



# the **SURVIVOR**

The quarterly journal of Desert Survivors • Experience, Share, Protect • Summer 2002

## **Deserts of the Middle East**

DS First Annual Conference, 10/26/02

Science & Politics at Odds



# Letter from the Editor

By Jessica Rothhaar, Communications Director

The Middle East has been much in the news this summer. Through the news, we see the Middle East as primarily a political place, a land of religious and ethnic hatred, of violence, of extremism and oppression of all kinds. Seen in this light, the Middle East appears to offer us nothing but oil and trouble.

But the Middle East is also a place of beautiful deserts, fantastic landscapes, and rich and varied ecosystems. It is a place where a people, the Bedouin, have learned to live in harmony with the desert. In this issue, we explore some of the deserts of the Middle East as seen through the eyes of two DS members who have lived and traveled there. By giving us a different view of this part of the world, Shosh Moalem and Tamia Marg allow us to broaden our view of the region.

In this issue, we also reprint an article by Jeff Ruch, Executive Director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), about the growing conflict between science and politics in our federal agencies. Ruch posits that the roots of these conflicts are deeper than partisan politics and, as such, that they will continue to grow. This article was originally presented to the Desert Tortoise Symposium in March of this year, but remains timely.

Finally, we also have an amazing collection of trip reports from you, ranging from southeastern Oregon to southcentral Utah, including four Death Valley trips. These trip reports detail certain of our members' perverse insistence on riding bicycles through sand; braving high winds and freezing temperatures to search for long-forgotten trails; and riding in a bus through 101-degree heat with 33 closely packed strangers. They also describe the varied joys of hiking through water-filled slots in the Waterpocket Fold, finding rare Panamint daisies in Tuber Canyon, stumbling accidentally onto the kaleidoscope colors of Copper Canyon, and lazily watching violet-green swallows on the cliffs overlooking Warner Valley.

While researching this issue, I came across an article on Arab poetry which said, "City people refer to the desert as a sign of absence, of no life, but desert dwellers use the land to express a presence and to celebrate a way of life." Reading the trip reports, the poetry and the passionate advocacy pieces penned by our members, I have to agree.

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## Submissions and Letters for Next Survivor

Deadline for submissions for the Winter 2002 issue is September 28. Articles should be 1000 words or less and are subject to editing; please read the Submission Guidelines at [www.desert-survivors.org](http://www.desert-survivors.org) before submitting your article. 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: trip leader Craig Deutsche at Font's Point in Anza-Borrego state park, February 2002  
photo by Eric Rorer

# Short Takes

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Congrats to all concerned for the glorious improvement shone in the Spring 2002 "Survivor." Was disturbed to note that membership is declining and wonder if that reflects decreasing popular love for the desert and its mountains? My reaction is to hereby pledge a special donation of \$1000, to be paid before the end of the year. Suggest you use a bit of it to advertise in "Nevada" and "Arizona Hiways" as well as the Utah and New Mexico state publications, explaining what Desert Survivors is and what we offer. My donation will be in honor of Frank Wheat and his dad Carl, who introduced me to the desert long, long ago and who did so much to preserve it. Thanks!

Bert Fraleigh  
Sequim, WA

**Editor's Response:** On behalf of the entire DS Board, thank you for your very generous donation. We think the membership decline is due to the fact that, since the CA Desert Protection Act passed in the early 90s, the public's attention has not been focused on the desert. We also clearly could do more to get our name out there, and your gift will help us to do that. We'll look into advertising in the publications you suggest. Thank you!

Dear Editor:

Having been a member for a year, but unable to participate in any functions due to my work schedule (now corrected by retirement), I wished to congratulate you on the new layout and features of "The Survivor" in the Spring 2002 issue. I'm looking forward to some activities with the Desert Survivors.

Julian Holt  
Sacramento, CA

**Editor's Response:** Thank you. Hope to see you in the desert soon!

Dear Editor:

Wow!! Thank you for such a great issue of the survivor!!!

It's the first time I'll be reading it from cover to cover. I've no doubt at all that more people will want to read it, write for it, distribute it and pass it on. I'm sure it will help our outreach.

In that regard, what about trying to infiltrate a few UC (or other university) campuses and/or getting the word out to out-fitters other than REI. I crossed the Desert Trail in my Patagonia t-shirt...

And yes I'd love to help with the website redesign and DS information dissemination. I think we can do a better job with our links to external sites and with finding ways to get other organizations to link to us. I really just wanted to thank you for putting out as well as recruiting the energy to transform The Survivor.

Ella Mental  
Berkeley, CA

## Save a Tree - Subscribe to DSEM

Sure, you like those colorful Desert Survivors flyers that show up in your mailbox every couple of months. And you definitely like the desert! But you certainly don't want forests converted into deserts. So, why not sign up for Desert Survivors E-mail (DSEM) instead, and get your Desert Survivors flyers and trip schedule as e-mail instead of on paper? You'll still get the Survivor on paper. Tree-huggers everywhere will thank you.

Inquiries and subscriptions to:  
[tortoise@desert-survivors.org](mailto:tortoise@desert-survivors.org)

## Help Needed

Members needed to help staff the Desert Survivors booth and walk Seymour the snake in the Solano Stroll on Saturday, September 8th in Berkeley, CA. If you can help, call Dave Barr at (510) 465-9762 home, or (510) 622-2313 work.

## Help promote Desert Survivors: send a free issue of the Survivor to a friend

Who do you know who might like a sample copy of this issue of the Survivor?

We hope the Survivor can help increase people's understanding and love of desert places. If you agree, why not share the

Survivor with others?

Just give us the person's name and address, and we'll mail a Survivor to the person you choose. To send a sample copy, give recipient's name, address, and your name to us @ 510-525-4921 (tel), 510-526-2994 (fax) or [JesseRoth@aol.com](mailto:JesseRoth@aol.com).

## Call for Nominations: Desert Survivors "Activist of the Year" Award

Know a Desert Survivors member who exemplifies our motto, "Experience, Share, Protect"? Nominate that person today for the first annual DS "Activist of the Year" award, to be presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting. The fragile desert ecosystems of the United States face constant threats from off-road vehicles, military expansion, grazing, mining and groundwater extraction, to name a few. Steadfast defense of these lands by individuals dedicated to their protection is critical if they are to survive.

This year, for the first time in its 25-year history, DS will publicly thank one of our members for their good work, with a keepsake Activist Award to be presented at the close of our Annual Meeting.

Please tell us which fellow DS member should receive the 2002 Activist of the Year award, and why. Send a written statement (one page max.) detailing the work your nominee has done to help promote greater appreciation and preservation of the desert. Include your name, phone number, email address and city and state of residence. Current members of the DS Board of Directors are not eligible for the award. Nominations must be postmarked by Friday October 4, 2002.

Send your nomination to:  
Desert Survivors Award Committee  
PO Box 20991  
Oakland, CA 94620-0991  
Or via email to [malakai@sbcglobal.net](mailto:malakai@sbcglobal.net)

For further information call David McMullen at (510) 841-9757.

## Congratulations!

Warmest congratulations go to Arnold Lavive and Karen Felker on their wedding, June 22, 2002.

# Hardcore Desert Hiking in Israel and Jordan

## Interview with Shoshana Moalem

By Jessica Rothhaar, El Cerrito, CA

The following is from an interview with Israeli-born DS member Shoshana Moalem of Oakland, CA, conducted on June 15, 2002.

### How did you become a desert backpacker?

I didn't used to be into camping at all. I was used to dressing up in shiny dresses and high heels. Then in my twenties I got hooked up with a guy who likes creeks, mountains and greenery. From that point my life changed to embrace wilderness and photography. I started to look for groups to hike with. That's how I got involved with the SPNI (Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel). In SPNI I found a special group that mostly hikes in the desert; we called ourselves "kokhvei lekhet" ("Planet Stars"), because we used to walk until we could see the stars. Now the group is called "El-Ad." El-Ad was our oldest guide's son who died in 1995, in his 20's, while travelling in the Himalayas.

El-Ad is a very special group; it's not for everyone. The hikes are very difficult, very strenuous, lots of up and down. Most new people drop out after one or two hours; they say, "you're crazy" and never show up again. El-Ad doesn't do backpacking, we go carcamping with a bus and do day hikes. It's too difficult for backpacking and you have to carry all your water. We do a lot of hiking off trail, scrambling, high knife-edges and also rappelling. We also hiked all over the world: the Himalayas, Jordan, Turkey. El-Ad became a family over the years. We still get together for slide shows and other occasions.

### How did you find out about DS?

I was living in San Francisco and looking for hikes in the desert. I joined the Sierra Club and some people mentioned DS. My first DS trip was led by Craig Deutsche, in Death Valley. We were supposed to climb Telescope Peak, but one guy got lost in the very beginning, so we had to go on a day hike instead. On the second day, Craig took us to the Sierras. Lawrence Wilson and I had come only for the desert and were very disappointed. On the third day, on our way back, the two of us hiked in the Mojave for a few hours.

### Where is the desert in Israel, and what is it like?

Israel has two deserts: the Judean and the Negev. The Judean desert is east of Jerusalem, along the Dead Sea. The Negev is in southern Israel, south of Be'er-Sheva. As you go south towards Eilat the desert becomes drier, with rainfall ranging from 200 millimeters per year in Be'er-Sheva to 20 millimeters per year in Eilat. The Judean desert has dolomite in the lower part, and chert and chalk in the higher part. The Negev has limestone, with chalk, marble, chert, sandstone and basalt in its three craters. The south Negev (below Wadi Paran) also has granite, schist, and gneiss.

There are lots of fossils in both deserts, like shark's teeth and giant ammonites.

### In the US, you're most familiar with the deserts of the Colorado Plateau (Arizona and Utah) and Southern California. How are the Israeli deserts different from these deserts?

The biggest differences are the elevation and the rainfall. The US deserts are high deserts while the highest peak in the Israeli desert is just 3280', in the Negev Highlands above the huge Ramon crater. Still, since the mountains are not high, you can cover a long distance on foot, and have views to very far.

Our desert is much drier, too. US deserts have a lot of running water that we don't have. There are only a few places where you can find water in the desert in Israel; there are very few desert springs. After a heavy rain in Jerusalem and Mt. Hebron, the Judean desert will have lots of floods in the narrow canyons down by the Dead Sea. That will also fill lots of natural water tanks and waterfalls will be running. That usually occurs in the fall and spring. We almost never have rain in the deserts themselves. Also, your deserts get snow, whereas our deserts may see a very light snow once every 10 years. So, the best time to hike in our deserts is right after a flood.

The Judean desert has lots of canyons, narrows and high dry waterfalls. The Negev has fewer canyons, but has beautiful riverbeds and mountains. The Negev also has Wadi Paran, the biggest dry river in Israel. It is 150 km (93 miles) long and 700 meters wide. It starts in the middle of the Sinai, and flows about 100 km until it reaches the Israeli border. Once or twice a year, but not every year, a storm called 'afik Yam Suf' comes from the south to the mid Sinai. At those times, the wadi will be full in a few hours with a chocolate-colored, stormy water. It dries out in a few days. This storm will also fill other wadis in the Negev. It can be very dangerous if you're in the middle of that wide wadi when the flood suddenly shows up. It's even more dangerous to be in the slot canyons of the Judean desert when the flood comes. There you will be on a wonderful sunny day and suddenly a huge wave will be running after you; from that you'll not survive.

### What sorts of plants and animals do you see in the Israel desert?

There are lots of dry bushes and acacia trees in the riverbeds, and a few palm trees in a very few places (not as much as in Sinai and Jordan). In a rainy year, in the spring, you will find beautiful flowers there. A few leopards are still surviving in the deserts. If I'm not wrong, only three are left after some were killed by accidents. We have wolves, and deer; once I saw a hyena at night. Israeli snakes are not as dangerous as the rattlesnakes, and it's more likely to see them in the summer. Yellow and black scorpions hide under

rocks. You see camels that belong to the Bedouins. You sometimes see Bedouins, but not a lot.

**What is the temperature like?**

The time to hike in the desert is the winter; the rest of the year is too hot. The temperature range in winter is 18-24 degrees Celsius [64-75F] in the day, at night it can drop off to freezing. In summer the temperature can go up to 40-48 degrees Celsius [104-118F], and sometimes very humid -- it's terrible.

**Where is your favorite desert place in Israel?**

Eilat Mountains in the south, because of the colors! The mountains there have different colored bands of red, black and white, made of granite, schist and gneiss. Red Canyon, Hidden Valley, Lost Canyon and Mt Shelomo are all very beautiful. Mt Shelomo especially is very colorful. From the bottom, at Eilat, you can see a range of black mountains meet a range of white mountains and a range of red mountains [For a picture of this, see <http://www.bgu.ac.il/~sergeev/pictures/archives/compress/2001/193/15.htm> - ed.].

Once I backpacked two days over there. We cached water and woods for a bonfire (for the cold night) ahead of time. We climbed down a rock wall, scrambling, and had to pass our packs down. It was very difficult, as we had never backpacked before. But after such trips you feel so good!

**You've done a fair bit of hiking in Utah. Do you have slot canyons like that in Israel?**

The most amazing and beautiful slot canyons are in Jordan, east of the Dead Sea. The best canyons are in the Moab and Edom regions. Moab is in the northern part of Jordan, on the east side of the Dead Sea, parallel to the Judean desert. Edom is in the south, from the southern end of the Dead Sea south to the Gulf of Aqaba, parallel to the Negev. The highest peak of Moab is 1300 meters [4265'], while Edom's highest peak is 1700 meters [5580']. The canyons of the white Moab Mountains are sub-tropical, with warm and cold springs that flow into the Dead Sea. The Edom Mountains are red granite. Wadi El-Hasa is the border between the two, as it was between the kingdoms of Moab and Edom in the Bible. Wadi El-Hasa is a beautiful river with warm springs in a spectacular red sandstone canyon on the Edom side



Shoshana Moalem

**On the Cockscomb, Negev**

and cold springs on the Moab side. Green algae grows on the cold side, while red algae grows on the hot side. Hundreds of palm trees hang from the canyon walls. I've been there twice.

