Hi Desert Climbers!

Our season is here! I hope you can get out to celebrate our peaks by climbing and enjoying them! Megan Birdsill, our new Outings Chair, is working hard on putting some trips together. If you are a leader, why not submit a trip to add to the schedule? Whether you are a leader or not, join a trip (or two or three) as we also need participants—and bring a friend (or two or three). After a lull in DPS activity a few years ago, we're still in the process of getting up and running again. Be active in our Section! Build our membership!

Our schedule now includes our Banquet, to be held at The Reef Restaurant in Long Beach on May 17, 2020. Save the date! It also includes the MComm meetings and potlucks to be held in October, December, March, and April. The MComm will have phone conferences for our meetings in November, January, and February. These months have not traditionally been as well-attended so we are saving resources by conducting our meetings over the phone. This also allows your board members to be out on the weekends in these popular months to climb. Please feel free to contact me at ssperling1@verizon.net if you have anything to add to the agenda or if you wish to participate in a call.

Happy Climbing!

Sandy Lara, DPS Chair

The Next Sage Submission Deadline
Is December 8, 2019

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SAGE PHOTOS AND REPORTS NEEDED!

The SAGE needs articles and photographs, including cover photos, that pertain to outdoor activities of interest to Desert Peak Sections members and subscribers. Please note that 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 gregrg1955@verizon.net no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months.
Desert Peaks Section Leadership for the 2019 - 2020 Season

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Cover Photo Credit...

goes to DPS Webmaster William Chen. The photo was taken on February 16, 2019 on the way to Nopah Range High Point on a scheduled DPS climb.

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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

November 2019 — May 2020

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

NOV 2  SAT  LTC, WTC, HPS  Navigation: Beginning Clinic
NOV 8-9  FRI-SAT  DPS  Needle Peak and Manly Peak
NOV 9  SAT  DPS, LTC, WTC, HPS  Navigation: Beginning Clinic
NOV 9-10  SAT-SUN  DPS  Sentinel Peak
NOV 9-10  SAT-SUN  LTC  Indian Cove Rock Checkoff and Practice
NOV 16  SAT  DPS  Telescope Peak
NOV 16-17  SAT-SUN  LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS  Mission Creek Navigation Noodle
NOV 17  SUN  DPS  Tucki Mountain
DEC 8  SUN  LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS  Indian Cove Navigation Noodle
DEC 8  SUN  DPS  DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
MARCH 15  SUN  DPS  DPS Management Committee Meeting and potluck
APRIL 19  SUN  DPS  DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
MAY 17  SUN  DPS  DPS Annual Banquet “Save the Date”

♦ 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 8-9  FRI-SAT  DPS
M-R: Needle Peak (5,803’) and Manly Peak (7,196’): Join us for two peaks in the Butte Valley area of Death Valley National Park. After caravanning into Butte Valley in 4WD vehicles, we'll climb class 2 Needle Peak cross country and on some use trails (7 miles RT, 2,900’ gain). We'll camp in Butte Valley. Saturday we'll hike cross country up class 2 Manly Peak. (5-6 miles RT, 2,300-2,800’ gain, depending on route). Sierra Club members with prior roped experience who also submit a medical form may climb the 3rd class summit block provided they also wear a harness and helmet and are on belay; 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 of Manly should also send their Sierra Club number, expiration date, and experience on class 3 and higher rock to Leader: Tina Bowman (tina@bowmanchange.com). Co-leader: Nile Sorenson (nsorenso@pacbell.net).

♦ NOVEMBER 9  SAT  DPS, 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.

♦ NOVEMBER 9-10  SAT-SUN  DPS
I: Sentinel Peak (9,634’): Join us on a climb to bag DPS-listed Sentinel Peak, exploring a Death Valley ghost town along the way! From Chris Wicht camp, we will hike along Surprise Canyon to explore the ghost town of Panamint City. We will camp overnight at a nearby spring, for a first day of 6 miles and 3,700’ gain. In the morning, we will hike past an abandoned mine to the top of Sentinel Peak to enjoy expansive views of nearby Telescope Peak, the Panamint Range, and Death Valley National Park, and hike out to cars the same day, for a
second day total of 12 miles and 3,300’ gain. Weekend round trip totals: 18 miles and 7,000 gain. This trip will be strenuous and requires comfort with steep/loose rock. Please send recent experience and conditioning to leader: Fiona McGinty (fionalanemcginty@gmail.com) to be considered for the trip. Co-leader: Mat Kelliher (mkelliher746@gmail.com). Cancellation Policy: Activity is held rain or shine, but may be altered due to inclement weather.

