



# The Desert Sage

**OUR 76th SEASON**

**JULY-AUGUST 2017**

**ISSUE NO. 370**



<http://desertpeaks.org/>

# Chair's Corner

by Tina Bowman



As I get up to speed as the new chair, I first wish to thank those members of the management committee who are leaving the committee: Paul Cooley, who was our chair for three years; Leo Logacho, vice chair/outings chair for two years; and Kathy Rich, the web master

for just over three years. I am looking forward to serving with Sandy Lara, vice chair/outings; Diana Neff Estrada, secretary; Laura Newman, treasurer; and Tracey Thomerson, programs and banquet. Thank you to Jim Morehouse for taking over as web master and Sandy Lara for becoming the chair for the mountaineering committee. I'm pleased to say all others in appointed positions will continue in those important roles for the DPS.

As you know, Jim Morehouse has been revising the guidebook. He is nearly done with that work and proposes making the guides available through the website, possibly available to members only. The perk of having access to the guides would certainly add incentive for people interested in climbing in the desert to join the section. Along those lines, attracting and retaining new members is always a very high priority for activity sections such as the DPS. If you have any ideas about how to do that, please contact me. Sandy Lara already has some great ideas for boosting membership and increasing the number of DPS outings to serve our members. We're moving forward with a lot of positive energy!

Though it's the quiet time of year for the DPS, it's a perfect time to visit our high peaks. Leaders, do you need Boundary and Montgomery? How about Arc Dome and Jefferson or others? We need you to lead

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outings—what is an outings section without trips? A moribund one. We need outings leaders to offer the trips that will revitalize the section. It's never too early to plan and schedule trips not only for the summer but the coming fall, winter, and spring high season for climbing our beloved desert peaks, whether on the list or not.

Happy trails and safe climbing!



## **THE NEXT SAGE SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS AUGUST 13, 2017.**

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# Desert Peaks Section Leadership for the 2017 - 2018 Season

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## Cover Photo Credit...

goes to DPS Outings Chair and trip co-leader Sandy Lara. The photo is group shot in front of Palm Oasis on an April 7, 2017 climb of Indianhead. Left to right: Illwoo Suh, Jinoak Chung, Tracey Thomerson, Peter Lara, Naresh Satyan, Lawrence Lee, and Wasim Khan. Please see pages 11-13 of this issue of the Sage for story.

## Appointed Positions

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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 July 2017 — December 2017

**The Thumb, an unlisted desert peak located in Imperial County (photo taken by Penelope Smrz).**

JULY 15-17	SAT-MON	DPS	Arc Dome and Mount Jefferson
SEPT 17	SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Mount Pinos Navigation Noodle
OCT 7	SAT	LTC, WTC, HPS	Navigation: Beginning Clinic
OCT 7	SAT	LTC	Leadership Training Seminar
OCT 11	WED	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Knots & Basic Safety
OCT 14	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Belaying
OCT 21	SAT	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Rappelling
OCT 28-29	SAT-SUN	LTC	Advanced Mountaineering: Anchors
NOV 11-12	SAT-SUN	LTC	Rock: Joshua Tree Rock Checkoff and Practice
NOV 18	SAT	LTC, WTC	Navigation Workshop on 3rd Class Terrain
NOV 18-19	SAT-SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Indian Cove Navigation Noodle
DEC 10	SUN	LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS	Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle

♦ **JULY 15-17**                      **SAT-MON**                      **DPS**

**I: Arc Dome (11,773') and Mount Jefferson (11,941'):** Join us for a summer climb of these two high altitude Nevada peaks. Saturday we will start at Columbine Campground to climb Arc Dome (15 miles and 4,900' gain) with option to tag Cirque Mountain (11,290') on the descent, and stay Saturday night here. Sunday we will drive to the Jefferson trailhead, possibly doing some sightseeing at the Berlin Ichthyosaur State Park and Ghost town along the way, and enjoying a leisurely potluck that night. Monday we will get an early start for climbing Jefferson (11 miles and 3,900'). The road now requires an extra 3.2 miles round trip of walking to get up to the old 2WD trailhead. To sign up for the trip, or for additional info, email Sandy at: [ssperling1@verizon.net](mailto:ssperling1@verizon.net). Co-leaders: Sandy and Peter Lara.

♦ **SEPTEMBER 17**                      **SUN**                      **LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

**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. Saturday is for practice; Sunday is for checkoff or additional practice. Send email with contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, [rmmyers@ix.netcom.com](mailto: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 Leadership Reference Book for more information. Send contact information (including mailing address) and your qualifications to the leader as soon as possible.

♦ **OCTOBER 7**                      **SAT**                      **LTC, WTC, HPS**

**I: Navigation: Beginning Clinic:** Spend the day one-on-one with an instructor learning and practicing map and compass skills in our local mountains. Beginners to rusty old-timers are 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 and 500' of elevation gain. Send sase, phones, rideshare info, \$25 deposit (refunded at trailhead, check made payable to the Sierra Club) to Leader: Diane Dunbar (818-248-0455, [dianedunbar@charter.net](mailto:dianedunbar@charter.net)) Co-Leader: Richard Boardman.

◆ **OCTOBER 7**                      **SAT**                                      **LTC**  
**Leadership Training Seminar: DARE TO LEAD!!** Attend the Fall 2017 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. 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. From experienced volunteer leaders you will learn how to plan a trip, handle 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. The application is available online at [angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc\\_leadership\\_seminar](http://angeles.sierraclub.org/ltc_leadership_seminar). You can also pore over more of LTC's upcoming offerings and leadership information on this site, including the brand new Paypal option! Mail the application and \$25.00 check, payable to Sierra Club, to Steve Botan, LTC Registrar, 18816 Thornwood Circle, Huntington Beach 92646. You also can reach Steve by email at: [ltpseminarregistrar@gmail.com](mailto:ltpseminarregistrar@gmail.com). Applications and checks are due September 23, 2017. Scholarships are available for those with financial need. Apply to LTC Chair Anne Marie Richardson at: [AMLeadership@gmail.com](mailto:AMLeadership@gmail.com) [http://angeles.sierraclub.org/get\\_outdoors/becoming\\_leader](http://angeles.sierraclub.org/get_outdoors/becoming_leader) .

◆ **OCTOBER 11**                      **WED**                                      **LTC**  
**M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP16): Knots and Basic Safety Systems:** First of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This will be an indoor workshop held in the evening reviewing ropes, harnesses, helmets, basic climbing gear, and knots in preparation for later workshops. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. To register, please see <http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 14**                      **SAT**                                      **LTC**  
**M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP16): Belaying:** Second of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on belaying and related principles starting with standard sport climbing all the way up to advanced techniques to move large groups across dangerous terrain. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountainprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 21**                      **SAT**                                      **LTC**  
**M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP16): Rapelling:** Third of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on rappelling using a variety of techniques with a heavy emphasis on redundancy, safety, and efficiency. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountainprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **OCTOBER 28-29**                      **SAT-SUN**                                      **LTC**  
**M/E-R: Advanced Mountaineering Program (AMP16): Anchors and Real World Application:** Fourth of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing, both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This weekend completes the series of AMP workshops at Joshua Tree National Park and focuses on building anchors and applying previously learned skills in real world climbing situations and multiple participants. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. To register, please see: <http://www.advancedmountainprogram.org>. Leaders: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)); Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)); and, Matthew Hengst ([matthew.hengst@gmail.com](mailto:matthew.hengst@gmail.com)).

◆ **NOVEMBER 11-12 SAT-SUN**

**LTC**

**M/E-R: Rock: Sheep Pass/Indian Cove Joshua Tree Rock Checkoff and Practice:** M & E level rock checkoff and practice for LTC leadership candidates wishing to pursue a rating or practice skills. Also open to Advanced Mountaineering Program students wanting to solidify what they learned in the course. Practice Saturday and optionally checkoff Sunday. Restricted to active Sierra Club members with previous rock climbing experience. Climbing helmets and harnesses required. Email climbing resume to leader to apply: Leader: Patrick McKusky ([pamckusky@att.net](mailto:pamckusky@att.net)). Co-leader: Dan Richter ([dan@danrichter.com](mailto:dan@danrichter.com)).

