Hello, my fellow climbing compatriots!

Now that we've had another successful Banquet and have come to the end of another season of our lower desert summits, it is time to gear up for the higher ones! Remember that on our list, we do have some great "Trans-Sierra" ranges including the Inyo Mountains, White Mountains, Spring Mountains in Nevada, and the highest point of Nevada and Arizona. So, a multitude of adventures awaits us all, and the higher elevations are great this time of year. On Saturday, August 10th, Mathew Kelliher and I will be leading a climb of Boundary Peak and Montgomery Peak as a strenuous day hike and we invite all of you "tigers" and "tigresses" (hmmm, is that a real word?) to join us. The climb had to be postponed from last year as I had a conflict involving work that prevented me from assisting Mat. We'll get there this time, though!

On another note, we are looking forward to planning the events for the next season and year, including the popular Chili Cook-off that has been graciously hosted for some time by Dave & Elaine Baldwin and assisted for outings by Larry & Barbee Tidball. Anyone having suggestions for a good location and outings should contact me so that I can work with our new team (Julie Rush, Jan Brahms, and others) to get it planned for the next year.

I look forward to working with the Management Committee and having a great time!

THE NEXT SAGE SUBMISSION
DEADLINE IS AUGUST 11, 2013

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.

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Cover Photo Credit...
...goes to Matthew Hengst.
The photo, which was taken on September 21, 2012, is of Gloria Miladin repelling from North Guardian Angel as Mat Kelliher looks on.

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

**AUGUST 2013 — APRIL 2014**

Baboquivari Peak, a DPS listed peak (photo by Penelope Smrz)

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**AUGUST 2013**

- **AUG 4**  SUN  LTC, WTC, DPS, HPS, SPS  *Mount Pinos Navigation*
  
  *I: Mount Pinos Navigation:* Navigation Noodle in San Bernardino National Forest for either checkout or practice to satisfy Basic (I/M) or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. Send email/sase, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leaders: Robert Myers. Assistant Leader: Phil Wheeler.

- **AUG 10**  SAT  DPS  *Boundary Peak (13,140’), Montgomery Peak (13,441’)*: Join us on this very strenuous hike to summit a couple of spectacular peaks high up in the White Mountains north of Bishop, CA. The first peak is the high point of Nevada; from there we’ll cross the state line into California along a steep and rocky ridge to a peak high above all other DPS Emblem Peaks. Expect 12 miles round trip and 5,500’ gain. Comfortable hiking up very steep, loose, and rocky terrain at high elevation is essential. Contact Mat Kelliher at mkelliher746@gmail.com with recent conditioning and experience, including high altitude experience and vehicle/rideshare information, for trip status and details. Leaders: Mat Kelliher, Jim Fleming.

**SEPTEMBER 2013**

- **SEPT 22**  SUN  LTC, WTC, DPS, HPS, SPS  *Grinnell Ridge Navigation:* Navigation Noodle in San Bernardino National Forest for either checkout or practice to satisfy Basic (I/M) or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. Send email/sase, contact info, (Continued on page 5)
navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers. Assistant Leader: Phil Wheeler

OCTOBER 2013

♦ OCT 13   SUN   DPS
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Please contact any Management Committee member if you’re interested in hosting the DPS Management Committee meeting and Potluck.

♦ FALL DATE TBD  SAT   LTC, WTC, HPS
I: Beginning Navigation Clinic: Spend the day one-on-one with an instructor, learning/practicing map and compass in our local mountains. Beginners to rusty old-timers welcome and practice is available at all skill levels. Not a checkout, but it will help you prepare. Many expert leaders will attend; many I-rated leaders started here in the past. 4 mi, 500' gain. Send SASE, phones, $25 deposit (Sierra Club, refunded at trailhead) to Leader: Diane Dunbar. Co-leader: Richard Boardman

NOVEMBER 2013

♦ NOV 10  SUN   DPS
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Join us at the home of Bob Wyka and Peter Christian in Marina Del Rey for the DPS Management Committee meeting at 4:30 pm and potluck at 6:00 pm. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a potluck item to share. RSVP to Bob Wyka at r.wyka@att.net

♦ NOV 16  SAT   LTC, WTC
MR: Navigation Workshop on 3rd Class Terrain: This navigation workshop is limited to individuals participating in the Indian Cove Navigation Noodle and is intended to explore special navigation issues that arise on 3rd class terrain. Class 3 rock travel experience required. Restricted to Sierra Club members. Helmets and medical forms required/group size limited. Send email/sase, SC#, class 3 experience, conditioning, contact info to Leader: Robert Myers. Co-Leader: Jack Kieffer

♦ NOV 16-17  SAT-SUN   LTC, WTC, DPS, HPS, SPS
I: Indian Cove Navigation: Navigation noodle at Joshua Tree National Park to satisfy the Basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Sat for practice, skills refresher, altimeter, homework, campfire. Sun checkout. Send email/sase, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers. Assistant Leader: Phil Wheeler

