

outdoors
SPECIAL ISSUE

High Country News

For people who care about the West

PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE
in the modern-day West





PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE in the

Editor's note

Longing for pilgrimage

*Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage,
And palmers to go seeking out strange strands,
To distant shrines well known in sundry lands.*

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*

Today, when billions struggle for survival, hiking the entire Pacific Crest Trail or climbing all of Colorado's Fourteeners might seem like trivial pursuits. Unlike the long-distance treks of the past — Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery, Brigham Young's Mormon Trail — our modern-day ventures aren't about nation-building or the search for homeland; they are usually very personal journeys, undertaken to enliven our days and bolster our egos.



And so we pedal, paddle, walk, run, climb and motor our way through a bucket list of landscapes in hopes of achieving some tangible victory. Raft the length of the Grand Canyon? *Check*. Climb Mount Whitney? *Check*. Pedal the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route? *Check*.

This consumerist approach to recreation brings clear economic benefits. That's why, as Krista Langlois reports in this special "Outdoor Recreation" issue, many small Alaskan communities are keen to develop destination trails. As oil and mining falters, rural Westerners are cultivating tourism. Whether we're miners, loggers or recreationists, it seems, we all want to eat the scenery.

But I like to think that, no matter how selfish our motives, something happens once we're outdoors that touches our

deeper human natures. As we encounter the wild, and recognize our own small place in it, we can't help but be humbled and changed. In this issue, Caroline Benner, a Pacific Crest Trail enthusiast, awakens to the immigrant shadow-hikers who also navigate the first stretch north from the Mexican border. And Loretta McElhiney, who has spent her life building trails to Colorado's Fourteeners, realizes that, in the long run, her trails will fade away like a passing thunderstorm.

I recently took a long trek of my own, driving through seven Western states and northern Mexico. I set out with no particularly noble purpose — I just wanted to unplug from work, process the end of a long relationship and see some magnificent country.

One bright Friday morning in April, driving through Española, New Mexico, I passed hundreds of people walking along the highway. They were not athletes; they came in every age, shape and size. A few held umbrellas to ward off the sun; others talked animatedly on cellphones. Then I saw a man carrying a cross, and it clicked: These were Catholic pilgrims headed to El Santuario de Chimayo, a renowned adobe church where, for more than 200 years, people have sought inspiration and healing.

I felt an unexpected kinship with these walkers — I, too, was on the road for inspiration and healing, and suddenly it seemed possible that the hundreds of thousands of people traveling through the West that weekend sought something equally simple and beautiful. In Socorro, amid a fleet of RVs at the gas station, I got out my map and dreamed of the mysterious path ahead.

—Paul Larmer, executive director/publisher



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Exploring Waterpocket Fold
along the Burr Trail en route to
Boulder, Utah, from Lake Powell.

JT THOMAS

modern-day West

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On the cover

A hiker at sunset
near Kool-Aid Lake,
North Cascades,
Washington.

STEPHEN MATERA/
TANDEMSTOCK.COM

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STRANDED BIGHORNS

It's not surprising that, in the past, bighorn sheep found the rugged terrain of the Santa Catalina Mountains near Tucson ideal habitat ("The Cost of a Comeback," *HCN*, 5/29/17). Whether it is still ideal is the question.

While factors leading to the bighorn's extirpation in the 1990s have been cataloged, I'm not aware of research that estimates the importance of each. Surely, the encroachment of the Tucson metropolitan area was an important factor. In 2015, Tucson's population was more than 650,000, while surrounding Pima County had 1.2 million residents. That nearly doubles the 1990 population.

The bighorn release area in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness is hemmed in right up to the Coronado National Forest and wilderness boundary by dense urban development. The bighorn are stranded on a "mountain island." How will that herd maintain genetic diversity without manipulation by humans?

The nearest bighorn herd is in the Silverbell Mountains to the west. To reach it, a young bighorn looking for a mate would have to negotiate the newly completed wildlife-crossing structures on Oracle Road/AZ 77 and then would need to cross Interstate 10 with no such accommodation. Mountain lions are not the only, or even the most important, threat to a viable bighorn herd in the Catalinas.

Peggy Wenrick
Tucson, Arizona

SAVING UNIQUENESS

As the principal author of the successful petition to list the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep as threatened in 1999, I read your article "The Cost of a Comeback" with great interest (*HCN*, 5/29/17). The listing gave state and federal authorities the tools they needed to address the two major threats to the sheep's survival — domestic sheep grazing and predation by mountain lions — and today this icon of the Sierra no longer teeters on the brink of extinction. Even so, as your article makes clear, a single event, like this past winter's weather or the loss of 12 animals to mountain lion predation, can wipe out the gains that have been made over the past 18 years. Yes, loss of lions has been part of the cost, but mountain lions range throughout the Western Hemisphere, while Sierra Nevada bighorn are found only in the Sierra Nevada. We will all be the losers if we fail to ensure their recovery.

