



The Desert Sage

OUR 76th SEASON

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2016

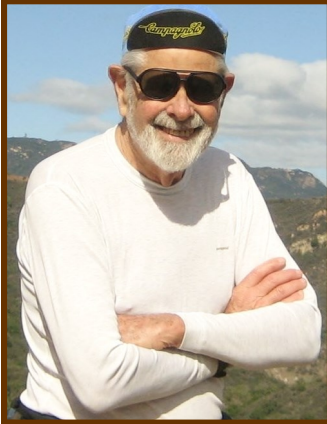
ISSUE NO. 366



<http://desertpeaks.org/>

Chair's Corner

by Paul Cooley



Indian Cove, at Joshua Tree National Park. Camping there with my family many times, with Sierra Club LTC once, and with my running club, the Santa Monica Mountain Goats. Several trips with the Angeles Chapter's Natural Science Section, leading bird walks.

There are numerous desert birds there that are not seen, or not often seen, in the Los Angeles area: Cactus Wren, Canyon Wren (sometimes heard in canyons of the Santa Monica Mountains), Le Conte's Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow, Verdin, and others. If you are lucky, a Roadrunner. Coyotes are heard, and occasionally seen. And once, in one of the group sites there, we had a desert tortoise meander through our camp.

Climbing, of course, is great; Indian Cove may be the next most popular rock climbing spot in Joshua Tree, after Hidden Valley. And hiking: the Boy Scout trail, that runs from Indian Cove to Hidden Valley, is a marvelous sampler of the back country of the park.

Mountains to climb, as well...Eagle Mountain, near Cottonwood Springs in the southeast part of the park, the first mountain I ever climbed. And on a good night, stars, lots more than can be seen from the city. The first time I saw M31, the nebula in the Andromeda constellation, a spiral galaxy similar to our own Milky Way but about 2 and a half million light years from us, was from Indian Cove. Fuzzy spot in the sky, but put a binocular or better yet, a telescope on it, and you can wonder at it.

Joshua Tree, Death Valley, Pinnacles, Sequoia / Kings Canyon, Yosemite, and Redwoods National Parks, and that's only in California.

This year we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the

National Park Service. Stephen Mather lobbied for such a service and became its first director after President Woodrow Wilson signed the legislation creating it on August 25, 1916. The value of the parks to all of us seems obvious to me. I never thought that we might have to defend them, but there seem to be some who favor dismantling the National Park system and "giving the land back to the people". Don't be fooled; the people own the parks, now, and should, forever.



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THE NEXT SAGE SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 11, 2016.

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Cover Photo Credit...

goes to Tommey Joh. The photo was taken from the summit of Canyon Point on January 23, 2016; also, the peak is located in Death Valley National Park and is on the DPS list.

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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.



Trips & Events November 2016 — January 2017

A DPS group descending Stewart Point (photo taken by Mat Kelliher on April 19, 2015).

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. 10	SAT	HPS	2016 HPS Holiday Hoopla
DEC. 11	SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Warren Point Navigation Noodle
JAN. 7-8	SAT-SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Indian Cove Navigation Noodle
JAN. 14	SAT	HPS	HPS Awards Banquet

♦ **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, rmmeyers@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, rmmeyers@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.

♦ **DECEMBER 3** **SAT** **DPS, WTC, HPS**

I: Nelson Range High Point (7,696') List Finish: After *6* years and one knee surgery, Matthew Hengst is (finally) finishing the Desert Peak Section List, and we're going to do it in suitable style. We'll meet Saturday at sunset at the trailhead for Nelson Range High Point, strap on our headlamps, and deck ourselves out in as much glow in the dark or light emitting gear as we can carry. We'll summit in the dark and proceed to have a celebration bright enough to be visible for miles before returning to camp and continuing the party fireside with glow in the dark libations. Total stats are 2 miles and 1,200' gain so appropriate for all levels of fashion challenged bipeds. Garishly colored jeeps optional though high clearance vehicles will be needed to reach the trailhead. Leader Matthew Hengst (matthew.hengst@gmail.com). Co-leader: John Kieffer (jockorock@yahoo.com).

