders tear down "Wilderness - Closed" signs every chance they get, other less-conscious bikers and four-wheelers have a tendency to hill climb wherever they see wheel tracks.

On previous service trips in this area, we were consigned to clean up after the off-roaders after the fact, by demolishing illegal wheel tracks with hand tools so nature would eventually spread seeds and new growth over them. This year, there was budget for the fencing and a new act of will to protect this corner of Wilderness. I was overjoyed to finally get the opportunity to prevent trespass instead of the moral equivalent of taking out the off-roaders!



Steve Tabor

Michael Scott setting a post to mark the wilderness boundary

Hall Newbegin



View southwest to the Santa Rosa Mountains and the Salton Sea

garbage.

The work went slowly at first. Heath Emmons of the BLM was in charge of the posthole digger, a mechanical auger held by two persons that was designed to drill a hole two and one-half feet down. It was gasoline-powered and had to be started like a lawnmower, which was often a feat in itself. The two people managing it had to work together and ease it down into the sand carefully as it churned the soil. This job was a back-killer. In addition, if they weren't careful, the auger blade would get stuck in the rocks and it would be difficult to get it out. This happened several times.

Once, we had to dig it out with shovels.

We drilled twenty-two holes, eight to ten feet apart. As the auger drilled, other Survivors followed behind with shovels, digging the holes deeper and widening them. They were followed by people with toilet trowels, sierra cups and tin cans, to get all the loose dirt. We did not have enough of the sierra cups or trowels for the work, so we had to get whatever we could find from the many nearby fire rings. A blackened ten-inch cookie tin was especially prized.

Working with the small scoops was the most time-consuming process. The auger never seemed to go far enough down. We often had to break up the bottoms of the holes with heavy iron pry bars to loosen the dirt and stones so they could be scooped out. Each hole became a work of art with its own idiosyncratic difficulties.

As part of the group moved down the line making the holes, others muscled the ten-by-ten inch posts into the completed holes, then packed them in with small rocks and stones, and later with sand and pebbles. The rocks and stones were compacted around the posts, then more sand and gravel was poured on top of the rock and compacted. The last six inches or so was tossed sand, and it too was compacted. When we'd finished, the posts were solid in their holes.

When we'd started, about a third of the crew had been consigned to haul brush from the surrounding area and to put it up on the hill climb to allow revegetation. A BLM truck was used to do the hauling. Most of those doing the brush work were refraining (wisely) from the heavy labor, either because they didn't think they could handle it, or because they had bad backs or other chronic physical difficulties. But as time wore on, everyone got into the act of building the fence, since it was beginning to look like we would actually finish the job! We left the brush and went to work doing the small time-consuming jobs like scooping the soil, hauling dirt and rocks, and compacting the hole filling. We worked from nine to five, with an hour for lunch. We worked faster as the job drew to an end. The cable was strung through pre-drilled holes in the posts and drawn tight. As we settled down toward sunset, it looked like we would actually finish the job.

In the end, we ran out of cable. We'd put in twenty-two posts and strung 185 feet of cable, but the BLM guys had not calculated the wrap-around part, so we were short. They had to come back and do the last fifteen feet the next day. We strung reflectors on the cable so off-roaders would be able to see it at night if they tried trespassing in the moonlight (government regulations). We also left a two-foot-wide zig-zag walkway in the fence, so horsemen or hikers would be able to get through (also regulations). Bikes, not being pliable, would not be able to get through the hole.

When it was finished, the fence looked good! Chalk up a good deed for Desert Survivors!

Next morning, we drove to Painted Canyon on the west side of the hills to do a hike in the badlands. The Mecca Hills, especially on this west side, right along the San Andreas Fault, is a wonderland of upthrust and tilted sandstone and mudstone, colorful and

fantastically eroded. I had an ambitious plan for a hike along and across the fault, then into Thermal Canyon and around to Painted's North Fork.

This was a ramble into and out of gulches and over hills, down mud slopes and around little falls, always pushing northwest, looking for an opening in the sandstone walls. We got about as far to the northwest as we could, then we ran into some nasty steep rock that seemed to get even steeper. Through much of this, I did not know exactly where we were on the map. We seemed close to breaking into the major canyon going northwest to Thermal

Canyon, but "so near and yet so far." We failed to break through, so I gave up on that and took us back southeast to find a different way.

As we backtracked, we searched slot canyons to the east for possible ways over the ridge in that direction. Surely if we got through there, we could break on through to Thermal. We checked five slots, all of which ended in tall chutes worn into solid rock. At one point, it looked like we could climb the rocks to get just above and over, but it was too dangerous.

Our search for a way through soon evolved into an aesthetic appreciation of the badlands

environment. We marveled at the intricate twists and turns of the slots and at their smooth walls. The tilts of the rocks and their colors were intriguing. We could hear lonely birds chirping somewhere in the slots, but we never saw them.

Following a straight fault trace parallel to the San Andreas, we came upon a wide canyon draining from the east. If any canyon went through, this one would, I thought. We followed it through many twists and turns. At its head, the sandstone was tilted down toward us at an angle of 45 degrees. We hiked through narrow slots, up small falls, then larger ones, only to find ourselves on the tilted rock itself, going higher. Most folks stayed down while a few of us pressed upward. Finally, the rock became too slick and steep for safety. We came back down. Peter Ruddock and another hiker tried another side gulch, only to give up on that too.

We'd had our hike. We'd seen the slots. We'd experienced the essence of the Mecca Hills and its badlands. I realized that this Wilderness offered a lot more hiking than one would think, judging from its small size. We retraced our steps to camp for dinner and a fire.



Steve Tabor

Animal tracks in San Sebastian wash

The third morning, we drove farther up Painted Canyon to the road end, then hiked the North Fork of Painted, just to see where we would have gotten if we'd succeeded in breaking through to Thermal. The canyon here was colorful, with black, red and blue metamorphic rock faulted against the sandstone. Only here the sandstone was horizontal, looking like a Utah canyon. The wash was wide, with nice palo verde and ironwoods. Little sandstone gulches led back away from the main trunk, and several full-fledged forks led off everywhere and nowhere. Each would make for an interesting hike of many hours.

We ended up deep in the muds, picking our way over crumbly loose dirt. We were in a "pseudo-karst" region, where drainages came out of holes in the mud of the sidehill. Collapse structures abounded. There were deep vertical holes to fall into, if you weren't careful. I managed to creep up some mud and found myself on top of a divide. A great six-mile-long canyon extended downstream to the northwest, toward the Coachella Canal and Thermal Canyon. This is where we would have emerged, after a long, long hike through twisting vertical-walled sandstone slots.

