



# The Desert Sage

**OUR 77th SEASON**

**JULY-AUGUST 2018**

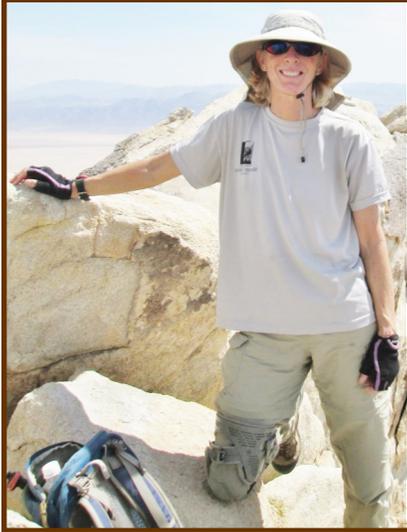
**ISSUE NO. 376**



<http://desertpeaks.org/>

# Chair's Corner

by Tina Bowman



DPSers came from far and near to the banquet held May 20th in Newbury Park. After being greeted and checked in by Kelley Laxamana and Greg Gerlach, attendees found themselves in a wonderfully large room with very high ceilings, which leant itself well to pre-

dinner socializing. Those wanting to savor the slide show put together by banquet chair Tracey Thomerson could do so in the comfort of loungers. Jim Fleming made a round of the miniature-golf course, and I wandered out to make sure he wasn't cheating. Besides photos of DPS peaks and climbers, DPS trivia questions were sprinkled among the slides. We cheered for Jim Morehouse, recipient of the DPS Service Award, and were all enthralled by Wynne Benti's presentation on her desert activism, especially current battles against the military in Nevada; adventures climbing the list, including pictures of those we haven't seen for a number of years; river touring adventures; and motorcycle touring trips in the wide-open west. The buffet dinner was a big hit with plenty for everyone and nice choices among the appetizers, side dishes, main dishes, and dessert.

We're very thankful that Ken Snyder donated the wine and beer, which attendees in turn donated to the section to enjoy. A great selection of silent auction items—donated by members Diana and Jorge Estrada, Deuter, Mountainsmith, MPowered, Nalgene, Columbia, and more—led to some bidding wars all in good fun and many happy winners. Unlike last year when we lost about \$1,200 on the banquet, this year we're breaking even. Hooray! Many thanks go to Tracey for pulling together such a fine banquet, but we all pitched in to make it a memorable event.

## In this issue:

Chair's Corner	Page 2
DPS Leadership	Page 3
DPS Trips and Events	Pages 4-8
Outings Chair	Page 9
Treasurer's Report	Page 9
Conservation Chair	Page 10
Membership Report	Page 10
DPS Chili Cook-off	Pages 11-12
DPS Banquet	Page 13
Trip Reports:	
List Thoughts & Recollections	Page 14-15
Ryan Benchmark	Pages 15-16
Conglomerate Mesa	Page 16
Great Basin Peaks Section News	Page 17
Revised DPS List	Page 17
Desert Books	Pages 18-21
Letter to the Editor	Page 21
DPS Merchandise	Page 22
Sierra Club Membership Application	Page 23
DPS Membership Application	Page 23
DPS Info	Page 24

## THE NEXT SAGE SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS AUGUST 12, 2018

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While it's too hot now for many of the peaks on our list, it's a great time to climb those high peaks. Also it's time for leaders to start planning outings for the fall and winter. Because some of the potlucks the past few years had rather skimpy attendance, we'll be cutting back to four potlucks: October, December, March, and April. Please see the schedule in this issue of *The Desert Sage* and mark them on your calendar. Even if it's not a potluck month this fall through next spring, the management committee will be meeting, most likely via conference call and quite possibly not on Sundays.

Happy trails, Tina

# Desert Peaks Section Leadership for the 2018 - 2019 Season

## Elected Positions

### **Chair**

Tina Bowman  
283 Argonne Avenue  
Long Beach, CA 90803-1743  
(562) 438-3809  
[tina@bowmanchange.com](mailto:tina@bowmanchange.com)

### **Vice Chair / Outings / Safety**

Sandy Lara  
5218 East Parkcrest Street  
Long Beach, CA 90808-1855  
(562) 522-5323  
[ssperling1@verizon.net](mailto:ssperling1@verizon.net)

### **Secretary**

Diana Neff Estrada  
138 La Fortuna  
Newberry Park, CA 91320-1012  
(818) 357-1112  
[hikinggranny@aol.com](mailto:hikinggranny@aol.com)

### **Treasurer**

Laura Newman  
11755 Entrada Avenue  
Porter Ranch, CA 91326-1933  
[desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com)

### **Program / Banquet**

Jim Fleming  
538 Yarrow Drive  
Simi Valley, CA 93065-7352  
(805) 405-1726  
[jimf333@att.net](mailto:jimf333@att.net)

## Cover Photo Credit...

goes to Richard Stover. The photo is of a Bluepod Rockcrest and was taken on the summit of Conglomerate Mesa. Please see the story on page 16 of this issue of *The Desert Sage*.

## Appointed Positions

### **Archives**

Barbara Reber  
PO Box 1911  
Newport Beach, CA 92659-0911  
(949) 640-7821

### **Conservation Chair**

Dave Perkins  
1664 Buttercup Road  
Encinitas, CA 92024-2451  
(818) 421-4930  
[david.perkins@csun.edu](mailto:david.perkins@csun.edu)

### **Guidebook Editor**

Jim Morehouse  
3272 River Glorious Lane  
Las Vegas, NV 89135-2123  
(702) 528-3712  
[desertpeakssection@gmail.com](mailto:desertpeakssection@gmail.com)

### **Mailer**

Elaine Baldwin  
3760 Ruthbar Drive  
Hawthorne, CA 90250-8473  
(310) 675-4120  
[DWBaldwin@aol.com](mailto:DWBaldwin@aol.com)

### **Membership Records Chair**

Ron Bartell  
1556 21st Street  
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266  
(310) 546-1977  
[ronbartell@yahoo.com](mailto:ronbartell@yahoo.com)

### **Merchandising**

Laura Newman  
11755 Entrada Avenue  
Porter Ranch, CA 91326-1933  
[desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com)

### **Mountaineering Committee Chair**

Sandy Lara  
5218 East Parkcrest Street  
Long Beach, CA 90808-1855  
(562) 522-5323  
[ssperling1@verizon.net](mailto:ssperling1@verizon.net)

### **Mountaineering Committee**

Ron Bartell  
[ronbartell@yahoo.com](mailto:ronbartell@yahoo.com)  
Tina Bowman  
[tina@bowmanchange.com](mailto:tina@bowmanchange.com)

### **Mountain Records (Summit Registers)**

Mark Butski  
6891 Rio Vista  
Huntington Beach, CA 92647  
(562) 716-9067  
[hbmark58@yahoo.com](mailto:hbmark58@yahoo.com)

