Hello Fellow DPS-ers!

Summer is almost over. While it’s not our high season for climbing in the desert, I hope you might have had a chance to climb one or more of our higher peaks. They are so beautiful!

What an unusual year, weather-wise! So much rain, then snow…and more snow, then heat, then rain and snow, then heat again. We certainly got fantastic wildflowers. Unfortunately, there has also been more deterioration of some of our access roads.

Our new Outings Chair, Megan Birdsill, is ready to take your trip submissions (mbirdsill@gmail.com). If you would like a certain peak or peaks to be led, why not let her know?

We mentioned previously that we would like a discussion on the Mexican peaks in general, and Cerro Pescadores in particular, with regard to keeping them on The List after the dangerous vandalism that occurred at the Pescadores trailhead in January (see the Chair and Outings Chair columns in the March-April 2019 issue of this newsletter here: https://desertpeaks.org/adobepdffiles/Sage380.pdf). Please send your comments to me (ssperling1@verizon.net) or a piece to our editor, Greg Gerlach (greg1955@verizon.net).

Kudos to William Chen, our webmaster, who is continuing to improve our site. If you haven’t been there recently, click www.desertpeaks.org and see the changes.

Our Management Committee will begin meeting again this fall. Please let me know if you have any items you would like us to include on our agenda.

Happy Trails!

Sandy Lara
Desert Peaks Section Leadership for the 2019 - 2020 Season

**Elected Positions**

**Chair**  
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**Cover Photo Credit...**  
go to Greg Gerlach. The photo is of Mopah Point and was taken on January 30, 2016 from Umpah Peak. Mopah Point is on the DPS list and its easiest route is rated class 3.

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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.
Trips & Events
September 2019 — December 2019

Please visit the DPS website for an even more up-to-date listing of upcoming trips and events at http://desertpeaks.org/.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day(s)</th>
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<td>SAT-SUN</td>
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<td>SUN</td>
<td>LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS</td>
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♦ AUG 31-SEPT 1 SAT-SUN DPS, WTC, HPS

I: Charleston Peak (11,915') and Mummy Mountain (11,528'): Join us on this very strenuous, moderately paced, Labor Day weekend trip up into the Spring Mountains of Nevada to climb two of the State's most alluring peaks. Saturday we’ll take the South Loop trail out of Kyle Canyon for a moderately paced, but very strenuous hike on trail to Charleston Peak and return for a day's total of 18 miles and 4,300' of gain. Saturday night we'll relax around the campfire and enjoy a festive Happy Hour/Potluck under moonless-night skies at a nearby campground. Sunday we’ll start out on the North Lake trail out of Kyle Canyon and then travel cross country at a moderate pace over very rugged class 2 terrain to the summit of Mummy Mountain and then return the way we came in for a day's total of 10 miles and 3,700' of gain. We've reserved a local campground for Friday through Sunday nights; campground fees will be split among the group. This is a DPS Outing co-sponsored by WTC and HPS. Email Mat Kelliher (mkelliher746@gmail.com) with contact info, recent conditioning, and experience, including high altitude experience, for trip status and details. Leaders: Mat Kelliher and Bill Simpson.

♦ SEPTEMBER 29 SUN LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS

I: Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle: Navigation Noodle at Mount Pinos to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Practice skills or checkoff. 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.

♦ OCTOBER 5 SAT LTC

O: Leadership Training: Offered just twice a year, the next Sierra Club Angeles Chapter's Leadership Training Program (LTP) Seminar is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 5, 2019. Apply at least two weeks in advance to guarantee your spot. Later applications accepted on a space-available basis but are not guaranteed, so register
early. Come learn all about the best leadership practices of our outings program. This all-day event covers group management, our ratings system, rules of conduct, safety and much more, from presentations, breakout groups and scenarios. The Sierra Club Angeles Chapter's many groups, sections and committees sponsor thousands of trips ranging from easy hikes to backpacks to world wide travel and mountaineering expeditions. From experienced volunteer leaders you will learn how to plan a trip, handle problems on the trail and make sure that everyone has a great time. You'll gain knowledge about good conservation and safety practices, along with tips for getting your leadership rating quickly and then, if you choose, pursuing more advanced ratings. For information, Email LTPSeminarRegistrar@gmail.com. Cost: $25. Signup Instructions: Go to website URL for application: https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-outings/leadership-training-seminar. Location: 5950 Stoneview Drive, Culver City, CA 90232. Leader: Anne Marie Richardson (amleadership@gmail.com).

♦ 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 13      SUN       DPS    
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Join us at the home of Tom and Tina Bowman 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 Tina at tina@bowmanchange.com.

♦ OCTOBER 19      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.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org. Leaders: Dan Richter (dan@danrichter.com); Patrick McKusky (pamckusky@att.net); and, Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com).

♦ OCTOBER 26-27   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).

♦ NOVEMBER 1-3  FRI-SUN  LTC,WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS
Wilderness First Aid Course at Harwood Lodge: The course runs from 7:30 am Friday to 5:00 pm Sunday. Fee includes instruction, lodging and meals. Proof of CPR within previous 4 years required to enroll. The fee is $305.00 (full refund until 9/27/19). For sign-up and more information, instructions and application, please go to www.wildernessfirstaidcourse.org. Event Organizers: Steve Schuster, steve.n.wfac2@gmail.com, 714-315-1886.

