FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Notch Peak, Utah
Canyonlands Service Trip
2 Wheels to the Arctic Circle

http://angeles.sierraclub.org/dps/
Dear DPSers and friends of DPS, I'm looking at the calendar and trying to figure out how it got to be August 1st, so fast! One more month or two of summer climbing, then we'll really start looking at the desert dunes and the higher and lower mountains on our DPS List. Other than the monthly potluck meetings starting in the fall, our first huge gala is the cuatro List Finisher hosted by the celebrants, Dave and Anne Perkins and Bob Hoeven and Anne Rolls, Nov. 22 on Old Woman. I guess there's room for an additional List Finisher especially if your name is Anne; but thus far in the vestibule of "almost finishing," are Ed Hermann and Jim Prichard. Even John Gibba, an old friend from the past, popped up out of nowhere (Lancaster) saying, "I have eight peaks to go, four northern ones, three Mexican peaks, and Babo."

John may be close, but he sure has his work cut out for him.

Our DPS management didn't meet in July due to trip and climbing conflicts. Instead of our tete-a-tete meetings, we conducted several discussions via the email route. The next Angeles Chapter Schedule covers trips listed Nov. 1-Feb. 28. Then we're looking at the primo months for desert climbing, March, April, May. Michael, our outings coordinator plus management committee members, will study our membership roster and make personal appeals for you to lead a trip of your choice. If your leadership rating is a little rusty, we'll drive you to the nearest Red Cross or Wilderness Training for a Saturday session. Why not team up with other sections such as Desert Committee, HPS, SPS, Canyon Explorers? Bob Sumner, "Mr. Sage", led me up some unlisted peaks in the Mammoth and Yosemite areas during July proving to me there are some fun peaks out there that are not on anybody's list other than the "Just Out Having Fun List." Many of these peaks are day hikes and perfect for early summer conditioning. How about a combination of Glass Mountain (DPS), San Joaquin (SPS), and Mt. Hoffman (unlisted peak off the Tioga Pass Road) for three days of car camping and unleashed joviality? If we threw in those DPS guitar playing musicians and some memorized poetry performances, it could be something worth writing home to Mama!

I'm off to Colorado, so I'll see you in September. Check the website, and we'll send you reminder emails about the upcoming parties, potlucks, and of course our DPS raison d'être, the Peaks. May you have sunny days and starry nights ahead of you, and may your vibram soles wear dangerously thin from your many treks to the heights of glory. - Mary

COVER PHOTO: Smith Mtn from Galena Canyon Road. Photo by Bob Sumner.

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Book Reviews

NEXT SUBMISSION DEADLINE OCTOBER 11, 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 Sage 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
## OCTOBER THROUGH NOVEMBER 2008

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<td>OCT 4</td>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>Monthly Meeting and Potluck/Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCT 25</td>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>16th Annual Chili Cook-Off &amp; Pumpkin Carving Challenge</td>
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<td>OCT 26</td>
<td>SUN</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>New York Mountain</td>
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<td>NOV 1-2</td>
<td>SAT-SUN</td>
<td>DPS, WTC</td>
<td>Moapa Peak, Virgin Peak</td>
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<td>NOV 22-23</td>
<td>SAT-SUN</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>Old Woman Mountain</td>
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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://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 anything similar. 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.

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**OCT 4**

**SAT**

**DPS**

**O: DPS Monthly Meeting and Potluck/Party:** Potluck dinner at 6:00 pm. Please bring a dish to share. Management Committee meeting earlier at 4:30 pm. Oktoberfest themed event will be at the home of David and Elaine Baldwin. **Please RSVP** if you plan to attend at (dwbaldwin@aol.com) or 310-675-4120.

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**OCT 25**

**SAT**

**DPS**

**O: 16th Annual DPS Chili Cook-Off and Pumpkin Carving Challenge, California Eastern Railroad History Tour:** Join us for a day of fun in the Eastern Mojave National Preserve at the foot of the New York Mountains. Whether you like your chili traditional, Texas-style (no beans), or vegetarian, bring your favorite recipe or just stroll past the annual challenge. Cooks prepare chili from scratch at the site and enjoy happy hour followed by chili tasting and judging. Prizes will be awarded by category, with special recognition for spiciest chili, best presentation, and the coveted Best Overall Chili. Cook for free or taste for $10. Pumpkin artisans bring your gourd and carve your best design at the site to be judged for a prize alongside the chili. Optional hiking history tour of the long abandoned California Eastern Railroad. Send ESASE with choice of Cook or Taster to Hosts: Dave & Elaine Baldwin (dwbaldwin@aol.com) and Leaders: Larry & Barbee Tidball (ltidball@earthlink.net).

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**OCT 26**

**SUN**

**DPS**

**M: New York Mtns (7532’):** Climb New York Mountain (4 miles, 1900’) with 3rd class summit block. Follows DPS Chili Cook-Off on previous day. Send ESASE with 3rd class experience and conditioning to Leaders: Larry & Barbee Tidball (ltidball@earthlink.net).

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**NOV 1-2**

**SAT-SUN**

**DPS, WTC**

**MR: Moapa Peak (6471’), Virgin Peak (8071’):** Climb these two desert peaks in Southern Nevada. The trip will be two day climbs with a car camp in the local desert; happy hour on Saturday night. Sat climb Moapa via a class 3 route (6 mi, 3400’ gain). Route entails 3rd class ledges and a knife-edged ridge. Sun climb Virgin, a class 1 peak, via SE ridge (4 mi, 2200’ gain with 4WD vehicles). Class 3 rock experience is required. Restricted to Sierra Club members (medical form will be required). Send detailed resume including class 3 rock experience via SASE or email (preferred) to Leader: Kathy Rich (KathrynARich@gmail.com). Assistant Leader: Alex Amies.

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**NOV 22-23**

**SAT-SUN**

**DPS**

**I: Old Woman Mountain (5325’):** Yes, I know it’s been led recently, but Ann and Dave Perkins are finishing the list on this peak and invite you to join them. We will also be celebrating the list finishes of Anne Rolls and Bob Hoeven, who recently completed the list on other peaks. We will be doing Drive and Climb route A: 3200’ gain, 7 miles. 2wd ok. Bring an appetizer or dessert to share for the potluck; main courses will be provided. Email or SASE to Leader: Dave Perkins (david.perkins@csun.edu) or Assistant Leader: Ann Perkins (aperkins@csun.edu).
MEMBERSHIP CHAIR / ACTIVITY REPORT, JULY 29, 2008

Membership Summary

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Activity Report

Address/Info Changes

Randy Bernard
randy4@bernard@verizon.net

Jim Conley
mrstyrofoam3@yahoo.com

Robert Hethmon
PO Box 2026
California City, CA 93504-0026

Keith Martin
1 year

Daniel B A Richter
1 year

Anne K. Rolls
2 years

Bill Sampson
1 year

From Treasurer Gloria Miladin

Donations to the DPS, 2008:

<table>
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OUTINGS CHAIR

First off, I’d like to welcome and thank Mary McMannes as our new Chair and Elaine Baldwin as our new Banquet Chair. Both do so much already and it’s great they have stepped up to donate even more of their time.

