The Desert Sage

OUR 73RD SEASON

JULY-AUGUST 2014

ISSUE NO. 352

http://angeles.sierraclub.org/dps/
Hola! From out of the past come the doddering feet of the mighty…once Secretary, now your new DPS Management Committee Chair, Paul Cooley.

Responding to the call from Jim Fleming, I agreed to once again be a member of the committee and promptly received a message asking if I wanted to be an officer. Next thing I knew…

Among the good things: I’m currently the West Los Angeles delegate to the Chapter Executive Committee, and also secretary of that august body, so DPS has an (informal) representative there as well. And yes, I’ve been on a few desert peaks, though mostly with the Bruin Mountaineers, in the 1950s. The last successful climb with the DPS was to the Whipple Mountains, four or five years ago. In the past I have done Rabbit Peak from the Salton Sea side, in a 24 hour assault with two friends, and I’ve climbed El Picacho del Diablo a few times: six successful climbs, out of eight tries, also many years back…all from the east side. Glass Mountain, Tin, Dry, Mount Inyo, Providence, Clark, and a few others – last time I noticed, I was one short of an emblem. Perhaps I’ll try for that. Last but not least, my father was a surveyor for one of the power lines crossing the desert from what was then Boulder Dam to Los Angeles, so perhaps my love of the desert is inherited.

I look forward to working with the rest of the Management Committee for the upcoming year and encourage all of you out there to think about trips you’d like to lead or events you would like to plan. Any ideas for recruiting new members would be welcome as well. Please contact me, or other committee members, with your thoughts.

Here’s to a wonderful season, safe climbing, and good companionship.
# DESERT PEAKS SECTION LEADERSHIP, 2014 - 2015 SEASON

## Elected Positions

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<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Paul Cooley</td>
<td>4061 Van Buren Place, Culver City, CA 90232</td>
<td>(310) 837-4022</td>
<td><a href="mailto:paul.r.cooley@aero.org">paul.r.cooley@aero.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Chair / Outings / Safety</td>
<td>Brian Smith</td>
<td>2306 Walnut Avenue, Venice, CA 90291</td>
<td>(818) 898-2844</td>
<td><a href="mailto:brian.s.smith133@gmail.com">brian.s.smith133@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Jim Fleming</td>
<td>538 Yarrow Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-7352</td>
<td>(805) 405-1726</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jimf333@att.net">jimf333@att.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program / Banquet</td>
<td>Gloria Miladin</td>
<td>11946 Downey Avenue, Downey, CA 90242</td>
<td>(562) 861-2550</td>
<td><a href="mailto:miladingloria@yahoo.com">miladingloria@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Pat Arredondo</td>
<td>13409 Stanbridge Ave, Bellflower, CA 90706-2341</td>
<td>(562) 867-6894</td>
<td><a href="mailto:paarredo@verizon.net">paarredo@verizon.net</a></td>
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## Appointed Positions

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<tr>
<td>Archives</td>
<td>Barbara Reber</td>
<td>PO Box 1911, Newport Beach, CA 92659-0911</td>
<td>(949) 640-7821</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Chair</td>
<td>Virgil Popescu</td>
<td>9751 Amanita Ave, Tujunga, CA 91042-2914</td>
<td>(818) 951-3251</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gillypope@ca.rr.com">gillypope@ca.rr.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidebook Editor</td>
<td>Jim Morehouse</td>
<td>3272 River Glorious Lane, Las Vegas, NV 89135-2123</td>
<td>(702) 528-3712</td>
<td><a href="mailto:desertpeakssection@gmail.com">desertpeakssection@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maier</td>
<td>Elaine Baldwin</td>
<td>3760 Ruthbar Drive, Hawthorne, CA 90250-8473</td>
<td>(310) 675-4120</td>
<td><a href="mailto:DWBaldwin@aol.com">DWBaldwin@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Records (Registers)</td>
<td>Daryn Dodge</td>
<td>2618 Kline Ct, Davis, CA 95618-7668</td>
<td>(530) 753-1095</td>
<td><a href="mailto:daryn.dodge@oeoha.ca.gov">daryn.dodge@oeoha.ca.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountaineering Committee Chair</td>
<td>Brian Smith</td>
<td>2306 Walnut Avenue, Venice, CA 90291</td>
<td>(818) 898-2844</td>
<td><a href="mailto:brian.s.smith133@gmail.com">brian.s.smith133@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountaineering Committee</td>
<td>Ron Bartell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:tina@bowmandesigngroup.com">tina@bowmandesigngroup.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter Editor (SAGE)</td>
<td>Greg Gerlach</td>
<td>23933 Via Astuto, Murrieta, CA 92562</td>
<td>(626) 484-2897</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gregrg1955@verizon.net">gregrg1955@verizon.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webmaster</td>
<td>Kathy Rich</td>
<td>2043 Berkshire Avenue, South Pasadena, CA 91030</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Kathrynarich@gmail.com">Kathrynarich@gmail.com</a></td>
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## Cover Photo Credit

The photo is of Baboquivari Peak, which is a listed DPS Peak, and was taken by Tommey Joh on April 6, 2014 from Baboquivari Campground.

