



# The Desert Sage

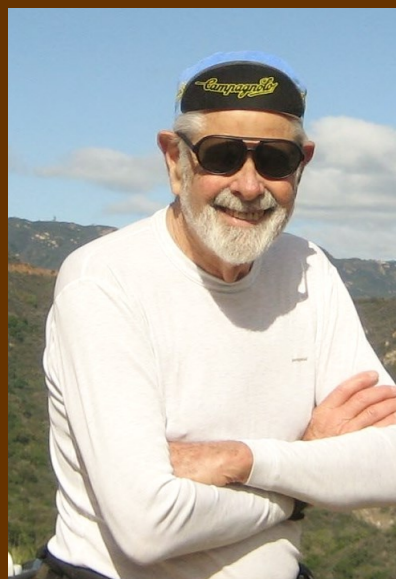
**OUR 74th SEASON**

**SEPTEMBER –OCTOBER 2015**

**ISSUE NO. 359**



<http://desertpeaks.org/>



# Chair's Corner

by  
Paul Cooley

As we relax in summer doldrums, climb Sierra peaks if we are ambitious (or, unfortunately, run to escape wildfires, for some Californians; I hope that no one in

our community was affected), 'tis the season to thank those who have volunteered and helped to keep our Desert Peaks Section in good order. So: many thanks to our outgoing Outings Chair, Brian Smith, and welcome to our new one, Leo Logacho, along with Kathy Rich, who is helping Leo get on board.

Thanks to Pat Arredondo, our outgoing Treasurer, and welcome to Laura Newman, incoming to that position. Thanks also to Jim Fleming, who will continue as Secretary, Kathy Rich, who will continue as Webmaster, and Ron Bartell, who will continue as Membership Records Chair. In addition, thanks to Gloria Miladin for her program and banquet chair service and Daryn Dodge for taking care of Mountain Records (summit registers); and, we are seeking two DPS members, one to take on the Program/Banquet responsibilities and one to take on the Mountain Records responsibilities. Please get in touch with anyone on the management committee if you are willing to help.

Thanks also to the following: Dave Perkins, our new Conservation Chair; Barbara Reber, Archives; Jim Morehouse, Guidebook Editor; Gloria Miladin, Merchandising; and Elaine Baldwin, SAGE mailer. Lastly, thanks to Greg Gerlach, SAGE Editor. I have particularly enjoyed the SAGE photographs as for one reason or another I've not been out there for a couple of years.

And I don't know about the rest of you but I'm hoping for some rain so there will be flowers in our deserts next spring.

# DPS Membership Report

by Ron Bartell

## Membership Summary

<u>Type</u>	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Sustaining</u>
Member	123	23
Household	29	
Subscriber	25	2
Totals:	177	25

## Activity Report

### Renewals

Mat Kelliher & Tanya Roton	1 year
Jeffrey Koepke	1 year
Karen Leonard	1 year
Edward H. Lubin	1 year
Edward Stork	1 year



## THE NEXT SAGE SUBMISSION DEADLINE

IS OCTOBER 11, 2015

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The Desert Peaks Section maintains a website at:  
<http://desertpeaks.org/>

# Desert Peaks Section Leadership for the 2015 - 2016 Season

## Elected Positions

### **Chair**

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### **Program / Banquet**

#### **Open**

Please contact any Management Committee member if you're interested in becoming the Program/Banquet Chair

### **Treasurer**

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13409 Stanbridge Ave  
Bellflower, CA 90706-2341  
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## Cover Photo Credit...

goes to James Barlow. The photo is of Mountain of the Sun located in Zion National Park, and was taken on a scheduled DPS trip on September 22, 2012.

## Appointed Positions

### **Archives**

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### **Mountain Records (Summit Registers)**

#### **Open**

Please contact any Management Committee member if you're interested in becoming the Mountain Records person

### **Mountaineering Committee Chair**

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## 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.





## Conservation Chair

by *Dave Perkins*



### CALIFORNIA DESERT CONSERVATION AREA

Covering more than 25 million acres — about a fourth of California — the geologically diverse California Desert Conservation Area includes sand dunes, canyons, dry lakes, 90 mountain ranges, and 65 wilderness areas. This huge expanse of land is also home to numerous imperiled species, including the threatened desert tortoise, the endangered Peninsular bighorn sheep, the cushionberry buckwheat, and many other rare plants and animals adapted to live in harsh desert environments. Congress designated the area in 1976, and the 1994 California Desert Protection Act further increased protection by setting aside as wilderness 3.5 million of its acres, turning the Death Valley and Joshua Tree national monuments into national parks and establishing the 1.6-million-acre Mojave National Preserve.

But the Bureau of Land Management, entrusted with protecting the conservation area for the sake of wildlife, plants, and sustainable human enjoyment, continues to support destructive human activities within its borders, and imperiled species suffer as planning efforts to protect their habitat are delayed time and again. In March 2000, the Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility filed suit against the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of 24 endangered species that had been hurt by poor land management. Thanks to a series of sweeping settlement agreements in 2000 and 2001, millions of acres were protected from destructive human impacts when the Bureau of Land Management promised to prohibit mining on 3.4 million acres, reduce or prohibit livestock grazing on 2 million acres, prohibit off-road vehicles on more than 550,000 acres, close more than 4,500

miles of roads, and increase wildlife surveying, monitoring, and conservation plans. The agency also agreed to protect the Peninsular bighorn sheep and its habitat, close a sand and gravel mine threatening the arroyo southwestern toad, require the use of wildlife-safe engine coolant, and make power lines raptor-proof.

