CHAIR’S CORNER
by Michael Gosnell

I remember this time last year receiving an email from Dave Baldwin which discussed the possibility of the DPS closing down if people didn’t get involved. We had the same problem this year with finding two members to run for the management committee. Deadlines came and went without anyone volunteering. Such problems have led to discussions of radical changes to the DPS. For example, how about we take our section and make it into a committee ala the Lower Peaks or how about we merge with the Sierra Peaks and become one section. Both are extreme, but someday we might have to consider some sort of change to the section if members don’t get involved. As of press, it looks like a couple of hardworking DPSers have stepped up to help out the management committee - my fingers are crossed!

We have a new Webmaster in Larry Hoak. I have been very impressed with his SPS website work, so I look forward to our site getting an overhaul which, by the way, has already started. Thanks, Larry for helping out.

He also brought up a concern: why does the DPS go dark during the summer? It would be great if a leader or two could step up and lead a trip during the summer. We have some fine peaks that are summer worthy, especially the distant Nevada peaks, Mt Humphreys, Montgomery, Boundary, Dubois and, of course, White Mountain. Another member brought up the idea of publishing the Sage online in a PDF file in a member's area. Some organizations have already made this change. I don’t know what our membership would think of this, but it is an idea to discuss.

As this management committee comes to an end, I’d like to thank my fellow members - elected and appointed - for their hard work. Secretary Paul Cooley and Banquet/Programs Chair Edna Ersperman are finished with their terms, so a special thanks to them for their service. Audrey, Gloria and I are back for more punishment with two new board members. I’d also like to send out a special thanks to Bob Sumner, Sage Editor, and Elaine Baldwin, Sage Mailer, for their continued hard work. We couldn’t exist without them.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve,

Michael

Next Submission Deadline June 14, 2008

The Desert Sage is published six times a year by the Desert Peaks Section of the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club. Subscription to The Desert Sage is ten (10) dollars a year. See back cover for ordering details. The Desert Peaks Section’s Sage is the property of the Desert Peaks Section of the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club. All rights reserved.

The Desert Peaks Section maintains a website at:
http://angeles.sierraclub.org/dps/

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
MAY THROUGH JUNE 2008

MAY 3 SAT LTC, WTC, HPS Beginning Navigation Clinic
MAY 3-4 SAT-SUN DPS, HPS, WTC Indianhead, San Ysidro Mtn
MAY 10-11 SAT-SUN DPS, LTC, WTC, DC Mojave Navigation Noodle
MAY 16-18 FRI-SUN LTC, WTC Wilderness First Aid Course
MAY 17-18 SAT-SUN DPS, SPS, LTC Sierra Snow Checkoff / Practice
MAY 18 SUN LTC, WTC, HPS Warren Point Navigation
JUN 13-15 FRI-SUN DPS, NAT SCI, LB Telescope Pk, Wildrose Pk

In order to participate on 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://sierracclub.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. 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.

♦ MAY 3 SAT LTC, WTC, HPS
I: Mt. Lowe (5603') Beginning Navigation Clinic: 4 mi 500' gain. Spend the day one-on-one with an instructor, learning/practicing map and compass. Beginners to rusty old timers welcome. Not a check-off. Many expert leaders will attend; many I-rated leaders started here in the past. Send sase, $25 deposit (Sierra Club—refunded at trailhead), phones to Leader: Diane Dunbar. Co-Leader: Richard Boardman.

♦ MAY 3-4 SAT-SUN DPS, HPS, WTC
I: Indianhead (3960'), San Ysidro Mtn (6147'): Enjoy desert scenery in Anza Borrego Desert State Park. Sat dayhike up beautiful Palm Canyon to DPS peak Indianhead (8 mi, 3200' gain). Car camp at Borrego Palm Canyon with happy hour and potluck dinner. Sun am drive short distance to trailhead for HPS peak San Ysidro Mtn (4 mi, 2300' gain). Send SASE or email (preferred) to Leader with contact information, recent experience and conditioning. Leader: Kathy Rich (KathrynARich@gmail.com). Co-Leader: Will McWhinney.

♦ MAY 10-11 SAT-SUN DPS, LTC, WTC, Desert Committee
I: Places We've Saved Navigation Noodle in the Mojave National Preserve: Join us for our fifth annual journey through this jewel of the Mojave now preserved, under the California Desert Protection Act, as a result of the efforts of Sierra Club activists and others. An intermediate xc navigation day-hike workshop will be conducted out of a camp in the pinyon and juniper forests of the Mid Hills. Potluck and social on Sat, and for those arriving early on Fri. Send email/sase to Leader: Harry Freimanis (hfreimanis@ca.rr.com). Assistant: Virgil Shields.

♦ MAY 16-18 FRI-SUN LTC, WTC
C: Wilderness First Aid Course: Runs from 8 am Fri to 5:30 pm Sun. Includes lodging, meals, practice first aid kit. CPR within previous 4 years. Harwood Lodge.

♦ MAY 17-18 SAT-SUN LTC, DPS, SPS
M/E: Sierra Snow Checkoff / Practice: For M & E candidates wanting to check off leadership ratings or others who wish to practice new techniques. Restricted to SC members with some prior basic training with the ice axe. Send SC#, climbing resume, email, H&W phones to Leader: Nile Sorenson (nsorenso@pacbell.net). Co-Leader: Doug Mantle.

♦ MAY 18 SUN LTC, WTC, HPS
I: Warren Point Navigation: Navigation noodles at Joshua Tree National Park for either checkout or practice to

THE DESERT SAGE
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May/June 2008
satisfy the Basic (I/M) or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. To receive homework assignment, send navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, phones, email/sase to Leader: Harry Freimanis (hfreimanis@ca.rr.com). Assistant: Robert Myers.

**MEMBERSHIP CHAIR / ACTIVITY REPORT, April 2, 2008**

**Membership Summary**

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**Activity Report**

**New Members**

- John Hooper
  - Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
  - 760-934-8844
  - graynewk@qnet.com

- Greg Mason
  - 3466 Val Verde Ave
  - Long Beach, CA 90808
  - 310-930-1140

- Mark Conover
  - Baboquivari Pk
  - PO Box 3369
  - Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
  - 760-934-8844

- Jim Hinkley
  - P.O. Box 510
  - Packwood, WA 98361

- Don Ricker
  - rickerdwal@aol.com

**Address/Info Changes**

- Joseph Wankum
  - PO Box 11590
  - Conway, AR 72034-0027
  - 501-327-2548
  - 310-938-7845 (cell)

**Membership Renewals**

- Henry A. Arnebold
  - 1 year
- Gary Bowen
  - 1 year
- David Comerzan
  - 1 year
- Mark Conover
  - 1 year
- Sara Danta
  - 1 year
- Bruno Geiger
  - 1 year
- Audrey Goodman
  - 1 year
- Bill Haauser
  - 2 years
- Rich Henke & Rena Tishman
  - 1 year
- Bob Hoeven
  - 2 years
- Darryl Kuhns
  - 2 years
- Roy & Barbara Magnuson
  - 1 year
- Igor & Suzanne Mamedalin
  - 1 year
- Sharon Moore
  - 1 year
- Terry Morse
  - 1 year
- Chuck Pospishil
  - 1 year
- Barbara & Dave Sholle
  - 1 year
- Brian Smith
  - 1 year
- Don Sparks
  - 1 year
- Joseph Wankum
  - 1 year

**Sustaining Renewals**

- Ronald Horton
  - 1 year
- Carlton McKinney
  - 1 year
- Don Ricker
  - 1 year

**COME CLIMB WITH ME**

Send notices to Audrey Goodman, Outings Chair, at music2835@yahoo.com for forwarding to the Editor.