DECEMBER 2013

♦ DEC 8  SUN   LTC, WTC, DPS, HPS, SPS
I: Warren Point Navigation: Navigation noodle at Joshua Tree National Park for either checkout or practice to satisfy the Basic (I/M) or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. To participate, send email/sase, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers. Assistant Leader: Phil Wheeler

♦ DEC 8  SUN   DPS
O: DPS Management Committee Meeting and Potluck: Join us at the home of Tom and Tina Bowman in Long Beach for the DPS Management Committee meeting at 4:30 pm and potluck at 6:00 pm. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a potluck item to share. RSVP to Tina Bowman at tina@bowmandesigngroup.com

(Continued on page 6)
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 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
In my first article as Outings Chair, I’d like to say “thank you” to Ann Perkins for a job well done in this position for the last 2 years. I have been a member of DPS for about 25 years and hopefully, serving as Outings Chair will give me an opportunity to give back to a club that has given me so much.

I expect to be active over the next couple of years as I close in on my second list finish (Summer 2014, perhaps) and continue to work towards my Explorer emblem. What a great idea Ron Bartell had in setting that up! Exploration is, I think, at the heart of our Desert Peaks Section, since, even doing standard routes, one often feels like few others have gone before on some of those dirt road drive ins. Doing non-standard routes enhances that feeling even more and I would encourage everyone to try second routes on our peaks. I have found it very rewarding so far.

Our list currently has 96 peaks and 3 suspended peaks. I think it is unlikely that China Lake is going to change its mind regarding climbing two of the suspended peaks and having personally experienced the Border Patrol activity and seen the heavy weaponry they carry in Organ Pipe NM, I doubt we will be able to change the status of Kino any time soon. Perhaps now would therefore be a good time to encourage Exploratory Trips to look at new and exciting peaks which might become potential additions to our list. I recognize not everyone is in favor of adding to the list, but promoting Exploratories, even if they don’t lead to additions, would add a “breath of fresh air” to future trips into areas of desert we don’t often frequent.

In the last Sage, Ann suggested there be a forum in the Sage for advertising private trips, particularly to peaks that are considered technically difficult, or just plain tough and I’d like to support that, since often, a member might need a peak that is not being officially led, but may be a target for other members. Mexican Peaks would fall into this category very well. I can assure you, having attempted or succeeded in climbing all 4 of these peaks in the last 2 years, they are all accessible (with AWD or 4WD) and doable, assuming adequate fitness and route finding skills.

Finally, those who would like to become official Sierra Club Leaders, the Outdoor Leadership Training is set for October 5th in Costa Mesa. The all-day class costs $25 and applications are due September 21st. Let me know if you’d like further information.
**Membership Summary**

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**Activity Report**

**List Finish**

#164 Jim Scott 4/7/13 Spirit Mt

**New Members**

- Francesca Marcus
  - Rosa Pt
- Laura Newman
  - Signal Pk

**Sustaining Renewals**

- Gordon MacLeod 3 years
- Virgil Popescu 2 years
- Jim Scott 1 year

**Renewals**

- Jim Adler 3 years
- Pat Arredondo 1 year
- Dennis Burge 2 years
- Winnette Butler 1 year
- Rudy Fleck 1 year
- John Gibba 1 year
- Bill Hauser 1 year
- Kevin & Lisa Heapy 1 year
- George Kasynski & Laurie Loshaek 3 years
- Ken Linville 1 year
- Edward H. Lubin 1 year
- Mike Manchester 1 year
- Don Raether 1 year
- Julie Rush 1 year
- Kent Santelman 1 year
- Sharon Marie Wilcox 1 year

**Donations**

- $10 from Ken Linville
- $340 from Gordon MacLeod

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**Renewable Energy**

The California Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan’s main goals is to convert existing buildings to "zero net energy". The concept of "zero net energy" means to built or retrofit buildings in order to produce as much electricity as the buildings consumes by using a combination of energy regulations and roof mounted photovoltaic panels. According to the Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan, California will convert 25 percent of existing homes and commercial buildings to "zero net energy" by 2020. Also, new homes will be designed and built to achieve "zero net energy" from 2020 onward and new commercial building will be designed and built to achieve “zero net energy” from 2030 onwards. The Sierra Club is making it easy and affordable to power your home with clean solar energy power through an attractive program called "GO SOLAR, HELP THE PLANET ", which offers a no-obligation quote at sierraclub.org/homesolar. By installing solar panels with SUNGEVITY (the company that is working with the Sierra Club) you can save money on your electric bill and get a $1000.00 cash gift card from Sungevity. In addition, the Sierra Club also gets $750.00 from Sungevity to help support the club’s important programs.

Get a new power company: "THE SUN".

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**CONSERVATION**

by Virgil Popescu

**Conservation**

by Ron Bartell

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The Desert Sage 8 July-August 2013
Rabbit Peak (5,623’) and Villager Peak (5,756’)
February 16-17, 2013, by Greg Gerlach

John Fisanotti, Kelley Laxamana and I left Los Angeles early in the morning for the drive to the Villager and Rabbit Peaks trailhead. The trailhead is located on S22 about 14.8 miles from the junction of SR 86S and S22. We parked on the north side of the highway next to a highway call box.