♦ NOVEMBER 2  SAT  LTC, WTC, HPS
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).

♦ NOVEMBER 9-10  SAT-SUN  LTC
M/E-R: Rock: Indian Cove Joshua Tree Rock Checkoff and Practice: M & E level rock checkoff and practice for LTC leadership candidates wishing to pursue a rating or practice skills. Also open to Advanced Mountaineering Program students wanting to solidify what they learned in the course. Practice Saturday and optionally checkoff Sunday. Restricted to active Sierra Club members with previous rock climbing experience. Climbing helmets and harnesses required. Email climbing resume to leader to apply. Patrick McKusky (626-794-7321 or pamckusky@att.net). Co-Leaders: Daniel Richter (818-970-6737 or dan@danrichter.com) and Matthew Hengst (949-264-6507 or matthew.Hengst@gmail.com).

♦ NOVEMBER 16-17  SAT-SUN  LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS
I: Navigation: Mission Creek Preserve Navigation Noodle: Navigation Noodle at Mission Creek Preserve to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday for practice, skills, refresher, altimeter, homework and campfire. Sunday checkout. To participate, send email with contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmmayers@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.

♦ DECEMBER 8  SUN  LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS
I: Navigation: Indian Cove Navigation Noodle: Navigation Noodle at Indian Cove in Joshua Tree National Park to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Practice skills or checkoff. 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, rmmayers@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.
Outings Chair
by Megan Birdsill

It is a hundred degrees outside and I can imagine the punishing clear skies, the burning sun, jumping cholla, poisonous rattlers, and air so dry is sucks the moisture from my skin. But in a few short months, as the days grow shorter, the thermometer will fall and the desert will be ready for us again. As the mountaineers of Southern California, it is key to our comprehensive development. With so many trips affected this year in the Sierras due to snow and high water crossings, I'm personally looking forward to getting back to our desert mountains.

August may be the hardest month to imagine enjoying the desert but the perfect month to start planning for it. Did you hear the planning got even easier?! We've opened the peak guide to public access. We believe this will better grow the legions of climbers that will feel welcomed into joining our ranks.

The management committee continues to solicit your response from possibly delisting Cerro Pescadores. Whether or not this happens we should also plan exploration trips to consider growing the list as well. A good place to start may be some of the peaks Ron Bartell mentioned in his Death Valley presentation at this year’s banquet: Saline Peak (7,045’), Ubehebe Peak (5,678’), and Sugarloaf Peak (4,820’). I'd like to lead at least one of these this season.

The bi-annual leadership seminar will be on October 5th this year. Email LTPSeminarRegistrar@gmail.com for more information.

As always, a lot is going on, but most importantly the climbing continues so pick a date and a friend. Bug a leader for an official trip. Whatever you do, get out there!

Special Offer to New DPS Members and Subscribers

The DPS would like to welcome new members and subscribers (who don’t yet meet the criteria for membership) with a one year free subscription to The Desert Sage. New members as well as new subscribers should send their completed membership application form to the DPS Membership Chair, Ron Bartell, by email (desertpeakssection@gmail.com) or USPS (the form with the address may be downloaded in Word or Adobe Acrobat format at http://desertpeaks.org/aboutus.htm), or may be found in this issue of the Sage.
A recent and provocative study in the journal Science reported that the most effective way to fight global warming is to plant a trillion trees (added to the approximately 3 trillion trees that now are on Earth). The study calculated that a trillion new trees could suck up nearly 830 billion tons (750 billion metric tons) of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. That’s about as much carbon pollution as humans have spewed out in the past 25 years. Much of that benefit would be quickly realized because young trees remove more carbon from the air. The study claims that tree planting is the cheapest and the most effective solution to global warming, according to study co-author Thomas Crowther, a climate change ecologist at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. The study claims that there is enough space for new trees to cover 3.5 million square miles (9 million square kilometers), an area roughly the size of the United States. Six nations with the most room for new trees are Russia, the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, and China. Before his research, Crowther figured that there were other more effective ways to fight climate change besides cutting emissions, such as people switching from meat-eating to vegetarianism. But, he said, tree planting is far more effective because trees take so much carbon dioxide out of the air.

In spite of what is basically a good news story, much criticism has arisen around this study. “[The study] is probably the best assessment we have to date of how much land could support tree cover on our planet,” says Robin Chazdon, a forest ecologist and professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut not involved in the study. But she was quick to point out that restoring forests is not as simple as it sounds. “Not all areas that could be forested should necessarily be forested,” Chazdon says. Taking the local ecosystems into consideration, as well as the impact of trees on the communities nearby, is essential in making global tree restoration viable. In other words, battling climate change with carbon-sucking trees requires more planning and strategy than just planting trees everywhere we can.