### **Newsletter Editor (The Desert Sage)**

Greg Gerlach  
23933 Via Astuto  
Murrieta, CA 92562  
(626) 484-2897  
[gregrg1955@verizon.net](mailto:gregrg1955@verizon.net)

### **Webmaster**

Jim Morehouse  
3272 River Glorious Lane  
Las Vegas, NV 89135-2123  
(702) 528-3712  
[desertpeakssection@gmail.com](mailto:desertpeakssection@gmail.com)

## 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 2018 — October 2019

**Desert-banded Gecko. Photo credit: Richard Stover.**

SEPT 23	SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle
OCT 6	SAT	LTC	Leadership Training
OCT 6-7	SAT-SUN	WTC, DPS	Last Chance Mountain
OCT 10	WED	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Knots and Basic Safety
OCT 13	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Belay Skills
OCT 14	SUN	DPS	DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
OCT 20	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Rappelling
OCT 20	SAT	LTC, WTC, HPS	Navigation: Beginning Navigation Clinic
OCT 27	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Anchors and Systems
NOV 10-11	SAT-SUN	LTC	Rock: Checkoff and Practice
NOV 17-18	SAT-SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Mission Creek Navigation Noodle
DEC 9	SUN	DPS	DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
DEC 9	SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle
MARCH 10	SUN	DPS	DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
APRIL 14	SUN	DPS	DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck
APRIL 17	WED	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Knots and Basic Safety
APRIL 20	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Belay Skills
APRIL 27	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Rappelling
MAY 5	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Anchors and Systems
OCT 9	WED	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Knots and Basic Safety
OCT 12	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Belay Skills
OCT 19	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Rappelling
OCT 26	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Anchors and Systems

♦ **SEPTEMBER 23**                      **SUN**    **LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

**I: Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle:** Navigation Noodle at Los Padres National Forest for either checkoff or practice to satisfy the basic (I/M) level or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. 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](mailto:rmmyers@ix.netcom.com) ). Assistant: Ann Pedreschi. 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 6-7**                      **SAT-SUN**    **WTC, DPS**

**I: Last Chance Mountain (8,456’):** We are off to Last Chance Mountain as your last chance for a graduation trip. The mountain is located in super secluded northern Death Valley National Park just a few miles from the Nevada state line. Total two-day stats: 15 miles and 3,700’ gain. Saturday afternoon we’ll hike in on a dirt road through abandoned mines for 3.5 miles and 1,300’ of gain and make camp; later, we’ll tell ghost stories during happy hour among the ruins. Sunday morning we’ll rise early and hike to the summit, sign the register and return the way we came, then break camp and hike back to the trailhead (11 miles and 2,400’ gain). Participants should be comfortable on 2nd class terrain and be prepared to carry in all their water (6-8 liters). A National

Park pass is required to enter the park. This WTC Outing is co-sponsored by DPS. For consideration, please email hiking resume and current conditioning to Leader: Megan Birdsill ([mbirdsill@gmail.com](mailto:mbirdsill@gmail.com)). Co-leader: Saveria Tilden.

◆ **OCTOBER 10**                      **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, and the cost is \$75.00. To register, please see <http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 13**                      **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, and the cost is \$75.00. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 14**                      **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](mailto:tina@bowmanchange.com).

◆ **OCTOBER 20**                      **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](mailto:dianedunbar@charter.net) or 818-248-0455). Co-Leader: Richard Boardman (310-374-4371).

◆ **OCTOBER 20**                      **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, and the cost is \$75.00. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 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, and the cost is \$75.00. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountainingprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **NOVEMBER 10-11**      **SAT-SUN**      **LTC**

**M/E-R: Rock: Sheep Pass/Indian Cove Joshua Tree Rock Checkoff & 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](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)). Co-Leader: Daniel Richter (818-970-6737 or [dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)).

◆ **NOVEMBER 17-18**      **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](mailto:rmmyers@ix.netcom.com) ). Assistant: Ann Pedreschi. 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 9**      **SUN**      **DPS**

**O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck:** Join us at the home of Christine and Ron Bartell 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](mailto:christinebartell@yahoo.com).

◆ **DECEMBER 9**      **SUN**      **LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

**I: Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle:** Navigation Noodle at Joshua Tree National Park for either checkoff or practice to satisfy the basic (I/M) level or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. 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](mailto:rmmyers@ix.netcom.com) ). Assistant: Ann Pedreschi. 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.

◆ **MARCH 10**      **SUN**      **DPS**

**O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck:** Join us at the home of Tom Sumner in Sylmar for the DPS Management Committee meeting at 4:30 p.m. and potluck at 6:00 p.m. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a potluck item to share. RSVP to Tom at [Locornr@aol.com](mailto:Locornr@aol.com).

◆ **APRIL 14**      **SUN**      **DPS**

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

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

◆ **APRIL 20**                      **SAT**                      **LTC**  
**E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program: Belay Skills:** Second of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on belaying and related principles starting with standard sport climbing all the way up to advanced techniques to move large groups across dangerous terrain. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. the Monday two weeks after the final previous class outing. Please see website for cost. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountainingprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

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

◆ **MAY 4**                      **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](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER**                      **SAT**                      **LTC**  
**O: Leadership Training:** Offered just twice a year, the next Sierra Club Angeles Chapter's Leadership Training Seminar is scheduled for Saturday, October 6, 2018. Apply by September 22 to guarantee a spot and learn all about the best leadership practices of our outings program. Full details, including cost and required application, can be found at the following website link: [https://angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc\\_leadership\\_seminar](https://angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc_leadership_seminar). This all-day event covers group management, our ratings system, rules of conduct, safety and much more, from presentations, breakout groups and scenarios. Location: Eaton Canyon Nature Center, Altadena, California. Email [LTPSeminarRegistrar@gmail.com](mailto:LTPSeminarRegistrar@gmail.com) for information. Leader: Anne Marie Richardson ([amleadership@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.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](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 26**                      **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.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see <http://sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms> or call 415-977-5528.

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

# Outings Chair

by Sandy Lara



Hello Fellow Desert Climbers!

We are into summer and often don't think of this as the time to climb desert peaks. Not so! We have 19 peaks over 10,000' and some are best climbed during the summer. These high peaks have their own rugged beauty with varied vegetation that often does NOT include

cactus and other pointy things. You might even see some wildflowers. Go, climb, enjoy!

Speaking of pointy things, my husband, Peter, thought it might be a good idea to let you know some of the things we add to our packs when we are going to climb in an area with special risks. When we will be around a lot of cactus, yucca, buckthorn, etc., we add a pair of needle-nosed pliers (or a multitool containing such) as the grip on larger pieces of debris is much greater than with tweezers. A comb is useful for pulling a cholla ball off. A small magnifying glass can be really helpful, especially for those of us with aging eyes who need extra magnification to see a small thing clearly. A credit card can help remove a stinger. A needle can help dig out something that broke off under the skin that is intolerable (otherwise, it is sometimes best to wait for the body to push it out). We have a tick kit that has a special tick-extraction tool. If we are going where there is snow or very cold weather, we add hand warmers. Think about where you are going, what risks you might encounter, and alter your first aid kit accordingly. Safety first!