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
JULY 2014 — NOVEMBER 2014

♦ SEPTEMBER 12-14  FRI-SUN  DPS
I: Arc Dome (11,773’) and Mount Jefferson (11,941’): Join us for a fall climb of these two high altitude Nevada Peaks. Friday we will climb Arc Dome (4,600’ gain, 12 miles). That night we will camp at Columbine Campground at the trailhead and Saturday drive to the Jefferson trailhead, possibly doing some sightseeing at the Berlin Ichthyosaur State Park and Ghost town along the way, and enjoying a leisurely potluck that night. Sunday we will get an early start for climbing Jefferson (2,400’ gain, 4 miles) from the 4 wheel drive parking spot. There are only about 2 miles of 4 wheel drive road, and we can carpool if necessary. Co-leaders: Dave Perkins and Jim Fleming. Email if interested to Ann Perkins (ann.perkins@csun.edu).

♦ SEPTEMBER 27-28  SAT-SUN  DPS,HPS
I: Charleston Peak (11,915’) and Mummy Mountain (11,528’): Join us on this very strenuous, moderately paced, early autumn trip up into the Spring Mountains of Nevada to climb two of the State’s most alluring peaks. Saturday we’ll take the South Loop trail out of Kyle Canyon for a moderately paced, but very strenuous hike on trail to Charleston Peak and return for a day’s total of 18 miles and 4,300’ of gain. Saturday night we’ll relax around the campfire and enjoy a traditional DPS potluck at a nearby campground. Sunday we’ll start out on the North Lake trail out of Kyle Canyon and then travel cross country at a moderate pace over very rugged class 2 terrain to the summit of Mummy Mountain and then return the way we came in for a day’s total of 10 miles and 3,700’ of gain. We’ve reserved a local campground for both Friday and Saturday nights; campground fees will be split among those of us who will be using it. This is a DPS Outing co-sponsored by HPS. Email Mat Kelliher at mkelliher@att.net with contact info, recent conditioning and experience for trip status and details. Leaders: Mat Kelliher and Bill Simpson.

♦ NOVEMBER 1-2  SAT-SUN  DPS
Chili Cook-off: The Chili Cook-off is scheduled for November 1-2, so save the date. The venue will be in/around the Death Valley area. More information will be forthcoming in a future issue of the Sage and on the section’s website. Hosts: Julie Rush (julierush@roadrunner.com) and Jan Brahms (janbee@reneric.com).

♦ NOVEMBER 8-9  SAT-SUN  DPS,HPS
I: New York Butte (10,668’), Pleasant Point (9,690’), Cerro Gordo Peak (9,188’): Join us for a pleasant autumn weekend in the southern Inyo Mountains as we scale a couple of classic DPS peaks as well as a bonus trip up to the summit of one of the Great Basin Peaks Section peaks. Saturday we’ll start out from Long John Canyon near Lone Pine, CA to ascend the long and steep southwestern ridge of New York Butte to its summit and return for a very strenuous day’s total of 8.3 round trip miles with 6,200’ of gain. Saturday night we’ll camp at our cars in Long John Canyon and enjoy a traditional and festive DPS Potluck Happy Hour. Sunday we’ll drive over to the eastern side of Owens Lake and head up into the Inyo Mountains. From our trailhead in the Cerro Gordo Ghost Town, we’ll first head north up the southern ridge crest to Pleasant Point and return for a total of 6.0 round trip miles and 1,850’ of gain. Then we’ll head south to hike up an old mining road to the summit of Cerro Gordo Peak and return for a total of 2.8 round trip miles with 1,150’ of gain. This is a DPS Outing co-sponsored by HPS. Email Mat Kelliher at mkelliher@att.net with contact information, recent conditioning and experience for trip status and details. Leaders: Mat Kelliher and Bill Simpson.

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 constitute approval by the State of California.
The Desert Sage 5 July-August 2014

Membership Summary

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Sustaining Renewals

- Bob Henderson 1 year
- Dave & Ann Perkins 2 years

Renewals

- Pat Arredondo 1 year
- Randy & Joyce Bernard 1 year
- Fred & Marianna Camphausen 1 year
- Rudy Fleck 1 year
- Jay Frederking 2 years
- Mat Kelliher & Tanya Roton 1 year
- Sandy Lara 3 years
- Igor & Suzanne Mamedalin 1 year
- Laura Newman 1 year
- Don Raether 1 year
- Anne K. Rolls 2 years
- Julie Rush 2 years
- Sharon Marie Wilcox 1 year

Activity Report

Achievements

List Finish

#165 Michael Gosnell 5/11/14 Virgin Pk

Explorer

#10 Brian Smith 4/26/14 Rabbit Pk

Michael Gosnell on top of his final Desert Peaks Section peak, Virgin, as Doug Mantle looks on. Michael finished the list on May 11, 2014 and is list finisher number 165.
Greetings, fellow desert-o-ephiles!

I don't need to tell you how hot it is out there. I'm sure you already know. Unseasonally hot weather hit the desert in April and put most of the low desert peaks out of reach.

I was anxious to do Rabbit by a second, explorer route (as opposed to the regular routes via Villager and per Route B of the guide) and managed to sneak into the Coachella Valley during the one weekend of cooler weather (and rain) in April. See my article in this issue with detailed descriptions of the trailhead approach and route up the east ridge. A week later, it was not so cool climbing Martinez by the gully to the left of the standard route. Not recommended and very steep, but you do come out on the east side of the summit instead of the west and get a different perspective.

As you can see in this issue, our autumn program for climbs is under way (thanks, Mat, Bill, Dave and Jim). The exploration theme seems to have caught on as one of the trips is a route up New York Butte from the base, instead of driving from Cerro Gordo or up the Swansea Grade. Hopefully, some of you will try it out. I encourage all our leaders to think about trips for the September - December period and start submitting them now so we can have a full and rewarding program for our membership. Meanwhile, enjoy the summer visiting our higher peaks in the White, Inyo and Nevada ranges. Some of you will also have climbed Glass as part of the June 7 List Finishing extravaganza. As for me, I'll be trying a route on Wheeler (by climbing Jeff Davis) that I got from the "Off the Beaten Path" section of our website (/otbp). This rarely visited part of our archive has a number of interesting ideas for climbing desert peaks not on our list. Check it out.

