FROM THE EDITOR:

GOOD NEWS: Responding to environmental groups’ request for review, the California director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Mr. Jim Kenna, has overturned the agency’s approval for exploratory drilling for the Dragonfly Placer gold mine in Last Chance Canyon. The Center for Biological Diversity led the effort that included Desert Survivors to stop the development plan with papers submitted to the BLM in February 2015. Yay! I wrote about this potentially disastrous mining project and our opposition to it in the last issue of The Survivor.

In reversing the Ridgecrest Field Office’s decision to allow the drilling, Kenna agreed that impacts of the mine exploration proposal were not adequately addressed, specifically that it was deficient in the analysis of the effectiveness of mitigation measures. He also found the reclamation cost estimate to be unsupported. In its proposal Glacial Minerals Inc. (the company behind the mine proposal) estimated the costs of restoring the drilling sites at $9000.

NOT AS GOOD NEWS: Director Kenna turned down several arguments made by the conservation groups, including that the exploratory mining would violate right-of-way regulations for Red Rock Canyon State Park. Kenna also concluded that the Environmental Assessment adequately regarded the impacts to native wildlife and plants, soil, water and air resources, and cultural resources and that it reviewed reasonable alternatives to the mining plan—all issues vigorously contested by the Center for Biological Diversity in its arguments.

Director Kenna made this ruling on July 15, 2015. He gave the Ridgecrest Field Office 60 days to make a new decision on the drilling proposal. In effect he told Glacial Minerals to make relatively, small adjustments to the proposal, and most likely he and the Ridgecrest BLM would approve the modified plan. As this issue of The Survivor goes to press we are waiting for a new Environmental Assessment of this project. No doubt if such a plan is approved the Center for Biological Diversity along with petitioners Desert Survivors, the Sierra Club and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility will challenge it.

AN UNEXPECTED BIT OF NEWS: On August 20, 2015 the Ridgecrest BLM office made an unusual move. Through a press release it announced that it, “...intends to write a programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) that will consider how small-sized mining operations would be authorized in the Ridgecrest resource management area.” In short, they plan to write new standards so that mining operations it considers “limited in size” could be approved without the current Environmental Assessment—perhaps even without new public input. The “small mining operations” the new program would streamline approval of could include bulk testing, excavation, pits, drilling exploration, road construction, mining and reclamation. This proposed change in land management procedures is most likely a reaction to the July 2015 Dragonfly Mine reversal.

This change in policy does require public input and the Center for Biological Diversity and affiliated groups will be sending comments on this plan by the September 19th deadline.

WHAT WOULD BE THE WORST NEWS: While we are happy the Dragonfly Mine exploratory approval was overturned, it is quite likely the drilling will ultimately get an okay. Of course the next question is, what happens if the core samples pulled from the site indicate commercially viable deposits of gold?

No doubt Glacial Minerals will be back with a proposal to excavate hundreds of acres of alluvial deposits in Last Chance Canyon, and creating an immense open-pit mine. The ore will be pulverized into a fine powder and heaped in drainage basins where it will be washed with a cyanide solution. These cyanide-washed tailings and the toxic sludge residue from the gold refining process will be left behind when the mine plays-out leaving scars on the land and changes to the desert ecology that will be significant and permanent. The El Paso Mountains and Last Chance Canyon will forever be changed for the worse.

Laws and policy allowing the appropriation of public lands for mineral extraction are highly favorable to mining interests. The mining law the BLM is primarily mandated to uphold dates back to 1872. Laws and policy intended to protect the environment and cultural resources are often a secondary concern. Many times decisions on mining and other uses of public land are made by people who feel virtually all government regulations are evil and they inhibit personal freedom. A pro-business Republican Party along with its media mouth-pieces such as Fox News promotes this mindset at every opportunity.

Turning back The Dragonfly Mine may require tremendous effort. Desert Survivors will continue to join with the Center for Biological Diversity and other conservation groups to contest this potential environmental disaster. Your Desert Survivors membership is a crucial component in this fight. Your support is always appreciated.

Nicholas Blake

I drove to Simi Valley, CA to take a photo of the headquarters of Glacial Minerals Inc.—the corporation behind the Dragonfly Mine. As it turned out, its address is this modest, suburban house. Go figure.

Cover photo: Patches of sunlight and shadows of storm clouds dapple the Black Rock Desert landscape. Alice Oline contemplates the vista from the slope of King Lear Peak, NV, June 2015. Photo by David Oline.
The Desert Survivors Annual General Meeting at
Mission San Antonio de Padua
Monterey County
October 16-18, 2015

This year our annual camping retreat will take place at the Mission San Antonio de Padua, California’s third mission established in 1771. The site is located in the peaceful San Antonio Valley and was once part of the William Randolph Hearst’s ranch. Unlike most missions, this one has no towns built up around it, with no modern buildings and the likes. It is relatively remote and tranquil. Camping here is NOT offered to the general public, hence, a rare opportunity for Desert Survivors to be surrounded by a part of California’s rich history.

Activities will include hikes in the Santa Lucia Mountains and walks in the mission’s gardens and historic structures. There will be a docent tour of the mission ($6 fee). Following tradition, we will enjoy a Happy Hour on Friday evening and a potluck feast for Saturday dinner. Sunday morning will feature our annual general meeting—where issues and directions for the organization will be discussed and our board of directors will be elected. All Desert Survivors members are encouraged to attend. We want you to be there.

Information on reserving your campsite and the schedule of activities will be announced via email and posted on our website: desert-survivors.org.
“That’s the beauty of it: there is no trail, unless some animal put it in,” Skip said as I shouldered my way through a stubborn patch of sagebrush that had enthusiastically grown until it was taller than me. But as I rounded the corner of our traverse I appreciated how right he was. The sage covered hill fell away from our group down the slope and spread out across the valley through which we had driven the day before. The entire expansive landscape was dramatically patterned by the unsettled sky with patches of shade and sun. This kind of desolate beauty could be found nowhere else.

The Return to King Lear Peak

By Alice Oline

Our climbing trip to King Lear Peak, led by David Oline, was a second attempt. We had tried to climb the mountain the year before and had made it almost all the way up. David and Stan had taken part in this abbreviated hike and were back to finish the job this year. Our group had met up the morning before at Bruno’s Country Club in Gerlach, Nevada, a small dusty town we had driven hours to get to, and from which one had to drive for hours in order to get anywhere else. All eight of us adventurers met briefly before caravanning out onto the sage-covered playa and heading for the base of King Lear Peak, where we would go for a short hike and then camp for the night and ascend the next morning. We reached our hiking destination for the day after a long drive, a short bout of map-confusion, and a discussion of whether the mine that we passed on the way produced gold or sulfur. Dave Book assured us that it was sulfur.

