First, thanks to those who arranged for and contributed to this year’s very enjoyable DPS banquet, held at Luminarias in May. Especially, thanks to Jim Fleming, who volunteered as banquet chair when we really needed it; Laura Newman, who took reservations and greeted us at dinner; Leo Logacho, for setting up the silent auction, and Kathy Rich, for arranging for our speaker, Doug Kasian. Also to Tom and Tina Bowman, who provided the computer and projector for Doug’s show.

Another story from the past: this time, a tale of El Picacho del Diablo. I’ve told some people parts of this story, but here’s an account of my first ascent of the twin peaks. The UCLA Bruin Mountaineers already had somewhat of a history with Baja California’s “peak of the devil” when I joined the group in 1953. They had done a successful climb – all of mine were – the previous year.

In December 1954 we assembled a group and made a somewhat ill-organized assault. Is this the canyon we want? Who knows? But we’re young, it doesn’t matter, right?

Several days – almost a week – later, we discovered our folly. There are three reasonable approaches to Picacho from the east; two canyons leading more or less directly to the top, and Canyon Diablo which starts to the north of the peak and turns south so as to approach the peak from directly below it, to the west. The canyon we went up was at least one south of any reasonable approach. I think we came down a canyon that might have led us to the top but by that time we were out of time, food, energy and patience.

The next winter we got all the information we could find – including a write-up by Niles and Loise Werner from San Diego. Again we drove to San Felipe, turned inland and north, and stopped in the desert east of the Sierra San Pedro Martir. There it is! Diablo Gorge, or Canyon Diablo, the canyon described in the write-up; with a “white spot high on the north wall”. Seems like a long way away, but again, we are young and strong; and with a bigger food supply this time.

That trip is a story in and of itself. No trail; crawling up the middle of a small stream with a backpack, in the rain, bushwhacking, with catclaw (senegalia greggii) grabbing at clothes and pack, at last we reached a cliff at the head of the canyon where we stopped for the night. A ledge on the cliff served for a camp for the four of us (Lincoln Axe, Gene Farr, Howard LeVaux, and me). The ledge had just enough overhang to protect us from the light rain that was still falling.

The next day we took off across the Western Plateau of the Sierra San Pedro Martir. We seemed to be

(Chair’s Corner continued on page 7)
Elected Positions

**Chair**
Paul Cooley  
4061 Van Buren Place  
Culver City, CA 90232  
(310) 837-4022  
prc.calif@gmail.com

**Vice Chair / Outings / Safety**
Leo Logacho  
11150 Dunning Street  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
(562) 714-1272  
leologacho@hotmail.com

**Secretary**
Jim Fleming  
538 Yarrow Drive  
Simi Valley, CA 93065-7352  
(805) 405-1726  
jimf333@att.net

**Treasurer**
Laura Newman  
11755 Entrada Avenue  
Porter Ranch, CA 91326-1933  
desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com

**Program / Banquet**
Tracey Thomerson  
6808 Falconview Lane  
Oak Park, CA 91377-3949  
(805) 901-1330  
tthomerson@roadrunner.com

Appointed Positions

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

**Conservation Chair**
Dave Perkins  
1664 Buttercup Road  
Encinitas, CA 92024-2451  
(818) 421-4930  
david.perkins@csun.edu

**Guidebook Editor**
Jim Morehouse  
3272 River Glorious Lane  
Las Vegas, NV 89135-2123  
(702) 528-3712  
desertpeakssection@gmail.com

**Mailer**
Elaine Baldwin  
3760 Ruthbar Drive  
Hawthorne, CA 90250-8473  
(310) 675-4120  
DWBaldwin@aol.com

**Mountaineering Committee Chair**
Leo Logacho  
11150 Dunning Street  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
(562) 714-1272  
leologacho@hotmail.com

**Mountaineering Committee**
Ron Bartell  
ronbartell@yahoo.com  
Tina Bowman  
tina@bowmanchange.com

**Newsletter Editor (The Desert Sage)**
Greg Gerlach  
23933 Via Astuto  
Murrieta, CA 92562  
(626) 484-2897  
gregrg1955@verizon.net

**Webmaster**
Kathy Rich  
2043 Berkshire Avenue  
South Pasadena, CA 91030  
Kathynarich@gmail.com

**Merchandising**
Laura Newman  
11755 Entrada Avenue  
Porter Ranch, CA 91326-1933  
desertpeakstreasurer@gmail.com

**Membership Records Chair**
Ron Bartell  
1556 21st Street  
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266  
(310) 546-1977  
ronbartell@yahoo.com

Cover Photo Credit...

Cover Photo Credit goes to Richard Stover. The photo is of Desert Senna, which was taken on March 28, 2016 on a climb of Umpah Point. Please see the trip write-up on pages 9 and 10 in this issue of the Sage.

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 2016 — January 2017**

The Desert Sage

SEPTEMBER 18 SUN LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle
OCT 1 SAT LTC Leadership Training Seminar
OCT. 5 WED LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS Advanced Mountaineering (Basic Safety Systems)
OCT. 8 SAT LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS Advanced Mountaineering (Belaying)
OCT. 8 SAT LTC, WTC, HPS Navigation: Beginning Clinic
OCT. 15 SAT LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS Advanced Mountaineering (Rappelling)
OCT. 22-23 SAT-SUN LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS Advanced Mountaineering (Techniques / Anchors)
NOV. 19 SAT LTC, WTC Navigation: Workshop on Third Class Terrain
NOV. 19-20 SAT-SUN LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS Indian Cove Navigation Noodle
DEC. 3 SAT DPS, WTC Nelson Range High Point List Finish
DEC. 11 SUN LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS Warren Point Navigation Noodle
JAN 14 SAT HPS HPS Awards Banquet

**SEPTEMBER 18 SUN**

**I: Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle:** Navigation noodle in Los Padres National Forest for either checkout or practice to satisfy Basic (I/M) or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. Send email, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmmyers@ix.netcom.com). Assistant: Ann Pedreschi. Note: Early (at least two weeks prior to the event) sign-up for all navigation checkoffs and practices is recommended. These outings require substantial pre-outing preparation work, including completion of both a comprehensive written exam and a route planning assignment that will be mailed to you prior to the checkoff. See Chapter 6 of the Leaders Reference Book for more information. Send contact information (including mailing address) and your qualifications to the leader as soon as possible.