COME CLIMB WITH ME Notices:

1) Small group looking to climb Big Picacho in April/May, and would like to be joined by someone(s) who has already done it, and would like to do it again. Contact Gloria Miladin (gm500@yahoo.com) if interested.

2) Bob Greenawalt is looking for companions to climb the following peaks in Death Valley National Park: Schwab, Nevares, and Winters Peaks. For more information, contact him at 626-572-0419 or av261@lafh.org.

3) Aging, out-of-state DPS peakbagger seeks companions on his four remaining list peaks. Pico Risco/Cerro Pesca-dores in April/May; South Guardian Angel/Mt.Dubois in Sept. Willing to drive. Jim Prichard: jprichard@lewiscounty.com or 360-494-2335.
DEATH VALLEY SPECIAL USE PERMITS NOW REQUIRED

Following is the basic info regarding Death Valley National Park’s ‘new’ request for Special Use permits when we are doing a peak in the area.

"A National Parks law was passed in 1998 with an expectation that permit requirements for non-profit group use of national parks would become both easier and less expensive. A decade later the regulations implementing this law are still not in place... In addition, there is a lot of confusion about what permits are required for what activities and different parks are requiring different permits for different types of outings. Until the final regulations are issued...we can expect confusion and in inconsistent requirements to continue...we are working with Death Valley to clearly explain the challenge that the permitting poses to our group, chapter, and activity sections outings programs."

You can see SC leadership is on the side of minimizing paperwork for our leaders as the outcome but in the meantime...Yo. These permit requirements were ‘launched’ as of 1/11/08.

What National has done for us all is to obtain a 2008 Special Use Permit for outings to Death Valley, which covers all chapters. HOWEVER, for the moment, in order to be included under this SUP, all leaders taking outings to Death Valley in the year 2008 must complete and submit a one page Supplemental Activity Application.

I have copies of this form and will see about getting it onto our newly reforming DPS website for easy download. You will need to send this form to:

Special Park Uses Coordinator
Death Valley National Park
P.O. Box 759
Death Valley, CA, 92328
FAX: 760-786-3246

It must be sent so as to be approved 30 days in advance of trip departure.

Please note this is not a form going to Sierra Club management, this is what the PARK itself is requiring. Once your outing has been approved by whomever, you can download a Special Use Permit 2008 from Sierra Club and you will need to have it WITH YOU at all times while in Death Valley NP.

I’m sorry to have to burden you with more ‘stuff’ to do in order to lead trips into Death Valley. But, there are reasonable goals vis a vis land/resource protection that agencies are trying to attain. Hopefully there will be easier methods for us to do so, worked out with the NPS and Sierra Club management in the not too distant future.

- Audrey Goodman, DPS Outings Chair

UPDATE CURRENCY FOR OUTINGS LEADERS

Here’s a quick reminder for outings leaders. When you take a first aid class or refresh your leader knowledge (OLT 101, reviewing the National Club’s Outing Leader Handbook, etc.), let the outings chair for the group, section, or committee you lead for know. You do not need to send a copy of the first aid card or certificate; just let the Outings Chair know the date you took the course or refreshed your leader training. For first aid, also indicate whether the course was standard or wilderness first aid. The Outings Chair will forward this information to the leader database.

-Tina Bowman

COVER PHOTO: Mt Palmer and Grapevine Pk from near Coyote BM. Photo by Bob Sumner.
OUTINGS CHAIR

What a beautiful hike Palen was this past weekend. I was with the oh so svelte Renerics, Necia Bower, Jack Wickel, the Baldwins, the ever charming Virgil Popescu, the lovely and fashionable Dantas, and one or two other hardy characters. Plus, the trip was skillfully managed by Larry and Barbee Tidball; he who seems to effortlessly float uphill and she with her never ending stamina and good nature (except when you cross those wilderness boundaries in your truck - then it's time to put up those deflector shields Scottie!) I mostly jest, of course.

It was my 11th summit on the DPS list in 4 1/2 yrs, though it's been over a year since I did a hike where I actually went for the 'big' outcome. But the Tidballs assured me I could do it, and took turns 'bringing up the rear' with me as I plodded along. The wildflowers were in fair abundance with a lot of variety, the vistas were beautiful and there was an almost ever present cool breeze to lessen the seemingly infinite boulder hopping up to the summit, and back down again. And I will tell you, my quads were horrifically sore for a week! A reminder, boys and girls, to do those weighted lunges (like I didn't) in EARNEST in between mountain hikes!

Speaking of mountain hiking and my somewhat limited history with same, we will be doing some job re-arranging with the board to take effect after the Annual Banquet, which I hope you'll be joining us at on April 27th at the Reef. Elaine Baldwin will be taking on the Programs job as Edna is leaving the board this season, and I will be taking over Paul Cooley's job as secretary. I felt it was a great choice for Michael Gosnell, current Chair, to manage Outings this year as he's such a prolific and capable hiker, and certainly less rebellious in nature than I (you think I haven't noticed?). This leaves the Chair position and I am thrilled to announce that our own Mary McMannes will be taking the DPS Chair position for this upcoming season. It promises to be a great upcoming year!

In the realm of tying up loose ends, we're soliciting for a leader to do an 'officially publicized' hike of La Madre in the wake of our excellent Mountaineering Committee's trek of same a few months ago. After this is done, we will be placing this peak on a ballot to add to our list. Our Committee will be doing a few others over the next year which have been requested for consideration. We'll then have follow up hikes led and publicized for anyone to attend once it's deemed as list worthy by our MC group. So, adding to our list will take a bit of time, but you can be assured the peaks named will be great peaks that you'll truly enjoy climbing. In the meantime for those of you working on completing the list right now, it still remains as is on our Website, with the exceptions of the few suspended. There are many wonderful adventures to be had out there with what we already have! Plus, since it would be lovely to maintain activity over the summer, I strongly encourage our leaders to consider a trip to one of our farther away and higher peaks which are so gorgeous. Many of these haven't been led in some time and would be a great opportunity for new members. So by all means one and all - have AT in months to come!

I have enjoyed my time as Outings Chair immensely in spite of some inherent frustrations. I've learned a lot and appreciate the patience, support and companionship I have gained. I hope I haven't pissed off too many of you. Tough even if I have, I'm still lucky in that I gained new DPS friends of great value, and deepened relationships I've already had. Healthy debate is not necessarily a bad thing, and we of all people know that it does take some pretty extreme friction in the form of plate tectonics to give us those mountains we love. So, in a way, isn't it appropriate that a bit of friction between us leads to

Audrey enjoying a stop en route to Palen Mtn. Photo by Barbee Tidball.
growth in members, outings and ways of looking at the ‘how to’ of things? Perhaps?? Ah well. I’m looking forward to continuing with our Management Committee from a position that possibly fits better with my current experience as an infrequent climber/peak bagger, but no less a desert enthusiast. Next time you hear from me, it’ll be as author of our Management Meeting Minutes (perhaps we should call it the ‘M’Cubed column??) which will be a feature of the SAGE from now on to keep you all informed with the ‘haps’. And, I do hope to see many of you around those campfires often for some time to come.

All the Best, Audrey Goodman, DPS Outings Chair/Mountaineering Committee Chair

CONSERVATION

Greetings fellow DPSers! I hope that the spring is finding you well and that you have had a chance to get out and climb a few desert peaks.