As always, we need leaders to lead trips to our peaks. Please send your write-ups to me at [ssperling1@verizon.net](mailto:ssperling1@verizon.net)

Happy off-trail!

Sandy Lara  
DPS Outings Chair



# Treasurer's Report

By Laura Newman

DPS Account Summary from  
January 1, 2018 to  
May 31, 2018

## INCOME

Banquet Silent Auction	\$479.00
Banquet Ticket Sales	\$1685.00
Donations	\$130.00
Membership/Subscriptions	\$1315.00
Merchandise	<u>\$90.00</u>

**TOTAL INCOME** **\$3,699.00**

## EXPENSES

Banquet Expenses	\$485.25
Merchandise Expenses	\$2.76
Sage Expenses	\$451.85
Sales Tax	<u>\$8.14</u>

**TOTAL EXPENSES** **\$948.00**

**PAY PAL BALANCE** **\$9.41**

**CHECKING ACCOUNT BALANCE** **\$5,515.12**

### Special Offer to New 2018 DPS Members and Subscribers

Beginning in 2018 the DPS would like to welcome new members and subscribers (who don't yet meet the criteria for membership) with a year's free subscription to *The Desert Sage*. New members as well as new subscribers should send the membership application form to the Membership Chair, Ron Bartell, by email ([desertpeakssection@gmail.com](mailto: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*. Although the *Sage* is available to all on the web site, members and subscribers receive an email with a link as soon as a new issue is published.

# Conservation Chair

by Dave Perkins



## Big Plans Afoot for Nevada Wilderness: Air Force and Navy wish to expand Nevada training ranges

The Air Force wants to add 301,507 acres to its Nevada Test and Training Range, which already covers more than 2.9 million acres in Clark, Lincoln and Nye

counties. 2.9 million acres is roughly four times the size of the state of Rhode Island and twice the size of the state of Delaware. Likewise the Navy, not wanting to be outdone, plans to add more than 600,000 acres of public land to its Fallon Range Training Complex which is south of Highway 80 near Fallon Nevada. These plans to expand the vast training range would close off more of Desert National Wildlife Refuge north of Las Vegas and near Fallon.

Critics of these expansions argue that if the Air Force and the Navy have their way, nearly 70 percent of the largest wildlife refuge in the lower 48 will be locked away from public use, maybe forever. Specifically, refuge officials fear the loss of more public access and the possible impacts to bighorn sheep, desert tortoises and other wildlife from the construction and use of new roads, equipment pads and aircraft runways. Conservationists, hunters and tribal groups have all come out against the expansion, which they say will endanger wildlife, cut off public access to public land and hurt rural recreation economies. Henry Brean, in a piece for the Las Vegas Review-Journal of March 10, 2018, said that even though there were no bighorn sheep in attendance, their interests were well represented. More than 200 people attended a public hearing in Las Vegas and many expressed concern or opposition to the plans.

Both the Air Force and the Navy have held a series of hearings and have called for public comments on their proposals, but the deadlines for these forms of input have passed. The next step is for the Air Force and the Navy to complete their Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) which are due in the fall of

2018. Congress is expected to vote on the final version of these proposals sometime before November 2021, when the military's current hold on the entire 2.9 million-acre range is set to expire. It appears that the most appropriate form of input at this point will be political. So, what to do? Get involved. Call your congressperson, your Senator, or your Sierra Club conservation committee member.

# DPS Membership Report

by Ron Bartell

## Membership Summary

<u>Type</u>	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Sustaining</u>
Member	102	31
Household	30	
Subscriber	23	2
Totals:	155	33

## Activity Report

### Sustaining Renewals

Mike Manchester 1 year

### Renewals

Dain Clark 2 years  
Kevin & Lisa Heapy 1 year  
Peter & Sandy Lara 1 year  
Leo Logacho 2 years  
Edward H Lubin 1 year  
Julie Rush 2 years  
Steve Smith 1 year  
Don Sparks 1 year  
Tracey Thomerson & Peter Kudlinski 1 year

### 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 [gregg1955@verizon.net](mailto:gregg1955@verizon.net) no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months.

# The 23<sup>rd</sup> DPS Chili Cook-Off

By Julie Rush

## The 23<sup>rd</sup> DPS Chili Cook-off

By Julie Rush

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Photos Credits: Linda McDermott, Dave Baldwin and Peggy Albright

Our DPS Chili Cook-Off this year was a real event. I should say a “wind event”. Great temperatures and sunshine, but... did that wind BLOW !!



The line up of our seven cooks.

After a fairly calm Friday night camp to secure our spaciouly beautiful desert site on the Furnace Creek Wash Road, Saturday morning began a flurry of activity by my crew: Linda McDermott, Gloria Miladin, Judy Hummerich and my old friend from New York City, Peggy Albright. We began setting up a canopy, the DPS banner, inflating balloons, preparing the ballot boxes, cooks’ check-in table, marking the grand fire pit for the night's activities; then posting road signage for incoming hikers and friends. All this while fighting wind gusts that continued to intensify.

Balloons began to fly away. The DPS Cook-Off banner became a sail and our well-secured canopy became airborne one too many times. We soon had to deconstruct the site and thought to circle a small common area with our vehicles for a wind block.

By late morning Tina Bowman and her Pyramid Peak hikers who included cooks Annie Stockley (a seasoned rock climber but her first DPS peak). Rana Parker and Ben Uong breezed in to join Tomás Sumner and Danny Boy, Linda McDermott, Gloria Miladin and Danelle Rozell to cook their pots of chili gold... Elaine Baldwin soon had her stove shielded and going, too. Our seven (7) cooks were now at work crafting their special recipes. What a feat to dice, chop, mince, brown, braise, sear, sauté, season, simmer and stew for hours in wind blasts clocked at 30+mph (The next day’s 50+mph gusts forced many of us to alter our Death Valley exploring).

Tasters from Daryn Dodge’s and Kathy Rich’s hike to Saddle Peak high point and Mat Kelliher’s trip from Ord Mountain began to roll in mid afternoon (Mat was a little delayed due to an unforeseen incident in Baker). More high-profile vehicles were commandeered to expand our communal wind-break. Soon munchies began to appear and everyone was greeted with complimentary Patron tequila

margaritas crafted by Brian Smith.

Nevertheless, by 5pm all (7) cooks were gathered to present their colorful, earnest sales pitches to the impressionable voting masses. Tomás Sumner tried his bilingually, serape and all; Linda gave hers ardently but one-handed as her other was rather occupied with a huge margarita glass; Ben U blamed his chili efforts on Rana. Denelle, a veteran winner from 2010, had a



Julie Rush explaining the voting rules.

smooth delivery but seemed a little pushy - like a Pendergast politician (and I don’t mean Teddy). Elaine and Carol gave demure yet hopeful pleas for votes and Gloria forewarned

tasters about her 4-alarm green pork chili (Hot, Hot!).