Johanna Wald
San Francisco, California



JOEL PETT EDITORIAL CARTOON USED WITH THE PERMISSION OF JOEL PETT AND THE CARTOONIST GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

SHEEP STRUGGLES

The bighorn reintroduction project in Arizona's Catalina Mountains did not appease everyone; far from it ("The Cost of a Comeback," *HCN*, 5/29/17). The Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club did not approve of the project and a local Tucson group, Friends of Wild Animals, vehemently opposed both killing mountain lions and net-gunning bighorn from helicopters, collaring the animals and dumping them out in unfamiliar habitat.

The impetus for the Catalina Bighorn Project was Brian Dolan's group of hunters, the Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, which has members on the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and thereby dominates the commission's decisions, particularly about slaughtering mountain lions. The habitat of the Catalina Mountains is not as great as this article reports. In fact, the vast majority of the habitat is rated poor to fair on a habitat-quality map. The present bighorn population estimate of 85 head is actually five fewer than the 90 sheep relocated from established home ranges in western Arizona. There is a net loss in the number of desert bighorn sheep in Arizona as a result of the relocation project.

It is highly unlikely that there will be a herd established in the Catalinas, because the human disturbance is too great for long-term survival of bighorns in the poor-to-fair habitat.

Ricardo Small
Albany, Oregon

SEEKING SCIENTIFIC TRUTH

Regarding the article "On leaving the government" (*HCN*, 5/29/17), I would caution *HCN* to avoid reporting petty arguments between scientists, and to research their backgrounds more carefully before framing some scientists as more mainstream than others. There are many types of scientists working on climate change, and calling them all "climate scientists" is misleading and even inaccurate. Some scientists, such as Jane Zelikova, choose to work on policy in the U.S. government or nonprofits, such as the Berkeley nonprofit Center for Carbon Removal, which is more of a political action group rather than a scientific research organization. That is valuable work and needs to be pushed forward. But policymakers are often not scientists; they have social science training.

The reporting of public attacks between scientists blocks progress and confuses the general public and our politicians in Washington, D.C. My scientific opinion: None of the current climate models can say for certain whether wildfires are directly caused by long-term climate change or by local weather variations that have been happening since long before humans populated Washington state, or by both. When scientists with knowledgeable opinions based on years of weather modeling, such as Cliff Mass, clash with other scientists, such as oceanographers with strong scientific viewpoints about the cause of fires, such as Sarah Myhre, this is part of the normal scientific process, which eventually vets out what the truth is.

Patricia A. Cullen
Longmont, Colorado

High
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News



High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the issues that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the region's diverse natural and human communities.

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recycled paper.



A greater sage grouse hen roams near a well in the Pinedale Anticline natural gas field on BLM land in Wyoming. A plan aimed at protecting the imperiled bird will be reviewed. DAVID SHOWALTER

Interior orders sage grouse review

In early June, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke ordered a review of sage grouse conservation plans, which impact 10 Western states and 70 million acres of public land. The review of the 2015 plans will examine whether or not they give states enough input or if they hinder extractive industry activity on those lands. The original plans were five years in the making and included a long list of stakeholders, seen by many as an impressive compromise between federal and state governments. Republican Gov. Matt Mead of Wyoming and Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat, both of whom worked on a taskforce behind the 2015 plans, stated that wholesale changes were "likely not necessary." Zinke's order looks at population targets and captive breeding, which some conservationists fear might be used in lieu of holistic approaches like habitat management. Federal officials have until early August to conduct a review with recommendations.

TAY WILES MORE: hcne.ws/grouse-review

Trending

Gutting rural development

In May, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue eliminated the undersecretary position for Rural Development, the only office solely dedicated to improving the economies of rural communities. The position oversaw a \$216 billion portfolio for housing, utilities, and business development projects and had offices in 47 states. Perdue posited the removal as a way to elevate the office to report directly to him, but rural advocates say it's a downgrade. The removal of the position came as Trump's 2018 budget proposal includes a 26 percent cut to rural development programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and a 21 percent cut to the agency overall.

TAY WILES

You say

WALTER KLOEFKORN: "And why shouldn't they? We haven't had actual rural economies for decades. ... I've been living in rural America for 25 years, working towards solutions. The specifics of rural development cannot be driven from outside."

STEVE LANGDON: "Rural communities never wanted this. Only politicians did."

SHERI L. HUGHES: "This program was a good thing originally. It brought electricity, phone service and postal delivery to rural areas where there was no profit to the large utility companies and a huge outlay to build the infrastructure to these areas."

MORE: hcne.ws/rural-undevelopment and [Facebook.com/highcountrynews](https://www.facebook.com/highcountrynews)

6 million

Number of acres of BLM land in southern and eastern Utah whose travel routes will be re-assessed as a result of a lawsuit brought by 10 environmental groups.