♦ **DECEMBER 10** **SAT** **HPS**

O: 2016 HPS Holiday Hoopla: The Holiday hoopla will be held at the Sheep Pass Campground in Joshua Tree National Park this year. In addition, camping will be available on Friday and Saturday nights at a cost of \$5.00 per person or \$10.00 per family. Please check the Hundred Peaks Section website for additional details. Leader: Mat Kelliher (mkelliher746@gmail.com).

◆ DECEMBER 11 SUN

LTC, DPS, WTC, HPS, SPS

I: Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle: Navigation noodle in Joshua Tree National Park for either checkoff or practice to satisfy the Basic (I/M) level or Advanced (E) level navigation requirements. To participate, send email, contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, rmmymers@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.

◆ JANUARY 7-8 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, rmmymers@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.

◆ JANUARY 14 SAT

HPS

O: 2017 HPS Awards Banquet: Join the HPS for its annual awards banquet at the Monrovia Restaurant in Monrovia, California, as we celebrate our accomplishments and visit with friends new and old. Mark your calendar; please check the HPS website for additional details. Leader: Mat Kelliher (mkelliher746@gmail.com).

In order to participate in 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.

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

“It had nothing to do with gear or footwear or the backpacking fads or philosophies of any

particular era or even with getting from point A to point B. It had to do with how it felt to be in the wild. With what it was like to walk for miles with no reason other than to witness the accumulation of trees and meadows, mountains and deserts, streams and rocks, rivers and grasses, sunrises and sunsets. The experience was powerful and fundamental. It seemed to me that it had always felt like this to be a human in the wild, and as long as the wild existed it would always feel this way.” — Cheryl Strayed, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*.

The Desert is cooling down and there is ONLY one scheduled DPS hike for the rest of the year... The great open horizon is waiting for our footsteps, the cool breeze and the dry air is blowing and calling our names. These desert peaks are calling our names, too. Leaders, please share the beauty of the desert and schedule hikes for the rest of the year.

Please check this link for more information: http://angeles.sierraclub.org/get_outdoors/becoming_leader

Conservation Chair

by Dave Perkins



Recently, nearly 100 protesters packed the room at Utah's Salt Palace Convention Center, mad as hell that the federal government was about to sell oil and gas leases for up to 45,000 acres of public land. Some of the activists held signs: "Our lands, our future," or, "Don't auction our climate."

As the bidding got underway, a few of the protesters started chanting, and soon everyone joined in. The Keep it in the Ground movement protesters were eventually ordered to leave and the bidding continued auctioning off oil leases for as little as \$2 an acre.

What's happening with the climate isn't complicated: for every ton of carbon humanity emits by burning fossil fuels, the world is getting hotter and is already 1 degree Celsius warmer than it was before the Industrial Revolution.

The Salt Lake City protesters had a simple demand for President Barack Obama: Stop making public land and water available for oil and natural gas drilling. It's a message that's taking hold across the country. In recent months, activists associated with the Keep it in the Ground movement have protested federal auctions in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Reno and elsewhere. They've got supporters in Congress, including Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

Any serious plan to deal with climate change, these activists say, requires the United States to start limiting the extraction of fossil fuels — immediately. They point to studies showing that if the world doesn't keep the vast majority of its coal, oil and gas in the ground, global warming will almost certainly exceed 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial times, the target adopted by 195 nations in Paris last year. Scientists once believed that 2 degrees of warming would be relatively safe, but recent studies have found that even less warming could be catastrophic for people, animals and the natural systems that underpin

DPS Membership Report

by Ron Bartell

Membership Summary

<u>Type</u>	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Sustaining</u>
Member	122	24
Household	29	
Subscriber	26	2
Totals:	177	26

Activity Report

Achievements

List Finish

#171 John Bregar 9/24/16 White Mtn

Sustaining Renewals

Karen & Brian (Wolf) Leverich 1 year
 Barbee & Larry Tidball 1 year
 Bruce & Terry Turner 1 year

Renewals

George Barnes 1 year
 Mary Ann & Jeff Bonds 1 year
 Stephan Bork 1 year
 Daryn Dodge 1 year
 Jay Frederking 2 years
 Walt Hill 2 years
 Edward Stork 1 year
 Tobi Tyler & Howard Steidtmann 2 years
 Greg Vernon 1 year

human civilization.