With ballots and bowls in hand the hordes were released to their task to taste and vote. Great salads, cookies and other desserts rounded out a great communal feeding frenzy in true DPS spirit. It’s the sign of our health conscious times that so many vegetarian entries competed this year. Cooks went well beyond expectations of just meat and beans to procure beauti-

# The 23<sup>rd</sup> DPS Chili Cook-Off

By Julie Rush

fully fresh garnishes, savory ingredients and spices for their unique recipes – so creative and delicious!

As all hope of a campfire gathering was dashed because hot embers or camp chairs could end up in Kansas or Furnace Creek. Nearing sunset, the satiated Chili Tribe convened back at the high-rise wind shelter to learn the ballot results.



**Famous tasters grazing.**

By popular vote, the winning Chilis and Cooks for the 23<sup>rd</sup> DPS Chili Cook-Off are:

- Champion Chili Chef and Best Traditional: Danelle Rozell, Chili-A-Go-Go (Traditional)
- Best Texan Chili: Gloria Miladin, Pig Out Chili
- Best Vegetarian Chili: Annie Stockley, Bird Count Chili
- Most Original Chili: Recipe Rana Parker/Ben Uong, Fireman's Chili (Vegetarian)
- Best Presentation: Tomàs Sumner, Mucho Macho Chili (Traditional)

Recognition to muchly appreciated Runner-ups Cooks:

- Linda McDermott Chili Willie (Traditional)
- Elaine Baldwin Gold Nugget Chili (Vegetarian)

To earn by popular acclaim a “DPS Chili Cook-Off Certificate” is truly a culinary feat in the adventurous spirit of food critic Anthony Bordain. The certificates read “... at a primitive campsite in the Mojave Desert without benefit of piped water, electricity, or other conveniences of modern living.” Yes, all of the chefs were winners!!

Certificates created and printed by Jan Brahms' design company and goodie bags of miscellaneous desert-themed items procured by Linda M were awarded to the winners. Especially memorable and enviable

are the wooden cutting boards and utensil containers etched with the DPS insignia and especially crafted for this event. Over 40 tasters were fed at this chili chow down with only seven (7) cooks, but they made extra so no one went away hungry. (Beano was not even requested!)

This years' event was very well attended even though the venue

was 230 miles from Los Angeles. A cadre of DPS oldsters alongside HPS peakbaggers of the younger, tech savvy generation commiserated about peaks and trails and “to do” lists. Two participants that I know of, Catherine Ross and Annie Stockley earned a first peak. Meeting new folks who have such an enthusiasm for desert wanderings and arduous accomplishments couldn't be possible without our skilled and experienced leaders. So, a special thanks to Mat, Tina, Daryn and Kathy. Oh, all proceeds gleaned, after expenses, are to go to a non-profit organization that champions and protects our desert flora and fauna. I suggest the Desert Tortoise Preserve.

Thanks to all for the swell camaraderie and another opportunity to experience the treasures of our Mojave Desert.

Julie

Footnote N.B.

Although the Chili Cook-Off is often an annual event either in spring or fall; this is not necessarily so. The coordination efforts are not that much more involved than planning any RSVP outing. So who of you may now be convinced to take on coordinating this event for next year? I'll assist in any way possible. Please think about it and let me know. Our leaders both in the DPS and HPS are also very supportive to lead a nearby peak. And hey, YOU get to decide WHERE to host the next Chili Cook-Off weekend.

# 2018 DPS Annual Banquet

This year's banquet was held in Newbury Park, at the Vallecito Club House. The room was spacious, but very comfortable, with splendid views of the Santa Monica Mountains. Stonefire Grill served up a fabulous buffet dinner that included salmon, tri-tip, grilled vegetables, pasta, salad and bread sticks. Our 56 attendees were awarded with plenty of time to enjoy their meal and catch up with friends.

Our speaker this year was Wynne Benti, a long-time member of DPS, who presented "33 Years in the Desert West. An Illustrated Memoir of Adventure and Activism". Wynne alerted us to the military's proposed expansion into almost 1 million acres of Nevada's public lands. She also shared memories of the friends she met as well as beautiful photos of the many outings she participated in while completing the DPS list. Additionally, she gave us a glimpse into her adventures canoeing and motor cycle riding. To learn more about Wynne Benti please visit: [wynnebenti.com](http://wynnebenti.com).

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Desert Peaks Section Service Award to James Morehouse. This award is given for outstanding service to the section. It is a prestigious honor that serves to recognize those who go above and beyond within our section.

Jim's dedication to updating and digitizing the Peak Guide and his service as our Webmaster qualified him for this award.

## Sunday, May 20th By Tracey Thomerson

In choosing the recipient, several things are considered, including support of DPS List improvement. What set Jim apart from other candidates was his participation in exploratory trips and review of the status and conditions of existing peaks as well as his long-standing support of the section by maintaining the website. Congratulations Jim!

A special thanks to this year's Sponsors – Columbia, Deuter, Edna Erspamer, Jorge and Diana Estrada, The Law office of Kenneth L. Snyder, Mountainsmith, MPOWERED and Nalgene – for their generous contributions. We collected \$579, which helped offset the cost of the banquet.

It really was a pleasant evening filled with celebrating accomplishments and sharing memories. The program wrapped up at 8:30 PM, but many people lingered to continue conversations with their Desert Peaks friends.



**James Morehouse: DPS 2018 Service Award recipient.**





A DPS group on the way to Arc Dome. Photo credit: Sandy Lara.

# Trip Reports

## DPS 2<sup>nd</sup> List Finish Thoughts and Recollections By Jim Morehouse

So many memories, it's hard to put something like this on paper. Once I decided to go for a 2<sup>nd</sup> round (thanks to Greg Gerlach for convincing me it was a good idea), I had to plan out how I was going to do it. When I met up with Greg and Dave Perkins for Avawatz back in March of 2016, I was going for the Explorer Emblem, and they were going to do it from the north, which is why I wanted on that trip. Greg made the point that if I did the Emblem, I'd be nearly half done. Well, almost half done. But it began to seem reasonable. Many of the peaks can be done in pairs, or even clusters, so I tried to plan my trips so I'd only have to go into an area once, maybe twice. For example, I climbed Sandy Point and Last Chance on one trip. Other pairs include Dry and Tin. Another grouping was Manly and Needle. Canyon Point was done with Manly and Needle the first time, and with Dry the second time. Other clusters include Indianhead, Rosa Point, and Spectre. Chuckwalla, Black Butte and Orocopia can be done together as well. Sentinel and Porter go well together. Some were done opportunistically. I climbed Glass the 2<sup>nd</sup> time on my way to a longer Sierra trip. Pleasant Point was done on my way back from a Sierra trip. It was warm, but not horrible. Patterson was done in that fashion as well. Nelson Range High Point was done in conjunction with a DPS trip up Panamint Butte. Some absolutely must be done as a double day hike. It made for a long day, but Inyo and Keynot must be done together, as getting there and the actual climb is so difficult that you might as well suck it up and do them both. I mean who would want to gain over 5,000' to get to the summit ridge twice? Boundary and Montgomery fall into that category too. They can be backpacked, but there generally isn't a reliable source of water on either pair, and you know what that means! My last five were Little Picacho, (done solo, which I absolutely had to be successful on or the