Zeke Hausfather, an analyst for climate science news website Carbon Brief, challenged many of Crowther’s conclusions on Twitter shortly after the study was released. Citing the most recent report of the Global Carbon Project, whose estimates of cumulative carbon emissions from human activities differ from Crowther’s, Hausfather pointed out that Crowther’s projection might actually represent just one-third of historical emissions. It’s a reminder that the problem may require more than just planting trees, he says. “That’s not to say that reforestation is not an important mitigation strategy, just to caution that like every other climate solution, it’s part of a larger portfolio of strategies rather than a silver bullet,” Hausfather concluded.

In a different study published last week in the journal Science Advances, Robin Chazdon and colleagues argue that a more focused approach on tropical rainforests is a more efficient means of halting climate change using trees. They considered both available space and cost-opportunity factors that would make restoration most feasible in what they called “restoration hotspots.” Brazil, Indonesia, India, Madagascar and Colombia topped the list of countries with the most restoration hotspots. The study adds to the pile of literature calling for action in protecting and restoring natural forests, especially in the tropics. Despite the global effort in reducing deforestation, logging and clear-cutting in the Amazon deforests areas larger than a soccer field every minute. “We are kind of running against the clock here. But at the same time, I think we shouldn’t just be thinking about quick fixes, about just massive tree-planting programs,” Chazdon says. “We can’t really afford for it to fail [our efforts to reverse global warming].”
DPS Membership Report
by Ron Bartell

Membership Summary

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Corrected Renewals from the Report in the Previous Sage (#382)

Sustaining Renewals
- Peter Kudlinski 2 years
- Anne K Rolls 1 year

Renewals
- Pat Arredondo 1 year
- John Cheslick 2 years
- Kevin & Lisa Heapy 1 year
- Edward H Lubin 1 year
- Dave & Ann Perkins 2 years
- Steve Smith 1 year
- Bruce Trotter 1 year

Activity Report

Renewals
- Peter & Sandy Lara 1 year
- Mat Kelliher & Tanya Roton 1 year
- Edward Stork 1 year
- Diana Neff & George Estrada 1 year
- Wasim Khan 1 year

I am sorry to have to report the death of Ronald Beimel, age 34. While Ron was not a member of the Desert Peaks Section, his name often appeared in the Desert Sage, during the last five years as my mountaineering partner. Ron was a skilled climber, hugely athletic and adventurous. Together we climbed all eleven range high points in Death Valley National Park, possibly the fourth and fifth persons to have achieved this eccentric goal. Among the desert peaks we wrote up for the Sage were Mount Jefferson, and the Ruby Crest Trail, both in Nevada. One climb not previously written up was his trip from Badwater to Telescope Peak and back in 27 hours. In addition, together we did a five day wilderness backpack in the Grand Canyon and another five day trail-less hike in Grand Staircase - Escalante National Monument.

Ron had been expanding his exploration of the wilderness—hiking, back country travel, mountaineering and technical climbing. Last year he took his first overseas climbing trip, to the Ecuadorian Andes. In May 2019 Ron set out to India to attempt an unclimbed peak near Nanda Devi. Tragically, his entire climbing party was killed in an avalanche high on the mountain. Ron found great joy in mountain wilderness, cared deeply about conservation and was a kind and meticulous partner. He will be greatly missed.

By Gregory Frux

Edna Erspamer
By Elaine Erspamer Marchant

Today [June 10, 2019] our dear mother, Edna Erspamer, left the earth she loved, on her own terms, surrounded by her children. She lived life to the fullest and is now reunited with her other beloved children, Sharon and Bob Erspamer.

Climb high, mom, climb high!

Editor’s note: Edna Erspamer was a long time DPS member who obtained her DPS Emblem on July 1, 1982 on Boundary Peak and finished the DPS list on February 18, 1989 on Orocopia Mountain.
CHINA’S DEATH VALLEY, THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY, AND (maybe) THE WORLD’S HIGHEST DESERT PEAKS
By Bob Michael

Something hidden.
Go and find it.
Go and look behind the Ranges.
Something lost behind the Ranges.
Lost and waiting for you.
Go!
-----
Kipling

A glance at a physiographic map of Asia will show as its most prominent feature the great arc of the Himalaya, extending from the northern tip of Burma west and northwest to a grand congregation of huge mountains where India, China, Pakistan, and the other Stan countries all meet in what has been termed the “Pamir Knot”. From this center radiate all of Earth's very highest mountain ranges – the Pamirs to the northwest, the Hindu Kush (doesn’t that very name send a shiver up your spine?) to the southwest, the Tien Shan (“Heavenly Mountains”) to the northeast, the Kunlun (north margin of the Tibetan Plateau) to the east, and to the southeast the Karakoram subrange of the Himalaya, home of K2 and, I think, generally considered by most world mountaineers to be the planet’s ultimate mountains -- the "throne room of the mountain gods,” as the late Galen Rowell put it.

