Ivanpah Airport land grab
BY ELDEN HUGHES
The entire Nevada delegation, both Senators and Congressmen, are making a stealth land grab in Southern Nevada. The stated purpose is a new airport, but it goes much further. The introduced legislation is “Ivanpah Valley Airport Public Land Transfer Act,” HR-3705 (Gibbons and Ensign) and S-1964 (Reid and Bryan). It involves a 2000-acre airport within a 6000-acre industrial support area within a 20,000-acre umbrella — all within the Ivanpah Valley just north of Whiskey Pete’s (Stateline, Nevada) and 30 miles south of Las Vegas. Thus, this is a new city and a terrible example of urban sprawl. This legislation will have enormous impacts on the Mojave National Preserve.

There has been no public planning process and no public input for the legislation. The legislation speaks of an official map, yet none has been made available. The Bureau of Land Management’s Area Plan calls for this area to be retained as Public Land, yet the BLM has caved in its public statements.

The legislation, if passed, will be a ripoff of public lands. The land would be paid for at 1998 prices when taken into possession by the airport authority/Clark County — even if the land is acquired 20 years hence.

Also, hundreds of planes each day will use the Mojave National Preserve’s airspace in the landing/take-off patterns. The noise levels in Death Valley National Park and Lake Mead National Recreation Area will greatly increase.

In an attempt to stop this legislation, the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, National Parks and Conservation Association have filed a joint letter of protest with the Senate and House committees dealing with the legislation.

ACTION
Nevada folks should contact their Senators and Congressmen on the issues of urban sprawl and lack of planning. California folks should contact Senators Feinstein and Boxer on the issue of impacts on the Mojave National Preserve.

Wilderness inventory begins in Nevada
BY TOM MYERS
With Friends of Nevada Wilderness as the lead, the Sierra Club, Desert Survivors, and The Patagonia Corporation, through its internship program, has begun a major re-inventory of wilderness quality lands in Nevada. On the weekend of August 15 and 16, Friends and Patagonia held a training session for leaders within the company. These are the people who will be leading trips and training other Patagonia volunteers in mapping protocol. There were about 16 Patagonia employees along with Friend’s Tom Myers and Mark Sailor in attendance.

After a day of classroom training, we traveled to the Stillwater Mountains northeast of Fallon. There are two wilderness study areas separated by about 4 miles and additional roadless land to the north and south. The charge was to determine whether the WSAs could be expanded and combined to create one large Stillwater Mountain wilderness.

We split into six groups and traveled the boundaries, photographing intrusions and jeep trails. With only about four hours, we took about eight rolls of film showing jeep routes that could be closed and recovering mining disturbances. The Stillwater Mountains were an excellent choice because of the complicated boundaries and questions to be asked. New
View from the Chair

By Elden Hughes

David Brower speaks of a time when all the areas still in a pristine state worth protecting in their pristine state are in Wilderness or Parks or otherwise protected. At such a time our protection activities will flow into restoration.

Of course we aren't waiting. As we continue our efforts for Nevada Wilderness and Wildlands 2000 (California Wilderness), and certainly Utah Wilderness, we start the drumbeats of restoration.

Every dam creates a lake which ultimately fills to become a long, narrow, mostly level field with a waterfall at the lower end. It is with this certainty that we now look at Hetch Hetchy and Glen Canyon dams and think maybe we shouldn't wait that long. Maybe we can do something now or soon.

In the Santa Monica Mountains in Malibu Creek we have a dam that has already become a level field with a waterfall. Removing the dam would allow the steelhead to migrate to their spawning grounds. However, removing the dam could release so much silt that it would kill the few steelhead surviving in Malibu Creek. Undoing our mistakes is not easy.

At the August 21-22, Desert Committee meeting in the White Mountains, east of Bishop, Mike Prather reported on an upcoming undoing of a past mistake. In the 1920s, and again in the 1970s, Owens River water was diverted to the Los Angeles Aqueducts and Owens Lake dried up. Sixty miles of the Owens River were dewatered.

As part of a settlement of an Inyo County/City of Los Angeles lawsuit, water will again flow in the lower Owens River. It looks to me like we will have 120 miles of canoeing with only one portage (downed trees excepted) — not counting the riparian areas that will spring back to life on each side or around Owens Dry Lake. The Owens River below Bishop meanders about as much as a river can meander, so estimating miles can be tough. And, we may not be able to call Owens Dry Lake a "dry" lake any more.

This settlement is a tribute to Sierra Club activists. Thank you Mike Prather, Mark Bagley, Bob Jellison, and attorney Larry Silver. Thank you, all the activists who are helping to make well a damaged land.

Afterthought 1. Also in Toiyabe Chapter, but farther north and in Nevada, Sierra Club activists are supporting the purchase of water rights on the Walker River to save Walker Lake (and Walker Lake is eminently worth saving).

Afterthought 2. Desert populations are small and desert activists are spread thin over a huge area. The CNRCC Desert Committee makes this relatively small group of activists count for far more than its numbers. The recent meeting brought together 25 folk from as far as Ocotillo (near the Mexican border), San Francisco, and Reno. We met on White Mountain and shared knowledge and strength. Consider joining us. We do good work.

