The Desert Sage

OUR 78th SEASON

MARCH-APRIL 2019

ISSUE NO. 380

http://desertpeaks.org/
Have a look! By the time you receive the Sage, our completely redesigned website will be live—same great information but fantastic new look. So check out [http://desertpeaks.org/](http://desertpeaks.org/)! We are so very grateful to new web master William Chen for his expertise in creating the new version of the web site.

Thanks to banquet chair Jim Fleming, everything is coming together for our annual gathering on Sunday, May 19th. I am so delighted that Ron Bartell will be our speaker, telling us about his list of Death Valley peaks that aren’t on our DPS list. Death Valley is such a special place; I’m really looking forward to his presentation. The banquet will be at the Reef in Long Beach, quite close to the Queen Mary. See the banquet flyer in this issue of the Sage, and send in your reservations soon. It will be a wonderful evening!

Thanks to vice chair and outings chair Sandy Lara, we have lots of outings for members for spring fun in the desert. Sandy has done so much to revitalize our outings program and thus the DPS. I’m hoping that the wildflowers will be blooming after this rain, that the desert has had some gentle rains that the seeds love for germinating. Will we have a superbloom?

Finally, please read in Sandy Lara’s Outings Chair column about the vandalism that occurred while a private group was climbing Cerro Pescadores recently. The management committee discussed this on its February 5th conference call and would very much like your thoughts about some ideas we discussed. Send any comments you have to Sandy or me, please. As long as I can remember, there’s been discussion of deleting the Mexican peaks from the list, partly because no one has led an official Sierra Club outing there in decades (special insurance required), partly because of long border crossing times, partly because of safety worries. So dropping those peaks is one option. Should we suspend Pescadores? Put it on a ballot for possible deletion? Mark Butski proposed two versions of the list, one with, one without the Mexican peaks (perhaps with other peaks added to make up for the Mexican peaks). Definitely we advise those that go to Pescadores to go in groups, go prepared for the sand, and be prepared for possibly more than the usual remote desert peak experience. Be safe!

Happy trails, Tina
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Cover Photo Credit...

goes to Jim Morehouse. The photo is of a snow cornice that Jim encountered on
a spring descent of Mount Dubois via DPS Route B to the trailhead located at
Middle Creek. Jim took the photo on May 27, 2017.

The Desert Peaks Section
explores the desert mountain ranges of California and the Southwest, stimulates the interest of Sierra Club membership in climbing these ranges and aids in the conservation and preservation of desert wilderness areas.
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**Trips & Events**

March 2019 — December 2019

Lamoille Canyon, which is located in Nevada’s Ruby Mountains. Photo credit: Daryn Dodge.

**Trips & Events**

**March 1-2**

**FRI-SAT**

**DPS**

**M-R: Manly Peak (7,196’) and Needle Peak (5,803’)**: Join us for two peaks in the Butte Valley area of Death Valley National Park. Saturday we’ll climb class 2 Needle Peak, first caravanning into Butte Valley in 4WD vehicles. The cross country hike might have a bit of an old road and some use trail to follow (7 miles RT and 2,900’ gain). Saturday night we'll camp in Butte Valley. Sunday we'll hike cross country up class 2 Manly Peak (5-6 miles RT and 2,300 - 2,800’ gain, depending on the route). Sierra Club members with prior roped climbing experience who also submit a medical form may climb the 3rd class summit block, provided they also wear a harness and helmet; many people do not climb the block. Icy conditions will nix climbing the high point. Everyone, please send the Leader your vehicle/carpool information and conditioning; those wishing to climb the summit block should also send their Sierra Club number, expiration date, and experience on class 3 and higher rock to Leader: Tina Bowman ([tina@bowmanchange.com](mailto:tina@bowmanchange.com), (562) 438-3809. Co-leader: Nile Sorenson ([nsorenso@pacbell.net](mailto:nsorenso@pacbell.net), (714) 203-1405).
MARCH 2 SAT DPS, HPS
I: Rabbit Ramp-Up Hike #4: Martinez Mountain (6,560’) and Sheep Mountain (5,141’): Join us for the fourth in a series of five hikes on five consecutive Saturdays. The Rabbit Ramp-up hike series will culminate with a hike to Rabbit Peak in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. With 23 miles and 8,300 feet of elevation gain round trip, Rabbit Peak is the toughest day hike among the Hundred Peaks Section's 281 peaks. The Rabbit Ramp-up series is designed to provide the desert hiking experience and conditioning necessary to handle the "BIG Bunny." This is a very strenuous hike in the Santa Rosa Wilderness desert terrain. The Santa Rosa Wilderness is a 72,259-acre wilderness area in Southern California, in the Santa Rosa Mountains of Riverside and San Diego counties. Enjoy views of the surrounding mountains, Palm Desert and the Coachella Valley. Expect around 21 total miles with about 5,000 feet of elevation gain. Not intended for new hikers. Bring hiking footwear, water, lunch, snacks, layers, hat, sunblock and headlamp (with extra batteries!). Leader: Bill Simpson. Co-Leaders: Virginia Simpson, Larry Pond, Ryan Lynch, and Reddy Yetur. For details (meeting time, place, etc.), please contact the primary leader: Bill Simpson at simphome@yahoo.com.

MARCH 9 SAT DPS, HPS
I: Rabbit Ramp-Up Hike #5: Rabbit Peak #2 (6,640’) and Villager Peak (5,756’): Join us for the fifth (and final) in a series of five hikes on five consecutive Saturdays. The Rabbit Ramp-up hike series culminates with this hike to Rabbit Peak #2 in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. With 23 miles and 8,300 feet of elevation gain round trip, Rabbit Peak is the toughest day hike among the Hundred Peaks Section's 281 peaks. The Rabbit Ramp-up series was designed to provide the desert hiking experience and conditioning necessary to handle the "BIG Bunny." Spend a special day in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park while hiking the BIG Bunny at a moderate pace. We will also summit Villager Peak during this hike. Very strenuous. Not intended for beginners. Hike will start in the dark and will probably end in the dark, and it will be paced moderately to take around 15.5 hours. The hike will be about 23 miles round trip with around 8,300 feet of elevation gain (6,950’ on the way to Rabbit; 1,350’ on the return to the trailhead). Not suitable for beginning hikers. Bring hiking footwear, water, lunch, snacks, layers, hat, head lamp (and extra batteries!). Leader: Ryan Lynch. Co-Leaders: Bill Simpson, Virginia Simpson, Mike Dillenback, Larry Pond, Reddy Yetur, and Dave Taylor. For details (meeting time, place, etc), please contact the primary leader: Ryan Lynch at ryan.b.lynch@gmail.com.