Looks like I'll be leading more trips to the Mecca Hills in future years. Not only are there another thirty square miles of slot canyons and badlands to explore, but there's another mile or two of cable fence to put up. All other things being equal, we'll be back next year to do more work in Box Canyon.

The Honor Roll (in alphabetical order):

Jude Brennan
Paul Brickett
Bruce Bostwick
Sally Greensill
Peter Ruddock
Jackie Schiedeck
Michael Scott
Susan Sherman
Ellie Strodach
Steve Tabor
Yali Yang



Steve Tabor

Mecca Hills badlands

Bedrock Springs Archaeological Project

Labor Day weekend, 2001; west of Death Valley near Ridgecrest, CA

By Peter Ruddock, Palo Alto, CA

Why would 70 people spend two and a half days digging holes in the desert, only to spend the next two hours filling them in? It all started a few years ago when the California BLM decided to try to get people involved in projects as volunteers, in particular in archaeological projects. These projects have proven quite popular and, on Labor Day weekend 2001, one finally came to the desert, to Bedrock Springs southeast of Ridgecrest

I learned about the project through the Desert Survivors listserv. (For those of you who do not know, this is an on-line forum that all Survivors with email can join, where you can find and share up-to-the-minute information about desert issues, activities and conditions.) The project was posted on the listserv by one of our members, who had heard about it as a member of the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest. The Maturango Museum is a wonderful little institution dedicated to the cultural and natural history of the Mojave Desert around Ridgecrest, and works closely with the BLM archaeologist based there.

At least four of the volunteers were Survivors. There were also at least 15 professional archaeologists from other BLM districts, the U.S. Forest Service, Caltrans and various universities. It seems that they spend most of their time in offices, and jump at the opportunity to actually dig in the dirt. There were also two Boy Scout troops, whose members were attempting to earn their archaeology badges, numerous residents of Ridgecrest, and several other people who were just randomly attracted to the project.

Bedrock Springs lies on the northern edge of the Golden Valley Wilderness. It is a site with a long history of occupation. The springs do not produce much water today, but in wetter times they apparently made it a good site for habitation. The occupants were the ancestors of the modern Kawaiisu people, some of whom still live in the Ridgecrest area. The Kawaiisu were made aware of the project and invited to join in the activities; although none did, they did give their blessing to the project.

The site had already been disturbed by pothunters who had dug there as long ago as 1920. The archaeologists were certain that there were still things to be learned from the site, but they wanted to move soon. With the increase in recreational activity in the desert, they feared that a new generation of pot hunters would beat them to the site and make it useless for study.

We rigorously measured and methodically dug a number of holes under the supervision of the professional archaeologists. Layers were pulled out of the holes ten centimeters at a time. Small items were documented by layer, while larger items were more carefully documented by location within the layer. There were not many large items, but one hearth was uncovered. The most exciting small items were arrowheads and scrapers made from obsidian, jasper and chert, some of which may have been 1500 years old.

These may make their way to the Maturango Museum after being completely studied. Mostly we found the debris of the site's former inhabitants: animal bones, chips from broken points, charcoal. Not terribly exciting to the layman, but enough to get an archaeologist's attention.

Despite the attention to detail, and the 98 degree temperature, the site was very relaxed and the volunteers had a lot of fun. By the end, I was perhaps the dirtiest that I have ever been, which actually just added to the fun.

So, why did we fill the holes in at the end of the third day? Because this is a remote site that cannot be guarded. It was put back the way it was, with the surface shaped to look like it had never been disturbed, to disguise it from those who might go pot hunting. The archaeologists know where it is.

While this wasn't a Desert Survivors outing, we could do a service trip with the BLM archaeologists in the future. This would seem to fit in well with our motto of Experiencing, Sharing and Protecting the desert. Either way, the BLM plans to have a follow-up project at Bedrock Springs some time in the fall of 2002. If you're interested, stay tuned to the listserv.

To join Desert Survivor's listserv which will enable you to send and receive emails on desert related issues, send an email to list-owner@desert-survivors.org with "subscribe petroglyph" in the subject line and your name and address in the body. This list is open to members only.

Carrizo National Monument Carcamp

Jan 19-21, 2002; west of Bakersfield, CA

By Cathy Luchetti, Oakland, CA

Fifteen people huddled in the frost and fog on Saturday morning, 8 a.m., in a remote valley in San Luis Obispo county, 40 miles from Buttonwillow. "I thought there were only wineries around here" one said. As the sun struggled through the murk, a vast plain of 250,000 acres shimmered ahead, pearly with frost.

We drove first to the Painted Rock Education Center, pausing to admire the vastness of Soda Lake, a powdery white playa of sulphate and carbonate salts that lies between the Caliente Range and the Temblor Range. As the sun finally broke through, a vast panorama of rolling, sweeping plains unfolded. In spring the plains would burst into gorgeous color but, for now, there was only gray saltbush and desert needlegrass. Two large vans of bird-watchers zoomed by, binocs glued to the window as they searched for favorites among the 100 species of birds. With luck, sandhill cranes might swoop into sight, huge wings raised skyward like sails.

The San Andreas Fault Rift Zone presents striking geology as it cuts directly through the plain. One creeping segment, according to the sign, would edge its way as far as San Francisco if we waited

long enough.

Painted Rock juts out from the base near the Caliente Range, one of the most significant examples of rock art in California. Elaborate pictographs, from 200 to 2,000-years old, are banded across sections of rock. Older paintings are overlaid with newer, more stylized images. These differ from the usual rock art in having solid bands of red ochre, or hematite, fill in large sections of background, with white, abstract tracings painted with diatomaceous earth or crushed egg shell.

"The Chumash still come here for religious ceremonies," the ranger said. "But if they know the meaning of these symbols, they're not telling."

At our camp near Wallace Creek, we settled next to a group of pig hunters in full camoflauge, bristling with guns but friendly as all get out. One hunter approached, holding out his skinned and bloodied arm.

"Hi there. I just rolled down that hill and scraped myself up."

No one knew what to say. We hoped he felt better soon. And we especially hoped he wasn't armed when he fell. But they seemed kindly, and left us their load of wood on departure to warm up the freezing morning hours.