This great planetary train wreck has been caused by a tectonic situation unique in modern geology – a smaller granite continental plate (India) colliding from the south with the huge granite continent of Asia. The buoyant granite of India refused to subduct under Asia, as would have been the case with a heavy basaltic seafloor plate, and the resulting crushing and compression raised these mountains to far greater heights than elsewhere on the planet. (Size matters, and eventually the leading edge of India was forced underneath Asia; we see its ghost in the anomalously high Tibetan Plateau.) So great was this collision that compressional shock waves deformed the Asian continent well north of the plate boundary; the Tien Shan range of central Asia rises to over 24,000 feet. (Some of the world’s most complex geology in one paragraph; a broad-brush version indeed.)

While the Asian plate was upthrust by compression in some places, it was downwarped in others; the deepest of these troughs, deepest point on any continent except for the Dead Sea, is the Turfan Depression south of the eastern end of the Tien Shan in China's far western Xinjiang province, which bottoms out at over minus 500 feet, beating out Badwater. Xinjiang is a vast and thinly-populated region of barren deserts interspersed with soaring ice mountains. South of Turfan is the forbidding Taklamakan Desert, one of the world’s biggest sand seas, comparable to the Empty Quarter of Arabia and the ergs of the Sahara. I remember studying that utterly remote, alien, and (at the time) forbidden place on National Geographic maps and thinking that I had about as much chance of ever setting foot there as hiking on Mars. Don’t think I'll make it to Mars, but I have trod the Turfan. Here’s the story.

I’m on the mailing list of Betchart Expeditions, a small outfit in the Bay Area which specializes in taking oddball people to oddball places. I was on their mailing list, as a few years ago I went to Iceland with them. When I opened my mailbox early last year and saw a brochure with the words “Karakoram Highway”, they had me. So, last August saw me on a plane from LAX to Guangzhou, then a 5-hour flight to Urumchi, capital of Xinjiang. Urumchi is a large and rather charmless modern Chinese city with a lot of traffic (I saw more people on bikes in Fort Collins than China) and pollution. After a couple days exploring the foothills of the Tien Shan – very nice once one got out of the city – we drove southeast on an Interstate-quality highway past barren black desert mountains and down a wide canyon into the warmth of the Turfan. Unlike Death Valley, Turfan is populated, so it’s more of a crude analogy to the Salton Sink. Snow and glacier melt from over 18,000’ Mount Bogdo to the north (talk about...
vertical relief! ) waters an extensive agricultural area. The precious water is conveyed to the desert by a remarkable system of ancient underground channels. Principal produce seems to be the most delicious honeydew-type melons I’ve ever tasted, and grapes. Everywhere, “grape stands” offering the fresh fruit, dried as raisins, and pressed into juice. (Although the population is Muslim and theoretically prohibited from touching alcohol, they also make a delicious sweet low-alcohol wine, schooled in oenology by the French, we were told.) We weren’t able to go to the lowest point, some distance south of the inhabited area, because it is almost inaccessibly roadless. (This is not a tourist destination like Badwater!)

We also toured spooky adobe ruins of Silk Road cities. The Silk Road was not like an early I-10; more like a braided stream, it had many branches as travelers experimented with the least painful route through the deserts and mountains of Central Asia.

We returned to Urumchi and flew southwest to Kashgar, an ancient major Silk Road hub on the western margin of the Taklamakan. This is the major city of the native Uygur folk, and ground zero for one of the most egregious human-rights violations in the world today. China is so huge that the Xinjiang population is not racially or culturally Han Chinese – they’re central Asian Muslims, like Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. They have never really gotten along well with the Chinese, and, although a mostly peaceful folk, they have pushed back in some incidents – and the Chinese have come down on them like a ton of bricks.

It’s estimated that up to a million of them are in “re-education camps” where they learn to love Big Brother Xi (or else). Especially “uppity” Uygurs are known to mysteriously “disappear” – for good. There are plenty of cameras in the USA, but cameras in Xinjiang are thicker than mosquitoes in Alaska. Razor wire, vehicle barriers, paramilitary, and police EVERYWHERE. My first experience of a police state. Frankly, we were a bit surprised that Americans were allowed to more or less freely travel in this region. Kashgar is a mish-mash of modern China and scenes Marco Polo almost might have seen – the narrow passageways of the Old Town (in the process of erasure), tiled mosques, and the barely controlled chaos of the weekly livestock market. I could barely contain my excitement as the day came when we headed south out of Kashgar to begin the Karakoram Highway. As we drove through irrigated agricultural country, great snow peaks of the Pamir Knot began to materialize through the haze to the south. I’d entered the Himalaya from the lushly forested south many years ago in Nepal, and this stark desert approach couldn’t have been more different. The dun-colored desert, with just a sparse covering of drab little ground-hugging plants, segued to bare rock and perpetual ice with absolutely NO forest zone. Even Telescope Peak has a modest alpine forest of bristlecone and limber pine – but here there was absolutely nothing. So – are these the world's highest desert peaks? With little in the way of foothills, we entered a fierce and profound gorge between the west end of 25,318-foot Kungur Shan and the eastern outliers of the Pamirs. The gorge widened at its upper end into a valley at about 10,000 feet of almost Atacama-like barrenness except for some grassy bottoms along meltwater creeks. Two-humped Bactrian camels -- some “owned”, some feral, and some in-between, according to our guide -- grazed in these meager meadows. We stopped to enjoy a large lake whose opaque waters were of the most exquisite pale sky blue from their heavy load of glacial flour; creamy sand dunes spilled into the far shore. Ahead to the south rose the biggest single mountain I’ve ever seen in my life, except for perhaps Denali – 24,750-foot Muztagh Ata, or “Father of Snows”. This is a humungous anticlinal fold at the southern edge of the Asian plate formed by compression from the plate collision just to the south. Huge glaciers spilled off its flanks and down Yosemite-like gorges gouged into its flanks, pushing end moraines out toward the desert floor. The southern limb of this great fold rises at a fairly moderate angle, and, although it looks like a long slog, it has a reputation as the easiest mountain on Earth of that height to summit….well, maybe, if you don’t take into consideration crevasses, deep snow, ever-thinning air and worsening weather.