See you out there!

Outings Chair
by Brian Smith

TREASURER’S REPORT
by Pat Arredondo

DPS Account Summary from January 1, 2014 to May 31, 2014

INCOME
Banquet Book Sales $54.00
Banquet Silent Auction $172.00
Banquet Ticket Sales $2,285.00
Merchandise $167.00
Subscriptions $1,190.00
TOTAL INCOME $3,868.00

EXPENSES
Banquet Award $16.35
Banquet Payment $2,233.13
Office Supplies $42.49
Sage Mailing $616.44
Sage Printing $302.68
Sales Tax $25.84
TOTAL EXPENSES $3,236.93

CHECK BALANCE (05/31/14) $3,865.07
SAVINGS BALANCE (05/31/14) $501.10
TOTAL BALANCE (05/31/14) $4,366.17

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

Please send road and climbing route updates to the DPS Road and Peak Guide Editor, Jim Morehouse, at desertpeakssection@gmail.com. Jim is working on a new Version 6 of the Guide, so be sure and send him a quick email after climbing a peak with suggested updates to the Guide while the information is still fresh in your mind. The DPS and Jim also welcomes volunteers to join the DPS Road and Peak Guide Committee to assist with updating the current Guide. Please contact Jim via email for further information.
Mount Siegel (9,450’), Oreana Peak (9,309’),
Galena Peak (9,418’) and Middle Sister (10,859’)
By Debbie Bulger
April 25 - April 28, 2014

With snow predicted, Richard Stover's and my spring trip to the Pine Nut Mountains in Nevada proved to be more of a winter experience. Our 4 wheel drive truck made it to a fine campsite at about 6,800 feet, 5.2 miles up Red Canyon Road from the intersection with Day Road.

Our plan was to climb Oreana Peak on the first day, Mt. Siegel and Galena Peak on the second day, and Middle Sister on the third day. The routes are mostly on rocky, off-road vehicle roads in expansive sagebrush country. As we went to bed, snow flurries were starting to fly, and the air temperature was dropping rapidly.

At sunrise the wind was starting to pick up, and there was no snow accumulation yet. We started up the road full of high spirits since it was our 22nd wedding anniversary. As we trudged up the road, the wind increased until it reached an estimated 50 mph by the time we achieved the summit of Oreana Peak. Mount Siegel and Galena were no longer visible to the north. My fingers, already somewhat compromised by Raynaud's phenomenon, started hurting so much I was moaning in pain. The furious wind raced through our clothing despite our donning ski gloves and rain pants. We headed back to camp. However, even in our misery we took delight in watching the snow swirl in fantastic patterns: up and around, sometimes sideways before the gale. That evening we celebrated 22 years of sharing fun times like these with roasted Peeps S'mores around the campfire. Oreana Peak was 6.4 miles round trip with 2,500 feet of elevation gain.

The next day we were at it again. Our wind-up weather radio had predicted the storm would pass by 11:00 a.m., so we lingered in camp until 8:00 a.m. figuring the worst would be over by the time we reached Mount Siegel and Galena Peak. The lovely flowers we had seen the day before struggled to hold their heads up beneath their new burden of snow. The winds on the summits were still strong. Near the top of Mount Siegel my clip-on sunglasses were ripped

(Continued on page 8)
off my face and blown 20 feet away by a gust. The new-fallen snow revealed the comings and goings of coyote, hare, mouse or vole, and bobcat. Another upside of the weather was the fact we had the landscape all to ourselves. No dirt bikes, no ATVs, just cold silence. Our Mount Siegel and Galena Peak loop was 11 miles round trip with 3,335 feet of gain. To watch Debbie approach the summit of Mt. Siegel, visit http://youtu.be/8T8nMO4ZENk.

As the weather gradually improved, the next morning we drove to the trailhead for Middle Sister off Risue Road. I was looking forward to our April 28 climb of Middle Sister where there is another boundary monument built by Von Schmidt as he surveyed the California/Nevada border in 1873. We have been visiting these historic rock cairns since we first became aware of their existence on Wahguyhe Peak in 2011. With the much-improved weather, we enjoyed a leisurely climb of Middle Sister including a short pitch of snow near the summit. On the way we observed a Townsend's Solitaire, Chipping Sparrows, and Mountain Chickadees among other birds. Middle Sister was 7.6 miles round trip with 3,300 feet of gain.

Ibex Peak (4,751’), Saddle Peak Hills Wilderness Highpoint (2,280’) and Noon Peak (4,237’)
Leaders: Daryn Dodge and Kathy Rich
March 29th-30th, 2014

This was our second scheduled Desert Wilderness High Points trip in six months – in part to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act. This time we visited the area just south of Death Valley National Park where three Wilderness Areas are located. The plan was to bag the Wilderness Highpoints: Ibex Peak, the high point of the Ibex Mountains Wilderness, “Noon” Peak, the highpoint of the South Nopah Range Wilderness, and lastly the unnamed high point in the tiny Saddle Peak Hills Wilderness. Leaders and participants also climbed
TRIP REPORTS - continued...