Summer is winding down and soon, the weather will cool and we’ll be back in our deserts climbing and enjoying their mountains. I hope our leaders will consider leading at least one outing this season, if not more. That would give us a full schedule. Speaking of our schedule, the Baldwin's annual party has been announced for October 4th. Make sure to RSVP and don't miss this one; it's always a popular and fun DPS party. Dave and Elaine have also agreed to take over the chili cookoff for this year and hopefully a few more. Our 16th Annual Chili Cook-Off and Pumpkin Carving Challenge will take place October 25 and on October 26, Larry and Barbree Tidball will lead a climb of New York Mountain, which is one our finest, IMHO.

So start making your plans for our upcoming events. This summer we had a couple of trips and we're going to try and nudge our leaders into planning more trips during the hot days. One final note, Larry Hoak has been hard at work on our website, so stop by and check out what he's done. If you have any pictures from DPS outings or even private pictures, submit them to Larry. I believe he'd like them in JPEG format.

Hope to see you out there, Michael

WILDERNESS TRAVEL COURSE

Wilderness Travel Course (WTC)
Sierra Club, Angeles Chapter
Jan-March 2009

Plan ahead for this very popular 10-week Sierra Club course that has been offering classroom instruction and field experiences to Los Angeles and Orange County outdoor enthusiasts for the past twenty years. The Wilderness Travel Course teaches basic mountaineering skills for mountain and desert travel. Class includes navigation instruction using topo maps and compass, rock scrambling techniques, how to choose equipment, backpacking food and nutrition, snow travel, wilderness first aid and lots more. Includes ten evening classes, 2 full-day, and 2 weekend outings with bus transportation provided. Classes are offered in four SoCal areas -- West Los Angeles, Long Beach, Orange County and the San Gabriel Valley. Enrollment opens September 7th. Classes begin Jan 2009. See WTC website for more information and exact locations. www.angeles.sierraclub.org/wtc
CONSERVATION

Greetings fellow DPSers! I hope that the year is finding you well and that you have had a chance to get out and climb a few desert peaks. A few months ago, my parents (for some odd reason) received a CD-Rom in the mail from the BLM. The CD-Rom in question was an electronic copy of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Truckhaven Geothermal Leasing Area, located in Imperial County, west of the Salton Sea.

There are 14,371 acres within the Truckhaven Geothermal Leasing Area (TGLA), which are managed by the Department of Interior and BLM, El Centro Field Office. Aside from the TGLA, there are seven areas within the Salton Sea-Brawley-Glamis quadrant of western Imperial County that are known areas of geothermal activity. These include: Salton Sea, South Brawley, East Brawley, Glamis, Dunes, East Mesa and Heber. The need for the EIS is to determine whether or not the Federal government should extend leasing licenses to the public. If the licenses are denied, then the land can be protected by the Department of Interior. However, if the licenses are granted, then private companies could do-as-they-wish on the former Federal Land. One such example would be turning Truckhaven into an OHV area like nearby Ocotillo Wells and Glamis (and I think we all know what that means).

Unfortunately, there are a couple of dilemmas which are facing the protection of TGLA. First, and foremost, the public outcry for more Off Highway Vehicle Areas in this particular area of Imperial County as far outweighed the public cry for protection of our desert resources. This is tragic. Second, “sandwiching” the TGLA are two State Vehicle Recreation Areas (SVRA): Ocotillo Wells and Glamis, as well as the Fish Creek Wilderness Area. IF TGLA is given left unprotected, then three of the four areas in western Imperial County would be left to public (ab)use, which in turn could, and possibly would threaten the Fish Creek Wilderness. This is of concern because the public could petition the government to release the wilderness back into unprotected status.

I think that it is our duty to lend a voice to the land which seems like it is in immediate danger of being overrun by OHVs. Therefore, I propose that we, members of the Desert Peaks section, should, at the very least, write our Congresspersons and notify them of the potential travesties that could be unfolding in the very south of the state.

All the best, Peter

P.S. On a personal note, my wife and I are expecting our first child (a girl, Katherine, due in mid-November). So, unfortunately, I am looking to cut back on extraneous activities in preparation for the baby’s arrival. If anyone is interested in taking over the Conservation Chair position, please do not hesitate to let me know.

“Responsible climbers realize that their pursuit is inherently risky; they do not climb beyond their ability, and they do not let their personal desires, egos or goals outweigh good judgment.” --Andy Zdon

DID YOU KNOW?

I'm back again with DYK having survived Ohio and the 17 year cicada swarms and the sticky spice bar on the Cincinnati library computer. It's been pretty fun lately hearing from some old cronies coming out of the woodwork and rejoining us. Did You Know, Kris Korpi emerged, and yep, he's still climbing desert peaks and hopes to join our Potosi trip (Dec 6). John Gibba, still teaching school in Lancaster, has some hefty DPS peaks left to finish the List. Greg Vernon emailed after completing a 50 mile Sierra backpack (I guess the bridge table hasn't completely claimed our Gregie-boy), and he says, "It's nice to see you've gone from writing obituaries to doing a Gossip column, but you do have to get juicier material." DYK Barbara Reber telephoned and said she's hanging up the WTC (Wilderness Training Course) mantle after 15 years of dedicated work. Gosh, we all quit doing BMTC years ago, and here is Barbara continuing on into 2008.

New found friends met during the Bob Sumner conditioning tour in Mammoth/Yosemite are John and Tammy Hooper. John has 11 desert peaks left to go, so we're trying to talk him into a List Finisher Party. John is the one who wisely said, "Hire a mule and add two peaks to your knees." And then there's one of our all-time favorite DPS guys, Bob Michael. You know, the one in Colorado who has given us our worst peak dreams in thinking about the ongoing sagas from the death defying Little Bear Mtn. Did You Know that Bob appeared on the Denver TV news and in the Rocky Mountain News, because he confronted the designer of the new Colorado flag stamp? Sure the stamp has evergreens and the Colorado flag--hey wait. The peak featured on the Colorado stamp is not a Colorado...
peak, but it's a Wyoming peak (Mount Helen), and one eagle eye Bob spotted it and let the cat (or the peak) out of the bag. Boy, were their faces red. To quote Bob, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time where there are peakbaggers involved." It goes to show that one has to get up early in the morning to get ahead of Bob Michael. So if you happen across one of the new Colorado flag stamps, you can have a chuckle along with Bob.

Speaking of Colorado and the 14ers, Doug Mantle and our Chilean buddy, Marcelo Altamirano, are over in Estes Park ascending a Classic Climb (one of 50 North American Classic Climbs) on the Diamond Route of Long's Peak. We ran into these two in Yosemite, as they were bagging a few more Classics such as Fairview Dome and some others. Doug Mantle is the only fellow I ever knew who ate his climbing gear. On T-Bolt (sorry, I know I stray from DPS peaks now and then), Doug tied an apple on his rope to lasso the summit block. Leaping across to the summit block by his self balance, he then proceeded to eat his apple. Marcelo is our newest DPS member after climbing Babo, Bridge, Potosi, Telescope, Smith, Hayford, and S. Guardian Angel. Welcome to the section, and we know it's a major trip when you go DPSing with us.