MARCH 9-10 SAT-SUN DPS
I: Mitchell Point (7,048’), MR: New York Mountains Highpoint (7,532’): Two interesting desert peaks in two days! Mitchell Point is just outside the Providence Mountains State Recreation Area in the Mojave Preserve, east of Barstow. We'll start early Saturday morning to climb Mitchell Point via DPS Route D (4.5 miles, 3,200’ gain , about 8 hours round trip). This route involves traversing some severe terrain on loose and sharp rock. After returning to the vehicles, we will drive about 2 hours to a nice campsite in Caruthers Canyon for a tasty happy hour potluck. On Sunday we will arise early for our 4 mile with 1,900’ gain round trip route (DPS Route B) to New York Mountains Highpoint. NYM's summit block is fun class 3. If we have time, we may also climb the two slightly lower highpoints to the north and east of the main summit. All participants on NYM will be required to bring a helmet, harness, belay device with locking carabiner, personal anchor system with locking biner, and one autoblock. High clearance 4WD vehicles required for both trailheads. Medical form required to climb NYM. Send climbing resume, vehicle type, and current conditioning to Leader: Jason Seieroe ( jasonseieroe@gmail.com). Assistant Leader: Sandy Lara.

MARCH 10 SUN DPS
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Join us at the home of Tom Sumner in Sylmar for the DPS Management Committee meeting at 4:30 p.m. and potluck at 6:00 p.m. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a potluck item to share. RSVP to Tom at Locornnr@aol.com.

MARCH 23-24 SAT-SUN DPS, WTC
I: Pyramid Peak (6,703’): Recover from the snowy Sierras on an early season experience trip to Pyramid Peak, the highest point in the Funeral Mountains within Death Valley National Park. On Saturday we'll make a late start to cross 3 mile of open desert to the base of the range where we’ll set up camp and enjoy happy hour.
On Sunday we’ll start early to tackle steep, loose and rocky terrain to the colorful summit, enjoy expansive views of the Panamint, Amargosa and other remote ranges, and sign the register before retracing our steps to break camp and return to the cars before dusk. Total trip is about 13 miles and 3,900’ of elevation gain. This is a strenuous outing that will keep a comfortable pace for new backpackers. Participants should be comfortable on second class terrain (loose, steep rock) and be prepared to carry all their water into camp (6 liters minimum). A Death Valley or National Park pass is required for each vehicle entering the park. Preference given to WTC students. Activity is held rain or shine, but may be altered due to inclement weather. For consideration, please send hiking resume, current conditioning and references to Leader: Megan Birdsill (mbirdsill@gmail.com). Co-leader: Justin Bruno (justinbruno@hotmail.com).

❖ APRIL 5-7  FRI-SUN  DPS
I: Sentinel Peak (9,634’) and Porter Peak (9,101,): Very strenuous 3-day backpack in Death Valley to climb two desert peaks and visit the mining ghost town of Panamint City (water there). Friday backpack 6 miles with 3,800' gain up Surprise Canyon to Panamint City and explore the area. Saturday hike 14 miles with 5,800' gain over the summit of Sentinel Peak to Porter Peak and back the same route. Sunday hike out Surprise Canyon. Three day totals: 26 miles and 9,600' gain. High clearance 2WD needed to get to trailhead. Participants must be in top physical condition. Send current conditioning, experience, and vehicle info to Leader: Megan Birdsill (mbirdsill@gmail.com), Co-leaders: Sandy Lara, and Peter Lara.

❖ APRIL 6-7  SAT-SUN  LTC
M/E: Sierra Snow Checkoff and Practice: For M & E candidates wanting to check off leadership ratings. We welcome others who wish to practice new techniques. Restricted to Sierra Club members with some prior basic training with the ice axe. Send Sierra Club number, climbing resume, email, and home and work phone numbers to Leader: Nile Sorenson (nsorenso@pacbell.net). Co-leaders: Neal Robbins, Phil Bates, and Jack Kieffer.

❖ APRIL 14  SUN  DPS
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Join us at the home of Larry and Barbee Tidball in Long Beach for the DPS Management Committee meeting at 4:30 p.m. and potluck at 6:00 p.m. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a potluck item to share. RSVP to Larry or Barbee at lbtidball@verizon.net.

❖ APRIL 17  WED  LTC
E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program: Knots and Basic Safety Systems: First of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This will be an indoor workshop held in the evening reviewing ropes, harnesses, helmets, basic climbing gear, and knots in preparation for later workshops. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).

❖ APRIL 20  SAT  LTC
E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program: Belay Skills: Second of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on belaying and related principles starting with standard sport climbing all the way up to advanced techniques to move large groups across dangerous terrain. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: http://www.advancedmountainingprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).
APRIL 26-27 FRI-SAT DPS
I: Dry Mountain (8,674’) and Tin Mountain (8,953’): Join us for two class 2 peaks in northern Death Valley off the Racetrack Road. Friday we’ll follow DPS guide route C for Dry Mountain (about 13 miles and 5,900’ gain). Saturday it’ll be Tin Mountain (6-7 miles and 4,200’ gain). Both are cross-country hikes, partly following ridges. Send conditioning and vehicle information (high clearance may be needed, but not 4WD) to Leader: Tina Bowman. (tina@bowmanchange.com, (562) 438-3809). Co-leader: Nile Sorenson (nsorenso@pacbell.net, (714) 203-1405).

APRIL 27 SAT LTC
E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program: Rappelling: Third of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on rappelling using a variety of techniques with a heavy emphasis on redundancy, safety, and efficiency. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: http://www.advancedmountainingprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).

APRIL 27-28 SAT-SUN DPS, HPS, WTC
I: Grapevine Peak (8,738’) and Mount Palmer (7,958’): Join us for a nice spring weekend in Death Valley National Park to climb these classic DPS peaks near Beatty, Nevada. Saturday we’ll head out at first light from our dry, primitive campsite in Nevada and travel cross country to the south along rugged desert ridgelines and ascend Mount Palmer, passing into California as we do so. We’ll do this very strenuous hike at a moderate pace; expect about 11.0 miles and 3,100’ of gain for the round trip. Sunday we’ll head out from that same dry, primitive campsite and hike west; travelling cross country at a moderate pace we’ll ascend along ridgelines to the summit of Grapevine; expect about 6 miles and 2,500’ of gain for the round trip. Festive Happy Hour – Pot Luck Saturday night under barely lit, last quarter-moon night skies!!! High Clearance, 4WD vehicles are required to reach our campsite/trailhead. This DPS outing is co-sponsored by WTC and HPS. Email Mat Kelliher at mkelliher746@gmail.com with contact, vehicle type and carpool info, recent conditioning, and experience for trip status and details. Leaders: Mat Kelliher and Stephen McDonnell.

APRIL 27-28 SAT-SUN LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS
I: Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle: Navigation noodle at Warren Point in Joshua Tree National Park to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday for practice, skills refresher, altimeter, homework, campfire. Sunday checkoff or additional practice. Send email with contact info (mailing address and phone numbers), navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmyers@ix.netcom.com ). Assistant: Ann Shields. Note: Early (at least two weeks prior to the event) sign-up for all navigation checkoffs and practices is recommended. These outings require substantial pre-outing preparation work, including completion of both a comprehensive written exam and a route planning assignment that will be mailed to you prior to the checkoff. See Chapter 6 of the Leaders Reference Book for more information. Send contact information (including mailing address) and your qualifications to the leader as soon as possible.