(Continued from page 8)

several other peaks in the area before/after the scheduled DPS trip, including Epaulet Peak, Sheephead Mountain, Salsberry Peak, Tecopa Peak and Rhodes Hill, most very worthwhile climbs.

Most of the group (Terry Flood, Henry Arnebold, Corrine and Bill Livingston), including the leaders, arrived at the trailhead for Ibex Peak on Friday evening. This trailhead is only a few miles from Salsberry Pass inside Death Valley National Park. It was a beautiful starry night and there were ample places to camp just beyond the boundary markers barring further vehicle travel up an old dirt mining road. Barbee and Larry Tidball arrived early on Saturday morning. After going through the usual formalities, we set off up the old road towards the peak, going right at a fork and dropping into a wash after roughly a mile. We headed up the wash taking the most prominent fork at several junctions in the wash. The old road then left the wash and went over a saddle. Here we turned left following a ridge to the summit. The desert wildflowers were in full swing and we stopped many times for Barbee to identify the numerous wildflowers for us. A favorite was the Desert Five-Spot. The summit afforded many good views of the southern Death Valley area, and we were happy to find one of the classic Gordon Macleod/Barbara Lilley registers (this one from 1985) that one can still find on many of the lesser known desert peaks in the southern U.S. The climb came in at just under 5 miles round trip with 1,750’ of gain.

We arrived back at the cars around noon where we took a lunch break before driving back over Salsberry Pass and to the junction with Route 127, parking the cars at Ibex Pass. Our next goal was the Saddle Peak Hills Wilderness high point, an unnamed bump in this surprisingly diminutive Wilderness Area. From Ibex Pass, we headed west to the main ridgeline, then south to the obvious highest point. The views were better than expected and there was even a register in among a pile of rocks on the summit. The hike was only about 2 miles round trip and a few hundred feet of gain.

Our plan was to then head over to the trailhead for Noon Peak and set up camp near the abandoned Noonday mine for the evening. However, we still had several hours of daylight left, so at Corrine's urging we made a short detour to visit the China Ranch Date Farm, located in a canyon near the town of Tecopa. Most of us had not been there before and were surprised at what it had to offer: a lush green oasis in the desert, a well-stocked store with different types of dates and baked goods to sample, and last but not least, amazingly delicious date milkshakes!

From Furnace Creek Road, we headed up a good paved road to some abandoned buildings at Upper Noonday Camp, and then proceeded north a few
miles on a dirt road past the abandoned Noonday Mines. The wreck of an old blue Dodge marks the trailhead for Noon Peak. Unfortunately, as per the weather forecast, the wind had picked up considerably, so we retreated back down the road about a mile to the area near the mine. We parked the cars close together to act as a wind break amongst the tall piles of mine tailings and were reasonably successful at gaining some shelter from the wind. We quickly set up tables and chairs and enjoyed a much overdue Happy Hour, including a camp fire provided by the Tidballs.

Next morning it was still quite windy and at least one unattended tent took off and had to be chased down. After packing everything up we walked the short distance to the trailhead to begin the hike up to Noon Peak. We headed directly towards the peak crossing a wash, eventually ascending the ridge up to the summit. The last 50 feet or so was steep class 2 with some loose rock. Luckily the winds seemed to die down somewhat and we had a most enjoyable hike of about 3 miles round trip and 1,500’ of gain with colorful rocks and many wildflowers along the way. Everyone agreed that Ibex and Noon Peaks were worthy climbs and that these wilderness areas include some beautiful areas of California desert.

I had wanted to climb Rabbit Peak by a second route for some time. However, I did not want to carry a pack up Villager with 2 days worth of water, so I started looking at Route A in the Guide. This route starts in a lemon orchard south of Coachella about 50’ below sea level. I had checked out the trailhead previously. The guide notes are inaccurate. Fillmore is now closed off at 74th Street and Harrison (the old route 86). Plus, Harrison is a long 20 mile drive through endless traffic lights from Indio. Better to take the new 86 freeway from I-10 and continue to 80th St, turn right and cross over to Harrison. Going north on this road, turn left on 78th (a paved road) or 76th (a dirt road) to cross to Fillmore, then turn left (south) on Fillmore to road’s end at the orchard. There is a dirt road going west a half mile after...
crossing the levee and the wash per the notes. However, there is no 2nd levee. The orchard road turns south and follows a berm separating the orchard from the open desert. Climbing the berm at the earliest opportunity and heading west again leads directly to the jeep road and the trail across the open desert lined by white rocks.

Most people climb Rabbit Peak in February or March when there is more daylight, but desert temperatures are still cool. By April, the desert is too hot – even in the morning. This year, March and early April were unseasonably hot, so it looked like I would have to wait another year. Watching the weather forecast suggested the weekend of April 26th would be cool (76F in Coachella) as a front came through, bringing rain to the Los Angeles Basin. Gloria agreed to go with me and try the peak in this window of opportunity for cool weather. The guide has this route – 16 miles, 6,700’ - at 14 – 16 hours. I estimated it would take us longer, as we travel at a slower pace these days. Not wanting to hike out in the dark, we decided on a backpack. This of course would slow us down, but might guarantee the peak and a daylight walk out. The topo shows a plateau about 6 miles in at 3,200’ and this seemed like a good place to make camp.

We drove through Coachella Friday night and slept in the lemon orchard under a starry night sky. Sometime after midnight, I felt spots of rain hitting my face. I knew it wouldn’t rain fully as this was the lower desert in the Coachella Valley. Later, more spots hit. By now, the stars were hidden behind cloud and rain fell lightly, but continuously. Gloria moved into the car, but I still thought it wouldn’t rain much. Ten minutes later, I was in the car myself and the rain came down torrentially! So much for it not raining in the Coachella Valley!