The most beautiful canyon in Moab is supposed to be Wadi El-Hidan, which has beautiful pools near the confluence of Wadi Mujib and Wadi El-Hidan. It has a 50 meter [164f] waterfall, basalt canyons, a spectacular sandstone gorge, many colors, and warm and cold springs. Hiking in this Wadi requires rappelling of some waterfalls. Unfortunately it's closed to hikers now, after some German hikers got lost or injured there. I have done five long trips in Moab and Edom but never that Wadi.

Once I organized a trip to Wadi Rum, which is very beautiful. We climbed to Jabel (which means "mountain") Rum peak, which is 1754 meters (5754'). It was very strenuous and scary. In one part we walked on a narrow shelf above an 80 meter drop, using a rope to secure ourselves. In another part we used ropes to climb up and rappel down on the way back. The top is a lot of yellow, white and pink granite domes that require ropes. And the view is amazing. Highly recommended!

**Do Israelis have any better appreciation of their desert landscapes than Americans do?**

Not really. Most Israelis aren't hikers, not as much as Americans are. Most Israelis

don't really care about the desert and nature. They like to go in the summer to the beaches or north to canoe, barbecue and smoke cigarettes. But they are not really hiking. The few people who live in and love the desert are unusual.

**How might the violence in the Middle East affect the desert environment in Israel? Is it threatened with ecological damage?**

The big enemy of our desert and wilderness is civilization. The highways that the government is insisting on building will not solve our traffic problems anyway. The private hotels that are threatening to be built will destroy the Dead Sea.

**For additional information about desert hiking in Jordan, Shosh recommends Trekking and Canyoning in the Jordanian Dead Sea Rift, by Itai Haviv. Much of the book can be read online at <http://www.tictac.co.il/desert/>**

# Bedouins of the Sinai

By Tamia Marg, Berkeley, CA

It is the spring of 1983, during the weeklong holiday of Passover, and I have signed up for a trip to the Sinai with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), the Israeli equivalent to our Sierra Club. SPNI is popular among both native Israelis and tourists for its hiking treks, led by guides knowledgeable in the history and ecology of the ancient landscapes of Israel and the Occupied Territories. This trip is taking place about a year after the return of the Sinai to Egypt on April 18, 1982. Israel had claimed the entire Sinai Peninsula after the 6-Day War in 1967, but has now consented to its return as part of peace negotiations.

From Jerusalem, it is a six-hour ride south to Eilat, on the cusp of the Gulf of Aqaba. We cross into Egypt at Taba, and transfer to cramped Egyptian mini-buses. From there, the drivers race through a fantastic landscape of rugged, barren peaks which descended abruptly to the deep blue of the Red Sea. The road passes craggy mountains that rise suddenly from the narrow coastal plain, cut by gorges that open up to vast stretches and distant horizons, and finally passes into the realm of high desert mountains. Heavy dust and haze in the Sinai make the many jagged peaks look like overlapping and receding grey shadows.

Tribes have lived among these rocks for at least a couple of millennia, a fact that fires the imagination of travelers to this mythical place.

As we approach Mt. Sinai, the political tension is palpable. Tall cyclone fences topped with barbed wire start appearing. Scattered units of the American-led multinational peace-keeping forces and the Egyptian army are stationed in munchkin mounds of sandbags with flags sprouting from the tops. The valley at the foot of Mt. Sinai is also the site of a Bedouin village of stone rectangular huts that creep up the gentle south-facing slope at the base of massive mountain peaks.

The cold of winter in the high mountains is more difficult for these people to survive in their scanty dwellings than the glaring heat of summer. With instinctive accuracy, the Bedouins plan their houses for maximum benefit from passive solar heat. During most daylight hours, the one-story huts are barely visible, camouflaged against the monotone sand-colored plain. But in the first light of the morning, they seem to be the focal point of the rays beaming between the craggy points of Mt. Sinai.

In contrast, a Christian-built dwelling stands in the shadow of these rocks and cannot bask in the sun until mid-morning. Now uninhabited and isolated in the stark desert valley, buffered by an ample walled garden, this European villa appears completely out of



We're not in the Mojave anymore, Toto: Egypt's Sinai Mountains



A Bedouin and his camels

place. The entire complex seems to have been lifted from the Italian countryside. The Bedouins never planted cypress; these trees owe their existence in the Sinai solely to the nostalgia of expatriate Europeans. Perhaps by accident, the garden's vertical accents of cypress echo the craggy fingers looming behind.

The relationship between the displaced Christian monks and the Bedouin natives must have been a rare case of symbiosis between two diametrically opposed cultures. Supposedly, the Jebeliya tribe, who comprise the Bedouins of this high mountain region, intermarried with Romanian pilgrims in the sixth century. Thus, they are distinct from most Bedouin by this infusion of exotic blood. The monks brought with them their European culture of monastery gardens and introduced the practice of agriculture to the area. Subsequently, the Bedouins embraced the practice of growing plants, a significant break from classic Bedouin lifestyle. (According to ancient Bedouin legend, God took the clouds to make the camel, the wind to make the Bedouin, the earth to make the donkey, and the donkey's excrement to make the farmer.) Though our contact with the Bedouins is limited, the evidence of their accomplishment in high desert agriculture appears around every bend in the mountain path. Even from a mountain top, as we stare down through the haze at the wadis (desert arroyos) far below, the gardens are the only visible signs of a human touch, besides the few stone cairns placed to mark the circuitous path up the rocks to the jagged peak.

We come to a Bedouin garden situated on a slope near the base of a peak and not, as is more customary, on the valley

floor. Here the site was chosen for a spring which now flows through hand-carved channels to irrigate the nearby gardens. An unmortared stone wall curves around manmade terraces to meet the solid granite slope. Beyond the stonework, bright puffy clouds of pink and white fruit tree blossoms, glow against the landscape of reddish, tan, and grey rock. After crossing a pass, we descend along a wadi past continual gardens. The stone walls hold the planted plots at a slightly higher elevation than the wadi bottom, allowing the winter flash flood waters to irrigate but not deluge. The path is a gravel channel, bordered on one side by the garden walls reaching above our heads and, on the other, by giant boulders accumulated at the base of a steep rise. The design of each garden is determined by its water

source and topography. Unlike the ordered sensibility so evident in western agriculture, the planting here appears entirely random.

The places along the tops of the walls most susceptible to intruders are protected by thistly and thorny branches jammed horizontally under large rocks, with some pieces of their modern equivalent, barbed wire, stuck in for good measure. Even so, these private growing plots are open to theft. The key to their preservation is the tight social structure among the Bedouins. Though a Bedouin tribe may spread over a wide area, everyone knows everyone and every place intimately. Thus, if a Bedouin breaks into another's garden, he is easily apprehended by the invisible network of the tribe. Once the thief is caught, a trial date is set concurrent with a festive occasion, such as a wedding celebration. The trial of the accused is held only when the festivities are in full swing. The



More magic in the Sinai Mountains

men of the court interrupt the merrymaking and feasting of roast goat to read a long and involved fine with great solemnity to the crowd. The financial burden imposed on the thief might start with five camels for the stolen fruit and a goat for every step he took into the garden. Finally, the sum is so great that no Bedouin, or even his whole tribe, could pay it. Then the owner of the garden steps forward and with great ceremony, "On behalf of so and so . . .," excuses his burglar from one fine after another until he has nothing more to pay. The guilty one is left with this embarrassing pardon. Corporal punishment is never considered an option. The harshest punishment the Bedouin impose on members of their society who have gone astray is banishment from the tribal life to solitary life in the wilds.

In modern times, the Bedouin have seldom been self sufficient. Before 1967, when the Sinai was Egyptian, their major revenue was from aiding smuggling operations, bringing opium from the Saudi Arabian peninsula across the Red Sea to mainland Egypt. After 1967 (and the Israeli occupation of the Sinai), the Israelis put a strict end to the smuggling when several spies and terrorists came over with the opium. As Israelis developed many small but flourishing resort businesses, the Bedouins had the option to supplement their income by providing food, shelter, camels, or guides for the visitors that flocked to the Sinai. The previous outlets for Bedouin-grown vegetables and fruits from their high mountain desert gardens had been Egyptian marketplaces. Cut off from

Egypt and without Israeli buyers (the latter already grew plenty of higher quality produce themselves), the Bedouins neglected their gardens, though they still gathered enough fruit for their own consumption. Fortunately for these people caught in the shifting politics of marketplaces, these gardens are by design, tolerant of low maintenance.

With the Egyptians once more in the Sinai, the lifestyle of the Bedouin is once again affected. While the Egyptians are not great lovers of the desert and generally are not enchanted by its beauty and wonder, they feel proud to have the Sinai back in their possession. Their attitude towards the Bedouin, who truly know the desert, is less than complimentary. The ubiquitous Egyptian soldiers harass the Bedouins for not having correct identification papers or for giving lifts to tourists. It seems that never the twain shall meet, each considering the other to be a lesser sort of being. The Bedouin will persist, it seems, despite all odds, as adaptable nomads with their roots solidly planted in this harsh magical land.

**DS member Tamia Marg lived in the Sinai for a couple of months in the early 80's. She highly recommends two books: *Where Mountains Roar, a Personal Report from the Sinai and Negev Desert*, by Lesley Hazleton, 1980, and *Arabian Sands*, by Wilfred Thesiger, 1959. Marg writes, "Anyone awed by life, culture, and history in the desert will love these books."**



Tamia Marg

A Bedouin garden in the desert

# Activism in Action: Come Join Us For Desert Survivors First Annual Conference

Saturday, October 26, 2002, 1:00 – 9 :00 p.m.; Harrison Center, Alameda, CA

To sharpen our focus on activism and member involvement, we are shortening the business portion of the annual meeting to just one hour; the rest of the day will be an informative, interactive conference on the desert for members and the general public. Please join us!

## Highlights

**Video: Desert Under Siege** - Clearly describes the birth of California's desert protection movement and the ongoing challenges of population growth, ORV use, mining, grazing and military use. Great for new and old members alike!

**BLM's Changing Relationship with Environmental Groups** - Paul Brink, Wilderness Coordinator, CA Bureau of Land Management

**The Desert Tortoise Decision and Other Victories** - Brendan Cummings, Attorney, Center for Biological Diversity

**Discussion of three "macro-threats" affecting the desert:**

- **Military Lands and Pork Barrel Politics** - Bob Ellis and Dave Halligan
- **The Growing Political Strength of ORV Users** - Steve Tabor
- **Southern Sprawl** - Joe Pendleton

**Hands-On Breakout Sessions:**

- **How to Respond to an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)** - Bob Ellis
- **Letter Writing in Support of New Desert Wilderness** - Sierra Club Organizer, TBD
- **Working with the BLM to Preserve Biological Diversity** - Paul Brink and Brendan Cummings

## Annual Report and Elections

This is YOUR opportunity to:

**HEAR** the Board's accomplishments for the past year and priorities for the coming year.

- **ASK** the Board anything relating to DS activities, goals, priorities, finances, management, etc.
- **ELECT** new Board members.
- **STAND** for election to the Board. All Board positions are open every year.
- **GET INVOLVED.** Find out about opportunities to work on the Survivor, the website, membership development, service trips, and anything else you think we should be doing.

**Potluck Dinner Party** - Catch up with old friends and meet new ones

**Activist of the Year Award** - To be presented to a DS Member in recognition of exemplary service to desert protection

**Door Prizes** – You must attend the business portion of the meeting to be eligible for a door prize!

Home stay arrangements will be made to accommodate DS members from outside the Bay Area. If you live in or near Alameda or Oakland, and are able to put up one or more DS members on the night of the 26th and/or 25th, please contact Steve Tabor at [StevTabor@aol.com](mailto:StevTabor@aol.com) or (510) 767-1706.

Please plan to attend. Desert Survivors is an entirely volunteer-run, member-driven organization, and your participation can make a big difference in what we do, and how well we do it.

RSVP to Steve Tabor at [StevTabor@aol.com](mailto:StevTabor@aol.com) or (510) 769-1706. Watch for a separate mailing with more information, including a detailed agenda and description of Board positions, in early September.

# Professional Ethics Within Public Service: The New Incompatibility

By Jeff Ruch, Executive Director, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), Washington, D.C.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) is a service organization for state and federal employees who are struggling with natural resource-related issues. PEER assists public employees in removing or resolving obstructions to environmental protection, especially when those obstructions are lodged within the employee's own agency.

## The New Challenge

Without harping on the changes occasioned by the Administration of George W. Bush, especially in the Interior Department, it should be noted that the transition is only now just beginning. The events of September 11, the slow pace of nominations and the clumsy handling of early issues have all slowed the pace of new policy formulation and key personnel changes.

In the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), for example, the removal from line positions of moderates such as Idaho Director Martha Hahn and California Desert Conservation Area Manager Tim Salt bode ill for the coming years. Notwithstanding the significance of the Bush transition, the underlying dynamic of growing political pressure on natural resource management is truly non-partisan, occurring at all levels of government - federal, state and local - and across the spectrum of disciplines.

Three factors drive this dynamic:

A. The environmental conflicts themselves are becoming both more common and acute.

Recent NASA satellite photos evidence the extent that urban sprawl now dominates the American landscape. Those of you working in wildlife management know that human/wildlife contacts are becoming more frequent and are often the greatest threat to some species' survival. As a consequence of the inexorable human pressure on the natural world, your job as a natural resource manager is itself more under the gun, so to speak, than ever before. Looking ahead, the conflict between man and nature will only become more acute.

B. The battles are fought on administrative (rather than policy) turf.

Few politicians propose the outright repeal of the environmental statutes; instead pro-development politicians advocate a different

emphasis, interpretation or attitude in enforcing these laws (i.e., everyone, including developers, now claims to be an environmentalist). Consequently, the public portrayal of the conflict is not black and white but swathed in shades of gray.

The locus of controversy is the rigor of a resource statute's implementation - the very area inhabited by resource managers. The result is a pressure to undermine laws on the books; which, in turn, leads to a dysfunctional agency.

A prime example is the federal Endangered Species Act. Following the Republican takeover of Congress in 1995, then Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt ordered the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to slow down or avoid implementing the law in order to

save ESA from political backlash.

Key listing decisions by Interior then became more the product of litigation from environmental groups whose most powerful weapon is the scientific data gathered by USFWS scientists who are forbidden from using this data in making honest management deci-

sions.