A series of injunctions and suits since 2001 against the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service have resulted in a diminution of some destructive mining practices, off-road activities in so called “open wash zones,” and has given greater protection to a number of endangered species.

In January 2008, the same group of environmental allies won a victory against the Bureau of Land Management’s plan to build an off-road vehicle route through Furnace Creek in the White Mountains. Furnace Creek provides rare, desert riparian habitat that supports many rare and imperiled species, including the migrating southwestern willow flycatcher. Keeping this area closed on Bureau of Land Management lands protects hundreds of square miles of wilderness in the Inyo National Forest, including Tres Plumas Flats, from destruction by off-road vehicle route proliferation. Much of the text above was abstracted from the Center for Biological Diversity’s website at [www.biologicaldiversity.org](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org).

An item of considerable interest from a conservation standpoint is the May 25th *New Yorker* article on the Colorado River titled “Where the River runs Dry.” An internet search on this title provides the text.

**THE DPS NEEDS ONE MEMBER  
TO SERVE AS PROGRAM/  
BANQUET CHAIR AND ONE  
MEMBER TO TAKE CARE OF  
MOUNTAIN RECORDS ASAP!!**

**Please contact any  
DPS Management Committee  
member if you’re interested  
in taking on the responsibili-  
ties of either position.**

# Outings Chair

by Leo Logacho



## AN ENCHANTED PEAK

Greetings Everyone,

Let me point you to an enchanted peak as I continue in my attempt to inspire readers to come, experience and enjoy our DPS outings.

I was able to summit an enchanted peak located south of the border in the spring of

2014. I learned about it from an article published in an old copy of *The Desert Magazine* dated March 1950. The article talked about the first expedition to this peak by a Sierra Club mountaineering group consisting of Captain Sam Fink of the Santa Ana fire department and 13 mountaineers, who failed to reach the summit. The article also mentioned that a Mexican team was able to summit this peak in 5 days by trail-blazing a new route up La Providencia canyon. Their approach was highly technical, reaching the summit from the east side of the peak. In addition, I learned while hiking in our local mountains that the Sierra Club Safety Committee was created because of an accident that happened in the 1970's while climbers on a Sierra Club outing attempted to summit this peak.

Back to my adventure: Laura Newman, Duane Gilliland, Grant Myers, Greg Gerlach, and I reached the summit of this peak on April 26, 2014. It involved a 3 day backpack plus one long day to climb this peak, as well as many miles of driving, but it was one of my best outings ever!

The DPS calls this peak "Picacho del Diablo" (Devil's Peak), but I think the Mexican government's name for the mountain describes it better: "Enchanted Peak" (El Cerro de la Encantada).

I hope this story will inspire you to go out and explore the desert and bag a DPS peak.

See you on the trails!



# Treasurer's Report

by Pat Arredondo  
DPS Account Summary from  
January 1, 2015 to  
August 4, 2015

## INCOME

Banquet Book Sales	\$79.30
Banquet Silent Auction	\$112.00
Banquet Ticket Sales	\$2,510.00
Merchandise	\$190.00
Subscriptions	<u>\$1,540.00</u>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$4,431.30</b>

## EXPENSES

Banquet Awards	\$49.05
Banquet Expenses	\$200.00
Banquet Payment	\$2,220.00
Postage for Merchandise Mailing	\$37.00
Sage Mailing	\$535.57
Sage Printing	\$620.36
Sales Tax	\$20.47
Web Page Expenses	<u>\$129.73</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$3,812.18</b>

<b>CHECKING BALANCE</b>	<b>\$3,677.98</b>
<b>SAVINGS BALANCE</b>	<b><u>\$501.27</u></b>
<b>TOTAL BALANCE</b>	<b>\$4,179.25</b>

## 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](mailto: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.



# Trip Reports

**A wild horse (photo taken by Tina Bowman on April 29, 2015 on a climb of Navajo Mountain).**

**South Sister (11,360')  
By Debbie Bulger  
April 27, 2015**

With the climb of South Sister in April, Richard Stover and I completed the Sweetwater Mountain sister trio 15 years after we climbed the first of these peaks: East Sister in 2000, Middle Sister in 2014, and finally South Sister in 2015, the highest of the three. We spent the night outside Nugent Cabin at the trailhead so we could get an early start. It was a cold night and we found ice on the inside of our camper shell when we woke.

South Sister is over 11,000 feet high. I was not as acclimated this early in the season as I usually am in the summer after more time at altitude. Consequently, I huffed and puffed my way up the more than 3,000' of elevation gain. To make the ascent even more fun, the route passes through thickets of Mountain Mahogany. I told myself as I sought low passages through the brush that "we were not the only things caught in the brush". Richard found a lost balloon, making the trip official.

We ascended the southeast ridge and came down the south ridge of this rocky peak. We spotted Coyote



**Debbie Bulger heading up the southeast ridge of South Sister. It's just a little further to the summit of the mountain.**

tracks in the snow near the summit. Humans are not the only ones to climb peaks. The views of the Sweetwater Mountains were expansive.

There was no formal register on the top of the peak, only a plastic candy jar containing a few small sheets of notebook paper, and no pen or pencil! We had no way to sign in since I had not brought my usual climbing gear, which includes a journal and pen. A photo would have to do to document my achievement.



**The view from the summit of South Sister.**

Interestingly, there was cell phone reception on the summit, so we snapped a selfie and sent it to my daughters. They are supposed to call in the Mounties if we don't return as scheduled, so we wanted them to know we were safe and had at least made it to the summit.