Sunday was the day the carcamp rating (E) would shift up to (M), with a 15-mile hike that lasted until well after dark. By 10 a.m. we had thawed out enough to move, eaten, packed up and set out for Caliente Mountain. We gradually climbed 3000 feet, walking through terrain similar to Nevada's Great Basin. The salt marsh plains gave way to juniper, saltbush, and sage. Views were expansive and stunning in both directions. Toward the top of Caliente, a fossil bed banded across the top, littering the path with large, well preserved shell imprints as well as large, well preserved animal scat. Apparently, Caliente Ridge is the Santa Cruz boardwalk for lumbering pigs, deer, coyotes, kit fox and an occasional giant cat. Deeply embedded tracks were frozen and held in the mud. Mounds and piles of scat showed feral activity that we could only imagine, especially after dark. Leader Bob Lyon pointed out the difference between canine (rounded) and feline (pointed) scat.

Occasional human structures turned up: an oddly built guzzler like a small rodeo arena; a collapsed Airstream adjacent to a rusted corral; the hut on top where weary hikers signed the peak register before loping off down the mountain, trying to beat the sunset and get back to camp before dark.

The Carrizo is near yet seems far. It feels isolated and remote as a Mongolian steppe, without phones, buildings, gas or services. Occasional Pronghorn antelope graze its plains, and the minute it rains, all roads are impassable. Burrowing owls, kangaroo rats, lizards and ground squirrels frolic and burrow on this "llano estero," or salt marsh plain, while its visitors, DS carcampers, do the same. Crisp, clear nights flickering with stars, an aromatic crackling fire, and good company. Who could ask for more?

Using GPS On The Desert Trail

By Bob Ellis, Berkeley, CA



Stopping to check the map along the Desert Trail in the Orocochia Mountains, Spring 2002

By Bob Ellis, Berkeley, CA

Global Positioning System (GPS) units are becoming standard equipment for the long-distance hiker. They are a great help in determining just which canyon you are in and just how far you have gone and where you are. That being said, they are also, in untrained or careless hands, a hindrance, even a menace.

There are a range of units available, now much better than those of a few years ago. We now routinely expect to be positioned within 50 feet (even 10 feet with some units under good conditions). Whether that information is of value depends upon your ability to connect the GPS position in either Latitude/Longitude or Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) units to a detailed topo map of the area.

Travel on the Desert Trail is not meant to be a mechanical exercise. Route-finding is part of the experience. The trail is neither marked upon the ground nor in any meaningful way in a GPS format. Some users have thought that complete entry of key waypoints on a Desert Trail segment beforehand, combined with leaving the GPS on continuously as they travel, would free them of the need to pay close attention to maps or compass directions.

That expectation has not proved correct. Perhaps the units produced for soldiers in the Afghan War are now able to do that. I suppose they have audible alarms or vibrating pagers that alert the

traveler to any deviation from the expected course so that they are not encumbered with any maps. Perhaps their GPS units do indeed have a wide screen map display showing some level of detail of their surroundings. I haven't seen that yet; it may come soon. However, I am not looking forward to it.

At this time, it is quite reasonable to use a GPS to enter waypoints for locations you have passed, and to confirm where you are in conjunction with a 7.5 degree topo map for the area.

Three elements must be in place to make good use of a GPS to confirm your position on the Desert Trail:

Travel on the Desert Trail is not meant to be a mechanical exercise. Route-finding is part of the experience.

1) Your GPS must be set to the "datum" of the 7.5 topo map being used. For most of Nevada and much of California these maps are printed using the 1927 North American datum, NOT the 1984 datum most often set as the default in GPS units.

2) Your printed topo map must be "gridded" sufficiently to allow you to place yourself accurately on the map. Many maps have 1000 meter UTM grid lines printed on them. Many don't and have only sporadic tic marks along the edges to give Latitude/Longitude or UTM values. To be properly prepared the traveler must draw in the grid lines with a hard pencil prior to the trip.

3) You must have a sense of where you are, a sense of what are reasonable variances from where you think you are, and an under-

standing of how conditions might affect the accuracy of the GPS. This can best be achieved by faithfully entering significant waypoints into the GPS as you go along. Then you can easily discover how far you have come since the last checkpoint and, with the map, determine your position with confidence both in GPS units and in relation to the physical features you see around you.

Now available for \$99 or so per state are National Geographic (Wildflower) Topo! Map sets. These contain several CDs with every 7.5 and 100K topo in the state. The set for Nevada has just been released, and can be used both to scout your routes for desert travel as well as assist on the ground. You must print out maps at the 7.5 level with the desired grid overlay at a reasonable scale. This can work out well if none of the following occur: 1) Rain, sweat, or tears runs the ink on your printed maps, 2) You chose a scale so small you can't make out where a dry fall is likely or where the canyon really forks, 3) You forget to set the datum for the printed map to match the datum to be used in the field and don't make sure the grid and grid labels are printed.

A particular area of confusion regarding GPS units is their ability (or inability) to tell you which direction you are heading. Unless you have an expensive unit with a specifically enabled stationary compass function, you must be moving in a straight line with the unit turned on before it can tell you which direction you were going. It can then tell you that, to go somewhere it knows about, you should change direction by so many degrees. The difficulty is that desert travel is often not in straight lines; in canyons reception may be blocked as you travel; and the GPS only knows what you have been doing, not what you will do.

What about entering in the destination and intervening waypoints ahead of time? I don't see the value in that. Assuming you have a map, the GPS will help you to know where you are on the map. At that point the map will tell you how far and in what direction your destination is; the GPS doesn't add anything. Not bringing the map is the BIG mistake. The GPS can tell you how far and what direction you need to go, but it doesn't tell you about the twist in the canyon in between, the steep cliff that could be avoided, or which fork is the best choice. Lost time, lost energy and increased frustration are often the result of attempting to avoid reliance on maps. The map is your friend, not the GPS.

GPS units have batteries that last from ten to 22 hours. On three-day backpacks in summer you will use two sets of batteries if you leave them on only when hiking. As explained above, I don't see the value in that type of GPS use. Turn them on only when a checkpoint is to be taken, then off again. At least that's what makes sense to me.

I'm reacting to this from the point of view of an experienced desert traveler. I am used to generally being able to see ahead some distance; not traversing areas covered up with trees or lacking high points for reference. In canyons I am often unsure about my place, however. There the GPS brings security, confirmation, and gives me enough assurance to make everyone else believe I know where I am going.