From the parking area at about 1,000’ above sea level, the route is visible along the ridge that comes down from Villager Peak. We started hiking at 9:00 a.m. with full backpacks and about 6 quarts of water each along a use trail that starts at the parking area. We walked across the desert for about one mile before we reached and started up the ridge. For the most part, the route up the ridge is a well defined use trail up to about 4,800’ above sea level, where it becomes less distinct. We had lunch at 1:00 p.m. and reached the summit of Villager at 3:20 p.m., which is about 6.5 miles and 4,700’ of gain from the trailhead. The summit register box contained 6 register books inside which dated back to December of 1990. The last book was placed on December 14, 2007 and is about ¾ full. After signing the register book, we headed down the east side of the summit about 200’ and made camp in a very nice, flat area in a grove of trees.

The next morning, we started for Rabbit Peak at 6:25 a.m. As we descended from the top of Villager Peak, Rabbit peak was visible in a north, northwest direction as an obvious, rounded bump. We side hilled around the bumps along the ridge to avoid excessive elevation gains, but Kelley thought that the side hilling was a lot of extra work. We topped out on Rabbit Peak at 10:05 a.m., which is about 3.5 miles and 2,000’ of elevation gain from Villager Peak. The register box was located in a rocky outcrop and contained 3 books, which dates back to April of 1993 and the current register book dates back to March of 2003. On the way back, we stuck to the ducked use trail along the ridge, which is actually the best route choice. We left Rabbit at 10:35 a.m. and arrived back at our camp on Villager Peak at 1:20 p.m. We packed up our gear, started hiking, and reached the car at 6:00 p.m.

Trip statistics: 20.0 miles and about 8,100 feet of elevation gain.

(Continued on page 20)
Panamint Butte (6,584’) via Lemoigne Canyon
March 16th - 17th, 2013, by Brian Smith (photos by Greg Gerlach)

I had read about a backpacking route to Panamint Butte - avoiding the 5000ft climb from the head of Panamint Valley - in Ed Zdon’s Desert Summits book. Since I needed a second route on the peak and the description of the route made it sound quite attractive, Gloria Miladin, Greg Gerlach, Kelley Laxamana and myself decided to try it out. The hardest part seemed to be getting to the mouth of Lemoigne canyon by the 4WD road.

We met at the rest area/campground near the junction of the Wildrose and Towne Pass roads at 7.30am Saturday morning. The turnoff for the 4WD road is 3 miles closer to Stovepipe Wells and well signed. The road across the desert is indeed rough, but the four of us made it in Greg’s trusty 4WD truck. After about 4 miles, the road enters a deep wash and it then twists around very solid, large boulders. We parked to avoid hitting them and started hiking with full packs and a gallon of water each after 9am. It turns out the road is navigable for about another 0.7 miles with fewer boulders until one reaches an "End of the Road" sign. The route up the canyon is straightforward - there's only one way to go and the few side canyons branching off are much smaller than the main canyon. The terrain is mainly sand with occasional slick-rock sections and a few short, dry falls. It was a hot day, so we took our time with rest stops and water breaks. The canyon is narrow and windy with impressive cliff faces rising 2500ft above us.

After almost 6 miles, the canyon widens into a plateau dotted with Joshua Trees. The peak cannot be seen due to the low rolling hills on the plateau, but is southwest of the widening canyon and separate from its receding left wall. There is an opportunity to take a side wash heading west, but this should be avoided in favor of the second westward wash. This climbs slowly and the Joshua Trees become more frequent and much bigger. About 4pm, we picked a campsite among the trees below a steep slope to the south. We estimated we had hiked over 7 miles and about 2800ft. Climbing about 150ft above our camp, we were able to look across the plateau covered in Joshua Trees and see Panamint Butte for the first time. The summit was less than 2 miles and about 1400ft above our camp. There was a large cairn on rocks nearby, presumably to mark the spot to descend from the plateau down to camp in the wash. Obviously, we were not the first to choose this campsite. We settled into our camp, cooked dinner and watched the sun go down before sleeping under a star-filled sky.

Sunday morning, we were climbing up the slope again by 7.30am and headed straight across the plateau towards our mountain. The hiking was very pleasant and apart from crossing some shallow washes, very easy going. As we got close to the base, we selected the right hand ridge and hiked quickly up the slope, which was not steep. At the top of the ridge, we turned left, crossed a shallow saddle and reached the summit about 9am. We had great views to the snow-covered Sierra and could see where the Panamint...
Valley route came up to the summit area. After a snack break, we descended a ridge east of the one we ascended, which came down steeply to a gully between our original two ridge choices. We made good time crossing back over the plateau and spent some time admiring a huge, branched Joshua tree that looked more like an oak. We broke camp and set off down canyon at 10.30am. The descent went very quickly as the packs were lighter and the shallow gradient facilitated a fast pace. It was hotter than the day before, so we took rest stops and water breaks again, but returned to the truck before 3pm. Once again, Greg expertly drove the rough 4WD road back to the main road without incident. We all agreed with Ed Zdon that this was indeed a great alternate route for Panamint Butte.