C. The public's scientific ignorance limits political support for agency policies.

To the layperson, the issues that dominate modern resource management often seem hopelessly technical and arcane. Some have referred to this as "the snail darter syndrome" for the little fish which held up (but, significantly, did not block) a massive and, in retrospect unwise, dam. Mobilizing public support for agency policies rooted in protection of un-charismatic creatures, like insects, or complex natural phenomena can prove especially daunting.

The principal considerations that should govern the resource decisions are scientific. Since biologists are not political scientists (or spin doctors), they often make poor public advocates. As a result, the technical expertise often remains locked inside agency cubicles and is not made part of the public debate. Meanwhile, in the absence of a persuasive scientific case, the advocate with the best slogan carries the day.

## The Endangered Agency Scientist

Caught in the middle of this tug of war are the agency scientists, land managers and law enforcement officers. The archetypal setting for political pressure that we see at PEER involves a multi-million dollar project hinging on the evaluation of a single field biologist. The field biologist, in essence, holds the future of the

**Notwithstanding the significance of the Bush transition, the underlying dynamic of growing political pressure on natural resource management is truly non-partisan**

project in his or her hands. In this way, even field specialists can be found at the apex of intense political pressure. In a growing number of cases, that staff member cannot count on support from his or her chain-of-command in making a professional assessment.

Thus, agency professionals are increasingly at career risk simply for doing their jobs. Three examples from the U.S. Forest Service illustrate:

- The agency's leading goshawk scientist in Arizona had an up and coming career until his research on the amount of undisturbed land area required for a successful mating pair of the birds was used by local environmental groups as evidence in a lawsuit against proposed timber cuts. In order to defeat the suit, the Forest Service set about not only discrediting its science but its scientist. The researcher was forced to move to Alaska to save his job. Through no action of his own, except what he had been doing for years, this scientist went from "Golden Boy" to "Public Enemy Number One" in a twinkling solely because his work had become institutionally inconvenient;
- Similarly, a botanist on a North Carolina national forest ended her career by discovering rare plants in an area slated for a timber sale. After she refused to renounce her find, she was confined to doing all future plant surveys in the dead of winter until she finally quit in disgust; and
- Forest Service special agents who uncovered massive commercial timber theft in Oregon and California all lost their positions in a curious re-organization. Today, the Forest Service has no single unit dedicated to investigating timber theft on our national forest system. The agency explains that such a unit, of any size, is not cost-effective and deprives the agency of maximum flexibility in its use of investigative staff. Not surprisingly, the agency has stopped bringing multi-million dollar timber theft cases for prosecution.

None of these people considered themselves "whistleblowers." They were simply doing their jobs and get caught sideways in agency politics.

### The Limits of Law

For employees caught in the undertow of these politics, the legal tools available are sometimes unreliable. By way of brief overview, the three principal areas of law involved in these cases are:

#### *The First Amendment*

Precisely because public employees work for government, the First Amendment protects them on the job in a way their private sector counterparts are not protected.

The First Amendment is not without limits and those limits are murkily defined. In a public agency context, employee speech is protected so long as it does not impair the efficient functioning of the public agency. First Amendment cases generally provide only injunctive relief not monetary damages and thus have restricted utility. In order to vindicate First Amendment rights the employee must file formal litigation (literally "make a federal case out of it"), a step that usually requires legal counsel and can entail considerable time and expense. For employees undergoing daily, low level harassment due to the circumstances of their jobs rather than speaking out, First Amendment litigation may not be at all a practical avenue.

#### *Whistleblower Laws*

There are two basic types of whistleblower statutes: those protecting civil servants and those rooted in a particular statute, such as the Clean Air Act or the Clean Water Act.

Civil service statutes generally limit employees to an administrative forum with circumscribed remedies. California is a notable exception: state employees may bring civil actions for monetary damages under legislation PEER drafted that became effective January 1, 2000. Consequently, California has one of the strongest state employee whistleblower laws in the nation.

Civil service statutes also require that the employee report some form of misconduct and limit protection only to retaliation caused by management knowledge of that disclosure. Most civil service whistleblower laws do not protect employees for -

- Merely doing their jobs;
- Expressing reasonable scientific conclusions; or
- Adhering to professional ethical standards.

By contrast, statute-based federal whistleblower laws broadly protect employee disclosures that further the enforcement or the administration of that particular law, e.g., the Clean Water Act. Seven major federal environmental laws have similar provisions; all are enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor. While these statutes are broad there are drawbacks:

- Patchwork Protections. Protected speech is limited only to those disclosures furthering the particular statute. Thus, a disclosure relating to the Endangered Species Act (which lacks a whistleblower provision) would be outside the scope of the Clean Water or Clean Air laws.
- Very Short Statute of Limitations. Claims must be made within a very short period, ranging from 15 days to 6 months, depending on the statute, following the act of discrimination or retaliation from which the employee seeks relief.

- **State Employees May No Longer Be Protected.** Due to a string of U.S. Supreme Court cases during the past two years, an expanded doctrine of state sovereignty rooted in the Eleventh Amendment may preclude state employees from citing state agencies under federal law. PEER is litigating the lead case in this area on behalf of Rhode Island's top state hazardous waste scientist. That case is now pending before the federal First Circuit.

### *The Appearance of Impropriety*

This final area is the least defined and most slippery of the lot. In many cases, resource agency employees are counseled that they cannot be involved in environmental issues or organizations in their off duty time because it would create the appearance of a conflict. As the employee has no financial interest in these matters, in a strict sense there can be no "conflict of interest."

Instead, the agency contends that the employee who is an off duty activist is guilty of the appearance of impropriety or partiality. At the federal level, the statutory bulwark of this prohibition can be found in 18 U.S.C. § 205 which bars a federal employee from acting as "an agent or attorney" against the United States in any "case or controversy."

In February of 2000, the limits of this statute were decided in the case of Jeffrey van Ee, an EPA electrical engineer based in Las Vegas who, on his own time, became an advocate for the desert tortoise. Many of you probably know his story. After ten plus years of litigation, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that van Ee had a constitutional right to advocate, belong to advocacy groups, serve as a spokesperson and on boards of organizations concerning matters of public interest.

The Court, however, declined to strike down 18 U.S.C. § 205 as unconstitutional and only struck down EPA's interpretation of the statute as overly broad. Thus, there remains more of this legal swamp to drain.

### **Delivering the Message Without the Messenger**

As a practical matter, few agency scientists want to invest the time, emotion and often the sizeable expense of being a legal test case. Moreover, even employees who win personnel litigation against their agency often cannot truly be restored to the same career path, professional standing or peace of mind, prior to the matter arising. The very employees conscientious enough to take career risks over ethical issues are precisely the people who need to stay in public service. PEER is not trying to create martyrs; we are trying to solve the environmental conflicts facing conscientious civil servants. To fill this role, PEER has developed a number of techniques designed to deliver the message to the agency while masking the identity of the messenger:

- **Anonymous Activism.** Under this technique, PEER, a professional society, employee union or environmental organization serves as a vehicle for employee disclosures. With painstakingly careful planning and by using tools of collective disclosure, such as all-employee surveys or anonymously authored white papers, the identity of the true source can be protected;
- **Pen Pal Privileges.** PEER allows employees to use our organizational stationery to communicate back with their own agency. Thus, many of our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are actually drafted by the employee who is the custodian of a critical document but are signed by a PEER staff attorney. Through this technique, employees can file comments under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or under a counterpart state act. Any form of administrative interaction that a citizen can have with a public agency, a public employee can have as well; and
- **Litigation.** While PEER does provide legal representation in the form of legal defense for whistleblowing or other protected speech, our preferred approach is to play legal offense, if you will, rather than employee defense. Since public employees are discouraged (and often legally prohibited) from suing their own agency for environmental malfeasance, PEER files citizen suits or other environmental enforcement actions in their place with the public servants as the unnamed but nonetheless quite real parties in interest.

In our experience, if the public agency is forced to confront the substance of an issue, without the ability to divert the debate or change topics, half the battle is won because, in the clear light of day with focused public attention on the issue, most public agencies will do the right thing - only so long as the spotlight is squarely on them.

### **Conclusion**

PEER is premised on the belief that, despite appearances to the contrary, public employees retain the full rights of citizenship. As such, public employees have the right as well as the ethical duty to be activists in the public interest. The role of PEER is to provide employees with ways to safely exercise their free speech rights by using their freedom of association - and to defend them when those rights are threatened.

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**The very employees conscientious enough to take career risks over ethical issues are precisely the people who need to stay in public service**

## Devil's Hole to Badwater Backpack

March 9 -15, 2002, Death Valley National Park, CA

By Dave Halligan, Berkeley, CA

One of the driest years ever in Death Valley; so dry that we didn't see hardly a single green plant; even the creosote was dry, brittle, and suffering. But it was a wonderful trip: a withering dust storm and a dead bighorn, fossils and panoramic views, a charming spring, and mining activities old and new were the features of our week-long backpack through a variety of lands, some wilderness, some not. We crossed parts of Ash Meadows, the Amargosa Desert, the Funeral Range, Greenwater Valley, the Black Mountains and Death Valley proper, ending at the lowest point in North America, Badwater. It was a great adventure, especially our unplanned detour through one of the most spectacular places we'd ever been, a mysterious place that no longer appears on the maps. But let's start at the beginning.

We started at Devil's Hole, a little detached piece of Death Valley National Park on the Nevada side of the border. Here a unique species of desert pupfish dwells. In fact, this hole in the rock connected to the ground water table is this fish's only natural home. As a security measure, the site is surrounded by a massive fence, and small populations of the fish are kept in aquariums at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and the University of Nevada. One can see down into the hole, and near it lounged a fox in the mid-day sun, totally unconcerned by our presence. Does it ever go fishing?

We headed west across Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The water table is essentially at the surface here, and the ground is often soft and marshy. Most of the plants and trees were still dry and brown, as the cold Mojave Desert winter was not yet over. These lands, full of springs, were once privately ranched, but have been purchased by the Nature Conservancy and the Federal Government to form the Refuge. Several unique species of desert pupfish dwell here, and many of the springs boast unique snail species. When combined with the number of unique endemic plant species, it is conjectured that this area, for its size, contains more species unique to this place than any other place in the world.

Crystal Pool alone is worth a visit to the Refuge: it is a large pond where crystal-blue waters well up from the ground, forming the cattail-fringed home of the Ash Meadows desert pupfish. When I was here a few years ago you could just walk around the area. Now there is a boardwalk to protect the cattails and other plants from being trod upon. It is a beautiful place where birds sing and ducks paddle about.

As we continued west, the damp, marshy ground gave way to dry, loose sand dunes. We passed a borax processing facility and entered California. We camped in the drainage of the Amargosa River, noting that the riverbed itself, and our path forward, consisted of an impenetrable thicket of mesquite and brush. Our first night out was very cold; there was ice in our water when we awoke.



Paul Menkes taking a break in Ash Meadows

The next morning we found a road that cut through the thorny mesquite, saving us a detour of several miles. It was a long slog up the wash to the saddle south of Pyramid peak, but we arrived in mid-afternoon and lounged away the day.

The third day we climbed Pyramid Peak. Cambrian Age fossils seemed to be everywhere. We checked out a guzzler showing no signs of bighorn, just a lot of drowned bees. After a few hours of climbing, we made it to the top. The views from the Peak are truly great: Mt. Charleston to the east, covered in snow; Telescope Peak to the southwest, dusted with snow; and to the west, the Sierra Nevada, drenched in snow. After leaving the peak we continued our trip southwest down a large wash. Fossils were still to be found here in abundance. We camped on the bed of the old railroad grade that parallels Hwy 190 as it heads east from Furnace Creek Inn.

The next day was full of variety. In the morning we followed the old railroad grade for a while, which crossed several large and steep ravines. This was not easy to do, as the bridges were long gone, the timbers having been used construct the Furnace Creek Inn in the 1930's. We passed some interesting stone ruins, and then left the grade to follow a nameless canyon down to Furnace Creek Wash. As Travertine Point loomed above, we headed west along the wash towards Navel Spring. We had cached food and water nearby, and after recovering the cache, we took a quick day-trip in the mid-day heat to the spring itself.

Water was flowing at the spring, and we were surprised by the presence of a dead bighorn nearby. It had fallen off the high cliffs above and smashed headfirst onto a boulder. But it is a beautiful spring and well worth a visit, as it is enclosed in a grotto, well protected from the sun and wind. Detracting from its beauty is the fact that the spring had been "developed" and the water used for nearby borax mining operations. Still worth a visit for anyone visiting Death Valley; and it is only a short hike from Hwy 190. After a brief rest in the shade, next to the carcass of the bighorn, we returned to our packs and turned north, now heading back up Furnace Creek wash towards Greenwater Valley.

We passed by some active borax mining operations, and later learned that much of this land is private (patented) mining land owned by American Borax. The views back down towards Death Valley were wonderful. We found a sheltered place to camp at the convergence of two washes, where we had fantastic views of the Funeral Range and Pyramid Peak. Unfortunately, we were kept awake much of the night by the operations of the Billie Mine. Despite earplugs and although we were over a mile away, the sounds of trucks, tumbling rocks, and huge ventilation fans made an incredible racket from 11:30 p.m. till about 7:00 a.m. Portions of this week-long trip were not in wilderness, and we were at times very close to relatively busy paved roads and other works and activities of man. Yet these regions of the planet offer their own perspectives on our place in the world.

The next day we continued up Furnace Creek wash, paralleling the road to Dante's View, passing the detritus and ruins of the Ryan Widow Mine complex, and reached Greenwater Valley about noon. As the afternoon wore on, the winds increased, and the views of the previous day were slowly erased by clouds of white

and gray dust. We abandoned our idea of climbing Coffin Peak and also our plan of continuing north in Greenwater Valley, then down Sheep Canyon to Death Valley proper. Instead, we headed down a tributary of Coffin Canyon to escape the wind as best we could. It turned out to be a fascinating detour. An old mining trail on the south side of the canyon let us pass some short dryfalls without trouble but, as we continued down, the dryfalls became higher and the trail disappeared. It was getting late, and we were tired, the wind was still howling, so we made camp, deciding to tackle the high dryfalls when we were rested after a night's sleep.

In the morning, well rested and watered, we tackled the last few dryfalls down to Coffin Canyon proper. The wind had stopped and the air had cleared, and we could now see the Panamint Range on the other side of the Valley. We were astonished by the appearance of the view that yesterday had been totally obscured. But we couldn't tarry long, we had work to do. The last fall is a 40 footer, requiring a difficult but short detour to the right up and out of the canyon on loose rock and gravel. We made it down safely and headed down the wide, meandering canyon. A short detour up a beautiful, narrow side canyon, its red rock warming in the morning sun, broke up the slog over cobbles and rock.