Bees in your bonnet or better yet in your little homemade airplane -- that brings up Bob Hartunian who built an airplane from a kit right in his Big Bear garage, and so he says. He and the guys flew their one seaters to some undisclosed place and landed. After breaking out the lunch, the bees swarmed, and the boys could barely make it back into the airplane with bees blanketing their bodies and faces. Taking off in an airplane demands concentration and skill, but can you imagine battling these pests at the same time? Speaking of that, some poor hiker near Phoenix (South Mtn. Trail) was swarmed by bees causing him to fall 200 feet down into a ravine. If that wasn't bad enough, he fell into a bed of cholla. Search and Rescue couldn't get near him without donning bee suits (in 110 degree heat). Miraculously, this fellow lived, and one of the rescuers added, "Never hike alone, and always carry a cell phone." I have yet to have a cell phone work in a wilderness setting.

DYK, Huell Howser (recent guest at the Angeles Chapter Banquet) featured the Bristlecone Pine Forest in one of his Faraway Places television shows? These ancient trees and The Tour are on our way to White Mountain which will be led next July ('09). In the interview, the ranger mentioned that mules never breed and have no inclination to breed. Try and figure that one out. Anyway, Huell asked the ranger if he could take a small pine cone home, and the bristling ranger sure gave Huell the dickens.

Avid climber and joker, Bobcat Thompson, was featured in the Glendale Newspaper with a half page full color picture this past June. It was a fine article, and we learned that in 33 years of being a postmaster in Glendale, Bob never once called in sick. As a peakbagger who sometimes gets back to the cars at dawn, that's a pretty incredible feat. Did You Know George Wysup emailed that his little pinky fingers were curling up and causing him great distress. Searching on the web, George found a surgeon in Boise, Idaho, who'd fix those pinkies with a 40 minute procedure called, Dupuytren's Contracture or in layman's terms, "We're gonna straighten out those curly little fingers." It was George's birthday (July 18th -- last year he was on the summit of Mt. Fuji with the Baldwins), and after the doc administered a little novocaine, he gave George the minor surgery which was no worse than getting a cavity filled. George drove home all 830 miles (driving with his knees, of course, oh just kidding), and later in the week, he backpacked over Kearsarge Pass with nary a worry (well, at least his fingers felt good). With all this success, George has signed up to take string art lessons from David Eisenberg in the fall.

Did You Know I ran into Bob Cates at Trader Joe's in Northridge? Being true DPSers, we were staring at the wines. If you don't know Bob, he's our main resource man for Sierra Club photos, biographies, and addresses. This Bob knows it all and more. Asking for a scoop, Bob said he was the grateful recipient of a never before published photo of John Muir. That's right, John Muir hanging out in Griffith Park with some hikers, maybe back in 1911. This photo was found in the attic of the Little Old Lady from Pasadena, and a WTC student passed it onto Bob. Hopefully, we'll see it published in the Southern Sierran soon. After such a good scoop, Bob and I returned to the wines. He bought a Simi cabernet for $19.95, and I bought an Alexander Fitch for $5.95. I would have bought a Two Buck Chuck, but I didn't want to look bad in front of Bob.

On a sad note from DYK, a good friend from the Golden Decade of Climbing (when the SPS and DPS meetings averaged 100 in attendance), Bill Bradley passed away, June 9, 2008, at the age of 75. Bill was an E-rated leader, DPS List Finisher, SPS and DPS chairman, and led some pretty terrific climbs in the Sierras and the desert. He also was the LTC snow chair for years, too. Bill was a tall, quiet, kind man who was low key but chuckled and smiled at our jokes and campfire banter. My favorite story was when Bill was on a Bill T. Russell trip leading Mt. Russell, and someone kicked a cannon ball rock ricocheting straight for Bill. They said that Bill ran across the snow so fast that he didn't even leave footprints. I'd remind Bill of that story now and then, and he'd always give that big famous grin.
once received an Outings award from the Angeles Chapter, and Ron Jones later presented it to him at a DPS campfire with great aplomb. Bill was very touched by that. I'll remember some great climbs with Bill, and we knew when we climbed with him, we'd be safe, and we'd always get our peaks. Rest in peace, Bill. You will be remembered and missed by many of us. (Note: if any of you have photos or specific memories about Bill, please email or send them to me.) I learned of late that Wilson Harvey had hired Bill, and Wilson was responsible for leading Bill into climbing.

Well, we all can't wait for these fabulous List Finisher parties which are on the horizon, and hopefully, a few more will be scheduled in 2009. The potluck meetings will start up again in October (Dave Baldwin is rolling out the Meister keg), and there we'll be able to catch up on summer jaunts and journeys to far off places. I've heard about some outstanding South American treks from the Sholles, Tidballs, Mitchells, and the Henneys. I think I can see some banquet programs forming even as I write this column. Thanks to everyone who sends me DYK tidbits now and then and keeps in touch so I know what you're up to.

Stay tuned for more Did You Knows as we gather together soon and break the sour dough bread and drink the fine wines. Pending in the next issue -- Ron Jones and his moving rocks episode, plus the ghosts sightings at Cerro Gordo and Panamint City. George Noory, are you listening? I'd like to close with a memory of Fred Bode who hiked well into his 80s, said when hiking uphill. "Well, Lord, you pick 'em up, and I'll put 'em down." Happy climbing to one and all. We'll see you in the fall. - Mary McMannes

**LOST HIKERS**

Original painting by Betty McCosker, artist and bon vivant residing in San Diego with DPS List finisher and husband, Joe McCosker. So...who are these lost hikers which Betty painted shortly after the "incident."

Betty says they are people we all know, well. The fellow standing in the foreground has led many hikes and peaks of all the sections. Now, he's probably 70something and has received prestigious awards throughout his career. There are three girls on the log waiting for the Pathfinders to find the route and lead them from harm's way. Betty thinks it's funny the two guys are studying an Auto Club map and not a regular topo. The area is in the Glass Mountain vicinity where there are quaking aspen trees. Can you guess who these climbers are? Mary Mac's lips are sealed (for now).

Flash: This month, Betty has published a short autobiography complete with drawings called, Tales of the Hollywood Auto Court and Beyond. Her father owned the Hollywood Auto Court (a motor lodge) on busy Ventura Blvd. in the 1940s. Scenes for the movie, "It Happened One Night," were filmed there. This and many stories are in this delightful hard-bound book. Mary Mac is Betty's "agent" for the DPS. Let her know if you'd like to order an autographed copy. Betty and Joe have been pillars of the DPS, and she's a trickster apt to put a plastic spider in a conspicuous place on someone's potluck food item. Life continues to be zany for these octogenarians! -Mary McMannes
CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK
SERVICE TRIP
April 2008
By Gloria Miladin

While you all had fun at our DPS banquet my coworker Elizabeth and I drove 800 miles to the Needles district of Canyonlands National Park in Utah to work on removal of the tamarisk bushes. This was a national Sierra club trip. Our leader Mike was from Texas, other 12 of us from all over USA, and 4 of us from California. The Californians were all girls, city slickers!

The Canyonlands is a park with 3 districts, each with a separate entrance: Island in the Sky, Maze, and Needles. Our work was in the Needles district along the Salt Creek area. We camped at the Wooden Shoe Group site campground. High on the mesa across from our campground is the rock formation of a wooden Dutch shoe.