We crossed a gentle pass at about 13,000 feet – the drab, dun-colored desert with wretched little half-dead ground-hugging plants at that altitude didn't look much different from the desert 8,000 feet lower -- and descended into the valley of Tashkurgan, the last town in China at about 11,000 feet, mostly inhabited by Tajik people. On either side of the valley rose gaunt, grayish-
The Desert Sage

The scenery on the other side of the pass dramatically changed from the merely enormous mountains of China to the fierce, savage, lethal, needle-sharp splintered granite towers of the Karakoram. The highway dropped off the edge of nothingness and descended at least 2,500 feet straight down in a ladder of narrow sharp hairpin switchbacks without, of course, the psychological "belay" of guardrails. The China side is a high plateau without much in the way of big rivers, but south of the divide the many headwaters of the Indus have gouged out deep gorges as they plunge to near sea level in the sweltering plains of Pakistan. What has not changed is the total barrenness, except for a very few gnarled Utah-like junipers in a very few places. And the mountain scenery -- indescribable; my words here are like trying to describe the Grand Canyon to somebody who has never been out of the Bronx. At about every turn of the road, about all I could say was, "Oh. My. God!!" (My tripmates found this amusing, but they grudgingly cut some slack for a geologist.) It's amazing that the Chinese and Pakistanis were able to chop a road into this terrain; I learned that the body count was considerable. (Apparently the Highway is part of the Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative".)

As we traveled south and lost elevation, the gorge widened into a narrow valley, and we saw the first settlements of Hunza, now part of Pakistan but once a "lost kingdom" which was only accessible by foot and horseback until the 1960's! Of course, there's no such thing as Shangri-La, but this may be the closest approximation. (And yes, now they have Wi-Fi, smartphones, and flat-screen TV's.) Trees and greenery began to soften the bare rock; every bit planted and irrigated by humans. Poplars are popular, ubiquitous as in China, and they love apricot trees. We stayed a few days in Karimabad, (about 8,000 feet -- roughly the same as Aspen or Mammoth) the largest town, exploring the vicinity. Immediately behind town 24,964-foot Ultar soars straight up, three vertical miles of granite, snow, and ice. To the left of Ultar is 23,000-foot Hunza Peak, with what must be an El Cap-size face of pure clean light tan granite topped by a vicious-looking cornice. (Calling Alex Honnold!) We did short hikes and scary trips on one-lane cliff-hanging dirt roads in what had to be customized war surplus American Jeeps with fearless, gear-grinding, clutch-popping drivers (who, I think, were secretly amused at the terrified gringos). When I told my friends I was going to Pakistan, the general reaction was disbelief and dire warnings; and I confess that I had some reservations and second thoughts; after all, it's in a "bad neighborhood". I can't speak for the rest of the country (parts to the south, especially bordering Afghanistan, probably are dangerous), but the people of Hunza were gentle, nice, and welcoming. Wealthy Pakistanis vacation in Hunza in the summer to escape the infernal heat of the lowlands; as educated folks, they speak perfect English, and twice I was greeted by gentlemen who saw an obvious American (me), a rarity in Pakistan after 9/11, who offered to buy me coffee (no alcohol here) and engage in intense discussions of world politics. Frankly, Hunza was a breath of fresh air after the Xinjiang police state.

Clouds often veiled the highest peaks. Now and then the clouds would part and reveal jagged rock hanging impossibly, unbelievably, high in the sky (an Omigod moment for sure). On our last full day in Karimabad, the clouds lifted to reveal the summit of Ultar, and downvalley, the reigning monarch of Hunza -- the dazzlingly white, symmetrical, massive peak of 25,551-foot Rakaposhi, soaring like the very walls of Heaven -- a perfect finale to this journey behind the Ranges.
Hi Greg,

I have always been against delisting peaks for nominal reasons, especially because they are too far away, but instead maybe we should be moving towards ADD-ING more Mexican peaks, especially in Baja which is relatively close. A bunch of us have done a couple of very moderate peaks close to the border around the Laguna Hanson area, and always enjoyed the Baja experience with no major problems, except for the cross back to the US.