So, the forecast was exactly right - rain Friday night. But rain brought the cool air. We started off at 6:30am and immediately found the jeep road and white ducked trail. We had cool breezes all the way in and Gloria got a great shot of a rainbow over Rabbit as the last of the rain fell on the peak Saturday morning (see above photo). We made it to the foot of Rabbit’s east ridge in 2 hours – about 4 miles and 1,100’ gain. From here a good trail climbs to the crest of the ridge. Unfortunately, the trail leaves the ridge crest almost immediately and slowly descends to the ruins of a stone cabin to the north. Do not follow the trail, but stay on the ridge crest. We didn’t and found ourselves over 500’ below the ridge line before we realized our mistake. This meant climbing back up to the crest over rough, steep ground with packs. We were back on the ridge at just over 2,500’ and soon crossed over a 2,600’ summit following a good use
trail. The ridge drops to a saddle and then climbs 300’ to the start of the plateau we were aiming for at 2,800’. There were fire rings and signs of camping here, but we wanted to be a bit further up. Although the use trail continues, well cairned, the terrain is rough and covered in desert vegetation. Progress was slow. Crossing a series of short, steep climbs and rough plateau, we arrived at the saddle in front of the 2,000’ headwall climb to the Rabbit massif at just after 11:30am. We had some lunch and agonized over whether to rest and start early next day, or go for the peak immediately. I estimated 4 hours up and 3 down, so we went for it. Alas, best laid schemes.....

The headwall climb was relentless. Although it is only about a mile, it is very steep and rough going. It is, however, well cairned. The top of the climb is marked by a short plateau at 5,200’ and then the slope gets steep again. Desert vegetation gives way to rocks and slabs and the odd small pine tree. We got to 5,400’ in just under 3 hours and thought we'd reach the summit easily in less than 90 minutes. We took a break among the rocks and saw a steep ridgeline covered in boulders, slabs and trees rising above us. We could not find a route over the boulders to continue along the crest, so we descended down the north side through thick vegetation on loose soil and leaves, pushing through tree branches, and traversing steep slabs. We then climbed back up through trees, vegetation, more loose soil and slabs. What a miserable detour. So now 4 hours in and only 5,700’. Tired legs slowed us down, but the going went easier up the summit ridge and through groves of pine trees. We hit the summit in 5 hours 15 minutes. The summit register had two furry bunny toys inside and so I had to have a photo holding them – bunnies on Big Bunny! (See photo on this page). Time was passing rapidly and darkness would be falling. We knew it was at least 3 hours back to camp. We took off after a snack and made good time to the rocky, boulder section of the ridge. Here we decided to stay with the crest and not repeat the miserable detour. We found cairns and after some route finding and 3rd class bouldering, we were back at our snack spot at 5,400’. We were at the flat area at 5,200’ in 1 hour, 30 minutes from the summit, but it was 7:30pm and we knew we did not want to drop 2,000’ in the dark, even with headlights. We both had survival blankets, spare water and some food, so we bivouacked under a convenient juniper tree. I think it got down to 45F that night. It was cold and an uncomfortable night. Next morning, we got back to camp in 1 hour, 50 minutes, ate a hearty breakfast and took a long rest in the warm sunshine. We eventually packed up and got out to the car uneventfully in 4.5 hours (only a half hour less than it took getting in). We were tired and the temperature rose rapidly as we hiked out. Our window of cool weather was closing. Subtracting sleeping time and our long breaks at 3,200’ both up and down, we were still hiking for 18 hours. A fitter group, not making the same mistakes we made could probably day hike it in 14 hours or backpack it in 16 hours. I can safely say I will not be revisiting the east ridge of Rabbit ever again.
DESSERT MUSIC

If you’ll pardon me a little detour, I’d like to take a break with something totally different in my column-inches this issue. Don’t worry; we’ll be back “on the rocks” next time. (I won’t be writing up every peak; some would be repetitious. For instance, the story of Potosi would be largely a repeat of my Charleston/Mummy limestone/thrust fault article, with some minor different details. I’ve pretty much covered all the Mesozoic [Indianhead, Martinez, etc.] granite peaks – so a separate article on, say, Sombrero wouldn’t have much new to say.) And, while all have a story, some aren’t all that interesting...East Ord (the Rodney Dangerfield of The List) comes to mind. But I’ll be going on for a while. In this vein, does any reader have a favorite peak they would like examined? I welcome suggestions at rob-ertmchl@aol.com.

We all know that our Desert has inspired great, distinctly American, art (Georgia O’Keefe, John Hilton, Maynard Dixon and the “Taos school”, the Palm Springs art colony, etc.) And, the desert has inspired much great American writing from Major Powell to Zane Grey to Ed Abbey to Craig Childs. But...what about music? These muses were inspired by a live concert of the Sons of the Pioneers I recently attended in Loveland, Colorado. Their repertoire included some of the most explicitly desert music out there that we have loved all our lives .... “All day I faced the barren waste/without the taste of water...cool water!....Keep a-movin Dan, he’s a devil not a man, and he spreads the burnin sands with water...”) (I think most of us who have spent a good part of our lives hiking in the desert can personally relate to these lyrics!) While not specifically desert music, a number of their classic songs have a distinctly deserty vibe (“Lonely but free I’ll be found/Drifitin along with the tumbling tumbleweed”). Their most explicitly desert song , “Ridin Down the Canyon”, paints the desert as a paradise rather than the wasteland of the better-known “Cool Water” “Cactus plants are bloomin'/ sagebrush everywhere/granite spires are standin all around... I tell ya folks, it’s heaven/ T’ be ridin down the canyon/When the desert sun goes down”. (And we sure can relate to that!)