Should the Desert Trail Guides have GPS points printed in them for the user? Should the Desert Trail Association put Desert Trail waypoints on the web for downloading? At this point I would argue no. I've seen a lot of GPS confusion and only recently have the units been fairly accurate. Maybe in the future when we all take that stuff for granted it will become just part of what we do. Not yet, however.



Eric Rorer

Bob Ellis enjoying a moment of solitude on the Black Rock Playa

THE JEPSON DESERT MANUAL

Vascular Plants of Southeast California

Published by University of California Press, 2002

By Bob Ellis

It's been a long wait but it's finally here: the definitive desert plant manual. Now there is no excuse. We better start learning those plants. California is blessed and cursed with 6200 different species of plants growing within the state. After more than a decade's work, the Jepson Manual -- containing detailed descriptions and drawings of all of them -- was published in 1993. It had consistent descriptions and keys for everything, and line drawings for most of the plants.

However, it was a two inch thick, 1400 page hardback weighing several pounds. Those of us interested primarily in the desert were forced to deal with all those other plants cluttering up the book. Rarely have we seen the Jepson Manual taken along on our Desert Survivor backpacks; it's just too heavy.

Now, finally, a slimmed-down version of the Jepson Manual has been published, containing just the 2267 desert species. It has only 627 pages, including 160 color pictures, and it's definitely carry-able at 7" by 9" by 1".

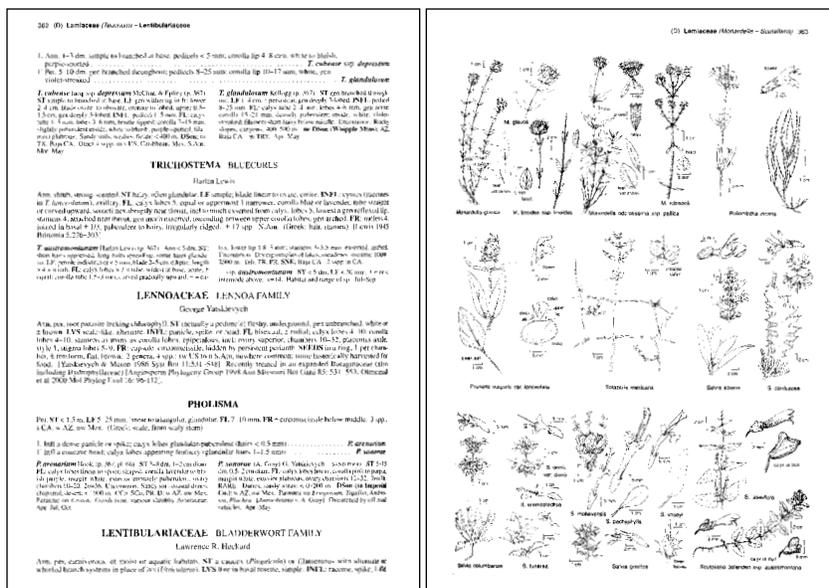
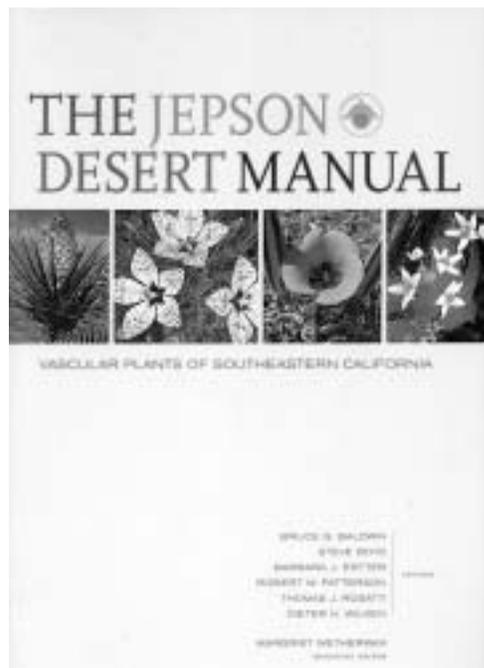
What's all the fuss? Those of you with normal attractions to desert plants may have wondered what those flowers were, may have asked about unusual shrubs, trees, and cactuses, and may even have purchased one or more guides to desert flowers. Those books usually focus on the most common, showy flowers. Once interested, however, you've discovered that most of the time the plants aren't in bloom, often the leaves are gone, or even worse, the plant just isn't in the book. The next step might have been to take a plant identification class and begin to learn a little about plant classification. Or it might have been to give up on trying to identify desert plants altogether. Now, finally, there is a book that has ALL the state's desert plants. For each species, Jepson tells you the generally known locations, the altitude range, type of habitat, as well as special require-

ments like limestone soils. With some experience, you really can begin to narrow down the possibilities fairly quickly.

Should you get one? The Jepson Desert Manual definitely isn't for everyone. This is a professional botanists' reference work. The language is arcane (although the illustrated glossary helps), the descriptions usually assume that flowers are present, and the keys for identifying unknown plants may require a hand lens and the presence of fruits and seeds. The line drawings tend to focus on differentiating similar species of the same genus of plant rather than on showing how the overall plant appears. In short, it's a tough read; it takes a lot of patience, a supporting class or two, and trips to the desert with enthusiastic friends.

For those of you familiar with the original Jepson, the desert version is

essentially a subset of the same material in the same format. All non-desert species have been dropped. They re-wrote the keys since now there are fewer "breaks" needed to get to the species you are looking for. The Group/Family key in the front is still in the same format, just slimmer. I haven't tried it in the field yet, so I don't know how well this slimming down has been done. The line drawings have been re-arranged as well. In the original Jepson, an illustration was often a drawing of one representative species, with related species shown as small inserts of distinguishing feature



Pages from the new Jepson Desert Manual

details. Now all the non-desert species are gone, so in some cases new drawings had to be made. The publishers promised at least one drawing per genus, but I don't think the overall percentage of drawn species has increased very much. All corrections and changes which have been accepted in the main Jepson Manual since 1993 are present here. The color pictures were a surprise. They are all in the center of the book and could be cut out to save weight. I'll leave them in for now and see if the selection is helpful.

For the last few years, I have been interested in finding range extensions for several rare desert species. This involves searching around in suitable habitats and keeping my eyes open. Often I see plants I don't know and the question is always: Is that a rare plant I should be recording, or is it a common plant I haven't encountered before? Now that there's an edition with only the desert plants, I should be able to solve those botanical mysteries. I'll be packing in my new Jepson Desert Manual and expecting great things from it. I can't wait.