"Nobody is saying we want to stop burning fossil fuels today, or that we have the ability to stop burning fossil fuels today," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, the country's largest environmental group. "What we're saying is that the challenge of climate change is a severe one. The need to act has never been more urgent."

This report was abstracted from the *Palm Springs Desert Sun*. Story by Sammy Roth, April 13, 2016.



DPS Conservation Chair Dave Perkins on top of Wheeler Peak in Nevada (photo by Greg Gerlach).

Trip Reports

Ruby Mountains of Nevada by Gregory Frux August 6-10-2016

A passing remark on the beauty and remoteness of the Nevada's Ruby Mountains by Len Warren, resident naturalist of Shoshone, California, started me on a quest. Living in New York City I love to venture into remote and sparsely peopled wilderness. My hiking partner, Ron Beimel of Los Angeles, was similarly interested.

The mountain range, a north-south spine mostly of granite, is located in the north-central part of Nevada, south of the town of Elko. It is a solid twelve hour drive from Los Angeles with memorable vistas along the way of open valleys and dry ranges. Our arrival at a campground in the Ruby Mountains on August 5th was heralded by a lightning storm firing up the mountains.

The North trailhead was a hive of activity the morning of our departure. Part of the activity was joyous -- a fund raising trail run for the Boy Scouts. Another, sadder event was underway at the same time -- a search for a missing hiker. During our five day walk, we were witness to helicopters, small planes, ATVs and rescue dog teams searching; in addition, many of the searchers were volunteers. We kept an eye out during our walk and even called in a find of clothing at a remote camp, via Sat phone. We later learned the sad outcome of the search. *

Our plan was to traverse the Ruby Mountains on the Ruby Crest Trail, from south to north, roughly 45 miles in five days. In order to do this we arranged to leave our car at the North trailhead parking lot, meeting up with Cowboy John for a ride to the South trailhead (<http://cowboyjohntours.com/>). Ron and I initially missed our connection with Cowboy John, but we tracked him down hours later. We were



The Ruby Crest.

extremely apologetic as he drove us far up the jeep road to the trailhead, which he received compensation for. John is a lovely fellow, a tour guide and one of the founders of the Cowboy Poetry Festival in Elko, Nevada. It is well worth meeting him if you are in the area.

August 6. Ron and I finally got on the trail about noon. The excellent trail made a very gradual climb around Green Mountain. We were high up, but in and out of the forest. There were no water sources until camp, so we carried extra water. After 6.4 miles we stopped at the first stream, which is also the first decent camp site.

August 7. We planned on 9 miles of walking, and spent the entire day in the three forks of Smith Creek, descending and then climbing out of each valley through gentle country of sage and aspen groves. We saw great views east and west out of the mountains and into the deserts of northern Nevada. While the grade was gentle all day, we gradually climbed from 7,800 feet to a pass at over 10,000 feet. The day ended with a descent to lovely Overland Lake, a gem

Trip Reports ... continued.

below King Peak, where Ron and I set up camp in high winds.

August 8. We decided to attempt King Peak (elevation 11,031 feet), one of the highest mountains in the range and two miles off the trail. We retraced our route of the day before by climbing 500 feet up to the pass, then we hiked cross country along sage covered slopes. As we crossed below a subsidiary



Ruby Mountains.

peak at 10,827 feet, the ridge beyond looked intimidating at first, a series of rock towers. It turned out that the scree slopes below the towers were low angle and very manageable, and the final ascent up to the summit block had a single rock climbing move. Ron and I summited at 11:20 AM, and had a superb, 360 degree view of the Ruby Mountains. While on top, we relaxed and sketched drawings of our view. Later, we descended the mountain and were back to our camp at 3 PM; however, our repose was a bit disturbed by high winds at the lake.

August 9. This was our most ambitious day with 11 miles and 3,500 feet of elevation gain. Around noon, we got above 10,000 feet and hiked above this elevation the rest of the day. The trail is really a crest here, straddling a north — south ridge. The only drawback is that there is no water until camp, so we had to be cautious and carry four quarts each. There were great views, deer, marmots, ground squirrels, a

million bees and lots of flowering lupine. I have a silly project to summit as many peaks over ten thousand feet as possible. This route, with short side trips, added to my score (for my rules there must be a minimum of 200 feet of elevation gain and loss). Peaks this day:

Peak 10,207 at 12:30 PM
Peak 10,756 at 2 PM
Peak 10,722 at 4 PM
Wines Peak at 4:30 PM

This makes a lifetime score of 96 summits over 10,000 feet high.