10,000

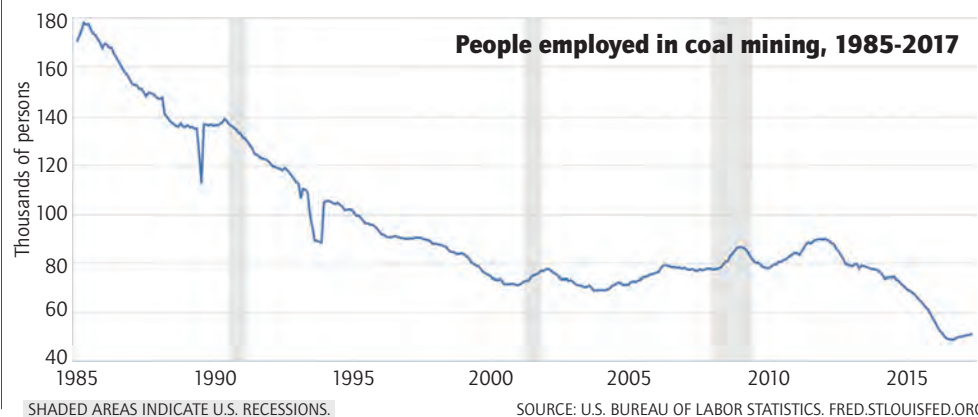
Miles of routes on those acres.

A major lawsuit that pitted the Bureau of Land Management and off-highway vehicle interests against environmental groups in Utah reached its conclusion at the end of May. A settlement requires the BLM to review 13 travel management and five land use plans by 2025, for being too lenient to motorized recreation. Environmental groups brought the suit against the BLM, highlighting areas that should be off-limits to vehicles to minimize damage to wildlife, water quality and wilderness. Opposition to the settlement argued the reviews would result in road closures that infringe on recreation and livelihoods. TAY WILES
MORE: hcne.ws/road-quarrels

Explaining the Trump administration's false coal stats

After President Donald Trump withdrew from the Paris climate agreement in June, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt falsely claimed that job growth has skyrocketed in the coal sector. Since December 2016, Pruitt said, the country had added 50,000 coal jobs. But those numbers aren't accurate: Only about 1,300 jobs have been added. Pruitt has also pushed the idea that the Trump administration's rollback of Obama-era environmental regulations was behind that growth. Even though the new

administration says regulations kill jobs and slow the sale of coal, other factors point to coal's declining importance in America's energy mix. The downhill trend of the coal sector is not only from regulation, but also from automation and market forces. That's likely to continue: The now-booming Permian Basin is expected to be a huge gas producer, and it will further glut the market, lower prices and push utilities further from coal and closer to natural gas. JONATHAN THOMPSON
MORE: hcne.ws/alternative-coal



12

Number of elk an Oregon rancher was arrested for shooting following his many attempts to keep them from eating his hay. MORE FROM WEST OBSESSED: hcne.ws/animal-crimes