After we figured out that we had already passed the road that we would later take to find a camp, we continued on until we found a pullout that all five of our cars fit into and stopped for a quick lunch before taking off into the brush and hills. The objective for this first day—as stated by trip leader David—was something like, “Go on up over here and find Trout Creek, and then we can wander up that for a ways until we find a grassy bank or something cool like that.” And that is basically what happened. We climbed over a few rolling sage-covered rises until we dropped down into Trout Creek, which we immediately deemed contained no trout. We followed the small creek upstream through groves of aspen and along an abandoned road until thunder clouds began to gather above us and raindrops started to fall. Then we climbed up a ridge line, from the top of which the wind ripped at our clothing and we could see the valley on the other side where we would be driving out in a few days. Because of the violent wind we hurried down the ridge and returned to the relative calm of the valley below, where our cars were waiting.
We returned to the roads that we had missed earlier that day and chose one to follow closer to King Lear Peak until we found a suitable camping spot, or the deteriorating road would let us drive no further. Once we found a clearing at a promising junction, tents rose into existence and stoves began producing dinner. Our camp was located in the sagebrush on the valley floor a short ways from the base of the mountain that we would climb the next day. The most surprising thing about looking up at the peak was how green the desert was all the way up the mountain and spreading out below it. The sagebrush was not yet dry and silver-colored, but awash in hues of green due to the recent rains that we observed brushing over the desert in the distance.

Unsettled and partly cloudy skies provided a spectacular sunrise as our group rose early to get started. We drove about a mile more up the road until the rocks became too large and from there we started hiking towards the eastern slope of King Lear Peak. The first part of the journey was simply trekking along the road through sage and the occasional group of cattle. Then the climbing began. We chose to go up a ridge to the right, and then traverse over and make our final ascent up a draw on the northeastern side of the mountain. As our group slowly climbed the steep sage slope we watched as the cow patties were gradually replaced with piles of horse droppings and then collections of tiny bighorn pellets. The vegetation also changed with the altitude, from sagebrush and cheat grass, to leafier shrubs and abundant wildflowers. We stopped for lunch on a gentle ridge before making the final ascent up the steepest brushy slope. Once we had made our way up resistant brush, we found ourselves on a pass with rocky peaks on either side of it. The dark rock that was exposed was almost completely covered with bright orange lichen, which formed a brilliantly contrasting pattern against the pale sky above and green brush below. From this pass we could see the playa of the Black Rock Wilderness spreading out below us for miles and miles. We only admired the view for a short while though, because we turned to the rock outcropping on our left and began climbing King Lear Peak.

No technical climbing was necessary, but the rocky scramble did require us to use our hands and climb up to the very top. The peak was larger than we expected, not a spiky pinnacle, but a small rocky platform, on which there was plenty of room for us all to wander around. Stan, who was the first to reach the peak, found it occupied by a herd of bighorn sheep, who unfortunately ran off down the opposite side before the rest of us were able to see them. The view from the summit was expansive and beautiful. We could see the Jackson Mountains spreading to our north and petering out in the south. In the east and west, and south where the mountains ended, the playa spread out and faded almost out of sight into the hazy distance. The huge sky was patterned with clouds that dappled the entire playa with patches of shadow, and in a few places rain poured from a cloud onto an isolated patch of ground, or was carried off by the wind before ever reaching the valley floor.
We hung out on the summit for a while, had a snack, signed the summit register, and watched a lonely bighorn make its way up the rocks across from the pass on which we had arrived. To our disappointment, there was no “tattered copy” of Shakespeare’s play included in the summit register, and we concluded that we would have to return and bring one up to the top next time. Our descent was fairly straightforward; we retraced our path from earlier, with only a moment’s confusion about which draw we had taken to come up the mountain. Our return to the cars was heralded with many sighs of exhaustion and speculations on how sore everyone would be the next day. That night, as we ate another incredibly satisfying camp dinner, we witnessed a spectacular sky streaked with bright pink clouds that shifted into darker hues of purple as the sun went down behind King Lear Peak.

The next morning our group began to disperse homeward after breakfast, but five of us continued driving around the mountain range and past King Lear Peak on its western side. We were searching for the origins of Buckbrush Springs. Fittingly, our last little outing ended with wandering through sagebrush towards even denser, impenetrable thickets that completely shielded the springs from any attempt that we made to find them. When we returned to the cars we found that cows had claimed the area for their grazing.

King Lear Peak was an amazing and eye-opening adventure for me. It was my first Desert Survivors trip since I was old enough to participate in the hiking and appreciate the beauty of the desert around me. I realized how much these mountainous sagebrush-covered lands hide from the eyes of most who drive through them.
Snow on the 4th of July!

The Return to White Mountain Peak

Trip Report by
Nicholas Blake

I guess you could say this trip began a year ago, during the August 2014 Desert Survivors trip to the Bristlecone pine forest in the White Mountains of Inyo County. In the evening after a fun day of walking in a grove of the world’s oldest living trees, several participants sitting around the campfire and made brave from several bottles of wine conjured up an ambitious impromptu adventure. The trailhead to White Mountain peak at 14,292 ft. elevation was just 20 miles away, and they heard it was the easiest of the 14,000ers in California to bag. Visions of summiting the third highest peak in California overwhelmed a party of seven Desert Survivors. They quickly came up with a half-baked expedition plan for the next day.

Things began badly the following morning, as the party did not drive from camp until 8:30 am. The road to the trailhead took over an hour and the planned car shuttle past the locked gate, that would have subtracted four miles of trail, fell apart from poor communications. Nevertheless the group headed out toward the peak at 10:00 am. After three hours of hiking, covering 5 miles of the trail and gaining 2000 ft. in elevation and nearly reaching the base of the mountain, it became clear that the group was not going to reach top that day. An excursion to the summit of this peak would require a much earlier start time. The group stopped for lunch before turning back. While eating sandwiches and energy bars you could feel the disappointment of the hikers. One Desert Survivor in particular, Judy Kendall, vowed to try again.

Fast forward to the July 4th weekend, 2015 and the Desert Survivors White Mountain Summit Car Camp with Bob Lyon leading along with a newly-minted co-leader Judy Kendall. The plan this time was to spend a first night at the Grandview Campground (8,500 ft. elevation) and the second night at the trailhead at the 11,680 ft. locked gate to the University of California High Altitude Research Station. Spending the night this high would allow the participants to become acclimatized to the thin air. The hikers would set out for the summit at 7:00 am on the morning of July 4th. Years ago I worked on a project with the University of California here and I was given the combination to the locked gate. If the lock had not been changed we could car shuttle the hikers up the first two miles of the trail. Now this was a fully baked plan.