MAY 4-5 SAT-SUN LTC
E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program: Anchors and Real World Application: Fourth of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing, both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This weekend completes the series of AMP workshops at Joshua Tree National Park and focuses on building anchors and applying previously learned skills in real world climbing situations and multiple participants. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: http://www.advancedmountainingprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).
I: Navigation: **Beginning Clinic**: Spend the day one-on-one with an instructor, learning/practicing map and compass in our local mountains. Beginners to rusty old-timers welcome and practice is available at all skill levels. Not a checkout, but it will help you prepare. Many expert leaders will attend; many I-rated leaders started here in the past. 4 miles, 500’ gain. Send sase, phones, rideshare info, $25 deposit, refunded at trailhead (Sierra Club) to Leader: Diane Dunbar. (dianedunbar@charter.net or 818-248-0455). Co-Leader: Richard Boardman (310-374-4371).

**MAY 19**

**SUN**

**DPS**

O: **DPS Annual Banquet**: Join your fellow DPS members and friends for a wonderful evening at The Reef Restaurant located in the city of Long Beach. The DPS is honored to have as our speaker long time member and three time list finisher Ron Bartell, who will present “Beyond the List in Death Valley National Park.” Happy hour starts at 5:00 p.m. and dinner starts at 6:00 p.m., followed by awards. Please see page 10 of this issue of the Sage for more information, or to sign up for the banquet.

**JUNE 15-16**

**SAT-SUN**

**LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

I: **Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle**: Navigation Noodle at Mount Pinos to satisfy Basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday is for practice, skills, refresher, altimeter, homework and campfire. Sunday is for checkoff. Send email/sase with contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmyers@ix.netcom.com). Assistant: Ann Sheilds.

Note: Early (at least two weeks prior to the event) sign-up for all navigation checkoffs and practices is recommended. These outings require substantial pre-outing preparation work, including completion of both a comprehensive written exam and a route planning assignment that will be mailed to you prior to the checkoff. See Chapter 6 of the Leadership Reference Book for more information. Send contact information (including mailing address) and your qualifications to the leader as soon as possible.

**OCTOBER 9**

**WED**

**LTC**

E-R: **Advanced Mountaineering Program: Knots and Basic Safety Systems**: First of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This will be an indoor workshop held in the evening reviewing ropes, harnesses, helmets, basic climbing gear, and knots in preparation for later workshops. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).

**OCTOBER 12**

**SAT**

**LTC**

E-R: **Advanced Mountaineering Program: Belay Skills**: Second of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on belaying and related principles starting with standard sport climbing all the way up to advanced techniques to move large groups across dangerous terrain. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).

**OCTOBER 19**

**SAT**

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E-R: **Advanced Mountaineering Program: Rappelling**: Third of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on rappelling using a variety of techniques with a heavy emphasis on redundancy, safety, and efficiency. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org. Leaders:
In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club’s outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see http://sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms or call 415-977-5528.

In the interest of facilitating the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. In addition, participants assume the risks associated with this travel. CST 2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.
Ron Bartell presents Beyond the List in Death Valley National Park

Ron has been a member of the Desert Peaks Section for over forty years and has finished the DPS list three times. He and his favorite climbing partner, Christine Mitchell, especially enjoyed climbing the peaks in and around Death Valley, so they kept going to Death Valley, looking for non-list peaks to climb. This led to the creation of a list of peaks in Death Valley National Park. The program will feature climbs of peaks in remote areas of the park and Ron’s explanation of his choices of which peaks are “worthy” of being on this list.

Sunday, May 19, 2019
5:00 Happy Hour, 6:30 Dinner
The Reef Restaurant
880 South Harbor Scenic Drive
Long Beach, CA 90802 • (562) 435-8013

Your Name(s): ______________________________________________________
Phone Number or Email: ____________________________________________
Number of Reservations: $35 until May 9 _____ $40 after May 9 _____ Total _____
Entrée Choice (please indicate total number of each):

Chicken Piccata ________ Cheese Enchiladas ________

To order tickets by mail, send this form and a check payable to “Desert Peaks Section” to
Jim Fleming, 538 Yarrow Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-7352

Or you may use PayPal to pay for tickets (desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com), but let Jim know your entrée choice(s): Jimf333@att.net or (805) 405-1726.
### Treasurer’s Report

**By Laura Newman**

DPS Account Summary from January 1, 2019 to January 31, 2019

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| Pay Pal Balance         | $9.41   |

| Checking Account Balance| $3,989.44 |

### Income Categories

- **Banquet Silent Auction**: $0.00
- **Banquet Ticket Sales**: $0.00
- **Donations**: $10.00
- **Membership/Subscriptions**: $540.00
- **Merchandise**: $15.00
- **Outings Income**: $0.00

### Expenses Categories

- **Banquet Expenses**: $0.00
- **Donation to Charity**: $0.00
- **Merchandise Expenses**: $0.00
- **Sage Expenses**: $147.08
- **Sales Tax**: $4.76
- **Web Page Expenses**: $0.00

### Pay Pal Balance

- **$9.41**

### Checking Account Balance

- **$3,989.44**

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### Outings Chair

**by Sandy Lara**

Hello DPSers!

We’ve had two successful I-provisional backpacks completed on our peaks! Lawrence Lee led Martinez Mountain and Sheep Mountain, and Sunny Yi led Avawatz Mountain with a special navigation task of finding a section corner marker. Congratulations to them!

We had some serious vandalism occur at the Cerro Pescadores trailhead on a private trip last month. While climbing the peak, someone came and attempted to remove a wheel from a 4WD pickup. The spare tire was locked onto the truck and every lug nut on each wheel was locked. The person(s) proceeded to break off four of the eight lug bolts on one of the wheels. This was not noticed until the vehicle was home in the US. If they had succeeded in breaking all eight bolts, there would not have been anything to which to attach the spare, and the truck would have been stranded several miles off the highway in desert sand. With bolts missing, the wheel could have come off on the freeway on the way home. We don’t know if there would have been danger if anyone had stayed back with the vehicles to guard them. Cerro Pescadores is the only DPS peak in Mexico that is not in a national park. Being in a park doesn’t necessarily provide protection but there is oversight in national parks that does not occur near Cerro Pescadores. Going to Mexico to climb is not what it was when the Desert Peaks Section originated in the 1940s. Official Sierra Club trips are not led to DPS peaks because National requires extra insurance and paperwork, which are not required if trips go privately. Border crossings take considerable time, extra vehicle insurance must be purchased, safety is a great concern, theft and vandalism do occur. Your Mountaineering Committee will be reviewing the safety of keeping this peak on the List. We welcome your comments.

As always, I welcome your trip submissions!

Sandy Lara
IS THE INSECT APOCALYPSE HERE?

by Dave Perkins

There was an interesting article in the December 2nd New York Times Magazine titled “The Insect Apocalypse is Here.” The author, Brooke Jarvis pulled together various threads of data that seem to indicate that there may be some major declines in insect populations in the developed world. This article was not a scientific study, more like a wake-up call. A German study done in 2016 by an obscure entomological society found that, measured simply by weight, the overall abundance of flying insects in German nature reserves had decreased by 75 percent over the past 27 years. European studies of bird and fish populations that feed on insects are apparently also in decline.