The constantly blowing wind and sun glare were getting tiresome and chilling by the time we climbed Wines Peak, and Ron and I were delighted when the trail finally dropped into the forest and we found a sheltered spot by a stream, where we erected the tent just as the sun set.

August 10. Our hike out was anything but dull. Ron and I climbed over one more mountain pass and past at least three emerald lakes in our 6.5 mile walk to the car, where we arrived around 2 PM. This area is the most visited part of the range and has more water than the southern half of the Rubys, and it would be well worth a return visit to explore more of the glacier carved valleys (some without trails) and the many high peaks.

**Searchers Find Body of Missing Hiker Near Ruby Mountains. Posted: Aug 17, 2016, Updated: Aug 24, 2016. Courtesy: Elko Daily Free Press, Jacob Beetler.*

A search and rescue team has found the body of a Nevada hiker who went missing in late July. The Elko Daily Free press reports Elko County Undersheriff Ron Supp says 20-year-old Jacob Beetler of Spring Creek was reported missing on July 29 after leaving for a day hike in the Ruby Mountains two days earlier.

Hikers found some of Beetler's belongings near Birch Creek on Saturday.

Letter to the editor

Submitted by Bob Michael

First of all, look forward to a temporary re-appearance of The Rocks We Climb fairly soon...I've been asked to write up Kofa!

Now, I must step forward as the person TOTALLY RESPONSIBLE for the very existence of the book "Coming Home from Devil Mountain", which was reviewed in the last SAGE by Burton Falk, and for the near-death of my friend Ogden Kellogg and his girl friend. I was a year ahead of Ogden at Pomona College in the long-ago, and we ran into each other, found we both loved mountains, and became friends. Also, I had just joined the Sierra Club, and, starting with Hundred Peaks, I soon worked my way up to the DPS. It just blew me away that there were OTHER PEOPLE who actually climbed those beautiful, mysterious desert mountains that had captivated me since I was a little kid! (My first DPS climb was Big Maria in December, 1964.) Soon, sitting around DPS campfires, I heard tales of a magnificent and very challenging peak in Baja! I told Ogden about it, and he instantly caught fire at the idea of the two of us somehow going down there and climbing it. It never got past the talking stage, and just as well; we were woefully unprepared to tackle it. But, obviously, the dream didn't die for him, and a year after I graduated (he would have been a senior), he and a new girl friend gave it a go...and the rest, as they say, is history. I got a one-sentence letter from him..."Well, we climbed your damned enchanted El Picacho!" Nonetheless, we remained friends for a while, but I have lost track of him for decades

I would also like to quickly review, and acquaint folks with, a truly extraordinary desert book which Burton Falk would never review, as it's set in a desert far, far away which I visited in 2012 (and wrote up for the SAGE). "The Sheltering Desert" by Henno Martin is the story of two young German geologists living in Namibia (at that time the former German colony of South-West Africa) at the outbreak of World War II who decided they wanted nothing to do with Hitler and getting drafted for his damned war (good for them), packed a German jeep-type vehicle with supplies, and determined to hide in a canyon in the forbidding vastness of the Namib Desert. And they survived for two and a half years in one of the most terrifyingly hostile, hottest, and driest places on Earth. It's an utterly fascinating landscape and I'd love to go back, but there is also the faintest vibe of menace about the place; sure, Death Valley at 125 degrees will happily kill you, but the ancient Namib just feels like.... it has had so many more millions of years to perfect its lethality, along with its deadly flora and fauna. (It's hard to describe the sensation...I guess you have to have experienced it firsthand.)