Owens Lake:
Will what we had been when the dust settles?

By Mike Prather

On July 28, 1998, the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) voted to approve a settlement solution with the City of Los Angeles for controlling the unhealthful dust that pours off of the surface of Owens Lake. Owens Lake is the largest single point source of PM 10 and other dust in the United States.

With approval by the California State Air Resources Board this compromise solution will result in 16.5 square miles of the lake bed being covered with gravel, sheet flooding or managed salt grass vegetation by the year 2003. Which percentage of each treatment is not defined.

Los Angeles would prefer no gravel (cost) and the use of ground water (not aqueduct water) for the vegetation and sheet flooding. After the year 2003, 2 square miles/year will be treated until the GBUAPCD determines that the originally developed, the subsequent

Please see OWENS LAKE, page 6.

The Desert Report

The Desert Report is published by the Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee. To receive the Report send the coupon on the back cover to DESERT REPORT, 3435 Wilshire Blvd. #320, Los Angeles, CA 90010-1904. Articles, photos, letters, and original art are welcome. Please submit them to the above address two weeks before the end of March, June, September, and December.

Desert Committee Mission

The Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee works for the protection and conservation of the California/Nevada desert, supports the same objectives in all desert areas of the Southwest, monitors and works with governments and agencies to promote preservation of our arid lands, sponsors education and work trips, encourages and supports others to work for the same objectives, and maintains, shares and publishes information about the desert.

Desert Committee Officers

Jim Dodson, Listserv, jimdodson@sierracub.org, 805-942-3662; Hillary Gordon, Secretary, hpgordon@earthlink.net, 310-478-4102; Vicki Hoover, Coordinator, N. Calif./N. Nevada vicky.hoover@sierracub.org, 415-977-5527; Elden Hughes, Co-Chair, elden.hughes@sierracub.org, 562-941-5306; Jim Kilberg, Outings, jim.boki@aol.com, 310-215-0052; Joan Taylor, Co-Chair, joan.taylor@sierracub.org, 760-778-1101.

Guest Editor, Lynne Foster.

Photos, The Learning Company, Inc. (royalty free).
Glamis Gold Project Update

Open pit cyanide heap-leach mine threatens Quechan tribe’s sacred lands

BY EDIE HARMON

The comment period on the BLM/Imperial County Draft EIS/EIR for Glamis Gold’s proposed Imperial Project ended in April 1998. The Sierra Club and others have recommended the “No Action” alternative, with denial of all permits for the project. We believe we have provided sufficient information on the important archeological and cultural resources and sites sacred to the Quechan Indians that would be impacted by the project. We’re also optimistic that we have given Imperial County substantial evidence and reasons to (1) deny the requested water well and groundwater appropriation permits as being not in the public interest and (2) to reject the Reclamation Plan as being inadequate under CEQA.

BLM’s most recent estimate is that a Final EIS/EIR will be available by the end of October. However, we think the changes needed are so significant that either a supplemental or a third draft will be needed, along with public comment. Also, three days after the comment deadline, Glamis made significant changes in its recorded claims, thereby outdated its original plan of operations in the draft EIS/EIR. We suspect these changes may require a new draft EIS/EIR reflecting the amended plan of operations.

Since the BLM comment period ended in April, we have continued our research. The mining company requested the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) to begin its environmental review for a “dredge and fill” permit under the Clean Water Act. The deadline for comments was August 17, 1998. We hope COE will deny the requested 404 Permit or discontinue its review until after comments on the draft EIS/EIR are available to COE and the Final EIS satisfies COE requirements.

US EPA submitted strong comment letters to both BLM and COE raising concerns about environmental justice and hydrology. They’ve designated Indian Wash on the proposed site as an “Aquatic Resource of National Importance.” They have also questioned the Draft EIS/EIR failure to discuss sites for mining gold outside Indian Wash or sites having less impact on sensitive cultural resources and sacred sites.

The “conservative” local newspaper, “Imperial Valley Press,” printed an editorial on 8/24/98 opposing development of a mine at the proposed site. The IV Press stated, “While it is not a popular thing in Imperial County these days to agree with the federal government on desert issues, we agree with the EPA on this one. Other mines have proven there is plenty of gold elsewhere in Imperial County. As much as we need jobs and tax revenue here, we must consider that the land for the proposed Imperial Project is already golden in the eyes of the Quechans. For that reason, and others cited, it should be left as is.”

We know this is a long process requiring agencies to follow specified procedures. Nevertheless, as always, we still believe that BLM will ultimately “do the right thing” by denying the proposed mining project plan of operations — as well as finding the mining claims invalid. We strongly encourage BLM to withdraw the lands from mineral entry, thus protecting the irreplaceable archeological and cultural resources and preserving for the Quechans their ability to use sacred sites for religious and cultural purposes without the threats of mining operations.

Only time will tell if we have made our arguments well enough to convince the federal, state, or local decision-makers.