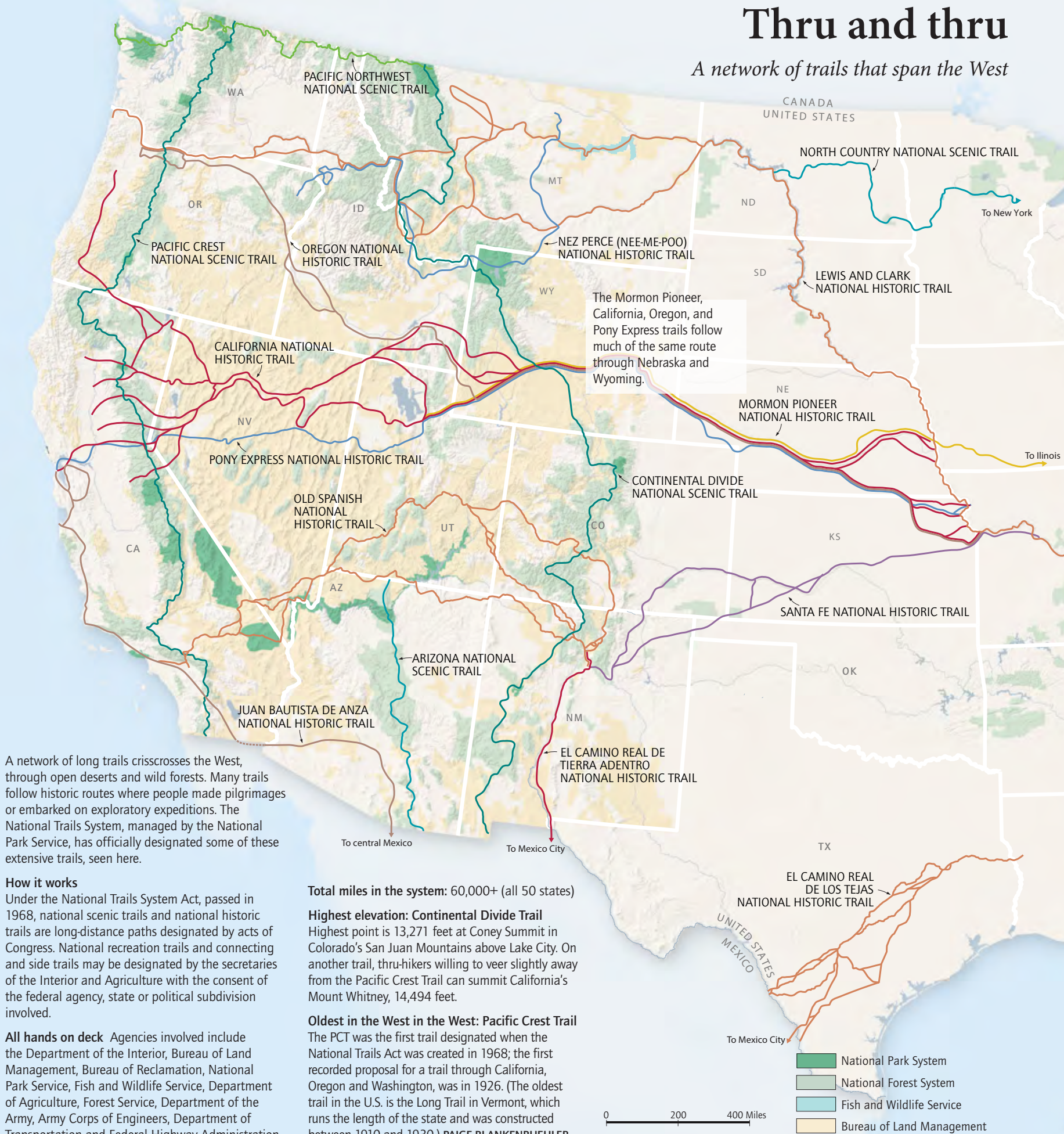
JAMES MOREL/BROWN GIRL SURF

"Every picture of surf culture and beach culture is very different from the way we look. If you picture a surfer, it's a white dude with beach-blond hair. ... If you picture a surfer girl, it's a blond girl in a bikini, hyper-sexualized."

—Mira Manickam, founder of San Francisco-based Brown Girl Surf, talking about the persistent barriers to minorities enjoying what is arguably California's most valuable public asset. JILL REPLOGLE
MORE: hcne.ws/closed-coast

Thru and thru

A network of trails that span the West



A network of long trails crisscrosses the West, through open deserts and wild forests. Many trails follow historic routes where people made pilgrimages or embarked on exploratory expeditions. The National Trails System, managed by the National Park Service, has officially designated some of these extensive trails, seen here.

How it works

Under the National Trails System Act, passed in 1968, national scenic trails and national historic trails are long-distance paths designated by acts of Congress. National recreation trails and connecting and side trails may be designated by the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture with the consent of the federal agency, state or political subdivision involved.

All hands on deck Agencies involved include the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Department of the Army, Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration.

Total miles in the system: 60,000+ (all 50 states)

Highest elevation: Continental Divide Trail

Highest point is 13,271 feet at Coney Summit in Colorado's San Juan Mountains above Lake City. On another trail, thru-hikers willing to veer slightly away from the Pacific Crest Trail can summit California's Mount Whitney, 14,494 feet.

Oldest in the West in the West: Pacific Crest Trail

The PCT was the first trail designated when the National Trails Act was created in 1968; the first recorded proposal for a trail through California, Oregon and Washington, was in 1926. (The oldest trail in the U.S. is the Long Trail in Vermont, which runs the length of the state and was constructed between 1910 and 1930.) **PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER**

* IN MANY PLACES, EXACT TRAIL LOCATIONS HAVE NOT YET BEEN DETERMINED. PORTIONS OF THE TRAILS INDICATED ON THIS MAP MAY NOT BE ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC. THIS MAP REFLECTS THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM, WHICH IS NOT THE ONLY TRAIL SYSTEM IN THE U.S. SOURCE: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NATIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM, 2010.

The engineer of mountain walkers

Master trail designer Loretta McEllhiney creates sustainable paths on Colorado's highest peaks

BY SARAH GILMAN

What do you see when you look at a trail? Dirt and rocks? A line sketched across the landscape by 100,000 footsteps? The adventure of some not-yet-visible lake or summit or cirque?

Master Forest Service trail designer Loretta McEllhiney sees those things, too. But she also believes that a good trail is about controlling two unstoppable forces: People flowing up a mountain, and water flowing down.

And on a wintry May morning, I provide a perfect object lesson about one tool McEllhiney uses to steer these two juggernauts: I fall hard on a hillside and get snow down my pants.

"Sideslope," McEllhiney says helpfully, after checking to make sure I'm OK. That's why she's picked this route for a new trail on the southern toe of Colorado's Mount Elbert, where we're bushwhacking over fallen aspens slick with fresh snow: The land here is steep enough that the path contouring across it will be the only place you can walk without tumbling ass-over-teakettle, and water will drain easily off its downhill edge, instead of scouring a

trench down its center. "Sideslope," McEllhiney concludes as I brush off my butt, "really helps confine people onto a bench."