While I was set to write about some issues in Nevada, which were brought to my attention by Bob Sumner, Wynne Benti sent me an article published last week in the Inyo County Register concerning the movement of Death Valley’s boundary. So, it is with serious decorum that I bring to your awareness that the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and the Advocates for Access to Public Lands (AAPL) are in favor of receding Death Valley’s boundary back to the Saline Valley Road.

The current boundary of Death Valley, I believe, is flush with the boundary for the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. If the County Supervisors and AAPL, which veils itself as a group of “concerned” citizens, gets it’s way, then the 1994 boundary expansion of Death Valley would be abolished, leading the opening of now protected lands.

Arguments for County Supervisors and AAPL claim that they are “losing thousands of dollars of revenue” from hunters and off-roaders. Unfortunately, the article seems to be completely one-sided, as there is no mention of dissent among those quoted. Unfortunately, the county and AAPL are going to petition Congress to “rethink” the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, and it is reported that those in favor of a less protective boundary already have 3,600 signatures (mainly from hunter and off-roaders), which will be presented to Senator Feinstein and Congressman McKeon.

As Wynne pointed out in an email to me, this is a fight that is going to bitter and ugly, and it should be a fight that we, the DPS, should take up. If Congress does go through with the redefinition, then, it would seem as if there could be no stopping those who are nearsighted and willing to sacrifice protected areas for their monetary gains.

All the best, Peter

“Here are lands of expansive vistas, of exceedingly clear, clean skies, sometimes flecked with clouds brilliantly white. Here we see mountains charmingly colored in pastel shades of blue of magenta, and after ample summer or winter rains, look upon huge expansions of floral color.” –Edmund Jeager

DID YOU KNOW?

Did You Know the DPS season is in full swing both in climbing and potlucking? The venerable Gene (Gino) Mauk has finished the DPS and HPS Lists by the time you are reading this Sage, and a good time was had by all. He's a Triple List Finisher (add SPS on Alta, 1990). I'm wondering about our other near List Finishers, the Perkins, Bob Hoeven and Annie, and Ed Herrman (Mister Man Man). Ed's got the Mexican peaks under his belt, but he's waiting for a group to ascend the Big Mama--the Great Enchilada--Big Picacho.

Did You Know--hot on the wires, our Virgil Popescu survived his solo endeavor and "stuck in the sand far from home," adventure this past weekend (April 6). After Palen and Big Maria, Virgil went off by himself to Granite #2 despite worries from fellow climbers. Emails shot out on Monday, Virgil didn't come home! "Ohmigawd, another Vi Grasso story," I shrieked inwardly. But, this one had a happy ending. Someone came along and gave Virgil a lift. Meanwhile, his SUV is out there stuck in the sand. Stay tuned for Virgil's Big Adventure!

Did You Know...some of our favorite DPS stories come from the Big Picacho Days, both past and present? They
don't call it the Devil Mountain for nada! The Big P. is located on the Baja Peninsula, between San Felipe and Ensenada. Pat and Gerry Holleman made a casual reference to John McCully's 1993 Big P. trip where John filled his backpack with McDonald's burgers slathered in mayo. John was known for bringing unusual food caches on peak bags, but this takes the cake (or takes the bun!) I emailed John to verify the story, and he says he got the idea from Ron Bartell who said, "There are so many preservatives, you can't go wrong." Barbara Sholle was heard to say, "But John, you can't carry mayonnaise and burgers for four days in the hot weather of a Mexican peak!" John's bout with food poisoning cost him the peak (that time). But he says he did have one good memory of a pretty climber (Paula Peterson) who burned her shorts, socks, and underwear in a campfire. "It was fuchsia underwear," recalled John who never forgets such details. John now resides in the Philippines with a family of 40. He says, "I sure miss desert peaking!" And we sure miss John!

Erick Schumacher tells about an early Picacho trip led by John Robinson and Jay Wiley. Sixty to eighty participants showed up, and there were three helicopter rescues on this one trip! As you probably know, the skies of Mexico are restricted to air travel, so you can't call an American helicopter, willy-nilly. There might be days between the rescues, as the copters come from San Diego and must get permission. The three people who got the air ride out had experienced a broken leg, a dislocated shoulder, and some other injury. Erick and Joan held vigil with the broken leg fellow, and then the next a.m. Henry Heusinkveld (a manly man) carried the victim by himself (un-aided) all the way down to the helicopter landing. "That Henry was sure strong!" said Erick.

Did You Know Ron Jones led, assisted, or ambled 14 times to the summit of Big Picacho? Ron recalls a Sage write-up he did called the Kellogg-Dart Party...a group of two who were rescued by helicopter after wandering 10 days in the Picacho Wilderness! And then there’s that inimitable solo climber, Bill Banks. I located a write-up from 1976 where Bill’s VW “Guero Negro,” broke down, and Bill was kidnapped by one named Juan Carlos and his drug cartel. According to Bill, he was held in the back country for five days, and finally released by Juan, "because he found Bill to be a gringo like none he had ever met." Bill showed up at a December potluck, and I failed to asked him about this. Didn’t O.Henry write a similar account in a short story named, "The Ransom of Red Chief?"

Mario Gonzalez mailed me a photo/postcard from Colorado. There was ole Mario in his signature bandana wrapped around his sweaty head as he crossed the finish line of some marathon. He says although his time was double of Gary Craig's record breaking marathon speeds, he’ll make up for it in the Denver Marathon. Go, Mario!

(continued next page)
And Did You Know Dave Jurasevich was featured in a Cal Poly Pomona alumni article? Dave who was instrumental in writing the Desert Peaks Guide is now the new superintendent of Wilson Observatory. Mr. J. was always a star-gazer, but now he's getting a salary for it. He's taking good care of the Hubble Telescope, and if you want to hear more go to www.starimager.com.

Doug Mantle is out there doing winter ascents (backpacking from the Owen's Valley) on separate backpacks to White Mtn., Dubois, and Montgomery. In the Dubois register, Doug read Chris Libbey's note that Chris had seen 36+ (yeah..count 'em) bighorn sheep on Dubois! At night, Doug snuggles in his sleeping bag reading Harry Potter books, in Spanish!

Speaking of Harry Potter, the energizer bunny Ellen Grau was awarded The Mom's Choice Award for her new novel, Chessie Bligh and the Scroll of Andelthor. Ellen has five stars in my book; at a recent potluck, I brought a casserole plus a vacuum cleaner that needed to be assembled. When crying for help from strangers, all the men turned their heads to the wall. Ellen, on the other hand, came forth with screw drivers and "ellen wrenches," and assembled that vacuum cleaner in 5 minutes, flat. This is also the girl who brings a generator to make margaritas in the desert!

Did You Know three notable climbers share the same birthday? March 13 is the birthday of Doug Mantle, John McCully, and Ron Hudson!

If you want to hear many more scoops and hair-raising tales from our legendary desert climbs, sign up for a trip or show up at our monthly DPS potlucks. There's always a surprise guest or two -- Dan Richter and Paul Cooley were seen in April -- Barbara Lilley and Gordon McLeod showed up in December. And if the stories scare you too much, well, as John Muir said (and Virgil P. will agree), "It might hae been waur!" It might have been worse! Happy climbing to all my friends of DPS. - Mary McMannes, the Roving Girl Reporter

DESSERT PHOTO

Chuckwalla spotted enroute to Palen Mtn. Photo by Audrey Goodman.
Having climbed all the DPS peaks in the Joshua Tree area, I am checking out other peaks. Richard Stover, Debbie Benham, and I started our Joshua Tree trip with a fun scramble to the top of Joshua Mountain, having spent the previous day driving to this wild and fantastic playground.