South Potosi Mountain (8,192’), Potosi Mountain (8,514’) and Virgin Peak (8,071’)
May 10-12, 2013, by Greg Gerlach

Kelley Laxamana and I signed up for the DPS trip to Potosi Mountain and Virgin Peak led by Mat Kelliher and Jim Fleming several months ahead of the trip date. As the trip date got closer, we discovered one problem: Mother’s Day was on Sunday, May 12. Therefore, we decided to climb Potosi on Friday on our own and Virgin with the DPS so that we could be home in time for Mother’s Day.

In researching the route to Potosi, the DPS Guide lists two options (routes A and B) plus vaguely mentions a road in Sideline note 2 that goes up the ridge to the summit from the south. The note goes on to say that the road is accessible to “authorized maintenance personal”. I found several write-ups on Peakbagger.com of people who had climbed the peak from the south along the road who did not say anything about any access restrictions. Therefore, our route choice was set.

Kelley and I left Chino Hills early in the morning on Friday, May 10 for the drive to the Potosi trailhead. We exited Interstate 15 in Jean, Nevada, and headed towards Goodsprings. Kelley and I turned right onto the Goodsprings Bypass/Gravel Haul road at 5.7 miles from the interstate, turned right at the stop sign located at mile 7.6, turned left at mile 12.0 onto a good gravel road marked by a tire with “Potosi” painted on it, then stopped at the locked gate at mile 13.9.

Kelley and I put on our boots, hoisted our packs onto our backs and started hiking up the road at 10:55 am. We gained almost 2,000 vertical feet in only 1.65 miles up the road to a saddle located at about 7,400’ in elevation. The road is mostly paved to this point, probably because it’s very steep. We continued up the road, detouring up a side road to climb South Potosi Mountain along the way. After summiting and not finding a summit register, we dropped down the north side from the peak down a cat track to reconnect with the Potosi road. Kelley and I continued up the main road, then bypassed some communication buildings on the left side and climbed up a steep, rocky path along the side of some conduits to the top of the peak. We arrived on the top of Potosi at 2:15 and the GPS said 4.95 miles from the car. The summit register box included two books, each about ¼ full. We started back down the road at 2:30, and were greeted by 10 or so wild horses when we reached the car at 4:30. Afterword, Kelley and I drove to the Virgin Peak trailhead, which took about 4 hours and included a dinner stop in Las Vegas.
The next morning, we meet up with trip leaders Mat Kelliher and Jim Fleming and fellow trip participant Wasim Khan at the 2-wheel drive trailhead for Virgin Peak mentioned in the DPS Guide. We consolidated into Mat’s and my 4-wheel drive vehicles for the drive up the 4x road, but were only able to drive 8/10 of a mile before the road became impassable. After parking the vehicles, the group headed up the road at 7:20 am. Mat lead us up the road about 2.33 miles to 5,428’ in elevation, then turned left and the group made its way to the ridge. Once on the ridge, we walked through a burnt and charred Pinyon Pine forest that had an abundance of wildflowers, probably spurred on by last week’s rain. As we continued up the ridge, we left the fire damaged trees and weaved our way through a nice Pinyon Pine forest where the wildflowers became less abundant. The group passed the sub-ridge where the DPS route connects with the main ridge at about 6950’ in elevation, which was marked by two large ducts. We continued up the ridge, reaching the top at 12:00, a total distance from the car of about 5.8 miles. The route was mostly class 1 with some class 2 near the top. Also, the summit register book was placed on October 16, 2011, and only 8 pages have been filled with signatures. After lunch, the group started down at 12:40. Jim led us down the ridge to point 1775 meters, then down a sub-ridge to the road and finally to the vehicles, arriving at 4:15.

Jim, Mat and Wasim decided to climb Potosi via the road that Kelley and I had used, so the group drove to a flat area located just below the gate along the Potosi road, which took about 3 hours. Although our group consisted of only 5 people, we had the usual DPS potluck.

The next day, Sunday, Kelley and I headed for home while the rest of the group successfully climbed South Potosi Mountain and Potosi Mountain.

Photo credit correction: The photo of Ted Brasket on top of Three Finger Jack in the last issue of the Sage was actually taken by Terry Richard, not Neil Scott.
WHEELER PEAK, NEVADA (and touching on Ruby, Jefferson, Arc Dome)

Let’s saunter up the trail to Nevada’s grandest peak and look at the rocks. (Okay, okay, I know that DPS Boundary is the state summit [less than 100 feet higher] – but Boundary, as you know, is the north buttress to a higher peak [Montgomery] across a col in California. Does Boundary have glacial lakes, a glacier, lush forests, caverns, and its own national park?)