For more information visit:

www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9321.html

The Void, the Grid and the Sign: Traversing the Great Basin

by William L. Fox, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2000

"Roughly a quarter of a million acres of land spanning much of Utah and most of Nevada, the Great Basin is the highest and driest of the American deserts. Fox walks us through this landscape, investigating our responses to the Great Basin's appearance: a pattern of mountains and valleys on a scale so large, so empty and undifferentiated by shape and form and color, that the visual and cognitive expectations of the human mind are confounded and impaired."

The heart of the Great Basin, one of America's four deserts, lies within Nevada. It's a high and dry region where all waters flow inward, a land that Native Americans, ranchers, miners, and others have inhabited successfully for centuries—but it's also one that most people find visually intolerable. We drive as fast as we can across its immense salt flats on improbably straight roads, and from the air-conditioned cockpits of our vehicles erect the

illusion that it looks more like the surface of Mars than of earth. We treat it as if it were science fiction and in our minds populate it with alien spacecraft."

[From Side Canyon's description of *The Void, The Grid and The Sign* (n.d.), retrieved April 2, 2002 from www.sidecanyon.com]

by Leonard Finegold, Philadelphia, PA

This is a book that should be read backwards. I found the first section, "The Void," as densely written as a text-book and the opposite of a page-turner. Fox's writing did not give me much of a mental picture of the regions being described. By contrast, John Hart's *Hiking the Great Basin*, intended to be a practical guide book, does give the reader a vivid picture of the land, enabling him to be there vicariously. I also suspect that Fox's thesis, that "we seek to neutralize our fear of the void," is not a feeling shared by DS members. In one place he states that "...we are genetically ill-equipped to perceive [the desert] correctly." Sorry, but I feel at home in the desert. One theme I found particularly annoying in this section was Fox's attempt to draw a parallel between the desert and the massive sculptures of a reclusive sculptor. I happen to like outdoor sculpture, but Fox's descriptions of them were tantalizing and made me want to see pictures. The hooker: our reclusive sculptor does not permit photographs of his work, let alone public viewing. So I'm reminded of another Nevada phenomenon: the captive aliens, held by a US Army colonel somewhere in northern Nevada, that are so secret no-one is allowed to see them. Both phenomena leave us dangling uncomfortably.

"The Grid" is easier reading. Its thesis is that the idea of mapping, e.g., imposing a grid upon the landscape, influences our perception of land in many ways. For example, Fox finds it significant that towns are plotted in rectangles. He also posits that the grid itself is "the result of a genetically bred triangulation." This relationship seems highly speculative, to say the least. While offering several metaphysical explanations for our ubiquitous use of the rectangle in defining towns, Fox doesn't seem to recognize the practical one: rectangles are one of the few ways to completely cover an area with the same shape. Any medieval Arabic ornamenteer could have told him this. Given flat terrain and some

governing authority, it's the most logical way to do it. It is true, however, that Nature knows nothing of human-constructed grids. That is why in my trade, physics, we have a wondrous selection of grids, some of which aren't even at right angles.

The third section, "The Sign," is on petroglyphs, and it is gracefully written. In contrast to his earlier inclination to interweave fact with speculation, Fox skeptically and skillfully evaluates the various theories about petroglyphs. His writing was evocative, and made me feel that I was in the field with modern petroglyph hunters.

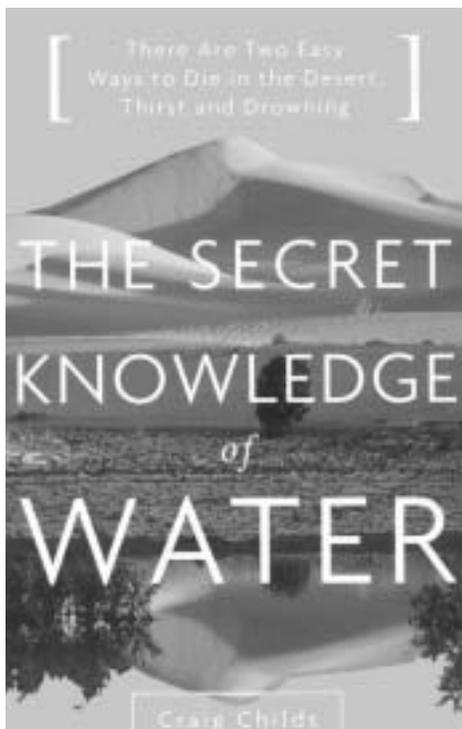
As a scientist, I found frequent inaccuracies in Fox's statements which cast a pall over the whole. For example, he mentions "the ten-thousand-year half-life of plutonium." There are lots of plutoniums; for weapons plutonium the half-life is 24,000 years. It would have been better to simply say "...many thousands of years." He mentions "magnesium ... the mineral." Sorry again, but magnesium isn't a mineral; it burns. In another place he reports how a surveyor, using a wooden rod, measured a distance of nine miles "with a measurement only 0.003 of an inch off the first one." This is an accuracy of better than 1 in 100 million, much better than possible with modern laser surveying, and highly unlikely to be achieved with a wooden rod.

Fox also misuses and misrepresents scientific theory in a way I find irritating. In one place he talks about the "Principle of Uncertainty" as manifest in the landscape. The Uncertainty Principle applies to the world of the very small, but certainly does not apply to our usual macroscopic world. In another place he describes fractals as encompassing "the structure of the seashore [and] weather systems." Seashores are not fractal, though they were once thought to be, and I have my doubts about whether weather systems are. In another place, he uses the word "entropy" where "disorder" would have been more accurate.

In sum, a book which interweaves physics and metaphysics, fact and subjective experience, in a way that requires some suspension of disbelief. Those who enjoy New Yorker articles may enjoy it. Those looking for a guide to the Great Basin will be disappointed.

The Secret Knowledge of Water: Discovering the Essence of the American Desert

by Craig Childs, Time Warner Books, 2000



by **Chris Schiller, Meadow Vista, CA**

Every so often, a book is written that needs to be written. As if there is a gap in a row of books on a shelf that is waiting to be filled. These books form milestones in our understanding of the world, in our understanding of nature. We reference them and quote them and discover the world through their lens. Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* is one. *Arctic Dreams* by Barry Lopez is another. *The Secret Knowledge of Water* is also such a book.