♦ 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 SAT DPS O: Telescope Peak (11,048’): Join us in Death Valley National Park for a 14 mile, 3,200 foot gain hike on trail to a DPS Emblem Peak: Telescope (11,048’). A strenuous hike by statistics and elevation, we will keep a moderate pace to properly enjoy our surroundings including a dramatic and stark high alpine meadow. Telescope Peak is the highest point in Death Valley National Park and from the top one can see both the lowest elevation (Badwater Basin, -282’) and the highest elevation (Mount Whitney, 14,505’) within the lower 48. Participants encouraged to camp at the Mahogany Flats Campground Friday & Saturday nights, which is the trailhead for Telescope and provides some acclimatization at 8,200 feet. We will enjoy happy hour and a campfire Saturday night. 4WD required to reach designated trailhead but 2WD can camp at Thorndike Campground, adding an extra 1.5 miles RT, or arrange a carpool. Please send contact info, experience, current conditioning, and vehicle type to Leader: Megan Birdsill (mbirdsill@gmail.com). Co-Leaders: Jackie Sly (jackie.sly@gmail.com), David Jahng (dave.jahng@gmail.com) and Tohru Ohnuki (erdferkel944@yahoo.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, rmmyers@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.

♦ NOVEMBER 17 SUN DPS I: Tucki Mountain (6,726’): Day Two in Death Valley takes us up Tucki Mountain, which towers over well-known Stovepipe Wells and Mosaic Canyon. We’ll take DPS Route B; expect approximately 7.5 miles and 2,000’ gain on Class 2 terrain. HC 4WD vehicles required to reach trailhead. A national park pass is required for access to the national park. Heavy rain cancels. Send hiking resume, including recent conditioning and vehicle type, to leader, Megan Birdsill (mbirdsill@gmail.com). Co-leaders: David Jahng (dave.jahng@gmail.com) and Tohru Ohnuki (erdferkel944@yahoo.com).

♦ 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, rmmyers@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 DPS**  
  **O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck:** Join us at the home of Ron Bartell and Christine Mitchell in Manhattan 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 Christine at christinebartell@yahoo.com.

- **MARCH 15 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 Barbee at lbtidball@verizon.net.

- **APRIL 19 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.

- **MAY 17 SUN DPS**  
  **O: DPS Annual Banquet “Save the Date”:** Join your fellow DPS members and friends for a wonderful evening at The Reef Restaurant located in the city of Long Beach for the DPS annual banquet. Happy hour starts at 5:00 p.m. and dinner starts at 6:30 p.m., followed by awards. Additional information to follow on the DPS website and in *The Desert Sage*.

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**DPS Membership Report**  
*by Ron Bartell*

### Membership Summary

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### Sustaining Renewals

- Beth Davis: 1 year
- Burton A Falk: 1 year
- Karen Isaacson & Brian (Wolf) Leverich: 1 year
- Karen Leonard: 1 year
- Barbee & Larry Tidball: 1 year

### Renewals

- Debbie Bulger: 2 years
- Daryn Dodge: 1 year
- Daniel B A Richter: 2 years
- Carleton Shay: 1 year
- Jim Wick: 3 years

### Activity Report

**Achievements**

**Fifty Leads**

- #10 Mat Kelliher: 9/1/19, Mummy Mtn

**Emblem**

- #597 Mat Kelliher: 8/31/19, Charleston Pk
- #598 Don Weiss: 1987

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The lore is well known: John Muir co-founded the Sierra Club in 1892 with the expectation that by getting the public outdoors it would lead to a greater appreciation for the wilderness and as a society our desire to protect sacred spaces would grow and intensify. A hundred years later The California Desert Protection Act of 1994 preserved some of our favorite places: Joshua Tree National Park, Death Valley National Park and the Mojave National Preserve.