Every morning we had a breakfast at 7:00 AM prepared by Phyllis, a local cowgirl from Moab. She cooked all our meals in huge cast iron pots. Then we drove for about 2 miles to the work site where forest rangers joined us. We were given clippers and hand saws to attack that impenetrable and nasty tamarisk. Our purpose was to clear all the cottonwood trees and native plants along the creek. And clear we did. We sawed and stacked the tamarisk while the rangers used chain saws for larger pieces and then sprayed the roots with chemicals. We worked for 5 days, 8 am-3 pm. Behind us; we left piles and piles of chopped tamarisk to be burned by rangers later in winter. Once we cleared the cottonwood trees, they were free to breathe and spread. At the end of the 5th day we cleared an area about a mile long. The National Park Service awarded us with a certificate called “Volunteers in Parks”.

On my free day Dolores and I hiked to the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. The confluence trail is 9 miles round trip. The trail course is through rock mazes, passing through windows in the rocks, and climbing a 15 step ladder to the next mesa. The trail is well marked by cairns. Without cairns or a compass you are lost. One year a group of teenagers scrambled the cairns and pointed them in wrong direction. As a result there was a group of lost Germans. After 2 hours hiking at a brisk pace we reached our destination, at the end of a trail 2000 feet above the two rivers. I’ve never seen such a site in my life, two rivers converging into one. The distinct colors gray and brownish-gray of the two rivers are visible for about two miles before the waters completely mix.

To me the Canyonlands is a beautiful and also very harsh desert. It is not tourist-oriented as one of our participants Russ from Colorado informed us. It does not have dancing Indians, gift shops, restaurants etc., for example. It is for people who like to camp and explore either by bike, on foot, or 4x4. Just hiking will bring you to the Anasazi ruins to be seen in its natural state at their original sites, including petroglyphs, hand prints, cliff dwellings and granaries. One evening after dinner I went exploring across from our campsite to a small canyon with many cottonwoods. There was not one tamarisk there. It was removed in previous years by volunteers just like us. Just strolling along the creek looking for any animals my eyes caught a glimpse of something round under a rock overhang. Dolores and I climbed to the spot and there it was: an ancient Anasazi granary left empty about 700 years ago by cliff dwellers who planted corn along the creek. I was ecstatic with this new discovery.
and that I was able to even peek inside its ancient walls!
So if you are in for a long drive and in love with desert wonders, I highly recommend the Utah, Canyonlands National Park.

POTLUCKS GALORE
April 6 and June 8, 2008
By Mary McMannes

It's always a joyful time when Edna returns from bagging yet another country and invites DPS to her beautiful yard for a barbecue. Santa Monica is the place we want to be when the Valley tips the temps over 100 degrees. However, this evening in April (6th) was a little nippy and chilly which gave us even bigger appetites. The barbecue gave off lots of heat plus good smells for the carnivores.

People in attendance at Edna's -- Gloria, Michael, Edna, Edna's daughter Karla, Karen Leonard, a friend of Karen's, Vic and Sue, Sherry, Dan Richter and daughter Joanclair, Ron Young, Mary and Rayne, Paul Cooley, Mary Mac. It was an evening we were sad to hear that Charlton Heston had passed away earlier in the day. Comments were made about what a gorgeous hunk he'd been in his hey-day (Ben Hur, 1959, 1960?... long before Bob Sumner, Michael G., etc were born.) I made a comment that when I saw Ben Hur's blue eyes, my adolescent romantic feelings were first awakened. The conversation continued with various stories as people shared what movie or movie star awakened them from childhood innocence, where we said to ourselves, "What are these new feelings? I think I'm in love." Sherry Harsh said for her, it was Kirk Douglas' thighs and his short skirts in Spartacus. Rayne Motheral had been quiet, and when quizzed about his first pubescent awakenings, he said, "No, I've never had any, yet. But I'm still waiting." Mary Motheral started shrieking, and we all had a good laugh.

Ron Young jumped into the discussion and pensively added, "I've always been told I have Charlton Heston's blue eyes and Kirk Douglas' thighs." Since we've never seen Ron in anything other than long pants, we have no idea if he's telling the truth or not.

The next DPS potluck was Sunday night, June 8th, at the beautiful home of Paul and Lee Cooley in Culver City. Management got lots done with great ideas for the upcoming year plus we had a good time just being together. Thanks Edna, Paul, and Lee for hosting great barbecue parties. Please let one of the management committee members know if you'd like to get involved and have a potluck at your house in the next few months (08 and 09). Our next DPS meeting is Octoberfest at the Baldwins, and they've got the German brew and brats down to a fine science in gastronomical delights. Stay tuned for future developments! - Mary Mac

Photos provided by Mary McMannes

NOTCH PEAK (9,654'), UTAH
May 2008
By Bob Michael

When we think of going to Utah for desert fun, we usually think of the great Colorado Plateau desert of the south and east – from Zion through Canyonlands and Moab all the way up to Dinosaur. And that's as it should be – no finer desert playground on earth! But there is another Utah desert, a largely forgotten no man's land stretching from I-15 west to
Nevada. This “empty quarter” is informally called the West Desert; south of the flat alkaline nothingness of the Great Salt Lake Desert, the continent’s biggest salt playa, the West Desert, almost devoid of human settlement, includes great mountains such as the 12,000’+ Deep Creek Range – the most isolated big mountains in the Lower 48 – and places whose names whisper of loneliness, desolation, and “something lost beyond the ranges” -- Whirlwind Valley; Confusion Range; Skull Rock Pass; Topaz Valley; the Wah Wah Range.

Perhaps no one feature symbolizes the stark mystery of this country better than Notch Peak, a razor-sharp rampart of gray limestone in the House Range which rises 5,000 feet straight out of the Tule Valley to the west. I came under the spell of this crag long ago driving east on Highway 6/50 from Wheeler Peak. It’s 3,000-foot absolutely sheer north face is one of the greatest big walls in the country, far grander than the east face of Longs or Whitney and only rivaled in scope by Yosemite. To stand as close as you dare to this edge is to sense the compelling force-field of pure gravity which fills this void and rises up to tug gently yet insistently – almost seductively – at your topheavy body.....

A classical tilted fault block out of Geology 101, the House Range is a mirror image of the Sierra with a sheer west face and a relatively gentle east slope which allows class 2 access to its heights. The Fillmore BLM district has done a great job of maintaining the back roads, so despite its primitiveness, the range is accessible in an ordinary car. To reach the Sawtooth Canyon roundhead, George Quinn and I turned north off 6/50 near milepost 46 about 42 miles west of Delta onto an excellent graded road. Continue on this road north about 3.4 miles to the signed, also excellent, Miller Canyon road which ascends the bajada to the base of the House Range. After about 5 miles, be looking for an oddly lavish new BLM picnic site/restroom/kiwisk on the right. Here, a fair dirt road turns off to the left; this road is drivable in a car with caution past a stone cabin at 2.5 miles. We left our rented low-clearance compact here as the topo shows the road deteriorating at the cabin from solid to dashed lines; however, the road turned out to be OK to a juniper grove at the wide mouth of Sawtooth Canyon where the road is closed to all vehicles at 6,850’.