In *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, water is not so much the subject of the book as the vehicle for knowing the desert. The book is divided into three parts: *Ephemeral Water*, *Water That Moves* and *Fierce Water*. In each, we discover how water shapes the land and the land shapes it, and how interrelated and vital water is to the animals and people who have lived there. Hydrology and observation are seamlessly interwoven with passion and myth. Childs approaches the desert with humility and veracity, avoiding the rollicking bravado of Abbey and the meticulous explication of Terry Tempest Williams. The effect is prophetic.

In one essay, Childs maps water sources in the Cabeza Prieta desert, locating tinajas that range from a sip to many thousands of gallons, and finds himself relying on his knowledge after a water cache is chewed and drained by mice. In another, he describes the legend and sanctification of a remote monument on the lands of the Tohono O'odham in Southern Arizona, a place where mythical catastrophic floods issued forth until innocents were sacrificed to stem it. To traditional desert inhabitants, we learn abundant water does not mean prosperity, it means destruction and death. In a third essay, high on the north rim of Grand Canyon, Childs descends into a huge, narrow canyon just as the first raindrops of an approaching storm splatter the stone. This one is titled *Fear of God*.

In *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, Childs places himself within water, and without. In an essay titled "Water That Waits," he writes about exploring the tops of the Vermilion Cliffs in Utah:

"...freckles of water-filled pockets extended over a sandstone plain. I squinted, then started counting. They looked like fallen pieces of sky, so delicious that dry seeds would split open just to know of their presence. Each sat in the open as if lounging, unaware of the aridity surrounding it, mocking the sun."

In "The Acts of Desert Streams," Childs describes a search for what moisture might remain in a creek in mid-summer, when water emerges only during the cool of night:

"I stopped. Swallowed. Looked around my feet, my eyes burning with sweat and light. A hundred and nineteen degrees Fahrenheit, at least. This was the hottest July on record for Arizona. If I prayed for rain, the sky would laugh at me."

In "Seep" Childs explores the threads in time and space between ourselves and the water within us:

"To touch water, especially water out of a spring or seep, is to return to each origin, meeting the rains and the snowmelts and the cold interior of the planet, meeting, in fact, the comets machine-gunning against our atmosphere. I am surprised that when a hair dryer falls into a bathtub we are not all electrocuted."

Childs' knowledge of the desert is not just secret, it is visceral. He spends vast amounts of time out there on the land, in the desert, under the stars. Wet from rain and sweat, scared and exhilarated and lonely. The words he forms from those experiences are like a morning high on a desert range: full of clarity and vision. Childs recognizes the desert as he experiences it. He has a gift for distilling his encounters into their essence, as the subtitle suggests. More remarkably, he has the knowledge and the ability to make connections between the disparate things he experiences: history with emotion; sensuality with science; pain with joy.

Last October, on a beach beside the Colorado River in Grand Canyon, I read one of the entries from *The Secret Knowledge of Water* to a group of raft trip passengers. As I read, the listeners gasped and murmured at the insights and drama that Childs draws from the desert and from water. When I finished, there was a long moment of silence, and then "Wow" and "Powerful" and "Great." In the morning, at least four people mentioned having dreams that were related to Childs' writing, and most of the listeners made sure to get the title and author from me with the intention of buying the book upon returning home.

In a publishing world thick with nature writing, Childs' book stands out for its prose and for its insight. Such books rarely become popular through marketing. Like *Desert Solitaire* in its beginnings, *The Secret Knowledge of Water* has been spread more through word-of-mouth between desert wanderers than through advertising. As a friend of mine has said "Most people who write about the desert do not have a clue; Childs gets it."

ISSUES WATCH

By Janet Johnson, Hayward, CA

Wilderness Protection

A new wilderness bill for California is expected to be introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) within the next couple of months. What remains a question is whether any desert wilderness will be included. Members of Desert Survivors continue to visit and survey all of the WSAs which were left out of the 1994 Desert Protection Act. Protection is also being advocated for the Slate and Iron Mountains wildernesses, both in the Mojave. [See *Escape from Trona*, this issue – Ed.]

Desert Survivors continues to monitor a Notice of Proposed Action in the Palen-McCoy Wilderness. The owner of a private inholding has been allowed by the BLM to commence weekly motorized trips for family camping trips and amateur astronomy activities. That accomplished, now the owner has requested permission to drive a front-end loader and a farm tractor through the wilderness in order to lengthen a dirt landing strip for more ready access to his property in his private plane. During the previous review of the request for motor vehicle access, the BLM never revealed that the owner had accessed the property for years by plane. Wilderness Watch joined Desert Survivors in protesting this action.

At the end of February, the California Wilderness Coalition released its list of the ten most threatened wild places in California. The list included two desert areas, the Cadiz Project Area and Fort Irwin. [An Associated Press article noted that, "with the exception of the Mojave," the list represented California's most beautiful wilderness areas – Ed.]

Desert Tortoise

On March 1st, the BLM acted to protect the desert tortoise from harmful livestock grazing by reinstating grazing restrictions for the upcoming spring. As recently as October of last year, ranchers had won a reprieve which allowed them to keep their cows on the Mojave Desert ranch land that had been set aside for endangered desert tortoise protection. Six of the seven Mojave public lands ranchers have worked out agreements with the BLM to protect the tortoises. The appeal of the seventh

rancher has finally been rejected. If the permittees fail to comply by not moving cattle during the March 1-June 15 tortoise protection period, they'll face trespass fines, extension of the grazing restrictions, herd size reductions, impoundment of cattle, and possible loss of public lands grazing privileges. Moving forward, conservation groups and the BLM will be conducting separate on-the-ground compliance monitoring. This was the latest skirmish in a battle dating back to mandates created by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, and culminating in a landmark settlement last year between the BLM, the Center for Biological Diversity, Employees for Environmental Responsibility and the Sierra Club.

Military: Fort Irwin, CA

Congress passed legislation in mid-December to set aside over 110,000 acres of public land that the Army can now add to its tank-training center at Fort Irwin in the Mojave Desert. Before the land can be converted, the Army must comply with all environmental laws, approve money for relocation or recovery of the desert tortoise (or further studies), and allocate funds to buy 12,000 acres of private land included in the 110,000 acres. The earliest that the Army could make use of the land is 2004. Public scoping hearings for the Supplemental DEIS were held in January with written comments due February 19th. [See related article on next page – Ed.]