Wheeler and the Snake Range forms one of the most massive of the north-south-trending block-faulted mountain ranges which essentially define the geography and character of almost all of Nevada – fault-bounded horst mountain blocks and linear graben valleys one after another from Bishop to Provo. (For some reason, early geologists used German words to describe these features.) A famous quote by an old-time geologist (whose name escapes me) commented that a shaded-relief map of the state “looks like an army of caterpillars crawling north out of Mexico”. The exceptional 13,000-foot height of Wheeler is part of a broader pattern across the Great Basin of high country in the center of the geologic province and lower elevations on its west and east margins – the Sierra and Wasatch, respectively. Just to the north-northeast of the Snake Range is the Deep Creek Range in extreme western Utah, with peaks over 12,000 feet. The next range northwest of the Snakes is the Schell Creek, which rises to almost 11,900 feet; and directly west in central Nevada are the Toiyabes and Toquimas, which almost touch 12,000 feet in Mt. Jefferson. Not only are the peaks higher in the middle section, but the valley floors are higher, 5000-6000 feet. While there are some smaller dry lakes in the central region, the really big dry or salt lakes are at the western and eastern edges of the Great Basin, the lowest areas where the interior drainage would mostly end up. Think Owens Lake, the Carson Sink, Pyramid Lake, Sevier Lake, and the daddy of ‘em all, the Great Salt Lake. (Yes, there’s high Charleston to the south, and by far the highest terrain in the Great Basin is the White Mountains near the western margin – but we’re going for the big megathought picture.)

One theory seems to best explain this topography and physiography – you guessed it, it’s our old friends the late great overridden Farallon (East Pacific) plate and its attendant overridden mid-ocean rise whose ghost is very likely still lurking beneath the southwestern part (our part) of the North American continental plate. As I wrote in the last issue (Muddy Peak), the Farallon Plate apparently went “flat” and dragged along the bottom of the North American plate all the way to the modern Southern Rockies before detaching itself and slowly sinking to molten oblivion in the mantle. Also, the Rise itself most surely did not go gently under the continental plate. This caused a long-lasting regime of extreme compressional tectonics during the whole 190 or so million years of the Mesozoic (Age of Dinosaurs). But things changed radically shortly after the start of the Tertiary period (Age of Mammals) +/- 60 million years ago, after the Farallon plate broke loose and the overridden Rise was at least partially squelched. (North America still locked in combat with the Pacific seafloor plates, of course, but now the relative motion in our neck of the woods is accommodated by lateral strike-slip along the San Andreas – a transition WAY too complicated to go into here.)

So, relatively quickly in geological terms, the southwestern U.S. found itself in a radically different tectonic environment. The Big Squeeze was gone! Replaced by the Big Stretch as all this built-up compression relaxed. This

(Continued on page 24)
thinned and fractured the crust, especially in places like Nevada which had a relatively weak non-cratonal crust (See Muddy Peak writeup.) And, the underside of North America, insulated from the full heat of the Earth’s depths for eons by the relatively cool top of the Farallon plate, suddenly was exposed to the Hadean heat rising from the Earth’s center. Probably exacerbating these effects in the Southwest, particularly Nevada, was the ghost of the East Pacific Rise, still pumping up extra heat from the mantle. The result? Faulting on an enormous scale, with some blocks rising and some falling. As the compression had been from the west, so the relaxation expanded towards the west – which explains the predominantly north-south faulting and mountain block orientation. (Megathought moment: Does the ghost of the Rise underlie, and explain, the central highest part of the Great Basin? Is it still trying to be a spreading zone underneath the North American plate, which would add to the crustal extension?) All this heating applied to a thinned, cracked crust brought on a cataclysm of violent volcanic activity in central Nevada, western and central Utah, (Tushar Mountain volcanic field), western New Mexico (Mogollon volcanic field), etc. The volcanism even drilled through places underlain by the tough old craton – consider the enormous (Tertiary) San Juan volcanic field of southwest Colorado, many cubic miles of volcanics capped by perhaps Earth’s largest supervolcano explosion in the (relatively) recent geologic record. Even the (Miocene) Conejo Volcanics that underlie the Conejo Grade on 101 between Camarillo and Thousand Oaks are probably part of this big picture. The Southwest was literally hell on Earth at times in the Tertiary Period, and we should be glad there’s nothing remotely like that going on anywhere on Earth today.