**OCTOBER 1 SAT**

**O: Leadership Training Seminar:** DARE TO LEAD!! Attend the Fall 2016 Leadership Training Seminar. What better way to step up and lead your favorite outing than by taking advantage of the training opportunities that the Angeles Chapter’s Leadership Training Committee (LTC) provides each year. As home to one of the largest outings programs on the planet, the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter's many groups, sections and committees sponsor thousands of trips ranging from easy hikes to backpacks to world wide travel and mountaineering expeditions. Taught by experienced volunteer leaders, the seminar covers all the basics of leadership. You will learn how to plan a trip, prevent problems on the trail and make sure that everyone has a great time. You'll gain knowledge about good conservation and safety practices, along with tips for getting your “O” rating quickly and then, if you choose, pursuing more advanced ratings. The all-day class costs $25, and will be held at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center, 1750 North Altadena Drive, Pasadena, California 91107. The application is available online at angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc_leadership_seminar. You can also pore over more of LTC's upcoming offerings and leadership information on the Angles Chapter’s website. Mail the application and check for $25, payable to Sierra Club, to Steve Botan, LTC Registrar, 18816 Thornwood Circle, Huntington Beach 92646. You also can reach Steve by email (ltcregistrar@hundredpeaks.org) or by phone (714-321-1296). Applications and checks are due Sept. 17, 2016. Scholarships are available for those with financial need. Apply to LTC Chair Anne Marie Richardson AMLeadership@gmail.com.
**OCTOBER 5**  
**WED**  
LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS  
M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP14): Basic Safety System: First of four climbing workshops open to Sierra Club members with prior roped climbing experience. Today's indoor evening workshop of four hours reviewing ropes, harnesses, helmets and basic climbing gear will take place in Pasadena. As space is limited, priority will be given to participants who commit to all four workshops. Send email or sase, phones, Sierra Club number, resume to Leader: Dan Richter (818-970-6737, dan@danrichter.com). Assistant: Patrick McKusky (626-794-7321, pamckusky@att.net).

**OCTOBER 8**  
**SAT**  
LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS  
M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP14): Belaying: Second of four climbing workshops open to Sierra Club members with prior roped climbing experience. Today, at Stoney Point in Chatsworth, focus is on belaying and principles of anchor building. As space is limited, priority will be given to participants who commit to all four workshops. Send email or sase, phones, Sierra Club number, resume to Leader: Dan Richter (818-970-6737, dan@danrichter.com). Assistant: Patrick McKusky (626-794-7321, pamckusky@att.net).

**OCTOBER 8**  
**SAT**  
LTC, WTC, HPS  
I: Navigation: Beginning Clinic: Spend the day one-on-one with an instructor learning and practicing map and compass in our local mountains. Beginners to rusty old-timers welcome, and practice is available at all skill levels. Not a checkout, but it will help you prepare. Many expert leaders will attend; many I-rated leaders started here in the past. 4 miles with 500’ of gain. Send sase, phone, rideshare info, $25.00 deposit (refunded at trailhead, check made payable to the Sierra Club) to Leader: Diane Dunbar (818-248-0455, dianedunbar@charter.net). Co-leader: Richard Boardman (310-374-4371).

**OCTOBER 15**  
**SAT**  
LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS  
M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP14): Rappelling: Third of four climbing workshops open to Sierra Club members with prior roped climbing experience. Today, at Stoney Point in Chatsworth, focus is on rappelling. As space is limited, priority will be given to participants who commit to all four workshops. Send email or sase, phones, Sierra Club number, resume to Leader: Dan Richter (818-970-6737, dan@danrichter.com). Assistant: Patrick McKusky (626-794-7321, pamckusky@att.net).

**OCTOBER 22-23**  
**SAT-SUN**  
LTC, DPS, WTC, SPS  
M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP14): Rock climbing techniques and anchors: Fourth of four climbing workshops open to Sierra Club members with prior roped climbing experience. This weekend completes the series of AMP workshops at Joshua Tree National Park and focuses on climbing and anchors. As space is limited, priority will be given to participants who commit to all four workshops. Send email or sase, phones, Sierra Club number, resume to Leader: Dan Richter (818-970-6737, dan@danrichter.com). Assistant: Patrick McKusky (626-794-7321, pamckusky@att.net).

**NOVEMBER 19**  
**SAT**  
LTC, WTC  
M-R: 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, Sierra Club number, class 3 experience, conditioning, and contact info to leader: Robert Meyers (310-829-3177, rmmyers@ix.netcom.com). Co-leader: Jack Kieffer.

**NOVEMBER 19-20**  
**SAT-SUN**  
LTC, DPS, WTC, HPS, SPS  
I: Navigation: Indian Cove Navigation Noodle: Navigation noodle in Joshua Tree National Park to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday for practice, skills refresher, altimeter, homework, and campfire. Sunday, checkout. To participate, send email, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmmyers@ix.netcom.com). Assistant: Ann Pedreschi. Note: Early (at least two weeks prior to the event) sign-up for all navigation checkoffs and practices is recommended. These outings require substantial pre-outing preparation work, including
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.

Moving on to more conventional conservation measures, California has developed a plan for large scale renewable energy production that involves the use of desert lands. This program is called the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

The DRECP is focused on the desert regions and adjacent lands of seven California counties - Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. It is being prepared through a collaborative effort between the California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

It is hoped that DRECP will result in an efficient and effective biological mitigation and conservation program while also providing renewable project developers with permit timing and cost certainty under the federal and California Endangered Species Acts. Part of the plan is to preserve, restore and enhance natural communities and related ecosystems. Approximately 22.5 million acres of federal and non-federal California desert land are in the DRECP Plan Area.