◆ **NOVEMBER 18 SAT**

**LTC, WTC**

**I: 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, and group size is limited. Send email/sase, Sierra Club #, class 3 experience, conditioning, contact info to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, [rmmyers@ix.netcom.com](mailto:rmmyers@ix.netcom.com)). Co-Leader: Jack Kieffer.

◆ **NOVEMBER 18-19 SAT-SUN**

**LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

**I: Navigation: Indian Cove Navigation Noodle:** Navigation Noodle in Joshua Tree National Park to satisfy Basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday is for practice, skills, refresher, altimeter, homework and campfire. Sunday is for checkoff. Send email/sase with contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare, to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, [rmmyers@ix.netcom.com](mailto: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 Leadership Reference Book for more information. Send contact information (including mailing address) and your qualifications to the leader as soon as possible.

◆ **DECEMBER 10 SUN**

**LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS**

**I: Navigation: Warren Point Navigation Noodle:** Navigation Noodle at 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 with contact info, navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers (310-829-3177, [rmmyers@ix.netcom.com](mailto: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.

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 Sandy Lara



Greetings, Fellow hikers and climbers!

I'm excited to be the new DPS Outings Chair! Our peaks are precious and need to be climbed, creating awareness and conservation efforts, as well as for our own enjoyment. The Section wants to increase the number of hikes on our schedule.

I'd like to ask those of you who are leaders to decide on one DPS peak you would like to do in the coming year, and then lead it! I will help match you up if you need a co-leader. What is that peak that you've really wanted to climb? Do it!

Many of you are not official leaders and climb DPS peaks on your own. The Section welcomes your expertise. Those of you who are not leaders can post private trips in the Sage by emailing your submissions to Greg Gerlach, Sage Editor.

My husband, Peter, and I are M-rated leaders and plan to post a number of DPS trips once our schedule settles down. In the meantime, consider climbing Arc Dome and Jefferson with us around the third weekend of July. (This will not be posted on OARS until late June due to technical difficulties, but you can contact me at [ssperling1@verizon.net](mailto:ssperling1@verizon.net) to indicate your interest.)

The updated Peak Guides will eventually be available on our website for member access. Many thanks to Jim Morehouse for his careful revisions and becoming our Webmaster! Having up-to-date guides will help all of us to more easily plan our trips. Having them on the website will allow for frequent updates which you can submit as necessary.

I am open to your ideas. Please let me know what you think! Let's climb!

Sandy Lara

## DPS Membership Report

by Ron Bartell

### Membership Summary

<u>Type</u>	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Sustaining</u>
Member	114	24
Household	30	
Subscriber	23	3
Totals:	167	27

### Activity Report

#### Achievements

##### Explorer

#11 James Morehouse 4/7/17 Martinez Mtn

##### New Member

Dain Clark Telescope Peak

##### New Subscriber

Lawrence Lee

##### Renewals

Pat Arredondo	1 year
Ute Dietrich	2 years
Vic Henney & Sue Wyman	3 years
Ted Lubeshkoff	1 year
Mike Manchester	1 year
David & Barbara Sholle	1 year

### 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 [gregg1955@verizon.net](mailto:gregg1955@verizon.net) no later than the second Sunday of even numbered months.

# Conservation Chair

by Dave Perkins



There are two remarkable animals that share the varied lands in which we hike and travel: the California condor and the desert tortoise.

The condor is the largest bird in North America, and once dominated the western skies. The California condor population steadily declined during the 20th century until

there were only 22 known to exist in the world, and the last of the free-flying condors were taken into captivity in 1987 in order to save the species from extinction. There were no California condors in the wild between 1988 and 1991, but reintroduction efforts began in early 1992 and continue today. As of May 2013, there were approximately 435 California condors in the world, about 237 of which are free-flying in California, Arizona and Baja California, Mexico.

The condor is one of our nation's most magnificent birds, with wings spanning an amazing nine and a half feet. It is black in color with white underwing patches and sports a bald head with very few feathers. The color of the head varies from white to reddish purple. The skin of the Condor's head and neck is capable of changing noticeably in response to emotional state - like a mood ring! This helps condors communicate. The bare head is an adaptation for hygiene since they eat dead and rotting meat and must, for the most part, stick their heads into the carcasses to feed. As unappetizing as this may seem to us, scavengers like condors are vital to the natural ecosystem. They are nature's cleaning crew. The birds prefer the carcasses of large dead animals like deer, cattle, and sheep. However, they are also known to eat the carcasses of smaller animals like rodents and rabbits. Condors can soar to heights of 15,000 feet and may travel up to 150 miles a day in search of their next meal. They do not have a good sense of smell, so they find their food mostly by their keen eyesight.

The mating season is Winter – Spring, and it takes about 56 days for egg incubation. Instead of having many young and gambling that a few will survive, condors produce very few young and provide an extensive amount of parental care. The chick learns to fly when

they are about 6 months old but will stay with the parents for many more months.

California condors most often nest in caves or crevices in rock faces, but are also known to nest in tree cavities. They live in rocky, forested regions including canyons, gorges and mountains. The species' current range includes California's southern coastal ranges from Big Sur to Ventura County, east through the Transverse Range and the southern Sierra Nevada, with other populations in northern Baja California and in the Grand Canyon ecoregion in Arizona.

The desert tortoise lives in some of the most extreme desert habitats in North America. It has a high domed shell, which is usually brown in adults and dark tan in younger individuals. Its powerful limbs are equipped with claws to dig its underground burrows, and its front limbs are protected with a covering of thick scales.

What a desert tortoise eats depends on where it's located within the species' range. Its diet is made up of a variety of vegetation, including annual wildflowers, grasses, and new growth of selected shrubs, cacti and their flowers. Desert tortoises forage in the spring and



again in the fall. During the late summer, they may emerge from their underground burrows to drink standing water after periodic thunderstorms. Increased water intake allows them to forage on dried herbaceous vegetation and grasses. Much of the tortoise's water intake comes from moisture in the grasses and wildflowers they consume in the spring. To get the most out of the rain that falls so infrequently in their habitat, desert tortoises dig basins in the soil to catch rainwater. The tortoises always remember where these basins are, and may be found waiting by them when rain appears imminent. Their most active time is in the spring when they

*(Continued on page 9)*



## Conservation Chair - continued

By Dave Perkins

(Continued from page 8)

will forage for food. During the hottest, driest periods of the year, these tortoises conserve the water already stored in their bodies. This is especially important in the hot, dry Mojave Desert summers, but adult desert tortoises can survive a year or more without access to water.

Most desert tortoises live in creosote bush scrub habitat at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level, although they are known to occur in suitable habitats up to about 5,000 feet in elevation. Within suitable habitat they occur over a relatively large region including the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts of California, Nevada, Utah and portions of Arizona. The desert tortoise is able to live where ground temperatures may exceed 140 degrees F because of its ability to dig underground burrows three to six feet deep to escape the heat of summer and the cold of winter. It is one of the most elusive inhabitants of the desert, spending up to 98% of its time underground. Desert tortoises spend November through February in a torpid or dormant state in their underground burrows.

Females do not breed until they are 15 to 20 years old. When hatchlings emerge from eggs they are approximately 2 inches long. Only about 2 percent of hatchlings survive to become adults. The mating season is late summer to early fall, with a gestation period of 10-12 months and a clutch size of 4-6 eggs.

In some areas, the number of desert tortoises has decreased by 90% due primarily to human activity. Desert tortoise declines appear to have been most severe and widespread in the Western Mojave Desert. Recent estimates indicate that there are about 100,000 individual desert tortoises remaining in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts. As late as the 1950's the desert tortoise population averaged at least 200 adults per square mile. More recent studies show the level is now between 5-60 adults per square mile.

The source for this article was the Defenders of Wildlife website.