As a climbing section of the Sierra Club, how do we continue this tradition now in 2019? Often conservation is not highlighted on our trips beyond the Leave No Trace principles. The onus is entirely on the leader to incorporate these elements and in truth, we are often focused on safe, happy participants and summiting those gorgeous ninety-five DPS peaks!

Now there is a new initiative to flip the switch. Moving forward, leaders in the conservation committees are going to advertise trips they want led that focus on a specific issue. They will plan the trip, they will do the homework, and they will lead the outing. But they need outings co-leaders to get published. That's where we come in! For current leaders, please consider furthering our overall mission by co-leading one of these trips. For past leaders, maybe your knees can't take the abuse of our list anymore but you could become current and share your love of the desert in this new way. And for participants, deepen your understanding about what makes the deserts of the southwest so special.

Two current issues are the Cadiz Water Project and the construction of solar panels on wilderness land.

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.
BYE BYE BIRDY

North America has lost almost 3 billion birds since 1970 according to recent studies reported by Science News. Scientists found profound losses among both rare and common birds such as snowy owls, sparrows, sanderlings, cactus wrens and meadowlarks. While scientists have known for decades that certain kinds of birds have struggled as humans encroach on their habitats, a new comprehensive tally shows the staggering extent of the loss. Nearly 1 in 3 birds — or 29 percent — have vanished in the last half century, researchers reported in the September 19 issue of Science. “Three billion is a punch in the gut,” says Peter Marra, a conservation biologist at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The loss is widespread, he says, affecting rare and common birds alike. “Our study is a wake-up call. We’re experiencing an ecological crisis.”

Rosenberg, Marra and their colleagues mined 12 databases built from decades of on-the-ground bird observations in the United States and Canada, often made by citizen scientists. Yearly observations built a record of population-level changes in 529 species, representing 76 percent of birds that breed in North America. A statistical analysis of these data let the team estimate population trends since 1970 and compare them with current best estimates of population size.

The numbers paint a grim picture: Most habitats and species have experienced tremendous losses, especially migratory birds. Some 700 million individual birds across 31 species, including meadowlarks, have vanished since 1970, a 53 percent drop. American sparrows, little brown birds commonly seen flitting through backyards, saw the largest drop of any group of birds. Nearly a quarter — 750 million — have disappeared over the past five decades. Even invasive species like starlings, which are highly adaptive generalists, experienced massive losses, with their populations declining 63 percent.

The researchers also confirmed their results with an unusual new way of monitoring birds — weather radar. Radar systems tracking the movement of clouds across the United States also register other large masses moving through the air, including flocks of migrating birds. The researchers estimated the change in total biomass of birds migrating at night and found a 14 percent drop from 2007 to 2017. While not directly comparable, the two methods reveal a similarly steep decline. “That [both methods] came to the same conclusion suggests these numbers aren’t just being pulled out of a hat,” says Morgan Tingley, an ornithologist at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. “They’re real.”

The study doesn’t address why birds are disappearing, but many face habitat degradation and loss. “As habitats diminish birds have nowhere to go,” Rosenberg says. Cats may kill more than a billion birds a year (SN: 1/29/13), while nearly a billion more die in collisions with buildings (SN: 1/27/14), previous studies have found. But the study offers some hope. Populations of waterfowl, like mallard ducks and Canada geese, have grown 56 percent since 1970. “This increase is no accident,” Rosenberg says. “It’s a direct result of decades of conservation efforts made by hunters and billions of dollars to protect these birds and their habitat.” Rosenberg says he hopes this study will spawn similar concern for all birds. “This paper doesn’t tell us what the future holds,” Tingley says. “Only what has happened up to this point. It’s up to us to decide what to do next.”

June 22nd was my birthday and I had a permit and I had a plan. But as so often happens, the wilderness threw up its barriers: the road to Devils Postpile would remain closed due to this year’s record snowpack in the Sierras. What to do?

My youngest brother, Trevor, and I have long talked about doing Humphreys Peak together. It is Arizona's highpoint at 12,633' and this was the perfect opportunity: after the snowmelt but just before the monsoon season and its infamous lightening storms. Trevor lives in Phoenix and had done it two years previously but since I've started on the DPS list he promised to go back with me one day. I flew to Phoenix the day before and enjoyed a small birthday celebration with him and my parents and then we drove to Flagstaff, had lunch and walked around for a little acclimation before driving back through gorgeous Oak Creek Canyon to our AirBnB in Sedona.