From here, follow the now-abandoned jeep track up the broad canyon to the west-northwest, bearing left past the first defile. Past a spectacular, almost overhanging cliff on the left, the canyon narrows to a limestone slot with a vaguely Zion-like feel. It also becomes rather brushy – although bone-dry – so a hint of a clipped use trail is welcome. Past the narrow brushy passage, the canyon opens up. We chose to gain the ESE ridge of Notch up a slope that proved to be the effort-crux of the route; lots of chippy loose small limestone talus, in places veneering bedrock slabs flush with the slope. (Worse going down.) Fortunately, this doesn’t last too long before you are on the easy ridge, a straight shot to the summit. A few bristlecones are on north slopes of this ridge higher up. An easy contour around the south slope of point 9,520’ takes you to the first ominous abyss vista at the saddle between this point and the summit. Nothing can prepare you for this. I’ve looked off the top of, say,
Half Dome, and that's pretty intense; but at least that's wide open. This is a semi-enclosed pit of almost overhanging ferocious verticality with a sinister fascination quite unlike anything I've ever seen.

The final 400' from ‘Pucker Col’ looks intimidatingly steep and exposed from the ridge, but as is often the case goes fine when you're on it as steep, somewhat loose second class. The summit is broad and rounded to the south, infinite void on the north; I couldn't muster the courage to get down on my belly and look over the edge. (The platy limestone at the edge didn't inspire confidence.) Views stretch across the eastern Great Basin from Mount Nebo, highest in the Wasatch, west to cloud-wreathed Wheeler Peak and Mount Moriah in the Snake Range, with the Schell Creeks looking over their shoulders. To the northwest, past the jumbled and tilted limestone blocks of the Confusion Range, rose the white domes of 12,000' Haystack and Ibapah in the Deep Creeks. Cloud shadows and mirages dappled the vast alkali plain of Sevier Dry Lake to the southeast. Other than a few fine tracings of roads, there was no evidence that other humans existed on the planet. If Notch were closer to LA, I have no doubt it would be on everyone's short list of favorite DPS peaks!

Photos & Maps by Bob Michael

The staggering view from "Pucker Col".

Notch Peak route map.
Notch Peak summit from east of Point 9520'.

N from summit across the tilted upland of the House Range to Swasey Peak.

Notch Peak overview map.
TWO WHEELS & 65 MPG TO THE
ARCTIC CIRCLE & BACK
JUNE 11 - JULY 5, 2008
By Wynne Benti

A year ago, I decided to learn how to ride a motorcycle, so I took the California Motorcycle Safety Foundation's course in Barstow and got my license. Ten months later, five of those months on my 650 GS, I was offered the opportunity to join friends Lee Blake, Ron Browne and Carl Bontrager, all riding BMW 1200 GSAs, on a motorcycle trip to Alaska. Trip requirements: a willingness to ride a lot of miles and a special admiration for tequila. Such offers come around once in a blue moon. As a new rider, it was the trip of a lifetime.

With only two weeks to get ready, I booked a ticket online for the 650 and 1 on the Alaska Maritime ferry, the MV Columbia, departing Friday, June 13 from Bellingham, Washington to Skagway, Alaska. Our plan was to camp most of the trip with occasional stays at motels. I carried all of my own camping gear: tent, bag, MSR stove, chair, and food packed into a bright blue REI dry bag that I used on a 500 mile canoe trip on the Yukon River from Whitehorse to Dawson in 1988.

One set of new Metzler Tourance tires and underwear advertised as “17 countries, 6 continents and 1 pair of underwear” later, I rode across the Sierra from my home in Bishop to Danville (with a three-day stop in between in Sonora). My odometer read 10436 miles.

Lee and I left Danville before dawn on June 11 for Bellingham and our first camp that night, at Jackson Hot Springs in Oregon, about 350 miles from Danville. On I-5, we were besieged by chaotic winds, from Williams to the state line, crop-destroying winds unlike any the locals had seen in years past.

Early the next afternoon, we met Lee’s friends Ron and Carl in Castle Rock, Washington. We camped on Silver Lake, and from there, took an afternoon side trip up to Mount St. Helens, a total of 450 miles for the day by the time we got back to camp.

We arrived in Bellingham around noon on Friday the 13th and waited in a long line for the ferry, which operates on Alaskan time, an hour behind PST, regardless of the time zone in which it’s berthed. Eventually, we tied down our motorcycles on the lower deck of the MV Columbia. By 6 pm we were Skagway bound, in a tightly-quartered, four bunk berth with a small sitting room and a view of the deck.

After three days on the Inside Passage with the quirky crew of the Columbia we arrived in Skagway, the main port for miners heading to the goldfields of Dawson City via the Chilkoot Trail, 150 years ago. We headed for Whitehorse, through low clouds, over a rocky snow-patched pass to the Canadian border crossing at Fraser, British Columbia. The vistas were spectacular: massive snow-covered mountains on the horizon above Tagish and Bennett Lakes.

Our first night was spent at the Robert Service campground on the Yukon River in Whitehorse, then up to

Canadian border patrol checking our passports. (Photo: Wynne Benti)
Dawson City for a second night of camping with dinner in town at Klondike Kate's. The next morning we took the ferry across the Yukon River to the Top of the World Highway, a dirt and gravel road turned to mud by continuous rain. I once asked Lee, "Are there any times you don't ride?" to which he responded, "If I get traction I ride." Thick white clouds settled on the highway decreasing visibility to perhaps twenty feet ahead in some places. Our first obstacle was a road grader coming full speed toward us, grinding up the highway behind it, creating a foot tall berm on either side of its blades. They don't believe in pilot cars in the Yukon. The grader operator, a lonely gray shadow behind wipers and heavy rain, left a two-foot wide undisturbed path between the grader blade and the far left cloud-enshrouded edge of the highway. We rode approximately 162 miles to Chicken, Alaska (crossing the border at Poker, Alaska). We stopped for lunch, sandwiches and homemade pies and to admire our completely mud-encrusted bikes and clothes.

We continued on to Glenallen, Alaska, where we spent the next two nights. On June 19, my birthday, we got up early and had a fine breakfast at the Copper Center Roadhouse. We rode through morning rain showers to Chitina, a small Alaskan community at the mouth of the Chitina River and the 63 mile narrow, dirt McCarthy Road to the old Kennecott Copper Mine in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Between 1911 and 1938 nearly $200 million (over $1.2 billion in today's dollars) of copper ore was processed at the mine, a completely self-contained community of 300 people at its height of operation.

Lee, Ron and Carl took off in a choking cloud of dust. We met up at the Kuskulana Bridge, a fabulous wood bridge straddling a narrow canyon hundreds of feet below, and then again, at the Gilahina Trestle, part of the 196 mile railway from the mine to Cordova that took 6000 men several winters to build. We rode across a pedestrian foot-bridge over the Kennicott River, squeezing through a barrier meant to keep cars from driving over the bridge. A few more miles, and we arrived at the mine where people in white Hazmat suits were engaged in asbestos removal. We wandered around the mine, with plans to dine but the restaurant posted a sign eschewing dusty boots and clothes. So we turned around and rode back to Glenallen. I took orders and made a run to the liquor store, owned by a Californian living in back with her old black lab mix. "She's all I got up here," she said looking at her dog. She was trying to sell out and head back home to the Central Valley.