The decent took about four hours. We were rewarded by seeing nine does as we threaded our way down the mountain. There was much less brush on the south ridge. We stopped to stare at the deer, and they in turn stared at us trying to determine if we were a threat. Two looked at nine. The deer ran when we started to move, and in their haste artfully showed us the best route down across a drainage course and up the far slope, thus avoiding a rocky cliff. Let's take the deer route, Richard suggested. Good advice. We got back to camp at 5:30 p.m. in time for supper and a cozy evening in front of the stove in Nugent Cabin.



# Trip Reports - continued...

## Death Valley Peaks By Gregory Frux April 2015

Since being exposed to the wonders of Death Valley, where I served as artist in residence in 2005, I have had a low key project to reach the summit of the high point of each range in the park. On previous trips I ascended Telescope Peak (11,043'), high point of the Panamint Mountains, and Funeral Peak (6,384'), high point of the Black Mountains. With two hearty mountaineer buddies, Mark Duffy and Ron Beimel, I choose April 2015 for an ambitious campaign to try four more high points (Brown, Pyramid, Grapevine and Tin Mountains) in a little over a week. The forces of nature demanded adjustments to my plan, but we had some excellent adventures and climbed three peaks.

When Mark Duffy and I arrived in Shoshone, California temperatures were pushing 90 degrees by mid morning. We scouted the two potential access routes to Brown Peak. With the low clearance vehicle we had we felt that the preferred approach from Dead Man's Pass was not viable. The alternative climb from the east was 3,000' and would be in the sun immediately at dawn. It seemed to us that this easterly route on the peak would not be a good introduction to desert climbing in these temperatures. Fortunately Mark asked the correct question -- "were there any other nearby objectives that might be a little easier?"

The next morning at 7:00 a.m. found us at a roadside pull out, looking south at Ibex Peak (4,751'), high point of the Ibex Hills. Because I hadn't planned this climb we didn't have a route description with us, only notes of where to start. The backlit mountain appeared to have cliffs blocking the approach. Based on previous travels I suspected this was an illusion of foreshortening. We followed the remains of an old road (mining?) for the first hour. The desert at the 4,000' level was all abloom with poppies and flowering cactus. The most likely line gradually became visible. Once we acquired a ridge to the left of the highest point visible on the skyline, the going became easier. From here we followed a series of ridgelines to

the summit. We topped out at 9:50 a.m. on April 19th and the temperature was 90 degrees. The views were



**Mark Duffy approaching the summit of Ibex Peak, with views to the east.**

expansive: the southern portion of Death Valley, Lake Tecopa, Calico Mountain, and the Greenwater and Black Mountain Ranges. The climbing register demonstrated how isolated this peak is -- some years there were no recorded ascents. The descent took two hours and the heat justified our peak choice and early start time. We kept it on the safe side, having carried four quarts of water, but only drinking two. By 1:00 p.m. we were in the swimming pool in Shoshone.

The weather continued to get hotter. We had a brief, delightful and a roasting hike into Kaleidoscope Canyon at the south end of Death Valley. By that afternoon, we relocated to Furnace Creek, where the temperature was 102 degrees at 6:00 p.m. Given the conditions, Mark and I decided it wasn't the right time to attempt Pyramid Peak. We did get in a terrific morning hike into Red Wall Canyon, one of the most colorful routes in the Grapevine Mountains.

Mark's time ran out and he departed. My companion for the last three days was Ron Bemiel. We were blessed with a turn in the weather, to stormy, unsettled and cooler conditions. This, along with rental of a vehicle at Farabee Jeep Rentals at Furnace Creek,

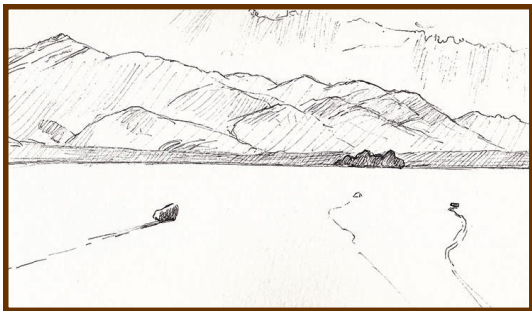
*(Continued on page 10)*

# Trip Reports - continued...

(Continued from page 9)

made the next two climbs possible. We departed Furnace Creek on April 23rd, driving to Beatty. From here we entered a maze of dirt roads heading across a plateau towards the Grapevine Mountains. We got mildly lost, but were rewarded with close up views of wild horses and burros at a spring. Back on route we reentered the National Park's Nevada portion (called the Nevada triangle). The route became four wheel drive as it climbed Phinney Canyon. There was one difficult section where a boulder partly blocked the road, but it was certainly passable in the jeep. We reached the high point and end of the road at a saddle, elevation 7,400' at around 12:30 p.m. From here we hiked north, up and down a ridgeline, through forest. There appeared on and off use trails, but these might have been game trails. Grey clouds and a few drops of rain kept temperatures very reasonable -- 70 degrees at the summit. The summit of Grapevine Peak (8,737') was reached at 3:00 p.m., which had hazy views in all directions. We easily retraced our steps to the car by 5:00 p.m. and returned to just north of Beatty, where we had notice a campground featuring hot springs.