The official South Mount Elbert Trail that this route will replace, meanwhile, is a textbook example of what happens when walkers and water run amok. Colorado has 54 peaks over 14,000 feet high — its famous "Fourteeners" — and Mount Elbert is the tallest, rising to 14,433 feet from the bulky Sawatch Range just southwest of Leadville. People once drove to its summit in jeeps, and climbers eager to tag the state's highest point followed the same straight-up route. Today, above treeline, the trail is a series of nasty-looking parallel trenches and denuded patches of tundra that McEllhiney calls a "catclaw" — 21 feet wide here, 13 there, knee-deep in places.

Over the next three years, professional trail crews and volunteers will close and revegetate 2 miles of this mess, and build more than 3 miles of new tread that McEllhiney and her seasonal assistant, Dana Young, have designed. They'll use landscape elements like sideslope and

structures like rock retaining walls to keep people on the right path and protect fragile alpine plants and thin topsoil. It's one of 42 new "sustainable" routes on the Fourteeners that McEllhiney has conceived as the Forest Service's Fourteener program manager.

Slim and muscular at 54, today she wears a green shell and a daypack strapped with a pair of snowshoes. A blonde braid pokes from under her beanie, and her face is like a map of past mirths, its lines pointing straight into the Colorado high country.

It would be hard to find anyone else who has spent so much time there. She has shepherded Fourteeners trailwork for more than two decades, through so many thousands of feet of elevation gain that she refuses to consider how many Everests they add up to. Through a pair of boots every season. Through two divorces.

"I'm not very good at marriages. I don't know why I do it," McEllhiney, now happily in the midst of her third, jokes when we drop our packs under the sheltering branches of a limber pine. "It's like, do you

TRAILWORKER SLANG

By Joseph Sax

hitch A block of work usually lasting eight or nine days. During a hitch, crews will camp, eat and work together.

on hitch To be on the job. "I won't be able to hang on Saturday. I'll be on hitch."

crew A group of people who live, work and hang together while on hitch. A crew usually consists of four to six members and one or two leaders.

rig A motor vehicle.

rig-up To load a rig with all gear, food, tools, people, etc., necessary for a hitch.

burrito A pile of tools or gear wrapped in a tarp.

stretch and safety A morning routine of exercise, stretching and safety discussion. Usually lasts 30 minutes. Abbreviated "S & S."

PPE Acronym for Personal Protective Equipment.

dime A trailworker's personal space, or a 10-foot radius around a person using a tool, also called a "blood bubble."

backslope The upslope side of a trail profile where a trail blends into the slope of the land it is built upon.

tread The walking surface of a trail.

hinge The point at which a trail's backslope meets its tread.

outslope A trail is outsloped when its tread has a slight downhill angle, encouraging water to flow off the trail.

bench A complete trail profile consisting of backslope, hinge, tread and outslope.

critical edge The downhill edge of a trail's tread.



Loretta McEllhiney explains the key role pocket gophers play in soil distribution and seeding success for alpine plants before a trail crew begins construction on San Luis Peak. ELI ALLAN

TRAILWORKER SLANG

corridor An area around a trail, extending 10 vertical feet above the tread and 3 feet on either side of the tread.

crush Chunks of broken rock ranging in size but usually smaller than a tennis ball. Used as compacting backfill during rock work and structure construction. (2) *verb.* To turn rocks into smaller pieces of rock using a jackhammer. "I spent all afternoon crushing." (3) *verb.* To add and compact said chunks of rock to a structure. "After you've set that rock, crush it in."

babyhead A rock roughly the size of an infant's head. Used as fill in a variety of trail structures.

batter In rock and timber work, the angle at which a structure leans into a hillside.

contact In rock work, a point of connection between two set rocks. When set rocks are touching, they are said to "have contact." The more surface area two rocks share, the better the contact. Contact is crucial to quality rock work, as it strengthens the structure against erosion and use. (2) A common word game among trailworkers.

cairn A pile of rocks used to aid off-trail overland travel.

water bar A trail drainage structure built from rock or timber, used to chute running water from a trail.

fell To cut a tree down.

blowdown Trees that have fallen or blown over into a trail corridor, obstructing passage.

duff Dead organic matter such as needles and twigs that have fallen to the forest floor.

love the mountains more than you love your husband?"