It’s hard to find many desert references in the popular music of the last half-century. Sure, U2 had a celebrated album “The Joshua Tree”, with a lovely black and white photo on the cover of somewhere in the Mojave, but there’s not much desert in the tracks. Some songs by the Eagles had a somewhat deserty vibe and a few lines referring to the desert, most famously “On a dark desert highway/cool wind in my hair” (Don’t those few words stir up happy memories?) But the rest of “Hotel California” is about a house of sadomasochism that could just as well be in Miami. The one classic rock song I can think of that is explicitly mostly about the desert is, of course, America’s “Horse With No Name” – (“Ya see I been through the desert on a horse with no name/It felt good to be out of the rain/In the desert you can remem-

(Continued on page 14)
ber your name/Cause there ain’t no one for to give you no pain).

Turning to more “serious” music, we’re again hard-pressed to find much that celebrates the desert, in comparison to the large amount of “pastoral” music that depicts European landscapes where orchestral music was born. With one huge exception, American “classical” music, historically mostly developed in the Northeast, also has little regard for the desert. One Brooklyn boy who broke the mold was Aaron Copland, with his famous ballet scores “Rodeo” and “Billy the Kid” which, while not specifically desert music, beautifully convey the vastness and spirit of the West. I’ve often thought that those two works are the sonic equivalent of Georgia O’Keefe’s New Mexico paintings – amazing how an urban “New York Jew” (as the stereotype goes) could write music which, perhaps better than almost any other, so nails the very soul of the West of the imagination. (I’d put a few film scores, specifically “Dances with Wolves”, in that category.)

And now the piece you’ve been waiting for – the one major composition specifically about the desert that has made it into the standard symphonic repertoire – of course, I’m talking about the “Grand Canyon Suite” in five movements (1931) written by one Ferd de Grofe (a wonderfully 1930’s Hollywood name, that). The work had its world premiere in November 1931 in Chicago with Whiteman’s orchestra. Even one whole movement – a shadowy minor-tinged adagio – is titled “Painted Desert”. The triumphant last movement, “Cloudburst”, is in my opinion the best sonic portrait of a thunderstorm ever written, better than Beethoven’s storm in the “Pastoral” symphony. This piece is so well-known, and does such a good job portraying its namesake, that there’s nothing much more else I can add. Did you know that someone once put words to the main leitmotif theme of the work? “Along the trail/ The sun is low, the canyon is wide/Hi-yee, hi-yo/We sing a sing as we ride” (Probably luckily, that is fading into obscurity.) Even worse, Philip Morris (Call...for...Feelip Morr-eeess!) Cigarettes hijacked the same theme for radio ads.

Wanting to know more about the composer of this American masterpiece, I found out some interesting things about Grofe. Turns out he wrote more desert music (that hardly anyone has ever heard of.) Born Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofe in New York City (do we see a pattern here?) in 1892, his parents were professional classical musicians; his father an opera singer and his mother a professional cellist. His mother took him to Leipzig, Germany as a youth for a formal musical education, when he became proficient at a number of instruments. He left home at age 14, and drifted around in life, working for a while for $2/night as a piano player in a bar (just like the young Brahms!) – but continually dabbling in composition.

His big break in life came at about age 28 when he landed a gig as a pianist with Paul Whiteman’s big band, soon becoming Whiteman’s chief arranger by dint of his innate talent. His major accomplishment in this field is the orchestration of Gershwin’s celebrated “Rhapsody in Blue” – originally written as a two-piano work. Grofe’s 1942 version of that arrangement is the one we hear today on the radio, concerts, and CD’s! Reading this, I couldn’t help but wonder if some of the most electrifying sounds in all
music – the chromatic clarinet howl at the very beginning of the work – is Grofé’s genius and not Gershwin’s!

By the time he left the Whiteman band, he was a well-known figure in the American music scene, launched on a lengthy career of arranging and composing, including film scores; he became in demand as a film score composer, so much so that in 1945 he moved permanently from New York (where he taught at Juilliard) to Los Angeles. He died in Santa Monica in 1972.

He left a lengthy legacy including film scores, four ballets, chamber works, and orchestral pieces, most of which exist in utter forgotten obscurity, among them “Sonata for Flute and Bicycle Pump” and “Theme and Variations on Noises from a Garage” (you can’t make this stuff up). (Like Mendelssohn and Sibelius, it seems his masterworks came early, and he sort of fizzled out later in life.) AND….he wrote more Desert Music, also collecting dust. Chief among these pieces is “Death Valley Suite”, written in 1949, 18 years after “Grand Canyon”. It’s supposed to depict the hardships of pioneers traveling through Death Valley. The movements are:

1. Funeral Mountains (!)* -- a strange atonal movement in 5/4 time.

2. 49’er Emigrant Train – with colorful musical depictions of a wagon trail and an Indian attack.

3. Desert Water Hole – a medley mixing “Oh Susannah” and the main theme of the work.

4. Sand Storm – another atonal movement featuring a wind machine(!)* with a final coda recapitulating the main theme.

*emphases added

I’ve never heard this (so it must not be that good) but I’d love to!