Nuclear Waste: Yucca Mountain, NV

In mid-February President Bush stated that he intends to accept a recommendation from his energy secretary that Yucca Mountain in the southern Nevada desert be developed to bury 77,000 tons of highly radioactive waste. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham formally recommended the site and said that he is convinced that the project is "scientifically sound and suitable" and would meet "compelling national interests" by consolidating nuclear waste to "enhance protection against terrorist attacks." No mention was made of the risks of transporting high-level radioactive waste across the country for storage in

Nevada. Despite years of scientific research to the contrary, Secretary Abraham has found that the site will be able to "protect the health and safety of the public." Outrage best describes the response of Nevada's governor, political delegation, and environmental groups. Within hours of the announcement, the State of Nevada filed suit in federal court to block the Bush administration's decision. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle has pledged to block the project as long as he is in power.

Nuclear Waste: Ward Valley, CA

In the same vein, two years after the State of California abandoned its plans to open a nuclear waste dump at Ward Valley in the Mojave Desert, state officials are ready to allow the shipment of radioactive debris to ordinary landfills. Such sites were never designed to safely store such material, yet the state Department of Health Services has finalized a policy which would allow dirt and debris from decommissioned nuclear power plants and other mothballed facilities to be disposed of without the oversight, licensing or monitoring typically required of all radioactive waste. The Committee to Bridge the Gap, a group which opposed the Ward Valley site, is suing the state over the new disposal policy.

Water: Cadiz Project

You never know how things will go. When the anthrax terrorist struck the Washington mail sorting center in early November, it caused the Desert Survivor's Cadiz Final EIR protest and possibly other protests arriving at that time to be sent to an outlying mail disinfection processing center. Some were delayed, some misplaced, others lost. In late January, the Department of the Interior reopened the Cadiz Project protest period to allow anyone whose protest was lost or misplaced to resend in the materials. This meant that the deadline for protest was extended from November to February 15th. As of this writing we have not had any response to our protest of the project. Assuming the BLM overrides our protests and issues a pro-project Record of Decision by May, the next step is the vote by the Metropolitan Water District Board. Our anti-Cadiz project coalition will be continuing the campaign to convince the Board that the project is a costly environmental nightmare. Litigation is possible.

Fort Irwin Update



Bob Ellis

A Desert Survivors group in the Avawatz Mountains; this will be tank and gun country if Fort Irwin gets its way

By Paul Menkes, Berkeley, CA

The Fort Irwin steamroller continues. But we ain't flattened yet. In the wake of September 11, it has become harder to fight the expansion of the Fort Irwin National Training Center, even at a time when its principal task, large scale tank warfare, is fast becoming a relic of the past. There is too much at stake to give up, however. Large tracts of pristine wilderness stand to be lost, including Superior Valley, home of the endangered Lane Mountain Milkvetch. 87,000 acres of prime tortoise habitat in the southern part of Fort Irwin will be lost. Especially important are the "UTM 90" lands where large tortoise populations exist. Additional environmental impacts will occur from increased noise and air pollution from the expanded maneuvers.

On December 13, 2001, President Bush signed the joint House-Senate defense appropriations bill, which includes language authorizing the withdrawal of public lands on the southern border of Fort Irwin and transferring them from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Defense. This was no surprise, as the Feinstein-Lewis rider of 2000, signed into law by President Clinton, paved the way. This rider provided for the expansion of the Fort Irwin National Training Center only in full compliance with environmental laws.

The comment period for a supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was extended to February 19, 2002. Additionally, public scoping hearings were held in early winter

2001-02. The next round of public comment will be when the DEIS is released, sometime in late 2002.

What can you do now? You can help maintain pressure on the military to respect environmental laws in the expansion areas. Write Senators Feinstein and Boxer and tell them that the U.S. Army must comply fully with environmental laws; the endangered Lane Mountain Milkvetch must be adequately protected; UTM 90 lands in the current Fort Irwin border area should continue to be managed as critical habitat for the benefit of the threatened desert tortoise; and express your concern about the increased air and noise pollution inherent in expanded maneuvers.

Senator Dianne Feinstein

331 Hart Senate Building
Washington D.C. 20510
(202) 224-3841

Senator Barbara Boxer

112 Hart Senate Building
Washington D.C. 20510
(202) 225-3553

Additional Resources:

California Tortoise & Turtle Club <http://www.tortoise.org>
California Native Plant Society <http://www.cnps.org>
Center for Biological Diversity <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org>
Fort Irwin website <http://www.irwin.army.mil>

Desert Survivors Loses Bodie Court Case: Board Decides Against Appeal

By Steve Tabor, Alameda, CA

Last September, the Mono County Superior Court decided against Desert Survivors in our case against Mono County for its handling of the proposed Bodie RV Park. After carefully weighing the possibility of victory and consequences of defeat, the DS Board of Directors decided in November not to appeal the decision. The landowner is now free to build his RV Park on State Route 270 on the way to Bodie State Historic Park, if he can get the water permit, which he has yet to do.

Desert Survivors' involvement in the Bodie issue started in 1997, soon after the RV Park was proposed. The original design of the RV Park called for facilities on both sides of the road in the narrow canyon of Cottonwood Creek. A sage meadow and a riparian area loaded with willows and currant bushes would be destroyed. A general store, a motel, an RV camp with 39 spaces, a tent camp with 14 spaces, 8 cabins, 116 parking spaces, and a building with toilets, showers and a laundromat were all to be crammed into the former meadow, straddling a flowing stream. On our visits there, it was hard to believe that all this could be shoehorned onto the site, but somebody obviously had big plans.

Survivors traveled to Mono County to speak at two hearings on the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), attesting to its inadequacy. We also submitted written comments. We objected to the scale of the project, to the damage it would do to the meadow and the creek, to its degradation of bird and wildlife habitat, to its interference with a major deer migration corridor and a nearby sage grouse mating area, to its adverse impact to water quality in Cottonwood and Virginia Creeks, to its vulnerability to flooding, and to the traffic dangers it would bring to the narrow road. We were also concerned about the type of development proposed, its proximity to wilderness and wildlife habitat nearby, its encouragement of suburban sprawl, and the challenge the project posed to the Mono County General Plan, which expressly discourages piecemeal development away from towns. After the Mono County Board of Supervisors approved the development, we decided to file suit.