The following day we drove the Titus Canyon Road and continue on to Racetrack Playa. Besides visiting



**The art work, which was drawn by Gregory Frux, is of the Racetrack Playa in Death Valley National Park.**

the famed location of the moving rocks, we scouted the start point of Tin Mountain (8,953') the afternoon before the climb. One thing I learned was that I should create a way point on my GPS. I didn't and we did not get our 4:30 a.m. start off smartly! By the time we found the correct starting point it was nearly 6:00 a.m. and it was getting light. The west side of Tin Mountain looked like a series of cliffs, which was somewhat true, but more a question of

foreshortening. The direction in Andy Zdon's book *Desert Summits* was adequate by required diligence. The line gradually steepened with the upper several thousand feet a series of stable scree fields. The steepness did keep us in the shade and make for speed. Coming into the sun at about 8,000' elevation, we entered a different world. The upper mountain had the appearance of rolling forested hills -- a very appealing

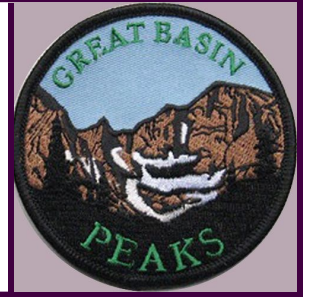


**The slope of Tin Mountain as Ron Beimel watches a storm approach.**

prospect. We pushed back out original turnaround time of 10:00 a.m. and made it to the summit by 11:00 a.m. The prospect was tremendously satisfying, with views across Death Valley to the Grapevine Mountains, plus Dry Mountain, the Panamints, Inyos etc. Views were somewhat limited by haze and on-coming storm clouds. I assured Ron that precipitation rarely reached the ground in Death Valley. On the descent I was once again proven wrong when we were hit by several fierce hail storms, accompanied by thunder. Despite this we were able to reach the car after a four hour descent, well satisfied.

This project has been immensely rewarding. I love getting to peaks which have a true wilderness aspect, despite being only hours walk from a road. I hope to speak with my friends in the Desert Peaks section, to draft a revised list of the high points of all ranges in Death Valley National Park!

# Great Basin Peaks Section News



## State Highpointers Convention By Sharon Marie Wilcox

Finishing a peak list would be easier if there was only one list to complete; however, there are many good lists! Every time I cross one peak off of a list, I discover more peaks and lists to pursue.

When non-peak list friends ask, “When will you stop working on peak lists?” I previously said when my knees require me to stop. However, that answer took on a twist after attending the State Highpointers Convention in Sibley, Iowa this summer. The convention was a fun way to meet others that are pursuing the 50 state highpoints ([www.highpointers.org](http://www.highpointers.org)) and those pursuing the 3,142 county high points ([www.cohp.org](http://www.cohp.org)). I spent time with county high pointers locating a number of Iowa and Minnesota’s county highpoints in the middle of cornfields or dirt roads.



**Left to right, Laura Newman and Sharon Marie Wilcox on the Iowa state highpoint, Hawkeye Point, elevation 1,670’ (photo by Gerry Roach)**

The Iowa state highpoint, Hawkeye Point (1,670’), was a drive to a mosaic plaque and stone marker. A totally different concept than hiking Nevada’s Boundary Peak or California’s Mount Whitney, though, still a time to connect and share with other peak climbers from all around the country.

So when will I finish pursuing peaks? After joining the Highpointers and discovering the number of “flatter peaks” that one could do even with a walker, my new answer is “Never”!

How much fun was the convention? I’m already signed up for next year’s convention in Montana. I hope to see some of you there to join me and the other Great Basin Peaks members that are participating.

If exploring state highpoints interests you, a great resource is, *Highpoint Adventures: The Complete Guide to the 50 State Highpoints* by Charlie and Diane Winger.

Join the GBPS! For details on membership, recognition categories, peak list, and trip reports check out Great Basin Peaks Section at: <http://www.sierraclub.org/toiyabe/great-basin-peak- outings>.

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## Table & Currant Mountain Wilderness Areas By Sharon Marie Wilcox June 16-17, 2015

In June, Larry Dwyer led an exploration in two Nevada wilderness areas to hike two Great Basin Peaks Section listed peaks.

We entered the Table Mountain Wilderness area in the Monitor Range from the Morgan Creek trailhead to hike Table Mountain (10,888’). This trail meandered up through the shade of aspen trees to a fence line about 10,000’ in elevation. Here we headed cross county to the ridge, passing through scattered aspen groves with Basque carvings, unusually twisted trees, and a few deer.

Enjoying great views from both sides of the ridgeline, we headed to the cairn on Danville Benchmark. Along the ridge the hedgehog cacti displayed their blooms while a swallow swooped around us. This was a very pleasant and scenic hike with a relaxing break on top to enjoy the 360-degree views.

Leaving Table Mountain, we continued to the Currant Mountain Wilderness in the White Pine Mountains. At Warm Springs on Highway 6, be on the lookout

*(Continued on page 13)*

# The Rocks We Climb

by *Bob Michael*

## MOUNT PATTERSON, SWEETWATER MOUNTAINS

Let's head above timberline and cool off again. (Let's not even THINK about climbing Palen or Castle Dome in [ugh] August!) This time we'll look at the most bizarre and unusual Arctic-Alpine zone on the List and in possibly all of California – the strange, rolling, multi-colored “soft” terrain atop the Sweetwaters.