Join us at the Quechan Cultural Committee’s second annual Thanksgiving pot-luck dinner/weekend outing at the proposed minesite. (Please see page 9 for details.) Then we may be able to celebrate or learn what we need to do to save the archeological resources, sacred lands, and the microphyll woodland habitat from open-pit mining so we can celebrate in the near future.

Discover why so many archaeologists, Indians and non-Indians find this area so special. Some places are so unique that they must be protected from mining, even if they aren’t included in wilderness or national parks.

Ivanpah airport . . .

intrusions were found, as well as new areas that could be added to the proposal. Original inventories done by the BLM may be out of date. However, many of our own proposals may also have changed.

There will be additional training sessions early this fall. We need as many Sierra Club volunteers as possible. There are over 100 wilderness study areas in Nevada and about 80 more possible wilderness areas that need surveying. If 90 people commit to survey just two areas over the next two years, we can easily get this reinventory completed.

What you can do. Please contact Tom Myers as soon as possible to indicate your interest in helping with the inventory and attending the training. Call Tom at 702-348-1759 or e-mail at tom@black-rock.reno.nv.us.
Mining update

California desert national parks

BY HELEN WAGENVOORD

Mining in national parks should be a contradiction in terms. However, an antiquated law perpetuates mining and its devastating legacy, even in and around our most stringently protected public lands.

The majority of national park mining claims are concentrated in the California desert parks. The 1994 California Desert Protection Act (CADPA), which created Mojave National Preserve and significantly expanded Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks, placed a substantial number of mining claims under National Park Service (NPS) jurisdiction.

Mojave National Preserve contains an estimated 1400 mining claims, more than any other park unit, while Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks have approximately 400 and 60 claims, respectively. Most of these claims won’t translate into mining operations. But there are several current and proposed mining operations that merit concern.

While many mining claims have been forgotten and will not be pursued, development of even a small fraction of the valid claims seriously jeopardizes sensitive park resources. For example:

• In Mojave National Preserve, an active mine is currently destroying Cinder Cones National Natural Landmark with heavy machinery. The mine is also operating without a legally required deposit to cover post-closure clean-up, yet the NPS has failed to use its authority to stop the operation.

• In Death Valley National Park, claimants wish to open the Rainbow Talc Mine within newly designated park wilderness. If NPS approves this mining operation within park wilderness, it would set a dangerous precedent for our national parks. The Rainbow Talc mine could destroy habitat for sensitive reptilian species, blast the desert quiet with heavy machinery and explosives, and degrade local air and water with dust, diesel fumes and toxic runoff.

• Mojave National Preserve’s fragile desert ecosystem could be degraded by the establishment of an open-pit gold mine at the mouth of Caruthers Canyon. This proposed cyanide heap leach operation would involve the extraction of 130,000 tons of wollastonite.

Why the problem?

The 1976 National Parks Mining Regulation Act granted the NPS authority to approve and regulate mining within the National Park System, but these regulations are often overlooked by park management.

The region’s anti-environmental Congressional and local political representation only compounds the problem. Some members of Congress are currently trying to reduce the size of all three desert national parks, in part to remove mining claims from NPS oversight.

Thus, mining in our California desert national parks is a problem, and part of the problem is with the National Park Service’s failure to sufficiently regulate mining to ensure protection of national park resources. The other part of the problem is the absurdity of the 1872 Mining Law.

This law gives away our public lands, even our national parks, for private, corporate and even international profit. In fact, mining in our national parks provides us with an additional opportunity to magnify public awareness of the 19th century act that has subsidized untold destruction of natural resources throughout the western U.S.

What you can do

If you’re interested in the National Parks & Conservation Association’s (NPCA) mining campaign to combat mining destruction in national parks and boost efforts to reform the 1872 Mining Law, call 510-839-9922 or e-mail hwagenvoord@npca.org.

If you would like to receive NPCA’s new bi-weekly update on California and Hawaii’s national parks, send a message to majordomo@ari.net and in the text message write: subscribe ppam-list.
Keep vehicles off the desert!

BY JUDY ANDERSON

Formal scientific research is again confirming what we’ve been saying for decades: Get those vehicles off the desert; the tracks last forever.

**Damage lasts 1000 years**

According to *Science News*, August 8, researchers Jayne Belnap and Steven Warren, of USGS and the army construction engineering research lab, working on a US Army funded project, found that Patton’s WWII tank tracks damage in areas like the Palen-McCoy Wilderness will likely last 1000 years.

The results were presented recently at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society. The research focused on the response rate of the cyanobacteria and its ability to hold soil particles. The micrometer scale of the cyanobacteria leave them “vulnerable to destruction even by rolling sand grains.”

**Don’t squash the algae!**

The *Science News* article said Belnap compared the tank track damage to that of 4-wheel drive vehicles, and concluded that the damage from 4WD was greater because the smaller cross sectional area of the tires concentrates weight and forces that tear apart the soil surface.