Coffin Canyon itself ends in a series of impassable falls and cliffs, dropping vertically into Death Valley and the salt flats. But there is a low pass between Coffin and Copper Canyon, and Copper, in studying the maps, followed an easy path down to the Valley. On many maps, Copper Canyon no longer appears as a place name, and I was always curious about this place. It is one of the largest canyons in the Black Mountains, but it is not mentioned in any of my travel guides or reference books on the Park.

Once in Copper Canyon we entered a fantastic realm of red, white, black, yellow, and turquoise canyons and hills, many consisting of soft, dry mud. It is one of the most incredible landscapes we have ever seen in the Park, or anywhere on earth. As we were to learn later, however, this area of Copper Canyon is closed to all entry! To protect the paleological resources in the area, visitors are not allowed here unless escorted by a Park Ranger. If you are caught in Copper Canyon by a Ranger, a court appearance and a \$500.00 fine (or up to six months in jail) may be your fate, so DO NOT enter this area on your own, as we mistakenly did.

We camped near the mouth of the canyon, where we were able to climb up a ways to the canyon rim and enjoy the views into the Death Valley salt flats below. On our way out of the canyon the next morning we passed the signs declaring the area closed, and clearly setting out the penalties. It was early in the morning, and we decided we had better get down the fan into the Valley as fast as our legs could carry us.

We got to the floor of Death Valley and turned north. We had the pleasure of walking across alkali mud flats and salt pans in the shadows of the morning. As we continued north and the morning lengthened, the sun came up over the Blacks, and we began to feel the warmth of the day. In the bright sun, the salt under our feet began to shimmer and shine. We were getting close to the end of our trip. By mid-day we had made it to our car at Badwater, and another adventure in the desert was over.

## Green Tortoise to Death Valley

April 12-14, 2002, Death Valley National Park, CA

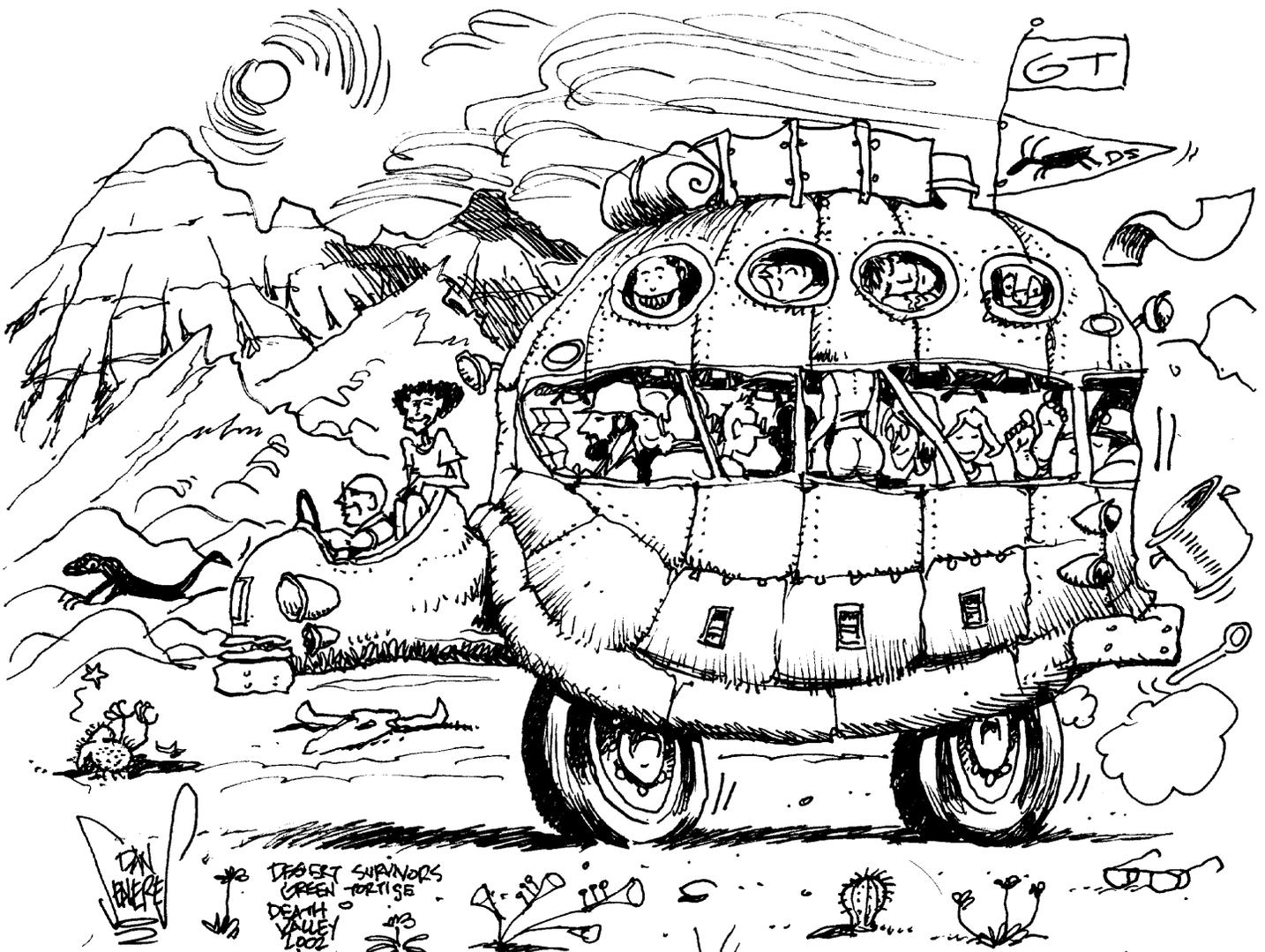
By Miriam Steinbock, Oakland, CA

I hadn't backpacked in over twenty-five years, and my only experience with Death Valley was a family trip in an RV twenty-some years ago. Despite my age and lack of experience, I became intrigued with the idea of hiking in Death Valley after I'd listened to my daughter Jessica's lyric accounts of the desert's beauties. Jess assured me that even I could manage this hike, and that the Green Tortoise would save me from driving 12 hours at night to get there. I lured my secretary, a woman considerably younger whose experience with the desert had been living in Las Vegas, into coming along and we boarded the Green Tortoise on Friday, April 12 for our night ride to Death Valley.

I'm a stranger to the desert, so I can't name the rock formations or plants we saw as we hiked along the Amargosa River on Saturday. I can say that we walked along an abandoned railroad route, taking a detour into a canyon that was dark and beautiful and provided some relief from the 101-degrees-in-the-shade heat. We could see traces of the railroad, green brush and plants along the river bed, and two birds that Dave McMullen, one of our two terrific trip leaders, identified as phainopepla. It's a small black bird

with a jaunty crest and a long tail. I and a few other similarly inexperienced hikers decided not to press on after about an hour and a half in the sun, and we hiked back to the bus, stopping for a while to rest in an abandoned assay office under the care of our other trip leader, Jessica, who showed us ways to stay comfortable in the desert heat. The experienced hikers went on to the waterfall and the pupfish that had been one of the promised highlights of the hike.

After our hike we drove to Tecopa Hot Springs, where we showered and soaked. We then drove to Death Valley Junction for an al fresco dinner by a sludge hole, and then walked to the Amargosa Opera House, where we saw a one-woman show that beggars description. The star wasn't a day under 75 and, despite an injured ankle, she danced and sang with an intensity that commanded our attention. The plot, if it matters, involved a nobleman who married a doll. Or not. The playbill told us the star had come to Amargosa from New York (for reasons not explained) decades before, leaving a dancing career behind. She bought the opera house, restored it with her own labor and painted audiences on the walls when live audiences were not to be found. The opera house, the performance, and its star were a dramatic example of something I realized on this trip: the desert calls to people who want the space to be different.



After the show, we drove to Death Valley National Park where the best part of the trip, for me, occurred: we dragged pads from the bus and slept outside, while more stars than I'd ever imagined filled the bowl of the sky above us.

On Sunday we headed for Fall Canyon. The start was slow, because there were lots of flowers requiring discussion among the knowledgeable, reference to Dave's new Jepson Desert Manual, and further discussion before satisfactory identifications could be achieved. This hike was wonderful, though the temperature was again in the 90's, as we moved steadily up hill through cliffs and canyons under a beautiful blue sky. Our hike ended at a place where the canyon walls seemed to meet, dark and relatively cool. Although I was one of the first to start back, I was the very last one to reach the bus. I'm sure that I made it at all only thanks to the encouragement of Dave, his wife Diane, and to Jessica, who patiently and firmly told me to take it a step at a time, and ignored my protests that the bus was moving farther away.

When we were all in the bus, our drivers treated us to a cool, sweet yogurt and fruit dish perfectly suited to the hot desert. Then we drove over to Stovepipe Wells, where we were able to shower and swim in the hotel pool and pretend to shop in the air-conditioned general store. After dinner in the shade of the bus, we boarded and drove back to the Bay Area

The trip on the Green Tortoise was an experience in itself. Started in the 60's, the original Green Tortoise was the vehicle where radical hippies could take trips of the mind as well as the body, and the issue of smoking on the bus was not about tobacco. In 2002, everybody on the bus was over 30 and, of necessity, a lot more practical. By day, the bus had a platform at the back where campers could sit or lie and look out the windows; the mid-section had tables for four, above which hung bunks where gear could be stowed; in the forward section people could sit facing each other across the aisle on "regular" bus seats. By night the bus was transformed so that the platform was filled with silent campers lying head to toe, the tables became double bunks for people who wanted to lie entwined through the night, the overhead bunks became swaying sleeping compartments that rose and fell with the road, and people crept into the dark compartments that had been leg room beneath the table, immured till morning. Up front, the aisle and seats were covered over with a platform like that at the back. Our two drivers planned the meals and set up the cooking facilities while we shared the meal preparation and clean up.

I would not dream of backpacking anywhere, but I now understand the lure of the desert, with its intense light and pure landscape. I'm ready to take another trip like this one.

## Daisy Picking in the Panamints

April 5-7, 2002, Death Valley National Park, CA

By Paul Menkes, Berkeley, CA

Not really. No daisies were harmed in the making of this backpack! During the weekend of April 5-7, 2002, seven Survivors hiked from the Panamint Valley to the top of Telescope Peak and back. We hiked up Tuber Canyon, a wonderful riparian corridor. In the last six years DS has gone in there four

times, and each time there has been water present at all of the mapped springs. Because of this, Tuber gets flowers even in a very dry year. We saw a lot of lovely lupines, a few globe mallows, and three magnificent examples of the rare Panamint daisy.

The Panamint Valley, one of the great American scenic treasures, is facing two major threats: Surprise Canyon may be reopened as an extreme ORV route, and the Briggs Gold Mine could be expanded. Surprise Canyon may be even more sensitive than Tuber Canyon, and mine expansion will disfigure the Panamint Valley viewshed even more. Happily for us, Tuber Canyon is completely protected as part of Death Valley National Park, nonetheless, at the trailhead I told the trip participants about the dangers Panamint Valley faces.

Stumbling up the lower canyon, we hugged the loose, rocky slope on the south side. Suddenly, we came upon a Panamint daisy. Its pale yellow petals seemed to glow in contrast to everything else in the canyon, all of which seemed dry and brittle in comparison. We stopped and gawked. A little further up we found two more plants which, if possible, were even more beautiful. This was one of those sublime backpacking moments that make desert backpacking so wonderful.

Further up the canyon we camped in a lovely juniper-pinyon forest. We found numerous mining camps, and remains of pipelines that brought water from the upper springs to lower in the canyon. In one dry wash we came up to a teepee made of logs. Nearby were empty rusted cans and broken glass. At some point in the last century a miner probably made this mess.

We also dayhiked up the rugged canyon to the crest of the Panamints. We huffed and puffed up to Arcane Meadows, then turned south and hiked to 11,049' Telescope Peak. Even on a day with poor visibility we had a great view down to Badwater, only fifteen miles away and 11,328' below! All in all, it was a great backpack made very special by our encounter with Panamint daisies.



Butterfly in the Lupine

Paul Briekert

## Wind in the Willows, and Everywhere Else: Hunter Mountain Backpack

April 26-28, 2002, Death Valley National Park, CA



Steve Tabor

By Steve Tabor

After weeks of unseasonable heat in Death Valley, the desert turned cold on the last weekend of April. This trip was a reconnaissance of an alternate Desert Trail route on Hunter Mountain. At times, it seemed more like a battle in the Arctic.

We parked our cars on the Saline Valley Road where Hunter Mountain Road goes uphill. The latter had some atrocious pits when we'd done the Desert Trail Relay the previous fall, so my plan was to scout the suitability of an extension of the Desert Trail from Marble Canyon to a place where a simple passenger car could be left. This would add a day to each segment of the route on Hunter Mountain, a burden to be welcomed if the country was exciting enough. It was. We hiked up the road past Jackass Spring, then took a side canyon off to the east. We immediately found ourselves in dense sagebrush, with only a faint deer trail to guide us uphill, to keep us out of the even brushier bottom. The trail swung around to the south and we swung with it.

At the crest, the deer trail became fainter, as animal trails do when they reach a flat where the beasts can wander. We ate lunch at the high point. The clouds thickened and the wind came up. Soft hail, or "graupel," began to fall on our little picnic. It was not enough to cause us to move on; we suffered through it. So dense was the vegetation that I had to study the map to see which way to turn. Hunter

Mountain certainly feels like wilderness once you're away from the road.

I led us north down a drainage toward a cabin showing on the map. We had to fight our way through some wild rose thickets and rabbitbrush messes to proceed. The gulch became a deep trench with steep brushy walls. I kept pressing on, but the other hikers asked me to slow down. Folks were falling behind in the brush. Finally I stopped, in a place with high rocky cliffs on both sides. When the hikers in the rear came up, I was informed that they'd seen a mountain lion on the rocks, watching us. Apparently the lion had quietly watched the first six of us pass below. Only the pair of hikers in the rear saw it, before it snuck away. We'd been seeing tracks on the other side of the hill. It was good to see the lion here, but I'm glad one of our hikers wasn't picked off as a laggard. That's the normal lion way of stalking.