Treasurer's Report

by Laura Newman

*DPS Account Summary from
January 1, 2016 to
September 30, 2016*

INCOME

Advertising	\$36.00
Banquet Silent Auction	\$72.00
Banquet Ticket Sales	\$2,590.00
Donations	\$55.00
Merchandise	\$273.50
Subscriptions	<u>\$1,500.00</u>

TOTAL INCOME **\$4,526.50**

EXPENSES

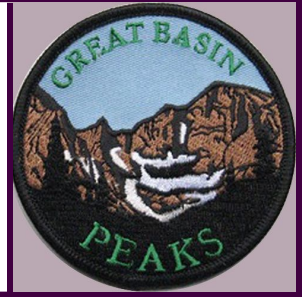
Banquet Expenses	\$3,305.81
Postage	\$50.93
Sage Printing/Mailing	\$1,195.70
Sales Tax	\$19.26
Supplies	\$417.25
Web Page Expenses	<u>\$151.75</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES **\$5,140.70**

CHECKING ACCOUNT **\$3,054.24**
BALANCE

Unlike our desert, there is a surprisingly large assortment of good-sized animals (baboons? antelope? rhinos?) who have evolved to live there, and the details of how the two men killed and ate some of the creatures can be a bit off-putting; but they couldn't exactly run down to the Safeway, as they were terrified of Nazi cops looking for them on top of their other challenges. Even though they faced a daily struggle to keep alive, there are occasional passages describing the terrible beauty of the desert. A remarkable tale of somehow surviving in one of the most hostile and alien places on the planet; you've never read anything quite like it. I have a paperback published by "paper books" (logically), a trademark of A. D. Donker Ltd. in South Africa, but my rare-book store in Fort Collins didn't seem to have any trouble getting it and it wasn't expensive.

Great Basin Peaks Section News



Great Basin Peaks Section News A Peak Birthday and New List Finishers By Sharon Marie Wilcox

Where is the best place for a birthday celebration? On a peak, of course! In April, Sue Wyman planned a hike up Thisbee Benchmark for her birthday followed by a feeding frenzy back at the trailhead.

Great Basin Peaks Section members and friends headed up Thisbee Benchmark (5,971') on a cloudy, gray morning that threatened rain. We reached the summit where we could look down to the Truckee River Canyon with Derby Dam on one side and USA Parkway vicinity on the other. We were happy that the rain only drizzled a bit on the return hike down, but otherwise didn't interfere with the birthday celebration. Numerous wildflowers, horned toads, and a Great Basin rattlesnake added to the day's celebration.

A peak, food, and friends certainly equates to a win-



Great Basin Peaks Section members and friends celebrating Sue Wyman's birthday (photo by Sharon Marie Wilcox).

ning birthday. Thanks for the fun day, Sue!

In other news, this has been a busy summer for those pursuing peak lists. Three of our members accomplished list finishes this summer.

First, congratulations to John Ide on his finish of the Great Basin Peaks Section list in June on Haystack Peak. John is the fourth person to complete this peak



The four Great Basin Peaks Section List Finishers on the summit of Mount Blitzen in Nevada, from left to right, Sue Wyman, Bob Sumner, John Ide, and Vic Henney (photo by Sharon Marie Wilcox).

list. Stay tuned for his List Finish Celebration this autumn. Amazingly, all four list finishers hiked Mount Blitzen together, so we had a rare opportunity for a group list finisher photo.

Congratulation also goes to Sue Wyman & Vic Henney who finished the Tahoe OGUL peak list this summer on Mount Fillmore. They celebrated with a campout and feeding frenzy at Davis Creek Park. More on their celebration in a future Great Basin Peaks Section news article.

There have been many fine peak explorations this summer and I hope that everyone gets the opportunity to experience many more before the snow starts to blanket the mountains.



DESERT BOOKS

By Burton Falk

THE HISTORIC DESERT, PETER SKENE OGDEN

In May and June 1827, Jedediah Smith and two fellow trappers, returning from a winter spent trapping in California, barely survived an arid trek between the Ebbetts Pass area of the Sierra Nevada and the Great Salt Lake, becoming the first non-natives to cross the Great Basin.

Six years later, during the early autumn of 1833, Joseph Walker and his brigade of sixty some trappers, following the Humboldt and Carson Rivers, on their way to test the trapping in California, also crossed the Great Basin.

So what, if anything, happened in Great Basin during the six-year interval, 1827-1833?

The best clue lies in the fact that Smith and Walker and their men were fur trappers. In fact, during the early 1800s, because the demand for fur, especially beaver pelts, was so strong, the most important economic activity in what is now U. S. Northwest was the fur trade.