Cyanobacteria (algae) are the basis for nutrients used by other plants, and seem to recover faster in shrubby areas where there is more shade, precipitation, and protection from wind and other disturbances than open areas. The army has other researchers working on whether disturbed areas could be “reseeded.” (Natural recovery is about 6% for 58 years.)

**See the WWII tracks**

Activists interested in seeing tracks can visit the BLM’s Patton’s Camp ACES northeast of Joshua Tree NP or the center of the “C” making up the Palen-McCoy Wilderness area. This is where a Desert committee study trip in the early 1980s poked around the northern end of the McCoy Mountains. Trip members saw evidence of the tracks for themselves.
Owens Lake dust . . .
continued from page 1

Federal EPA air and State air quality standards have been met.

Originally, Los Angeles had been ordered by the GBUAPCD to treat 32 square miles of lake bed. Los Angeles appealed to the State Air Resources Board and there was real concern that it would accept LA's appeal. A compromise solution that requires Los Angeles to do most of the original order, but on a longer time scale is probably the best that could have been hoped for, given the political pressures in Sacramento that threatened to "roll" the GBUAPCD.

Groundwater pumping a threat to wildlife habitat

While efforts to control fugitive dust should be applauded — after all, Los Angeles admits to having caused the problem — there is a potential downside resulting from the "cure." When the GBUAPCD studied environmental impacts of the dust solution they had originally developed, the subsequent EIR only applied to use of surface water by the City of Los Angeles. The agreed-upon settlement solution, however, does not specify whether the water used in the project is surface water or groundwater. Surface water would come from the aqueduct and ground water would come from under and around the lake.

The pumping of large volumes of ground water from under the lake may have adverse impacts on the numerous wetlands and springs that line its shoreline. These small marsh and mud flat ecosystems are used by thousands of ducks, geese, and shorebirds for feeding, rest, and nesting each year.

Some of the "clouds" of shorebirds are traveling from their arctic tundra nesting areas to winter as far away as South America and then back north again the following spring. Brine flies and other food sources help these birds make the long migration journey.

Even in winter, brine flies and other invertebrates are present for the small number of wintering birds.

Remember — Owens Lake is not dead! In fact, it is quite alive and critically important to thousands of birds.

Local birders have helped census birds on Owens Lake by participating in the Pacific Flyway Project with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (1989-1994) and by helping with numerous surveys of snowy plover populations at the Lake. (Owens Lake is the largest inland nesting site for the snowy plover.)

In addition, fieldtrips and study trips to the Lake before the Flyway Project and since then have shown the tremendous level of use by many bird species.

New EIR needed

Los Angeles and Inyo County have jointly hired a consulting firm to study the effects of ground water use at Owens Lake as part of the dust solution. As much as 40,000 acre-feet/year may be necessary. Because the EIR written by the GBUAPCD did not study use of groundwater, an entirely new EIR must be developed.

A new EIR would provide the public an opportunity to comment on this study and its predicted impacts. The Inyo County Water Department will eventually determine the pumping limits or whether there will be any pumping at all under the Long Term Groundwater Management Agreement it already has in place with Los Angeles.

However, Inyo County plans to have the consultants write a management plan for water use at Owens Lake itself because the groundwater management plan for the Owens Valley doesn't specifically "fit" Owens Lake.

Members of the public need to study and comment on the ground water EIR as it is developed. We should stand strongly in support of wetland and habitat protection at Owens Lake. Members should advocate use of surface (aqueduct) water as opposed to ground water pumping in order to protect wildlife and habitat for the future.

Aqueduct water in large quantities will be flowing down 55 miles of the Owens River as part of the Lower Owens River Project now being developed by Los Angeles and Inyo County as part of their Long-Term Groundwater Management Agreement. This transport of aqueduct water would be a good delivery system for water that could then be spread on the surface of the lake bed or used as part of the managed vegetation.

What you can do

Los Angeles hopes to fast-track their work on the Lake, so it is important for you to contact the INYO COUNTY WATER DEPARTMENT: Inyo County Water Dept. 163 May St., Bishop CA 92514 (www.sdsc.edu/Inyo/inyohp.htm, 760-872-1168).

Ask to be put on their mailing list; specifically say you want to be informed about the EIR on Owens Lake groundwater pumping.
Desert Outings

All outings listed here are sponsored by the CNRCC (California/Nevada Regional Conservation Committee) Desert Committee, in partnership with regional Club entities. Unless otherwise stated, all are suitable for anyone who enjoys the outdoors.

Average vehicles with good clearance are adequate for most trips. However, many of the trips use “dirt” roads and, as with all desert travel, you should come prepared. For a good overview of desert exploration consult the Sierra Club guidebook, *Adventuring in the California Desert*, by Lynne Foster.

**Sign up now!**

Most trips require prior sign-up by mail. This is to insure trip size does not exceed necessary limits and enable the leaders to send you more information than space allows here, along with a participant’s list, before the trip.

Don’t feel reluctant to sign up because you may not have the high-clearance vehicle specified. On the list you’ll see who’s offering a ride/needs a ride and what area they live.