The springs above and below the cabin were almost dry. We continued down the canyon, then hiked north in the sagebrush across the flat top of Hunter. This was a beautiful sage flat with pinyon pine interspersed. To our right, the trees were thick. To our left, the country was more open. I was aiming for the ten-foot-high metal pole that marked the old CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) trail that led down into Cottonwood Canyon. I'd found it before in 1991, in the middle of a burn area. In the dense brush of 1992, I had trouble finding it again. For some reason, I thought I remembered the trail that led north and east from the pole. If it was there in 1991, it was obliterated now. This historic trail dating from the 1930s was the reason why I'd brought us this way. We spotted the pole only by accident. Close work with the map was necessary to get us to the pole and into the right canyon.

I stopped us partway down for a well-deserved rest. The bushwhacking had left us, especially me, really tired. Five hundred feet below the crest, we picked up a wild horse trail that led downhill. I now knew we were on the right track. The wind picked up and



Steve Tabor

Looking south into Cottonwood Canyon from CCC trail



Steve Tabor

**Hikers on spur trail to Marble Canyon; Cottonwood Canyon in background**

began to blow cold. An hour before dark, I stopped the group and asked what was more important: to make progress, or to camp in a nearby sheltered gulch. We'd have no view there, but the choice was obvious.

The wind blew colder as night fell. It was hard to believe that, two weeks earlier and barely twenty miles away as the crow flies, Dave McMullen's Green Tortoise crowd had experienced temperatures of 106 F. We went to bed early and I slept with all my clothes on. It was 23 F. when I awoke.

The next day, we left the packs and day hiked downhill on the horse trail. We lost it a couple of times, but by now we were following the only route down that was halfway easy. Once again, I followed the 1955 USGS topo map with its faint dashed line. We zigged and zagged with that line as we descended toward Cottonwood.

At 5500' we rested in a wide clearing loaded with obsidian shards. A metate, or Indian grinding stone, lay nearby. Also prominent was a faded spray-painted arrow. Now I knew we were on the right track! We picked our way downstream to the big cottonwood grove at the head of Deadhorse Canyon, where we found an old deer skull and a bighorn rack. Starting down the wash from the grove, we found it to be a huge mess of interlocking blowdowns. The flood of September 2001 had done some damage. I decided we would not follow through with my plan to descend Deadhorse to Marble Canyon. We'd have to go somewhere else.

I struggled up the west wall of the canyon to regain the old CCC trail. I found it after a climb of 100 feet. The trail was better here, which was not surprising, considering there was nowhere else to go. The trail clung to the steep sidehill. Looking down, I could see that Deadhorse was as impassable now as it had been in 1991. No doubt it had been that way since the days of Shorty Harris.

The tangle of willows and wild roses and mesquite down there was immense! Only one way to go: straight ahead.

We achieved the crest, then dropped to a nice little spring overlooking the deep trench of Cottonwood Canyon. The view from there has got to be one of the great ones of the desert. The upper canyon is a couple of miles long, ringed round by steep high hills. The hills on the west are truncated on the opposite side by 5000-foot cliffs dropping to Panamint Valley. The canyon to the west is another deep brushy trench, this one with water. The hills to the south rise and fall for many miles more. It's remote country, and awe-

some desert. It was good to sit and stare.

Dropping to Cottonwood, I kept us on the east side of the canyon, hoping to contour up to a pass below Canyon Point. Propelled by both luck and skill, we stumbled on a trail that took us gently up to the pass. After a quick lunch, we followed the trail, now well-worn from hikers on the Cottonwood-Marble loop. The trail led down a canyon to the west, then on to a fantastic overlook, where we could peer a thousand feet down into Marble Canyon, whose bottom had been swept clear of debris by the September flood. There was also a great view of the contrast between the rounded granite hills of the upper canyon and the colorful, striated sedimentary cliffs of the lower canyon. This, too, is one of the great desert views! Bob Lyon had taken his hikers straight down on the loose granite gruss when he'd led this hike in 2000, but I was convinced that the 1955 map was right, that a prospector's trail went down into Marble, one you could take a mule on. A group of us headed east on the continuation of the trail. We found it dropping off the slope and switchbacking down into the next gulch. We didn't follow it all the way down, just far enough to determine its existence. It's definitely there. How easy it is to follow uphill from the bottom, and how faint, are questions best left for a future trip.

Way overextended, we started back up to the packs in late afternoon. It was a race against the late sunshine, and afterwards, the wind. We pushed hard to get up. I was tired most of the way.

We hiked to Upper Cottonwood Spring, on good trail. We stopped for a long time at the spring, carefully dipping water from the small pool Spencer Berman had constructed on the way down. We stopped several times during our 2100 foot ascent. It was almost like climbing a mountain in places, despite the trail. After passing the flat with the prehistoric sites, we had to do the next 500 feet on faith, for the trail was indistinct. Here again, the map

came in handy.

As we neared the crest, the wind picked up and blew hard from the west. Scraps of ragged cloud moved across distant peaks. Near the camp, the crest of Hunter Mountain across the canyon looked like an alien being, like something from "The Night on Bald Mountain," nothing like Death Valley National Park in April. As the temperature dropped, several of us stopped and put on all our clothing, even gloves. Hikers swapped articles of clothing, just to ward off hypothermia.

I was the last one into camp. There were several poignant moments as the other hikers in the rear waited for me on the trail, crouched behind large rocks to protect themselves from wind blasts. I was fighting exhaustion. We made it back to the packs just before dark. I'm afraid I wasn't very sociable that night. I ate and dove into my thin sleeping bag, fully clothed. I drifted off as candle lanterns flickered in the wind blasts. When I woke up, it was 19 F. My 30-degree bag had been truly tested.

The backpack uphill on day three was anticlimactic. We hiked slowly, still sore from the day before. We spotted a couple of wild horses as we ascended. The trail was easier to find, until we got to the flat. There, I had to lead us largely by compass. We again found the CCC pole only by accident. The rolling top and granite knobs made clear sight difficult. Once at the pole, it was easier.

We stumbled on another cabin showing on the map. It was hidden in the brush. Below was a cow-ripped meadow, wet and grassy, an anomaly in these parts, but a fitting place for Rupert Essinger to pull out a Shakespeare quotation, which he read to us. The language of Elizabethan England seems obscure, yet it made sense as we reclined on that sunny cow-cropped lawn. Suffice to say, my Desert Trail guidebook will refer to this as "Shakespeare Meadow".

We walked down the road to the cars, our exploration over. It was warmer as we hiked out, and the wind had stopped. That was reason enough to be happy. I was satisfied that this change to the route of the Desert Trail would work. I was struck, though, by the obscurity of this route. I'd assumed that, since I had "discovered" this old prospectors' trail on the map, had located it on the ground in 1991, and had published its existence in the SURVIVOR so many years ago, that others would have been here by now, would have walked it, and would know it. I expected a trail well-worn by hikers. I was shocked to find the trail no better now than then, perhaps even more obscure. Nobody had been on it but wild horses. The weather had obliterated it further. It was a revelation.

It must be my infinite expectation of progress. I came of age at a time when progress and improvement were expected, even assumed. Starting from Point A and moving toward Point B was the normal way, and things would get better. Obscure desert trails would become known, the desert would be appreciated, ignorance would be abated and overturned. But on the Hunter-Cottonwood Trail, not much had changed. We were re-inventing the wheel. The desert was reclaiming its own, making its own kind of progress.

*O, mighty is the powerful grace that lies  
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:  
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live  
But to the earth some special good doth give...  
Nor ought so good but, strain'd from that fair use,  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.  
Virtue itself turns vice being misapplied,  
And vice sometimes by action dignified.*  
*Romeo and Juliet, Act 2 Scene 3*

## Hart Mountain Car Camp

May 25-27, 2002, Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, SE Oregon



Steve Tabor

View over Campbell Lake from Poker Jim Ridge

By Steve Tabor, Alameda, CA

This car camp was an anniversary celebration for me. It was ten years ago this weekend that I led a car camp to this National Wildlife Refuge. I enjoyed it then; I am equally impressed by it now. Another source of joy was the turnout. Twenty-seven Survivors joined me on this trip, a number not often seen since the early days of our trips program.

We met in Lakeview, Oregon. Our cars took up all of the parking spaces in front of the Lakeview Post Office. Good thing it was a Saturday morning! We drove over the lava plateaus and through the small village of Plush, then on to the Hart Mountain Refuge. On the plateau, we saw several antelope, both near and far from the road. Bright red Indian paintbrush startled our eyes as we drove along. The sagebrush was about as green as it can get, close to blooming (the blooms are also green).

We stopped at a marsh where there is a small display and a birders' platform. Not many birds were in evidence, and the marsh grasses were dry. We walked across the road to the shore of Hart Lake, but saw few birds there either. A small snake poked its head out of the rocks and watched us walk. We gave up on this place early and drove on. Winter is the best season for birds at this refuge.

Next, we drove on to Flagstaff Lake for a walk in country away from the road. We parked along the gravel road that runs alongside Flagstaff and hiked south toward Mugwump Lake. Our walk took us across stabilized sand dunes clothed in greasewood shrubs and around various vernal pools, some wet, some muddy and

some dry. I got great pictures of Survivors on the mud flats, taking giant steps. On the way to Mugwump, we passed one small pool that still had water. About a dozen white pelicans were floating in the water, secure in their refuge from foxes and bobcats. We watched them as they skittered around; our presence made them nervous. They eventually flew up, showing off giant five-foot wingspans. Meadowlarks called in the brush, not yet knowing this is desert. Winter floods were giving way to summer's heat. The ground here takes the whole of spring season to dry out. When we'd been here in 1992 after a five-year drought, all of these lakes were dry clay pans. But the last few years have been wet ones, so more than half the lakes in this basin now held water. In truly wet years, this whole part of the valley is inundated in winter and spring. No wonder birds love it as they cruise on the Pacific Flyway between Mexico and interior Canada.

By noon we reached Mugwump. This was a good-sized body of water, about half a square mile. We took up a position on the high dune above the north shore. Only a few birds flew in and out of the water: avocets, willets, baby ducks, and coots. Though small in number, the birds were loud. The view was better: the expanse of water locked between stabilized dunes, ringed 'round by a green weedy patch. It was easy to see why we found so many shards of obsidian around. This must have been a hunting heaven for native tribes. I found a perfect obsidian arrow head and, after letting everyone admire it, buried it again for some other hikers to find and enjoy.

The ride up the rim road to the plateau was spectacular! We got good views of the lakes and especially of the north end of the plateau, out toward Poker Jim Ridge. There, vertical lava cliffs rose up out of the water of Stone Corral Lake. Horizontal shorelines were etched into the cliffs and talus. During the Ice Age, water had been four hundred feet deep and extended far across the valley. We drove east along the road to the Refuge Headquarters. There weren't enough maps and brochures available for all of us, it being only the beginning of the season. The campground host got wind of our presence and quickly decided to guide us into a secluded and hidden part of the campground where our presence wouldn't disturb the other guests. We convoyed with her to a nice meadow alongside Rock Creek. Our invading regiment set up camp by the babbling brook. Those who had already chosen the meadow for a little privacy soon left for

more secluded realms.

Before dinner, a group of us hiked downstream along the brook. We crossed and re-crossed the watercourse, through aspens and heavy grass. An old beaver dam, now abandoned, helped hold back the stream. A fire had raced through, burning the aspen blowdowns and renewing the grass. At the far north end, we saw a huge nest high in a snag, with a large raptor and at least one chick. We spied the bird with binoculars and debated long and hard about what it was. I thought it was a golden eagle, and I was not alone. At length, the bird flew off, showing its bright red tail.

Yes, it was a red-tailed hawk, but a large one. On the way back to camp, we heard a grouse, but we never saw it. Dinner, a dip in the hot spring, and a bright campfire graced the night. Most of us slept inside to ward off mosquitoes.

The morning of the second day was cloudy and cool. We hiked south from the campground, up Bond Creek. Bond had great aspen and even better birds. Expert birder Jeffrey Black was along to identify species. We saw a yellow warbler, a black-headed grosbeak, white-crowned sparrows, and the ubiquitous robins. At the head of the creek, we hiked up to the crest through dense sagebrush. On top, we rested, with views both east and west.

A lone antelope watched us from the ridge above before bounding off. The rest of the morning, we hiked along the crest, mostly on an abandoned jeep trail. We ate lunch at 7100', just above a large persistent snow bank. A strong wind blew from the south, but we were sheltered. The temperature never went above 70 F. We had a long view to the northeast and east, out toward the Steens Mountain and distant plateaus. The clouds made the sky hazy but, still, the sense of distance was great. It is oh! so tempting just to chuck it all and walk to the horizon in this country. That's the effect these high plateaus have on me.

After lunch, a couple of us walked higher on the plateau for a view to the southeast. Several lakes could be seen out there, occupying various depressions. Snow banks also persisted on the north sides of lava rims. I'd like to backpack out there someday, when the lakes are full and I won't have to worry about water. In the afternoon, we hiked along the jeep trail to the west, making a loop back down toward camp. I had no energy for a climb of 8017' Warner Peak, but I expected others might. I was surprised when only one person wanted to go.



Steve Tabor

Lizard petroglyph at Petroglyph Lake

When we reached the saddle below the peak, the group split into two. One group wanted to hurry back to camp. The other wanted to do Rock Creek Narrows to the northeast. I was among the second group. We dropped down the road through a snow bank, then into a beautiful aspen grove. We broke out into a meadow, whereupon it began to shower. We put on rain gear and hiked on in the drizzle. It was a great little interlude of wet and fragrance. Not only the sagebrush, but also the dry grass gave out odors. The country was open, the meadow only a little soggy. It was a beautiful walk. After a mile of open meadow, we entered the narrows on a trail. The stream meandered between terraces of green turf. We rested on the bank above some willows and watched a western tanager for awhile. Other birds were also in the thicket. Later, we followed the trail through the narrows, past green aspen and beaver dams and fallen trees. This was a great wilderness walk. Only a mile and a half the rest of the way, but it was exquisite in its strangeness and its ambience. In this country, aspen are never dominant, they're only tasty tidbits tucked away in nooks and crannies.