whole trip would fall apart), Pico Risco (with Sandy Lara), Pescadores (solo), Jacumba (solo), and Sombrero (the finishing peak, with several DPS members and friends), all one after another. Doing them like this made the driving a little more tolerable, but still stressful. But really, the driving is the crux, if you will, of the whole process. Some of the worst roads and longest drives were in pursuit of DPS peaks.

Here's some thoughts and recollections:

- 1000s of miles and many hours of driving.
- Many nights spent sleeping in the back of my truck at the end of rough dirt roads. Dark skies! Coyotes, burros, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, tortoises, big horn sheep, lizards, hares, and rabbits, and rarely other people (the best part!).
- Two cases of poison oak (and a third from the shirt I wore when I got the 2<sup>nd</sup> case, even though it had been washed!).
- One flat tire (on the road to Pinacate).
- Soloed all the Class 4 routes.
- Have climbed 49 (as of March 23, 2018) by different routes.
- Many new climbing partners.
- Deepened my commitment to the Sierra Club.
- Peaks on the List I'm most "proud" of: Baboquivari and Little Picacho.
- Most epic dayhikes: Pico Risco (both times), Rabbit, Inyo/Keynot, and New York Butte come to mind.
- Easiest peaks: Sombrero, Ajo, East Ord, Glass, and Nelson Range High Point; also, Orocopia via the "new" route is pretty easy, too.
- Most fun: Eagle #1, Little Picacho, North Guardian Angel, Baboquivari, Bridge, and Rabbit.
- Hardest (physically): Big Picacho, Spectre, Pico Risco, Dry, Rabbit, Inyo/Keynot (as a day hike), New York Butte, and Panamint Butte from Towne Pass.

# Trip Reports - continued

- Best views: Rabbit, Little Picacho, Baboquivari, Inyo/Keynot, and New York Butte.
- Most pleasant: Mummy, Eagle #2, Martinez, Indianhead, and Tucki.
- Best backpack: Panamint City to Sentinel.
- Snow climbs: Dubois and Ruby Dome
- Most scenic: Ruby Dome, Arc Dome, Dubois, Inyo/Keynot, New York Butte, and Rabbit.
- Trespasses: Edgar (twice), Mitchell (twice), and Granite North (see [Sage 358](#) for good alternate route).

A note about the “trespasses”. Edgar and Mitchell are either within or a good part of the route is within the Providence Mountains State Park, which has been closed for several years. The main road in has been gated, so climbers have either jumped the gate (easy) and hiked in from there (some have run into the caretaker, others have been “lucky”), or have found back ways in via 4WD roads that lead up to or close to the fence surrounding the park. There is a gate way back there that is easy to get through, and further up the fence line is a deliberate cut in the fence. Given the presence of cattle in the park area, I’m guessing the Blair Brothers Ranch (an inholding in the Mojave National Preserve) had something to do with the cut. Once across the fence there are several 4WD roads leading into the canyon with routes up Edgar and Mitchell. I tried calling and emailing the state park several times, but never received an answer, so I found a way in and climbed the peaks. I had the distinct impression that the park was mainly concerned with vandalism and theft to the structures near the caverns, which is where the caretaker stayed. But now, since the park is reopening, they don’t want to allow cross country travel through the park (control issues?), which is why the DPS has suspended Edgar entirely and allowing Mitchell only on route D, which is entirely off state and private property. Granite was done the first time without any knowledge of the closure of the “standard” route by the University of California. On our return trip, we saw the sign (along with a lot of evidence of both foot traffic and ATV traffic... hmmm). That’s why I went back and laid down the route up from the south. As I understand it, if one is able to get ahold of the people who run the

study site, one can get permission to hike the peak from the standard route. Otherwise, please don’t go that way. See the Guide for directions for Granite from the south, or follow the link to the Sage #358 above.

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## Ryan Benchmark (5,148’)

By Gregory Frux

March 19, 2018

Ron Beimel, Matt Burd and I camped slightly west of due south from the summit of Ryan Benchmark by Greenwater Valley Road in Death Valley at 3,800’ in elevation. Our line of approach was up the leftmost north-south ridge visible from our camp location, staying as close to the ridgeline as possible while also being willing to veer slightly off the true ridgeline whenever it became extra rocky at the top so that we could maintain easy dirt footing. This ridgeline merges with the adjacent ridgeline to the east via a



**Ryan Benchmark from our campsite. We ascended the ridge located on the left side of the photo to the obvious saddle and then onto the summit, which is not visible. Photo credit: Ron Beimel.**

very shallow saddle at just under 4,600’. We had our first snack break at this location. We then climbed around to the far side of the new ridgeline we now found ourselves on, and traversed/slightly ascended across to the base of the final summit area. We took a direct approach to the summit, ending in a slight traverse to the west to find an easy 15 foot class 3 rock scramble to the top, where we again had a snack

# Trip Reports - continued

break and enjoyed the view as the sun filtered through the patchy clouds down onto Greenwater Valley. We were able to see Pyramid Peak, Funeral Peak, Telescope Peak, and Brown Peak from the summit, as well as other features including Death Valley Junction. To descend, instead of going back the way we arrived, we descended down easy slopes to the southeast to bypass a rocky band, and then cut back west to proceed down what was approximately the same route we took up, but in reverse.

## **Conglomerate Mesa (7,700')**

**By Debbie Bulger**

**April 22, 2018**

**Photos Credit: Richard Stover**

On the way to Conglomerate Mesa Richard Stover and I drove through Lee Flats, one of my favorite places and home to the densest Joshua Tree forest in Death Valley.

We were in search of a dirt road that would take us near the east escarpment of the peak. After pursuing several unproductive tracks, we finally found an expansive camping area not far from the base of the mesa.

We found Conglomerate Mesa to be beautiful, wild, and extremely interesting. First there was the steep climb to the top of the mesa, then we hiked through a pine/juniper woodland to the flats dotted with mine claims and continued onto the summit which also sported a pine/



**A view of Conglomerate Mesa from the east. We climbed up to the notch located slightly left of center and then onto the summit, which is not visible in this photo.**

juniper crown.



## **Debbie Bulger on the summit of Conglomerate Mesa.**

On the tippy top we observed one and only one Bluepod rockcress (please see cover photo). We found no other examples of this unexpected plant anywhere else we looked.