With the new berm, it is not easy to park on the side of the road, so we asked permission from one of the property owners to park in their pullout. This impressive-looking peak is an easy jaunt with some fun scrambling at the summit where you can dangle your legs over the edge of a 160’ sheer cliff. Because of the cold wind, we did not linger. We saw dainty Brown-eyed evening primrose and Mojave popcorn flowers on the walk back.

We headed south to the warmer Cottonwood Campground with its surrounding habitat of Colorado Desert. Rising at daybreak the next morning, we headed for Monument Mountain, the highpoint of the Hexie Mountains.

Monument’s summit is not visible from the start on Pinkham Road. One must hike north across a broad wash then up the ridge. The conical summit had been doused with red fire retardant which had splashed with force from the southwest. Dry red dribbles ran down the sides of rocks and over the benchmark.

On the hike back we spotted Fremont’s pincushion, brittlebush, Mojave aster, a showy yellow primrose, desert bells (Phacelia), a red dwarf monkey flower, and a delicate red gilia. The alien filaree (redstem storkbill) had inserted itself everywhere (including in my lawn in Santa Cruz!). The bladder pod, which was just starting its bloom near Joshua Mountain, was a mass of yellow flowers and maturing pods here. A coyote gourd had taken root and looked like a small, round watermelon.

Christmas Day dawned too cold and windy to climb. We opted to explore Cottonwood Springs, a charming oasis full of birds and flowers. There American and Lesser Goldfinches munched on wild sunflower seeds, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker drummed. We noted a Phainopepla, a House Finch sporting a much redder paint job than its cousins at our bird feeder, and various sparrows too similar to sort. The highpoint of the day was our sighting of a bobcat as the day waned. Back at camp we shared Christmas dinner, a campfire, and went to bed early.
Wednesday, cold temperatures and more high winds. We explored Cottonwood further and, after it warmed up a bit, hiked the Mastodon Loop. The flowers were amazing for December. I had never before seen the enormous, translucent, creamy petals of the Sand Blazing Star or White-bracted Stickleaf as my flower book calls it (/Mentzelia involucrata/). The large cup-shaped corolla is streaked with orange.

Also new to me were the pink-white seed pods of the Paperbag Bush (/Salazaria mexicana/), looking like masses of fairy lanterns or a convention of tiny balloons. A bit further down the trail, we saw the deep blue flowers of this strange shrub. There was a desert tobacco, a light pink rock cress, and Golden princess plume. Brittlebush abundantly graced the hillsides. Mastodon Peak, not really a peak, but a fun scramble, completed our day.

After Debbie Benham left to visit an aunt in Big Bear, Richard and I checked out 49 Palm Canyon. Here was yet another oasis, full of native palms and birds gorging on the palm fruit. There were pools of water, some with ice on the surface. We scrambled for an hour above the oasis over dry waterfalls and giant boulders.

For our climb the next day, we chose Bernard and Little Berdoo off the Geology Tour Road. Since we had originally planned to go to the Turtle Mountains, we didn’t have a map. We did have descriptions, however, from two books. We never hiked the wash described in Desert Summits. Instead, we went north and west and ascended the ridge when we spotted a large duck. Sure enough, after about three miles of up and down on the ridge, we found the summit of Bernard, complete with HPS register.

Part of the ridge between Bernard and Little Berdoo had been burned, and the sad, charred hulks of Joshua trees and huge junipers dotted the hillside. Curiously, the Metropolitan Water District benchmark on the summit spells “Berdo” with only one o. From the summit of Little Berdoo we proceeded on the crest of the ridge south finally descending over easy slopes and traveling southwest by dead reckoning until we came upon our footprints. What a good feeling to navigate well without a map!

The next day brought our chance to visit the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. I will return. This reserve is a spectacular place to view birds in a variety of habitats: a marsh, a riparian corridor, and desert slopes. Highlights included a close up view of a Cooper’s hawk, Northern flickers eating palm fruit, a hermit thrush, and black-throated sparrows.

On the drive home, we ran up Castle Butte near California City. I’ve wanted to climb this bump since I purchased Walt Wheelock’s slim La Sierra Press volume in the early 80s. It probably would have been more fun back then. From the summit I counted 9 dirt bikers on the east and 3 on the west tearing up the desert. There were 4WD tracks everywhere.

Zdon’s driving directions are no longer necessary. Many “roads” lead to the peak. But the summit block was fun, despite the fact the rock is not quite solid. Someone has built a rock cross complete with religious pamphlets in the saddle near the summit. Not exactly wild country anymore.

All in all, a fabulous vacation with 6 peaks, lots of birds, and flowers galore.

Photos by Richard Stover.

**OWLSHEAD MOUNTAINS EXPLORATORY**
(OWLHEAD BM, OWL BM, SPRING BM, ROUND MTN)
December 26-30, 2007
By Gary Craig

The Owlshead Mountains in southern Death Valley National Park form something of a “blank spot on the map”, even for many experienced desert hikers. There are very few roads in the area, leaving large areas of nearly pristine wilderness to explore; one almost expects, when looking at the map, to see an inscription such as “terra incognita” or “there be dragons here”.

Ron Bartell and Christine Mitchell made plans to visit the area for a few days between Christmas and New Year’s, and I tagged along. We drove two high-clearance, 4WD SUVs. That’s not the most economical plan usually for only three people, but this is an extremely remote area, and we wanted the security of a second vehicle in case of trouble. We left home on the afternoon of the 26th, rendezvousing in Barstow (cold!) for dinner, and again in Baker (windy too!) for gasoline.
Then it was north on 127 to the Harry Wade road, and then 12.5 miles W on this excellent dirt road to the junction with the Owl Hole Spring road. This is the road marked on the AAA map as leading to a microwave relay station (40+ miles from paved road). We drove a few miles in on this road until we found a turnout where we could camp. Most of the road to this point, and for several miles beyond, is unsuitable for car camping. The road is basically a single-lane trench in the desert, with high berms on both sides. Pulling over far enough to camp while still allowing room for a truck to pass is possible only at a few points like the one we used. Farther along, the camping opportunities are much greater.

Our plan for the trip was a one-night dry backpack to Owlhead benchmark on Thursday and Friday (the 27th and 28th), climb Owl BM on Saturday, climb Spring BM and Round Mountain on Sunday, then drive home afterward.

It was cold and quite windy overnight, rocking us to sleep in the back of our respective vehicles. We awoke at dawn and had breakfast, then continued our drive west to the trailhead for Owlhead. While we were eating, a caravan of six vehicles passed by, most likely contractors heading for a job in Fort Irwin, which is just south of this area. We drove W on good road to our trailhead, 35.0 miles from the pavement on 127. The only noteworthy road conditions along the way were: 1) a Fort Irwin gate at 23.7 miles from the pavement (don’t go through the gate; instead, veer right on a rougher road and parallel a fence), 2) a sandy downhill section between miles 27.8 and 29.1, and 3) a steep downhill rutted section at 33.2 miles. Really, most of the road was fine, and the worse sections noted here weren’t difficult.

Our backpack started in the late morning with a stiff cold wind directly in our faces. Our route led along an abandoned jeep road N toward the extraordinary Lost Lake playa (thanks Richard Carey for describing this route!), then cross-country to a dry camp NE of the “lake”. It’s about 4 miles along the road (slight descent) to the playa, which itself is about 2 miles long. We passed Lost Lake on its E side on easy terrain, and found a sheltered campsite about a mile farther, and somewhat higher, in a wash cut into a broad alluvial fan, a mercifully sandy spot in an otherwise rocky area around camp. The walk took about 4.5 hours, including a lunch break and several navigation/map/compass stops. In addition to two days water supply, we carried a couple of sodas and a four-pack of Bass Ale tall cans (500 ml). The 40° temperatures kept all of our beverages well chilled. I packed in the stove, and dinner for that evening, which we eagerly consumed after an extended session of fiddling with the stove.