As part of Phase I, the BLM released the Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement on November 10, 2015. The proposed BLM plan covers the 10 million acres of BLM-managed lands in the DRECP plan area and supports the overall renewable energy and conservation goals of the DRECP.

The DRECP website which includes documents, maps, public comments and environmental impact statements can be found at [www.drecp.org](http://www.drecp.org).

(Chair’s Corner continued from page 2)

About twenty miles north of Picacho. During the day Howard veered off by himself and (we found later) spent the night on top of Bluebottle. Lincoln, Gene and I stayed together and camped in a light snow, just above what seemed to be a canyon descending into Diablo Gorge.

As indeed it was. At the bottom, at Cedarock camp, we found Vern Jones and Roy Bishop, who had made an unsuccessful try at the peak and were about to give up. Together (except for Howard) we tried again, and were successful, ascending both summits.

When we came down we found a note; Howard had gone through like an express train, expecting that his ride back home might evaporate and not realizing that we were all on top of the peak. We went down, by now out of food but having found some Bisquick cached at Cedarock Camp. Bisquick, mixed with water and “cooked” in a mess-kit frying pan over an open fire; it was raw on top, burnt on the bottom, and delicious. Just matters how hungry you are.

And it turns out that, of course, you can find a “white spot high on the north wall” of any canyon anywhere. You just need a good imagination.

SAGE PHOTOS AND REPORTS NEEDED!

The SAGE needs articles and photographs, including cover photos, that pertain to outdoor activities of interest to Desert Peak Sections members and subscribers. Please note that trip reports should include trip dates and identify trip participants and photos should indicate when and where the photo was taken, what it is of, who is in it, and who took it. Please email SAGE submissions to gregrl1955@verizon.net no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months.
Outings Chair
by Leo Logacho

Greetings Everyone,

Leaders, please report any accidents or incidents promptly to the link below. There is a new website for Leaders (live since December) that also incorporates the LTC, OMC and Safety websites, which can be found at:

http://angeles.sierraclub.org/leadership_and_outings

An inspirational poem to bring you to the mountains. Enjoy it!

Hiking above the Tree Line
By Raymond A. Foss

The granite exposed below me
the vista as far as the eye could see
the lake a mirror
glistening in the sun

My hiking, the climbing
through the tree line
rewarded with the beauty
of the scene from the top

Sitting, my eyes closed
drinking in the sun
a prayer to my creator
thanking him for this moment
aware of this means of grace
poured out on me

Summer is hot but high elevation Desert Peaks are nice, cool and waiting for you. Share your wilderness experiences and know-how with others. Bring adventures for future generations and grow the Sierra Club community. Lead, hike and motivate willing participants to visit a high elevation Desert Peaks this summer. Be a trail mentor, become a Leader.

Please check this link for more information:

http://angeles.sierraclub.org/get_outdoors/becoming_leader

Treasurer’s Report
by Laura Newman

DPS Account Summary from January 1, 2016 to May 31, 2016

INCOME

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TOTAL INCOME: $4,214.00

EXPENSES

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TOTAL EXPENSES: $4,337.97

CHECKING ACCOUNT BALANCE: $3,544.47

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 welcome 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.
Richard Stover and I were up at 5 a.m. and on our way to climb Umpah Point before dawn, packing 8 liters of water. The waning gibbous moon illuminated the dirt road now blocked by the wilderness boundary. Since I had been here in 2003 to climb Mopah Point, the trek had been lengthened by about one mile.

At the stone ruins at the end of the road, we entered the wash and hiked upstream to Mopah Point, passing it on the east side and continuing another mile to our goal. Umpah Point is not climbed very often since it is not on any list, even though it is higher than DPS listed Mopah Point. Both Mopah and Umpah are volcanic plugs. The up and down route took us slowpokes about four hours in each direction. We reached our objective, the north face of Umpah Point, about 9 a.m. and took a break. We then stashed half our remaining water and our trekking poles.

We started up a gully on the north face of the peak. Higher up the route-finding became more difficult. There were multiple branches of the gully. Once we encountered a headwall swarming with wasps coming in and out of a crack in the wall and had to reverse course. Another time we attempted to cross the east ridge too early and had to backtrack. Finally, further up we found a break in the ridge and easier slopes.

We continued ascending and crossed over another rib. Umpah Point is not the kind of peak where one can see the summit during the climb. We passed a prominent duck and continued traversing upward. Eventually the terrain became class 3. We passed under a large chockstone in a chimney, and the climbing became more difficult. Richard was becoming more uncomfortable with the exposure. “I don’t want to continue,” he said. “OK,” I agreed, swallowing my disappointment. We started down. It was getting late. As we traversed by a prominent duck, Richard (Continued on page 10)
looked up. “Maybe we can go up here,” he suggested. The route led up and around a corner. We couldn’t see where it went. Around the corner we hit easier going, then an easy chimney. Fierce winds pummeled us, especially in the chimney as we scrambled upward and across more rocks to the summit. On top the wind was so strong I could hardly stand up. I estimate there were gusts up to 50 mph.

And there we were, on top of Umpah Point with great views of Mopah Point and the surrounding desert. It was after 2 p.m. It had taken us four hours to ascend from the base of the peak to the top and it would take us another four hours to carefully pick our way down to where we had left three liters of water.

Debbie Bulger on the summit of Umpah Point (photo by Richard Stover).

By 6 p.m. we were safely down. After resting and eating, we started back. The crenellated terrain of the desert makes for slow going. By the time we trekked the mile back to Mopah, we were losing our light. The rest of the way back would be in the dark, and what a fantastic night sky it was! Guided by the brilliant north star and my well-developed sense of direction (did I mention I had a compass?), I found our wash. We paddled along in the sand and gravel the last 3.5 miles back to our vehicle accompanied by moths that fluttered around my headlamp, bumped into my face, and occasionally flew into my ear. Another close encounter with wildlife.

In all we had travelled 12 miles and did 2,400’ of elevation gain in about 16.5 hours. No getting around it, we’re slow.