To fill in the missing six years in desert history, this review considers what was taking place in the Great Basin during that period, with emphasis on the explorations of the Canadian-born trapper, Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson's Bay Company.

CONTESTED EMPIRE:

Peter Skene Ogden and the Snake River Expeditions (2002), John Phillip Reid

John Phillip Reid is a professor of Law at New York University, a seemingly unusual background for an author considering the life and times of Peter Skene Ogden, a man who had little interest in law and legal matters.

To explain Reid's interest, a bit of background information is required. In the 1820s, what is now the U.S. Northwest--Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana--was, as agreed to in the Anglo-American Convention of 1818, jointly occupied by both the U.S. and Great Britain. In reality, however, the area was controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), a monopoly both in fact and in law, which was operated under a grant from the Parliament of Great Britain.

Great Britain's foreign policy at the time was to hold that region--north of the 42nd Parallel, the present day southern state line of Oregon and Idaho; south of the Canadian Border, and west of the Rocky Mountains--for its own future settlement. In fact, after establishing its new Columbia District headquarters at Fort Vancouver (now Vancouver, WA) during the winter of 1824-25, the HBC's most important task was to prevent incursions into the area by American trappers, who they believed to be the forerunners of American settlement.

To do so, in a program carried out under the direction of John McLoughlin, the Chief Factor of the Columbia District, the HBC sent out its own trappers "to denude the Snake country, destroying all the beaver...creating a 'fur desert' so unappealing for trappers that the American fur men would think the area not worth canvassing."

So Reid's interest in Ogden wasn't based so much on the trapper himself or the area which he first explored, but rather the legal implications which arose in the "contested empire." The joint-occupation of the area, in the author's view, was a laboratory for the consideration of two interesting questions: 1) Do law and legal procedures exist only so long as there is an official authority to enforce them? 2) Do most of us possess an unspoken sense of law and ethics?*

In addition to considering these subjects, however, Reid penned an excellent biography of Ogden, focusing mainly on the years he spent in the American West. Unless noted otherwise, all quotes herein are either from Reid's *Contested Empire*, or from Ogden's own writings.

Peter Skene Ogden was born in 1790 to American parents in Quebec, Canada. Peter's parents, Isaac and Sarah Ogden, loyalists, moved to Canada during the American Revolution, after which Peter's father became a judge of the Court of the King's Bench in Montreal, and one of Peter's brothers, Charles, a lawyer, served several sessions as a representative in the House of Assembly for Lower Canada.

Peter, however, had no interest in pursuing his family's interest in law, and while in his twenties, he struck out for western Canada, then known as Rupert's Land, to join the fur trade. An early biographer who knew Peter explained, "(Law) had no charms for the mercurial temperament of Mr. Ogden...and contrary to the wishes of his friends, he preferred the wild and untrammelled life of an Indian

Desert Books – continued...

trader...(rather than) the wholesome restraints which are provided for the correction of over exuberant spirits in civilized society." A later biographer explained Ogden's preference for the wild west otherwise, i.e., "Peter grew out rather than up, to be less than average height and more than average width, with something troll-like in his irregular features; and even after he had become a man his voice retained some of its boyish squeak. With an athletic appearance and manly voice he might have reconciled himself to the law, but his stubby frame and uncommanding voice must prove themselves among hardships in the wilderness."

In 1824, Ogden, by then a veteran partisan (manager) for a rival Canadian fur trading company, was hired by the HBC to lead an expedition of sixty-some trappers, the goal of which was to decimate the beaver population of the Bitterroot and Snake River and their tributaries. Ogden was so adept at the task that during the following five years the HBC sent him out to lead five more missions to explore and trap in areas that were thought to be attractive to American trappers.

During his second expedition (1825-26) in the Snake River drainage, Ogden heard from the local Indians--the Snakes--that the rivers southwest of their nation were rich in beaver. Had his horses been in better condition and his supplies more sufficient, he would have explored the area at that time. "He (also) heard tales from the Snakes that Jedediah Smith (yes, the HBC trappers were well aware of what the American trappers were up to) had tried to go there and found the conditions too severe."