His other desert pieces are “Requiem for a Ghost Town” (his last composition in 1968) and “Dawn at Lake Mead”(1956) and “Valley of the Sun Suite” (1957), the latter written to celebrate the Salt River Project in Arizona (the BuRec must have loved him!).

FOOTNOTE: I hope Burton Falk doesn’t mind me trespassing a bit on his turf….I just finished “The Emerald Mile”. It’s subtitled “The epic story of the fastest ride in history through the heart of the Grand Canyon”…but it is so very much more than that. One of the great books of my life. Get it – you will thank me.
In an effort to be transparent, I preface this review by owning up to the fact that Faces' author, Diane Winger, is a good friend of mine. I should also confess that, while it is possible that I could be biased in my praise of this, Diane's first novel, after careful self-reflection, I have investigated and absolved myself of any misrepresentation.

Furthermore, I'll concede that, except for the opening chapter, Faces can't really be considered a desert book.

The Diane Winger I know is a brilliant and compassionate woman, and she is married to Charlie Winger, ice and rock climber par excellence, DPS List Finisher, and a friend with whom I have shared many a difficult summit. An accomplished rock climber and a dedicated peak-bagger in her own right, Diane has, with Charlie, co-authored several non-fiction works, including *High Point Adventures: The Complete Guide to the 50 State Highpoints; The Trad Guide to Joshua Tree: 60 Favorite Climbs from 5.5 to 5.9; and The Essential Guide to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.*

Several years after I first met Diane, she casually mentioned that the only way she could recognize me was by the way I walked—my stride. Curious, I asked what she meant. She told me she had prosopagnosia, or face blindness, the inability to recognize people by their faces. Really? Really.

Diane's handicap is congenital—a condition which may affect up to 2.5% of the population.
population--but it can also be caused by brain damage. Indeed, due to a leader fall while rock climbing in Joshua Tree N.P., Jessica Stein, Faces’ protagonist, becomes afflicted with acquired face blindness.

Faces’ plot follows Jessica, 36-years old and single, as she recovers from her fall--but remains unable to recognize faces--and returns to her job as Senior Developer at DenDev Solutions, a rapidly-growing Denver high-tech firm. Two unscrupulous men, aware of Jessica’s disability, scheme to use her to write a program that will funnel a portion of the automatically-deducted employee membership dues in an "international organization" to a bank account for their benefit only. Posing as a vice-president of finance and a functionary in the accounting department--and knowing Jessica can't distinguish them from the actual officers--the two convince her to keep the idea a secret, paying her for her work in cash.

Jessica's unknowing involvement in the scheme eventually creates a dangerous situation for the plucky woman. How she resolves the problem makes a good story.

An almost as interesting parallel story, however, is how Jessica must learn to recognize others, a difficult task. Observing her adjusting to the process of relearning identification cues and struggling with the social aspects she now faces is fascinating.

For a first novel, this is a good one. And Diane hasn't stopped yet. Since publishing Faces, which is currently available at Amazon.com for $3.99, she has penned and published two more.

THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL (1998), RALPH COMPTON

As a compliment to "The Historic Desert" series on the Old Spanish Trail (see first installment, Desert Sage, Jan/Feb 2014), I intend to review a handful of fictional accounts regarding that route, which, during the early to mid 1800s, prior to the completion of the transcontinental railroads, provided an important commercial link between New Mexico and Southern California.

The first trail tale, The Old Spanish Trail, is by Ralph Compton (1934-1998), a prolific writer of westerns, credited with over one million volumes in print.

A native of St. Clair County, Alabama, Compton was a big man, standing six-foot-eight without his boots. Early on, he worked as a musician, a radio announcer, a songwriter, and a newspaper columnist. He began his writing career with The Goodnight Trail (1992), which was chosen as a finalist for the "Medicine Pipe Bearer Award," bestowed by Western Writers of America for the best debut novel. Compton's Trail Drive series eventually grew to include The Western Trail, The Chisholm Trail, The Banders Trail, The California Trail, The Shawnee Trail, The Virginia City Trail, The Dodge City Trail, The Oregon Trail, The Santa Fe Trail, The Deadwood Trail, The Green River Trail, and, of course, The Old Spanish Trail, reviewed below. Compton was also the author of the Sundown Rider series and the Border Empire series. During the last few years of his life, in fact, he authored more than two dozen novels, some of which made it onto the USA Today bestseller list for fiction.

Ralph Compton died in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1998 at the age of 64.
The Old Spanish Trail begins in San Antonio, Texas, in early February, 1862. The Civil War is raging in the eastern U.S., and the price of beef in Texas has fallen to less than three dollars a head. Don Webb, a local rancher, has received a letter from a former Texan who, after moving to New Mexico five years earlier and acquiring a land grant near Santa Fe, and was interested in buying 5,000 cattle, delivered, for $30 a head. Webb and a group of nine fellow Texans decide to fulfill the contract.

In early May, after assembling a herd and driving it to Santa Fe, the Texans discover that their potential buyer and his wife were recently murdered by a gang of outlaws. A local livery stable owner informs them, however, that, if they could drive the herd all the way to Los Angeles, they might be able to sell the cattle for even an even higher price. Stubborn and unfazed, the Texans and their cattle depart forthwith, heading for Los Angeles, following the, by then, seldom-used Old Spanish Trail.