We want you to enjoy our study trips and work parties. They are designed to help you experience the desert in a way you may not have done before. We usually have a campfire in the evenings with lots of food (potlucks) and fun and enlightening camaraderie. Welcome!

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1998-99 Trips

**September - February**

**September 26-27**

(Saturday - Sunday)

Southern Sierra Exploratory. Dry car camp in spectacular canyon to enjoy some of most unique geology in Sierras; granite spires rising 200 ft above floor of Oil Canyon, surrounded by multi-colored volcanic cliffs. Saturday: two short, light x-country hikes into BLM’s new Horse Canyon ACEC and the State’s new Tomo Kahlmi State Park. Enjoy a bit of pre-Sierran geological history, as well as a dose of local Native American history, pictographs and mythology. Sunday: mod., 6-mi hike along ridge (1400 ft gain) for spectacular views of colorful geological forms and rugged canyonlands. Send $5 check (CA State Parks) with 2 SASEs, h/w phones, rideshare info to Reservations: SANDY HARE, 22601 Valley View Dr, Tehachapi, CA 93561, 805-822-0703. Leader: GEORGETTE THEOTIG, 805-822-4371.

CNRCC Desert Committee/Kern Kaweah Chapter

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**September 26-28**

(Saturday - Monday)

Desert Monitor Peak (10,888 ft) Exploratory Backpack, Central Nevada. Explore Table Mtn Wilderness with professional geologist. Mod. backpack, Class 1-2 peak climb in remote “blank spot on map,” central NV (approx. 3500 ft elev. gain, 12 mi). Saturday: backpack into Monitor Range via Little Fish Lake Valley on E. Sunday: explore glaciated high country of range; including tiny cirque lake; climb range high point and pack out. Monday: optional ghost town/geology exploration. High-clearance 2WD vehicles, 4WD better. Send SASE, h/w phones, rideshare info, vehicle type to Leader: BOB MICHAEL, 872 Highlands Dr., Ste 3, Santa Barbara, CA 93109, 805-963-5614 (Los Padres Chapter). Asst: RON GRAU (Angeles Chapter).

Desert Peaks Section/CNRCC

**October 2-4**

(Friday - Sunday)

Hunter Mtn (7280 ft)-Racetrack Area Exploration/Death Valley NP. Dry car camp with easy-paced, mod. hiking. Trip includes Fossil Falls; old mining trail hike (S of Nelson Range) to historic watering hole (petroglyphs); Hunter Mtn (7280 ft) exploration (Paiute area, pinyon, juniper). Spectacular views of Hidden, Saline and Panamint Valleys. Optional: descend Racetrack and explore old mining claims or hike Ubehebe Peak (578 ft), 2 mi RT, 1500 ft gain on trail, and more. Send large SASE with h/w phones, carpool info to Leader: CLAUS ENGELHARDT, 12008 April Ann Avenue, Bakersfield, CA 93312, 805-589-5196, cengel@lightspeed.net.

CNRCC Desert/Kern Kaweah Chapter
1998-99 Trips
SEPTEMBER - FEBRUARY
continued from page 7

October 10-12
(Saturday-Monday)
Inyo Mtns-Hunter Canyon to Big Horn Mine Backpack. Explore the history and enjoy the beauty of the mountains. Visit old mill site and mine, ruins of buildings, stamp mill etc. Backpack 2280 ft elev. gain. first day, 4000+ total gain second day. Third day down and home. Send SASE, experience, conditioning, h/w phones, car pool info to Leader: BARBEE TIDBALL, 3826 N. Weston Pl., Long Beach, CA 90802, 562-424-1556, LBTIDBALL@earthlink.net. Co-Leader: LARRY TIDBALL. Desert Peaks Section/CNRCC Desert Committee

October 16-19
(Friday-Sunday)
Fandango-Morey Peak (10,246 ft) Exploratory & Car Camp/Central Nevada. This classic basin and range topography is being proposed for wilderness status (70 mi NE Tonopah). Vicinity includes: year-round creeks with brook trout, prolific wildlife, scenic rock forms and canyons, history charcoal kilns, pinyon, juniper and aspen in fall colors. Easy/mod x-country hiking with strenuous option and possible peak bag. High-clearance vehicles required. Send large SASE with h/w phones, ride share info to Leader: JOE FONTAINE, Box 307, Tehachapi, CA 93561, 805-821-2055, joe.fontaine@sierra-club.org. Asst: MARGE SILL. Kern-Kaweah & Toiyabe Chapters

November 6-8
(Friday-Sunday)
Santa Rosa Mtns Traverse/Martinez Mtn (6560 ft), Sheep Mtn (5141 ft) Backpack. Friday: arrange car shuttle from Indio, backpack 9 mi, 1700 ft gain on Cactus Spring Trail in history Horsethief Canyon to camp at Agua Alta Spring. Saturday: climb both peaks, 8 mi, 4300 ft gain or loll at camp. Sunday: hike out Martinez Canyon 15 mi to Valerie Jean’s date shop, retrieve cars. Much rough x-country scrambling to these DPS/HPS listed pkts. For experienced hikers/WTC equiv. Send 2 SASEs, h/w phones, recent condition/experience, ride share info to Leader: BETH EPSTEIN, 4048 E. Massachusetts St., Long Beach, CA 90814, 562-439-0646, eepstein@gte.net (Angeles Chapter).
CNRCC Desert Committee