Back at the camp, we ate another dinner and enjoyed another fire, but the vigorous outdoor life seemed to take its toll. Our weary crowd didn't want to stay up late, and there were few takers for the hot pools. Everybody was in bed by 10:30 p.m.

On the last day, several people left early, but a small group stayed together for the last hike of the trip. We drove out past the headquarters to Petroglyph Lake, then hiked to Poker Jim Ridge. The drive to the lake was rough on the passenger cars, but it was well worth it. Lava rims on the west side of the lake had some great rock art: Anasazi-like male figures, representational totems of bighorns, lizards and snakes, and abstract designs like those in the

Mojave. It was a great setting for the art, with the lake sunken below the plateau surface, and its two companion lakes a short way east. From the lake, we hiked north on the rocky, scrubby plateau to Poker Jim Ridge. There we ate lunch and enjoyed the view west out over Campbell Lake and on to the western horizon. The Cascades were there, but you wouldn't know it on this hazy day. Peter Skene Ogden himself probably thought the desert went on forever when he came through here in 1829. A good half hour was spent watching a small family of violet-green cliff swallows playing on the cliffs. The young ones had just learned to fly. It was a good end to a great trip.

I was impressed once again with the variety of wildlife here, despite the bitter cold winters. Somehow, the antelope make it through the winter, and so do the lizards and snakes. Some of the birds may leave, but most stay all winter: the swallows and rock wrens and hawks. Unlike most Americans, I guess I've come to associate sagebrush with "good wildlife values." You'll never find me saying, "but there's nothing there!" Take a spring or summer trip to this refuge if you want to see some animals and birds. Camping is free and easy. It should be free of snow from mid-April through October. Even at the peak of summer, only the valleys will be hot; the plateaus are always cool enough for enjoyable hiking. Most spring seasons, May and early June will have occasional gentle rains or showers, making for interesting weather. This is great country to visit, and return to. My thanks to the many activists who worked so hard to get this Refuge established. In Europe or Asia, wealthy landowners or the army take this kind of country for themselves, scouring it for meat or heads. We in America are fortunate to have places like this to enjoy; that is, if we have the courage to seize them and defend them for the public good.



Hart Lake and Hart Mountain Rim

Steve Tabor

## Pedaling and Pushing in the White Mountains

June 14-16, 2002, Eastern California



Paul Menkes

Paul Menkes in action

By Paul Menkes, Berkeley, CA

Don't let those geologists lie to you. They will tell you that the White Mountains are a granitic uplift covered by the limestone remains of an ancient seabed. This is absolutely false. In reality, the White Mountains are the world's largest sand dunes. These dunes are thousands of feet higher than any other dune system in California. They make the Kelso Dunes look like a sand box.

That is how it felt at times when I led one other intrepid Survivor on a foolhardy expedition: we climbed the White Mountains from the bottom to the top of 14,246' White Mountain Peak. Then we dropped down from the crest and went 6,000' down the perilous Silver Canyon Road to the bottom again.

Oh, one other thing: we did it on bicycles. But wait, there's more! We even dragged 50-pound trailers behind us. So we feel that we know exactly what those mountains are made of.

There were few inquiries to the trip listing, and only Alan Katz was serious about going. The pairing of Alan and me turned out rather nicely. Alan's background is not as a desert hiker, but rather as one of the original mountain bikers from Marin. We started doing training rides in the East Bay and he immediately steered us to the more difficult and varied terrain of Marin. For weeks we were fixtures there, riding along from bay to oceanside and dragging our trailers behind us.

For his part, Alan had limited desert experience, and this was his opportunity to see a new part of the world and to get back into biking. Wherever we went people would ask us about the trailers and Alan could eagerly answer that we were preparing for the White Mountains. Those are in New Hampshire, right? No, they're here in California. Invariably that person would shake his head. I am sure he was picturing the Matterhorn ride at Disneyland as 'White Mountain'.

We left the Bay Area on a Thursday and headed to the Owens Valley. For this point-to-point trip we had all of our gear in one car, with bikes on top. On Friday morning we parked the car at the

Laws Railroad Museum in the Owens Valley and got a shuttle ride to Westgard Pass, at the crest of the White Mountains. We had 80 miles to ride. The trip would be grueling, but we started with a fun 2,000' drop down Highway 168 into Deep Springs Valley. Going 35 mph, we passed a rattlesnake crossing the road. We rode past the dry lake all the way to the far eastern end of the valley. Near the turnoff to Deep Springs College we left the paved road, going up Wyman Canyon Road.

That's when the real fun began. Steve Tabor has a favorite saying, "The map is not the terrain." My topo showed an improved road extending from Highway 168 to the mouth of Wyman Canyon. Instead we immediately got stuck as our bike trailers got mired in sand. We had to push our bikes a mile through the sand. Once we got to the mouth we could rest at the site of White Mountain City. All that is left of it is a few walls and a kiln. Wyman Creek flows all the way down to the mouth of the canyon, where it disappears into the sand.

The road up the canyon was rough but passable and we steadily toiled up the hill. Suddenly the canyon narrowed and we were moving through the Royal Gorge. A pretty stream criss-crossed the road numerous times, before briefly becoming the road. Flowers, such as globe mallow, bloomed in the mild June temperatures. We made it to the turnoff to Dead Horse Meadow and Crooked Creek.

Here the road immediately steepens and gets looser, turning very, very sandy. We got off our bikes and pushed. And pushed. And pushed. And pushed some more. There was perhaps a quarter-mile of bikable road in this entire stretch. Invariably I would get to the end of one those stretches and fall. Numerous minor cuts started appearing on my calves and shins. Once I fell and landed on an old man cactus (*Cephalocereus senilis*). I spent the next 20 minutes pulling needles out of my butt, and then resumed riding, er, pushing.

At the top of the hill we had a magnificent view of Dead Horse Meadow and north along the Whites. We could see our route through the meadow as it rose up to what should be the next hard section, an 800' climb to upper Crooked Creek Canyon. But first I spent another 20 minutes having Alan pull the rest of the cactus needles out of my rear. Surely, he had no idea that this was what he was getting into when he signed up for the trip!

The road down into Dead Horse Meadow is short, steep and loose. We crossed Crooked Creek and headed north. Soon we started climbing through fantastic hills of granite boulder heaps and hoodoos. Almost immediately, however, the road turned into a nightmare – impossibly steep and sandy. Slowly we would heave our bikes up the short slopes, then ride to the bottom on the other side, and get mired in sand as we headed up the next slope. Minutes turned into hours and afternoon turned to evening.

My goal for the day had been to get a couple of miles north of the hoodoo-land above Dead Horse Meadow. This would involve pushing bikes on the steepest section yet, a one mile, 800' climb and riding for several miles in the gloom. But with darkness approaching fast, I opted for a camp at the foot of the climb to the upper canyon.

Our camp was in a fantastically beautiful site about 100 yards above Crooked Creek. We rode our bikes to a level spot between three large pinyons. Alan dubbed the spot the "three kings" because of its prominent trees. We had a wonderful view of the hoodoo-land and of Crooked Creek where it falls steeply from the upper canyon down to our level.

Our first day had been grueling and we got to camp late, going far into the night to cook and eat. We slept in and got out of camp late, leaving at 9 a.m., with our biggest hill before us. There was no pretense of trying to ride up this one. Ninety minutes later, we were far above the three kings and on the brink of the upper canyon. There we passed a number of adits and claims. Within the past twenty years someone had been working this steep canyon side, and at some point they gave up and left all of their broken equipment and plastic piping strewn everywhere, spoiling a fantastic view.

We made it above the first treeline at 9,000 feet, and started riding again. Then we rolled along a few miles and dropped into the upper canyon of Crooked Creek. Flowers bloomed everywhere, with a riot of blue lupines. We lunched next to the creek. Then we filled up all of our water containers and headed to the crest. Soon we were in the second tree zone, in the bristlecone pine forest.

By 5 p.m. we made it to the crest and White Mountain Road. The first day-and-a-half had been exhausting. My original plan had been to ride to the peak on the second day, yet we were fifteen

miles away. In order to complete our goal, we would have to ride 45 miles on our last day. I proposed that we give up on the peak and just ride the 15 miles to the car, down in the Owens Valley.

Alan was adamant. We had just done what few people have ever done: take fully loaded bikes from the bottom of the Whites to the crest. Why give up now? He pointed to a rise a mile or so away: "Let's ride up there, camp, and do the peak tomorrow." It would make it an incredibly long day. But compared to what we had just ridden and pushed, we knew the roads would be easy. All we needed to do was pedal, even if it would be between 11,000 and 14,000 feet. We headed towards Alan's rise.

Once again we had a fantastic campsite. At 10,800 feet we had a view of the distant Sierra, Fish Lake Valley, the Silver Peak Range and the high peaks of the Inyo. We could make out the Eureka Sand Dunes and laugh grimly, thinking of what we had done to climb up our particular sand mounds. Nearby we could see the famed Patriarch Grove of bristlecone pines. A marmot scampered in the rocks.

On Sunday we rose early, packed our gear, and stowed our trailers. We would ride unencumbered today, carrying only emergency gear and three quarts each of water and Gatorade. By 7:30 a.m. we were climbing towards the Patriarch Grove. Soon we reached the locked gate below Mt. Barcroft Research Station. Now we saw dozens of marmots fearlessly scampering about. Several years ago a Barcroft researcher related to me that she was researching the



Paul Menkes

Alan Katz enjoying the view and solitude on the crest of the White Mountains; 14,246' White Mtn peak visible in distance

aggressive behavior of the marmots by the gate. I could picture them wearing tiny leather jackets and shaking down hikers. With this thought in my mind we headed onward.

We came to our first big climb, riding from the gate to the observatory above the research station at nearly 13,000'. Several times we had to dismount our bikes, catch our breath, and remount, sometimes pushing a very short way. The altitude did affect us, but now we were stronger, and without trailers we could really move. We passed many hikers on the road, as well as scores of yellow-bellied marmots. Soon we made it to the saddle just below the peak itself.

The final push was up the switchbacks to the peak, which start at a dip in the saddle at 12,900'. We did not have the lungs to bike up, even though the road was not that difficult. We pushed our bikes to 13,100' and dropped them. From there we trudged up to the top, joining a small line of humanoid ants going to a very popular peak. At last, we made it! I shook Alan's hand and thanked him for persevering and insisting we go for the peak. This was his very first 14,000' summit, and my seventh. We savored the view.

While at the peak we chatted with our fellow climbers. We proudly bragged of our route and showed off my legs, still scarred from that first miserable day of riding. While congratulating the various hikers we discovered a group of folks belonging to the Friends of the Inyo and the Wilderness Society. They were on a mapping expedition for a proposed wilderness area in the Whites. Amazingly the White Mountains contain no designated wilderness in California [See Paul's article this issue on the proposed White Mountains Wilderness page 28 -ed.].

Now came the ride down. We rode swiftly, stopping only to shovel snow into water bottles. We got to our trailers and reattached them to our bikes. Moving along smoothly in the early evening, we climbed one last uphill before getting to the Silver Canyon cutoff 10,000'.

Suddenly the road dropped out from under us and we could look almost straight down to the village of Laws, 6,000' below. It was 8 p.m. and turning to dusk. We started down. Immediately we hit speeds of 15-25 mph on the steep inclines. As the road twisted and turned we hurtled down, propelled by fifty pounds of trailer and gear. We had to stop at least five times to let our tire rims cool

down from the constant application of brakes. We continued moving, using all of our strength and skill to maneuver the steeps.

In no time we made it to the lower canyon, where the road winds amidst the cottonwoods of Silver Creek. We started hitting speeds of 45 mph in the approaching gloom. Four or five times we would spectacularly cross the creek, which was at least a foot deep. This instantly cooled our brakes as well as us. The heat of the



Paul Menkes

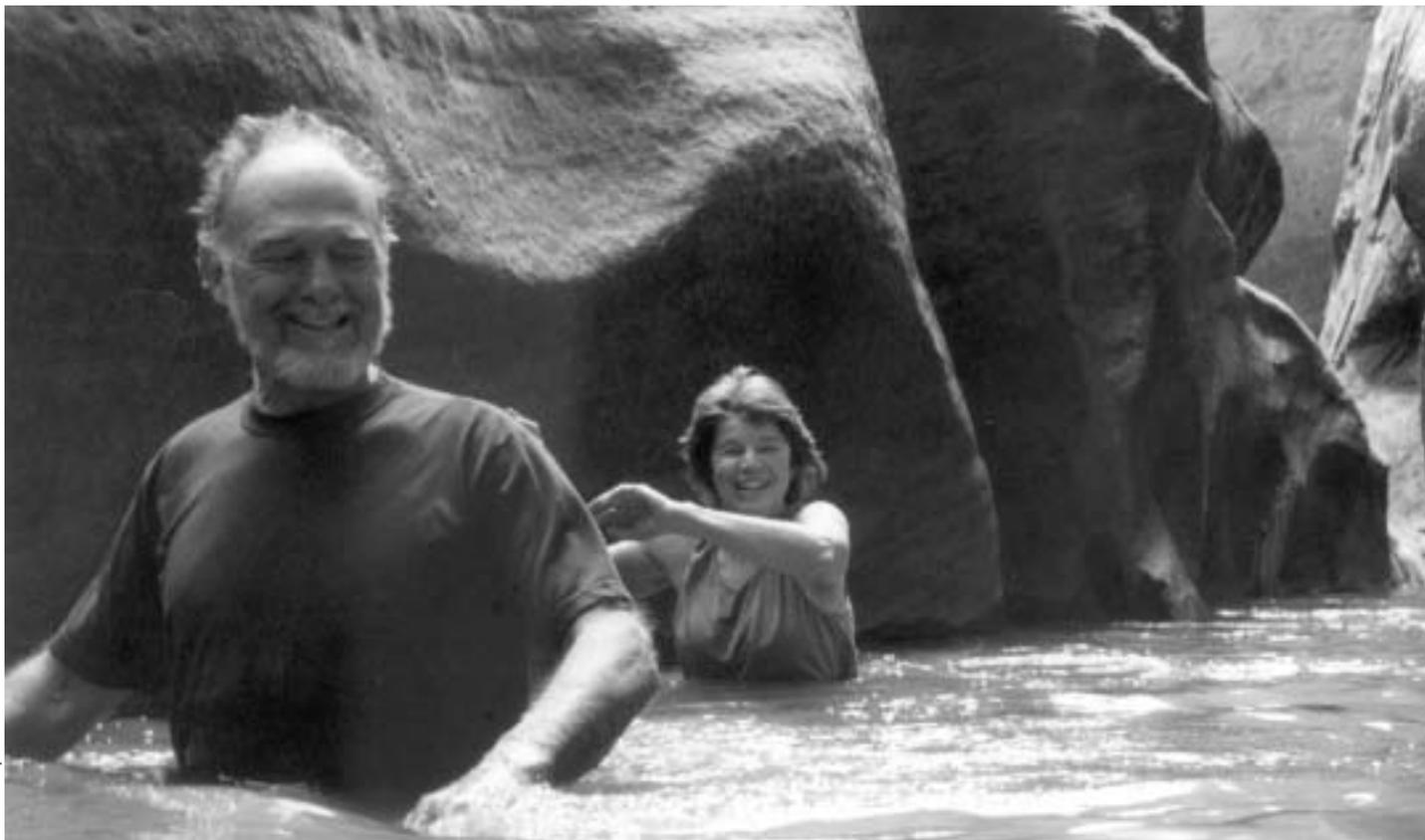
Alan Katz grinding up Wyman Canyon with the Sierra Nevada in the background

Owens Valley oozed up into the canyon.