## Treasurer's Report

By Laura Newman

DPS Account Summary from  
January 1, 2017 to  
May 31, 2017

### INCOME

Banquet Silent Auction	\$0.00
Banquet Ticket Sales	\$170.00
Donations	\$189.00
Membership/Subscriptions	\$1453.00
Merchandise	<u>\$123.50</u>

**TOTAL INCOME** **\$1935.50**

### EXPENSES

Banquet Expenses	\$3879.29
Merchandise Expenses	\$15.36
Sage Mailing	\$484.73
Sage Printing	\$446.37
Sales Tax	\$15.22
Supplies	\$0.00
Web Page Expenses	<u>\$0.00</u>

**TOTAL EXPENSES** **\$4,840.97**

**PAY PAL BALANCE** **\$9.41**

**CHECKING ACCOUNT BALANCE** **\$405.26**

### 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 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.



# Trip Reports

From left, Don Raether, Mark Butski & Jim Morehouse on the summit of Signal Peak (photo by Greg Gerlach).

## Providence Benchmark (6,612') By Debbie Bulger March 23, 2017

There are so many roads in the desert south of the Providence Mountains that it is quite confusing to drive to the Providence Benchmark trailhead. Some of the roads lead to mines, some are carved on the landscape by off road enthusiasts itching for excitement, and many are not on any maps. Others are overgrown and easily overlooked, some may have been re-routed and some are on the map but not discernible on the ground, even with a GPS. As a result, we camped about a mile from our objective at the Providence Mine and added two and a half miles to our hike.

On our wanderings on these roads Richard Stover and I passed a downed dirt bike whose rider I presume was airlifted to a hospital. That road eventually petered out, and we backtracked.



We wondered what had happened to the rider.  
Photo by Richard Stover.

It was chilly and windy. To the north the tops of the peaks were obscured by dark clouds. Rain fell intermittently. We later discovered it was snowing on the mountain tops.

We were climbing Providence Benchmark from the east. Our intent was to find the old railroad grade which led to a higher mine, then attain the ridge which we would follow to the summit. Sounds easy and straightforward on paper. Not quite so easy on the ground.

First, our map showed that the left fork of the road from our camp did not lead to the lower mine (now it does), so we hiked cross country and intersected the road near the mine.

Our next error was to turn left up the Providence Mine road instead of turning right to meet the railroad grade. No problem. We hiked up the ridge east of the mine and headed in the direction of the railroad grade. We figured we were paralleling the road. Sure enough, we found the grade and followed it to the upper mine, now mostly buried by landslides. The railroad grade is hard to follow in many places since large staghorn cholla and even 10-inch diameter pinyon pines have grown up in the right of way.

It is very steep from the upper mine to the ridge, perhaps 45-50 degrees in places. Once on the ridge, we followed it as planned to the summit.

Sounds simple, but the map didn't show all the sharp spines we had to dodge on our route.



Richard Stover dodging sharp objects on his way to the summit. Photo by Debbie Bulger.

# Trip Reports - continued

There were strong staghorn cholla, round pancake pear pads both on plants and on the ground, sharp Spanish bayonet, magnificent barrel cactus, mounds of Hedgehog cactus, and more. All lovely but challenging. Each step up was done with care. Often we had to squeeze between two sets of sharp points. The cactus garden soon gave way to pine-juniper woodland as we gained altitude.

Then there was the wind. As we climbed, the wind speed increased until at the top it was raging at an estimated 50+ mph. I was unable to stand up joyfully on the summit in my customary victory hurrah. Instead I had to hang onto a rock to keep my balance. Luckily, there was a sheltered spot protected by a tree and some rocks. I grabbed the register, staggered to the shelter and perused the register there. As I lurched toward the refuge, I thought someone had hit me in the head from behind. It was a chunk of ice ripped from a tree and thrown by the raging wind.



**Debbie Bulger nearing the summit of Providence Benchmark. Photo by Richard Stover.**

There are great views from the summit: the Kelso dunes, Edgar and Mitchell Peaks and Table Mountain near Hole in the Wall. But in the strong gale, we didn't linger long.

We descended carefully among the glorious show that Mother Nature is putting on this year: Goldfields, Desert Hyacinth, Desert Canterbury Bells, and the pungent Turpentine Broom to name just a few.



**What a glorious hillside ablaze with Acton Encelia. Photo by Richard Stover.**

At home we checked out the roads with Google Earth, something I advise doing before the climb rather than after. We could see where a road had been washed out and re-routed, roads that lead to nowhere, and roads that were not on our maps.

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**Indianhead (3,960+')**  
**DPS peak at the HPS Spring Fling**  
**Leaders: Sandy and Peter Lara**  
**April 8, 2017**

Participants: Jinoak Chung, Wasim Khan, Lawrence Lee, Naresh Satyan, Illwoo Suh, Tracey Thomerson

When I heard that the HPS Spring Fling was to be held at the Borrego Palm Canyon Campground, I looked at the map and discovered that this was the trailhead for Indianhead. My husband, Peter, and I

# Trip Reports - continued

have slowly been making our way through some of the DPS list, so this would add one more peak and also allow us to join our HPS friends for the party. After looking at the warning about Route A (“more needle-tipped agave per square foot than most any other peak described in this guide”) we quickly decided on Route B.

We started at 7:15am after being encouraged by HPS organizers to have our groups back in daylight to have time to enjoy the Spring Fling festivities. The DPS guide reads “3,200 feet elevation gain, 8 miles, 7 hours” but I had heard rumors about it taking longer. The stats don’t seem bad, so why would it take so long? After the first mile or two in, we started to discover why.

There is good trail up Borrego Palm Canyon to the first Palm Oasis, a really spectacular sight in the middle of the desert. This is where most people hike to, then turn around. We had to continue further up the canyon where there are ridges coming in alternately from one side and then the other, necessitating several stream crossings, finding our way through plentiful brush, and frequently taking a moment to enjoy the stunning beauty of what we were seeing. The



**Beavertail cactus bloom.**  
**Photo by Sandy Lara.**

wildflowers were just past their peak, but still abundant. As we climbed higher, they were in a bit better shape. Some cactus blooms I had never seen before, including cholla and hedgehog.

We continued up the canyon until we came to the ridge that we would ascend to get to the summit ridge. We stopped in the shade of a cottonwood for a nice break, then started up. It was quite steep with a lot of cactus and pointy things to avoid. With 8 hikers we kept the pace and route as easy and simple as possible. It just wasn’t

easy and simple. When we gained the ridge, occasional wind gusts of 40mph challenged us to stay on our feet, but it was nice to cool down. We



**The group ascending the summit ridge of Indianhead. Photo by Sandy Lara.**

continued up, alternating sides of the ridge thinking that the very top of the ridge was too bouldery, to the summit where we had a splendid view of the surrounding area and sat down for lunch.

When Peter and I hike together, one leads and the other follows, but if the leader hits a dead end or wrong direction, we turn around and the other leads. This change can occur several times a day. When we lead Sierra Club hikes together, the same procedure holds. If I end up off route, we stop and turn around and everybody follows Peter, and vice versa. Our participants aren’t used to this kind of leading, expecting the one in front to stay in front. We feel our way is more efficient and we are both competent

# Trip Reports - continued

leaders so it is easy to do. Our participants are first confused, then seem to be amused.



**On the summit of Indianhead, left to right: Peter Lara, Sandy Lara, Tracey Thomerson, Lawrence Lee, Wasim Khan, Illwoo Suh, Naresh Satyan, and Jinoak Chung. Photo by Peter Lara.**

We returned the way we had ascended but discovered that it was better to stay on the top of the ridge, that there was a route within the boulders, rather than traversing on each side. There were also a few minor alterations below the summit ridge as you can usually find more use trails on the way down since you can see from above. We had a nice break by the stream in a very green area with tall grasses. So unexpected for the desert! Our participants were a fun, cohesive group and although we didn't all know each other prior to the trip, we certainly have camaraderie now, and hope to hike together again. We returned to the trailhead 10 hours after we had started, quite a surprise for all of us. One member called it "a very hard, but very impressive, hike." I think the rest of us agree!