Rodman Mountains High Point (6,010’), Nellie Bay Benchmark (5,860’) and Newberry Mountains High Point (5,117’)

By Terry Flood
March 8-9, 2016

Driving out Tuesday afternoon through Apple Valley to our first destination, the highpoint of the Rodman Mountains, Jim Murphy, Henry Arnebold and I used some vague directions and our map, and then the seat of our pants to find the dirt road that allowed us to drive almost the whole way to the summit and its communications towers. It was a short cross-country jaunt from where we parked to the rocky Rodman Benchmark where we found a register that I had placed there back in 2007 when I had climbed this range highpoint from much further down. After enjoying the view, Jim and I continued another half mile over to Nellie Bly Benchmark and placed another register there and I took some pictures before heading back to the car. We then found a suitable flat area near a gas pipeline service road to camp for the night, which was fairly close to our next destination for tomorrow.

The next morning after breakfast, we parked just SSW of the summit and did a little bit of up and down over typical Mojave cross country terrain and about 1,500 feet of gain to make the summit of the

Left to right, Jim Murphy and Henry Arnebold on the Newberry Mountains High Point.

(Continued on page 11)
Newberry Mountain High Point, where we found an established register going back to 1977 with Gordon MacLeod’s and Barbara Lilley’s signatures, of course, and spent some time enjoying views of the Ord and Rodman mountains. It was about 1 p.m. when we had all returned to Henry’s vehicle, and enjoyed some celebratory refreshments! Still having some daylight left, we spent some time driving around the Rodman Mountains before it started to get late.

We then returned back to I-40 and home but we still have a lot to climb in the Mojave Desert where we shall return soon!

Opal (3,951’) and Black Mountains (3,939’)
By Terry Flood
April 19-21, 2016

Here we were on yet another adventure straight from the pages of Andy Zdon’s “Desert Summits” as Jim Murphy, Henry Arnebold and I drove out to the Mojave Desert just northeast of Barstow. We found Opal Mountain Road north of the town site of Hinkley, and managed to negotiate close enough on the road so that it was just a short, steep hike up a motor track to the summit of Opal Mountain. Once on top, we found a plastic jar and register with no writing implement, so I took some pictures of Jim and Henry and the surrounding area, then we descended the mountain and went looking for a suitable campsite in the Black Mountains. On the drive down from the summit we found Black Canyon Road and a rather large fire ring where we settled in for the night.

The next morning we parked just south and a little east of Black Mountain on Black Canyon Road, then took off cross-country up a long class 2 canyon that Henry and I had spotted the afternoon before. Upon reaching the top of the canyon we continued up towards a long basaltic ridgeline that eventually took us to the summit where we found some of the original wood tripods used to survey and set the three Black benchmarks from 1933. All three benchmarks were still intact and we entered our names in yet another register placed some time ago by Barbara Lilly and Gordon MacLeod. We were deliberate and careful down climbing the lava rocks through the canyon we ascended as we made our way back to the vehicle. Once at the car, we headed up Highway 395 to Kramer Junction for a quick lunch, then drove north towards Trona, scouted historic “Brown Ranch” with just concrete foundations left, and set up camp. The next morning, just north of dry Cuddeback Lake, we set out on a driving tour on a dirt road around Grass Valley, Cuddeback Lake, the Gravel Hills, around Fremont Peak, and then back to Highway 395. The road was definitely 4-wheel drive in parts and eventually we found a very remote motorcycle memorial at the southern end of this loop which has grown quite a bit over the years, and where we spent some time taking in all the memorial markers and “stuff” that had accumulated at this nostalgic site.

Another successful desert peak trip celebrated with dinner at The Roadhouse in Kramer Junction and then home again to plan another adventure out in the Mojave.
Panamint Butte (6,584’)
By Gary Schenk
March 5, 2016

After reaching the trucks, one participant settled to the ground and wearily exclaimed, “Every step was awful.” His wife disagreed, “The last couple of hundred feet wasn’t so bad.”

And so went the Panamint Butte trip.

Most arrived Friday night at the trailhead for Route A. This road from State Route 190 was suitable for 2 wheel drive cars. Mary Jo Dungfelder and I arrived in her Matrix in time to nab the last spot in the Toyota-only parking area. The Ford and Chevy trucks, both of them, were relegated to parking a bit down the road.

Everyone was up and ready to go at the appointed time of 6 a.m. We attempted to get everyone shuttled up to the 4 wheel drive parking area but some ended up walking partway. We’d need every bit of daylight.

We headed up to the adits, and the leader (ahem) eventually stumbled onto a light use trail. Everything was going swimmingly! We gained the ridge we were to follow to the summit and proceeded on.

Now I’m not saying this route is exceedingly loose, but back at the 4 wheel drive trailhead we had our first taste of what was to come when a participant, standing quietly on level ground, was felled when the ground she was standing on gave way. Now exactly how does level ground give way?

The ridge was not too bad, but then we came upon a towering gray cone of rock. Steep, it consisted of ball bearings on more solid rock. The bad thing about leading a trip is that you can’t sign out. So, on we went. Slowly. Molasses-in-March slow.

The group kept up their good spirits though, and we made the summit without mishap. The summit is a nice plateau with great views from Telescope Peak all the way to the Sierra. While it grew a bit windier and colder, we enjoyed the views and lunch.

Some youngsters on the trip decided they had had enough of these old coots and signed out and descended. As I watched them disappear, I ruminated on the abuse thirty-something year old knees can handle.

We headed down, this time accompanied by much wind. Nothing beats going down slick terrain on a knife-edge ridge with 60 mph winds. How do we know they were 60 mph winds? I read somewhere that when the wind hits 60 mph it can blow you over.

It was tedious going, everyone moving slowly, sometimes coming to a stop during particularly strong gusts.