The generally accepted advice is to start very early so as to be back below tree-line before afternoon lightning storms can threaten your summit attempt. People have died up here so we took it seriously and were at the trailhead at dawn. The trail begins from a ski resort so there is plentiful parking, porta potties, and no fees. A few other groups were gathering when we started out. It is a very popular trail; we met a lot of friendly people and I got a lot of special attention since I wore my birthday crown. There were occasional snow patches but nothing that wasn't easy to surmount or avoid. At 10 miles, 3,400 feet of gain and the crowds, I was reminded of the trail to Mount Baldy. And also, the stats don't quite reflect the exertion. It's on trail but relentlessly steep and the altitude starts to take its toll.

At the saddle we ate warm ramen and were happy we took the time to prepare something hot. Then we began the more gradual crawl on the ridgeline passing a few false summits before finally getting on the real one. We opened a small bottle of champagne and gave the other to newlyweds we met on top. There was quite a crowd growing and we enjoyed chatting with the fellow hikers - so very different from our usual more remote peaks! Then we started down. We passed a lot of people that seemed unsuited for the goal they had set out in front of them. We offered some words of encouragement and kept going. Right below the saddle we met a ranger that was posted to turn people around if the weather became dangerous and he said they expected over 300 people to be on the trail that day!

We finally arrived back to our car eight hours after leaving it, a bit longer than I expected. We went into
Flagstaff for a celebratory early dinner at the fantastic Diablo Burgers. Trevor has two DPS peaks now after we did Superstition Mountain together at Christmas 2017. Overall it was a great birthday and a great peak.

Chocolate Mountain and Panum Crater
By William Chen
Summer 2019

The desert mountains of California and the Great Basin have a reputation for being remote and difficult. I’ve always enjoyed the sense of adventure that these mountains provide. But there are also many hikers who are new or are looking for peaks that are easier and more accessible.

One of them is Chocolate Mountain (7,703 feet) in the Inyo Mountains, which can be hiked from California State Route 168. Many of you have probably driven over Westgard Pass, the main pass between the Inyo and White Mountains, and an access point to the ancient Bristlecone pine forests of the region. As you continue east on the highway, past Westgard Pass, you’ll drop down into Deep Springs Valley, after which the highway climbs again; eventually it reaches a highpoint at Gilbert Pass (6,373 feet). Here, there is a junction with a dirt road that goes off to the southeast.

On a cool day in May, I followed this road for about 0.5 mile to a junction with a faint trail. I then turned right onto this trail and followed it all the way to the summit of Chocolate Mountain, first going up a moderately steep gully and then tracing a ridge. After just 1.5 hours of easy hiking, I got to the summit, where I found a spectacular view: I could see the snow-clad Sierra Nevada, the bulky White Mountains, and the sandy majesty of the Eureka Dunes - it is incredible that all of this can be viewed from one place.

Eastern California is always full of surprises, and the joy of discovery can be found around every bend of the road. Mono Lake is best known for its tufa formations, its brine flies, and its intricate ties with the water supply of Los Angeles. Lesser known are the volcanoes that are found on its southern shores, the Mono Craters.

Panum Crater (7,040 feet), a peak on the Great Basin Peaks List found right off of California State Route 120, is the northernmost of these volcanic peaks. Past eruptions deposited vast amounts of tuff and obsidian; tuff is a very light and airy stone, while obsidian is heavy, dense, shiny, and sharp. The Crater is an easy one hour hike with very little distance and elevation gain, and I took a cross-country route on my hike. The tuff was fascinating to pick up and toss between my hands, and the sharp and shiny obsidian surfaces provided a sense of uniqueness to the place that one rarely gets hiking locally in the Los Angeles mountains. On the summit of Panum Crater, I got a great vista of beautiful Mono Lake.
Ruth Nolan is an associate professor of English at College of the Desert, Palm Desert, where she teaches poetry, creative writing, desert literature, and Native American literature. In 2009, she published *No Place for a Puritan* , an anthology of California desert literature containing a selection of eighty works written by a wide spectrum of authors.