Here are the two peaks that I entered into Peakbagger.com database some time ago:


Terry Flood,
Carlsbad, California

Dear Sage Editor,

I’ve been to Mexico 10 times in order to climb the four DPS listed peaks there two times each. I failed on three ascents: once because of poor route finding on Big Picacho; the second time because our group got a late start on Cerro Pescadores and did not want to descend the peak in the dark; and, the third time because a Mexican park ranger denied our group access to their national park to climb Cerro Pinacate because “they feared for our safety” (not because of bandits or drug smugglers, but because of inhospitable terrane). Each trip that I made to Mexico was an adventure. Not once did I feel unsafe or feel that I was in some sort of danger. However, having said that, I recommend that a person use common sense when traveling in Mexico, such as driving a reliable vehicle, camping overnight in the national park for Cerro Pinacate and Big Picacho, staying at the Guadalupe Canyon Oasis Resort for Pico Risco, and driving into the new DPS 4x trailhead located south of Peak 366m for Cerro Pescadores (the directions in the DPS guide are unclear, but Robert May posted a driving track to the trailhead on Peakbagger.com). Making the trek to Mexico is what makes the DPS list the DPS list. Since 1963, 173 people have finished the DPS list one of more times, and it seems really unfair to all previous list finishers who had to go the Mexico and also un-necessary to delist any of the Mexican peaks to water down the list!

Greg Gerlach

Dear Sage Editor,

I favor keeping Cerro Pescadores on the peaks list.

The fears of lawlessness in Northern Baja are mostly overblown in my view. Is it as safe as the Santa Monica pier or the Getty Center? No, of course not. But we all face dangers daily in our routine lives. The most dangerous part of the climb is driving the freeways and dirt roads to get there. The crime rate in all of Baja is relatively low compared to the rest of Mexico. The Department of State has Baja at “Level 2” travel advisory which is the same as Belgium, Brazil, Kenya, and Jamaica (among others). My experience climbing it twice, I had no problems. I know at least one person whose car was broken into while climbing a southern Arizona peak.

Bonus, it is a beautiful peak with some fun bouldering. I know I might be taking on some of the DPS royalty with this stance, but, you wanted an opinion, so you got it.

Gary Craig
DPS list finisher
So, what are the chances that there’s been a book published which focuses almost entirely on one of the most remote of the mountains on the DPS list? Well, until I picked up Emmett C. Harder’s, *These Canyons Are Full of Ghosts*, I would have thought, “Not likely.”

After reading Harder’s account of his mining days, however, I feel I know Death Valley National Park’s Manly Peak even better than when I climbed it back in 2003. More interesting still, the author is the “real deal” in desert characters—tough and adventurous, one of the last authentic prospectors in Death Valley National Park where most mining has now been banned.

Born in San Bernardino, California in 1932, Harder attributes his fascination with the desert west to his great-grandmother, Emma J. Rich, a woman who, after the Civil War, ran a boarding house in Hackberry, Arizona. Her stories of the miners and the Apache Indians of that era stoked his boyhood imagination and provided much of the impetus for his own gold seeking adventures as an adult.

In the early 1960s, after reading a story in a western magazine about a lost ledge of gold, Harder decided to explore the Manly Peak area of Death Valley’s Panamint Mountains. He and a friend, both pilots, rented a 40 horsepower J3 Cub—a bright yellow, fabric-covered aircraft left over from WWII—to make a reconnaissance of the lost ledge site. Their aerial exploration was thrill-filled, first being thrown about in a strong down draft, then flying so close to the mountain “that I thought we were going to leave tire tracks on the boulders,” and, finally, almost running out of fuel, being forced to land on a deserted runway (presumably Panamint Dry Lake). There, Harder and his friend found a rusty can containing two gallons of contaminated gasoline. Filtering the fuel through a Chamois skin in a funnel, they managed to fly on, barely making it to the airport in Inyokern.

The photographs the men took that day, however, were encouraging: “Glorious mountain terrain, geological marvel, naked slopes where you could find ledges and veins.” Soon afterward, Harder and two other friends returned to the area, where, climbing the north slopes of Manly, they discovered “white quartz float, containing flecks of metal and iron pyrites in it, possible gold ore.” The specimens they took that day, when assayed, showed promise.

Some indeterminant time later, Harder returned alone to Manly Peak, aware by then he would be searching for the so-called “Lost Mormon Mine.” To save the time and energy involved in climbing and downclimbing, he opted to camp out near the summit of the peak, where he spent several days excavating sites he suspected might conceal a hidden mine entrance. One day, while in the company of a solitary young prospector known only as Jim, he “broke through into the top arch of a tunnel,” where, crawling inside, he found “a stash of select high-grade ore waiting for me.” The Lost Mormon Mine was rediscovered.

After filing a claim, Harder and two associates set up an operation in Butte Valley, near Anvil Spring, and prepared to transport the ore down the mountain using pack animals. To approach their camp from the west involved driving through the ghost town of Ballarat,
then up steep Goler Wash, passing the site of Barker Ranch where Charlie Manson and his family were then living. After later meeting Manson and his friends, Harder big-heartedly offered to help them find claims of their own, but nothing came of the idea. Chillingly, the author adds, “Subsequent investigation and personal interviews have given the author information about at least five people that were murdered by the family in the area covered by this book.”