November 14-15
(Saturday-Sunday)
Tamarisk Removal Work Party, S. Anza-Borrego Desert. We’ll clean out new growth tamarisk (hogs water) and some trees in Carrizo Wash. With left-over energy, we’ll dayhike to Cimarron Springs and petroglyphs in the wash. Carcamp under the stars. Optional car camp Friday night, 4WD recommended, rain cancels. Send SASE, $10 (Sierra Club) refundable deposit at roadhead, h/w phones, ride share info to Leaders: LARRY and PAT KLAASSEN, 4821 Louise Dr., San Diego, CA 92115, 619-582-7407, klaasen_ljuno.com (San Diego Chapter).
CNRCC Desert Committee

November 27-29
(Friday-Sunday)
Little Hikers/CNRCC Desert Committee Death Valley Family Car Camp. Set up camp at Stovepipe Wells and explore DV’s Mosaic Canyon, Sand Dunes, Salt Creek, Furnace Creek area, Titus Canyon and more, if time permits. Saturday: eve potluck with campfires Friday and Saturday nights. Estimated campground fees $10 per night. 2WD OK. Send 2-4"x9" SASEs with h/w phones, numbers of family members on trip to Co-leader: VERONICA GRAY, 1826 Montana Ave. #D, Santa Monica, CA 90403, 310-829-1361h, 213-637-7252w (Angeles Chapter).
Little Hikers/CNRCC

January 16-18, 1999
(Saturday-Monday)
Jacumba Mtns/Borderlands Wilderness Car Camp. Join us with naturalist NICK ERVIN. Dry basecamp in open desert near Jacumba Mtns Wilderness by international border. All hikes mod. level x-country (no trails). First dayhike to unusual Crucifixion Thorn forest in remote Skull Valley with views deep into Mexico. Second dayhike to either Myer Valley or Lost Valley/Jacumba Jim Canyon in nearby Carrizo Gorge wilderness. Send SASE, h/w phones, carpool info to Reservations: NICK ERVIN, 4781 Mount St. Helens Dr., San Diego, CA 92117, 619-565-9582. Co-leaders: LARRY and PAT KLAASSEN (San Diego Chapter).
CNRCC Desert Committee

Jan 16-18, 1999
(Saturday-Monday)
Panamint Valley BLM Adopt-a-Cabin Program & Car Camp. Join BLM Wilderness Staff Chief, Steve Smith, and historian Stan Hayne in an introduction to efforts to preserve old miners’ cabins. Basecamp at Minnietta Cabin in Thomson Canyon, Argus Range, near historic Nadeau Trail. Activities may include hikes to Lookout City ruins, springs further up Thompson Canyon, trip to Kopper King Cabin, and some cleanup work. Mod. hiking with some x-country. Area offers geological, historic, and environmental interests. 2WD vehicles OK; 1 mi requires high clearance. Send large SASE, h/w phones, ride share info to Reservations/co-leader: DON PETERSON, 620 Beth Lane, Ridgecrest, CA 93555, 760-375-8599, donpetc@ridgecrest.ca.us (Kern-Kaweah Chapter).
CNRCC Desert Committee

Jan 24-31, 1999
(Friday-Sunday)
S. Nevada Wilderness Study Area Sampler & Car Camp. Basecamp in Lake Mead Nat’l Rec Area. With accent on natural history, join us in exploring Bowl of Fire (spectacular carved red sandstone forms) in Muddy Mtns WSA and Lake Mead NRA. Sunday: we’ll hike the canyon and ridgelines of either Eldorado or

1998-99 Trips
September - February
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S. McCullough Mts., depending on conditions. See wide variety of typical E. Mojave plants, due to elev. changes. Mod. x-country, 2WD cars OK. Potluck, campfire and camaraderie. Send SASE, h/w phones, rideshare info to Leaders: HOWARD and URSULA BOOTH, 1518 Sandra Dr., Boulder City, NV 89005, 702-293-7774 (Toiyabe Chapter, S. Nevada Group).

CNRCC Desert Committee.

Feb 13-15, 1999
(Saturday-Monday)
Carrizo Plain Study Trip & Car Camp in SE San Luis Obispo County. Join us and naturalist to explore, photograph, and map proposed Caliente Mtn Wilderness Area. Explore Soda Dry Lake (good birding) and San Andreas Fault Zone. Trip will include: area’s visitor center; Painted Rock (pictographs); and, if conditions allow, an easy-paced hike to Caliente Mtn (5106 ft); and more. This BLM management area has some cattle grazing and is home to pronghorn antelope, kit fox, kangaroo rat and raptors. 2WD cars OK. Dry car camp with potluck, campfire, sing-a-long. Send large SASE or e-mail with rideshare info, h/w phones to Leader: JOE FONTAINE, Box 307, Tehachapi, CA 93561, 805-821-2055, joe.fontaine@sierraclub.org (Kern-Kaweah Chapter).