The best restaurant in Glenallen was a burger place so we opted to stay in camp. Four MSR stoves hissed away on the picnic table as we each cooked up a freeze-dried dinner.

June 20-21. Up early, south to Anchorage through rain and endless forests of spruce and tall aspen. Breakfast at a beautiful roadside lodge where the owner, in the company of her mastiff, told us that business was off 70% since the start of the Iraq War. From the road, huge snow-covered mountains sat on the horizon above deep green forests, small blue lakes and low clouds lined across the sky. We passed the Matanuska Glacier and followed the beautiful Matanuska River with its plateaus of sand and water rippling through downed logs.

We camped at Anchorage Centennial Campground just outside of town. While Carl and Ron took a ride down along the Kenai Peninsula, Lee and I had breakfast at Flo's Pancake House, did laundry, then spent the rainy day at the Anchorage Museum to view their fine collection of Alaskan painters including Sydney Laurence, Eustace Ziegler, and Belmore Browne. My IPOD Nano lost all of its music. Lee located an independent MAC dealer on his Zumo, where I was able to download tunes from their collection to get me through the remaining 6000 or so miles of riding.
Sunday June 22. Rain, rain. More rain. We rode north to Denali in a steady rain that became a torrential downpour as we neared the national park entrance. Stopping at a gas station where other riders had taken refuge, Lee again pulled out his Zumo and cell phone and located the two last available cabins in the area at a B&B called "the Perch." Before walking up a gravel road to the main house for dinner, we pasted wet equipment and clothing over every open space in the cabins.

Up early the following morning and over to the visitor center at Denali, we watched a mother moose and two little mooslings cross the road. Lee, Ron & Carl watched the 18-minute film on the park while I opted to write out a few postcards. We rode into the park thirteen miles, as far as private vehicles were allowed. On the return, between mileposts 11 and 9 Mt. McKinley came into view then vanished again beneath its own weather-made cloud cover.

It was north to Fairbanks to Trails End BMW (and Harley Davidson), the northernmost dealerships in the U.S. We camped at the Chena River Recreation Site, parking our tents under Lee's big MSR tarp. Lee rode to town and brought back Subway sandwiches for all of us, a bottle of Clois Du Bois Cabernet, Alaskan Pale Ale (for the men!) and Drambuie. It rained heavily all night.

The next morning we packed up and rode north, destination Coldfoot via the Arctic Circle on the Dalton Highway, halfway between Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay. There was so much road construction and so many detours in the city, that our first challenge was actually getting out of Fairbanks. We ate breakfast at the "northernmost Denny's in the world." Afterwards, Carl came up to me and said, "Did you see that guy I was talking to in the parking lot, with the bruises from his neck all the way down? He and his wife were riding two up on a 1200GS and went down; he said he got distracted and hit a patch of gravel." Then Carl walked away leaving me standing alone in the rain with that unpleasant visual just as we were about to embark upon the notorious truck haul route north to the tundra: The Dalton Highway.

Through the rain and cold mist, road signs warned motorists to be aware of the heavy trucks moving at high speeds on the gravel highway. Passing the haul trucks in the rain and the fog was a challenge: they stopped for no one.

We stopped at "The Hot Spot" on the other side of the Yukon River for lunch but had to wait until the kitchen finished serving a busload of Princess Cruise passengers. A 1200 GS rider from Big Bear, on his way back down from Prudhoe Bay told of the great caribou herds as did the cruise passengers who had flown into Prudhoe.

Back on the road, we hit a patch of road construction that turned the highway into a deep red layer of the slickest sloppiest mud glistening in the rain. Two guys on Harleys were out in front of us puttering through at about three miles an hour. With the usual foot-high berms on either side of us and unable to pass, we slid along.

As morning became noon, we outran the clouds. Fir and spruce were replaced by a sage and pale olive-colored moonscape of moss-covered boulders and tundra. We finally reached the Arctic Circle, identified by a freshly painted sign along a pullout on the road.

When black clouds of mosquitoes and biting flies enveloped the guys at the Circle (I take vitamin B every day so I was never quite as affected by the bugs) Coldfoot and the caribous herds at Prudhoe Bay were out. All opted for immediate return to Fairbanks. Except for myself. It was so close!

I asked Lee, "What if I go to Prudhoe Bay?"

"Well, that's your decision," he said.

When I asked if he thought I could catch up with the
group again, the answer was, “Probably not.”

The guys turned right to Fairbanks and I turned left to see the caribou herds. I rode perhaps a half-mile. The road before me disappeared into the horizon. There was no movement on it all, no cars, no people, nothing but tundra and big sky. Taking in the miles of empty road before me, I thought, "What in the heck am I doing?" and quickly made a u-turn for Fairbanks. A few miles down, Lee, Ron and Carl (thankfully) were huddled in discussion alongside the road. Apparently, Lee was going to fetch me had I not shown up within a few minutes. All three looked up as I passed by, kind of embarrassed and full-throttle to Fairbanks. Average speed back on the dirt haul road was 70-75 mph. Lee got right behind me, a gentleman as always. Miles ahead of the other two, we finally stopped. I turned and looked at him. All I could see beneath his helmet were his eyes behind his yellow glasses. Smiling, I quietly said, "I guess you called my bluff." He got off his motorcycle, wandered over, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "I don't know you that well Benti, but I know you well enough to know you were going to turn around."

That night we got rooms at a B&B in Fairbanks called the Grizzly Lodge, a nice end to a tough day. We rode approximately 500 miles round-trip fully loaded on the Dalton Highway, which in the end took quite a toll on my 650. A few days later the rock-pitted forks tore up both front seals, which started seeping oil. The thrashed headset made entering curves even more of a challenge. Nothing that wasn't driveable, but all had to be replaced back home in California. The next morning, we officially started our trip back south to the states from Fairbanks. Above Delta Junction, the sun came out and snowy 18,000-ft Mt. Wrangell appeared on the distant horizon. The road wrapped around scenic sandy-bottom rivers. We ate lunch in Tok, a previous gas stop on our way down from Glenallen to Anchorage. We reached the boreder crossing at Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory and spent the night at a small campsite there.

We rode the Alcan Highway through the Kluane Game Sanctuary; another surfit morning with moose meandering across the road. We hit strong headwinds as we came into to Destruction Bay on Kluane Lake, where the Canadian and American road crews met as they finished building the American and Canadian sections of the Alcan. The Bay was named for the winds that blew down their tents and destroyed their camp. It was the first time I experienced being blown sideways across ball-bearing gravel, completely at the mercy of the wind, unable to stop the sideways movement. We watched the white caps on the lake while having breakfast at the Destruction Bay restaurant.

Continuing south through Kluane, Haines Junction, Whitehorse, we crossed into B.C., where the bridges were made of rain-slick steel with uneven tire-catching slots. We camped at Teslin Lake. It was Thursday, June 26.

Friday morning we rode about 150 miles to Jakes Corner, at the junction of the Alcan and Cassiar Highways, just before Watson Lake, and had breakfast at a small café. The gas station only had regular gas. The sun was out and it was a beautiful morning. After breakfast, we turned south on the Cassiar Highway, a remote narrow, but mostly paved road through several mountain ranges: the Cassiar Mountains, Three Sisters Range and Eagles Nest Range. There was little traffic and no towns for about 850 miles, just a gas station as noted in the Zumo database about halfway called Bell 2. The thick dark forest, home to grizzlies, brown and black bears, and moose, came to the edge of the road.