There is a huge gap in our knowledge of insects. Science has named and described a million species, yet entomologists estimate that this number represents only about 20% of the actual diversity of insects on the planet. Even those species that have received a lot of attention such as ants (12,000 types) and bees (20,000 varieties) retain their air of mystery – witness colony collapse. The estimated ratio of insects to humans is 200 million to one, say Iowa State University entomologists Larry Pedigo and Marlin Rice in their newly published (sixth edition) textbook, Entomology and Pest Management, 2008. An estimate of weight of the world’s insect population is about 70 times that of the human population.

With so much abundance, it very likely never occurred to most entomologists in the past that their multitudinous subjects might dwindle away. The current loss of biodiversity is popularly known as the sixth extinction: the sixth time in world history that a large number of species have disappeared in unusually rapid succession, caused this time not by asteroids but by humans.

Two possible causes for the die off mentioned by Jarvis were pollution and climate change. Both causes are speculative, but it seems to me that we are moving into an era in which the number of unknowns is growing.

In The Once and Future World, the journalist J.B. MacKinnon cites records from recent centuries that hint at what has only just been lost: “In the North Atlantic, a school of cod stalls a tall ship in mid ocean; off Sydney Australia, a ship’s captain sails from noon until sunset through pods of sperm whales as far as the eye can see; Pacific pioneers complain to the authorities that splashing salmon threaten to swamp their canoes.” There were reports of lions in the south of France, walruses in the mouth of the Thames, flocks of birds that took three days to fly overhead, and as many as 10 times more whales in the oceans as there are today. “These are not sights from some ancient age of fire and ice,” MacKinnon writes. “We are talking about things seen by human eyes, recalled from human memory.”

UPDATES ARE NEEDED TO THE CURRENT DPS ROAD AND PEAK GUIDE!!

Please send road and climbing route updates to the DPS Road and Peak Guide Editor, Jim Morehouse, at desertpeakssection@gmail.com. Jim is continuously revising the current Version 6 of the Guide; therefore, be sure and send him a quick email after climbing a DPS listed peak if you have suggested updates to the Guide while the information is still fresh in your mind. The DPS, and Jim, want to keep the guides as up to date as possible.
The DPS received a report about worn-out and dangerous bolts on the false summit of DPS listed Picacho Peak located in Imperial County. One bolt failed on a recent climb of the peak, and an adjoining bolt is loose. Climbers are urged to exercise extreme caution and not take any undue risk when climbing the peak. Do not depend on these bolts to protect you from a fall!

### DPS Membership Report

**by Ron Bartell**

#### Membership Summary

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#### Activity Report

**New Subscribers**

- Bernie Sanden

**Sustaining Renewals**

- David Comerzan 1 year
- Mark Conover 1 year
- Rick Craycraft 1 year
- Mary Jo Dungfelder & Gary Schenk 1 year
- Bruno Geiger 1 year
- Ron & Leora Jones 1 year
- Robert Michael 1 year
- Mary & Rayne Motheral 1 year
- Ken D Olson 1 year
- Shelley Rogers 1 year
- Catherine Rossbach 1 year
- Brian Smith 1 year
- Joan & Ed Steiner 1 year
- Roger Weingaertner 1 year

**Renewals**

- Marcelo Altamirano & Doug Mantle 1 year
- Henry A Arnebold 1 year

**Donations**

- $10 from Dave Halligan

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PICACHO PEAK (LITTLE PICACHO) CLIMBING GUIDE UPDATE

The DPS received a report about worn-out and dangerous bolts on the false summit of DPS listed Picacho Peak located in Imperial County. One bolt failed on a recent climb of the peak, and an adjoining bolt is loose. Climbers are urged to exercise extreme caution and not take any undue risk when climbing the peak. Do not depend on these bolts to protect you from a fall!
After reviewing the current bylaws of the section, the elected management committee proposes changing the wording slightly in one article and adding two articles to the bylaws. You’ll be able to vote on these changes in the 2019 election.

The proposed change is in Article IV.4, which currently reads “Vice-chair. During the absence or disability of the Chair, the Vice-Chair shall act in his/her place; shall arrange scheduled climbs; shall be Chair of the Mountaineering Committee; shall be the Outings and Safety Chair; shall solicit and collect outing proposals from leaders for approval for submission to the Angeles Chapter Schedule.” The proposal is to change the underlined words to “publication” to reflect the loss of the traditional Angeles Chapter Schedule of Activities.

The two additions are articles to provide the descriptions of the Bill T. Russell Mountaineering Award and Fran Smith Lifetime Achievement Award. The DPS Service Award and Desert Explorer Award are both included in the bylaws, but not these two awards, although both have been given to members since 2001. Below are the two proposed additions.

ARTICLE XIV: THE BILL T. RUSSELL MOUNTAINEERING AWARD

1. The Desert Peaks Section management committee shall annually consider giving an award at the annual banquet to a member of the section for outstanding mountaineering achievements. Criteria for selecting a member for the award may include the person’s being a leader of DPS outings; having a passion for mountaineering and peak bagging; having attained DPS achievements such as emblem, list finish, and Explorer Emblem; being a list finisher of other lists; and supporting DPS Peak List improvement by participating in exploratory outings, scouting and writing up routes, reviewing status and conditions of existing peaks. The award does not have to be given every year but must be considered. The name of the award shall be the Bill T. Russell Mountaineering Award.

ARTICLE XV: THE FRAN SMITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

1. The Desert Peaks Section management committee shall annually consider giving an award at the annual banquet to a member to recognize dedication to the Desert Peaks Section and Sierra Club over many years. Through service and/or mountaineering activities, such as those listed for the Service and Mountaineering Awards. The award does not have to be given every year but must be considered. The name of the award shall be the Fran Smith Lifetime Achievement Award.
Passages

Celebrating the Life of John W. Ide
By Sharon Marie Wilcox

With heavy hearts, we struggle to understand John’s decision to end his life. His decision will remain a mystery to all but him, leaving us grasping at scenarios to explain how this could happen.

In our frustration to understand John’s decision, we need to remember he would be the last person to want us to feel guilty or second guess ourselves trying to summon the solutions of what we could have done to prevent this end.

Consequently, we need to slowly process our grief and move forward embracing the essence of how John touched our lives.

I first met John when he joined a Sierra Club hike that I lead in the Painted Hills near Pyramid Lake in March 2010. At our lunch stop he politely asked if he, Rich Wilson and John Sparks could sign-out to do a couple of peaks. He was surprised that I had previously hiked Gin Peak and questioned me about this easy peak. This began our peak bagging history. Though I wasn’t even in John’s dust trail on all shared peak bagging adventures, he was always encouraging and never criticized my snail pace as he rocketed up the summit.

Another memorable outing was a hike to Loch Leven Lakes where we both discovered our first Dicentra uniflora, the longhorn steer’s-head wildflower. It was a notable find for both of us.