Yes, it was awful, but every chance we took to stop and look around we were rewarded with breathtaking views. And we got to share it with some of the best people around, including co-leader Tina Bowman, Mary Jo Dungfelder, Jim Morehouse, Wasim Khan, David Perkins, Greg Gerlach, Chris Adams, Bill Livingston, Corrine Livingston, Signe Swenson, Bob Hoeven, Anne Rolls, David Frances, Dagmar Platzer and Mark McCormick.

The “youngsters” descending Panamint Butte (photo by Mark McCormick).

The group trudging up the ridge (photo by Mark McCormick).
2016 Desert Peaks Section
Annual Banquet
May 15, 2016

(Photos credits: Terry Flood and Kathy Rich)

From left to right, Mirna Roach, Sage Mailer Elaine Baldwin, and Larry Tidball.

From left to right, Outings Chair Leo Logacho and Miriam Khamis.

From left to right, DPS Webmaster Kathy Rich and banquet speaker Doug Kasian.

From left to right, Shelley Rogers, Gail Hanna, John Strauch and Dave Jurasevich.
RISKY BUSINESS IN THE ARIZONA DESERT

By Doug Kasian

The following is a synopsis of the talk that banquet speaker Doug Kasian gave at the DPS Banquet on May 15, 2016:

For the past 30 years, I have lived and climbed in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. Back in the 1980s, the desert was a pretty quiet place without a lot of drama - you could go out into the most remote areas and probably not run into another soul. Well, things have changed – a lot!

As the years went by, climbing out there became more interesting. I started to see bits of trash in the valley bottoms, such as food wrappers with Spanish writing on them. Hmmm, must be from Mexico, left by people who had come up from there? During the 90s, it got worse. Finally, things peaked around 2007, when the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended over 500,000 undocumented border-crossers in the Tucson sector alone. Numbers dropped after that, but are once again on the uptick these past two years. This has made my climbing increasingly more dangerous.

To the west of Tucson lies the Tohono O’odham Indian Reservation. The size of Connecticut, it is home to a scant 12,000 residents. Its 62-mile border with Mexico serves as a conduit for Bad Guys who shepherd drugs and border-crossers into the U.S. for the Mexican cartels. Life for those who live there has changed dramatically over the years. Their land has become polluted with thousands of tons of trash and human waste. An aerial survey done a few years back showed over 3,500 abandoned vehicles littering the reservation, all stolen, broken down during the commission of crimes. Residents are uneasy, fearing break-ins and violence from the cartels in their own homes. I was fortunate to have spent 4 years climbing the 400 peaks on their land, thanks to a permit they had issued to me. It was a real eye-opener to see how the presence of the cartels had spread to every corner of their nation. It’s been a decade since I finished that project, but I still return to climb from time to time. When I do, I can easily see signs that show an increased presence of the Bad Guys.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument lies to the west of the Tohono O’odham Indian Reservation. For a dozen years, it was branded “the most dangerous park in America” following the killing of one of its law enforcement agents in a shoot-out with cartel members moving drugs into the U.S. In the year and a half since its back-country was re-opened to the public, I’ve had the good fortune to have climbed in all of its remote areas. It is truly shocking to see the level of infiltration of the cartels into this beautiful park. I have encountered scouts for the cartels in a number of places. Their job is to make sure that drugs and border-crossers can move freely north, unhindered by the Border Patrol. They wear camouflage and carry encrypted two-way radios to guide their charges through the most rugged of ranges. A climber friend of mine recently encountered a scout carrying a rifle less than 5 miles from the visitor center. Within the park, the cartels now move about with impunity in the Ajo Range, the Puerto Blanco Mountains and the Bates Mountains.

The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge lies to the north and west of Organ Pipe. Its 1,300 square miles are even more remote – only a few hardy souls each year dare to tread this spectacular wilderness. Sadly, the majority of those who do so are Bad Guys. Their goal is to cross 60 miles of the hottest, driest, most unforgiving desert on the continent. If they make it, they’ll use the disposable phone they’ve carried all the way from Mexico to call for their pickup along Interstate 8. Untold numbers never make it – the desert swallows them up and they are never seen again, leaving grieving families back home with no chance of closure. The mountain ranges that lie within the refuge are the Agua Dulce Mountains, the Growler Mountains, the Granite Mountains, the Bryan Mountains, the Sierra Pinta, the Cabeza Prieta Mountains, the Mohawk Mountains, the Tule Mountains and the Sierra Arida. In my humble opinion, this vast refuge offers the finest, remote, low-desert climbing in all of Arizona, but, I regret to inform you, it too has been overrun by the cartels and their minions. The Growler Mountains, as beautiful a range as you’d ever hope to visit, has lookout posts throughout its 27-mile length. They are up there on mountain-tops, keeping their lonely vigil 24/7, monitoring the movements of Border Patrol vehicles.

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on roads in the valley bottoms. With their hi-tech, en-crypted 2-way radios, they communicate constantly with their counterparts below whose job it is to ferry loads of drugs and groups of undocumented border-crossers safely north to the Promised Land. All nine of the ranges that lie within the refuge have been over-run by the Mexican cartels – their presence can be seen everywhere. These people are often armed and dangerous, and won't think twice about relieving you of your vehicle and everything in it if given the opportunity. If they meet you on foot in a remote spot, your backpack and its contents are of use to them and will be taken, by force if necessary. After all, we're talking about conditions where the difference between life and death can be measured by a quart of water.

To the north of the Tohono O'odham Reservation, Organ Pipe and Cabeza Prieta sits a huge swath of land called the Barry M. Goldwater Range. Its 1.7 million acres is used by the Air Force and the Marines to practice all things military, and most of it is strictly off-limits to the public. The Bad Guys routinely cross these areas with their charges, even though they are taking a terrible risk from unexploded ordnance. They don't always make it.

Over the years, I've been personally involved in the rescue of 5 people who were dying out in these remote areas. They were the lucky ones, as they lived to see the light of another day. As many as 400 have died in a single year in the Tucson sector alone, and those are just the ones they found.