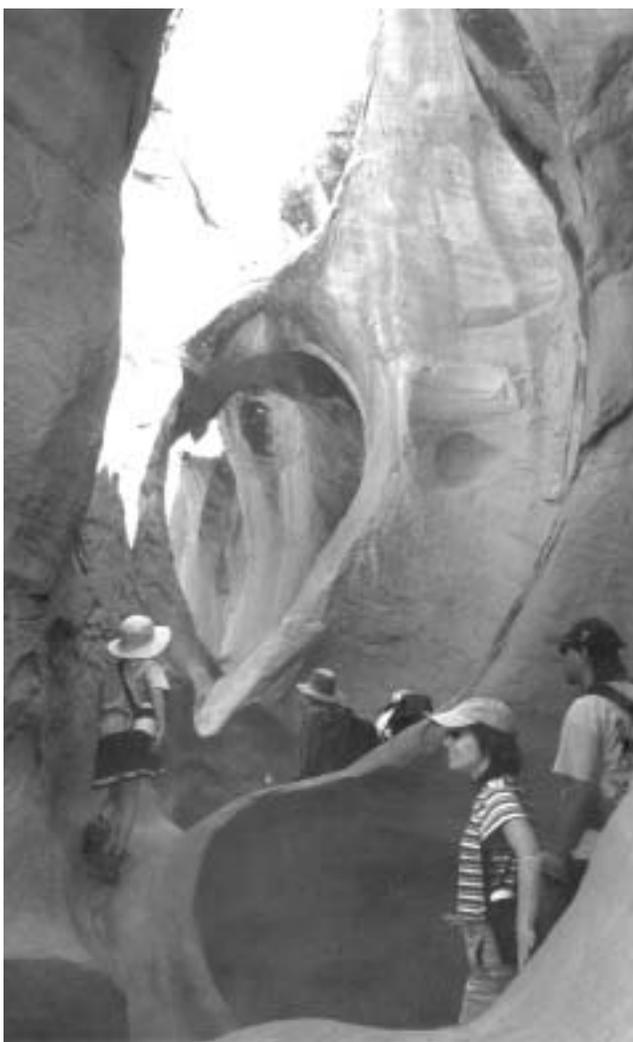
Suddenly we broke through the mouth of the canyon and cruised into Laws. In less than fifty minutes we had dropped 10 miles and 6,000'. In the dark at the railroad museum we dismounted for the last time. The ride down was one of the most exhilarating experiences either of us had ever done. More incredibly, just hours before we had been on a 14,000' peak! Now it was behind us. In the darkness and stifling heat we loaded up the car and headed back to civilized lands.

#### Statistics:

Total elevation gain:	11,000'
Total elevation loss:	14,000'
Lowest elevation:	4,100'
Highest elevation:	14,246'
Total distance:	80 miles
Weight of bicycle:	27 pounds
Weight of trailer/gear:	50 pounds
Number of falls:	Alan-1/Paul-7
Number of flats:	Alan-1/Paul-0
Water/Gatorade consumed:	Many gallons



Steve Perry



Steve Perry

## Walking the Waterpocket Fold

May 5-11, 2002, Capitol Reef National Park, Utah

By Nikki Ausschnitt, San Francisco, CA

Our hikes were through beautiful and bizarre landscapes created zillions of years ago when the earth heaved up an ocean bed and rearranged it into jagged eastward tilted mountains of contrasting colors: red Wingate and white Navajo with a band of purple Kayente between, and a river running through it, giving it the name Waterpocket Fold.

We went through slot canyons and washes with endless sheer rock walls carved into sinuous snakings by the ancient river.

Even had to swim at one point where the canyon walls closed in on us.

There were awesome arches that make cathedrals look puny and, in ones with water seeps, lush growths of maidenhair ferns came straight out of the rock - quite a contrast in that arid country.

Slept in an old Mormon corral and saw a rattlesnake, a whipsnake trying to eat a lizard twice his size, and lots of varieties of lizards. There were rocks of all colors and tumbleweeds, wild lavender, yucca, just blooming cacti and sage.

But the vastness and expanse of the landscape that is painted a kaleidoscope of colors, ever changed by the clouds passing in the huge sky overhead, is the most impressive sight. We didn't bathe for a week and still I loved it all.

Sounds like something Coleridge, in his drugged stupor, might have written in "Kubla Khan," doesn't it? It was...minus the drugs which weren't needed.

# PROTECTING THE DESERT

## Unassigned Territory and The Mystery Of The Mojave

By Bob Ellis, Berkeley, CA

*Death Notices - SF Chronicle Saturday July 20th, 2002*

*WALFRID SAARNI, 83, passed away peacefully at his home in Berkeley, surrounded by his loving family, on July 5th, 2002. He was born February 25, 1915, in Astoria, Oregon, lived in Berkeley 74 years, attended Berkeley public schools, and graduated from UC Berkeley in 1938 in zoology and chemistry. Berkeley's City Council proclaimed March 12, 2002, "Walfrid and Margaret Saarni Day" in honor of their 50 years of contributions to the well-being of their North Berkeley neighborhood*

*Walfrid worked as a research chemist at Shell Development in Emeryville for 32 years, and served in the Coast Guard Auxiliary during World War II. He developed a lifelong passion for the Mojave Desert and Panamint Mountains, where he worked as a boy and young man on the Myers family's homestead and mine claim. Other passions were hunting, fishing, and environmental conservation.*

I never met Mr. Saarni, I don't know anyone else who did. I may go to his memorial service next week because he seemed to share something that I may have some of. I only developed my passion for the desert in 1989 during a week-long community college field class at Anza-Borrego. But since that time the Sierras are only in the way, I must push through to the desert. I am thoroughly grateful for my desert passion. That I am still an alive, energetic person, happy with retirement, is largely due to the development of this passion. It seems to keep expanding into new dimensions of the desert each year.

Sometimes I have tried to express my passion to others, occasionally through the Survivor, other times verbally, in part to try to get a better definition for myself. More recently, I have tried to convey some of this passion to those in attendance at the BLM's Desert District Advisory Council meetings. In my verbal report as environmental representative and de facto wilderness and non-motorized recreation representative, I describe the intangible bene-

fits of walking in the desert: peace and quiet, internal renewal, re-connection with nature, a relationship with large space, an antidote to urban life. Some people respond, most don't.

Walking up the nearby 700 foot hill here in North Berkeley this morning with my 40 lb. pack, getting my legs and shoulders ready for another journey, I thought about Kem Nunn's 1987 novel of the Mojave desert, "Unassigned Territory." I read it about ten years ago and for me two phrases stand out, the title and "the mystery of the Mojave." A place not assigned and a place with some mystery: these are two seldom expressed attributes of the desert passion I have. Once I encouraged others to "de-name" wilderness areas, to remove the names from physical features on the maps, so that people would have to discover what was there for themselves, even just to talk to each other about it. It's very interesting to talk to others about unnamed places, without those coded labels that give a short-hand pseudo-exactitude to your description. A conversation about the second canyon branching northeast from the last high point on the Cottonwood Range is significantly different from the same conversation about Bighorn Gorge. Travel to unnamed places gives one the unexpected. In our recent hike from Trona to Baker, we traveled to the south of the Owlshead Mountains. The area comprises three significant, unnamed mountain ridge systems. It is a place of mystery, names have not been assigned. I am drawn there again and again. I don't know what the elements of Mr. Saarni's passion were. I do know there are many others out there with desert passion. You encounter them occasionally in remote outback places. The late Wendell Moyer was bitten by the Inyos. Last fall we met a day-hiker in Dedeckera Canyon, in Eureka Valley, who had been coming out regularly for fifteen years. I asked him what drew him to Eureka Valley. Plants? Geology? Landscape? History? He hadn't worked it out verbally, he said, he just liked it all. The Myers Ranch main buildings burned down last year. Mr. Saarni and Wendell Moyer have passed on. New folks are encountering our unassigned territory and getting inspired by the mystery of the Mojave. More of us need to struggle to articulate our passion for others. Not so much because we need to for our enjoyment, but to build a constituency to defend attacks on that quality of desert mystery. Collectively, we care very much. We have to find ways to let agency managers and politicians know that.

**Just Say NO to the Briggs Mine in Panamint Valley at:**  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~bobellisds/BriggsMine/PanamintValleyMainPage.htm>



# ISSUES WATCH

By Janet Johnson, Hayward, CA

## Wilderness Protection: New Desert Areas Included

On May 21st, Senator Barbara Boxer formally introduced her California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act of 2002 in the Senate as S. 2535. If passed, 2.5 million acres of new wilderness will be created. The list of proposed wilderness areas is impressive and several can be found in the desert regions of our state. These include: Avawatz Mountains Wilderness, Cady Mountains Wilderness, Death Valley National Park Wilderness Area Additions, Joshua Tree National Park Wilderness Area Additions, Kingston Range Wilderness, Soda Mountains Wilderness and White Mountains Wilderness. It's a grand plan and starting now Senator Boxer will need our support. As the legislation begins to move through Congress she will need as many co-sponsors as possible. As we go to press in late July she has none. All members should begin contacting their Senators and requesting that they sign on as co-sponsors of this important legislation. Senator Dianne Feinstein should receive as many letters as possible to ensure her support of Senator Boxer's bill. Write to Senator Feinstein at 1 Post Street, #2450, San Francisco, CA 94104. For other Senators' addresses, go to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

## Off Road Vehicles: Algodones Dunes and Surprise Canyon

Increased wilderness protection cannot come a moment too soon. In April it was learned that the Bush administration had issued a draft plan to re-open the Algodones Dunes to off-road vehicles. The current management plan, agreed to by conservationists, the BLM and five ORV groups, preserves half of the dunes for off-roading and the other half closed for protection of threatened species. Now the BLM has created a new proposal, which ignores its multiple use mandate by giving precedence to ORV use. Their belief that ORVs – up to 525 per day – and non-motorized, low-impact recreationists can

co-exist is not reasonable. It should be remembered that prior to the closure up to 200,000 off-road drivers would pound the dunes on weekends. Alcohol, drugs, guns and high speeds added up to a law enforcement nightmare. Public hearings have been held, but conservationists have been heavily out-numbered. Even so, opponents continue to push the BLM to issue a new draft plan, one that includes the current management plan as one of its alternatives. Public hearings are also being held on OHV use in Surprise Canyon. Off-roaders used to winch their trucks up waterfalls, cut down trees, pollute water and generally trash the area. A lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity resulted in the area being closed to off-road vehicles since spring 2000. The BLM and National Park Service are preparing a new management plan for Surprise Canyon and are coming under heavy pressure to reopen the canyon for ORV use. Reports indicate that these hearings have again been dominated by the very vocal off-roaders. Written comments will be accepted through Friday, August 30, 2002 and should be mailed to Hector Villalobos, to Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 300 South Richmond Road, Ridgecrest, CA 93555.

## Energy Development

The new July/August issue of Mother Jones magazine is largely devoted to energy issues. One article, "Open Season on Open Space" is a sobering read about the Bush administration's move to accelerate energy production across the west – often targeting sensitive areas that have remained closed to exploration and drilling in the past. As reported, to ensure that energy development gets the green light, the White House Task Force on Energy Project Streamlining is removing environmental protections that the energy industry considers roadblocks. BLM internal memos have made it clear that energy, not the environment, is now the top concern for federal land managers. When staff on the ground attempt to protect the environment by denying drilling permits, complaints to Washington by the energy firms draw swift action in the form of White House intervention to make sure that the industry gets what it wants. Dismayed? Angry? Let the

BLM, Department of the Interior and the White House know. The war on terrorism and national security issues should not be used as excuses to enrich the few at the expense of our public lands.

The extractive industries, private developers and oil companies seem to have a far more direct line to the White House than the average citizen. A further example of this is the recent revelation that an employee of a major developer, and the largest private landowner in Nevada, actually works out of the BLM office in Carson City assisting in arranging land swaps for the company. The manager of the BLM office calls it "a great success". The employee is called a volunteer, but the BLM has agreed to pick up the cost of his salary and expenses by giving the developer a credit in that amount as part of the land exchange. This means that the BLM will pay a developer's representative to work in its office and manage land acquisitions for the developer. Federal land exchanges have long been a source of controversy and federal auditors have shown that developers routinely bilk the BLM. In just one example a developer acquired 70 acres of public land that the bureau had valued at \$763,000. The next day the developer sold the land for \$4.6 million.

## Nuclear Waste: Ward Valley, CA

In April, the Ward Valley issue re-emerged in the state capitol. An Assembly committee passed AB 2214, a bill that would prohibit any further consideration of Ward Valley as a site for a low-level radioactive waste dump. It also requires that such a facility be built to long-term storage specifications and not merely as a disposal site, a significant extension of current state and federal requirements. Producers of radioactive waste and nuclear industry experts blasted the bill, stating that the lawmakers' intent is to send its waste out of state where it will pose no threat to California residents.