Our suit contended that the project was inconsistent with the Mono County General Plan and that the County had violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by approving the project. When filing, we were thinking about not only this project, but the leapfrog development it might encourage throughout the Bodie Hills. We wanted Mono County to take seriously its master plan, and to take seriously the wildlife and wildlands that are a primary source of its appeal to both visitors and residents. There are dozens of private parcels in the Bodie Hills, many of them within Wilderness Study Areas centered around the peaks north of Bodie State Historic Park. Development of this parcel would set a dangerous precedent.

On July 4, 2000, after our suit had been filed and while it was still

pending, the landowner ordered 10,000 square feet of the meadow bulldozed for the drilling of a water well. Because the Regional Water Quality Control Board had not given a permit for the bulldozing, this action was illegal. The Water Board ordered a "cleanup and abatement" of the site and threatened a fine. Soil was to be stabilized and the creek protected, but the damage had already been done.

Last summer, the court tossed out our CEQA challenge due to a technicality associated with a filing deadline. A few months later, the court denied our claim of inconsistency with the Mono County General Plan. In court, Desert Survivors was characterized by the judge, the County Counsel, and the attorney for the landowner as a group of outsiders from the big city, insensitive to local needs and unjustly beleaguering a small landowner. The RV Park, in turn, was portrayed as a small development subjected to an inordinately large challenge. The judge ruled against us largely on the basis of this interpretation, stating that he believed the County Plan had been followed in some detail and that the EIR was a good one.

After some deliberation, the Board decided not to appeal because of the danger of Desert Survivors getting slapped with hundreds of thousands of dollars in attorneys' fees for the other side if we lost. We don't have the resources to absorb that kind of loss.

Despite losing the suit, our opposition to the project made an impact. For one thing, Mono County is not used to having its development plans scrutinized in detail; our opposition was a wake-up call. One Mono County planner even thanked Desert Survivors, stating that the RV Park had better planning as a result of our fight. Local agencies joined us with objections, and praised Desert Survivors for bringing up the need for important mitigations. Most importantly, opponents (both Desert Survivors and others) were able to bring about the following changes in the project:

- the riparian buffer zone along Clearwater Creek was widened from ten to thirty feet
- the number of RV spaces was reduced from 39 to 32
- bear-resistant trash cans were added
- a grazing management plan was added to protect water quality
- fishing along the creek banks was prohibited to reduce trampling of riparian vegetation
- monitoring criteria were developed for revegetation of the site
- an archaeologist was mandated to be present during construction to identify Native American cultural sites
- additional hydrological studies will be done to assess and mitigate flood dangers
- damage to the Masonic rock cress, an identified "plant of concern," is to be avoided
- a performance bond will be established and collected from the developer for reclamation.

Crossing the Desert

by Michael Cope

from Marco Polo - *for Beverley*

What's more, the RV Park site is still being looked at by the state of California for a possible purchase or exchange. On behalf of the Board, thanks to our attorneys at the California Environmental Law Project for carrying the suit as far as they did. Larry Silver, and before him, Kelly Drumm, did a lot of pro bono work on the case, both before and after filing and in court. Thanks also to the members of Desert Survivors who were involved in the hearings and who wrote letters on the project to the Mono County Planning Department and Board of Supervisors. You are the ones who put the project on the map as something that needed to be reconsidered.

Our thanks also to the members of Desert Survivors and the Eastern Sierra community who donated money to pay for the lawsuit. Twenty five members donated \$5500 in response to special appeals; we took almost as much from general funds in our issues budget to cover the remainder of the legal costs.

A special thanks to Alan Siraco, our General Counsel, who tracked the hearings and the legal case throughout. Alan serves the Board and the membership for free, and attends every Board meeting. And finally a very special thanks to Emilie Strauss, who made the Board aware of the issue and carried the issue all along. Emilie did research, visited and studied the site, and wrote innumerable Alerts, SURVIVOR articles, and official comments. It was Emilie's work on the issue, fueled by her love for the land and its wildlife, that kept the issue at the forefront of our consciousness and activity. It is individuals like Emilie that really make a difference in this world. She is an inspiration to me and to the Board.

The Bodie RV Park is not yet built. We understand the developer is eager to start work on the RV Park this spring, but he does not yet have his permit from the Water Board, which must approve any plans for wastewater discharge or grading along the creek. We'll keep you posted on its progress, especially if we get news of a land transfer or a buyout. It could be we will yet see the land preserved, despite our loss in court. Let's hope that is what happens.

The desert is said to be so big
that it takes a year to travel its length;
even at the
narrowest point
the crossing lasts a lunar month.

The desert is only
mountains and sand,
valleys and sand
and there's nothing, nothing to eat.

But if you travel a day and a night
in winter,
there is drinking water —
too little water to quench
the thirst of a big company,
but enough
for a hundred or so men
and their retinue of animals.

And so, all the way
through the desert
you must travel
a day and a night
till you find water.

I can tell you that
in three or four places,
the water is bitter and brack;
but at the other watering-holes,
twenty-eight in all,
the water's sweet;
though there are
no beasts or birds
because there's nothing to eat.

But I assure you
that one thing is found there,
a very strange thing,
and this is the truth of it:

When you ride
through the night
of this desert
and you loiter
or doze in the heat
and fall behind

your company
and, coming to,
hurry to catch them
then you hear
spirits talking,
in the voices
of your companions.

Sometimes they seem to call your name,
you leave the path after them,
and don't come back to it.
Or you may hear the clatter
of a cavalcade of riders
luring you from the road;
and follow them,
and when day breaks
find you are
the victim of illusion.

There are some who,
travelling in this desert,
have seen a band of men approaching
and fled, suspecting robbers,
and gone helplessly astray.
Even by daylight they hear these spirit
voices,
or the strains of many instruments,
especially drums
and the clash of arms.

And this is why
travellers tend to stay
very close to one another,
and before they go to sleep
they put up signs which point
in the direction they're heading,

and they fasten little bells
round the necks of all their beasts
so that by listening for the sound
they can keep them from straying.

Well, that's how they cross the desert.
All that discomfort!
And now, let's take our leave of it
and talk of what's on the other side.

Reprinted by permission of the author, from *Crossing the Desert*, 1993.

Eric Rorer



Room to groove: Desert Survivors on the Black Rock Playa, May, 2001

Desert Survivors has been dedicated to experiencing, sharing and protecting desert wildlands since 1978. With over 40 carcamping and backpacking trips per year, we lead more desert wilderness outings than any other organization in the U.S. How long has it been since you've been to the desert?



Desert Survivors

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