Of course, in a range that abuts the Sierra on the east, our story must begin with this giant block of the Earth. In fact, while researching this article, I came upon a new word...”microplate” As a welded-together unit of hard crystalline rock of hundreds of square miles in extent, the Sierra, along with its “hinged-down” western extension buried beneath the sediments of the Central Valley, behaves largely as a tiny, sub-continental “plate” of its very own in the complex and chaotic geology of California and Nevada. To grossly over-simplify: (called “arm-waving”, part of mega-thinking), when the Sierra microplate moves, Owens Peak more or less moves in tandem with Sierra Buttes!

Along with the overall northwest-southeast-trending structural “grain” in the Pacific Southwest -- imposed by the greater San Andreas/Sea of Cortez plate boundary system from the tip of Baja to Cape Mendocino – we have the east-west crustal spreading beginning in the Miocene era which I've discussed before as shaping the topography of the current Great Basin into fault blocks and valleys, Interestingly, I learned from recent research papers that the great Sierra frontal fault from Inyokern to Bishop, the westernmost and the daddy of all Basin & Range faults, has not only the obvious vertical uplift component, but a horizontal, or strike-slip component – the Sierra microplate is not only rising above the Great Basin to the east but also pulling away from it to the northwest! Thus, the eastern side of the Sierra is a weak zone in the crust, under tension, much more stressed than, say, under Fresno. Any fault profound enough to create almost two vertical miles of relief in one fell swoop is a serious “wound” in the crust, and the plan-

et has bled all along this injury; consider (from south to north) the extensive and quite young Coso volcanic field north of the Indian Wells (Ridgecrest) valley; the lava flows and cinder cones around Big Pine; the enormous and still-uneasy Long Valley Caldera from north of Bishop to the young Mono Craters, filling the crustal “vacuum” caused by the pulling-away of the Sierra crest to the west north of Bishop (see my piece on Glass Mountain); and, not far to the north of the Long Valley complex, the extinct Little Walker Caldera. As is the case with Mount Jefferson, a caldera is a collapsed feature that results after a massive volcano has ejected all its innards and the superstructure collapses into the void; this hole usually (but not always) fills with the last remnants of the lava and ash as the ruined volcano slowly goes dormant. When you drive through Devil's Gate Pass on 395 northwest of Bridgeport, you're driving through the northern margin of this caldera. While it was active, from roughly 11 to 9 million years ago, in the late Miocene epoch, this mega-volcano did quite a job on the surrounding landscape, producing prodigious amounts of lava; flows have been traced on the west to the gold country foothills south of Angels Camp, and on the east beyond Bodie and into Nevada! Substantial areas of the Sierra themselves are made of volcanic flows in this region, very much unlike the highest Sierra from Yosemite south. If you've climbed Sierra Peaks Section Leavitt Peak from Sonora Pass, you'll remember trekking for miles across somber volcanic rock, mostly dark gray with a purplish cast; as I remember, Sierra granite is nowhere to be seen on this whole route!

Mega-thinking geologists have classified this whole trans-Sierra zone of generally north-northwest trending rifting, right-lateral (west side to the north) strike-slip faulting, major up-and-down (normal) faulting, seismic activity, and volcanism as a geologic sub-province called the “Walker Lane” that extends from the central Mojave Desert, with its northwest-trending fault-block mountains, including Death, Panamint, Saline, and Eureka Valleys, all the way up the east side of the Sierra to where the range, and the Lane, fizzle out into the southern margin of the vol-

*(Continued on page 13)*

*(The Rocks We Climb, continued from page 12)*

canic Cascades up by Susanville. The very persuasive argument has been made that some time in the (geologically) near future, this will become the new plate boundary between the (east) Pacific and North American plates; the San Andreas, tired of having its “style cramped” by having to kink at the “Big Bend” roughly between Indio and Santa Maria – all because the south end of that tough Sierra microplate gets in the way – will “jump” east to “San Andreas 2.0” running straight through Barstow, Lone Pine, and Reno! (Remember the 7.3 Landers earthquake in 1992?)

Now, let’s focus in on Mount Patterson and the Sweetwaters. In the big picture, these mountains are merely a spur off the Sierra in the Sonora Pass area, with granite buried by lava flows from the Little Walker megavolcano. But it’s the stuff on top that makes them unique. Capping the high central peaks are light-colored, porous latitic and rhyolitic tuffs (lithified ash) and flows – probably the last gasps from the dying volcano. This stuff is mostly fine feldspar with a little quartz, and is easily attacked by heat and steam from the volcano and, later, the elements, turning into clay. Here and there were exhalations of hot mineralized fluids; pyrite and other sulfide minerals were randomly spread around. These minerals quickly decay at the surface into variously colored iron oxides. Other areas which weren’t “juiced up” with iron are snow-white clay making the crazy quilt of colors one sees from the top of Patterson. I’ve seen similar landscapes in the volcanic San Juans of southwest Colorado and the volcanic Tushar Mountains of southwest-central Utah. This also explains the “soft” topography atop the range; this clay-rich stuff just can’t hold a sharp edge. There was some minor gold mining in the region southeast of Mount Patterson, but no major “strikes” were ever made.

Although in the direct rain shadow of the Sierra, it is certainly possible that these mountains are high enough to have held cirque glaciers in the Pleistocene ice age; but, scanning the topo map, I can’t see any obvious cirques. This is not surprising, as the soft rock, disintegrating and ever so slowly “flowing” downhill under gravity, would have smoothed out the outlines of any cirques that may have existed. Although there’s no real alpine tundra, botanists have identified some unique alpine plants that have evolved in isolation on the roof of the Sweetwaters, coping with cold, wind, and the weird inhospitable

soils. Since so much of the high country is 4x4-able, there is real concern that these tough but fragile plants are severely threatened.