Friday morning we made the fairly easy climb to the Owlhead BM summit. It is the high point of a ridge running SSW – NNE, elevation 4408’. The alluvial fan that I mentioned earlier merged into one of the more significant side ridges descending the W side of the main crest. This side ridge meets the main crest at point 1209m, UTM 198590. We walked easily up the ridge, staying on top until the last bump, where we side-hilled on the left (N) to avoid some rockier terrain and save some elevation. The main crest itself presented no significant difficulties and we were on the summit at 9:45, less than 2 hours after leaving camp. We found a large round cookie tin on the summit, but unfortunately there was no register inside, only a rock. There were excellent views to be had from the summit, and we took a few photos and picked out most of the DV DPS peaks, some other nearby points such as Avawatz and Kingston, and some more distant summits such as Mt. Charleston. We retraced our steps on the descent back to our tents, where we had lunch and tore down camp in preparation
for the hike back to the cars.

On the hike back we walked more directly toward the Lost Lake playa, then a significant distance upon it. The overall surface of the playa was completely flat, although it was ripped through with a maze of tiny cracks. The dried mud was rock hard. Distances became eerily distorted: it was nearly impossible to judge the distance across, or to the far end of, the playa; either could have been one or five miles. Only the peaks in the background provided a sense of scale. Sadly this interesting section came to an end all too soon, and we were left with the four-mile trudge along the jeep road back to our cars. But we sure were glad to see them, holding their treasure of food and drink and clean, warm, clothes. We made good time on our return, about 3 hours from camp to cars. Happy hour and dinner (rice and meatballs, prepared by Christine) followed at the trailhead.

Saturday morning we again arose early to continue our drive almost to the end of the road for the hike to Owl BM. For the second night in a row, several of our water bottles partially froze. But we were soon on the road west. We tried to spot the point (within the first couple of miles) where a road might possibly head S toward Quail Spring. This road is shown on the 7.5’ topos, but probably has been reclaimed by the desert. We had originally considered the possibility of climbing Quail BM on this trip (being higher than our other targets), but discarded the idea over the last couple of days. Quail is a large, uninteresting-looking mass, and would have been a long walk across the flats, even if we were able to drive a portion of the road, which no doubt would be red-staked for wilderness protection at some point. At any rate, we didn’t spot the Quail road, and we continued along good road to our trailhead for Owl BM at a saddle (UTM 101519, elevation 3850’). Only the last 0.3 mile before we stopped posed any difficulty, with a few easy washouts to negotiate. Not too bad.

Owl BM (4665’, our high point for the trip) goes easily. From the parking spot a ridge system meanders generally N toward a subsidiary lump to the west of the summit, where one turns right and hikes to the top. The terrain is obvious and easy the entire way, though you’ll accumulate a couple hundred feet of extra climbing due to various bumps en route. Side-hilling is possible in a few places, but I’m not sure it’s worth it. The summit (reached just a bit over one hour after leaving the cars) again had great views, including into the restricted environs of China Lake “Range B” to the west, where a remote airstrip is visible. To the northwest, across Wingate Wash, we could see Manly, Needle, and the remote and unlisted Sugarloaf. Telescope Peak loomed behind. More photos were taken under clear skies, followed by lunch and the register signing, our only such occasion on the whole trip.

After the return hike to the cars (again a bit over 1 hour), we walked the last 0.2 mile of the road to its bitter end at the microwave station. The station is in good repair, but doesn’t seem to be in use, and is under the management of a squawking raven. We returned to the cars and drove 10.4 miles back to our campsite, alongside the road in a cleared area 3.3 miles E of where we had left the cars for the Owlhead backpack. This was another nice spot, this time with a view of the eastern lobe of the Owlhead range. Christine and Ron prepared our last dinner and we enjoyed another nice sunset.

Saturday evening was more comfortable, and there was no ice, only cold water, in our bottles to greet us when we arose shortly after sunrise on Sunday morning. After breakfast we drove back out to 1.2 miles E of the Fort
Irwin gate to the junction with the Black Magic Mine road, leading north. This road is also fine for high-clearance vehicles for 3.8 miles up to a bad washed-out, rutted, section where nearly all pilots will want to stop. A few ticks before this point we passed through the camp of a Desert Survivors group (8 or so) who were in the area for a few days. We had burro encounters on both the way in and the way out along this road as well. From the spot where we left our cars, we hiked up and down mostly eastward on old mining roads to Spring BM, the last several minutes being cross-country on some down-then-up easy ground. No register on the summit again! Drat. But, there was plenty of other debris to note the passing of those before us. From the summit, we think we identified the remote Mill BM, a few miles to the NE of Spring, but it didn’t look like it met the definition of a "peak"; it was more like a "bump". After photos, water, and a snack, we retraced our steps along the roads past some mining ruins back to the cars, and headed back down to the main road with no delay.

After reaching the main Owl Hole Spring road, we drove 9 miles E to a reasonable stopping point for an assault on Round Mountain. There are no turnouts whatsoever along this stretch, so we just pulled way up along one side of the roadside berm, leaving the cars tilted at an odd angle, with enough room for others to pass on the other side. A few miles before reaching this spot, we passed a ranger vehicle and convoy heading in, the only other people we’d seen in three days except for a solo driver around dinnertime the night before. Anyway, Round Mountain is a small lump of solidified mud covered with loose gravel a bit north of our road. We didn’t have a detailed topo of the peak but were able to identify the summit and reasonable routes up and down from the road. Climbing was unpleasant near the top; perhaps crampons would have been a good idea. Despite having only our boots to help us, and were on top less than 20 minutes after starting. Due to the time of day, we carried lunch for this mighty ascent, and enjoyed temperatures on top warmer than any day so far. The return to the cars was quite annoying over the slippery terrain, but each of us found a route to our liking. Back at the cars we broke out one final chips-and-dip-and-beer happy hour, celebrating our final ascent of the trip in the sunny warmth.

Ultimately it was time to pack up and drive 1 mile back to the Harry Wade road, then out to I-15, S to Baker, and hit I-15 home. Xmas traffic was still heavy but was moving full speed, and both mine, and the Bartell/Mitchell’s time, home was reasonable. This was a great trip. Thanks to Ron and Christine for setting it up, and for some of the statistics and other facts I used in this write-up. Belatedly, “Happy New Year!”

SMITH MOUNTAIN
February 8, 2008
By Mary McMannes

Smith Mountain is Brian Smith’s List Finisher peak, and it was Gene Mauk’s, "two away from DPS List Finisher," so away we went to Death Valley for one of those gimme peaks (5.5 miles, 2300’ elevation gain). What really made this an extra-wonderful climb was due to Gene’s three sons joining us, too (Steve, Rob, and John). I hadn’t climbed with John since the 1980s on a Center Basin 4th of July trip, led by Bill T. Russell. John was a mere callow lad of 17, but what a climber (he is a Mauk, you know!) Anyway, we were tooling down the highway having great conversations, when Steve’s cell phone rang. Steve’s first reaction was: "Maybe I won’t answer it, because I’m out here for recreation and not business." None of the other cell phones were on. The caller’s first words were: "Do you have money?" Lo and behold, we heard Steve say, "Yeah, I got money ... and yeah, we all have money and can buy you gas." Was this a homeless person or what? We were certainly intrigued, and then Steve told us the caller was Doug Mantle, stranded in Barstow with no wallet—not even a dime in the glove compartment of his gas-hog SUV. Doug and Bill Gates being the wealthiest and most intelligent men in the Western World, well, we just had a good laugh knowing it was Doug, Helpless in Barstow. Can you imagine if Steve hadn’t answered his phone?