In addition to peak bagging, John touched many circles of friends with his varied interests. These interests included but weren’t limited to bridge, good books, movies, concerts, birding, nature hikes, environmental and scientific groups, politics, traveling, and volunteering.

On January 24, John’s peak bagging friends gathered in Reno to share memories and grieve his passing. Everyone shared stories and photos of adventures with John producing smiles and laughs. The retelling of John adventures provided an evening of comfort and healing. Thanks to Ron Moe and Dick Kendall for organizing this event.

Most described John with words like kind, compassionate, cheerful, interesting, intelligent, fit, fast hiker, energetic, and an all round nice guy.

Regardless of how John touched our lives, he will live on in our memories and his spirit will accompany us on all of our mountain endeavors.

May you rest in peace John Ide.

For those wanting to donate in John’s memory, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Population Connection, and Environmental Defense Fund are three organizations that he supported.

Composing thoughts regarding John has challenged me. Both sadness and tears get in the way and impede my progress. In order to complete this task, I remind myself of his sunny smile and focus on many fond memories of shared experiences. It is difficult to think of a favorite John story as I reviewed years of photos. I know many of us have endless memorable peak climbs with John, though two of my favorite outings with John were non-peak bagging trips.

John Ide on the summit of Nevada’s Granite Peak in 2012.
Photo credit: Sharon Marie Wilcox.
We awoke Thanksgiving Day in Lone Pine, California ready for some action.

It has been a tradition for the two of us to spend Thanksgiving week in Lone Pine, which has enabled us to explore many corners of the Owens Valley, the Inyo Mountains, and the nearby high desert areas.

We were meeting a family from Southern California for Thanksgiving dinner around 3:30 p.m. in Lone Pine, so we only had time for a few short hikes. They also drive up to the Owens Valley on the way to Bishop and Mammoth Lakes each year at Thanksgiving.

On Thanksgiving Day, we picked a couple of rocky high points to climb. First up was Peak 5396 (A.K.A. Rattlesnake Mountain). It is located in the southwest corner of Horseshoe Meadows and very close to the Whitney Portal Road. We did not have much in the way of route information to go on except for a topo map of the area. We drove past the mountain to take a real close look at it and try to get a visual of the best way up. We spotted a ramp on the northeast corner of the peak and decided to go for it. The first 150 feet up was fairly easy walking on sand and rocks. We got to a point where we had to turn right, and follow along the edge of a drop off. This was the steepest part of the hike and it got us into some class 2 terrain. After another 150 feet up, we hiked into a bowl and across to the other side, and then up to the summit plateau. We found the peak’s high point at the northwest corner of the summit plateau, but did not locate a summit register. We played around on the summit area climbing all the high points. The view across from us was of the Mount Whitney crest, which was covered in snow from the previous night’s winter storm; it had snow blowing across it. From the top, we descended down to the bowl following our ascent route. From there, we found a better way down, but still had to negotiate climbing down and around several class 2 rocky sections. Afterwards, it was an easy walk back to our car.

Next up was Peak 5213. The two of us drove north on Movie Road towards Peak 5213, parking off the main road. Peak 5213 is located pretty close to the highpoint of the Alabama Hills. After parking the car, we headed straight up the peak’s west slope to a saddle located just south of the high point. From there, we turned north and hiked to the summit to a rock pile with a glass container wrapped in tape. We had seen these registers many times before and suspected they were from Barbara Lilley. She had placed this register in October of 2018 doing a solo hike at age 89! It was very exciting for us to know that she was still doing what she has always loved to do! I had spoken with Barbara over a year ago and she told me that she only hikes by herself because she was too slow. The last couple of years we have come across many registers that were placed by her, (indicating she had hiked solo) and got the feeling we were following in her footsteps. Afterwards, we went down to the saddle located on the north side of the peak and then back to the car for a nice loop hike. The two of us got down in plenty of time to enjoy a lovely Thanksgiving dinner at the Whitney Restaurant with our friends!
It was a volunteer match made in heaven. Richard Stover and I worked for two days on a balloon survey in Death Valley. The day after our work we climbed Zinc Hill on the western edge of Death Valley near Panamint Springs.

If you have been reading my trip reports, you know that Richard and I have been retrieving lost balloons in the desert and Sierra Nevada for over 20 years. Many people do not know that Mylar balloons are not only litter on the landscape when they come down, but also can cause fires and are a threat to wildlife. The problem has become so severe that even in remote parts of Death Valley balloons blemish the scenery. In an attempt to quantify the threat, the Park Service is surveying balloons in random 300 meter square plots. Richard and I helped walk three of these plots on December 8 and 9. We each found one balloon.

About 15 volunteers spaced about 20 meters apart lined up and walked each area. When a balloon was found, we noted the GPS coordinates. Not one plot was balloon free. The results of the continuing survey are being mapped and will be used to educate folks and perhaps help people choose different gifts and memorial tributes other than balloons. Since many balloons littering the park have been picked up when found next to roads, most of the plots in the study were a mile or two from the nearest road and required an hour or more for the group to reach the starting place. It was a good workout.

After two days of chasing lost balloons, Richard and I headed for Zinc Hill, the northernmost peak of the Argus Range which borders the west side of Panamint Valley. The 4WD approach we selected passes the entrance to Darwin Falls and ends up on the west side of the peak.
We started hiking up a wash, then on an old mining road which had a spur leading to an adit which we found interesting.

As we approached the summit, again off trail, we heard a low rumble. Then perhaps two thousand feet below us, we saw several very-slow-moving large planes flying south down Panamint Valley. These were not the roaring fighter planes we have seen many times in Saline Valley and Panamint Valley. Were they bombers, transport planes, or were they practicing flying low to avoid radar detection? Let me know if you know the answer.

From the summit we could see snowcapped Telescope Peak and to the west the Sierras. Glorious.

On the way down we stayed on the unmaintained trail a bit longer until we could descend to the abandoned road by skirting the east side of hill 4806. The jaunt took us about 6 hours. Time for a hotel and hot shower.

Trip Reports - continued

Debbie Bulger starting the hike up the wash. The summit of Zinc Hill is not visible.

Debbie Bulger on an old road that leads to a mine adit.

We backtracked to the road and then hiked off trail up a steep slope and eventually reached an old miners trail which led to a saddle a few hundred feet below the summit.

Pico Risco (attempt) and Cerro Pescadores
January 5 and 7, 2019
By Laura Newman
Photo Credit: Sandy Lara

Trip participants: Peter and Sandy Lara, Mark Butski, and Laura Newman.

On the first Friday in January, four hearty souls headed south of the border in the hopes of checking out the view from Pico Risco and Cerro Pescadores. Sandy and Peter Lara, Mark Butski and I met up in Calexico, California. There was some short debate on whether to continue the trip or not given the current reported unrest along the border but as we soon
saw, there was no issue at all, at least in Mexicali. Using Google Maps to “Acceso A Canon de Guadalupe,” we traveled along south, approximately 2 hours after crossing, to arrive at Canon de Guadalupe. Peter had reserved the Vibora campsite at GuadalupeCanyonOasis.com and it did not disappoint as it came with our own private hot spring. There was plenty of parking for our two vehicles as well as space for my tent.