Around Dease Lake the blue sky vanished. Clouds closed in on the barren snow-patched mountains towering above the road. It started raining heavily. By this
time, my chain had been slipping. Being new at motorcycling I thought it was my clutch. Finally, the chain just fell off the rear sprocket, apparently having suffered rock damage, most likely on the Dalton Highway. One link was broken open. Each of the 47 teeth on the back sprocket were folded over, somewhat resembling Katsushika Hokusai's 1831 woodblock print “The Great Wave.” Lee used vice grips to pinch the pin back into the broken link and put the chain back on the rear sprocket. Ron and Carl rode ahead to the supposed gas station noted on the GPS. Lee followed me the last 40 miles in the dark rain at 25 mph. The “gas station” was one pump (regular gas only) out in front of a heliskiing resort called Bell 2. We got rooms ($200/night) and found a grinder in a small woodshop. Lee ground the bent teeth back into triangles and reversed the rear sprocket when he put it back on the wheel. There was no cell phone service so all calls were made by satellite phone at $6 per minute. We tried to order a new chain, front and back sprocket from Blackfoot in Calgary then discovered that Bell 2 was so remote, no courier service delivered there. In addition, we were coming up on Canada Day on Tuesday, their version of Independence Day, and most businesses were closed for five days from Saturday until Wednesday.

Lee secured the old chain on the newly ground sprocket and on Sunday, we were off at a conservative 45 mph to Smithers, B.C., 350 miles to the south, where new parts were scheduled to come in on the Greyhound from Blackfoot. It was a lonely, eerie ride, knowing that grizzlies wandered behind the trees and that the few settlements along the highway between Bell 2 and Smithers were boarded up and abandoned.

When the parts didn't show up in Smithers by Wednesday (a storm washed out the road between Calgary and Smithers) we went to the Honda dealer (who had been closed through Tuesday for Canada Day). He had one 520 chain which we bought and put on the bike. That afternoon we rode 378 miles to Williams Lake on Highway 97, yet another narrow shoulderless two-lane, but with the addition of fully-laden lumber trucks barreling along often drifting halfway over the center line, especially in corners. Just north of Williams Lake, we hit a squall. The sky turned olive-green. Tremendous side winds and torrential rain were enhanced by sky to ground lightening bolts snapping all around us. At the Overland Hotel in Williams Lake, we met a large group of BMW riders from Kelowna, B.C. who told us about Southwest BMW, a new dealer in Kelowna, much closer than Vancouver. Southwest had the parts so the next morning we were Kelowna-bound arriving there around noon. Southwest took us right in. They performed the mileage service on both bikes as well as replacing the damaged chain on the 650. The bikes were ready to go the following afternoon around two pm. It was July 4th.

From Kelowna, we rode a beautiful mountainous route down to the border at Osoyoos, an out-of-character Mediterranean-like setting in southern B.C. It was nice to get back to the U.S. We spent the Fourth of July at Moses Lake. The next morning we started early and rode down 395 from Moses Lake, Washington all the way to Susanville, California, approximately 625 miles. We had breakfast in Pendleton, Oregon. We rode through the Malheur National Forest in Oregon and passed Lake Abert a vast glassy body of water right along the highway. Parts of 395 between Riley and Lakeview looked like the original concrete from the thirties. Just north of Susanville smoke from fires near Quincy obliterated any views. The next morning, Lee went west across the Sierra to Danville and I continued down 395 through Reno to Bishop.

Three days later, after paying bills, we met up again and rode to the BMW MOA Rally in Gillette, yet another adventure across Highway 50 and the Nevada desert to Vernal, Utah, north to Flaming Gorge, up the old Pony Express-Mormon Trail-Oregon Trail and California Trail combined route with a stop at South Pass (made famous by Mark Twain in “Roughing It”) then over to Gillette. By the time I returned on July 25, we had ridden to Alaska, the Yukon Territory, British Columbia, across the Top of the World Highway, the Arctic Circle on the Dalton Highway, out to the Kennebunk Copper Mine in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, down the remote Cassiar Highway, through Washington, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, South Dakota, and California. My odometer read 21018, approximately 10,582 miles in the saddle.
But Bowden, now in his mid-sixties, has changed as he has aged. No longer does he make camp in the Santa Catalina Mountains above Tucson or take 150-mile hikes on the old Hohokum salt trail. Now he seems to spend much of his time confronting old bugaboos—“women, booze, anger, lust, violence, velocity”—and his prose, which remains stylistically impressive, is often hard to follow and seems to become more self-absorbed with each new volume.

Red Line (1989)

Fortunately, however, Red Line, written while Bowden was still in his mid 40s, retains much of the focus and energy of his earlier works. Although there are several interesting diversions, the book’s main theme concerns the 1987 Tucson assassinations of Ignacio Robles “Nacho” Valencia, a murderous drug dealer, and his cousin, Carlos Enrique Lopez. Bowden describes the visits he and his friend Arturo Carrillo Strong, a retired Tucson P.D. narcotics agent, made to the very dangerous Nogales, Sonora, Nacho’s hometown. Here they hoped to discover those responsible for the men’s execution style—“hands tied behind their backs, bullets pumped into their heads”—murders.

Another motivation behind Red Line, however, is Bowden’s attempt to explain why he pushes his life to the limit—to red line his personal tachometer. Addressing this issue, he claims that he needs to keep moving, similar to the English explorers of old, those who plunged into “hard deserts, primitive camps, bad food, and no proper tea.”

“The movement continues,” the author writes. “I am typical of this hunger for motion. I take no vacations. I just leave, go, race. I have to leave. The sun bakes me at noon, the night whispers through the fog of wine at midnight. I have to leave.”

One of Bowden’s diversions begins in July in Yuma after spending a week tracking Nacho through the barrios. “My body is giving out from drinking and something else is breaking up, something I cannot yet name, but I feel it falling apart within me.”

Although the temperature in the shade at 6 p.m. is 110, Bowden and a friend begin a multi-day hike from Yuma—via Glamis, Brawley and Coachella—to Palm Springs, generally following the path of Benjamin Butler Harris, a lawyer from Tennessee, who, during the Gold Rush of 1849, along with several friends, made the same trip at the same time of the year.

Along their route the two encounter Border Patrolmen, one of whom is annoyed at having the hikers on “his” desert. Perhaps this was because the duo were “ripping away the fabric of (the patrolman’s) West, the one that requires dune buggies, 4X4s, dirt bikes, sidearms, rifles, long hip knives, stout boots, flares, huge...
water cans, snakebite kits, salt tablets, curious bonnets, large belt buckles...the lonely flats anxious for bodies, the strangers who might drift over the horizon and kill you."

Another interesting diversion comes when Bowden meets Julian Hayden, archeologist, author and expert on the Cerro Pinacate area. Camping with Hayden near the DPS peak, Bowden describes finally breaking the ice with the curmudgeonly old man: "Around midnight, he stands, tosses down another shot of mezcal, stares into the flames, and snorts, 'I don't give a #@% what you write.'"