*(Great Basin Peaks Section news, continued from page 11)*

for Bighorn sheep. They are often spotted on the cliffs above the springs or even lounging around the upper hot springs.

Currant Mountain (11,513’) is the highest of the White Pine Range, topping dramatic white limestone cliffs. This hike was substantially more challenging than the leisurely hike on Table Mountain. We topped the ridgeline via a steep scree slope through ancient Bristlecone pines. As I trudged up this slope I tried to convince myself how young I was compared to these gnarled trees. Unfortunately, it didn’t seem



**Left to right, Sharon Marie Wilcox, Randy McNatt and Larry Dwyer on the summit of Current Mountain.**

to make the climb any easier. After a breather on the ridge, we followed the rocky ridgeline to the summit of Currant Mountain. The summit had a reference marker but no register. We took a well-deserved break to re-energize for the steep trip down plus relish the views and solitude of another wilderness opportunity in the Great Basin.

Good route information and GPS tracks for both peaks can be found on [Peakbagger.com](http://Peakbagger.com).



# DESERT BOOKS

*By Burton Falk*

## DESERT BOOKS; MUSTANGS

**MUSTANG, The Saga of the Wild Horse in the American West (2008), Deanne Stillman**

**THE MUSTANGS (1934), J. Frank Dobie**

**THE MISFITS (1961), Screenplay by Arthur Miller**

"The term 'Mustang' refers to the wild horses that roam the ranges of the western United States. The Mustang is not a breed but rather a mixture of many breeds that have co-mingled over many years. Swift, sure-footed, tough, and intelligent, Mustangs weigh from 600 to 1000 pounds and are well suited for the rugged conditions of life on the western ranges. These wild horses are descendants of animals that escaped from or were released by Spanish explorers, ranchers, miners, soldiers, and Native Americans. In the mid-seventeenth century they numbered between two and four million. Today, only about 50,000 survive. This drastic reduction in their numbers was due in part to the 'mustangers' who rounded up wild horses and sent them to slaughter." -- National Mustang Association

### **MUSTANG, The Saga of the Wild Horse in the American West (2008), Deanne Stillman**

Two of Deanne Stillman's books, *Twenty-nine Palms* and *Desert Reckoning*, both based on desert tragedies, have been reviewed in previous issues of *Desert Sage*. *Mustang* is also a tragedy--unless you happen to be a rancher--but its scope encompasses a much larger geographical area.

Always interested in the dark side of desert life, Stillman, in her preface, describes the event which encouraged her to research and write *Mustang*. While in Reno in December, 1998, she read in a local paper "that six wild horses had been gunned down in the mountains outside Reno. The next day the body

count had grown to twenty. By the end of December, thirty-four dead mustangs had been found in the Virginia Range... A few days later, three men were arrested. Two of them were Marines..."

In *Mustang*, Stillman, an advocate for the preservation of the wild horses of the American West, explains the nation's bipolar attitude--one part love, one part indifference--toward the animal upon which our forebears depended.

Starting off, the author reminds readers that the horse genus, *Equus*, evolved in North America during the Pliocene epoch, about 4 million years ago, when grasslands were spreading and stretches of desert and tundra began to appear. *Equus*, however, died out on this continent at the end of the last ice age around 10-12 thousand years ago due to changing climate and/or the impact of newly arrived human hunters.

It wasn't until Columbus arrived in the West Indies in 1493 that the vanished species returned to the New World. And it took another 26 years, until 1519, for Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, to introduce the domesticated horse to mainland North America.

Although Francisco Coronado, during his unrewarding 1540-42 expedition to the American Southwest, was the first to bring horses into contact with the American Indians, it remained for Don Juan Oñate, during his 1598 expedition into New Mexico, to lose hundreds of his horses and mules, many of which were "found" by Indians of the Southwest.

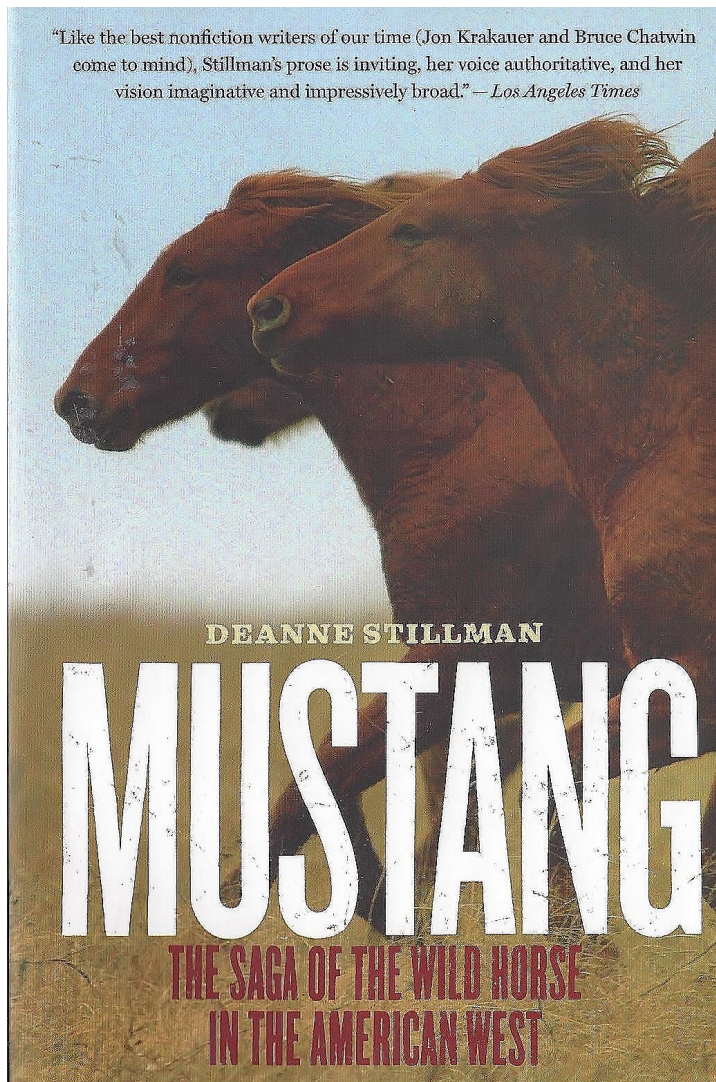
By the mid-1600s, horses and the Native Americans had become the best of friends. "From the Apache and Comanche to the Zuni to the Hopi to the Navajo to the Ute; from the Shoshone to the Flathead, Crow, the Mandan, the Ojibwas and beyond, horses allied with tribe after tribe...it was as if their kind had never disappeared from their native turf."