After a bit of a drive and more chuckling, behold there WAS Doug standing by the gas pumps with hat in hand. We filled his tank and gave him a bunch of $20 bills, and

Smith camp, left-right Gene Mauk, Doug Mantle, Mary McMannes, and the Mauk brothers. Photo provided by Steve Mauk.
all was well. It's a small fee for getting a man who's climbed the Seven Summits of the world leading us up Nelson, huh? The guide book reads: 10.5 miles of good dirt road and 11.6 miles of poor dirt road. All in all, it was a pretty good drive in there, and the road was better than we expected. We set up camp and had a scrumptious meal with Doug's homemade tamales, Gene's big salad, my Mexican rice dish, and Bob Sumner's lemon iced cookies. And of course, the wine and stories flowed, and the campfire roared. Doug regaled us with his account of Madagascar (as he was gaining his 7 high points of the islands: Borneo, New Guinea, Greenland, Baffin, Sumatra, Madagascar, and Japan's Fuji).* Talk about a bizarre climbing trip! It seems the Madagascar entree of the day and every day was lemur. And as Cuno Ranschau would add, "There's too much monkey business going on around here." Being February, we found it to be extremely COLD in

the desert, and I learned regrettfully my new Marmot sleeping bag, rated at 20 degrees, simply didn't make it. I wondered if my six companions were freezing as much as I was!

The next morning, Doug benevolently allowed us to rise with the sun and warm up with hot coffee before going for the peak. We crossed the desert (1 mile) and then swung to the prominent canyon (on our left) and went up a gully. After the gully, we climbed a hill (still not seeing the peak), ascended the false summit of Smith, dropped 100 feet into a saddle, and then finally made our way to the actual summit. The wind was blowing like a son-of-a-gun making the temperatures "just right." Bob Sumner (our noble Sage editor) passed us on the way down as he had left earlier to climb East Smith (1 hr. and 20 minutes) and Smith mountains. Bob gained lots of points by leaving us a new bag of mint chocolate cookies on the summit of Smith. After family photos plus Doug and me, we quickly descended the same route and returned to the cars for sitting in the sunshine which was quite appealing especially after that freezing night. We made sure Doug had enough gas to bag additional peaks in the area 'cause he NEEDS the peaks, and for Gene, well, it was one down and two to go.

*read more about Doug's "Seven Summits Plus Seven," in SPS editor Sara Danta's, January-March, 2008 "Echo." And yes, Doug promptly paid us all back!

**PANAMINT BUTTE, CANYON POINT**
**February 16-17, 2008**
**By Alex Amies**

I led this trip with the assistance of Virgil Popescu. Thanks also to Virgil and also Anne Rolls, Lisa Buckley, and Jorge and Diana Estrada for participating.

Panamint Butte: We met at the turnoff from Highway 190 at 8 am on Saturday February 16. All parties brought high clearance 4x4 vehicles, which came in handy for the Panamint hike and was essential for the Canyon Point hike. We managed to drive a little higher on the approach road than suggested in the guide for the hike up the west ridge to the peak, which left us with a little under 5,000 feet to ascend.

We started hiking at 8:40 am and left the very rough road after a few hundred yards to head up the slope towards the Big Four Mine adit. The mine was a simple tunnel with some wood relics at the entrance. Continuing up the sometimes loose slope we gained the ridge. We continued up the ridge, following an intermittent use trail, several thousand feet to the large flatter slope near the peak. There was plenty of loose awkward rock on
Looking back towards Panamint Valley and the group climbing up the west ridge of Panamint Butte.

beautiful traveling through a number of narrow canyons with marble walls and other fascinating rock formations. We arrived at the trail head and started hiking at 11:15 am after the epic drive in.

There is a short steep section at the very start of the hike, which our party handled well. We took the standard route up, which was a pleasant hike in contrast to the scramble up and down loose and cemented scree from the day before. We got to the top at about 2 pm, had a quick lunch and headed down. Coming down we descended the loose sand rather than going back down the ridge. This time the descent was easy and we arrived back at the cars just after 4 pm.

The drive out proved difficult after the sun went down and the road was very difficult to pick out. Nevertheless we did it with the lead from Virgil's expert 4x4 driving.

Photos by Alex Amies

MUDDY PEAK, BRIDGE MTN
March 1-2, 2008
By Alex Amies

Muddy Peak: I led this with the assistance of Asher Waxman, Dan Richter, and Ron Hudson. Thanks to them and also to Doug Owens, Chi Truong, Jim Edmondson, Kathy Rich, and Ron Eckelmann for participating as well.

We met at the turn off from Route 169 where the pavement ended at 8 am on Saturday morning. The road in was rougher than described in the DPS Guide and the 2WD cars only made it about 5 miles along, where we left them to pile into the two high clearance vehicles we had. Thanks to Dan and Doug for the extra driving. This took about two hours from our meeting point to the trailhead.

Canyon Point: On Saturday night we camped out on the west side of Panamint not far from the trail head. We headed out to Canyon Point at about 7:30 am with a stop at Stovepipe Wells to get gas and other supplies. From there it took several hours of driving over very rough, washed out 4x4 roads to reach the Canyon Point trailhead. I recommend using a GPS here to make sure that you are at the trailhead. The drive in is very

The group on the summit of Panamint Butte.

The namesake bridge on Bridge Mountain. The frozen pool in the foreground indicates how cold it was.
We hiked in along the standard route described in the DPS Guide, which traversed near some truly beautiful pancake-like red and white rock formations. There was some loose scree ascending the ridge to the notch below the headwall but it was handled easily by our party. When we first saw the headwall we imagined that it was class 5 and couldn’t see a way up at all. Now, arriving at the base it was actually simple.

We ascended the class 3 chute described in the Guide, which had a little loose rock but was good for the most part. After lunch we descended. I tried an alternate route out to avoid the loss and gain of elevation along the ridge but it proved to be worse than the standard route. We got back to the cars just before 5 pm for the drive back out.

We met at Himalayan Cuisine, owned by Jeff Dhungana’s family, for a delicious Nepalese meal. I highly recommend this restaurant at 730 E. Flamingo Road in Las Vegas. Thanks to Jeff’s father and brother for the excellent food.

Bridge Mountain: On Saturday night we camped out at the camping area on Lovell Road described in the Guide. It was a cold night and a cold and windy day following. I never took off my Gortex shell the entire day. Dan drove us part way up the approach road to Red Rock Summit, which again was rougher than described in the Guide.

We took the route described in the DPS Guide from Red Rock Summit. The hike in was straight forward as far as the ridge leading away from the west side of the rock headwall.

When we first saw the headwall from the approach trail it looked impossible. However, arriving at the base the class 3 crack described in the Guide was obvious. The parallel lines and arrows painted on the rock gave us confidence even if they were not politically correct being there. Anyway, I was glad to see them.