Focusing in on the Snake Range, the “big picture” in the Wheeler Peak area is that of a huge block of crust uplifted on a bounding fault on its western side and tilted to the east in an exact mirror image of the Sierra. The stratigraphic big picture is pretty simple; the Wheeler area is one extremely thick tilted section of Cambrian sedimentary rock, with the classic three-part Cambrian rock suite; sandstone on the bottom, shale in the middle, and limestone on top. The basal sandstone represents the top of the “Great Unconformity”, one of the defining moments in Earth history, the line of demarcation between the classic worldwide rock sequence we all memorized in Geology 101 (Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian….all the way to Recent) and the much more ancient and shadowy Precambrian. The end of the Precambrian seems to have been a quiet time of ancient crystalline cratonic continental cores eroded fairly flat, so not much was going on in terms of erosion or deposition; Precambrian sedimentary rocks certainly occur all around the planet, sometimes in impressive quantity (that’s what the heroic peaks of Glacier National Park are mostly made of), but are still much less common than the “Geology 101” sequence. For some reason lost in time, at the beginning of the Cambrian there was a widespread advance of relatively shallow continental seas across these cratons, laying down the three-part sequence as the seas deepened. First – and forming the Great Unconformity – were the sand beaches of the advancing seas, often with a pebbly layer at the very bottom of debris from the drowning cratons. This forms the hard tough Prospect Moutain quartzite, unusually thick in this area, which forms the mass of Wheeler itself. (Nevada has had a rough life geologically since these rocks were laid down, so these rocks have been somewhat “cooked”, or mildly metamorphosed… thus quartzite, not sandstone. As the seas deepened, there would be less sand deposited at a
given spot, and more silt and clay – now the Pioche shale (more properly phyllite, the lowest-grade metamorphic version of shale). As the sea deepened more and the shore advanced yet further from us onto the craton, there would be little terrestrial debris and most all of what accumulated on the bottom would be the tiny shells of plankton – making up the Pole Canyon limestone, home of the Lehman Caves. This same sequence is found in the Grand Canyon (Tapeats sand, Bright Angel shale, Muav limestone), Wyoming (Flathead sandstone, Wolsey shale, Meagher limestone) and all the way east to Wisconsin where the basal Cambrian sand forms the Wisconsin Dells, a rare Midwest rock-climbing area. It is believed that all the new aquatic environments – from the intertidal zone to deeper water - created by this marine invasion is as good an explanation as any for the “Cambrian explosion” of shelled creatures which (geologically speaking) quickly appeared in the rock record and became the direct ancestors of modern animal life.

Really, the stratigraphy is perfect for maximum scenery...tough resistant quartzite to hold up such a high peak, and down below limestone where drainage from above, made mildly acidic from humic acids from the dense forest above, dissolved out the grandest caves in the Great Basin.

Finally, let’s look at the one thing Wheeler boasts that no other DPS peak can – its very own glacier. There has to be a “perfect storm” of circumstances to generate a modern glacier in Nevada. First, of course, is Wheeler’s great height, higher than anything else for hundreds of miles, so on general principles it will be colder and get more snow than anything else around; this is shown by the extensive Ice Age glacial carving on the east side of the range. Given enough snow, the range is actually perfectly built to generate glaciers on its less steep eastern slope. Remember Wheeler’s appearance as you approach from the west? It’s a steep unglaciated slope from top to bottom. There was simply no place for snow to accumulate here and form a glacier; moreover, prevailing westerlies would tend to blow snow east over the crest, where the broader slope was a perfect place for snow to accumulate and form Ice Age glaciers. Fittingly, the grandest of these formed on the northeast side of Wheeler, and carved a spectacular trench with a magnificent vertical headwall – Wheeler’s northeast face. And it’s at the base of this headwall that the little modern glacier lives, fed by the snow blowing off the peak and sheltered from the sun by the headwall. This glacier probably is not a remnant of the valley glacier from the Ice Age that carved its home, but, like the other “pocket glaciers” of the Sierra and the Colorado Rockies, is a newcomer, dating from the “Little Ice Age” which froze Europe from about 1500 to 1800, peaking around 1700. There’s a “gray area” between a full glacier and a permanent snowfield; the defining character of a glacier is that it moves downhill, and while I’ve never hiked to “Wheeler Glacier” (despite doing the peak twice), a photo I saw while researching this article shows a clearly defined bergschrund crevasse; good enough for me. The Wheeler Peak 7-1/2 minute topo shows the glacier to be about 900-1000 feet long. A sizeable rock glacier continues down the valley from the end of the ice. There’s a difference of opinion on rock glaciers; some geologists think that at the core of a rock glacier is an ice glacier choked with talus, while others think the unquestioned downward motion of these things is mostly from freeze-thaw (expansion and shrinking) cycles of ice interstitial to the subsurface talus chunks.

Show me another official Peak List that has native palm trees, Arctic tundra, and a glacier!
DESERT BOOKS

SUMMER FICTION, 2013

Last December, the Los Angeles Times' book critic, David L. Ulin, published an article, "Sifting and shaping a desert reading list." Desert book aficionado that I am, I was intrigued.

Ulin's recommendations included the Land of Little Rain by Mary Austin, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas by Hunter Thompson, and Desert America (mostly concerning New Mexico) by Ruben Martinez, all non-fictional, plus the excellent Gods Without Men, a fictional work by Hari Kunzru, a volume which was reviewed in the Sept/Dec 2012 issue of Desert Sage.

Three of Ulin's recommendations, however, were works of fiction new to me: The Sun Worshippers, by A.S. Fleischman; Other Resort Cities, by Tod Goldberg; and Ask the Dust, by John Fante.

I became intent on securing and reading copies. The results were mixed.

THE SUN WORSHIPPERS (2012), A. S. Fleischman

A.S. (Sid) Fleischman, who died in 2010 at the age of 90, was the author of 12 novels, 43 books for children (including the Newberry Award-winning, The Whipping Boy), 6 screenplays, and 8 volumes on magic.