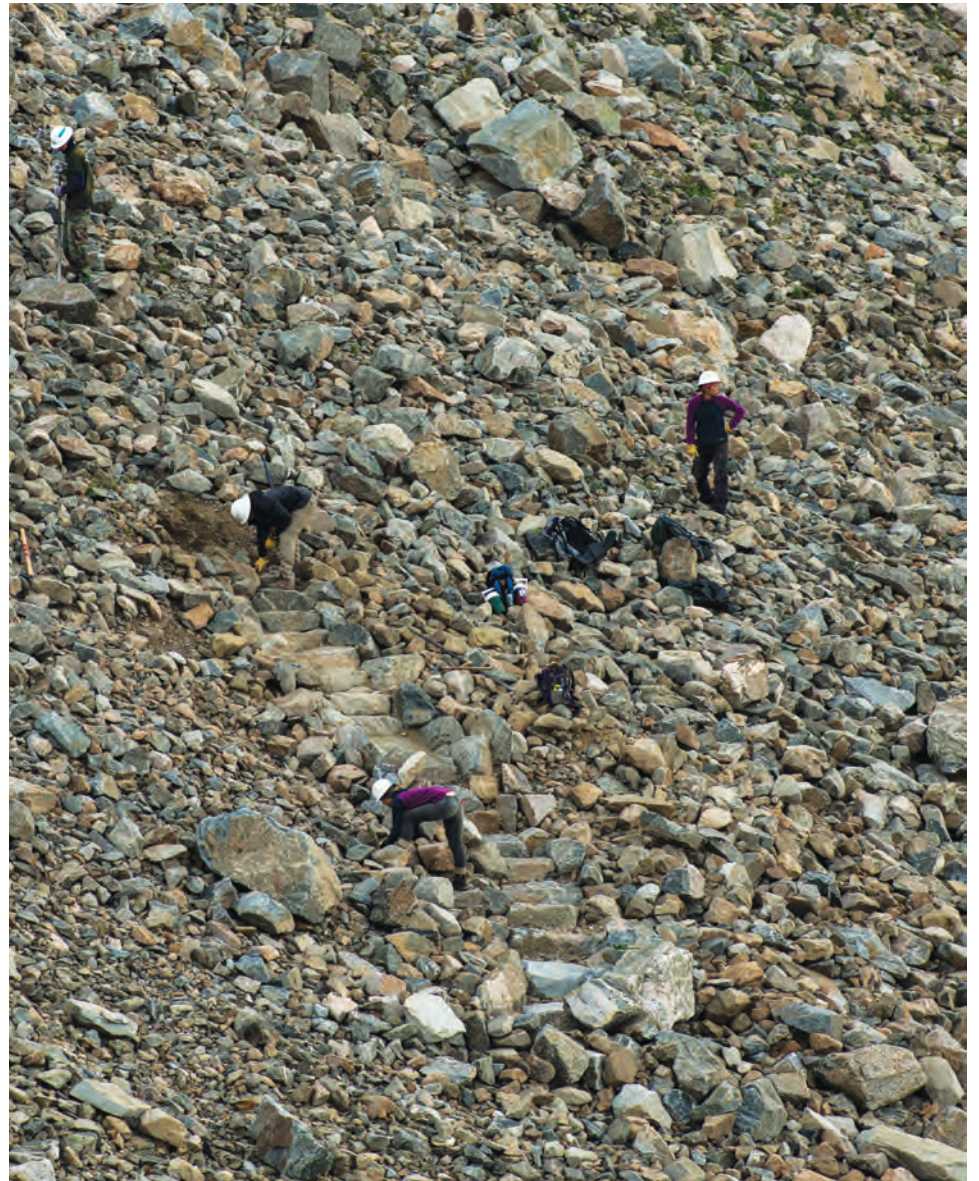
Colorado's Fourteeners have been promoted as a group for their scenery and mountaineering opportunities since at least 1914. But it wasn't until a wave of guide and coffee-table books were published in the 1970s that the moniker was cemented in the popular lexicon. Between the '80s and '90s, as the state's urban Front Range ballooned, Fourteeners became a bona fide recreational craze and peak visits roughly doubled. By 2015, they were up to 260,000 each year, with hordes of hikers crossing into an ecosystem that is at once one of Earth's toughest and most delicate.

McEllhiney was among those drawn to the mountains' magnetism. She was studying nutrition and exercise physiology at Kansas State University when she saw a documentary about Gudy Gaskill and the Colorado Trail, which now stretches 567 miles across the Rockies from Durango to Denver. The first female president of the Colorado Mountain Club, Gaskill was a sinewy hiker and trailbuilder who shepherded the development of the renowned singletrack for three decades, through funding lapses and presidential administrations, even hosting and cooking food for trail crews. "I'm going to go hike that thing," McEllhiney told herself, and in the summer of 1988, after her first husband settled in Leadville for college, she did. A year later, she put aside plans for a career in cardiac rehab and took a seasonal job with the local Forest Service, building and maintaining trail. One day, chopping through blown-down lodgepole, she turned to find Gaskill herself standing a short distance away. "Man," Gaskill said. "I love to see a woman who can swing an ax."

McEllhiney was hooked.

As she rose from trail grunt to wilderness ranger, she learned the Rockies as one comes to know her own skin. The cushion-shaped plants small as mixing bowls that might be a century old. The ground-nesting ptarmigan that phase from mottled gray to white when winter snows come. The alluring smell of alpine forget-me-nots that inspired her to plant the horticultural variety in her own lush backyard garden, even though they could never measure up.

The mountains also had a way of remembering human presence, and McEllhiney found arrowheads and flakes, a Finnish bread oven made of stones, a hollowed log full of porn magazines. Hiking trails there were no different, except that, instead of fading with time, some incised deeper with every footstep, every torrent of spring runoff and summer monsoon. It didn't take long for McEllhiney and others to notice that the Fourteeners had a problem.