I had to work on July 3rd but was able to get away at lunchtime and drive from Los Angeles to the White Mountains to join my fellow Desert Survivors. I cranked up the air conditioner in my car and drove north and east through the upper Mojave and into the Owens Valley—not making much notice to the weather. The sky was overcast when I arrived in Lone Pine. When I exited my car to buy gas, I was surprised by the 95° heat and the high humidity. Moist, sub-tropical air coming up from Mexico is not unusual for July in the Sonora Desert of Arizona, but it rarely makes it this far into the Mojave. Odd indeed. I arrived at the trailhead at about 8:00pm and was happy to find a camp of fourteen fellow Desert Survivors.
At this point everything looked good for perhaps ten of us to reach the summit the next day. The skies were partly cloudy and we witnessed a beautiful sunset. A few of the group never planned to hike White Mountain but instead would climb the nearby (and lower) Barcroft Peak. I learned that the Desert Survivors had experienced severe thundershowers the night before, that kept many of them from getting a good night’s sleep. Everyone was turning in early to make up for the lost rest. I checked the gate and the combination lock still worked. Yay!

It was clear that others camping at the gate were planning on hiking to the summit the next day too. Our Desert Survivors tents were in close proximity to those of a band of Japanese hikers. I fell asleep happy, and looking forward to the following day’s trek.

My rest did not last long. At some ungodly hour I was awoken by vehicles driving to the campground, with occupants exiting, slamming doors and tailgates and speaking in loud voices. I thought to myself, “Can’t they see there are people sleeping here?” I waited and listened to these rude campers set up their camp and finally go to sleep.

Awhile latter I was awoken again by voices. These people were speaking Japanese. I checked my watch. It was 3:30 am. The Japanese hikers were getting up at this hour to begin the hike! Again no one made an effort to speak quietly or keep the noise down, even though our tents were just a few feet away. Arrgh!

It went on like this throughout the pre-dawn morning. I was able to fall asleep between the sounds, but when I awoke at dawn I hadn’t had the best night’s sleep. I soon learned my rest was much better than most of my fellow ‘Survivors. But much worse, some of the participants were complaining of headaches and nausea—symptoms of altitude sickness. Trip participants Lynne Buckner and Judith Rosen (both nurses) stepped up and got those who were afflicted to break camp immediately and drove them down to lower elevations—the remedy for altitude sickness. Thank you Lynne and Judith for your good actions that morning.

After all of that settled out, there were five of us who were still interested in climbing the peak. Eugene volunteered to drive us the first couple of miles past the locked gate up to the research station and we were off to bag our “14,000er.” We were not alone this day. Perhaps three dozen hikers were making their way up the trail toward the peak. Since this was our nation’s birthday, several hikers adorned their packs with American flags. What a terrific way to celebrate the 4th!

All morning long the skies were overcast and we all reminded one another to pack rain gear for the hike. A mile or so up the trail we felt a few light sprinkles. No problem, we were prepared.

The trail out of the White Mountain Research station was steep with switchbacks for the first half-mile or so, but then leveled out on the Barcroft Plateau. At this point our 14000er came into good view—a towering edifice of dark brown lava rock jutting up from the white/grey-colored ground of the White Mountains range. Although the skies had high overcast the summit was clear of clouds. Our footsteps picked up as our peak was now in sight and every step was bringing us closer.

This section of the trail was an utter delight. The path was mostly a gentle uphill grade with wonderful views of the Owens Valley and the Sierras to the west. There was good evidence of recent rains for the ground was moist and covered with a carpet of green grass. There were notably more marmots to be seen scurrying about than we had seen the previous summer. We guessed that the wet early summer increased their activity. Soon we passed the point where we turned back in 2014. I was thinking, “Onward and upward.”
The path to White Mountain has one definite surprise for the first-time traveler. The trail looks as though it ascends a shoulder that leads right to the mountain, so the hiker thinks that every step forward is also bringing him or her higher, toward the top. However upon reaching the crest of the ridge we discovered the trail drops very steeply for a loss of several hundred feet of elevation, before heading up the peak itself. All that altitude gain is lost. Arrg! In addition to my frustration over the terrain, the intermittent sprinkles had turned into a light drizzle and the top of the peak was obscured by clouds. We donned our rain gear and pressed on.

Up to this point our party of five Desert Survivors hiked as a group. Once on the mountain for the final assent, our line began to stretch out, with some hikers pressing more vigorously toward the top. Perhaps a better way to describe it: the hikers who had gone on the previous year’s aborted trip sensed urgency in the situation. The weather was turning bad. They outpaced the others. They had gotten so close to the peak in 2014, they did not want anything to stop them now. Certainly not the rain, the gusts of wind or the snow that suddenly blew in. OMG! There were about thirty other hikers on the mountain that day. As we headed up into the flurries, we could see the grim faces of the cold and wet hikers who had reached the summit and were now heading down. The Japanese hikers who had awoken us early in the morning looked particularly distressed. The American flags some hikers were flying were flapping, soggy wet.

I was in the slow group of Desert Survivors and we soon lost sight of our faster hikers as they headed into the storm clouds. I should also mention how difficult it is to hike in such altitudes. At 14,000 ft. the atmosphere is only 40% of that at sea level. Strenuous physical activity requires much more breathing and frequent rest. We would walk a couple of hundred yards then have to stop to catch our breaths. By the time we lost sight of our fellow hikers, we figured we were 15 minutes behind them.

Our plan was for everyone to meet up on the summit for lunch, however it was quite obvious that these were not conditions for a picnic. As we struggled up the trail, in seemingly near whiteout conditions, we could only imagine what things were like on the summit. We fretted that our companions were suffering, waiting for our arrival.

To our great relief, we soon saw Barb Bane heading down trail followed by Vinz Hake and Judy. They told us the summit was miserable. The small building on top of the peak that looked like a warming hut was actually a research lab with locked doors. All the hikers who reach the summit at that hour, quickly signed the peak registry, took photos and immediately turned tail back down. Our group was only a couple of hundred feet below the summit, but there was no argument from any of us about turning back.

We hobbled back to our camp in the late afternoon. There was a discussion whether to break camp and head down to Grandview Campground where the group with altitude sickness symptoms had planned to spend the night. Since it was late in the day and we were not sure if our companions would find a campsite, we decided to spend the night at the trailhead. We enjoyed a dinner of vegan chili over brown rice with wine while breathing thin air. Everyone was exhausted. We turned in at sunset and slept ‘til dawn.

The next morning during the drive out, we stopped at Grandview and found Bob Lyon. He and the others who had altitude sickness symptoms were fine. Again, thank you Lynne and Judith.

All in all this was another satisfying Desert Survivors adventure. Even though White Mountain Peak is the easiest “14,000er”, it is still not easy. Add a snowstorm to the equation, and things get downright difficult. Even those of us who did not reach the top ended the trip with a feeling of accomplishment. After all how many people can say they were caught in a snowstorm on the 4th of July? This is a much better story to tell around the water cooler at work on Monday than watching fireworks I would say. 🦅
My sister lives in Tucson, and every time I visit her we try to take in a local sight or attraction. We’ve been to the Landscape Evolution Observatory, the Biosphere (in the original structure), visited the petroglyphs on Signal Hill, toured the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, hiked in Catalina State Park, and have often attended the annual Tucson Gem and Mineral Show. There’s a lot to see and do in Tucson!