The next morning, Saturday, Mark, Peter and I awoke early and headed out for Pico Risco. Sandy stayed behind as she had already summited Pico Risco the previous year. Peter had researched and learned of an old Indian trail that takes one to the top, and by all accounts we were moving along it pretty quickly once we found the start as marked with a green ribbon from the road. However, after 2 plus miles we found ourselves in the stream bed with no cairns in sight. This was a drastic change as they were plentiful up to this point. We decided to head out of the canyon and up on the ridge to the west toward the peak where we found the typical bouldering that is seen on the usual route. The weather had also turned on us by this point and we were trying to progress upward in horizontal rain and a strong, gusty wind; the temperature had dropped pretty low. It was clear that if we continued, we would have a long night hike out which no one wanted so the turn-around was called and we headed back to camp. This provided an excellent opportunity to see where we had missed the Indian trail. It was to the east of the wash where we had headed up to the west towards Pico Risco. Rookie mistake!

Sunday came with excellent weather and we thought briefly to try again but that passed quickly as we preferred relaxing at camp to hiking in wet clothes and boots--go figure. Canon de Guadalupe has some short hikes right out of the campsite that are worth exploring. It was also a nice change of pace to the typical DPS trips of hiking a peak every day, plus it was great to have time to take advantage of our hot spring. Our plan also scheduled an early morning exit the next day in hopes of getting to the Cerro Pescadores trailhead near sunrise. Who sets an alarm for 3:30 AM? The Lara’s, that’s who. We all awoke and packed quickly to head off for Cerro Pescadores unsure of what condition the road would be in based on previous trip reports. Once again, we used Google Maps, this time to turn right at Centro de Acopio de Llantas, BC. It had been reported that the road used at the tire dump was no longer an option, but we didn’t find this to be the case. In fact, we drove 2.8 miles to the end of this road as seen on the Google satellite map, then drove farther than the DPS directions shaving about 1.5 miles of flat sandy wash hiking off the trip. A four-wheel drive vehicle was needed to drive the access road further into the washes. We all felt that the lovely sandy wash that we parked in would make for a nice, safe campsite as well. Looks can be deceiving. There was an attempted theft of wheels from the Lara’s Ford F350 while we

From left to right, Laura Newman, Mark Butski, and Peter Lara at the Vibora campsite located at the Cannon de Guadalupe Resort.
were climbing Cerro Pescadores. Four of eight lug nut bolts had been broken off to remove the right front wheel. If one more had been broken off the truck would have been un-drivable. With no resources available in this remote wash in Mexico, assistance would have been extremely difficult to obtain.

Cerro Pescadores was an all-day adventure for our team. We followed the usual tracks up the wash but continued on a little farther and hooked to the right to take advantage of a not-too-steep gully past the usual loose rocky ridge recommended in the peak guide. The rock was decent in the gully and we would later take it down as well. Up the ridge, through the boulders and beyond Peter came across a group of bighorn sheep and stopped to take a photograph. We could spot them for a bit, envious of how deftly they could move amongst the blooming cacti and rock. We arrived at the top to find outstanding views, signing the register and then returning from where we came in short order. We knew that we had a long afternoon ahead of us and with the shorter days in January would be exiting after sunset. The border crossing took about 45 minutes. Mark and I said our good-byes to the Lara’s once we were back in the US. Then came the long drive home. Twenty-four hours after my early morning alarm in Canon de Guadalupe I was happy to be home with a successful climb, checking off another DPS peak.

New York Butte (10,668’)
By Sandy Lara
November 17, 2018
Photo Credit: Sandy Lara

Leaders: Peter Lara, Sandy Lara, and Megan Birdsill

Peter Lara led New York Butte in May 2018. Megan and I (Sandy) missed that trip so we planned this one, and Peter was up for going again. Ryan Lynch, Justin Barham, and Amy Huang joined us. With 12 miles round trip and 6,700’ gain, it was steep most of the way. The forecast was to be cold (30s) but with the sun out and little wind it was perfect weather for this climb. Snow did not come to this area until the following week.

New York Butte is on the Inyo Crest, the range running north-south just east of Lone Pine. The hike begins on the valley floor and climbs all the way to the top of the Butte on the ridge. As you ascend, you keep seeing new views of the Sierra to your west from different elevations. As the sun rises and passes through the sky, the images keep changing. Upon descent, the sun sets for another experience.

We camped at the turnoff from Owenyo Lone Pine Road on the dirt road that leads to the trailhead, which is 0.6 miles south of the intersection of Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road and Owenyo Lone Pine Road. Passenger vehicles can make it to this location. There is a large open flat area for parking and tents.

The hike starts at about 4,000’ in elevation where most 4WD vehicles cannot make it past a deep dip in the old dirt road. There is parking here. We
As the Desert Peaks Section’s Mountain Records Chair, I’m responsible for keeping track of the condition of summit register books and containers. Please email me after climbing a DPS listed peak and advise me of their condition. My email address is: hbmark58@yahoo.com.

hiked up the road to Long Canyon, then after about ¾ mile and 600’ veered off to the left, now going east, for another ¼ mile, then veered further left (NE). Peter found a ridge that is not the usual DPS route for getting to the main high ridge. It is barely west of being directly south of point 8293T. This ridge, which has the steepest 1,000’ of the climb, was much more stable than the reported loose rock and scree on the normal route. Stay on the right (east) side of this ridge.

After having climbed 4,300’ up to the east-west summit ridge at about 8,300’ in elevation we already felt like we had done a good hike, but we still had 2,400’ of gain to go. This upper ridge is pleasant with trees and nice rock outcroppings that allow for some fun rock hopping as a change of pace. Then there is a more open area, still climbing all the way, and finally the nice rocky summit.

The east side of the summit drops down into a deep canyon. It’s beautiful!

After celebrating and getting a bite to eat, we turned around and retraced our steps, eventually coming out in the dark as the days were getting shorter. Again, we had spectacular views including sunset.

It was a tough hike, but we all felt it was definitely worth the effort! We look forward to more desert climbs!

The Desert Sage
Soon after my wife Jo and I retired here to Palm Desert in 1998 it dawned on me that--because my favorite pastimes were reading, writing and exploring the desert--reviewing desert-themed books would make a perfect pastime

Now, more than three hundred volumes later, a groaning, ever-growing shelfful of books still await my review.

In keeping with the occasion, I’ve listed below what I consider to be the ten most notable desert books reviewed during the past two decades. The choices were made considering the volume’s historical importance, readability, and the area described. Interestingly, the list is unchanged from that which I prepared in 2009 for the 10th Anniversary Special. The ten volumes are listed in chronological order, not personal preference—to do the latter would be cause for certain brain freeze.

**Death Valley in ’49** (1894), William L. Manly

Death Valley in ’49 is a tale of desert survival describing the ordeal of the thirty plus Argonauts who became stranded in the valley in December 1849. The author, William Lewis Manly (1820-1903), was as noble a hero as the old West ever produced, a man who risked his life by venturing, with his companion, John Rogers, 270 miles from Death Valley to a ranch at Castaic Junction, and then, carrying provisions, returning to lead the starving emigrants to safety.