As a teen-ager, Fleischman had aspirations of becoming a professional magician. At 17, while still in high school in San Diego, he wrote a short book describing his original sleight-of-hand tricks which was published by a magic company in Michigan. When the book with his name on it arrived in his mailbox, Fleischman notes, "It impressed the hell out of me." Later, while performing magic tricks in Vaudeville, he began reading O. Henry and de Maupassant, and attempted to write trick-ending short stories.

In an interview in Paperback Parade published in January 2001, Fleischman noted that during World War II, he "went into the Navy a magician and came out, four years later, a writer." Indeed, during active service he sold a story to Liberty magazine, a popular weekly of those days, for a "bountiful" $300. He was on his way to becoming a serious author.

In the 1960s, one of the last novels Fleischman wrote for adults was The Sun Worshippers which, for some reason, his agent could not get published. Fleischman's son, Paul, later wrote, "My father had put a lot of effort into the story and was proud of the result; the experience might have helped him toward writing for children. It was, to my knowledge, his only novel not to appear in print."

Well, in 2012 Stark House at last published The Sun Worshippers, so Fleischman's record is now unblemished.

The Sun Worshippers opens in a spring month in the early 1950s as the former Pulitzer Prize winning newsman, Bill Gamage, now a Hollywood screenwriter, is on his way to Thebes, California, a date-growing community in the Coachella Valley. At loose ends, and short of money, Gamage's latest job is to write a biography of Col. Jesse Martinka, 74, a pioneer in desert agriculture, currently the developer of a new residential resort. Anchored by a Gizeh-like pyramid, which will "reach a height of 455 feet, exceeding by some four feet the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt...the tomb will cover

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"12 square acres," the new community will change Thebes forever.

Employing a 'Chandleresque' style, Fleischman’s protagonist is a complex, sometimes tough, sometimes sentimental, man. Endowed with brains, a quick wit, and a taste for beautiful women, Gamage also has a need to be ethically satisfied with any job he takes on.

The cast of characters that Gamage confronts upon his arrival include Frank, Col. Martinka’s son and co-developer of the new development; Conny, a local stenographer, "small and slim, but tough as wire..(with eyes) violet, and dark lashes that seemed to open and shut on a smile she wasn't making public;" and Frank's wife, Ginny, "An ash blonde (whose) tanned shoulders were thrust up through a summery green dress and (who) held her head at a slight tilt like a Modigliani, beauty abhoring a straight line. Something inside Gamage "gave a sudden, violent lurch" when he suddenly realized that Ginny was the woman whom he had met, loved and lost while in Genoa five years earlier.

Other characters include 'BeJesus' John Amador, the owner, operator, and lone employee of the Thebes Weekly Sunset, the "Scourge of the Martinkas, (a man who claims) if Colonel Martinka gets to heaven he'll try to subdivide the Green Pastures", and Greta 'Madam' Martinka, the Colonel's wife, a member of the Patriotic Daughters, an organization whose symbol is a broom and whose aim is to "sweep out the Jews and maybe a few Catholics and Negroes so as not to appear unduly biased."

Many of Fleischman's descriptions are laudable: "Night in (Thebes) was a small reprieve from the fires of the day. Crop hands gathered with their cigarettes along the neon-lit arcades and insects knocked along the shop windows."

"The hotel room bored him. The small hum of the fan was getting on his nerves. From the window he looked down on the deserted plaza with its dusty clump of palms. He could see the roofing over the pink arcade below with the black tar blistering and bubbling in the heat. The days were getting hotter, if that were possible, and the desert outside of town seemed rendered of color."

Fleischman's dialogues are also excellent: "Frank's not so bad,' Conny said, 'if you don't get to know him.'"

Or, as BeJesus John explains the Thebes Weekly Sunset to Gamage: "This isn't a newspaper, anyway. It's a charitable institution. If I'd had any brains when I was your age, I'd have gone into something with a future, like chimney-sweeping. Folks look up to a good chimney-sweep. But I didn't have the education for it, so I ended up running a newspaper. No future. None at all."

The Sun Worshippers is a good read; I recommend it highly. As mentioned, Stark House Press, in 2012, while finally publishing Fleischman's book, combined it with his only western, Yellowleg, yet another good story. The double volume is available from Amazon.com for $19.95.

OTHER RESORT CITIES (2009), Tod Goldberg

Tod Goldberg was born, raised, and educated in Palm Springs (P.S. High School, class of '89). First attending California State University, Northridge, he graduated with a master's degree in creative writing from Bennington College in 2009. Goldberg is the brother of the novelist, screenwriter and producer Lee Goldberg, as well as the nephew of true crime author and novelist Burl Barer. He lives in La Quinta, California with his wife, Wendy Duren, also a writer. In 2005, Goldberg was named Teacher of the Year by the students at the UCLA Extension program, where he taught creative writing. Currently he is the administrative director of the MFA creative writing program at University of California-Riverside's Palm Desert, California, campus. In other words, his creds as a writer are formidable.