So here I am, going on and on about the drama that occurs daily out in my favorite areas. Sorry about that, but it's easy to get swept away in all of it. What I really wanted to talk to you about was the climbing itself out in those places – it's the reason I go out there in the first place. Before I continue, I'd strongly recommend that you go to my website:

http://www.desertmountaineer.com

There, you can enjoy over 200 stories I've written about my adventures in these places, with thousands of photos. Anything I've mentioned in this piece can be seen there in much greater detail.

The Tohono O’odham Indian Reservation has some spectacular peaks. Baboquivari is well-known to climbers, but there are lesser-known peaks of even greater difficulty nearby. Two of them forced us into unplanned bivis when we were benighted near their summits. Along the U.S.-Mexico border in the La Liena Mountains sits Border Monument 153 on Peak 2,650’. Of all the monuments, this was the hardest for the surveyors to put in place and is by far the most challenging to climb. It's not the 5.7 degree of difficulty, but rather the extreme exposure coupled with its near-impossibility to safely protect. The Castle Mountains also offer technical peaks that appear impossible

(Continued from page 14)

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from every angle. Tom Thumb, in the Sauceda Mountains, is an outrageous and dangerous climb which resisted all attempts until its January 30, 2010 first ascent by Andy Bates (leader) and yours truly, Doug Kasian.

Organ Pipe has many remote and challenging peaks. Kino Peak is a classic, and its first ascent was put up by the Sierra Club's DPS back in 1952. Montezuma's Head is spectacular and offers 4 pitches with screamer exposure. Just to its north sits Peak 2,725', with its overhanging start.

The Cabeza Prieta Refuge offers many remote peaks, but none more daunting than Sheep Peak, which saw its first ascent only 2 short years ago on December 20, 2014 by Andy Bates (leader), John Klein and yours truly, Doug Kasian.

Almost 2 years later, Mark and I were hankering for the next big adventure. It had to include first ascents, of course, but where? It's a simple fact that the best unclimbed peaks are in the most hard-to-reach areas (read off-limits). In the Arizona desert, that would mean military bombing ranges. A range that caught our eye was the Aguila Mountains. It ticked all the boxes: remote; off-limits; 12 unclimbed peaks – in short, the most outrageous stealth climbing one could imagine. From where we parked, it was 23 miles to our first peak, which we climbed during an intense winter dust storm. Day after day, we pushed ourselves to our limits. Long hours, long distances - many of the peaks were very challenging, near the limit of what we dared do without being roped up. Things worked out – we placed all 12 of our registers. On the 6th day, we covered all of the miles across the desert back out to our vehicles. What a trip!

You've probably guessed by now that stealth climbing is my favorite - I focus much of my energy on it these days. Because most of it is in areas such as those I've discussed early in this piece, it comes with an element of risk. An article in today's local newspaper has warned that drug cartel hitmen, known as sicarios, are attacking and killing the “rip crews” that steal drug loads from rival cartels. These sicarios have been advised to shoot and kill rip crews on sight. This is happening in the areas I frequent. Scary stuff, huh? In spite of all that, I hope to continue climbing (cautiously, of course) for years to come in the beautiful deserts of Arizona.
Swasey and Notch Peaks in Utah’s House Range  
By Sharon Marie Wilcox

On May 25, 2016 nine hikers joined Larry Dwyer’s Utah trip to explore four Great Basin Peaks: Indian, Fool Creek, Swasey and Notch. Although all four peaks were climbed and were interesting, the House Range, home to Swasey and Notch Peaks, seemed to capture everyone’s attention.

The House Range, like many Great Basin ranges, has a gentle side and a steep, rugged side. The range’s west side is a continuous escarpment with 35 miles of vertical cliffs and fossil beds in the limestone containing trilobites. We didn’t find trilobites; however, we did find numerous gastropod shells on both peaks. Pinyon-juniper or sagebrush-shad scale communities dominate this range with ancient bristlecone pines at higher elevations.

Swasey Peak, at 9,669’ high, is the range high point. Our route up Swasey started from the road’s highest elevation before dropping to Sinbad Spring. Though not a long hike, the bushwhacking and rock scrambling added more challenge. Bushwhacking through unforgiving mountain mahogany isn’t pleasant, but Howard and Tobi did a great job of threading us through to the ridge. The summit rewarded us with great views and the solitude so common to great basin peaks. A benchmark and mailbox containing a register mark the summit.

Back at the cars ATVers stopped to ask where we had been. When we pointed up at Swasey Peak they asked, “Why would you go up there? Is there gold?” Hard to explain that the “golden opportunity” to sit on the summit is as valuable as gold.

From the highway, Notch Peak (9,655’) presents an impressive monolith of striated limestone standing only 300’ shorter than El Capitan in Yosemite. We started up Notch from the Sawtooth Canyon trailhead. The route turns up a dry wash with steep canyon walls leading up to a saddle before the final summit push. The saddle provides a good spot to carefully marvel at the drop off of sheer canyon walls. On the summit, we lei- surely absorbed the phenomenal views plus amazing drop off face of the peak. Thanks, Larry, for another wonderful trip to explore the great basin!
Marisa Silver directed her first film, *Old Enough*, while she was still a student at Harvard University. Underlining her early ability, the film won the 1984 Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. Silver then went on to direct three more films, *Permanent Record* (1988), *Vital Signs* (1990), and *He Said, She Said* (1991), after which she departed the film industry to become a writer.


*The God of War*, Silver's 2008 desert-themed novel, set along the shores of the Salton Sea, is no exception.

Named for the God of War, Ares Ramirez, age 12, the protagonist of Silver's story, lives with his younger brother, Malcolm, age 6, and their mother, Laurel, in a beat-up trailer in Bombay Beach, at the southeastern corner of the Salton Sea. Ares is the bright one in the family, responsible, compassionate, but also possessing a 12 year-old boy's normal sense of curiosity; Malcolm is autistic to such a degree that he needs constant attention, and Laurel is a free-spirited, overwhelmed, loving, and protective mother. When Malcolm was a baby, Ares accidentally dropped him on his head, and he now feels responsible for his brother's mental disability.