## Nuclear Waste: Yucca Mountain, NV

Yucca Mountain cleared one more procedural hurdle on July 9, when the Senate voted 60-39 to override Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn's veto of the facility. The

Energy Department must now submit a license application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission before it can build the repository, and could start shipping waste to the site within eight years. The battle against Yucca Mountain now shifts to the courts, where five pending lawsuits oppose the project on environmental and procedural grounds, and to the Congressional appropriations committees, which will be asked to approve an estimated \$49 billion over the next 17 years to build and maintain the facility.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal opined on July 10: "No, the battle is not yet lost. Yucca Mountain remains years from fruition and the entire matter will almost certainly wind up in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. And Nevada stands a better chance of succeeding in the more analytical and sober legal arena than in it did in the hyperbolic and hypocritical world of politics." We hope they are right.

For anyone looking for information on this issue, the July 2002 issue of National Geographic magazine contains an article on the proposed Yucca Mountain facility.

## Wilderness Status Proposed for White Mountains

By Paul Menkes, Berkeley, CA

On May 22, 2002, Senator Barbara Boxer of California introduced Senate Bill 2535, the California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act. This act will designate as wilderness some 2.5 million acres in 77 areas throughout California. This would include a newly designated White Mountains Wilderness, which would add some formal protections to what has been termed the 2nd largest unprotected roadless area in the lower 48. The 297,000-acre wilderness would include closure of 33 miles of roads and close Birch Creek and Furnace Creek to ORV access. Parts of Cottonwood Creek would remain open, but the stream itself would be designated as a wild and scenic river, affording the Cottonwood Creek Basin more protection.

While many popular four-wheel drive routes would remain open, including all the roads used for our recent bike expedition [see Pedaling and Pushing, page 22 –ed.], new road building would cease. Paul McFarland of Friends Of The Inyo (FOTI) has reported recent ORV road building activity in the Cottonwood Creek Basin. He also has heard some reports of mountain bikers creating new single-track routes as well. This would be forbidden in the designated wilderness areas.

The only active mine on the California side would be excluded from the wilderness. Also, a cyanide heap-leach mine has been proposed in the Northern Whites in Nevada, north of Boundary Peak Wilderness. All of the proposed wilderness is in California and would not, unfortunately, affect this proposed mine.

Grazing levels may not be raised in wilderness, but current grazing levels would remain. If this does become wilderness, be prepared

to continue to see cows in Campito Meadow in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest.

McFarland says that FOTI and other groups worked to have other desert areas in the Eastern Sierra included in Boxer's bill, but many proved too controversial. This included the Bodie Hills, which McFarland describes as being "riddled" with private inholdings. The local grazing permittees also vehemently oppose wilderness designation. McFarland also feels that this is one of the areas most threatened by ORV use and mining.

In addition to giving support to Senator Boxer, it is especially important to write Senator Dianne Feinstein. While she was the prime mover of the California Desert Protection Act, she has not taken a position on the current bill. If you enjoy driving your SUV on backroads, let her know that and tell her that you support wilderness, too. If you are a mountain biker, let her know that mountain bikers accept limits to two-wheel accessibility as well. And of course, if you simply enjoy walking in the wilderness, tell her we need to continue to expand protection. Write to Senator Feinstein at 1 Post Street, #2450, San Francisco, CA 94104. For other Senators' addresses, go to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

For more information on the California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act check out <http://www.calwild.org>

For information on the Eastern Sierra wilderness and desert initiatives visit <http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org>

## Be.... All That You Can Be .....

By Dave Halligan, Berkeley, CA

While the US Army has recently abandoned this marketing slogan, they haven't abandoned the idea of running tanks around the desert. In fact, as tank warfare becomes increasingly obsolete, the Army pushes to expand its tank warfare training operations at Fort Irwin onto wilderness-quality lands recently granted to them by Congress. As possibly a last farewell to these lands, a group of Desert Survivors visited the Superior Valley expansion area during the last few days of March.

The Desert Survivors trip to Superior Valley was a sad one. One of two huge chunks of public lands recently granted to the Army, Superior Valley holds within its realm a beautiful dry lake bed, thousands of Joshua Trees, lizards and ground squirrels. Two large tortoise shells and numerous burrows indicate this to be good tortoise habitat. A number of interesting mines around the site of Goldstone beckon to the historically-inclined visitor. But you will never get to see them. The Army will soon close these lands to public access and who knows what, if anything, will remain when the Army is through driving its tanks around, crushing everything in their paths.

This year is one of the driest on record in the Mojave. We were amazed at the ability of plants and animals to survive and thrive in such a place. How, we wondered, do the ground squirrels survive,

months of aerial attack, US tank forces rolled across essentially empty desert. While large-scale tank warfare proved to be useful in urban and semi-urban low-intensity wars (e.g., Yugoslavia and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict), the United States will never again fight another war like that, and didn't even really fight one in 1991. Yet this is precisely the kind of warfare that is being practiced at Fort Irwin, at great cost to the environment and our wallets. The lizards and ground squirrels of Superior Valley will pay an even heavier price.

## Should We Grow Cows On The Moon?

By George Wuerthner, Eugene, OR

Aridity defines the West. Nowhere is this limitation more controlling than in how it affects livestock production. Low precipitation translates into less vegetation to support animals. Greater variation in precipitation means greater variation in food available for herbivores, making it more difficult to sustain a stable livestock operation year after year, especially if you do not want to overgraze the landscape. In plain English, the West is a lousy place to grow cows.

Not only that, but the cow is a lousy animal to serve as the dominant herbivore in the West. It has high water demands. It's slow-moving and vulnerable to predators. It doesn't like steep terrain. It requires additional forage, like hay, to survive. You would have to search long and hard to find another creature less suited for life in a land of arid, steep terrain than the cow.

So how has the ranching industry survived? It has done this by manipulating the West to fit the cow and the needs of the livestock industry. It has only partially succeeded, yet this transformation of the West has come at tremendous ecological and economic cost. No full accounting of the real costs of the western livestock industry has ever been done, but note the following: livestock production is the single biggest source of non-point water pollution in the West; it is the biggest source of soil erosion; it is the biggest factor in species endangerment; it is a major contributor to weed invasion; it is the largest consumer of irrigation water, and the major reason we have dams on many western rivers; it consumes the majority of forage; and it occupies more land area than any other human activity. No human activity affects more of the West's landscape, and no activity contributes to greater biological impoverishment, than livestock production. These are real costs that aren't reflected in the price of a hamburger.

In Missouri, Georgia or any place where it rains, you don't need to drain rivers to grow hay for forage, or build dams to store water, leading to the demise of fish, amphibians and other animals. Where it rains, pastures are just as lush a hundred yards from a stream as adjacent to it, so cows don't trash the riparian zones. Where you can grow a cow on just an acre of land, you don't need to put it out on the ranges for weeks or months at a time, unsupervised and vulnerable to predators. Indeed, you can put cows in



Dave Halligan

Going AWOL: Dave jumps the fence at China Lake

year after year, century after century, where there is no surface water and when it doesn't rain for months, or even for a year to two? However, we didn't have to wonder how these little critters would survive tank warfare training. They won't.

But the Army needs to maintain the illusion that Fort Irwin serves a purpose. So while civilian military analysts such as Tom Clancy have written extensively about the end of tank warfare in the age of real-time satellite intelligence and unmanned Predator aircraft, and while Congress and even President George W. have mentioned the need to close surplus and obsolete military bases, the Army has invoked the doctrine of "the best defense is a good offense." The Army sought, and late last year was granted title to, over 100,000 acres of public desert lands. This land is, of course, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of acres of land already occupied by Fort Irwin.

It was a brilliant move by the Army. The Army wouldn't ask to expand a base that was obsolete. By definition, a base undergoing expansion must be important! The base is important, that is for sure: important to tank manufacturers, to the town of Barstow, and to a military officer class yearning back to the days of cavalry charges, but not to our nation's military preparedness.

It is often a dangerous world out there, and we need to be prepared to defend ourselves. But the expansion of Fort Irwin represents another sad example of wasteful military expenditure and effort. The last strategically meaningful tank battles fought by the United States occurred half a century ago, during World War II and in Korea. Desert Storm in 1991 was a tank commander's public relations dream. Following destruction of the enemy by

a barn at night, avoiding the need for predator control. These costs, and many others, are avoided when cows are grown in places where it rains, as opposed to the arid West.

Yes, ranchers can mitigate some of these impacts. They can fence riparian areas to keep cows from trampling vegetation and polluting the streams. They can hire herders to protect their animals from predators. They can reduce their herds in times of drought to avoid overgrazing. But these "solutions" all add to the costs of ranching. In the arid West, the marginal productivity of the land places real economic limits on what's possible, unless of course you can transfer most of your costs to someone else. That's exactly what the western livestock industry has done.

As taxpayers, we pay to control predators, largely for the benefit of livestock producers. We pay for many of the dams and irrigation projects that grow western hay. We pay for the weed control. We pay for fencing highways to keep cows off them. We pay for the small and large costs associated with livestock production, like greater flooding damage resulting from cow-damaged watersheds, and the recovery of endangered species that are only in trouble because ranchers are trying to raise alien cattle and sheep in their ecosystems. But these costs we bear, as great as they may be, are nothing compared to the losses to our natural heritage. The biological impoverishment resulting from these ill-advised attempts to make the West fit the cow, have produced a land that is infinitely less interesting and beautiful than it once was.

Ranchers are not bad people. They are victims of an institution, the western livestock industry, which is condemned to failure because it ignores geography. You could grow cows on the moon if you spent enough, but why would you?

Rather than trying to make the West fit the cow, we ought to let the West do what it does best. It's not, and never will be, the nation's feedlot. But it's a darn good place to grow grizzly bear, wolves, bison, elk, bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, cutthroat trout, sage grouse, and prairie dogs. And for me anyway, just doing that is plenty.

George Wuerthner lived in Livingston, Montana for many years.

## Survivors A Big Hit at Reno Earth Day: Seymour Wows Berkeley Crowd

By Steve Tabor, Alameda, CA

**D**S broke new ground by staffing a table at the Earth Day Festival in Reno, Nevada on Sunday, April 21. Members Dave Holten and David Serviss set up displays and managed an information booth at the event, and reported lots of interest in the presentation.

The display, built by Dave Holten and his wife Marion, consisted

of two 3' x 4' easel-mounted display boards, a 3' x 5' felt banner, and a dozen different handouts, trip schedules, and SURVIVOR newsletters. One display board showed photos of DS members doing their thing in the desert, camping, hiking and working on service trips. The other board displayed the route of the Desert Trail in Nevada. The Daves report that all the handouts, 50 to 70 of each, were gone by mid-afternoon, and that the Desert Trail info was of particular interest.

Total attendance at the Reno event, held at Idlewild Park, was between 2000 and 3000 people. Most were from Reno and Sparks, but a number were from Carson City and outlying areas along the Sierran Front: Gardnerville, Minden, Yerington, etc. This was a good crowd for such an event in a region known chiefly for gambling, mining and cowboying.

The Daves say that hosting this Earth Day booth was a fun experience, and they plan to be there again next year. All the display boards, the banner, easels, etc. are now carefully stored away for future use, and the photos on the boards can be updated next year, as Velcro attachments were used.

We also staffed a booth at the Berkeley Earth Day Fair again this year. Seymour Desert, our 17-foot rattlesnake mascot, was a big crowd pleaser as he weaved from one side of the street to the other. Back at the table, eight of us handed out literature and talked to the public. Unfortunately, the Berkeley parade was sparsely attended, largely because of a 25,000 person antiwar demonstration the same day in San Francisco. Nonetheless, our displays and our collection of desert rocks and bones drew a good crowd to our booth, and we ended the day with a well-attended potluck party at Justine Frazier's house.

We'll be doing Earth Day events again next year, in any city where DS members are willing to staff a booth. If you're interested in organizing a booth in your city next Earth Day (April 20 or 21), we can provide you with literature, photos, reimbursement for display materials, a list of members in your area, even Seymour (if transportation can be arranged). For more information or assistance, contact Jessica Rothhaar at [JesseRoth@aol.com](mailto:JesseRoth@aol.com) or (510) 525-4921.



Dave Holten (L) and Dave Serviss (R) charming the crowd

## Some Reflections on a Week in Escalante, Utah

by Elaine Schwimmer, Berkeley, CA

The sun pours into the deepest crevices, baking rocks, redding the dirt.

Indulgence of surfaces splay in liquid heat, mirages evaporating on approach.

What road there is has not been tended, left to spill into the river, the rocks break off, sandstone dissolves in the wind, forward it flies, carving huge holes in the rock.

Fear is not allowed, nor is softness, a neglected luxury found only in the rabbits fur before it dissolves into burnt toast or is scooped up by a swift hawk who alone with the wind owns the sky.

Buried beneath, unduly shy, the lone five fingered green bloused bud spreads out its color for a small moment in time.

Here the time is wrapped around layers of rock stretching on in red ribbons waving orange banners on spike peaked formations that jut out interrupting the sky, jabbing the air like 3 headed arrows pointing to beyond.

And winds shatter sight, vast strong screens come along carrying everything in their wake, then die down, a small flutter now and then until their next kaleidoscope assault on the air.

Our friends are the lizards, they come out in every size, pumping up and down doing their lunging lizard pushups oblivious to the two eyes staring at them, or are they?

Red dust in your nostrils, under your eyelids, you sleep in the furry long night on the land.

## Road from Utah

by Elaine Schwimmer, Berkeley, CA

Severed tree sweeps the ground  
switchback ropes  
loops up to the sky.

All the lonely roads criss cross America.  
Cans and tumbleweed litter fields.  
Below, granite gray peaks  
thrusting limbs to the sky.

Passing cars on the byways  
the great long gray highways  
slip stitched frozen miles into the night.

All that dust wells up in your throat,  
yellow sun down the center  
like a zipper stitched on slick rock.

Fortune travels wide.  
Then like a paint line down the center  
narrows to oblivion.

Rocks tumble, birds fly  
rabbits hit the pavement  
in a real red way.

Tree like thorns come up out of the ground  
wind widows shedding their last leaves.

Fields, exhausted in the sun,  
stretch on for miles.

**Elaine Schwimmer dabbles in poetry and painting, and has enjoyed Desert Survivor trips for a number of years. She lives in Berkeley with her cats, Nutmeg, Muffin, Bluebelle, Spider and Lambchop.**



Steve Perry



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For a copy of our current trip schedule, call (510) 769-1706 or go to [www.desert-survivors.org](http://www.desert-survivors.org)