I purchased a copy of *No Place in 2012* and have often mined its contents for *Desert Books* review ideas. This past summer, however, I finally read the volume from cover to cover and I’m glad I did. It turns out that by limiting myself to reading and reviewing books only, I’ve missed out on a treasure trove of excellent desert writing published in magazines, papers, poetry volumes and elsewhere, material that would be difficult to gather unless a person were in a position similar to Nolan’s.

In her preface to *No Place for a Puritan*, Nolan proposes that the desert has often been stereotyped as a waterless void, when, in fact, “thousands of springs and waterholes grace it.” Furthermore, the people who live in the desert have often been “reduced to two-dimensional characters.” It is Nolan’s hope that her anthology will provide a useful access to the history and culture of the desert, and that “with a little digging, one (can discover) that the literature of the California deserts is every bit as exuberant, varied and charming as the literature of its more populated and gentrified sister regions.”

Of Nolan’s eighty selections, a mere thirty-six come from books (fourteen of which have been reviewed in *Desert Books*). Many of her picks, including the poem from which the volume’s title *No Place for a Puritan* derives, come from collections of verse.

Each of Nolan’s choices is introduced by a short biography of its author and an identification of the publication from which the piece was excerpted. The collection is arranged thematically—rather than chronologically—into seven sections: dangers, crossings, refuge and exile, the lure of the desert, making a home there, changes, and conservation and protection.

Nolan includes works by many notable desert authors, including Mary Austin, Edwin Corle, William Manly, John Van Dyke, Colin Fletcher, Marshal South, and Edmund Jaeger. Surprisingly, several equally well-known desert authors didn’t make the cut, including: G. Wharton James, *The Wonders of the Colorado Desert*, J. Smeaton Chase, *California Desert Trails*, and Mark Twain and John Muir, both of whom wrote classic descriptions of Mono Lake. No matter how she chose her contents, assembling this anthology and gaining all the permissions necessary to publish the eighty pieces must have been a huge undertaking and Nolan is to be congratulated for doing so.

So, what did I personally take away from reading *No Place for a Puritan* cover to cover? Well, it would never have occurred to me that Sylvia Plath, of *The Bell Jar* fame, and her husband, the poet Ted Hughes, not only camped out on the desert but that Plath wrote a poem, *Sleep in the Mojave Desert*, describing that experience; or that Joan Didion, one of my favorite autobiographers (*The Year of Magical Thinking*, *Blue Nights*), wrote a novel, *Play It as it Lays*, describing, in part, the emotionally fragile life of a woman whose husband, a producer, was making a film in Baker, California; or that Asa Merton Russell, better known as Panamint Russ, wrote an article, “Life on the Desert,” published in *Desert Magazine* in 1953, describing his mine on the side of Manly Peak, the piece that just may have been the inspiration for Emmett C. Harder, as referred to in his book, *These Canyons are Full of Ghosts* (2001), to rediscover the Lost Mormon Mine.

Did *No Place for a Puritan* inspire me to add even more volumes to my already out-of-control reading list? Of course, it did. I’ve added several volumes to my need-to-read list, including: *The Great California Deserts*, W. Lee Stores; *Juniper Blue*, Susan Lang; *Travels with Charley*, John Steinbeck; and *Desert Notes/River Notes* and *Crossing Open Ground*, Barry Lopez. Look for reviews on those volumes in upcoming issues of *The Desert Sage*. 

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**DESERT BOOKS**

*By Burton Falk*

A Desert Anthology plus Two Suggested Reads

*No Place for a Puritan* (2009), Ruth Nolan

*Burro Bill and Me* (1993), Edna Calkin Price

*Everett Ruess* (2007), W.L. Rusho

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*No Place for a Puritan: The Literature of California’s Deserts* (2009), Ruth Nolan
First, I want to thank Debbie Bulger for suggesting that I read and review Edna Calkins Price’s _Burro Bill and Me_. What a fascinating adventure story it is, written by a well-educated woman from a good family who gave up a career as a nurse to marry a man whose biggest virtues may have been his passion for adventure and his fondness for animals, especially burros.