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## **Climbing in Death Valley National Park 2017 By Gregory W. Frux**

In April 2017 Ron Beimel and I completed our campaign to climb the high point of each mountain range in Death Valley National Park. The trip witnessed the weather extremes characteristic of the region. One afternoon we had 96 degrees F with a

fierce sandstorm. About 28 hours later we were shivering on the flanks of Dry Mountain with a temperature of 25 degrees F. Our climbing project carried us to several remote and wonderfully beautiful sections of the park.

**April 8-9, 2017:** Dry Mountain (elevation 8,674 feet) is the high point of the Last Chance Range. By some measures it could be considered the most difficult climb of our project.

The total route distance is about 14 miles and the elevation gain is 5,400 feet. Fortunately the footing and slopes were relatively mild and the scenery was magical. To improve our chance of success we planned to hike in two miles and around 1,000 vertical feet the evening before the big climb. Ron's two wheel drive Prius made it (barely) to the 4,600 foot elevation starting point on the Race Track Playa Road. We set off at 4 PM, hiking through a Joshua Tree forest with notable and varied desert blooms. 90 minutes and three jack rabbits later, we arrived at 5,400 foot elevation/camp and bivvied at the bottom of a shallow wash. It was a cold night with ice forming on the water bottles. For a native New Yorker like myself the quiet was profound.

In the morning we cached our camping gear and some of our water, and headed uphill just after 7 AM. The route was complex. First portion continued up the alluvium for one mile and 500 vertical feet. Turning north we gained a ridge by climbing one of the steeper sections of the route, with rock outcrops, boulders and scree. The angle lessened higher up and we were once more among Joshua Trees. We were now on a narrow north -- trending ridge with views of Tin Mountain to the east and the Race Track Playa to the south. The gradual ascent continued as we began to catch gusty winds until we reached 7,900 feet in elevation. Next, we traversed west into rolling highlands with small ups and downs. Notably, the area is dotted with beautiful juniper trees, not what we expected to find in Death Valley. From here we descended 700 feet into a shallow valley. For the first time we could see views to the west -- the Saline Range, Inyo Mountains and the snow covered Sierra Nevada. The final leg of the ascent was a 1,500 foot climb. We chose a direct and

# Trip Reports - continued

rather steep route. Ron reliably found class 2 through several rock bands. We reached the summit at 12:15 PM.

Here were found sweeping views in all directions, including of the White Mountains to the northwest, and two canisters at the top. The larger one is an emergency cache containing a blanket and a large filled water container, and the other canister had the summit register. We noted in the summit register that we were the second party to the top in 2017. Ron and I were very pleased with our good weather, and also our well-executed plan and easy footing. Afterwards, we descended the peak with little difficulty other than a few encounters with spiny plants. We passed very near to a venerable mountain sheep (ram), perhaps as close as 30 feet, before we spotted him. He was lying down and we thought he might be sick. We respectfully backed away and after a moment he stood up and bounded down the cliffs and out of sight. Ron and I reached our car at 6:15 PM.

**April 10, 2017:** Today we picked up the rental jeep from Farabee Rentals at Furnace Creek; without their services we could not complete this project (highly recommended). We were joined by my wife Janet Morgan. We all drove to the town of Shoshone and set up at the campground there. In the afternoon we used the jeep to explore the lower portions of Amargosa Canyon, using the Sperry Wash Road. In this area the river is free flowing and supports small groves of trees. Later, we met with Tanya Henderson, the Director of the Amargosa Conservancy. Their mission is to protect this tiny desert river, which supports so much wildlife and several small communities. Janet and I have been creating an illustrated map of the Amargosa River, including wildlife, access points and hiking trails. We are coordinating our work with the Conservancy to help support their mission.

**April 11, 2017:** Owlshead Range High Point (elevation 4,665 feet) was our next destination. It is one of the most geographically isolated peaks in the park, the route to the trailhead being half the adventure. We departed the pavement south of Tecopa at the turn off for the Harry Wade Road. Along the way we crossed the Amargosa River which had flowing, if salty, water. A little out of the way we visited the remarkable oasis

of Salt Creek. After about 12 miles on the Harry Wade Road we turned off west on to a dead end jeep road that runs for 25 miles into the Owlshead Range. Before our visit we were unable to get much information about the route, aside from warnings about deep sand and the risks associated with the adjacent military base. As it turned out the entire road was passable and in good condition, although 4-wheel drive came in handy in a couple of locations. We stopped briefly at Owls Hole Spring, site of the only open water in the range. It was an odd place: a one-time mine, with one dead palm tree, and water that appeared to be badly contaminated. Despite this there were hoof prints around the spring -- wild horses, I suppose. We also met a team from Fish and Wildlife who were maintaining a camera trap. A little further along the road was a gate to the military area, with dire warnings including, "Class 4 Lasers in Use" and "Unexploded Ordinance." Our road travelled along the outside of the barrier fence for a while, before turning north and back into Death Valley National Park. The road got rougher, though still passable. After two hilly sections and two flat sections, it eventually climbed up smooth alluvium and then gently around and up a ridge. Ahead of us the road ended at a large high tech structure, which reminded me of the lair of a super villain in an old James Bond movie. It is an abandoned microwave array, and its access road made our hike possible.

We parked down the road a bit from the installation, below the 4,000 foot contour. Janet, Ron and I started at 1:15 PM at a visible trailhead at a notch slightly below the microwave tower, but quickly lost the faint trail and continued cross country, heading towards the range high point, about two miles distant. There were a series of smaller summits along the way, which we contoured around staying mostly level on sloped and occasionally loose terrain. At the final ascent, we engaged in a substantial 600 foot climb to the actual summit, arriving at 3:15 PM. Our group encountered very high winds at the top. Also, we could not locate a summit register, if one exists. After descending from the true summit, we acquired the faint trail, and were able to follow it for most of the return to the car. We drove back along the road across one flat section and one hilly section, camping on the alluvium amid flowers and views of the eastern half of the Owlshead Range.

# Trip Reports - continued

**April 12, 2017:** We explored as we drove back to Furnace Creek, taking a spur road from Owls Hole Spring up to a mine in the mountains, where we found good views of one of the dry lakes below. Our group made an additional stop at Saratoga Spring, and then followed the Amargosa River bed on Harry Wade Road until it met up with the Badwater Road. The only bad sections of the road were manageable areas of deep sand on the Harry Wade Road. We also drove up to the Ashford Mills Canyon trailhead, 1,000 feet above the valley floor. Unfortunately, it was too hot to hike. Later, we continued north to the windswept camp at Texas Spring, near Furnace Creek. Ron took off in the evening to climb Funeral Peak, high point of the Black Mountains, so that we could finish the Range Project together.

**April 13, 2017:** Pyramid Peak (elevation 6,703 feet) is the high point of Funeral Mountains and is accessible from State Route 190, and is fairly near Furnace Creek. I think we had grown a little over confident, because this turned out to be the second hardest climb of our campaign. Ron and I were on the trail at 7:40 AM, the ten mile round trip begins with two miles of gradual ascent up the alluvial fans from 3,000 to 4,000 feet. From here we scrambled and hiked up a series of ridges, connected by ramps and guarded by a few small towers. We ended up with a little class 3 and 4, likely missing an easier line. Winds were quite high, buffeting us all day. About half way up the peak, we startled a herd of mountain sheep, which set off towards the summit along what we later discovered to be the main use trail. We followed a slightly different and inferior line which alternated between loose scree and low angle rock. At last the summit towers came into view. Faint trails led along the west side of the summit block. When these ran out we crossed to the east side, which was more (easy) class 3. At 12:15 PM we were happy to reach the top and congratulated each other on completing our project before signing the summit register. We had monumental views in all directions despite the winds. A sand storm was visible below us in Death Valley. Also, we had views of many of 'our' range highpoints including Funeral Mountain, Brown Peak and Telescope Peak, likely Grapevine and Tin Mountains as well.