More recently, I had suggested we visit Desert Survivors, Inc.—our namesake organization that operates a diverse Southwest native plant nursery. This is also the site of a therapy program for developmentally disabled adults. For over twenty years they have been located on 3.8 acres in the western part of Tucson along the Santa Cruz River—an intermittent stream that becomes a decently-flowing river in the monsoon season but which can disappear within a day after the rains. Desert Survivors (Tucson) offers about 650 species of local and regional native plants, that range within 500 miles of Tucson, give or take. It is the largest offering of native plants in Arizona. And it is a great place for bird watching, too.

Nate, one of the horticultural employees, kindly showed us around while giving us the background on the organization. Desert Survivors (Tucson) was founded in 1981 by psychologist Dr. Joseph Patterson, who recognized the need for adults with developmental disabilities to have meaningful work in their lives.
About the same time in Tucson, there emerged an interest in native plants—flora that was both beautiful and had low water requirements. Dr. Patterson put the two together to create the organization.

Adults with disabilities attend horticulture classes five days a week as nursery maintenance trainees. Tasks learned are weeding, re-potting plants, mixing soil, maintaining irrigation and watering. There is a calming and grounding effect that comes from working with native plants and organic soil for these trainees and a sense of community and family that evolves over time.

Until November 2014 Desert Survivors (Tucson) also operated a program for children identified as being developmentally delayed, but after 31 years, that program ended due to funding cuts and revised state regulations. School tours are still offered, though, and the organization is looking for other ways for outreach to children. Currently, Desert Survivors (Tucson) gets their funding from state and federal sources, their membership program, fundraisers and selling native plants.

My sister and I enjoyed our tour and learned new facts, such as that it takes 3-4 years to grow a 1 gallon-sized cactus from seed. Also, Arizona is the third most bio-diverse state after California (#1) and Texas (#2). I didn’t know that you are not supposed to turn some potted cacti. Such plants at the nursery had X-marks on their pots to denote the south facing side. Turning them can damage or even kill cacti. Please do not play “Spin the Cactus!”

Also, the nursery had some charming, artisan-made, native bee houses for hole-nesting bees. I had never seen these before. I especially found interesting their ethno botanical list of edible plants and the list of larval butterfly host plants.

My sister and I are making it a tradition to visit the nursery every time I am in town, to support this worthy organization and to bring home a new native plant. Check out their new website (same as ours without the hyphen): www.desertsurvivors.org 🦗
As long as the sun shines, and the earth spins, so there will always be a compass that does not need the Earth’s magnetism, nor need orbiting satellites. Should we Desert Survivors junk our compasses and Global Positioning System (GPS) devices? For me, this question came to mind at a lunch where I overheard neighbor Andy Bumstead tell how his uncle (Albert Bumstead) advised Richard Byrd on using a sun compass near the South Pole during his 1928-30 Antarctic expedition.

The heroic age of Antarctic exploration was powered by animal transport (animals included humans). Byrd’s claim to fame is that he started the modern mechanical age of exploration in the Southern Continent, using airplanes and a snow tractor. Byrd aimed to fly over the South Pole. A friend, who did research in Antarctic deserts, said that the main modern research tool is the helicopter.

This leads us to remind ourselves, “What is north?” The spin axis of the earth is what we call north-south. Our earth happens to effectively have a huge magnet buried inside it, oriented about the geographical south-to-north axis, and that’s how our pocket compasses know which way is north. On the latitudes where most people live, the magnetic field is approximately parallel to the earth’s surface, and compasses work fine. If you are near one of the poles, that isn’t so, and magnetic compasses don’t work. Hence Byrd consulted with Andy’s uncle, who was a cartographer, on the sun compass. Byrd’s flight over the South Pole was a success.

How do sun compasses work? Essentially a sun compass is a sundial in reverse. To make a sundial, you draw a north-south line in the sand, plant your hiking stick vertically in the line, turn off any clouds, and watch. When the shadow is shortest (at the local noon) it points due north (assuming you are not down under).

Sundials can be off: On a trip to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England (near the zero longitude line) I noticed that their impressive sundial was about 3 minutes off, which seemed improbable. I wrote to the curator, and months later received a reply. It had to be reset mechanically every so often, and they’d simply forgotten the reset. To make your sundial into a timekeeper, recall that the earth rotates every twenty-four hours.

The sun compass uses the Boy Scout trick of pointing the hour hand of your watch at the sun, halving the angle between the 12 (i.e. noon) and the hand, and that half-angle will point due south. (The half comes about because the watch hour hand rotates twice a day while earth rotates but once. A hand which rotates once a day would eliminate the half. A slight problem is that civil time zones are in 15 degree segments, so your watch is set to the middle of the zone.) And this is basically what Byrd used. That compass is in the Smithsonian. Incidentally, the US Government once required surveys to be done with sun compasses, because the magnetic kind are affected by geological magnetic material. Sun compasses like Bumstead’s are elaborate and precise; the watch trick is a...
The sun should shine for at least another four eons. What kind of sun compass should you use today? The neat ones are a bit elaborate, and require gears etc. I'd suggest that you use the wristwatch sun compass described above. Ooops, who of us nowadays has a watch at all, let alone can read one with hands? Make sure that you take an older Desert Survivor with you.

A simplification and an approximation—test it beforehand, at around the same time you will use it.

How about the hot desert? In the late 1930’s, Ralph Bagnold spent his vacation time (from his British Army job) roaming North African deserts in American trucks. During the war, he set up the Long Range Desert Group, which operated way behind the Italian lines in North Africa. He devised a clever sun compass that was mounted to his vehicles and could be read while moving. One of his trucks is on display at the Imperial War Museum, London; I have (surreptitiously) kicked a tire. Later, he did fundamental work on sand and deserts, for which he was awarded the highest U.K. scientific honor. He said that the award was more satisfying than his military awards.

How about magnetic compasses? I wear a magnetic wrist compass in the wild and in big cities for navigating subways. Away from the poles, they’re pretty reliable. However, the earth’s magnet poles can flip and exchange places, so in between times the magnetic field must be weak. Don’t laugh, the flip has happened several times, most recently while our ancestors were developing tools, making magnetic compasses unmarketable. I wonder what all those creatures, which use the earth’s magnetic field for navigation, such as pigeons and blind mole rats, thought of the change? How about using the mapping part of your cell phone? Many cell phones work by triangulating your whereabouts by using cell phone towers; you may have observed (and cursed) that there is usually no cell reception in the desert. Some cell phones have GPS units inside them. Phones and GPS units use batteries, and can get run down. I have heard of GPS reception failing because of solar magnetic storms, causing polar route airliners to be diverted. I try to have a paper map with me.