Two years later, on September 22, 1828, leading his fifth expedition, Ogden and his group--including his Indian wife, Julia, and five of their six children--left Fort Nez Perce, near present day Walla Walla, WA, and, once again, headed for Snake Country.

Passing south through the Blue Mountains and crossing the Grand Ronde River, the group first tested the trapping in the Mahleur River drainage of eastern Oregon. Because the results were not productive, in mid-October they struck out again, this time crossing unexplored country, heading for the Sandwich Island River (the Owyhee), a tributary of the Snake River which rises in northern Nevada. A few days later, continuing south, crossing the present day Idaho/

Nevada border, Ogden and his trappers became the first major non-native group to penetrate the Great Basin.

On November 4, following the Little Humboldt River downstream, Ogden's journal entry read, "The three men in advance discovered 4 Indians, one of whom directed them to follow the trail to a large river, and he advanced some distance with them, then deserted. A cold night. Reached a bend of the river and camped. Indians are most numerous, their subsistence grass roots and wild fowl. They fly in all directions. We are the first whites they have seen and they think we have come with no good intentions."

On November 8, the trappers reached an even larger river, the banks of which "are lined with huts and the river has natives most numerous." The Humboldt River had been discovered.

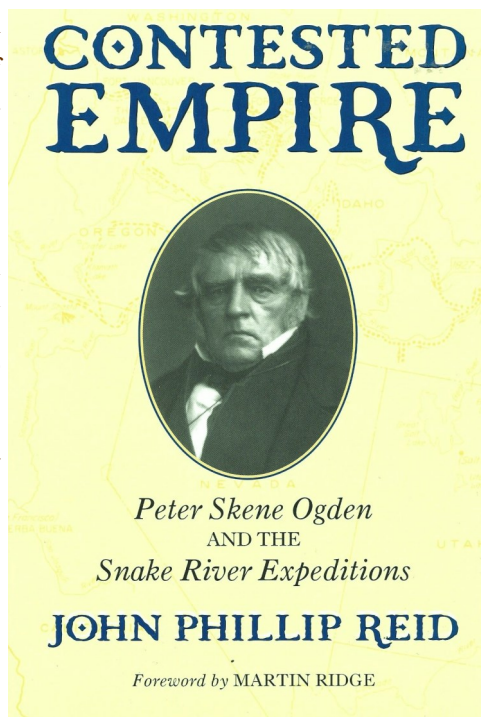
On the following morning: "Long before dawn of day every trapper was in motion. As dawn came the camp was deserted. Success to them."

In a later report to HBC headquarters, Ogden wrote, "I will venture to say in no part of the country have I found beaver more abundant than in this river and I apprehend we will not soon find another to equal it...I know of no other quarter excepting rivers that have been frequently almost yearly trapped and now almost destitute of beaver, but still small parties by gleaning, although dangerous to risk, may yet make tolerable hunts...I have now every reason to hope our returns will equal those of last year granting one of the two absent parties escape. The trappers now with me average 125 beaver per man and are truly well pleased with their success."

Ogden and his men worked the Humboldt and its tributaries for eleven months, returning to the HBC's Fort Nez Perces, in July, 1829, with a supply of about 4,000 beaver pelts.

Initially naming the new watercourse, "Unknown River," due to its source and course being unknown to him, Ogden later referred to it as "Paul's River," in memory of one of his trappers who died during the expedition and was buried on the river bank.

In his 1967 biography, Peter Skene Ogden, Fur Trader, Archie Binns noted, "Ogden's trappers called the Unknown



Desert Books – continued...

River by still another name: Mary's River, for Julia Mary (Ogden's wife), who had shared their daily hardships on that desolate stream. Later the trappers either conveyed sainthood on Julia--or took the river from her--by calling it St. Mary's River." Ogden's final attempt at dubbing the Humboldt was "Swampy River," as he thought it best described the course he had traversed.

It was for John C. "the Pathfinder" Fremont, however, who explored the area in 1843-44, to have the last word. He named the river the Humboldt in honor of the German explorer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), who never came close to the U.S. desert west. Go figure.