Even though *Death Valley in ’49* also recounts a good portion of Manly’s life prior to and after 1849, and that it was published 44 years after the events in the valley took place, the noted western bibliographer, Lawrence Clark Powell, describes the volume as a “classic…chronicle of death and disaster, survival and heroism, distinguished by narrative power, specific event and precise observation.”

Powell does wonder, however, about relying on the memory of an author who was seventy-four at the time he wrote his memoirs. He also ponders, “Who was it that helped Manly write his book?” Indeed, there is strong evidence, based on shorter pieces and letters which Manly published about the same time, that he alone could not have produced such a work.

Like *Death Valley in ’49*, however, *The Desert* raises some concerns. Purportedly, it is based on Van Dyke’s two-year desert Odyssey, a trip that he, a professor of Art History at Rutgers College (now University), claimed began in Hemet, continued down the Coachella Valley and Salton Basin, through Yuma and Tucson, across the border, and finally ending in Hermosillo, Mexico. Unfortunately, because many of Van Dyke’s tales—as related in *The Desert* and later enlarged upon in his autobiography—don’t match what we now know about the area, serious scholars believe that the author’s desert observations probably took place from the comfort of a railroad car or the front porch of a hotel.

Nevertheless, as Lawrence Clark Powell observed, “Van Dyke accurately captured the desert’s eternal strength, the poetry of its wide-spread chaos, the sublimity of its lonely desolation,” and especially “the glory of its wondrous coloring…If a modern reader should find (his) book excessive in its chromatic exuberance, it would surely not be when reading it at sunrise or sunset on the desert.”

**The Land of Little Rain** (1903), Mary Austin

Although Mary Austin (1868-1934) was to write thirty-five books during her lifetime, her first effort, *The Land of Little Rain*, a collection of essays regarding the Inyo/Kern County area, published when she was thirty-five, is still considered—as evidenced by the fact that the volume has remained in print for more than one hundred years—her finest work.

Pulitzer Prize winning biographer Carl Van Dorn observed that, “Readers who…discover or rediscover (Mary Austin) will find in *The Land of Little Rain* the records of a woman who…went into the venerable desert, put her heart...
Desert Books – continued

to the ground, heard men walking and gods breathing, mastered herself by generous surrender to the earth and sky, and came back to the world of muddy tumult with clear eyes. Because the world had no bread for a prophet, she wrote books to live by.”

Desert bibliographer E.I. Edwards adds, “The lasting appeal of The Land of Little Rain abides not so much in what the author tells as in the eloquent beauty she employs in the telling of it…Other great desert books have approached, but never quite captured, the peculiar charm of the Austin masterpiece.”

The best tribute I know of, however, is inscribed on the bronze California Historical Monument plaque, located outside Mary Austin’s former dwelling in Independence—a quote from The Land of Little Rain: “If you ever come beyond the borders as far as the town that lies in a hill dimple at the foot of Kearsarge, never leave it until you have knocked at the door of the brown house under the willow at the end of the village street, and there you shall have such news of the land of its trails and what is astir in them, as one lover of it can give to another.”

The Wonders of the Colorado Desert (1906), G. Wharton James

Born in England, George Wharton James (1858-1923), as a young man, for reasons of health, emigrated to the American West. Employed early on as a circuit riding pastor in Nevada, then as the minister of the 1st Methodist Church in Long Beach (a position he was forced to relinquish after a scandalous divorce), he eventually remarried, became enamored with the Colorado Desert, and acquired a rudimentary cabin in Palm Springs’ Chino Canyon. After making several pack trips through the region, he wrote The Wonders of the Colorado Desert, a two-volume work which Lawrence Clark Powell ranks as a classic, “(B)ecause it embodies more information about the region, its natural and human history, than any other single book; and because it is written in masterful prose, an expression of its author’s virile character; and finally because it is embellished with hundreds of accurate drawings by Carl Eytel, making the book a pictorial as well as a prose encyclopedia.”

Lawrence Hogue, author of All the Wild and Lonely Places, adds, “If (John) Van Dyke was an impressionist, then James was a social realist, showing farmers and engineers confidently taming the desert, with just a glimpse of pristine landscape visible in the background.” The late desert bibliographer, Peter Wild, in his Grumbling Gods: A Palm Springs Reader, avers that James gave readers “in snowy Ohio or slushy Connecticut” reason to believe that “they, as they read through the pages, were indeed entering a Wonderland—a word that after James was increasingly applied to a bright new region entering the nation’s consciousness.”

California Desert Trails (1918), J. Smeaton Chase

J. Smeaton Chase (1864-1923), like George Wharton James, was born in England, emigrated to the U.S. as a young man, and had a strong bent for improving the lot of his fellow man. Coincidentally, both Chase and James died in California in 1923; Chase in Banning, James in Saint Helena.

And the parallels don’t stop there. Both James and Chase relished long pack trips in the desert, and they both wrote excellent accounts of their adventures.

However, whereas James usually traveled with one or two companions, Chase was perfectly content to travel with only his horse. One of the most endearing aspects of California Desert Trails, in fact, is Chase’s obvious affection and concern for his Indian pony, Kaweah.

Desert Trails recounts three pack trips Chase made in the spring and summer of 1918, during which he visited 29 Palms, Mecca Hills, Borrego Springs and the lower Colorado River. Western bibliographer, Peter Wild, observed that the volume, “in contrast to the sometimes cloyingly sweet syllabubs produced by the enthusiasts, is a work of unprecedented emotional range, accuracy and human depth… as Chase sometimes hallucinating from exertion and dehydration, tries to make sense of a phantasmagoric land that, as reality wavers before him, sometimes seems bent on killing him.”

Laurence Clark Powell claims that Chase’s works, which included Yosemite Trails (1911), California Coast Trails (1919), and Our Araby, Palm Springs (1920), were minor classics, “more comfortable to live with than those rare works of heroic stature which demand great effort to read and comprehend.”

The Desert Year (1952), Joseph Wood Krutch

It wasn’t until 1952, thirty-four years later, that the next of my top ten desert books, The Desert Year by Joseph Wood Krutch (1893-1970), appeared on the scene. By that time a sea change had occurred in Western literature, and the new generation of writers was examining the then-settled
American Frontier in a new, more introspective manner.

Krutch, a long-time drama critic for The Nation, and a professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia, by 1951 had become one of the most important literary authorities in the United States. It seemed he was destined to remain forever rooted in the East Coast intellectual milieu.

In 1952, however, he and his wife Marcelle surprised their friends and colleagues by moving to the northern outskirts of Tucson, where they were to live out the rest of their days.

Krutch’s first book on the area, The Desert Year, was described in its cover blurb as “a report on the pattern of the desert world and its seasons, (in which the reader will find) the wise and often quizzical play of a mind which has learned that there is more joy in the way things are than in the way they might be.” The author was fascinated by “the brilliant little flower springing improbably out of the bare, packed sand; the lizard scuttling with incredible speed from cactus clump to spiny bush; the coquettish plume of the Gambel’s quail; the cocky stroll of the road-runner”.