The hills to the northwest looked like swirled chocolate. Someone was stirring up something delicious.

Our joy at reaching the summit was tempered by the knowledge that this special mesa may be turned into an open pit gold mine with a cyanide leach pond if the current federal administration chooses not to honor the mesa's wilderness values and historic past.

Back down in the flats Richard and I explored what seemed to be the remains of a charcoal-making oven surrounded by large stumps. Tom Budlong's article in the December 2017 Desert Report notes how charcoal made here in the 1870s supplied the smelter at nearby Cerro Gordo.

A few scattered obsidian flakes on the ground indicated that the Piutes likely came to this mesa to gather pine nuts before the old-growth pinyons were cut down by the charcoal makers.

We took another route back to the steep descent and walked back to our truck watched by a fat Desert spiny lizard.

# Great Basin Peaks Section News

By Sharon Marie Wilcox

## Mormon Dan Peak By Sharon Marie Wilcox May 27, 2018

The Black Rock Rendezvous is an annual family-friendly fun event sponsored by multiple organizations. Hosts of this event include, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Friends of Black Rock-High Rock, Nevada Outdoor School, and the Winnemucca BLM. The Rendezvous starts with an educational component of various speakers and topics, followed by a potpourri of interesting activities and service opportunities.

After the Saturday night Dutch Oven Cook-off with an abundance of yummy food, I decided the Sunday hike up Mormon Dan would be a good choice for the day. I'd never hiked this peak plus knew I needed to burn off some excess Dutch oven food calories. Sierra Club leader, Cathy Schmidt volunteered to guide the 16 hikers and one dog up the peak since she had visited it the previous year. She directed us from our camp at Upper Cassidy Mine via Soldier Meadows Road to a road that dead ends near the base of Mormon Dan. Driving to the trailhead gave us a nice view of the varicolored rock in the Calico Mountains.

Our trailhead situated on the east side of the Calico Mountains sits in the Calico Mountains Wilderness Area. This wilderness area was designated in 2000, adding another desert gem to Nevada's gift of public lands we all enjoy. Heading up the wash we spotted numerous wildflowers in bloom. Two favorites were the purple sage and hop sage.

Our pleasant hike culminated on the summit with sweeping views of the playa and a glimpse of part of



**A group shot at the Mormon Dan Peak trailhead.  
Photo credit: Sharon Marie Wilcox**

the Applegate-Lassen Trail. A perfect viewpoint to ponder the hardships and tenacity of pioneers who followed this trail. Cathy added to our summit view sharing two versions of how Mormon Dan Peak got its name.

Our leisurely summit break provided plenty of time for photos, snacks, and conversation. The 360-degree view displayed the uniqueness of this desert landscape. We are lucky that Nevada's public lands contain many

of these unique areas for our enjoyment.

We finally headed back to camp for more Rendezvous activities relishing another great day exploring our Great Basin!

### **THE REVISED DPS LIST IS NOW AVAILABLE!**

The 30th edition of the DPS Peak list is now available. Please visit the DPS website at <http://desertpeaks.org/> to download a copy.

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

Please send road and climbing route updates to the DPS Road and Peak Guide Editor, Jim Morehouse, at [desertpeakssection@gmail.com](mailto:desertpeakssection@gmail.com). Jim is continuously revising the current Version 6 of the guide; therefore, be sure and send him a quick email after climbing a DPS listed peak if you have suggested updates to the Guide while the information is still fresh in your mind. The DPS, and Jim, want to keep the guides as up to date as possible.

# DESERT BOOKS

By *Burton Falk*

**WONDER VALLEY (2017), Ivy Pochoda**

**LULLABY ROAD (2018), James Anderson**

**SILT: PAULA HELPS BUILD BOULDER DAM (1928), Otis B. Tout**

**SUMMER FICTION, 2018  
TWO NEWBIES; ONE OLDIE**

## WONDER VALLEY, 2017, Ivy Pochoda

The good news is that Ivy Pochoda is a bright young author with a long and fruitful writing career most surely ahead of her. Her latest volume, *Wonder Valley*, is in the same league as other noteworthy woman-authored volumes reviewed in Desert Books, including Susan Straight's *Highwire Moon*, Gayle Brandise's *The Book of Dead Birds*, and Marisa Silver's *The God of War*, all of which relate compelling stories while supplying insights on important issues of present-day life.

The bad news is limited to those who insist that their desert novels be set completely in the desert. Indeed, while the title, *Wonder*

*Valley*, implies that the story will be take place in the "half-abandoned homestead community just east of Twentynine Palms," it spends much of its time in a down-town section of Los Angeles—Skid Row—where a large population of homeless people abide.

The story begins in 2010, when Tony, a family-man and one-time lawyer, while caught in a huge traffic jam on the 101 in downtown Los Angeles, watches a bare-naked man run past him in the fast lane. For reasons unknown, Tony gets out of his stalled car and pursues the runner.

Next, in a flashback to 2006, we meet Britt,

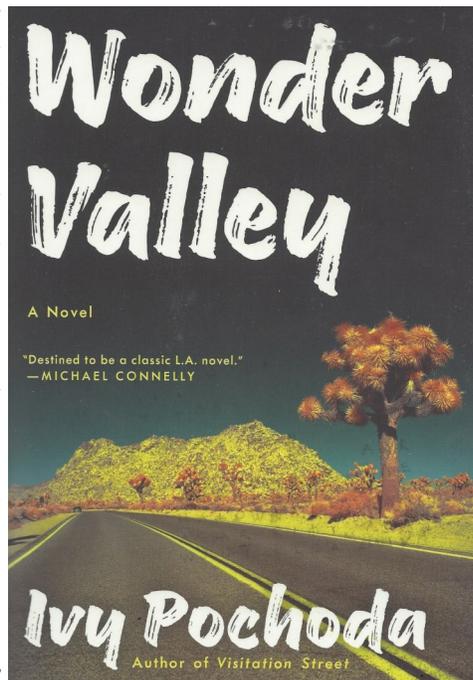
enrolled at USC on a tennis scholarship, who is on the lam, both physically and emotionally, following an accident in which the driver may have been killed and for which she may have been responsible. Shortly thereafter, she ends up at Howling Tree Ranch in Wonder Valley, where she becomes an unpaid intern working for a man named Patrick, a healer, who "could reach deep inside of you and pull out things that you hadn't even known you'd buried."

In a series of chapters alternating between 2006 and 2010, we also meet a seventeen-year-old Ren, a black youth, recently released from Juvenile Hall in New York City, who arrives in Los Angeles in 2010 looking for his homeless mother; Blake and Sam, unsavory characters, the latter of whom had recently killed a man near Las Vegas... "(H)is knife had found the wrong spot in the tweaker's neck, right at the jugular. Go figure—when he wasn't even trying," both of whom, in 2006, were hitching their way from Lake Havasu to Wonder Valley; and healer Patrick's wife and his twin sons.