Our descent was interesting. We found a much easier line following game trails west of the summit block. Below this was a possible line of travel down a low angle gully. Consulting our GPS we thought it might be a faster way down the mountain, but it was also possible that the gully would cliff out. From the contours it appeared that we could escape the gully to the east without climbing all the way back up. Sure enough, after descending about 500 feet we came to the edge of a monumental dry fall below. Fortunately, our escape plan worked and with only a minimal re-ascend we were able to contour east and regain our ascent route without having to climb all the way back up again. From this point, we were more successful at following the use trail, a reasonable line despite a few rougher scree fields. At a couple points we crossed sections with a pronounced wind tunnel effect, where the already high winds were magnified. Much lower we found an alternate use trail down a scree slope to the south which took us down to the alluvium safely. This bypassed several of the more rugged gendarmes we had encountered on the ascent. Ron and I reached the car at 5:10 PM, tired and extremely satisfied with this great mountaineering campaign. It was a treat to visit so much rarely visited wild terrain.

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## Death Valley High Points Project by Gregory W. Frux

In 2005 I had the opportunity to serve as Artist in Residence for Death Valley National Park. It was a great introduction to the vastness and diversity of this wild land. During that first visit I climbed Telescope Peak, attempted Surprise Canyon and soaked in the hot springs of Saline Valley. As I studied the park maps I noticed that there were a great number of mountain ranges, and wondered if it would be possible to reach the high points of each range and whether anyone had done it before. Access looked extremely difficult and the project stayed mostly in my imagination, despite return visits in 2006 and 2008.

In 2012 I climbed Funeral Peak in the Black Mountains, my only solo climb of the project. At that time I started planning to reach the remaining peaks. Access to Jeep rental at Furnace Creek made the project feasible, and discussions with Charlie

# Trip Reports - continued

Callagan, Back Country Ranger in Death Valley, were encouraging. In addition, connecting with the Desert Peaks Section was another important link in my planning. Although I already had a tentative list, correspondence with Ron Bartell (please see his article in the May-June 2015 issue of the *Desert Sage*) helped me solidify my plans. My count was that there are 11 mountain ranges in DVNP, of which I had done two. A long way to go!

I was able to organize trips in 2015, 2016 and this year to complete the nine remaining range high points. I have been very fortunate to be joined by my wife Janet Morgan on Owlshead, Mark Duffy on Ibex and Ron Biemel on the remaining peaks (also Owlshead).

It has been a great excuse to visit remote areas, where more often than not we were the only humans for many miles. Animal highlights on these treks included mountain sheep, wild horses, jackrabbits and a rattlesnake in mid mouse swallow. One great surprise was a deep canyon on the east side of Saline Mountain that rivals the commonly visited Titus Canyon, but without a road or cars. The hidden mountain top 'forests' of juniper tree on Grapevine,

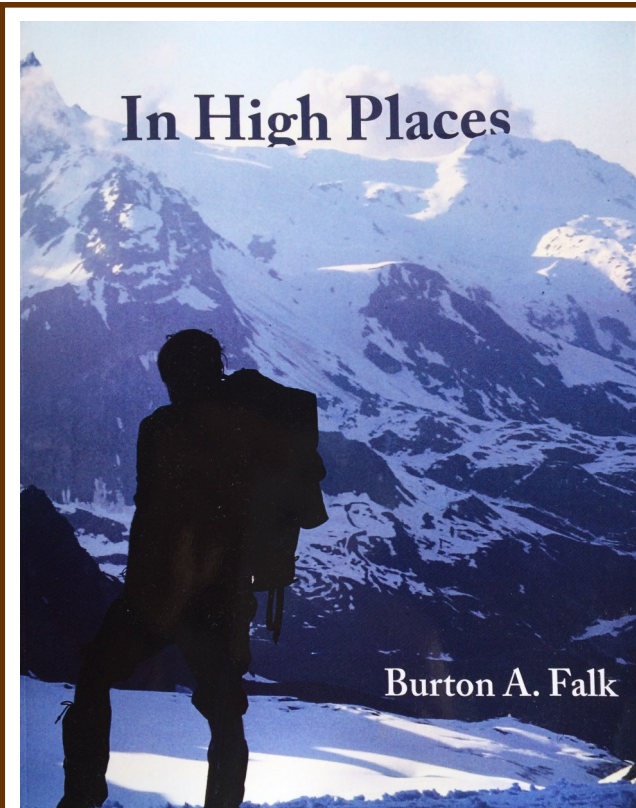
Tin and Dry Mountains are special, as is the isolation of the Owlshead Mountains. I guess the weather will remain most powerfully in my memories -- gales, sandstorms and several fierce hail storms.

## The Award Certificate

As a professional artist and a lover of maps, I decided to draw myself an Award Certificate for "Ascent of All High Points Death Valley National Park." It includes a list of the peaks with a space to write in the date climbed, as well as a map of the park showing the location of the ranges and peaks and a space for the NPS cancel stamp (please see copy of Award Certificate on page 17 of the *Desert Sage*).

My offer to the DPS -- I will be happy to send a blank certificate to anyone who has also completed all the Death Valley High Points. I would just ask you to send me a filled out copy for my records. I wonder if many people have completed this project?

Please write me with your postal address for your certificate at: Gregory Frux, 11 Sterling Place #3A, Brooklyn, NY 11217 or [art@frux.net](mailto:art@frux.net)



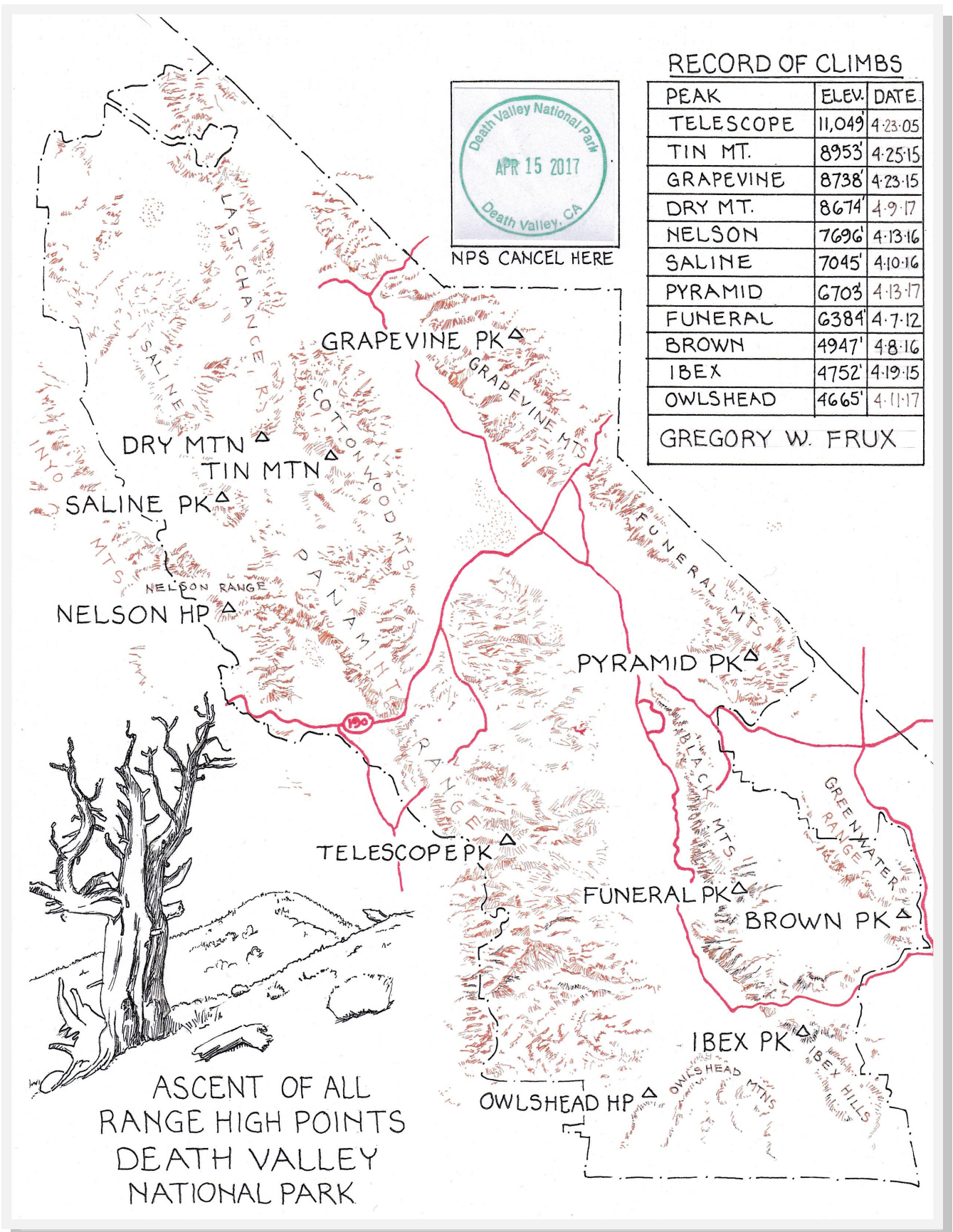
## JUST PUBLISHED! IN HIGH PLACES By Burton A. Falk