“Love me or hate me, the desert seems to say,” Krutch wrote. “This is what I am, and this is what I shall remain. Go north for astonishment if you must have it. What I offer is different.”

Krutch’s desert works also include The Voice of the Desert (1955); The Forgotten Peninsula; a Naturalist in Baja California (1961), and Baja California and the Geography of Hope (1967).

Desert Solitaire (1968), Edward Abbey

In his prime, Edward Abbey (1927-1989) blazed a bright trail across the desert southwest. As the author of several landmark books on the region, and as a man possessed with strong, even anarchistic notions as to how to preserve the natural wonders of his adopted homeland, he became a major force in many of the environmental battles waged in the area during the 1970s and 80s.

Desert Solitaire, published in 1968, is based on journals that Abbey kept while working for two summers as a seasonal ranger in Arches National Monument, Utah. Vividly describing the wild canyonlands and the delights of his isolation as a backcountry ranger, the volume is regarded as one of the finest nature narratives in American literature, and has been compared to Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac and Thoreau's Walden. Desert Solitaire also first elucidated what Abbey termed "industrial tourism," the unfortunate condition which he believed was turning national parks into "national parking lots.”

The problem is that Desert Solitaire does not directly concern the area in which the DPS climbs. Nevertheless, I believe it deserves top ten status because it does capture the essence of the DPS deserts, and because it was published at a time when the nascent environmental movement was eager for inspiration, in need of a point man to lead the struggle. Abbey—tall, rugged, bearded, cigar smoking and hard drinking, an incendiary voice crying in the wilderness—became that man.

In 1975, Abbey published his best-selling novel, The Monkey Wrench Gang, another milestone in environmental literature. Appearing to advocate eco-terrorism, Abbey claimed he wrote the book “in an indulgence of spleen and anger from a position of safety behind my typewriter.” No matter what his intentions, The Monkey Wrench Gang inspired environmentalists—including the radical action group Earth First!—frustrated with the compromises which the mainstream environmentalist groups were making.

Gathering the Desert (1985), Gary Nabhan

Gary Paul Nabhan (1952-) is intrigued with desert flora and Southwestern cultures in spades. He is an ethnobotanist, a vocation involving the study of the uses of wild plants and/or cultivated crops by the people indigenous to an area. In writing Gathering the Desert, Nabhan and his collaborator artist/biologist Paul Mirocha focused on the plant life and the people of the Sonoran Desert, and together they assembled an outstanding 209-page volume regarding those closely related subjects. So well did they conspire, in fact, that their effort was awarded the prestigious John Burroughs Medal for outstanding nature writing.

Even if you have little interest in desert flora, Gathering the Desert’s perfect blend of folklore, history and scholarship will delight you. Although there are more than 425 wild edible and/or otherwise useful species and twenty-five crop species that have been cultivated on the Sonoran Desert since prehistoric times, Nabhan considers only twelve, i.e., the creosote bush, native palms, mescal bacanora, mesquite, organpipe cactus, amaranth greens, tepary beans, chilies, devil’s claw, wild desert gourds, Sonoran paniegrass and sandfood. Among the tribes considered are the Cahuilla, the Mohave, the Pima, the
Yuma, the Papago, the Cocopa, the Seri, the Opata, and the Yaqui.

A cofounder of Native Seeds/SEARCH, a MacArthur Fellowship recipient, and the author of *The Desert Smells Like Rain, Cultures of Habitat, Why Some Like It Hot: Food, Genes, and Cultural Diversity*, and *Enduring Seeds: Native American Agriculture and Wild Plants*, Nabhan laments the fact that so many Native Americans and Mexican-Americans living in the desert Southwest now suffer from diabetes and other nutrition-related diseases due to the demise of native plants in their diets.

**Blue Desert** (1986), Charles Bowden

With style and passion, often opting for subjects considered unpleasant and/or unsavory, Charles Bowden (1945-2014) calls attention to several unfortunate trends in today’s Sonoran Desert. His on-going works, for my money, constitute the best contemporary writing on the region.

*Blue Deserts*, my favorite Bowden volume, dwells on such diverse subjects as the demise of the Mexican free-tail bat, the Sonoran pronghorn antelope, the Yaqui tompminnow, the urban sprawl in Tucson, Indian casinos, and the open pit mines at Ajo. In the final section, Bowden recalls two personal hiking experiences, the first a 130-mile trek along the ancient Hohokum shell trail, stretching from Puerto Penasco on the Gulf of California to Ajo, Arizona; the second, a long overnighter along the “wetback” trail, leading from a truck stop on Mexico’s Highway 2 to Interstate 8 at Tacna, Arizona. During this experience, about midnight, Bowden suddenly discovers that “…everything turns blue. The mountains rise azure, the ocotillo waves blue wands, the creosote whispers by my feet, and everything is awash with a rich, bright blue.”

Bowden, like his friend, Ed Abbey, passionately railed against the on-going degradation of the desert Southwest. In his introduction to *Blue Deserts*, Bowden noted: “Thousands move here each year…to escape the unemployment, the smoggy skies, dirty cities, (and) crush of human numbers…of their pasts. This they cannot do. Instead, they reproduce the world they have fled.”

**Marshall South and the Ghost Mountain Chronicles** (2005); text by Marshall South, introduction and biography by Diana Lindsay

The desert attracts a wide variety of devotees, including those who are spiritually and esthetically captivated by the area, those who relish the healthful living conditions thereon, and those who desire to get away from a money-driven society and to live an inexpensive existence. In 1932, for all the above reasons, Marshal and Tanya South began building their home, Yaquitepec, on top of Ghost Mountain in what is now Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. There, until 1946—except for two years spent in other desert locations—the couple and their growing family eeked out a simple existence. From February 1940 through December 1946, South supplied monthly, beautifully written essays recounting his family’s experiment in primitive living to *Desert Magazine*—a series which contributed to the early success of that publication, and through which he won both the affection of a great number of admirers and the scorn of a smaller group that disparaged his unconventional ideas.

So just who was Marshal South (1889-1948), this latter-day Thoreau, the man born Roy Bennett Richards in a suburb of Adelaide, South Australia?

Well, that’s a tricky question, because, as Diana Lindsay, who collected South’s works, researched and wrote the excellent biographic forward, and published this fascinating volume notes, “there has been a long-standing aura of mystery and secrecy” surrounding his past. “Marsharl South, like a character out of one of his western novels, was part fiction.”

Randall Henderson, editor of *Desert Magazine*, may have described Marshal South best when, upon the author’s death, he eulogized, “He was a dreamer—an impractical visionary according to the standards of our time, but what a drab world it would be without the dreamers. Marshal’s tragedy was that he tried too hard to fulfill his dream. He would not compromise. And that is fatal in a civilization where life is a never-ending compromise between the things we would like to do, and the obligations imposed by the social and economic organization of which we are a part.”

My thanks to the Desert Peaks Section and *The Desert Sage* for the opportunity to continue this fascinating exploration of desert-themed literature. Please let me know what your favorite desert volume(s) might be at burtonafalk@gmail.com.
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