During the novel's four-year span, one of the characters at the Howling Tree, mortally ill to start with, is stabbed to death. Retribution is called for and sought after. The last few pages of *Wonder Valley* connect the lives of the diverse men and women: the naked runner, who is one of the twin boys from the Howling Tree Ranch; the driver who leaves his car to follow the runner; the tennis player from USC; the black youth, a promising street artist; and his mother, Laila, an unlikely heroine—in a brilliantly written coda set not in the desert, but in Los Angeles.

Examples of Pochoda's writing:

On Britt after a week at Howling Tree Ranch, "At



## Desert Books - continued

first (she) resisted the desert's insistent takeover. But when she caught her reflection thrown back at her in the large window of her cabin by the night sky, she felt relief, as if the sand and sun and smells would soon hide her self from herself, building a new person on top of the one she'd been trying to escape...If she became unrecognizable to herself, she would be invisible to those who might still be looking. And if she labored hard enough, harder than she thought possible, she could reach that blackout stage of pure fatigue where mind and memory cease, leaving behind the body to do its work."

On Ren arriving in L.A.'s Skid Row, looking for his mother: "He passed two women braiding hair in an impromptu outdoor salon. Two men were huddled over a crossword. A short, balding preacher shouted gospel through a bull horn in Spanish to a congregation of six...A man prepped a needle next to a woman eating a bruised banana and reading a decade-old magazine. Two guys in dirty tracksuits sold drugs across from the entrance to the Nazarene Christian Mission. A woman belted out "Backlash Blues," a song Ren's mother used to sing in the shower when he was little."

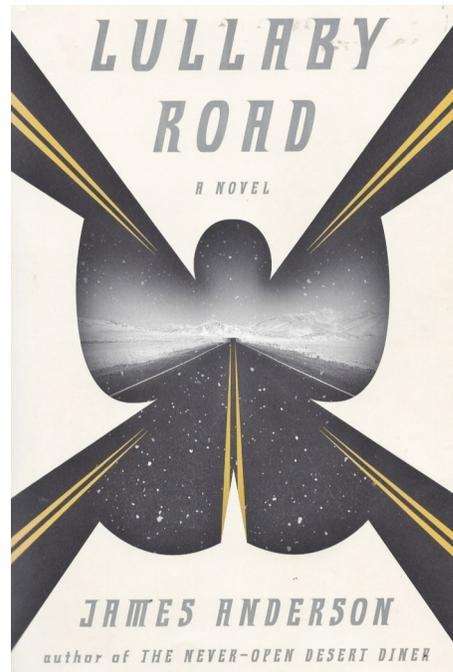
Pochada's *Wonder Valley* was named Book of the Year by the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. She holds a BA from Harvard College, an MFA from Bennington College, and she now teaches creative writing at the Lamp Arts Studio in Skid Row. If that weren't enough, Pochada was once a world-ranked squash player.

### LULLABY ROAD (2018), James Anderson

*Lullaby Road* is a sequel to Anderson's excellent 2015 debut novel, *The Never-open Desert Diner*, which was reviewed in the July-August 2017 issue of *The Desert Sage*.

Once again, the protagonist is Ben Jones, the owner and sole employee of Ben's Desert Moon Delivery Service, a company which holds contracts with both FedEx and UPS to serve the hundred-mile stretch of State Road 117—a mid-Utah highway you won't find on any map. Passing through high desert country, the road "ends up against the granite face of a towering mesa just outside the small former coal-mining town

of Rockmuse, population 1,344." Ben himself is "almost forty," six-foot-three, single, and part American Indian. He was raised in foster homes until he was seven, after which he was adopted and raised



by an older Mormon couple.

The story begins early on a snowy morning in early October when Ben, while fueling his truck before his daily run from Price, Utah, to Rockmuse, discovers a blanket-wrapped four or five-year-old child, a dog, and a note reading, "PLEASE, BEN, BAD TROUBLE. MY SON, TAKE HIM

TODAY. HIS NAME IS JUAN. TRUST YOU ONLY. TELL NO ONE. PEDRO." With no apparent choice in the matter, just as he's ready to leave, Ben is then stopped by Ginny, a young unwed mother who lives next to him in a duplex in Price. She, with no discussion other than, "You have too," hands over her three-month-old child, Belle, for him to look after during the day. Ben, it seems, has earned a reputation as big-hearted, trustworthy fellow—one of the many reasons why Anderson's novels are so enjoyable.

As his day progresses, Ben narrowly misses being involved in a serious accident; meets several acquaintances, including John the Preach—minister of the First Church of the Desert Cross of Rockmuse — "denomination unknown and unimportant;" Andy Smith — Utah Highway Patrolman who puts on his hat if there is official business to attend to; Phyllis Bradford—who arrived in Rockmuse in a silver Rolls-Royce, "not long after the coal mine closed and the smart folks were leaving town;" Roy Cuthbert—who had worked at the coal mine after he graduated from high school, but was now unemployed and attempting to fashion solar-powered dog houses fabricated out of old tires; and Rupert Conway, MD—a recluse, formerly with Doctors Without Borders, who is living

## Desert Books - continued

alone in an “old faded blue Terry travel trailer (that) rested alone in a sea of sand and rock on a dirt-and-gravel road that dead-ended up against the towering mesa cliff.”

That same evening, because John the Preach, while dragging his 10-foot cross along Highway 117, had been hit and badly injured during the afternoon—and because a storm was approaching, and Life Flight and other ambulance services were not available—Ben leaves his two young charges with Phyllis, and transports John, in the back of his truck, to the hospital in Price.

But Ben’s adventures are only beginning. During the following 48 hours, our hero manages to get punched in the face by two different men, get very little sleep, and almost dies while searching in a snow storm for little Juan—who in fact is a girl.

Anderson muses on several themes common to the west in *Lullaby Road*: On guns: “(W)hen folks started drowning, from debt or grief, loneliness, losing power over their lives or whatever, they often grabbed for the first life preserver they thought of, and too damn often a gun seemed like a life preserver.” On desert roads: “There are all kinds of roads in the desert...intersecting, converging, winding, occasionally circling back on one another, and all of them eventually leading nowhere. Who made them, where they thought they were going and why weren’t even memories anymore, lost and gone like the people who created them.” On hiking and biking tourists: “...they were often so busy enjoying the desert and rock formations they left their common sense in their travel trailers or hotel rooms.”

The cover blurb says it best: “At once a terrifyingly gripping thrill ride and a profoundly moving meditation on the power of human connection, *Lullaby Road* showcases a virtuosic new voice in American fiction.” I agree.