Now, the sun compass needs no batteries, no satellites, nor magnetism, although it does need a watch with a clock face. This can be a wind-up kind or perhaps a solar-powered electric. Will the sun compass wear out? Modern science knows exceedingly well how things like the earth spin, and how it slows down. So we can promise you that sun compasses will work for eons to come, in case you’re worried about obsolescence. An eon is a billion years. The sun should shine for at least another four eons.

What kind of sun compass should you use today? The neat ones are a bit elaborate, and require gears etc. I’d suggest that you use the wristwatch sun compass described above. Ooops, who of us nowadays has a watch at all, let alone can read one with hands? Make sure that you take an older Desert Survivor with you.

A labor of love website on sun compasses is: http://www.sundials.co.za/THE%20SUNDIAL%20GOES%20TO%20WAR%20web.pdf

This is an amusing site: http://www.instructables.com/id/Make-a-Viking-Sun-Compass/ Spoiler alert: Vikings did not have horns on their helmets.

Thanks to Bill Davis, Alan Finegold and Faye Flam for reading a version of this.
MONITORING THE MOJAVE

By Bob Davis

The author restoring a wilderness boundary marker. Due to budget and staffing cutbacks Federal land managers are often unable to visit the places they oversee. Davis and Desert Survivors provides a valuable service by documenting what he finds on his backpacking trips—both bad and good—and reporting it to officials.

A few years ago when I started leading wilderness backpack trips for Desert Survivors, I offered to be a backcountry observer for the Needles BLM. Ramona Daniels, the Outdoor Recreational Planner, suggested that I could work with her as a volunteer. They did not have backcountry rangers. Since I would be going to remote wilderness areas, I could monitor areas that were requested and report what was found. I would learn about the area before going there and then report on plants, animals, illegal intrusions, water sources, and archaeological sites or artifacts.

The Whipple Mountain Wilderness was known to have several unusual features including saguaro cactus, a palm tree, and caves. A grove of saguaros had been documented 15 years previously by helicopter and was not know to have been seen since. Only the general area of this grove was known. This grove was of interest because saguaros only grow in the area of the Sonora Desert that has rainfall every summer and not in the Mojave, where in some years there is no rainfall.

On my first attempt to find this grove, after covering some difficult terrain, I thought I was one canyon away from the site. Reluctantly I decided not to push the limits but start back since the time to find the site was unknown and my food and water supply were limited.

On the second trip at the end of a long day we shouted, hugged, and danced when, in the distance, we saw a single huge saguaro cactus. We were able to confirm that we had found the grove before we had to stop and find a campsite to spend the night. The next day we counted 26 saguaros, 22 were in the shelter of a cirque and 4 were outliers like sentries at the four points of the compass. There was the full range of the old, large, and multi-branched down to the young, small, and single-stemmed.
On that trip we saw a barrel cactus with the top chewed off and teeth marks where the pulp had been scraped out. At the time we thought that this was the work of one of the two big herbivores that live there, burro or bighorn. Later I learned that the sheep split the cactus with their horns and eat the succulent pulp. This is rare enough to suggest that it may not be very rewarding.

On another trip in Whipple Wash we found a single lonely palm tree on a ledge at the side of a wash. There was a tiny spring with a trickle of water at the base of the tree. Further up this wash there was a tall single-stem saguaro high on a ledge of the steep wall of the wash. Like the palm tree, the cactus had a spring source to account for its being there.

Native Americans have occupied the Mojave Desert for thousands of years. We have encountered village sites, rock mortars, petroglyphs, cave shelters, campsites, artifacts, and ancient trails.

On one trip we found a series of pottery and china shards, one with an image of a blue bird perched on a wild rose stem. We followed the trail of shards to a trash dump with a metal double bed frame, the springs of a mattress, and the back part of a tricycle. At the end of this road there was a very old windmill. A small family must have once lived there.

Army training centers from World War II have left major imprints on the ground. We found the grids of training bases, airfields both large and small, tank tracks, 50-caliber machine-gun shell casings, rusted machine gun belt links, and a tank cannon shell. In Needles, within sight of the BLM, there is a WWII training center tank trap. In the Old Woman Wilderness there was a bent and rusted 20-gallon WWII motor oil drum, far from any known training center.

In the Turtle Mountains we found a sheet-metal object that at first looked like a damaged propeller, then maybe a heater, or stove part. It was rusted from many years of exposure and had been damaged by falling from a plane or being blown around by many storms. I still do not know what this is or where it came from.
Most springs on the USGS maps are dry. Very few are reliable water sources. Most of the springs that had ponds in the past were dry now. Some have been covered and piped into big game guzzlers or cattle watering tanks.

On one trip we found a spring site where there were two adjacent small spring ponds that years ago had been converted into guzzlers by wooden structures. A few weeks later at that site we found truck tracks, sawed tree limbs, and a huge modern plastic underground guzzler that had been installed. Access to the source spring had been sealed.

Between the Nevada border and the Mojave National Monument there is an open pit perlite mine that had been worked in the 1930’s. In that area there were industrial artifacts, an airstrip, and the raised bed of the Barnwell and Searchlight Railroad. While on a hike a few miles from there in a narrow brush-lined wash, laying exposed on the ground, I found a big obsidian core that must have wash out of the sand during a recent rain shower.

Not far from there, deep in the woods off of a little used dirt road that goes to a Nevada highway, I found a burned out 1970’s Cadillac Coupe. My speculation was fuelled by realizing that this car, hidden at a remote desert location, was across a state line and 70 road mile from Las Vegas.

We encountered two PVC claim markers that we took down and found that one contained numerous dead insects and the other had small dead birds. We followed the policy of the BLM in taking these markers down and leaving them on the ground.

While at a campsite in another canyon we saw a helicopter land and then take off and later found the landing site. Nearby there was a natural shelter that could have been a hunting blind. Up that canyon there was a big game guzzler and a small black automatic camera.

On another trip when looking for a car campsite we encountered a hostile man at an extensive campsite at the border of a wilderness. I later learned he was an illegal small game trapper.

The BLM supplies me with information about wilderness areas to explore and I make observations, take notes and photographs, and write reports. The BLM benefits by gaining information that they would not be able to get. What I learn from them lets me make better wilderness backpack trips.
As a librarian, one of the first things I was drawn to on the Desert Survivors’ website was the list called Desert Books. I saw lots of my favorites such as the works of Edward Abbey and *An Island called California* by Elna Bakker. I also noticed that the most recent publication date was 2008. This gave me an excuse to look for newer books to add to the list. Here are two books that Desert Survivors may want to explore on a day too hot to leave the house; or in hopes of a strong El Nino winter, wet and stormy enough to stay inside and read about sunnier places.