In Bombay Beach, things take place that wouldn't happen elsewhere. For example, one morning hundreds of dead fish wash up on the shore, "grey hulls of tilapia piled on top of one another. The water, teeming with algae, had turned the color of canned peas." Because they live near the Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range, Ares and Malcolm often accompany Richard, their mother's boyfriend, to the area, searching for scrap metal that they can sell for cash. Poking through the debris along the Bombay Beach shore one day, Malcolm and Ares find a discarded but useable gun. And, because they live so close to the border, the illegal immigration issue is always present: "Daily, I watched Border Patrol cars speeding south along the highway, lights flashing self-importantly, our population diminishing once again as those dark figures in the backseats were escorted home." Bombay Beach's populace takes further hit on another day when a body, presumably that of a Mexican laborer, is found floating in the Salton Sea--a discovery that only briefly draws a crowd.

Bombay Beach also has problems common to most communities, i.e., bullying in local schools, prevalent drug dealing, and drug parties taking place in deserted buildings late at night.

The crux of Silver's story involves Ares, Malcolm, and Kevin, the latter a troubled older boy, recently released from juvenile detention and now living with a Bombay Beach foster-care family. I won't spoil the ending, but I do agree with one Amazon reviewer who wrote, "The conclusion of this novel...will touch even the hardest of hearts."

In addition to a strong story and brilliant characterizations, Silver crafts top-notch descriptions of the desert. Here, for instance, is Ares describing where he lives, "The rains of January were past, but their consequences, the orange and purple buds topping the plants like the candy orbs at the end of lollipops, were beginning to appear. The desert would briefly come alive with color before the summer heat and sun fired it into an old, faded Polaroid...Off in the opposite direction lay the low mungbean-colored homes in Mecca, which housed..."
migrant workers who dotted the fields each day, moving slowly up and down the rows of peppers and melon. At the edge of our town lay the Salton Sea, the lowest, saltiest place in the desert, lower than even the real ocean, which I had never seen."

And here's a description of Ares awakening one night: "The nighttime quiet dulled the sounds of distant trucks and cars, and the star-pocked sky obliterated the daytime luster of golden arches and other neon enticements. Night restored the desert to its naked majesty. I could hear it laughing at the gas stations and schools, at telephone wires and electricity converters and irrigation canals--at all the human attempts to tame it...I smelled the things that I knew--the mesquite in the air, the left-over smoke from Mrs. Vega's barbeque next door, fertilizer and ammonia from the farms, the chemical odor from the sea."

_The God of War_ is an excellent read by a skilled author. I recommend it highly.

**TWENTYNINE PALMS (2010), Daniel Pyne**

Daniel Pyne's thoroughly entertaining _Twentynine Palms_ reminded me of other writers whose light fiction I enjoy--Carl Hiaasen (Skin Tight, Bad Monkey), Tim Sandlin (Social Blunders, Jimi Hendrix Turns Eighty), and, for older readers, Peter DeVries (Comfort Me With Apples, Let Me Count the Ways). Writing humorous fiction isn't easy. It requires a special aptitude.

Early in his career, Daniel Pyne, a Stanford graduate with a degree in economics (Hey, me too!), wrote screen plays, including _Pacific Heights_ (1990), _Any Given Sunday_ (1999), and _Fracture_ (2007). His current interest, however, seems to be writing novels, a change of focus similar to that of Marisa Silver whose _The God of War_ is reviewed above.

In addition to _Twentynine Palms_ (2010), Pyne has also published _A Hole in the Ground Owned by a Liar_ (2012), and _Fifty Mice_ (2015).

Jack Baylor, _Twentynine Palm_ 's nice guy hero, is a struggling actor who needs to get out of Los Angeles following a steamy affair with the wife of his rich and dangerously temperamental best friend, Tory Geller. Twentynine Palms, a hundred and fifty miles to the east, seems the perfect refuge.

Once ensconced at the high desert Rancho Del Dorotea Motel, Jack meets Rachel, a petulant fourteen year-old running away from home, and Mona, the mother of two children and the daughter of the motel's owner. A warm-hearted person, Jack soon falls in love with Mona and becomes protective of the bright teen-ager.

But before Jack can settle in to enjoy his desert surroundings and his cast of new friends, Mona and her children disappear, leaving behind the signs of a gruesome struggle. As Jack becomes the prime suspect in the possible murders in the eyes of the Twentynine Palms Police Department, he needs to relocate fast, and does so by accompanying two Marines to Calexico on the Mexican border.

The next-to-last scenes play out in a Los Angeles area studio, where our hero, forced to play a small bit role in order to earn some much-needed cash, is about to be cornered by two Twentynine Palms policemen. Rachel, ever quick-witted, helps Jack escape even as the small-town policemen get completely lost in the vast studio lot. Very funny stuff.

Although Pyne is best at characterization his desert depictions are excellent as well.

Describing the high desert along Highway 62 on the way to Twentynine Palms: "A few miles west, on either side of the highway, modular slant-roofed homes squat defiantly on their parcelled acres of Mojave Desert. Fierce-looking, wind-whipped zealots with rusted TV aerials for hats, the wait for the God of Fast Food Chains and Mini-malls to send property values skyrocketing, or for the Big Earthquake to put them out of their misery. Higher up, in the ragged hills among giant, broken, burnt-orange boulders turned bloody by the sun, the larger stucco tract homes with industrial air-conditioning and polarized windows and upside-down loans gaze back emptily at traffic that hurries past as if embarrassed."

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"Joshua trees, thick and spiny thugs with multiple arms held aloft, swarm in from the south in an outrage at the invasion of men; tens of thousands of trees storming the interlopers' highway and then retreating into the barren, scarped-out, labyrinthine valleys to the north, where the poor subsist, and the wealthy hide their multi-million-dollar desert homes..."

Although it took a while to dawn on me, Twentynine Palms concludes with an ending similar to Silver's The God of War (see review above), in which the protagonist redeems himself by taking the rap for a person whom he loves.

Twentynine Palms is a thriller, a love story, and is chock-full of comic twists and turns. Once you start reading, I guarantee you'll have a hard time putting it down.