In his introduction to Price’s book, Luther Weare, the owner of the _Town Crier_, a weekly newspaper published in Idyllwild, California, recalled how he, a newcomer in town in 1972, kept running into Edna Price, an elderly woman who was somehow considered to be a local hero. What Weare soon discovered was that Edna, a former nurse, had kept the locals patched up before there was a physician in town. “In the 1950s and ’60s … she functioned as a kind of paramedic before there were such people.” During the winters, “She was not above donning snowshoes and accompanying rescue teams when someone was injured in the wilderness…People simply worshipped this good woman.”

After getting to know one another, Price urged Weare to read a manuscript she had written. Doing so, the publisher was amazed at what he found. “(Burro Bill and Me) was a jewel of Western Americana…, an absorbing story written in simple, lucid prose, full of colorful characterization and reflecting Edna’s wholesome gaiety. The contrast between her sedate background and the harsh life in the desert was vividly presented.” Weare ordered 2,000 copies to be sold locally, and in 1993 the Death Valley Natural Historical Association republished the volume.

Edna’s story begins when she, age 26, a trained nurse, met her husband-to-be, Bill Price, while working at a government hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas. Bill, age 23, was a migrant worker—a “stiff”—who had worked in the Canadian wheat fields, as a logger, a miner, a section hand, and as a jack of all trades. Edna, described Bill as “a gay and cocky youth,” and herself as “a sedate young woman.” She recalled, “it was love at first sight.

Three months after they met, they married, and five years later, while both were employed—Bill as a personal assistant, Edna as a nurse—by a billionaire who traveled the U.S. by private rail car, Bill became bored. One day he announced to Edna that he couldn’t take the “soft life” any longer and proposed that they buy a camp outfit and “just keep going until the money runs out.” Edna didn’t disagree.

So, in the spring of 1931, Bill and Edna set out on what was to be a 10-year long adventure. First visiting Death Valley and the Sierra Nevada, that fall they set up camp, i.e., squatted, in an abandoned miner’s cabin in Wild Rose Canyon, west of Death Valley. Exploring their surroundings and getting to know an array of locals, including the famous prospector, Shorty Harris, they gradually did run through their start-up cash. Bill, always full of money-making ideas, then set up a roadside stand in Death Valley—near the sand dunes at the Salt Creek Crossing—where he and Edna sold desert collectable and postcards to the valley’s few visitors, which averaged six cars per day. About that same time, Bill and Edna also became the owners of a mouse-gray burro named Jack, the first of several of the friendly pack animals to become Price family members.

Next, following a stint at prospecting while living in a primitive camp near Death Valley’s Bennett’s Well, Bill began to yearn to move on to an even more desolate location. And so, in late January 1934, the Prices set out, along with six burros, to pack across the desert, via Las Vegas, heading for the Arizona Strip, a lawless badlands located between the north rim of the Grand Canyon and the Utah/Arizona border.

And Bill and Edna’s Odyssey didn’t stop there. From Baker they and their burros packed on to Las Vegas, where, after setting up a photo stand in front of a busy bar, they met a rich eastern businessman who urged them to come to New York, where “people would go nuts over your burros and those pictures you take.”

The Price’s trip to the east coast, during which Edna made a visit to her family in Virginia, was short but memorable. Bill and Edna were westerners, however, not comfortable in the crowded, civilized east. Edna’s story ends happily as she, Bill, and their burros returned to the Death Valley area, where they lived until Edna became pregnant in 1941.

Well-written and always interesting, my issue with _Burro Bill and I_ is not knowing what happened to the Prices after their amazing desert adventures ended. Digging deep into Google pages didn’t shed light on my question.
Everett Ruess, A Vagabond for Beauty (2007), W.L. Rusho

My thanks to Ron Jones, desert mountaineer extraordinaire, past president of the DPS, and a person whom I look up to regarding his extensive knowledge of desert literature, for suggesting W.L. Rusho’s volume, Everett Ruess, as a worthwhile read.

Everett Ruess, was born in Oakland, California on March 28, 1914. His family, which was described by Rusho as a “cohesive unit that gave each individual member great strength,” consisted of his father, Christopher, a Harvard Divinity School graduate/Unitarian minister/probation officer; his mother, Stella, an artist and poet, whose specialty was block printing; and his four-and-a-half years older brother, Waldo, later a diplomatic aide and an international businessman.