Only two had designed trails — Pikes Peak and Rocky Mountain National Park's Longs Peak. All had routes created incidentally by hikers seeking the shortest path to the summit, usually straight uphill. Now, like the South Mount Elbert Trail, most were in bad shape, riddled with braids, chutes and bald spots. The damage wasn't just to vegetation; in some places, it endangered hikers. On Mount Evans, not far west of Denver, one route had become a "hideous gully" up to 15 feet deep that served as a bowling alley for rocks dislodged by careless feet. The trails needed to be rerouted in some places to switchback more gradually across slopes, and hardened in others to withstand erosion.

The Forest Service already struggled to fund recreation projects; it would never be able to tackle the 49 Fourteeners on its lands without help. So a group of statewide outdoor nonprofits joined the agency in a formal partnership in 1994, which spun off into its own nonprofit in 1996. Called the Colorado Fourteeners Initia-

tive, it and other groups would supply professional and volunteer trail crews and most of the money for the needed work. It fell to McEllhiney — first as a ranger and then in her current post, which she took in 2001 — to coordinate those crews and help pioneer the trailwork needed to accomplish the group's vision of creating a "sustainable" route for each peak.

McEllhiney doesn't much like to talk about her first forays into trail design in the mid-'90s; one, on the north side of Elbert, is still a mess. But over time, her expertise grew. She hiked the old roads and rail lines that served Leadville's 19th century mining boom, and peered at retaining walls and support structures that had weathered the decades, sometimes taking them apart and reassembling them to learn their dry masonry secrets. She got on a first-name basis with people who designed the Appalachian and Pacific Crest trails, dropped in on trail designers on Mount St. Helens, built massive rock walls with a visiting Yosemite crew.

Today, thanks to McEllhiney's designs

The Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI) construction crew builds a sustainable route of steps through a talus field on Mount Columbia, left. The ambitious project that McEllhiney designed will take another four years to complete. CFI volunteers Nick Gianoutsos and Staci Quevillon establish a robust sidewall on a trail leading up Quandary Peak, below. ELI ALLAN, CAMERON MILLER



and the labor of countless trail workers, there are 33 more tightly built routes on 32 Fourteeners, many doing what good trail should. A 1,272-foot-long rock staircase through a talus field diverts people away from sensitive Canada lynx habitat and alpine wetlands on the back side of Mount Massive. On Pyramid Peak, a 30-foot-wide, 6-foot-tall retaining wall that a crew built with a cable and pulley system channels people across a dissolving gully instead of up it.

Over the years, some people have questioned whether such extensive construction draws yet more hikers into the alpine, causing more damage. “There’s definitely concern that ‘If you build it, they will come,’” McEllhiney says. “Well, we didn’t have to build it, and they were coming. I think that putting in a trail that can be maintained is really important. And it seems to be working.”

Back on South Elbert, Dana Young blows on her hands. It’s still chilly, but the sun is out, and the falling flakes

sparkle against the few blue patches of sky. Young, now 31, remembers well the first day she hiked into the high country with McEllhiney, when she started assisting with design four years ago. “I got altitude sickness,” she says. “In my head I’m thinking, ‘This woman is much older than I am, I should be able to keep up with her!’ That was my first mistake.”

The two women tinker with a GPS and clinometer — for measuring slope — as they get ready to plot a last-minute, 130-foot route adjustment around some late-season snowfields that could force hikers off the trail, causing exactly the kind of vegetation-stomping the project is meant to prevent. McEllhiney likes to say that the mountains talk to her. Now, she’s mostly quiet as she listens, taking readings, hammering orange plastic tassels into the duff to mark the center line and yellow ones to mark needed structures. Young follows after, entering GPS locations to guide this summer’s crews.

By late June, when the higher snows withdraw, McEllhiney and Young will

venture into the alpine, hauling packs heavy with camping supplies, wooden stakes, tassels and metal staples. They’ll rise between 3 and 5 a.m., work 10 hours or more when they can. They never know when a thunderstorm will cut a day short and chase them below treeline.

McEllhiney has extra reason to be cautious. On Mount Belford, ground current from a nearby lightning strike knocked her down and blew off the soles of her boots. Even so, she stayed on the mountain for a week until her boss forced her to go to the hospital. Another time, in 2009, McEllhiney watched in horror near the summit of Mount Massive as a military helicopter lost its tail rotor to the wind and disintegrated against a ridgeline. There are funny stories, too: The map that she and a past assistant traded with some hikers for a flask of peach brandy; the time she accidentally stepped in a pile of human shit in her Chaco sandals, then had to steal them back from a strap-gnawing marmot who had spirited them into a rockpile.

The work, though, will likely continue long after McEllhiney’s own story diverges from the Fourteeners’. After all, mountains are mountains, and even the best-built trail is sometimes no match for hard use, erosive soils, and the inexorable pull of gravity. In 1999, the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative envisioned completing the highest-priority trail fixes within six years, spending a season or less on each of 35 mountains. Eighteen years later, most peaks have taken two seasons or more, and several have yet to be tackled. While many rebuilt trails have endured, others are already falling apart. Fixing those and constructing 16 new sustainable routes will cost at least \$24 million, mostly supplied by partners. With so much left to do, says Lloyd Athearn, the group’s executive director, “We all fear the day when Loretta might retire.”