AMERICAN DESERT (2004), Percival Everett

In spite of its title, American Desert adds little to the realm of desert-themed literature. It's a shame too, because Percival Everett, a professor of English at USC and the author of more than a dozen novels and short story collections, excels in describing Western outdoor scenes. Indeed, because I thoroughly enjoyed Everett's latest collection of short stories, Half an Inch of Water (2015), most of which are set in rural Wyoming, I was looking forward to his take on the namesake American Desert.

Alas, Everett's 2004 novel follows the life of Theodore (Ted) Street, an unpublished, untenured university instructor who has been negligent in his relationships with his wife and two children. While driving to Santa Monica where he plans to drown himself by walking into ocean, he is involved in a head-on collision with a UPS truck which leaves him unscratched and unbroken, but cleanly decapitated.

At his funeral service three days later, Street, his head roughly sewn on with fishing line, his lips stitched together, and his heart not beating, suddenly sits up in his casket. As you might guess, this is sensational news, and soon Street's house is surrounded by the media. A few days later, he is abducted by a group of religious zealots who live in a compound on the Mojave Desert, after which he is re-abducted and flown to a secret underground facility at a Roswell, New Mexico, U.S.A.F. base, where research is being conducted on eternal life. During all his travails, Street begins to understand what being alive really means.

If you can overlook the improbability of the situation--reminiscent of Kafka's Metamorphosis--American Desert, makes an interesting read. If you are looking for a good desert-themed read, however, I suggest one of the two novels reviewed above.

MEMORIES & SECRETS (2015), Diane Winger

Okay, to be transparent, Memories & Secrets is not really a desert-themed book. It is, however, a story set on the western slopes of the Colorado Rockies, was written by a woman who has spent weeks, if not months, rock climbing in the desert, and, best yet, much of its action unfolds in mountain settings.

The author, Diane Winger, is a self-described "retired software geek," the co-author of two climbing guides (Highpoint Adventures, 2002 and The Trad Guide to Joshua Tree, 2004), and the author of three additional novels, one of which, Faces (2013), was reviewed in a July/August 2014 Desert Books review. Married to Charlie Winger, with whom this reviewer has climbed a couple of hundred peaks (including a joint DPS list finisher) during the past 35 years, Diane lives and writes in Montrose, Colorado. She is an "enthusiastic" volunteer with the service organization, Altrusa International, and claims a fondness for watching cat videos.

Memories & Secrets is an old-fashioned coming of age story regarding seventeen year-old Ashley Bachman, of Denver, who is in the midst of a troubling period in her life.

Following her parents’ bitter divorce, including a wrenching breakup with her mother, Ashley now lives with her overprotective father, Aaron. She has become acquainted with one trouble-making friend, holds herself responsible for another friend's suicide,
The story begins as Aaron, a financial executive, finds himself required to spend five mid-summer weeks in London where his company is negotiating a take-over by an English firm. Needing someone to look after Ashley in his absence, he decides to send his daughter to her recently widowed grandmother's home in the fictional town of Seligton (based on Montrose).

Fortunately, Ashley's sixty-seven year-old grandmother Deborah, or Nana as Ashley calls her, is fashioned of the right stuff. Sensing that her granddaughter's life is not going well, Deborah slowly gains her trust, even while keeping the teen-ager from dwelling on her troubles by scheduling a full slate of physical activities, including swimming, hiking, and rock climbing.

And as Ashley's confidence returns, she begins to appreciate that her grandmother has her own concerns. Indeed, as the first anniversary of the death of David, Deborah's husband, Ashley’s grandfather, approaches, Ashley becomes aware that something is bothering Nana. When Nana asks Ashley if she would be up for a back-packing trip to the area where David died, Ashley, who has never spent a night out in the wild, willingly complies. Their plan is to light a yahrzeit candle --the Bachmans are Jewish-- for David, an intelligent man with a keen sense of humor.

On the trek, although the mountains are majestic, big trouble soon ensues, and the true natures of Ashley and Deborah become brightly illuminated.

Although starting slowly, Memories & Secrets builds to an engrossing and emotional conclusion. I must admit the final pages brought a happy, not sad, tear to my eye.
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The Desert Sage 23 July-August 2016
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EMBLEM AND LIST COMPLETION STATUS: Emblem status is awarded to DPS members who have been a member for one year, who have climbed 15 peaks on the DPS Peak list, including five of the seven emblem peaks, and who send a list of peaks and dates climbed to Membership Records Chair Ron Bartell, 1556 21st Street, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266, or ronbartell@yahoo.com. Recognition is also given for completion of the DPS list by notifying Ron of peaks and dates climbed. Please see the DPS website for additional Emblem recognition categories.

DPS MERCHANDISE AND PEAK LIST: DPS T-shirts, the DPS Peak Guide, Emblem, Explorer and List Finish pins, and other merchandise is available for purchase from the DPS Merchandiser. Please see the Merchandise page in this issue of the Sage for more information. Please note that the DPS Peak List is available as a download on the DPS Website, or it may be purchased from the DPS Merchandiser.

SAGE SUBMISSIONS: The Sage editor welcomes all articles, trip reports and photographs pertaining to outdoor activities of interest to DPS members. Trip participants are encouraged to submit a trip report if the participant knows that the trip leaders are not going to submit a trip write-up. The editor may modify submittals in an attempt to increase clarity, decrease length, or correct typos, but hopefully will not modify meaning. Please note that digital documents and photographs are required for submissions to the Sage. Trip reports should include trip dates and identify trip participants and photos should indicate when and where the photo was taken, what it is of, who is in it, and who took it. Please email Sage submissions to the editor no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months; the next submission deadline for the Sage is August 14, 2016.

ADVERTISEMENTS: You can advertise private trips that are of interest to DPS members in the Sage for free. Also, you can advertise in the Sage; the cost is $3.00 per line.

EDITOR: Greg Gerlach, 23933 Via Astuto, Murrieta, CA 92562, email: gregrg1955@verizon.net