CNRCC Desert Committee

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
November 26-29, 1998
Thanksgiving Day & weekend
Car camp in SE Imperial County, California
with Quechan tribal members & desert activists

The Quechan Cultural Committee is inviting desert lovers, activists, and environmental justice advocates to join them for the third annual Thanksgiving pot-luck dinner on public lands in southeastern Imperial County, CA. These public lands are within the Quechan Indian Tribe’s Area of Traditional Cultural Concern and are being threatened by a proposed open-pit cyanide heap-leach, low-grade ore gold mine. Join them for the day or the long weekend.

Discover what this remote part of California has to offer. This is an opportunity to learn about Quechan culture, environmental justice issues, mining law issues, desert washes, wildlife habitat, and archaeology — and to explore nearby wilderness areas. Send SASE, phones, and donation of $5 or more (check payable to “Sierra Club”) for reservations and information to: Thanksgiving, Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter, 3820 Ray Street, San Diego, CA 92104.

Outings and leaders needed
Is it guilt? Is it envy? Is it a desire to learn more?
Be a trip leader!

Outings help us get acquainted beyond our own Chapters, Groups, and Sections. They draw in new people who share our interest in protecting the desert. They can focus on conservation, political knowledge, or appreciation. Outings require leaders willing to make a few long-range commitments. Currently we are soliciting leaders and trips for the March 1-July 4, 1999 activities period.

The deadline for trip write-ups is October 9, 1998. We need leaders who are ready to show off their special part of the desert. Please contact Jim Kilberg, 8418 Naylor Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90045 (310-215-0092, 215-0093/fax; jimbo@sierraclub.org).

Trip announcements should be as concise as possible and submitted in the format as published in this newsletter. We also need trip reports (what people did on desert trips, including snafus) and photos for public-
Desert travelers tell (almost) all . . .

Eden in Cottonwood Canyon, Death Valley, WITHOUT burros

By Mike Prather

The Desert Committee took 18 car campers into Cottonwood and Marble Canyons in Death Valley National Park on May 2 and 3. The primary purpose of this trip was to revisit the riparian portions of the canyon 10+ years after hundreds of burros had been removed by the National Park Forest.

Years ago when I was in the area, the devastation was tremendous. The riparian areas were often bare ground and cottonwood trees up to broom stick size were chewed in half or debarked by the exotic (non-native) burro.

Although they are cute and fuzzy, burros didn’t belong in our desert. They came with the miners and should have left with them, too. Wildlife species such as song birds as well as mammal populations were devastated by the loss of their key habitat areas. Now we would see if the stream side had recovered.

Cool!

Luck brought us unseasonably cool weather that probably never reached 90 degrees. Starting at Stovepipe Wells, we drove west 9 miles to the entrance of Cottonwood Canyon.

The canyon mouth is a narrow slot opening that pours out granite and volcanic sand and gravel, forming the awesome Cottonwood Canyon alluvial fan. Excellent examples of desert varnish and pavement surrounded us on the drive.

Marble Canyon in bloom

Even in May the wildflower bloom was still impressive. Annuals were beginning to crisp, but shrubs and cacti were at their peak.

Our first exploration was up into Marble Canyon, a dry canyon in the lower reaches. We hiked up-canyon past the wilderness boundary, spotting many desert five-spots, globe mallow, and indigo bush.

The walls around us closed in and we soon came to the large granite boulder “plug” that blocks the canyon except for those on foot. A few in our party went further and found more spectacular narrows while the rest of us slowly hiked back to the cars and began to drive an additional five or 6 miles up into Cottonwood Canyon.

El Nino strikes again

Soon we came to El Nino water flowing right down the wash. It was only an inch deep, so when the road disappeared we simply plowed on ahead. All of the vehicles were four-wheel-drive except two. Those two soon allowed the group to “bond” by having us join together to pull them out of the soft and saturated sand.

The paradox of Death Valley: being stuck in water in the driest desert in North America. We decided it was time for camp (the road was literally obliterated just past the vehicle wallow). Our camp was dry and the appetizers excellent. Smoked salmon on crackers with cream cheese. We rewarded ourselves after the arduous day.

Cottonwood canyon lives up to its name

On Sunday we hiked up the remaining three miles to the first large riparian area and saw a wondrous recovery in the plant life there. A rushing stream and pure stands of willow and cottonwood wove through the canyon, surrounded by flowering shrubs of all kinds.

Lazuli buntings sang from perches, Costa’s hummingbirds “zinged” around as white-throated swifts strafed the group at lunch. The area showed no sign of burros. Habitat recovery was indicated by diverse bird and plant species.

Hiking further up-canyon we counted 26 species of birds, a rattlesnake, and even the large orchid Epipactis gigantea (another paradox?). Wild grapevines hung from the older trees. Many young cottonwoods about 10-12 years old lined the streamside.