The last short chapters of These Canyons Are Full of Ghosts describe a few local Death Valley characters, including the prospectors, Asa M. “Panamint” Russell and Charles “Seldom Seen Slim” Ferge. Wild burros & horses, eagles, rattlesnakes, polecats, and mountain lions are also briefly discussed.

Harder’s book is a true “gold mine” for those of us who love desert lore. My only complaint with the volume, published in 2001 by Real Adventures Publishing of San Bernardino, is that, due to its faulty binding, I ended up reading a pile of loose pages.

GOLDEN MIRAGES (1940), Philip A. Bailey

Michigan-born Philip A. Bailey (1885-1970) arrived in San Diego in 1911 where he was employed by San Diego Gas & Electric Company until he retired in 1950. Fascinated with the history and legends of the Southwest, Bailey spent his spare time roaming the nearby Colorado Desert, “digging into forgotten corners to turn up nuggets of desert lore...He talked with old timers, Indians, desert rats and prospectors by the score and became adept at extracting information.” Originally published in 1940, Bailey’s Golden Mirages is a grand collection of desert tales--history, legends and personalities of old California and our Southwest deserts.

Because much of Golden Mirages concerns the life and times of Thomas “Peg-Leg” Smith, a few salient facts regarding the legendary scoundrel would be helpful. Born in Kentucky in 1801, Smith left home as a teenager, first working on a flatboat on the Mississippi River, and later employed as a fur trapper in the Rocky Mountains where his companions included Kit Carson and Jim Bridger.

In 1827, while trapping on the headwaters of the Platte River, Smith’s right lower leg was shattered by an Indian’s arrow. “(Smith) called upon his friends to ‘cut it off,’ but they were ignorant of what should be done.” “He then called...for his butcher-knife and severed the muscles with his own hand.” A fellow trapper then sawed off the end of the bone and, “bound up the stump in an old dirty shirt.”

Smith recovered, relearned to balance while riding a horse, and, despite his handicap, he remained a successful fur trapper. Two years later, in 1829, departing from the junction of the Gila and Colorado Rivers, he and a few fellow trappers set off to cross the Colorado Desert heading for the Pacific Coast where they planned to sell their beaver pelts. Years later, in a conversation with “an old resident of
California whose name was Pearce,” Pegleg recalled that somewhere about half way across the desert, looking for water, he left his companions and headed for “three small buttes yonder—the two close together and the other stickin’ out by itself.” While he didn’t find water, on the top of one butte he did pick up several stones—black and heavy—which, when the coating was removed, “showed a yellow color like copper.”

Upon reaching the Mexican pueblo of Los Angeles, Pegleg “found out my yellow stuff was solid gold.” Flush with money from the sale of his pelts, however, and known as “a hard, two-fisted drinker (who) liked a good fight,” he set out on a spree so boisterous that the Alcalde of Los Angeles ordered him to leave town. “Strangely enough,” as Bailey comments, “three or four hundred horses left at the same time.” Pegleg had found a new profession—horse thievery.

During the next few years, as the trapping trade declined—silk hats for men became more popular than those made of beaver pelts—Pegleg became even more involved in stealing horses.

In the autumn of 1850, Pegleg—or perhaps an impersonator thereof—and three companions, along with several mules and a supply of prospecting tools, arrived at Warner’s Ranch, on the Old Butterfield Trail, prepared to launch the first known attempt to find the Lost Pegleg Mine. That effort, during which the men drank mescal and had their horses run off by Indians, ended unsuccessfully a few days later.

The Pegleg story, if possible, becomes even more complicated about this time. In fact, in a “remarkable coincidence,” another Pegleg Smith, whose exploits extended to 1875, nine years after the death of the original Pegleg, also found and lost a gold mine—the latter-day Pegleg’s find located in the Little San Bernardino Mountains, while the original’s most likely was located in the Fish Mountain area.

What we know for certain is that Pegleg, never one to pass up an opportunity to make money and asserting to know where a large amount of gold-bearing quartz could be found, “sold maps and claims to other prospectors of the Lost Pegleg Mine until his death in a San Francisco hospital in 1866.”

One of the many reasons that the Lost Pegleg Mine stories continue to be taken seriously is that in the late 1870s, the driver of a supply wagon for the Southern Pacific Railroad, which was being built through the Salton Basin at the time, picked up an Indian woman who was carrying a bundle containing several stones that turned out to be almost pure gold. Later, it became rumored that the woman had been Pegleg’s wife, and that she had said that the gold had come from the nearby Chocolate Mountains.

In succeeding chapters; “Tales Told in the Desert,” “Lost Mines,” “La Fratena Tales,” and “Canyon Specimens,” Bailey relates several more stories regarding desert legends, including, “The Phantom Stage of Carrizo,” “The Lost Ship of the Desert,” ”Montezuma’s Treasure,” and “The Lost Mission of Santa Isabel.” As for the latter, there is a recurring tale that in 1768, at which time the King of Spain expelled the Jesuits from Lower California, the departing padres supposedly stashed a treasure trove of gold and pearls at a mysteriously hidden mission site. “The Lost Mission story is the most persistent and elusive phantom to come out of the frontier. It is also migratory. One is never free from the specter. Let the traveler leave Lower California and work around the head of the Gulf into the Yuma district, or farther south into Sonora, the Mission legend either precedes him cautiously like the foot of the rainbow or lurks at a safe distance in the rear. It is always just two mountain ranges and a valley ahead or behind him.”