DPS List Finisher and *Desert Books* reviewer. A collection of 57 essays describing 40+ years spent climbing world-wide high points, including Denali, Aconcagua, the sometimes wettest place on earth, a first ascent in Chile, the Soviet Pamirs, remote Atlantic and Pacific islands, and, most recently, with four grandchildren.

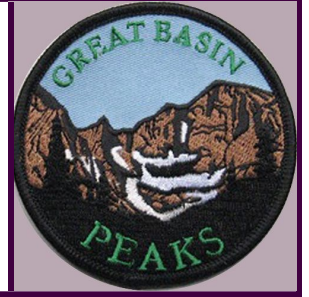
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# Trip Reports - continued



# Great Basin Peaks Section News



**Great Basin Peaks News**  
**Poodle Mountain (6,832')**  
**By Sharon Marie Wilcox**  
**May 25, 2017**

wildflowers. Our hike twisted through scattered juniper, sage, and grasses with a continual view of Poodle Mountain.

On May 25, thirteen hikers joined Larry Dwyer's Sierra Club exploration of the Buffalo Hills Wilderness Study Area. Our goal, besides learning about this WSA, was to hike the range highpoint, Poodle Mountain (6,832').

The landscape on our drive showed changes brought by a wet winter. A rushing Truckee River displayed results of this abundant water year. Normally dry Winnemucca Lake and the Black Rock Desert provided further evidence with large areas of standing water. In addition, the added moisture turned the often-dry brown hills to various shades of green. This added interest to our long desert drive.



**Front row, left to right: Mike Brooks, Larry Dwyer, Kirk Peterson, Deborah Stevenson, Bob Ralston, Gretchen Nelson, Mary Brooks, Sue Wyman, Vic Henney. Back row: Christopher Swinger, Ron Moe, David Porter. Poodle Mountain in the background. Photo by Sharon Marie Wilcox.**

The variety of colorful wildflowers, pleasant weather, and wildlife enriched this exploration. We spotted pronghorn, mountain bluebirds, a western tanager, and Great Basin Gopher snake. We also witnessed remains of the lightening caused Poodle Mountain Fire that burned this area last July.

On the summit there was ample time for a leisurely lunch. Everyone enjoyed a 360-degree view, including of the Granite Range and the snowy Warner Mountains. Afterwards, we retraced our route back to the cars, which gave us time to reflect on another memorable day spent in the Great

Basin on Our Public Lands.

The group stopped in Gerlach to top off gas, which is always wise before heading off the beaten path. Leaving Gerlach we drove about 30 miles up highway 447, then turned on a very rough, eroded and rocky dirt road. Many backcountry roads have been eroded and damaged from the year's heavy rainfall and flooding.

We continued six miles in and parked as the road became overgrown with multiple species of



# DPS Membership Directory - June 2017

## By Ron Bartell, Membership Records Chair

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# 2017 DPS Banquet

*Photo Credit: Ellen Schumacher*

## **Desert Peaks Section Annual Banquet By Tracey Thomerson May 21, 2017**

This year's banquet was held at the Castaway Restaurant in the hills of Burbank overlooking the San Fer-



**Left to right: Marlen Mertz, Doris Gilbert, and Ron Eckelmann.**

nando Valley. We were very lucky to be accommodated in the Valley View room with its floor to ceiling plate glass windows – our 62 attendees were awarded splendid views of Los Angeles as well as the setting sun.

Our speaker this year was Scott Swaney who presented “*Death Valley Canyoneering Exploration*”. Scott, an accomplished canyoneer and extraordinary peak bagger, has more first descents in Death Valley National Park than anyone on earth. He spent the past decade looking for everything from tight canyons to massive drop-offs and is believed to have led or been involved with 203 of the 258 first descents in the park. During his presentation, we were enticed by glorious pictures of seldom seen canyons and rock for-

mations as well as Scott's unique perspective of Death Valley.

Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Fran Smith Lifetime Achievement Award to Gordon MacLeod and Barbara Lilley. Gordon completed the DPS list in June 1965 on Mount DuBois. Barbara completed the DPS list in June 1977 on Mount Patterson. After years of successful leads in the DPS and SPS and completion of the DPS, SPS, and HPS lists, Barbara turned her attention to other high points in the Southwest, and her name (often along with that of her long-time climbing partner, Gordon MacLeod) is seen in peak registers everywhere. Congratulations Gordon and Barbara for your many accomplishments!

A special thanks to our Silent Auction Sponsors this year – A16, Columbia and Giv'r – for their generous contributions. All items were sold and we collected \$296.

The banquet was a great success and everyone seemed to have a great time catching up with their Desert Peaks friends.



**Left to right: Jack Wickel, Scott Jamison and Yvonne Jamison.**

# 2017 DPS Banquet – continued

*Photo Credit: Ellen Schumacher*



**Below and from left to right: Julie Rush, DPS Membership Chair Ron Bartell, Ron Jones, and Christine Mitchell.**

**Above and from left to right: Aysel Gezik, Karen Peterson, Ron Hudson, and John Padka.**



**Left to right: DPS Membership Chair Ron Bartell, Christine Mitchel, 2017-18 DPS Chair Tina Bowman, Tom Bowman, and Linda McDermott.**



**Left to right: banquet speaker Scott Swaney and DPS Banquet Chair Tracey Thomerson.**

# 2017 DPS Banquet

## Fran Smith Lifetime Achievement Award

**Desert Peaks Section Fran Smith  
Lifetime Achievement Award  
Presented to Barbara Lilley and Gordon  
MacLeod by DPS Chair Paul Cooley  
(unfortunately, Gordon MacLeod could not  
be present to accept his award)**

Tonight we honor Barbara Lilley and Gordon MacLeod with the Desert Peaks Section Lifetime Achievement Award.

Barbara's list of climbs is long, and Gordon has shared many of them with her. I have read that their shared list includes over five thousand ascents.

Though I met Barbara when I was in the Bruin Mountaineers in the 1950s, I have not climbed with her. What follows is excerpts from what many of you may already have heard or read, from Doug Mantle's speech at the Sierra Peaks Section's 60th Anniversary Banquet in 2015, published in the Sierra Echo for October - December 2015, and from the same issue, Kathy Rich's summary of Doug Kasian's accounts on the Desert Mountaineer website. My thanks to Doug Mantle and to Kathy and Doug Kasian for these.

Barbara was born in Salinas, California in 1929, and raised in the small town of Gonzales in the Salinas Valley. An only child, her parents were school teachers. During their summers off, she went camping and hiking with them, so she came by her passion honestly. Her working career included five years with the Langley Corporation in San Diego, from 1950 to 1955 and thirty years with Hughes Aircraft, from 1956 until her retirement in 1986. Her first real climb was via a trail to the top of Alta Peak in the Sierra Nevada in July of 1947. In August of the same year, she took the trail to the top of

Mount Lassen. Two years later, she was starting to do cross-country peakbagging in the Sierra Nevada with friends from the Sierra Club.