In fact, after the American acquisition of northern Mexico territory in 1848, travel over the Old Spanish Trail began to diminish. Roads designed for military use were surveyed and built. Americans moving westward, including the '49ers, found easier routes to California. For the Texans, the disused trail, no longer always obvious, seemed to be their best choice. Little did they know that a band of Utes in Utah, who had recently taken six young American women as captives, and a band of Piutes in Nevada, who were just downright mean, were poised to cause them serious troubles. In addition, the outlaws who had murdered the potential buyer in Santa Fe, decided to track the outfit at a distance and hijack their herd shortly before their arrival in Southern California. If that weren't enough, longhorn cattle, when they stampede in storms, manage to slash themselves, the cow punchers and the cowboys' horses. Several hair-raising escapades lay in ahead for the Texas ten.

So, you may wonder, considering the historic and geographic research required to write such a story, just how well did Compton succeed in his fact checking?

Well, in my opinion, while the author may have known Texas, Texans, and longhorn cattle, he assuredly wasn't too familiar with the Great Basin, the Mojave Deserts, or the Indians who lived on them.

First, a minor issue. By 1862, two hundred years after the Spanish first arrived on the scene, most western Indian tribes had acquired at least a few rifles. Compton, however, makes no mention of the Piutes or

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the Utes using anything but bow and arrows during their skirmishes with the cowboys.

There are several other inaccuracies as well, two of which are almost laughable. While the Texans are crossing the Mojave Desert, Don Webb, the trail boss, "wiped his sweating brow, it was gritty, and there was a smudge on the back of his hand. Somewhere, to the north, in the Great Basin, men had been riding in the darkness, so that there would be no dust against the blue of the morning sky." In the next paragraph, we discover that those men, the outlaws, were fifty miles away. Really? Webb felt dust raised fifty miles away?

Finally, with the cattle drive to Los Angeles a success, Webb is ready to board a ship bound for Texas, where his girl friend awaits him. His fellow Texans inquire if he would like to have them see him off. "The landing is near enough for me to walk,' Don replied." Walking from central Los Angeles to San Pedro? I don't think so.

If you have nothing better to do, and you don't mind a few discrepancies, The Old Spanish Trail offers a reasonably exciting read.

THE BORDER TRUMPET (1939), ERNEST HAYCOX

When I began this Desert Books series back in 1999, I consulted several desert bibliographies, notably those by Lawrence Clark Powell and E.I. Edwards, searching for volumes for possible review. Purchasing several volumes I thought would be worthwhile at that time, I soon discovered that there were more than enough classic and recently published material to keep me busy. The Border Trumpet was one of those early acquisitions. After patiently reclining on a shelf in my library shelf for almost 15 years, the time has come for a review of Haycox's interesting novel.

Ernest Haycox was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1899. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1915 and was stationed along the Mexican border in 1916. During World War I, he was in Europe, and after the war he spent one year at Reed College in Portland. In 1923, he graduated from the University of Oregon with a B.A. in journalism.

Haycox published two dozen novels and about 300 short stories, many of which appeared first in pulp magazines in the early 1920s. He was a regular contributor to Collier's Weekly from 1931, and The Saturday Evening Post from 1943. Fans of his work included Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, the latter of whom once wrote, "I read The Saturday Evening Post whenever it has a serial by Ernest Haycox." His story "Stage to Lordsburg" (1937) was made into the movie Stagecoach (1939), directed by John Ford and featuring John Wayne in the role that made him a star. The novel, Trouble Shooter, (1936), originally serialized in Collier's, was the basis for the movie Union Pacific (1939), directed by Cecil B. DeMille, starring Barbara Stanwyck and Joel McCrea. Haycox died in 1950, at the age of 51, in Portland.

Better late than never, in 2005 the Western Writers of America voted Haycox one of the 24 best Western authors of the Twentieth Century.
The Border Trumpet begins some ten years following the Civil War. Twenty-one year old Eleanor Warren, after spending three years at Mrs. De Launcey's Boston School for Young Ladies, is on her way to Camp Grant in Arizona Territory to be with her father, Major Warren, commander of the camp, and Lieutenant Phil Castleton, the man whom she had fallen in love before she left for Boston.

Arriving in Ehrenburg on the steamer Cocopah, the captain tells Eleanor, "Ordinarily, a military escort would have met you at Yuma. The direct way to Camp Grant is up the Gila, past the Pima villages and over the desert to the San Pedro. But there ain't any military posts along the route and the Indians are very bad, so you'll have to follow the supply line."

Indeed, it was a time in the Territory when, "(h)igh on the Mogollon plateau the Tontos were active, closing the courier service between Camp Apache and Fort Whipple. There was a flurry at Date Creek, on the road to Ehrenburg. A stagecoach and six passengers, venturing out of Prescott, never reached McDowell. A trapper and his Indian wife were massacred in the White Tank Mountains. The mines closed and everybody withdrew from the desert and hill, crowding the settlements."

Following an arduous 15-day journey, Eleanor at last arrives in Camp Grant, located at the confluence of Aravaipa Creek and the San Pedro River, fifty miles northeast of Tucson, where she finds her father's troop has its hands full dealing with a band of renegade Apaches (who, by the way, are equipped with rifles). And, golly, there is yet another handsome Lieutenant, Tom Benteen, for Eleanor to consider.

Haycox's vivid and accurate descriptions of the desert country ring true, e.g., "Afternoon's heat settled over the post. It was a suction that drew the last residual moisture from the earth and boards and living things. The mountains grew dim behind a blue-yellow haze; all along the valley of the San Pedro was a sulky glitter of rocks and sand and mica particles. Even the (local) hangers-on retreated to the thin, oppressive shadows of the post. Nothing moved."

The Border Trumpet makes an excellent read.
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EDITOR: Greg Gerlach, 23933 Via Astuto, Murrieta, CA 92562
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