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David Rains Wallace, *Chuckwalla Land: The Riddle of California’s Desert*

I had forgotten how jam-packed with facts and theories, a Wallace book could be until I started reading *Chuckwalla Land*. Then I remembered one of his other books, *Klamath Knot* (1983, 2003) and slowed down my reading pace. Finding the Chuckwalla of the title was almost as hard as finding one in the desert. There was almost too much to comprehend: details of the theory of evolution, discourses on literature of the desert; authors such as John C. Van Dyke, author of *The Desert,* and Mary Austin, known for *The Land of Little Rain* layered with botany, biology, geology and taxonomy thrown in for good measure. I would have loved some illustrations, say a map or a diagram of geologic ages to help put everything in perspective. Occasionally, a bit pedantic and sometime quite lyrical, *Chuckwalla Land* belongs on the Desert Book shelf as a reference book and an occasional reread to digest all Wallace tells us. University of California Press, 2011

Christopher Norment, *Relicts of a Beautiful Sea: Survival, Extinction, and Conservation in a Desert World*

We think of the desert as a place lacking in water. Yet some of the rarest and oldest living animals are indeed aquatic relics. Norment studies and writes about fish and amphibians, specifically several species of pupfish, salamanders and toads, all critters not normally thought of as desert residents. It can be hard to drive through the Mojave and environs and remember that the area used to be teeming with deep lakes. Maps, sketches and a chart of geological time helped break up the text and were helpful. Norment asks and answers the question, is it worth it to change water policy in the West to save these few and seemingly insignificant animals? How important is their survival.

My review copy lacked an index (a sin in my opinion) and had an odd way of listing notes (lacking pages number to refer back to the text.) Otherwise, this is another great edition to the desert bookshelf. University of North Carolina Press, 2014

Neither book was a quick read, but not quite textbook material. If you read both of these you will have a better understanding and still more questions about the Mojave Desert and its ancient and current denizens.

Deirdre Cerkanowicz 🍃
Desert Survivors travel to the U.S.-Mexico boundary in Arizona to see the impact that illegal border crossings, and the American measures to stop them, have had on the desert environment.

Article by Nicholas Blake

Photos: A. H. Cominos

Perhaps there is no place else in the world where a wealthy country is separated from a far poorer nation by a mere river or a line in the dirt. The 1,954-mile U.S.-Mexico border is not only a political border but a distinct line between the haves and have-nots of the world. The disparity of wealth between the two nations is obvious. In Mexico City a worker earning the legal minimum wage makes just $4.60 per day (U.S. dollars). Many Mexicans earn less. The Mexican Government lists 42% of its population as living in moderate to extreme poverty. In Central America the scale and extent of poverty is often even more severe. The United States is also the world’s leading consumer of illegal drugs. Considering the meager economic opportunities in Mexico and Central America and the billion-dollar U.S. drug market, there is a powerful incentive to grow, manufacture, and smuggle drugs. Violent gangs and drug cartels often force teenagers to join them or be killed to run these activities. Add to this the strong historic, cultural, and personal ties between people who live on both sides of the boundary, and one understands the motivation of millions of Mexicans and Central Americans to risk much, if not all, to get across the border and into the U.S.

About 675 miles of the border runs along the river boundaries of the Colorado and Rio Grande. The remaining 1,279 miles is mostly a series of unnatural straight lines across the desert. The boundary itself consists of steel and concrete walls and fences, vehicle obstacles, and signs telling the would-be trespasser to turn around. In addition, on the American side a small army of Border Patrol/Homeland Security agents is on patrol.

In April 2015, Desert Survivors had an opportunity to visit the border in one of its most beautiful places: the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Preserve of southern Arizona, in the Sonoran Desert. The trip was a car camp that would follow a historic trail that was established by Native Americans 1,000 years ago and was later used by Spanish conquistadors, Catholic missionaries traveling to California and Mexican 49ers during the gold rush. The trail ran between scant water sources and with the extreme heat of the desert hundreds of travelers died of thirst along its route. It was aptly given the name ‘El Camino Del Diablo’ (The Devil’s Highway).

The Desert Survivors would be led by a man who knows the area well. Fred Goodsell was a National Park Service ranger who worked as a naturalist at the nearby Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument from 1968 to 1970. Since that time, Mr. Goodsell has returned to the deserts of southern Arizona nearly every year. “It is my favorite winter-landplace,” he remarked. He developed and maintained contacts and friendships with Park Service personnel in the area, and over the years has been involved with research projects and environmental surveys in these lands. He keeps a winter residence in nearby Ajo, Arizona and has extensively hiked, camped, and explored the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Preserve.

The intent of the trip was to study the impact of the international border on the Sonoran ecosystem. Six Desert Survivors met Fred Goodsell in Ajo on a late-April Friday morning. The weather in this part of Arizona was already hot with afternoon temperatures in the mid-90’s to 100 degrees. After exchanging greetings they headed out in a caravan of 4WD vehicles.

The first stop was the abandoned ranch inside the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The ranch was once the home of Henry Gray. Gray’s family started the ranch in the 1920’s before the national monument was established. Mr. Gray resided here by himself into the 1970’s. He is noted for his friendship with another desert loner, the famous writer and environmental activist Edward Abbey. According to Goodsell (who was a friend of Abbey’s at the time) Abbey enjoyed visiting Henry at the ranch.
While touring the site the Desert Survivors made a curious discovery. They found a cache of one dozen store-bought one-gallon water jugs in the shade of a mesquite tree. Half of the containers were empty, the others were full. Also several unopened cans of beans were discovered. It was easy to surmise that the food and water were placed here by anonymous humanitarians to help immigrants. To cross into the US illegally in these parts, an immigrant has to hike 25 to 60 miles across the desert to reach a major highway or other place where a “coyote” (immigrant smuggler) could pick them up. Considering the inhospitable terrain, extreme hot weather and lack of water, the journey is a very dangerous undertaking. The water and food caches left by Good Samaritans have likely saved many lives.

The Desert Survivors jumped back into their vehicles and headed off to see more sights. Down the road they came upon a recent vestige of our obsession with homeland security––a Border Patrol station named “Boundary FOB.” The FOB stands for Forward Operating Base. The thousands of square miles of desert out here are uninhabited and sizeable towns are hundreds of miles away. Since Homeland Security wants agents patrolling, they have set up FOB’s. Thirty-two Border Patrol agents are stationed here on seven-day shifts. The base has food service, recreation and sleeping facilities, similar to what one would find at a US military FOB in some remote part of the world.

The Desert Survivors saw the base from outside. Its roof bristled with communication antennas. There were plenty of clean white Border Patrol vehicles parked out front, and sinister-looking chain link cages around back that reminded one participant of Gitmo. Obviously this was some sort of detention area.