"I am home safe. Julian Hayden has said hello."

Red Line makes a good read for desert lovers. Sorry I can't say the same for the next book reviewed.


It's six years later, and Bowden seems lost in a vision of a broken America. Following closely in the iconoclastic footsteps of Edward Abbey, he writes: "They (presumably the capitalists, governmental authorities, et al.) will do anything to reproduce. And they will use the needs of others, the deep appetites they see in all our faces, they will exploit these things to further their own ends. They will take over our ways of loving, they will seize upon our sense of property. They will ruthlessly read our diaries, our secret thoughts, and then make us slaves to our own obsessions."

Employing the hammer orchid—a plant which, in order to pollinate, lures male Thynnid wasps with a labellum that looks similar to a female wasp, and which releases a "delicious" pheromone similar to that which the female wasp releases—as a metaphor, Bowden also probes what he feels is the American love affair with violence. "We have been at war for over a century now and it has bankrupted our treasury, destroyed our land, corrupted our people, and fouled our bed. We are creatures of fear, supplicants, and we expect to be taken care of by something and we do not expect to be loved or give love."

Along with ruminations on Charles Keating (of bankrupt American Savings notoriety), life in a small Sonoran town controlled by drug dealers, and the disappeared ones in Argentina, the recurring thread in Blood Orchid is Bowden's long friendship with Rupert McLaughlin, a.k.a. Robert Sundance, a Native American who "spent the last thirty years of his life on skid row of Los Angeles, hardly knew a word of Lakota, loved to bet on the ponies, roll the bones in Nevada, romp with the whores." If Blood Orchid offers any redemption whatsoever, it is because of Sundance, who, while jailed for drunkenness, challenged the system by composing writs asserting that alcoholism was a disease. "In 1977, his case was won on appeal and from it flowed detoxification centers and the legal right of a public drunk to treatment for a sickness." Unfortunately, Sundance succumbs to cancer, after which Bowden and a friend, fulfilling a promise, drive the Indian's body to South Dakota, land of his heritage, in a horse trailer.

Most of the essays in Blood Orchid—all of which possess a Sonoran Desert ambience—originally appeared in magazine form. As in all his works, Bowden presents himself as a combination Abbey, Kerouac and Henry Miller, "fail(ing) to nurture, support, and listen to the wail of the inner child."

Chihuahua: Pictures From the Edge (1996), with photographs by Virgil Hancock

In this coffee table-size volume, published jointly by the University of Arizona Southwest Center and the
University of New Mexico Press, Bowden and photographer Virgil Hancock confront the on-going dilemma associated with the U.S./Mexican border.

In his opening 56 page essay, Bowden claims that, despite international treaties (think NAFTA), fences, and law enforcement agencies, the border remains porous. “The rich and powerful pretend to be in control and pretend to control the flow of things. The poor actually do it. The drugs move, the birds move, the chemicals move, the people move and no one can keep track of these numbers, no one can create an accurate table of these movements, and no one can actually control them.”

Although Hancock’s excellent color photographs were all shot in the Mexican State of Chihuahua, Bowden makes it clear that the “edge” he addresses consists of the entire border region, stretching from Texas to California. He believes that we are in a war to stop a future which is inevitable, a war in which the outcome remains unclear.

Commenting on Hancock’s excellent 39 full-page photographs, Bowden writes: “Colors stream into the mind from the Mexican walls. Burnt Orange, blood red, dark green, rich blues, deep purple, turquoise, yellow, pink, and black...Colors, my God, I can’t forget the colors. They are in my face and I love them.”


Blues for Cannibals makes for a difficult read because the essays therein, most of which first appeared in magazine form, have been cut and pasted in often jarring juxtapositions.

One of the interwoven stories concerns Michael and Patrick Poland, brothers, who in May 1977, in Black Canyon, near Bumble Bee Junction, north of Phoenix, robbed a Purolator armored truck of $300,000, murdered the driver and his assistant, then dumped their bodies in weighted bags in Lake Mead. Bowden interviewed Michael—married and the father of four—while in prison awaiting execution, and relates his tawdry history. The author was asked to, and did, attend Michael’s execution.

Another topic concerns the history of the small border town of Chorizo (Bowden uses an alias to protect its identity). Indeed, in 1774, Juan Bautista de Anza, while on his way to California, camped on the town’s present site, while in 1853, in the Gadsden Purchase, the area became a part of the United States. Although both gold and silver were later discovered in the area, Bowden notes that the mines failed due a “breakdown in interpersonal relations,” i.e., “The local Indians keep killing off the miners.” Cattlemen descended on the area after the Civil War, but it remained little developed due to continuing raids by Apaches, an earthquake, and a smallpox epidemic. In 1972, the 11,000 acre ranch surrounding the town got “busted up into 40 acre parcels, and new blood seep(ed) into the old veins of the town.” It was then, Bowden notes, that another plague arrived on the scene. “Dope fiends.”

Death is also a major theme in Blood. Four of the author’s acquaintances die in rather short order: Arturo, a retired Tucson narcotics agent (see Red Line review); Paul, an artist living in Brooklyn, whom Bowden knew growing up in the Midwest; Dick, a good friend and former business partner; and Chris, a rancher whose family once owned a huge spread in the Chorizo area. Brooding on the losses, Bowden declares that words such as death, grief and fear aren’t sufficient. “I don’t trust the answers or the people who give me the answers. I believe in dirt and bone and flowers and fresh pasta and salsa cruda and red wine. I do not believe in white wine, I insist on color.” Using food for solace, he proceeds to offer recipes for polenta with a shiitake and porcini mushroom sauce; pork chops with pesto noodles; and yellow bell pepper soup, with celery, onions and carrots.

A riff on a Teamsters’ Convention in Los Angeles and a sad history of the Yaqui Indians indigenous to Sonora are also included.

Inferno (2006), with photographs by Michael P. Berman

Yet another coffee-table size book, Inferno, complemented with Michael P. Berman’s excellent black & white photos, and published by the University of Texas Press, is Bowden’s tribute to the newly created (2001) Sonoran Desert National Monument.

Writing in an almost stream of conscious fashion, Bowden discounts both the dogmatic prose of the ecologists and the lyricism of the nature writers. Instead, he tells us that “we need these places not to remember our better selves or our natural self or our spiritual self. We need these places to taste what we fear and devour what we are. We need these places to be animals because unless we are animals we are nothing at all. That is the price of being a civilized dude.”

A highly literate friend of mine, after reading a few passages from Inferno—“Breath of dry air, heat coming off the inferno, the plants brisling, the snakes gliding silent toward my throat with their tongues tasting the sky, dirt burning as I swallow it whole, rocks everywhere and I want to lick them, bones singing one-part harmony, and who owns this place?”—observed that the author is a modern Walt Whitman. Shoot, I wish I’d thought of that.

Of the five books reviewed herein, Inferno is the only one primarily concerned with the area in which the DPS climbs. Despite a few non-desert detours in regard to his personal life, especially his chauvinistic view of the opposite sex, I highly recommend this volume.
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[Image of Desert Peaks Section items]
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EMBLEM STATUS AND GUIDES - To receive DPS emblem status you must climb 15 peaks on the list, five 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.

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