The first Mexican peak that Barbara tackled was Pico de Orizaba, Mexico's tallest. She rode down to Mexico in December 1955 with a group of UCLA students who belonged to a club called the Bruin Mountaineers. That

attempt was unsuccessful but a later one succeeded. Barbara also climbed Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.

Barbara is the first person to have summited all three of the highest and hardest peaks in the Northwest: Denali, Mount Logan, and Mount Saint Elias, and the first woman on each of them. Barbara is also the first woman to climb Yosemite's Lost Arrow, with Royal Robbins, and she logged first ascents at Tahquitz, with climbs such as Fools Rush, The Error, and Switch-back. And there was a scramble, for her, any-

way, up the East Face of Mount Whitney in 1959, where she popped up at the top and first met Gordon. Other major peaks she has climbed include Aconcagua, in Argentina, the highest peak outside of Asia, and Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania.

Barbara has completed the SPS, DPS, and HPS lists, and her name (often along with Gordon MacLeod's) is seen in peak registers everywhere.

Barbara is a peakbagger extraordinaire. Her name is known to any serious climber in the United States. We are fortunate to be able to help celebrate her and Gordon's accomplishments tonight with this well-deserved award.



**Gordon MacLeod and Barbara Lilley  
(photo taken by Mary McMannes at a  
past DPS banquet).**

# DESERT BOOKS

By *Burton Falk*

## SUMMER FICTION, 2017

**THE NEVER-OPEN DESERT DINER (2015), James Anderson**

**DESERT BOYS (2016), Chris McCormick**

**WALKS AWAY WOMAN (2013), Ki Longfellow**

**THE NEVER-OPEN DESERT DINER (2015), James Anderson**

To be up-front, the action described in *The Never-open Desert Diner* takes place in mid-Utah, outside the DPS' climbing area.

But that's okay because the author, James Anderson -- along with the likes of Edward Abbey, Craig Childs, and Terry Tempest Williams--describes the state's high-desert country in appreciative detail, making it a worthwhile read for any desert lover.

If you're a map nut like me, however, the area in which the story is set is annoyingly confusing. "U.S. 191 is the main highway north and south out of Price, Utah. North led to Salt Lake City. Due south took you to Green River, and eventually Moab. The turnoff for State Road 117 is about twenty miles from the city limits of Price. Ten miles east, down 117, on the left, surrounded by miles of flat, rugged nothing, you came upon The Well-Known Desert Diner." Sounds plausible, right? Well, it's not. Although there is a Utah State Highway 117, you can't turn off it from U.S. 191, nor can you drive its alleged hundred-mile length.

So, my advice is to forget geographic specifics. Be content to be transported to somewhere in central Utah and enjoy the story of good-natured Ben Jones, part Native American, part Jewish, the owner and sole employee of Ben's Desert Moon Delivery Service.

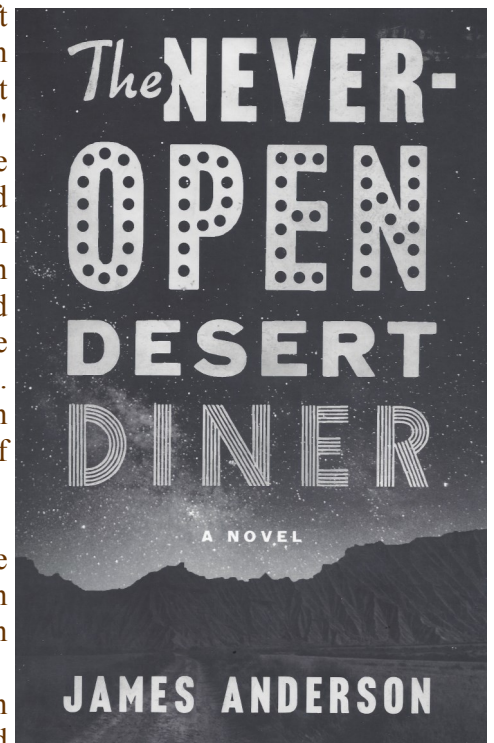
Ben is thirty-eight years old and single. Raised in foster homes and adopted by an older non-Indian

couple at age seven, he later discovered that his birth mother was probably a young Jewish social worker employed at the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in Oregon.

"Over the years my hair turned dark brown, (and) my skin darkened into a perpetual tan," he muses. "I grew to six foot three, an unnatural height for either Native American or Jew. To my way of thinking, the only thing left that made me an Indian...was that red blanket." Indeed, the blanket referred to is the wrap in which his birth mother bundled him before abandoning him. It will play an important part of Ben's story.

As the tale opens, we learn that Ben has an exclusive contract with both FedEx and UPS to serve the hundred-mile stretch of 117 which "dead-ended up against the granite face of a towering mesa just outside the small former coal-mining town of Rockmuse, population 1,344." Most of Ben's clients are lonely cattle ranchers and desert rats "holed up in their aluminum trailers that rose shimmering out of the brown distance like so much tin-foil pinned against the horizon."

One of the interesting locals is John the Preach, minister of the First Church of the Desert Cross--"denomination unknown and unimportant" -- located in a former True Value hardware store in Rockmuse. During the spring each year--the time at which this



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story takes place -- John can be found dragging a ten-foot wooden cross up and down the highway. Whenever Ben spots John, he stops to offer him an ice-cold bottle of water.

Another Highway 117-area character is seventy-nine-year-old Walt Butterfield -- "the one man on the planet you didn't want to piss off" -- possessor of nine vintage motorcycles, and owner of The Well-Known Desert Diner, originally opened in 1929, but closed since 1987, the explanation of the book's eponymous title, *The Never-Open Desert Diner*.

After dropping off a carton filled with motorcycle parts at Walt's Quonset hut shop behind his diner one day, Ben discovers a nearby turnoff leading to a half-built housing development whose only completed building "stuck out like a sturdy tooth on an empty gum." Living alone in the house, Ben finds a beautiful cellist named Claire who is apparently in flight from some ominous event in her past. Although she is initially aloof, Ben discovers that Claire craves ice cream (of which, fortuitously, he has several gallons stashed in his cab's refrigerator), and even though she remains cool, Ben's promise of Butter Brickle soon leads to a friendship.

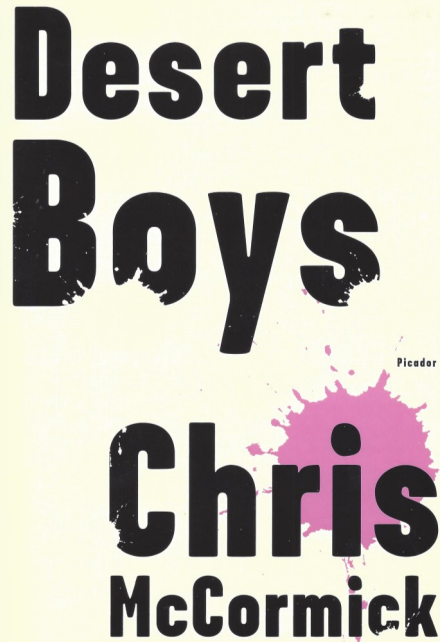
As the story unfolds, we learn of the tragic event behind the Well-Known Diner's abrupt closing, discover that Ben's Desert Moon Delivery Service is on the edge of bankruptcy, and the reason why Claire is living alone in the desert.

The big question remains, however. Will there be a high-desert future for Ben and Claire?

*The Never-Open Desert Diner* is one of the most satisfying debut novels -- desert-related or otherwise-- that I have read in the last few years. Reviewing lists of best desert novels on Google, I found that *The Never-Open Desert Diner* is mentioned along with works of authors such as Edward Abbey, Cormac McCarthy, and Barbara Kingsolver. Not bad company for Anderson, a native northwesterner, and a Reed College and Pine Manor College alumni.

### DESERT BOYS (2016), Chris McCormick

To be honest, *Desert Boys*, although set in the Antelope Valley, makes few mentions of the surrounding mountains. To be additionally upfront, it took me a while to become committed to this collection of twelve linked short stories which add up to one novel-length coming-of-age tale.