Although named after the devil, El Camino Del Diablo is a lovely, scenic pike for the American 21st Century traveler. The Desert Survivors drove along miles and miles of desert plains and over a low mountain pass with column-like saguaro cactus spotting either side of the road as far as one could see. Camp for the first evening was at Papago Well—a windmill water pump and water storage tank inside the Cabeza Prieta. Also notable here was a flagpole with a blue banner flying high. The flag is a signal that there is potable water here for a thirsty border crossing. One of the great paradoxes along our southern border is how on one hand there has been a tremendous build-up of security with hundreds of miles of new fences and barriers and increased Border Patrol presence—that is largely a product of American xenophobia—while at the same time there are humanitarian, and rather welcoming gestures, by Americans to the illegal immigrant such as this navigation aid to water.

Since the daytime temperatures were so high, Fred Goodsell planned an early morning hike for the next day. Everyone left camp at 6:30 a.m. and walked eastward to check out the abandoned Papago Mine. The hike was expertly timed and routed so that everyone had a good walk, protected by the cool morning shadows. Everyone ate breakfast and broke camp when they returned to their vehicles in the mid-morning. Nicely done, Fred.

The second day’s travel took the trip participants past yet another Border Patrol/Homeland Security facility—this one named Camp Grip FOB. Homeland security is a real growth industry around here.

The Devil’s Road came to within a mile of the Mexican border in some places and passed through more stark, beautiful desert landscapes of sand dunes and volcanic cinder cones. The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Preserve was established in 1939 for the seemingly altruistic reason of protecting desert bighorn sheep. As a Federal preserve it does protect a rare and endangered Sonoran pronghorn (an antelope). However, according to Mr. Goodsell, the preserve nurtures bighorn sheep not so much to protect the species but to provide a steady supply of trophy animals for hunters. Every fall, tags are awarded to hunters to go into the preserve and shoot the rams. What is particularly worrisome today is the “preservationists” are concerned that a recent increase in the population of mountain lions has had an impact on the size of the sheep flocks and there are calls to trap and kill the big cats. Please no!
The Survivor    Fall 2015

The deserts of southern Arizona are done on foot. The Today, virtually all illegal border crossings in the number of agents however, but the tactics they use. The problem is not the border than ever before. The problem has been solved, the bad news is the desecration of the desert lands has continued and take decades to restore. In 2008 the Department of Homeland Security completed a concrete and steel barrier, with the result of vehicle intrusions dropping to virtually zero. Clearly there was a border security problem, but there was also an alarming ecological concern. The border crossers, and to a certain extent law enforcement trying to stop them, were driving rough-shod over land, destroying plant and animal habitats and scarring the fragile desert surface in ways that will remain on land designated as protected and where their tire tracks emanating from El Camino Del Diablo and out of sight of most people who visit. The Desert Survivors trip on the El Camino Del Diablo went on for another day and night. Fred Goodsell’s itinerary included a visit to a natural water hole named Tule Tank, a walk to the borderline to checkout the vehicle barrier and other sights. In all the time that Goodsell has spent in these lands, only once in 47 years did he come across any illegal border crossers. “There is tons of evidence that they are out there, and I mean that literally. Several times I have been on volunteer clean-up crews that have pulled out tons of trash left by the people crossing in,” Goodsell says. In 2002 he happened upon a couple of Mexican fellows on ATV’s while driving down the El Camino Del Diablo. On the third day of this trip, the number of encounters Goodsell had with border crossers doubled. It is a wonderful story. To learn about it, please read the article that follows by trip participant Karen Rusiniak.

For the second night’s camp, the tour turned off of El Camino Del Diablo and drove eight miles north to Christmas Pass. The increase in elevation made the evening a bit cooler.

In the years prior to 2002, most of the hundreds of thousands of persons who crossed the border illegally did so near the large population centers like San Diego/Tijuana and El Paso/Juarez. With the step-up of border scrutiny in these urban areas after the September 11th attacks, smugglers and immigrants began to move their operations to more remote parts. Goodsell tells of a survey he was involved with in the Cabeza Prieta in 2002 where he walked over a 5-mile stretch of the desert near the border and recorded three sets of tire tracks from vehicles crossing from Mexico. In 2005 he walked the exact same route and recorded over 100 tracks. Clearly there was a border security problem, but there was also an alarming ecological concern. The border crossers, and to a certain extent law enforcement trying to stop them, were driving rough-shod over land, destroying plant and animal habitats and scarring the fragile desert surface in ways that will take decades to restore. In 2008 the Department of Homeland Security completed a concrete and steel border vehicle barrier, with the result of vehicle intrusions dropping to virtually zero.

While the good news is that this particular security problem has been solved, the bad news is the desecration of the desert lands has continued and even accelerated in subsequent years. According to Goodsell the ecological crisis continues because of the activities of the Border Patrol. Between 2005 and 2012 the number of Border Patrol agents nation-wide rose from 11,000 to over 21,000, with 18,516 assigned to the US-Mexico boundary. There are now many more agents guarding the border than ever before. The problem is not the number of agents however, but the tactics they use. Today, virtually all illegal border crossings in the deserts of southern Arizona are done on foot. The Border Patrol agents go after these intruders from the seats of their SUVs. Agents will spot footprints while driving and then turn into the desert to follow them—driving over and through any and all terrain, most times never stepping out of the vehicles in the pursuit. The results are scars to the land that rival those in off-road vehicle parks. What is so tragic and wasteful about this activity is that these tactics result in apprehension numbers that are pathetically low. Illegal border crossers can hear the Border Patrol vehicles approaching and easily scatter and hide until they pass.

Goodsell told a story from back in 2013 when he and some friends decided to check out a pronghorn water guzzler in the Sierra Pinta Mountains, inside the Cabeza Prieta. They parked their cars on El Camino Del Diablo and hiked north several miles. They only had vague details on the location of the guzzler. The guzzler was a type difficult to see and after several hours of searching they gave up. Goodsell found a fellow who had built the guzzler and he agreed to take them to the site 10 days later. They found the guzzler on the second trip, but what they also discovered were tire tracks upon tire tracks cutting over and through the desert where they hiked a few days before. It was obvious what happened: the Border Patrol discovered their footprints and thinking they were from illegal intruders went after them in their usual manner—with no results, of course, and terrible destruction to the land.

The Border Patrol is aware that this vehicular bludgeoning of the land, if it is not an ecological problem, at least could be a public relations concern. A few years ago they began hearing complaints about their tire tracks emanating from El Camino Del Diablo. In response they moved their interception activities to “administrative roads.” These are roads closed to the public that run a few miles north of El Camino Del Diablo and out of sight of most people who visit. The destruction is taking place in near secret, on land designated as protected and where off-road driving for the average citizen is prohibited.

In fairness these Border Patrol agents have been given a difficult job. They are assigned to stop very determined people from sneaking over a 110-mile-long line, into thousands of square miles of uninhabited land, of difficult terrain, with no water and extremely hot weather most of the year. For the intruder this land is difficult to cross but it is not difficult to cross undetected. Therein lies the problem in according to Goodsell. “The agents have nothing to do. They cannot see the people sneaking in, and other than respond to an occasional rescue beacon, or an odd sensor going off that could be caused by an animal, they have nothing to do. They just drive.”