GHOSTS OF THE GLORY TRAIL (1956), Nell Murbarger

Whereas These Canyons Are Full of Ghosts and Golden Mirages were written by able non-professionals, Nell Murbarger (1909-1991), author of Ghosts of the Glory Trail was a veteran journalist who first worked as an editor at two Southern California newspapers, and later became a free-lance author contributing to publications such as Desert Magazine, Sunset, Arizona Magazine and True West Magazine. Describing her later life as a desert writer: “I’m seldom required to meet a deadline, and I haven’t punched a time clock in more than 20 years...I
travel alone. My transportation...is provided by a ten-
year-old Mercury sedan. Loaded with my bedroll and
mess box, a five-gallon can of water, a few desert
clothes, and my typewriter and cameras, it carries me
an average or 15,000 miles each year—much of that
distance over rocky roads and steep, dim trails that
would scare the wheels off any of their shiny new
models.”

Passionate about prowling ghost towns, Murbarger
visited and photographed more than 400 of the
erstwhile mining settlements, and, by the time of
Ghosts of the Glory Trail’s 1956 publication, she had
“collected historical material on nearly three times
that many.” In forty chapters, presented in more or
less chronological order of their discovery, the author
describes scores of ghost towns, including famous
ones such as Uniontown, Belmont, Aurora, and
Rhyolite, along with many more which have almost
disappeared, including Schellbourne. Cherry Creek,
DeLamar, and Metropolis. Although Virginia City,
Tonopah and Ely were important in Great Basin
mining history, because they were still alive and
prospering, Murbarger did not consider them as
proper material for this volume.

Regarding the overall history of mining in the Great
Basin, it’s likely that most of the first prospectors
were survivors of the California Goldrush of 1849.
“For every Argonaut made wealthy by that mad
stampede, many others failed to connect with pay-dirt,
and by the middle 1850s, hordes of disappointed gold
seekers were turning away from California’s
overheated diggings.” Those who headed east over
the Sierra Nevada, “pitted their wits against hostile
Indians and daring the heat and cold and thirst and
starvation,” as they panned the gravel of every stream
and sampled the quartz of hundreds of ledges.

Some of the strikes were enormously successful—
think Virginia City, Austin, and Goldfield. At most
other sites, however, “Everything would zip along
handsomely for two years, ten years, maybe for even
30 years. But at last, would come a day when astute
citizens of the camp would begin to realize that the
old town was losing her bounce. Some of her ledges
were petering out, mills were no longer working at
capacity, more passengers were riding the outbound
states than were arriving.”

The stories Murbarger relates, many told to her by old-
timers, include the tale of a mine where more than
three million dollars of silver was taken from a
surface pit the size of a two-story dwelling, the
incredible story of $80,000 worth of high grade
tungsten ore that was shipped from the mine to the
mill by parcel post, and the grim tale of the old
Mexican gold miner who froze to death on the desert
and was buried with a gallon jug of whiskey clasped
between his knees.

Suggestions or comments? Contact me at
burtonafalk@gmail.com.
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EMBLEM AND LIST COMPLETION STATUS: Emblem status is awarded to DPS members who have been a member for one year, who have climbed 15 peaks on the DPS Peak list, including five of the seven emblem peaks, and who send a list of peaks and dates climbed to Membership Records Chair Ron Bartell, 1556 21st Street, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266, or ronbartell@yahoo.com. Recognition is also given for completion of the DPS list by notifying Ron of peaks and dates climbed. Please see the DPS website for additional Emblem recognition categories.

DPS MERCHANDISE: DPS T-shirts, the DPS Road and Peak Guide, the DPS Peak List, Emblem, Explorer and List Finish pins, and other merchandise is available for purchase from the DPS Merchandiser (see the Merchandise page in this issue of the Sage for more information). Please note that the DPS Peak List is also available as a free download on the DPS Website. In addition, individual peak guides may be downloaded from the DPS website for free by DPS members and subscribers; please contact Ron Bartell at ronbartell@yahoo.com for further information.

SAGE SUBMISSIONS: The Sage editor welcomes all articles, trip reports and photographs pertaining to outdoor activities of interest to DPS members. Trip participants are encouraged to submit a trip report if the participant knows that the trip leaders are not going to submit a trip write-up. The editor may modify submittals in an attempt to increase clarity, decrease length, or correct typos, but hopefully will not modify meaning. Please note that digital documents and photographs are required for submissions to the Sage. Trip reports should include trip dates and identify trip participants and photos should indicate when and where the photo was taken, what it is of, who is in it, and who took it. Please email Sage submissions to the editor no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months; the next submission deadline for the Sage is October 13, 2019.

ADVERTISEMENTS: You can advertise private trips that are of interest to DPS members in the Sage for free. Other announcements/ads are $1 per line or $25 for a half-page space.

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