*(Continued on page 15)*

## Desert Books - continued...

(Continued from page 14)

Stillman devotes the middle portion of *Mustang* to a chronological history of the breed in chapters titled, "Comanche: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Horse That Survived It"; "All Roads Lead to Buffalo Bill;" "Rawhide: Of Cow Ponies and Bucking Broncos," and "The Wonder Horses That Built Hollywood." All the above is interesting material but not especially relevant to desert lovers.



In "Part III: Last Stand," we at last arrive at an explanation of the problem facing the mustang today. In her next to last chapter, "The Mustang Besieged," Stillman explains that by the end of the 1800s there were two million or more wild horses ranging across seventeen states, "from California to Missouri, Texas to Montana," and that "then, as now, most of them had retreated to Nevada, staking out territory in the remote mountains and deserts..."

Unfortunately for the mustang, several things occurred at the turn of the twentieth century to threaten their existence, i.e., new ranchers in the Silver State captured and tamed scores of wild horses for use in ranch work; the Boer War broke out in South Africa in 1899, during which nearly 250,000 wild horses, many from Nevada, were sent to the front; and the winter of 1899 was the worst in Nevada state history, a time when both cattlemen and sheep men, usually bitter enemies, agreed that the remaining scant forage shouldn't be wasted on the wild horses who weren't meant to be on the range in the first place. Most devastating of all, in 1897, Nevada passed a law authorizing the killing of wild horses, an act which was, within a year, cause for thousands of animals to have been "shot and sent to a rendering plant in Elko, where they became fertilizer, glue, or hog food."

The first seventy years of the new century continued to be deadly for the wild horses of the western U.S. Mustangers, a new breed of entrepreneurs, sprang up, supplying droves of wild horses for slaughterhouses. "It seemed there was no end to the demand for mustangs; Scandinavians were eating tons of horseflesh, and glue and mattress factories were buying up all the spare parts." In the early 1920s, yet another market for wild horses emerged--canned dog and cat food. Stillman quotes Walker D. Wyman, who in his 1945 book, *The Wild Horse of the West*, wrote, "When the country was agricultural food for the dog was not a problem--scraps, left-overs, and rodents constituted the diet. But as the urban population increased, the delicatessen came into its own..."

The outlook for mustangs grew even darker in 1934 when, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Taylor Grazing Act was passed. Because western ranchers were suffering both economically and due to "vast hurricanes of dust (that) swept the land, the result of a drought, overgrazing, and high winds," the grazing act set up allotments, allowing a certain number of cows or sheep, based on how many the range could carry in a particular region. The mustang's status under this new plan, as one grazing service spokesman in 1939 explained, was that "a wild horse consumes forage

(Continued on page 16)

# Desert Books - continued...

(Continued from page 15)

needed by domestic livestock, brings in no return, and serves no useful purpose. (The agency) is interested in the removal of wild horses from the public ranges...and has relied on efforts made by individuals who have worked in cooperation with the Division." As Stillman adds, "In other words, the only thing standing between mustangs and oblivion was time."

In 1950, a Nevada woman, Velma Johnson, aka Wild Horse Annie, came across a truck filled with living, bleeding mustangs on their way to a rendering plant. Dismayed at the scene, she devoted the next two decades, endangering her life in the process, to become the driving force behind the passage of the first legal protections for mustangs. Surprisingly, it was Richard M. Nixon who in 1971 signed the landmark Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act into law--a moment that has been overlooked in the annals of his presidency "'We need the tonic of wildness,' Nixon said, quoting Thoreau at the signing ceremony. 'In the past seventy years, civilization and economics have brought the wild horse to 99 per cent extinction. They are a living link with the conquistadors, through the heroic times of the western Indians and pioneers to our own day...More than that, they merit protection as a matter of ecological right--as anyone knows who has stood awed at the indomitable spirit and sheer energy of a mustang running free.'"

Provisions of the 1971 bill included that all remaining wild horses and burros on federal land were to be held in Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed herds, each herd to be kept at an Appropriate Management Level (AML), the point at which herd population is consistent with the land's capacity to allow the animals to thrive in balance with other public land uses and resources. Most wild horse advocates, however, considered that the initial BLM's management levels were set too low. Animals that were culled to maintain herd size were to be placed in BLM feed lots, hopefully to be adopted.