Rusho notes that Everett, a precocious child, received much of his mother, Stella’s, attention, “directed first toward motherly care, then later toward teaching him to write, to sketch, and to paint, eventually toward convincing him that he should make a career of art.” While Rusho includes only small glimpses of Ruess’ early years, Wikipedia notes that Everett took a creative writing class while attending Los Angeles High School, and that in 1931 he published an original poem, “Lonesome,” while attending Hollywood High School.

Everett Ruess consists primarily of letters and poems Everett wrote during the four-and-a-half-year interval between the time he first left high school in 1930, and when he mysteriously disappeared in the Utah desert in November 1934. Most of the material, including Everett’s photo and block prints, were made available for publication thanks to Waldo Ruess, Everett’s older brother. As for the author, W.L. Rusho, he has done a good job both filling in gaps in the chronological flow of events and in offering timely, salient comments throughout.

Briefly, Everett’s last years were spent thusly:

1930 Leaving high school prior to graduation in June, Everett hitchhiked from Los Angeles to Carmel, where he camped out by the Pacific. There, in his ever-bold approach to famous people, he located and introduced himself to Edward Weston, one of America’s most famous and successful photographers. Weston, taking an interest in Everett, promptly invited him to supper and to spend the night in his garage. Later that summer, Everett visited Big Sur, then continued to Yosemite, where, carrying a heavy pack, he hiked from Glen Aulin, via Tenaya Lake, Cloud’s Rest, and Little Yosemite Valley, into Yosemite Valley. That fall, he returned to school, and that December he graduated from Hollywood High.

1931 Everett spent most of the year packing with burros through Arizona and Utah, exploring Monument Valley, the Grand Canyon, Zion, and Bryce. Rusho notes that the nineteen-year-old, “wandered into this desert land of the Navajos in late winter virtually penniless, paying his small expenses by doing odd jobs and occasionally selling one of his watercolors or block prints.

1932 Staying with his family in Los Angeles during the early winter, Everett was off to the desert once more, spending March through September, wandering with horse and burros through such places as the Painted Desert, Canyon de Chelly, and Mesa Verde. In a June diary entry, he wrote, “God, how the wild calls to me. There can be no other life for me but that of the lone wilderness wanderer. It has an irresistible fascination. The lone trail is the best for me.” That fall, probably at his father’s request, he enrolled for a semester at UCLA.

1933 Finishing his one and only college semester in January, Everett spent the spring “reading copiously, studying personalities, working out block prints, and dabling with the typewriter.” In June, he was in the Sierra once more, “fording swollen rivers, climbing trails by moonlight, and riding through rapidly-melting alpine snowbanks.” Ending up in San Francisco that fall, Rusho notes that, “Everett was embarking on...a Bohemian life in association with many other artists, where ideas, original concepts, and creativity flowed as the heady wine of California.” In fact, two of the artists that most influenced Everett during that period were the painter Maynard Dixon and Dixon’s wife, Dorothea Lange, the photographer who recorded the tragedy of the Depression in the Dust Bowl.

1934 Returning from the Bay Area to his parents’ home in Los Angeles in the early spring, Everett spent “a month in preparation for his forthcoming trip to northern Arizona.” And on April 14, his brother, Waldo, dropped him off in Kayenta, Arizona, the last time that the two brothers saw each other. During the late spring and early summer, Everett roamed Navajo country, including a trip to Navajo Mountain and Rainbow Bridge. In July, he unofficially joined a U.C. Berkeley Expedition investigating Anasazi ruins along Utah-Arizona border, and that fall he was in Escalante, Utah, from which he planned to explore “spectacular canyon country along the Escalante River drainage.” On November 11, Everett and his two burros descended into Davis Gulch, a deep side tributary of the Escalante River—”a place that had grass and water for the burros, high sandstone arches, pictographs, petroglyphs and Indian ruins, a perfect place to spend the winter”—and, in spite of several searches, he was never seen again.

Everett Ruess—both the book and the man—are fascinating. Inwardly, Everett was intelligent, gifted and sensitive, while outwardly he was outgoing, courageous, and adventurous. If you’re curious about this type of personality, love the desert, and/or you just want a good read, I highly recommend this volume.

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