Other Resort Cities is a collection of ten previously published short stories, the majority of which are set in desert areas--the Coachella Valley,
Las Vegas and the Greater Phoenix area. The fact is, however, that the desert plays an important role in only one of Goldberg’s tales. Indeed, the balance of the stories could have been set in Anytown, USA.

The first story, "The Salt," however, involves the fluctuating water levels of the Salton Sea, so a desert setting is necessary. The protagonist, Morris, in his mid-seventies, is a retired security officer who now lives in Indian Wells with his wife of seven months, Kim. Morris met Kim, a well-to-do widow, a little over a year ago at a cancer treatment center in Palm Springs where both were undergoing chemotherapy. Now, while both are making the best of remission, Morris has learned that he is also suffering the first signs of dementia.

Reading the morning newspaper on the morning of which the story opens, Morris learns that a previously buried body has been found awash in the Salton Sea. He drives down the north shore to determine whether it might have been that of his first wife Katherine—the woman he still loves—who was legally buried near the shore more than forty years ago. Because the sea level first rose and is now receding, several bodies that were buried long ago, including those of local Indians, have been recently found floating in the "fetid" sea.

The body wasn’t Katherine’s, however, and when Morris returns to Indian Wells that evening, with Kim at his side, he realizes, in a moment of lucid epiphany, "that this is the memory I want to live out the rest of my years with. A moment of silent perfection when I knew, finally knew, that I’d found a kind of contentment with who I was, who I’d been and what I’d tried so desperately to forget. I’m not surprised, then, when a strong gust of wind picks up from the east and I make out the faint scent of the Salton Sea, pungent and lost and so far, far away."

Goldberg’s other stories explore the human propensity to avoid problems by either self-deception or by solving them with violence (implied only, in Goldberg’s tales). Plots include a man who builds a Starbucks franchise in his gated development home so he’ll have the barista with whom to converse, an Italian Chicago gangster who assumes the mantle of a Las Vegas rabbi in order to escape mob retribution, and a Las Vegas cocktail waitress who decides to adopt a 12 year-old Russian orphan girl in order to build a real family in town of fantasy.

Although offering a fascinating mixture of flawed personalities, Other Resort Cities will probably disappoint any reader looking for a helping of desert ambiance.

ASK FOR THE DUST (1939), John Fante

I once knew a travel writer who shunned the word ‘picturesque.’ He claimed the word was a weak substitute for a better and more interesting description. I also knew a metallurgist who thought that the word ‘very’ was uninspired and overused. His position was that if you feel the need to use very, substitute ‘damn’ and, if it still makes sense, go ahead and use very. I have the same feeling about the word ‘evocative.’ It’s a weak stand-in for a better description.

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John Fante's 1939 novel, Ask for the Dust, however, is remarkably evocative of both a time and a place--Los Angeles in the 1930s. And although I was too young to be aware of the hard scrabble circumstances of the era, my parents and my maternal grandparents were living in Southern California at the time, and the stories they told of life during those depression years made an early and lasting impression on me.

Fante's protagonist, Arturo Bandini, is a young writer, just arrived from Boulder, CO, now barely existing in a cheap hotel on Bunker Hill in central Los Angeles. He has no money to pay his rent, he's living on oranges bought at a Japanese market for five cents a dozen, and he has writer's block. As he wanders the streets of downtown Los Angeles looking for inspiration, he notes: "Sand from the Mojave had blown across the city. Tiny brown grains of sand clung to my fingertips whenever I touched anything, and when I got back to my room I found the mechanism of my new typewriter glutted with sand. When I took off my clothes it fell like powder to the floor. It was even between the sheets of my bed. Lying in the darkness, the red light from the St. Paul Hotel flashing on and off across my bed was bluish now, a ghastly color jumping into the room and out again."

At a bar a few days later, Bandini meets a waitress, Camilla Lopez, to whom he is both attracted and repelled. As the complicated love-hate relationship moves forward, Bandini's story of his liaison with another woman, including being in Long Beach during a devastating earthquake (no doubt based on the actual 1933 event), is purchased for publication making Bandini feel a rich man.

Bandini's resolution in regard to Camilla comes in one of the book's few desert scenes, when he attempts to follow the marijuana-dazed woman into the wilds of the Mojave Desert. After hours of futile searching, he returns to his car, takes a copy of his newly-published book, and inscribes it: 'To Camilla, with love, Arturo.' With all his might, he then throws it in the direction in which the woman's footsteps led..

"Then I got into the car, started the engine and drove back to Los Angeles."

John Fante (1909-1983) wrote two additional Bandini novels, many short stories and several screen plays (he was co-author of 1962's Walk on the Wild Side). His stylistic prose was admired and often copied by many Southern California writers of the time.

Ask the Dust is a powerful story, one that left me in awe of Fante's considerable writing skills but also a bit perturbed. It's not a book I'd recommended for desert purists (some of his desert descriptions are flawed), but I'd give it two thumbs up to anyone looking for an excellent example of 1930's Southern California realistic fiction.
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