In 2004, Montana senator Conrad Burns, concerned because of the BLM's growing inventory of wild horses and burros, attached a rider to the 2005 federal appropriations bill allowing that any animal held in

captivity over ten years old or who hadn't been adopted on a third try would be sold off for a dollar a head. The Burns' rider passed, and for the first time in twenty-five years, wild horses and burros were in jeopardy of being sold to the slaughterhouse.

As far as this reviewer can determine, this is the situation as it currently stands.

In closing, Stillman assures readers that "in the higher elevations of the Nevada desert, and in certain pockets across the West, mustangs still roam, unfettered, in pretty herds, each herd with its own story..." She ends quoting Will James, the cowboy writer, who wrote: "They really belong not to man, but to that country of junipers and sage, of deep arroyos, mesas--and freedom."

## **THE MUSTANGS (1934), J. Frank Dobie (1888-1964)**

Born and raised on a ranch in Live Oak County Texas, J. Frank Dobie was at various stages in his life a newspaper reporter, a high school teacher, a college professor, and, eventually discovering a desire to put the story of Texas ranch life and southwestern folklore into words, a venerated author.

Dobie's 1934 volume, *The Mustangs*, includes a well-researched review of the impact the introduction of the mustang had in the Americas. But because Dobie is also a great story teller, the essence of the book comes from his anecdotes, many of which come from his discussions with cowboys and mustangers who lived through the final days of the open range in the American West.

The respected western bibliographer, Lawrence Clark Powell, in his book, *Southwestern Classics*, wrote, "In breadth of interests, intellect, sympathy, and perspective, (Dobie) is the greatest soul the Southwest has sired...I find it hard to write coolly of the writer so dearly did I love the man, so influential was he in providing me with standards by which I came to measure all Southwestern writing." Powell went on to profess that *The Mustangs* was his favorite of Dobie's volumes.

(Continued on page 17)



# Desert Books – continued...

(Continued from page 16)

To be honest, most of *The Mustang's* stories are based in the Southwest, especially in Texas, with only one or two occurring in the desert regions west of the Rockies. Don't let that deter you from perusing this gem of a volume, however. After reading *The Mustangs* you might be tempted to take a peek at other Dobie's works, including but not limited to, *Coronado's Children: Tales of Lost Mines and Buried Treasures of the Southwest*; *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver*; and *The Voice of the Coyote*.

**THE MISFITS (1961) Screenplay by Arthur Miller; directed by John Huston; starring Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Montgomery Clift, Eli Wallach**

Arthur Miller (1915-2005), the American author of several prize-winning plays, including *The Crucible*, *The Death of a Salesman*, and *All My Sons*, originally wrote *The Misfits* as a short story which was published in *Esquire Magazine*. Later, as a valentine, Miller adapted the story into a movie to star his new wife, Marilyn Monroe.



**A scene from the Misfits, Mustang Flat, Nevada**

Although the practice of mustanging, i.e., capturing wild horses to sell for use in dog food, does play a part in the film, the interaction of the four main characters: Roslyn, the recipient of a recent Reno quickie divorce, played by Monroe; Gay, an aging cowboy, played by Clark Gable; Guido, Gay's friend and amateur pilot, played by Eli Wallach; and Perce, a broken-down rodeo bull-rider, played by Montgomery Clift, all misfits, is the main theme.

Because this essay concerns mustangs, however, let's focus on that subject.

The movie (in black & white) was filmed on location mostly in and around Reno, with the climactic round-up scene filmed on a dry lake 12 miles east of Dayton, NV, an area known today as "Misfits Flat."

Guido, flying an open cockpit bi-wing plane that has seen better days, herds a pack of eight mustangs (one stallion, six mares, and a colt) from the sere desert foothills toward the dry lake. After he lands, the three men, driving a flat-bed truck, with Roslyn riding along, lasso the horses one by one, dropping off a heavy tire attached to each horse to prevent them from running away. The horses are then hog-tied and left lying on the ground awaiting someone else to take them to a rendering plant.

All goes well until Perce explains to the soft-hearted Roslyn where the mustangs will be taken. And that's all I'm going to tell you, except that *The Misfits*, which is not currently available on Netflix, was well worth the \$17.95 I invested in buying the DVD from Amazon.

Clark Gable died of a heart attack shortly after the film was completed. Many blame his death on the stress due to problems caused by Monroe, who was using drugs and alcohol during the filming. Monroe died of an apparent overdose a year and a half after the film was released at the age of 36. As for the director, John Huston, it is said that he often fell asleep during the filming, and that he ran up a huge gambling bill which the production company helped him repay.

Montgomery Clift was seriously injured in an automobile accident shortly after *The Misfits* was released, and was found dead in a New York City townhouse in July 1966 at the age of 45.

Makes you wonder about the benefits associated with being a celebrity.

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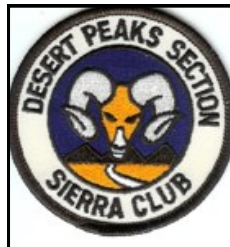
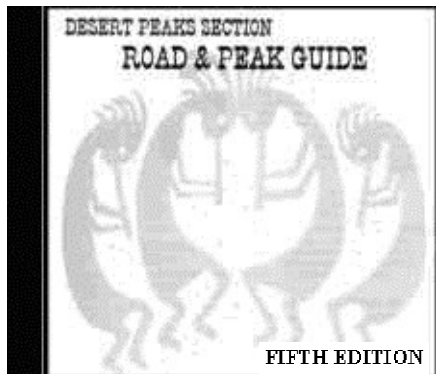
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