The principal character in *Desert Boys* is Daley "Kush" Kushner, whom we first meet during the summer before he enters high school, as he and two friends, Robert Karinger, and Dan Watts, build their own paintball field in the nearby "uncultivated" desert.

Similar to McCormick, the three boys grew up in Lancaster in the late 1990s/early 2000s as the area transformed from a rural backwater to a rapidly expanding city, populated by "people who'd been drawn to the cheap, carry-only-what-you-need, fresh-start sort of living the desert represented."

Kush is gay, his mother is an immigrant from Armenia, his father is a furniture salesman; Robert Karinger, along with his mother -- who works at the Antelope Valley Animal Shelter -- his younger sister, Roxanne, and several rescue kittens, live in a trailer; and Dan Watts, whose parents own a landscaping business, is half Mexican.

As the stories progress, blending present and past, we follow the three friends as they attend and graduate, class of 2005, from Antelope Valley High School. Kush, from whose POV the stories are told, is

## Desert Books - continued

accepted at U.C. Berkeley, becomes a writer, and moves in with Lloyd, a fellow Berkeley alumni. The impulsive Karinger marries his girlfriend, Jackie, while still in high school, joins the Marines, and, all too soon, is killed in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Watts, the most practical of the three, works his way through an EMT program at the local community college, passes the National Registry examination, and is working as a paramedic.

One of the stories, "Notes for a Spotlight on a Future President," concerns Joshua Stilt-- black, a fellow Antelope Valley High School alumni, and a Stanford grad--who is running for mayor of Oakland. During an interview with Kush, at the time a Bay Area journalist, the two reminisce about their AV days. Stilt says, "Mostly I thought about leaving, and what I was going to do after I left. I wanted to live in a place where I wasn't the only one trying to change things, you know?...There are specific challenges for each minority--black and gay aren't the same, obviously--but the common link if you're the only one of your kind is that it's tough to get taken seriously by the majority. People hear you complain and say, 'If you don't like it here, then leave.' If you don't complain, you start feeling complicit. I just had to learn to ignore everyone, even myself..."

Another of the stories, "My Uncle's Tenant," relates the murder of two thirteen year-old girls by a man who lived in a trailer park owned by Kush's Uncle Gaspar. Although Kush was a boy when the slayings took place, the memory of the events remain vivid to him as an adult. He remembers that his mother, on occasion, prepared dinner for Uncle Gaspar and his friend, Phil, a quiet man who had known and worked side by side with the murderer.

Kush can't understand why his mother would invite someone like Phil into her home at a time when her "children were roughly the same age as the victims."

When he asks his mother why she did so, she answers, "He had no family. No home. No place he wanted to be. This can fill a person with shame. He was choosing, God bless him, whether or not to die." He needed a place where he could feel at home, where he could live.

Kush asks if she and his uncle had been successful.

"For some, there is no such place," she answers. "Not in this world, anyway."

By the time I finished *Desert Boys*, I was a McCormick admirer. The author managed to capture the essence of the Antelope Valley, including its burgeoning expansion -- "...they came by the thousands;" the fact that, even so, the area retained a small town feeling--"You'd make a friend in kindergarten and shake his hand at your high school graduation;" and the climate--"For months the heat clocked in at three digits until, for months more, the temperature dropped below freezing..(T)he Santa Ana winds conspired with the tumbleweeds, compelling them to dart through traffic like suicide bombers."

McCormick earned his B.A. at the University of California, Berkeley, and his M.F.A. at the University of Michigan. A winner of two Hopwood Awards, the author now lives in Ann Arbor.

### **WALKS AWAY WOMAN (2013), Ki Longfellow**

This 237-page novel can and--for best results--probably should be read in one sitting. It's the story of Mrs. Peter Warner who, one morning while purchasing peanut butter in an Arizona Safeway, decides to walk into the adjoining desert and die.

An unlikely beginning for an upbeat, sometimes funny story, you think?

Well, wait until you get to know Mrs. Warner, nee Molly Anne Brock, originally from Burbank, California, and now the 50 year-old, eighteen pound-overweight wife of a cheating husband, and the mother of Peter Jr., "majoring in greed at Pepperdine," and Shelley, "twenty-two going on fifteen," living somewhere in East Los Angeles "where she could be doing anything--and usually is."

Molly's hope is for "a silent slipping away...somewhere 'nice,' preferably with a good view...where she could lie down and fall asleep and never wake up again." She heard that Indians ("sorry...Native Americans," she, a proper PCer



## Desert Books - continued

reflects) could "look out across a valley or up at a mountain, and say 'This is a good day to die.' Then they'd arrange themselves for death, lie out under the sun or the moon on a nice soft rock and quietly pass away."

And thus begins Molly's forty days in the desert at the end of which she, the *Walks Away Woman* of title,



has morphed into a different person.

The story is a flight of imagination by Ki Longfellow, an author who has led a fascinating life in her own right. And the book should be read purely for the fun of it, certainly not for precise descriptions of places and things or believable characterizations.

Molly's begins her unplanned desert trek with the following ten essentials: a Touch Time watch, sunglasses, "good sturdy shoes, her favorite pair of well worn, if too tight jeans, (and) a white tee shirt under a faded denim jacket." She also has a Gucci bag which contains her Gucci wallet, a dead cell phone, a bottle of Valium, a comb, hairbrush, eyeliner, mascara, and melted lipstick -- Cover Girl's *French Toast* (the latter of which she smears on her mouth, nose and cheeks for sun protection). Unfortunately, she has no food or water.

On her second day, while wandering a desolate area in southern Arizona, Molly discovers a tumbledown shack containing a bed, a "Van Gough" table, a chair, and a battered old hat on a peg near the door. Also, providing temporary respite, she finds several packages of Top Ramen soup mix, a few boxes of Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix, some gnawed through boxes of Hamburger Helper, and, in a nearby root cellar,

thankfully, six five-gallon plastic jugs full of water.

In the succeeding days, Molly befriends a lovable travel companion, Brue, a desert donkey; wanders into an old mining town inhabited by a group of artists (one of whom, insists that Molly should take up her old passion, painting); comes across an aging man living in a magnificent, fully staffed desert hideaway; and near the end of her forty days and forty nights, she is stalked by a homicidal youth.

Will the enlightened Molly return to her family? Read the book. I think you'll enjoy doing so.

Ki Longfellow's biography suggests she is very much like her impulsively brave heroine, Molly. Born on Staten Island in 1944, she attended high school in Marin County, where, determined to become a writer, she attended only the classes that interested her.

In her dizzying work career she was an actress, a director, a fashion model, and, for a year, she lived and worked on a ranch in Montana's Blackfeet Indian Reservation. In England in 1981, she married Vivian Stanshall, frontman for the Bonzo Dog Band, and in 1989, she started writing in earnest, producing several volumes including *China Blues* (1989), *The Secret Magdalene* (2005), and, in December, 2013, Longfellow published *Walks Away Woman*, a novel she had written in 2002 when she was living in Tucson, Arizona.



## DPS Peaks Register Report

Mark Butski is the Desert Peaks Section's Mountain Records chair. Please email Mark with the condition of summit register books and containers after climbing a DPS listed peak. Mark can also send you replacement DPS register books to carry up to DPS peaks. His email address is:

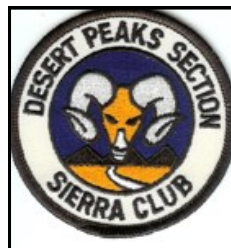
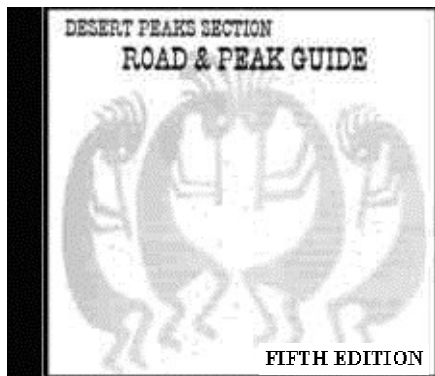
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