There was sustained and exposed class 3 climbing to reach the summit. The class 3 crack at the base led up for several hundred feet to the namesake bridge. Crossing over the bridge and traversing the nearby slopes with the wind howling around us was exciting but the wind was not so high that it presented a danger. The route up the ledges above the hidden forest was even less obvious from a distance but turned out to be negotiable and well marked when we got there. Nevertheless this section is exposed and not for the faint of heart. In the case someone did need a rope it would be hard to protect with placements for anchors few and far between and requiring cams. Luckily, we had a very strong and confident party. Dan Richter, Ron Hudson, Kathy Ridge, Jim Edmondson and I reached the summit and had a quick lunch sheltering from the bitter wind. We descended and reach Dan’s car just before 4 pm.

*Photos by Alex Amies*

On the summit of Muddy. Left to right: Kathy Rich, Jim Edmondson, Alex Amies, Ron Hudson, Doug Owens, Dan Richter, and Chi Truong.

Wildflowers on Palen. Photos by Audrey Goodman.
BOOK REVIEWS

LIGHT SUMMER READING,
DPS STYLE

THE LONESOME GODS
(1983), Louis L’Amour

MOJAVE CROSSING
(1964), Louis L’Amour

THE SECRETS OF HARRY BRIGHT
(1985), Joseph Wambaugh

FUGITIVE NIGHTS
(1992), Joseph Wambaugh

Summer is upon us. It’s time to choose the light fiction you’ll need to carry you through the season when it’s too hot to climb desert peaks and/or to read otherwise brow-bending literature. The following is a selection of fiction by two authors who—while you enjoy a cool beverage while sitting in your blow up swimming pool—capture the essence of the arid area’s ambience.

The highly acclaimed chronicler of Western U.S. lore, Louis L’Amour, was born into a family of French-Canadian extraction living in Jamestown, North Dakota in 1908. Bored with school, he ended his formal education at age fifteen, after which he spent years working at various jobs, including cattle skinning, baling hay, mining, long-shoring and prize-fighting. He was a member of the merchant marine prior to WWII, and during the war he served as a tank crewman in the U.S. Army.

L’Amour began writing for pulp fiction magazines in the 1930s, and started selling his novels in the 1950s. By the end of his career, over 100 of his books had been published, selling over 225 million copies. In addition, several movies and T.V. shows were based on his works, including Heller in Pink Tights (1960), starring Anthony Quinn and Sophia Loren, and The Quick and the Dead (1981), starring Sam Elliott and Kate Capshaw.

L’Amour won the Congressional Gold Medal in 1982 and the Medal of Freedom in 1984. Just prior to his death in June 1988, at age eighty, he was quoted as saying: “The worst of it is that I’m no longer a kid and I’m just now getting to be a good writer. Just now.”

THE LONESOME GODS (1983), Louis L’Amour

The Lonesome Gods, a 450-page saga set in pre-Gold Rush California, relates the story of Johannes Verne, a boy who, orphaned at age six in the Palm Springs area, is raised among the Cahuilla Indians.

At age ten, so that he can attend school, Johannes moves to Los Angeles, where he develops into a hard-working, idealistic young man—a straight-shooter both in the literal and figurative sense. The crux of the story is that Johannes is the grandson of Don Isidro, a wealthy but evil Spaniard, who has large land holdings in the Los Angeles area. The Don’s daughter, Johannes’ mother, disobeyed her father to marry Johannes’ American father, and thus the Don has vowed to eliminate Johannes, whom he considers a stain on his “noble” blood line. This means that Johannes goes through his teens looking over his shoulder.

The opening chapters describe Johannes and his tubercular father’s desperate wagon trip west across the Mojave Desert, evading both Indians and Peg Leg Smith’s gang of horse thieves. Later, there is a description of Johannes’ harrowing flight, as a young man, heading east from the Tehachapis, past the Rand Mts., Garlic Spring, Old Woman Spring and then down a canyon through the Little San Bernardino Mountains, to the Coachella Valley.

The Lonesome Gods makes mention of Taquitz, the maiden-eating demi-god of the Cahuillas, contains several references to Mt. San Jacinto and the Banning Pass area, includes many bloody gunfights, and, of course, there’s always the requisite love interest.

L’Amour, who was a serious historian as well as a writer, did an excellent job in providing an accurate description of California in the 1840s. The only error that I could spot—a horticultural, not historical one—is that he seems to have Joshua Trees growing in the Colorado Desert.

MOJAVE CROSSING (1964), Louis L’Amour

The impressive number of novels written by L’Amour includes a series of 17 volumes regarding one large family, the Sacketts, originally from the “high up” mountains of Tennessee.

Mojave Crossing, a mere 150 pages in length, concerns a member of that clan, William “Tell” Sackett, “rawboned, rougher than a cob, standing six foot three inches
in socks,” who, in the late 1870s, in order to get a better price for the gold that he and several other Arizona prospectors have found, decides to cross the Mojave Desert and to sell it in Los Angeles.

While in Hardyville (near the present-day Bullhead City), just before crossing the Colorado River, Tell meets a black-haired, black-eyed woman, with the “clearest, creamiest skin you ever did see, and a mouth that fairly pricked the hair on the back of your neck.” She, Dorinda Robiseau, asks Tell to take her with him, and, since our hero is a sucker for a beautiful woman, he agrees.

The problem is Dorinda is being pursued by a group of unsavory characters, and this causes their desert crossing to become a flight for life.

L’Amour knew the Mojave well, and used actual place names to describe the duo’s perilous passage, e.g., the Dead Mountains, Marl Spring, the Providence, Old Dad, Bristol, Sheep Hole and Pinto Mountains, plus the White Tanks and Lost Horse Well. This makes it possible (and interesting) for those of us who know the area to imagine the route the two followed.

At one point, after a long, dry stretch, Tell explains to Dorinda where and how to find water on the desert: “(Look) up a canyon, or somewhere the rock is faulted, or at the lowest point of a basin...Sometimes where a ridge pushes into the desert you’ll find water, but mostly you look for trees or brush of a kind that needs water. Palm trees grow with their feet in the water and their head in the sun—that’s what they say. It usually is only a little way to water if you see palms growing...But you can’t rely on that. Mostly a body should look for animal tracks, or birds flying, but mostly for bees. I’ve found that bees can lead a man to water faster than anything, but it’s chancy...it’s chancy.”

Well, eventually the two do make it into old Los Angeles, and there L’Amour describes the way the town looked at the time, including views of Laurel Canyon (a hideout for robbers at the time), the Santa Monica Mountains, the La Brea Tar Pits and El Tejon Ranch.

One final word about L’Amour. As a good friend of mine—a prominent Long Beach attorney, now passed on—once told me: “I read L’Amour because he tells such good stories. Also, he reminds me that it’s so important to stand up for what’s right.”

Joseph Wambaugh served fourteen years on the Los Angeles Police Department, a background that provided him material for a long series of successful police-related novels. A partial list of his gritty works include: The New Centurions (1971), The Blue Knight (1972), The Choirboys (1975) and The Glitter Dome (1981). The winner of two Edgar Awards, Wambaugh recently has been teaching screenwriting courses as a guest lecturer at the University of California, San Diego. His latest book, Hollywood Station, was published in 2006.

THE SECRETS OF HARRY BRIGHT (1985), Joseph Wambaugh

The Secrets of Harry Bright is set in the Coachella Valley. The story concerns Jack Watson, a handsome and wealthy young man, whose body, a bullet in the head, was found in the incinerated hulk of his father’s Rolls-Royce in a lonely canyon north of Palm Springs. Seventeen months later, Jack’s father, Victor, hires Sidney Blackpool, an L.A.P.D. detective, to spend a week investigating the case that had reached a dead end in the Palm Springs Police Department.