Fred Goodsell loves this desert and he knows it well. His concern for the desecration of the land is well-founded and particularly frustrating since virtually no one knows about it. It is his hope that by leading groups such as ours to these borderlands the word will get out to the larger public. We are happy to oblige you, Mr. Goodsell, and thank you again for showing us this wonderful, beautiful place.

Some of the magnificent saguaro cactus the trip participants encountered along El Camino Del Diablo. The ocotillo and ironwood were in bloom this time of the year. The palo verde were festooned with brilliant yellow flowers. Spring is the best season to visit the Sonoran Desert.

Papago Well. The flag tells the border crosser there is drinking water here. The pole on the left is an emergency beacon that summons the Border Patrol for rescue. This is a dangerous desert to cross on foot.
On the last full day of the trip, our 4 vehicles were headed west on the sand road from Christmas Pass. The scenery of saguaro, ocotillo and palo verde trees, completely covered in yellow flowers, was lulling us into a visual meditation as the miles passed by. Then unexpectedly, our eyes saw something that seemed like a mirage and didn’t make sense to our brains. Right outside our truck window was a half naked man holding up his pants with one hand, while wildly gesturing with his other and running parallel to the road. The first vehicle had not seen this lone figure, but we in the second truck did and stopped. We noted that the vehicle’s thermometer recorded a temperature of 99 degrees outside.

Here was Mexican man, probably in his 50’s, who had made a meager camp under a mesquite tree and had been there for three days without food or water. Someone in the group handed him a liter bottle of water and as I watched him gulp it down, I thought of so many Westerns I had seen as a child where the cowboy who had gone astray finally found the water hole and drank in the same desperate manner. The man immediately plopped down in the shade provided by one of the vehicles and leaning against a rear tire he started to tell us his story. His first words were: “la migra” (immigration). With that he admitted he entered the U.S. illegally and he wanted to be turned in. He was lost even though only a few miles from the Mexican border at this point, had been left by his group, was out of water. As his story unfolded we gave him soft things to eat, because it appeared he had no teeth. He tore open a grapefruit rather than peel it and ate a few dates for instant energy. When presented with a purple bandana dipped in water he immediately wrapped it around his hairless head. Most notable about him were the tattoos on his torso: Spanish words, bulls, naked women, the heads and faces of Mexican peasants in a Diego Rivera-like style. The next most notable thing was that he was half naked—only clothed in pants, no shirt, hat, socks nor shoes.

The man told us he had crossed over the border on two occasions previously, but he didn’t recognize where he was this time. He had picked asparagus and strawberries in the United States. He showed us the bottom of his feet, which had huge blisters the size of quarters.

His camp was simple. His black, polyester-filled jacket was draped on a branch to make modest shade. Nearby we found his shoes and a San Diego Padres baseball cap. He had an empty one-gallon water bottle and a backpack with no contents. “There was no tent, sleeping bag or Thermarest—the things one of us would have taken for a hike into the wilderness. The man told us that he would travel at night and use his jacket as his shelter. He had been sitting under his tree for three days, but no one had passed by. I would say our group saved his life.

Now he was asking to ride on the top of one of the vehicles. That was a crazy idea as he was weak and the top of the vehicle was hot enough to cook a meal. He began to cry as he thought we were going to leave him there. Judy Kendall, our Spanish speaker who thus far had been the interpreter, assured him we would notify the Border Patrol of his location so they could pick him up, as our guide (Fred Goodsell) told us this was the proper way to handle this situation. We left him with 7 quarts of water, 2 oranges and $20. We set his location with a GPS, put his jacket on a bush alongside the road as a marker and headed to the nearest Emergency Rescue Beacon where there would be a button to press and a Border Patrol would come immediately. It seemed odd that we had seen such a constant presence of Border Patrol officers in the eastern part of the refuge, but here, according to the man, no one had passed for three days. His ultimate rescue went according to our plan. We learned that the Border Patrol found him and picked him up.

Here in this desolate place of lizards, sun, sky and all things natural, this drama had played out, the struggle of a desperate man to find a bit more comfort and happiness in life and alleviate his suffering, and it nearly cost him his life. We certainly determined this man must have been in a desperate situation to attempt crossing this unforgiving desert.

The next day on our drive out of the Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Preserve we passed through the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range—the nation’s third largest military reservation, named after the long-time Arizona Senator and 1964 Republican Presidential candidate. We found warning signs that read, “Danger, Laser Range In Use.” Amidst the bees working the lovely, purplish blooms of the ironwood trees and the hummingbirds collecting nectar from the red-flowered ocotillo, most of the man-made contributions to the setting that we had witnessed in the last few days seemed incompatible and inappropriate.

Karen Rusiniak
The photographer told them not to look at the camera and, “Think Abbey Road cover.”

Checking out the vintage movie cameras during the Desert Survivors silent movie night, at the Edison Theater in Niles Canyon, May 2015.

Enjoying a siesta during the summer picnic.

Neal Cassidy pointing out pictographs during the Hands Cave backpack.

Our summer picnic at the Marta Perry family ranch, June 2015.

Photo above: Ron Cohen manning our booth for the 2015 Berkeley Bay Fair.

Photo right: On Desert Survivors Night, they showed the W. S. Hart classic western, Wagon Tracks.
Photos From Our Trips & Events

Photo left: A beautiful day for a summer desert hike. This in the cool, high altitude of the White Mountains.

Photo right: After three weekends in the desert, she achieved a perfect Teva tan.

Photo below: WHEN CACTUS ATTACKS! Get got too close to a cholla and watch out!

Photo above: Even Desert Survivors have succumbed to a dependence on electronic information devices. Everyone is happy because the camp has cell phone reception.

Photo right: A rest stop during a hike to Poison Creek in the White Mountains, July 2015.

In a grotto near the Hands Cave in the Ventana Wilderness.

Dinner at 11,500 ft. during the White Mountain Summit trip, July 2015.
Desert Survivors Membership Form

Membership dues are just $30/year, although additional donations are welcome. You can renew your membership by filling out this form and mailing it in with a check to the address shown below.

Name (req’d) _____________________________________________________________
Street Address (req’d) ______________________________________________________
City, State, Zip Code (req’d)__________________________________________________
Phone number: ___________________________________________________________
E-mail address: ___________________________________________________________

(Desert Survivors strives to prevent unsolicited use of members’ e-mail addresses, and contact details, and will not knowingly allow misuse. Our email-list servers guard email confidentiality.)

I want to renew at the following rate (make check payable to “Desert Survivors”):

_____ $30 - Tortoise (basic rate) _____ $50 - Roadrunner _____ $100 - Coyote
_____ $500 – Bristlecone _____ $1000 - Bighorn

Finding the best angle for a beauty shot, along El Camino Del Diablo.