Wikipedia describes the 290 mile-long river as having "no outlet to the ocean, but instead empties into the Humboldt Sink. It is the fifth largest river in the United States, in terms of discharge that does not ultimately reach the ocean, while it is the largest in terms of area drained. (Including) its tributaries the river drains most of sparsely populated northern Nevada, traversing the state roughly east to west, and passing through repeated gaps in the north-south running mountain ranges. It furnishes the only natural transportation artery across the Great Basin and has provided a route for historic westward migrations (notably the 1834 wagon train, led by Joseph Walker, the first of many to arrive in California, and the ill-fated 1846-47 crossing by the Donner Party), and subsequent railroads and highways."

In the fall of 1829, during his last and least known expedition, Ogden and his trappers again set out for the Humboldt River, Humboldt Sink area. This time, they were determined to explore even further south into the Great Basin and return to HBC country by way of California. Reid suggests that Ogden may have been lured to California by information gained from Jedediah Smith or one of his men, who in 1827-28 were the first to trap there.

Binns describes Ogden's 'last' expedition thusly: "On (his) poaching expedition into Mexican territory (both Nevada and California were Mexican possessions at the time) he made his way east of the high Sierras and on to the Gulf of Lower California, completing his exhaustive search for furs in a region more productive of pearls than beaver."

"In the spring of 1830, he did such a thorough job of trapping the region of the San Joaquin Valley that he left poor pickings for Ewing Young's party (Young was an American trapper, working out of New Mexico), which came through after him. Young, finding evidence of prior and recent trapping, managed to catch up with Ogden's expedition, then 'sixty men strong'; this not counting women and children...At the time that Young reached him, (Ogden

already had a thousand beaver skins. The two parties traveled together about ten days, during which time Ogden had a chance to get acquainted with Kit Carson, the veteran trapper with the Young outfit."

Later, in a letter to John McLeod, another HBC expedition leader, Ogden wrote, "I was not so successful in my last year's trapping as the year preceding, although I extended my trails by far greater distance to the Gulf of California but found beaver very scarce, and unfortunately below the main Dalles of the Columbia my own boat was engulfed in a whirlpool and 9 men were drowned. I had a most narrow escape."

Explaining the problem in determining exactly where Ogden traveled on his 1829-30 expedition, Reid writes: "It is the one about which we know the least because on the return to the Columbia the expedition's only journal was lost when a canoe filled with men and furs disappeared in a whirlpool."

In 1830, The HBC effectively ended Ogden's explorations of the American west by sending him north to establish a new post, Fort Simpson, in British Columbia. In the 1840s, after managing another company outpost on the south coast of Alaska, Ogden was promoted to his most important job yet, Chief Factor for HBC's fur trade at Fort Vancouver.

In December, 1847, although it was technically of no concern to the HBC, Ogden is credited with averting an Indian war as well as successfully negotiating for the lives of 49 settlers taken as slaves by the Cayuse and Umatilla Indians following a massacre at the Waiilatpu Mission, near present day Walla Walla. During that same uprising, Marcus Whitman--for whom Walla Walla's Whitman College was named--his wife, Narcissa, and twelve others were slain.

In March 1854, Ogden retired to his recently purchased home, 'The Cliffs,' situated above the Willamette River, in Oregon City, south of Portland. There, on September 27, 1854, in his mid sixties, attended by his wife, Julia, and his daughter, Sarah Julia, the man who is credited with first exploring the Great Basin lapsed into unconsciousness and passed away.

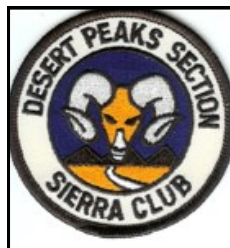
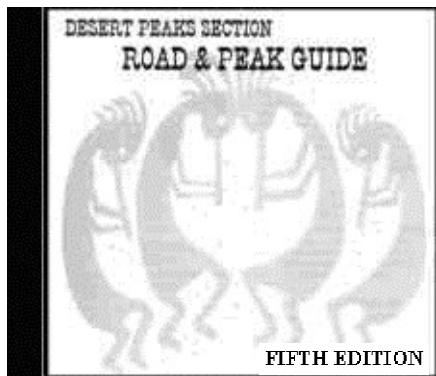
*Citing several examples of unenforced legal compliance and ethical good will, Reid believes that an unspoken sense of law existed in what otherwise has been considered a 'lawless' time.

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