With a $10,000 cash budget and the assistance of yet another L.A.P.D. detective, Otto Springer, Blackpool arrives in Palm Springs looking forward to staying at a posh hotel, playing a few rounds of golf at the area’s exclusive country clubs, and, without much prospect of finding any new leads, spending only a minimal amount of time on the case.

But Blackpool is mistaken. In a story involving the police force of the fictional town Mineral Springs (obviously modeled on Desert Hot Springs), Sidney and Otto, both divorced and single, find themselves confronted with an interesting cast of characters, including the off-beat Mineral Springs police force—of which the Harry Bright of title was a member, a scruffy drug-selling bike club, gays from the area’s large gay scene, members of the Thunderbird (President Ford’s home course) and Tamarisk (Frank Sinatra’s home course) Country Clubs, and two interesting but flawed ladies.

Wambaugh opens with a short description of the manner in which deserts are formed, after which he opines, “In former times such places were thought inhospitable to ordinary human beings, but then nobody ever said that ordinary human beings lived in Hollywood. It was probably the excesses of the good life during Hollywood’s Golden Age that pushed them out (to Palm Springs), just two hours drive from Los Angeles but a world away.
“People who live their lives like they were hot-wired to Caddy convertibles, people who claimed to wear cocaine on the genitals to stay hot-wired, found that for the first time in years they could actually uncoil. The desert possessed magic.”

Midway through Harry Bright, Blackpool, who has issues of his own regarding a dead son, finds himself standing on a sand dune in the vicinity of Walter Annenberg’s private golf course (northwest corner of Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope Drives). The time is 6:30 a.m. on a November morning, and “...the desert was putting on a show for him. Behind him were the Shadow Mountains whose low peaks of pink and copper and purple were shattered by cloud shadow. There was an amazing slash of color over the Santa Rosas, as though a heavenly house painter had dipped a wide brush in fire and painted a stroke across a silver canvas. But what astonished him even more was that the sun was rising behind the Santa Rosa Mountains at the same time that the full moon, pale and translucent, was setting behind Mount San Jacinto.”

The detective was in awe. “Time stopped for an instant. Then the moon was gone and the sun was soaring over the peaks and he realized how he must look out there in the desert to the working stiffs driving by on Bob Hope Drive to Palm Springs.”

An obvious desert aficionado, Wambaugh also includes a bit of local geology, i.e., “Twenty million years ago the Coachella Valley was created by fault action, and today the huge San Andreas Fault runs along the mountains on the north side of the valley. Mount San Jacinto and the Santa Rosas, which partly shelter this valley, are much younger than the neighboring San Bernardino Mountains, less rounded, more dramatic and impressive to the human eye.”

All in all, The Secrets of Harry Bright not only captures the desert’s ambience, but it’s a good read. I must admit, however, that I didn’t quite understand the epilogue, in which, after the mystery of Jack Watson’s death is solved, Blackpool is somehow able to come to terms with his own son’s passing.

FUGITIVE NIGHTS (1992), Joseph Wambaugh

Once again, Wambaugh sets his story in the Palm Springs area. Breda Burrows is a good-looking, fortyish, former L.A.P.D. officer turned private investigator. She is hired by wealthy Rhonda Devon, also in her forties, who is concerned after discovering a bill from a Beverly Hills fertility clinic made out to her sixty-three year old husband, Clive. Rhonda is sure that Clive intends to have a child by a surrogate mother, and she wants Breda to fathom the details.

Deciding that she needs help, Breda hires Lynn Cutter, an about-to-be ex-Palm Springs police officer to assist her. Cutter, a cynical boozer, soon finds himself attracted to the brash Breda, especially to a chocolate-brown freckle near her lips.

In the meantime, a strange man—the fugitive of title—bald, dark-completed, speaking with an accent and carrying a red flight bag, arrives via a private plane at a small desert airport. After accosting a police officer in the airport restroom, he disappears into the desert.

The Devon case and the incident of the vanished fugitive soon merge. To complicate matters, another police officer, Nelson Hareem, stuck in a sweltering, unnamed down-valley town, becomes involved. Described by the police departments with which he formerly worked as a “loose cannon,” Hareem’s unbounded but unchecked enthusiasm adds excitement to the story.

Once again Wambaugh does a nice job describing the desert’s mystic, although not always in the most glowing of terms. He writes, for instance, “It was estimated that in those local desert towns there lived the highest concentration of parolees in the United States. Some had a need for speed, and did methamphetamine at a hundred bucks a gram, but heroin was king. The addicts were the kind who moved their lips when they read, but not when they talked, but outside of science institutes they were the only class of people in the continental U.S. who could think in grams and kilos.”

In other descriptions, Mecca Hill’s Painted Canyon is portrayed as if “a huge can of watercolor paint had spilled over it. Burgundy hill formations abutted persimmon hills, next to chocolate hills, next to sandalwood hills.”

And here’s Wambaugh’s take on night on the desert: “The yip yip of coyotes. Then a keening, almost lost in the wind. Then more coyote voices, a pack of twelve sounding like a hundred...The wind was howling down the pass and the moon flooded the foothills with white light. Perhaps the brooding wind or the eerie light was stirring the wild hearts of the little desert wolves. They sounded deliriously happy.”

Joseph Wambaugh
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THE DESERT SAGE 23 May/June 2008
DEsert Peaks Section

DPS Newsletter - The Desert Sage - Published six times a year by the Desert Peaks Section of the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club. Submission Deadline for the next Sage is June 14, 2008.

Subscription/Membership - It costs ten dollars a year to subscribe to the Sage. Anyone can subscribe to the Sage, even if not a member of the DPS or the Sierra Club, by sending $10 to Membership Records. To become a member of the DPS you must (1) belong to the Sierra Club (2) have climbed 6 of the 99 peaks on the DPS peaks list and (3) send $10 to Membership Records for a SAGE subscription. Non members who subscribe to the Sage are not allowed to vote in our elections. Renewals, subscriptions, and address changes should be sent to Membership Records, Ron Bartell, 1556 21st Street, Manhattan Beach, CA, 90266. The subscription/membership year is for six issues, regardless of when payment is received.

Emblem Status and Guides - To receive DPS emblem status you must climb 15 peaks on the list, of which must be from the list of seven emblem peaks, and have belonged to the section of one year. To work on the list you will probably want to buy from the Treasurer (Gloria Miladin, 11946 Downey Ave, Downey, CA, 90242) the Desert Peaks Road and Peak Guide 5th Edition - $28 + $2 Postage. If you like to explore without much direction just purchase the DPS Peaks List - $1 (enclose a self-addressed envelope). Send completed peak and emblem lists to Membership Records, Ron Bartell, 1556 21st Street, Manhattan Beach, CA, 90266.

Correspondence - We welcome all articles and letters pertaining to outdoor activities of interest to DPS members. Some submittals tend to be too long and space limitations and other considerations are factors in the decision to publish an article/map. The editor may modify submittals in a perhaps, misguided attempt to increase clarity or decrease length but will hopefully not modify your meaning. Trip reports on official DPS sponsored trips are always printed. If you are a participant and know that the leaders are not going to submit a trip report then feel free to submit a report. We welcome reports of private trips to unlisted peaks and private trips using non standard routes to listed peaks. Please DATE all submissions. Please indicate topo map names, dates and contour intervals. Digital (word processor files) content are essential and will help ensure that there are no typographical errors. Send copy to the Editor (see below) by the published deadline. Please include a SASE if you would like to have your material (maps/floppies) returned. If possible, print on the back of a picture when and where it was taken, what it is of, who is in it, and who took it. Email usually works best for simple text-based submissions and minimizes editing complexity. Email editor for details on submitting attachments and/or digital photo scans.

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