### **SILT: Paula helps build Boulder Dam (1928), Otis B. Tout**

During its 19-year run, Desert Books has reviewed several noteworthy older novels and short story collections, including: *McTeague* (1899), by Frank Norris; *The Basket Woman* (1904), and *Lost Borders* (1909), by Mary Austin; *The Winning of Barbra Worth* (1911) *The Mine With the Iron Door* (1923),

by Harold Bell Wright; and *The Heritage of the Desert* (1910) and *The Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), by Zane Grey.

The problem with yesterday’s works for today’s readers is that most were composed in a melodramatic style and populated with cookie-cut stereotypes. Consider Wright’s portrait of Marta, the heroine of the *Mine with the Iron Door* for instance: “(She had) a vivid, flame like beauty (that seemed) to fill the house with joyous warmth and light.” “(H)er laughter rang with such happy abandon and thrilled with such tingling excitement.” Or Norris’ description of Death Valley’s mineralized valley floor: “League upon league the infinite reaches of dazzling-white alkali laid themselves out like an immeasurable scroll unrolled from horizon to horizon; not a bush, not a twig relieved that horrible monotony. Even the sand of the desert would have been a welcome sight; a single clump of sagebrush would have fascinated the eye.”

In writing *Silt*, a fictional history of Empire Valley (i.e., Imperial Valley), Otis B. Tout was no exception. His story focused on the brave newspaper editor, Tom Burgess—“a gaunt young man... (who had) been shipped to the desert with a pittance of six months allotted him by his doctors,” and his perky but crippled assistant, Paula Bernie—“Her face showed traces of the suffering she had experienced in her twenty-two years of life. She was not pretty. Her hair was “just brown.”...But her eyes were expressive and extremely intelligent. All the (valley) people soon called her by her first name and not a sunburned son of the desert would have hesitated to fight an army to save her trouble.”

As the story opens, the Colorado River has breached the head gate of the canal transporting water from the U.S., through Baja Mexico, before returning north to supply irrigation for the marvelously fertile Empire Valley. Furthermore, a waterfall has formed in the channel carrying the river’s full flow toward “Salt sea” (think Salton Sea). “The channel grew deeper as the water moved back into the high ground. It grew wider as the side banks caved in hour by hour. It destroyed ranch after ranch as its gluttonous mouth grew to half a mile in width and its bed seventy feet deep.”

In ensuing chapters, which are made confusing by Tout’s penchant for using aliases for local place

## Desert Books – cont.

names, i.e., Centralia for El Centro, Empire City for Imperial, Alexico for Calexico, and Exical for Mexicali, we find Tom and Paula doing their noble best for the inhabitants of Empire Valley. In addition to stopping a water grab by a greedy American—perhaps modeled on Harry Chandler, then the publisher of the Los Angeles Times, who owned much of the irrigable land below the border—silt is “the devil we’ve got to fight.” “The river grinds rock into silt and brings it down to the delta. The silt settles and the river bed is built up. When it gets high enough the water seeks new channels. It breaks through its slimy walls and devastates the valley...What human power is going to discover a way to control it?”

Although *Silt* is clichéd melodramatic fare, I found the story to be curiously refreshing. And even though the plot relies on unlikely coincidences, and there is more legalese than necessary (much of which was no doubt based on actual events), in the end, thanks to the spunkiness of young Paula—who marvelously recovers from her crippling infirmities, and brave Tom—cured of TB by dint of hard work and because of his wholesome character—Boulder Dam and the All American Canal will be built and silt will no longer endanger the good folks of Empire Valley.

Otis B. Tout was editor and publisher of the *Calexico Chronicle* and the *El Centro Progress* during the 1920s. He was also author of *The First Thirty Years, 1901-1931* (1931), a history of the Imperial Valley

## Letter to the Editor

**OKAY, SIX MORE**  
By Bob Michaels

When I wrote my new Peak List suggestions a couple SAGES ago, I immediately started thinking, “Gee, I wish I had put this peak or that peak in!” So, I will beg my Gentle Readers' indulgence just one more time to suggest six more. This could go on a while...I'll bet Shannon Marie Wilcox could submit a list as long as your arm!

### Two in Arizona:

**RINCON PEAK** (8,482') Shouldn't a “Desert Peaks Section” have a peak in Saguaro National Park? This summit is the south end of the Rincon Mountains, a small range almost entirely preserved in the eastern wilderness section of the Park. VERY long hike, realistically a backpack, from the Tucson side. I climbed

it from the somewhat shorter (but still long; 16 miles RT) route on the east. No Saguaros here; the trail starts in sycamores by a little creek and climbs through high desert chaparral and into scattered Ponderosa forest, all in pristine wilderness. Views from the turret-like summit are like from an airplane; west to Baboquivari, south to Mount Wrightson and the border country.

**MAZATZAL PEAK** (7,903') Pronounced “Mat a-zell” for some odd reason. Southwest of Payson. In its own wilderness area in the Tonto National Forest. A big tilted block of maroon Precambrian Mazatzal Quartzite. Only possible route is up the dip slope from the east; trail part way, then up a rib. Can be a tad cactusy and brushy. Ponderosas on top. Views of impressive cliffs to the west over forbiddingly rugged and wild country in the canyon of the upper Verde River.

### Four in Nevada:

**McFARLAND PEAK** (10,742'), Spring Mountains. Yes, the Springs are well represented on the List: Stirling, Charleston, Mummy, Potosi, Bridge. But this is SUCH a quality peak; prettiest and hardest peak in the range, in my opinion. From the southern approach, massive limestone cliffs are very intimidating; but savvy route finding will discover a steep way though them with a touch of minimal class 3. Very pleasant summit area.

**MOUNT MORIAH** (12,067'), Snake Range. Although technically in the Snake Range along with DPS Wheeler, this northern massif is separated from the Wheeler region by a wide lowland where Highway 50 goes. A big, imposing peak in its own right, far above timberline. To its northeast is a remarkable flat plateau above timberline called “The Table”. Far lonelier than the Wheeler area.

**NORTH SCHELL PEAK** (11,883'), Schell Creek Range. Northwest of Wheeler, across the broad Spring Valley, this is the third highest range in Nevada, exceeded only by the Snakes and the Springs. Beautiful approach through lovely forest; one photo I took on the approach could just as well be in Colorado. Extensive alpine tundra on top.

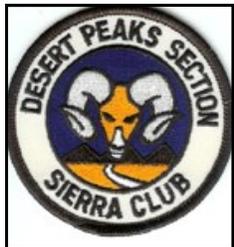
**BARE MOUNTAIN** (6,317') South of Beatty. As unlike the verdant Schell Creeks as night and day, this is the other, more familiar face of Nevada. The name says it all; this is hard-core nitty-gritty desert. A rough limestone route, a bit like Pahrump. The bands of white, gray and black limestone give this peak a striking appearance from Highway 95. The summit offers views into the forbidden mysteries of the Nevada Test Site.

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**EDITOR:** Greg Gerlach, 23933 Via Astuto, Murrieta, CA 92562, email: [greggr1955@verizon.net](mailto:greggr1955@verizon.net).