The trip was a success exceeding my hopes. Removing the burros had allowed the landscape to heal.

What you can do

Letters to the National Park Service in Death Valley are needed, urging quick removal of remaining burros — including removing them from the new lands added to the park — from, for example, Panamint and Saline Valleys.
Silver Peak Range
Desert study & backpack
By VICKY HOOVER
We had 13 backpackers in the Silver Peak Range, May 22-25. The hardest part was finding our way to the roadhead at the mouth of Icehouse Canyon.
Streams and springs
We backpacked in 4-5 miles on easy, pleasant terrain, gravelly canyon bottom, with some running water at times and a few small waterfalls. (more water than usual!). The canyon is deeply incised, colorful, volcanic, with contorted rocks, starting in gaunt desert, soon changing to increasingly lush pinyon woods, with occasional thickets in the canyon of wild rose, willow, and other riparian plants.
We camped at 6800 ft on a bench above a spring, within view of the snowy dotted caldera semi-surrounding the upper end of the canyon and marking the high point of the range.
Piper Peak views
On Sunday, we had a long day hike to Piper Peak — which is 9450 ft at the summit. The peak is set a few hundred yards back of the high caldera rim, so you can’t see it from below: it was a good destination with stupendous, truly incredible views of the White Mountains just to the west. Over the southern flank of the Whites we could also see a good portion of the southern Sierra. To the north we were seeing up past Mt. Grant by Hawthorne; to the northeast we looked over the snow-topped Toiyabe and Toquima Ranges, and maybe a little of the distant Monitor Range.
Wild horses and birds
We saw three wild horses up near the summit and a great variety of singing birds. I woke both mornings to the pleasant sound of a poorvill; there were also chickadees in the woods. Mosquitos were out in force, too.
"Zero" wilderness?
Although the BLM’s “zero” recommendation for any wilderness in this WSA is based on mineral potential, we saw no direct evidence of any mining activity. However, An old survey tower on the secondary summit of the peak was rather intrusive.

Sheldon Refuge service trip
By ROSE STRICKLAND
Despite dire weather forecasts, nine Nevadans and one Californian lucked out on the first warm, sunny weekend of mid-June, 1998. One day of sunny weather dried out the roads on our way to our rendezvous in far northern Nevada’s Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge.
At the Old Refuge Headquarters, our volunteers enjoyed the sun and managed to remove over two miles of obsolete fencing. Discovering the bones of a big horn sheep which apparently died in the fence made us realize the importance of our work. Surprisingly, we were able to remove fence posts by hand from the thoroughly wet ground.
On Sunday’s tour of the Refuge, we explored picturesque homesteads, investigated bluebird boxes, enjoyed huge expanses of wildflowers in the low sage rimrock country, and saw dozens of bands of pronghorn antelope and deer, as well as shallow lakes filled with terns, pelicans, nighthawks, yellow-headed blackbirds, swallows, and ducks.
Come along!
If you’d like to take a trip to the Sheldon this fall for more fence-pulling, please call Rose Strickland (702-329-6118).

Central Nevada rangelands exploratory
By ROSE STRICKLAND
As El Nino cranked cool, wet, and stormy weather into Nevada and E. California well into the “summer,” outings participants often dropped out of trips at the last minute. Seven hardy souls from Nevada and California braved the long winter and slippery roads and had a fantastic time on the central Nevada trip July 3-5, 1998.
We met with Nevada ranchers and BLM and USFS range officials to learn about grazing management problems and opportunities on our public lands. Prevented from reaching an “official” campground by high water, the group happily camped downstream in a grove of giant cottonwoods, taking day trips to fantastic country, like the Lunar Crater on BLM lands and a cross-range road tour of the Toquima Mountains in high forest country.
We camped with 26 species of birds, from spotted towhees and yellow warblers to orioles, grosbeaks, lazuli buntings and owls. Missing most of the storms visible around us, we greatly enjoyed being neighbors of a pair of kestrels who fed their chicks in a tree cavity directly over our heads.
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1999 Great Basin Group
Sierra Club Calendar

This calendar is a tribute to the Great Basin and to the Sierra Club amateur photographers who have captured it on film. Twelve of the best photographs were selected by the general membership and our production consultant, and they provide a truly beautiful calendar for your enjoyment in 1999. Full-color, 9x12 pages! You will find this calendar competitive in price and quality with those sold in stores and with those produced by the national office of the Sierra Club. The difference is that all the profits stay with the Great Basin Group!

By purchasing the Great Basin calendar, you help the Great Basin Group in its activities geared toward preserving and promoting the diversity and beauty of the Great Basin. You also honor the efforts of amateur photographers in Nevada.

A Great Holiday Gift!

Order your Great Basin calendars now. Quantity is limited. Your early order will ensure that you get these beautiful calendars. Tax, postage, and handling are included. Delivery will be approximately October 15.

Send order to:
Sierra Club, Great Basin Group
1999 Calendar
P. O. Box 8096
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The cover photo will be a full-color rendition of the Fly Ranch Geyser in the Black Rock Desert.

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