Fortunately, there’s little sign that will happen soon. On our way back to the truck, McEllhiney leads us along the old South Mount Elbert Trail. We struggle to match her pace on its steep grade as she tells us how, when the new trail is complete, crews will come to this one and remove the sign that marks it. They will shift soil into its furrowed tread, lace it with native seed, transplant young trees every 10 feet, cover it with protective mats.

We pause to catch our breath at a graffiti-carved aspen. “I’ve been working on this trail since I began trail crew,” McEllhiney observes after a moment. Someday, with luck, all trace of it will be gone, and this scarred tree will be marooned in a forest that has closed around it. “Smoked on Elbert,” it will proclaim to an indifferent thatch of spring grass and flowers, shivered with leaf shadow. McEllhiney turns and smiles at me, then strides up the trail. □

TRAILWORKER SLANG

trail call A call used when passing other trailworkers on the trail. “Trail!” (2) A call used to announce the presence of a trail user. “Hiker!” “Biker!”

percy Short for personal. “Let’s store group food separate from percy snacks.”

latrine A communal trench into which a crew poops over the course of a hitch. Usually about 8 inches wide, 12 inches deep and up to 6 feet long.

sprinkle the donut To sprinkle a thin layer of soil onto a freshly produced pile of feces in a latrine. This minimizes the odor of the latrine and spares the next user from having to look at someone else’s poop. “There’s no need to fill in the entire latrine after one poop. Just sprinkle the donut.”

cathole A small hole dug for a single bowel movement; usually about 8 inches deep.

danger day The last day of work and a common day for injuries due to complacency and inattention. Also known as “asshole day.”

smell the barn To begin to think about offhitch while still on hitch.

de-rig To unload, clean, and reorganize all vehicles, gear, tools, etc., taken on a hitch.

offhitch A block of time, usually four to six days, when a crew is off work; off days. “Do you have any plans for your offhitch?”

tool up To gather and count all tools used throughout the work day. Usually performed at the end of the day before halting work and returning to camp.

traildog A skilled, experienced trailworker. □

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WHITHER THE WATERS: MAPPING THE GREAT BASIN FROM BERNARDO DE MIERA TO JOHN C. FRÉMONT

By John L. Kessell

120 pages, paperback: \$29.95. University of New Mexico Press, 2017.

In the late 18th century, Spanish cartographer Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco created a series of maps. The most notable was his “Plano Geographico,” based on explorations of the Colorado Plateau and Great Basin. While the map was highly influential, it also included some errors that other cartographers went on to perpetuate over the next seven decades. Most glaringly, de Miera showed a major river flowing west out of the Great Salt Lake. No such river exists.

In *Whither the Waters*, which author John L. Kessell sees as an addendum to his earlier biography of de Miera, Kessell places de Miera’s map in historical context and traces its influence over time. This slim volume illuminates the evolution of our understanding of a complicated and rugged geography over time — and the human flaws of the hands that helped that understanding along.

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A skipped issue, and a new tribal affairs desk

Can you believe it? *High Country News* is already halfway through its 22 issues for the year! After this issue, we’re taking a break, so don’t expect us in your mailbox for another four weeks. We’re gearing up for our annual June editorial retreat and board meeting, where the board, writers and editors mingle and talk shop.

Marjorie “Slim” Woodruff, a regular contributor to *Writers on the Range* (page 25), and her husband, **Brad Houston**, visited on a cloudy May afternoon. The two longtime readers live in Grand Canyon Village but stopped off on their way to a friend’s retirement party in Carbondale, Colorado. Next up is a five-day run down the Yampa River. Safe travels!

Ryan and Erica Wood stopped by on a warm June day, looking for winery recommendations. Ryan, who works for Watershed Management Group, and Erica, a freelance graphic designer, were traveling from their Scottsdale, Arizona, home to Rocky Mountain National Park and looking for quiet corners to check out. We pointed them to our favorite vintners and sent them on their merry way.

Mike Burkley also stopped by; he’s moving to Paonia from near Zion National Park, Utah. He’ll be closer to his daughter, who lives in Denver, and away from some of Utah’s conservation politics.

Finally, Bozeman, Montana, readers **Marcia and Russell Miller** visited en route to their niece’s wedding in Crested Butte.

Award-winning journalist **Tristan Ahtone**, a member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, is joining us for the next two

months to help us build out our coverage of tribes in the West. Since 2008, Tristan has reported for *PBS Newshour*, *National Native News*, *Wyoming Public Radio*, *Fusion*, the *Fronteras Desk*, *NPR* and *Al Jazeera America*. Tristan serves as vice president for the Native American Journalists Association. “I’m honored to join the *High Country News* team, and look forward to helping create coverage that fairly and accurately portrays Indigenous lives and stories in the West,” Tristan says.

Some sad news on *HCN* contributor and Oregon author **Brian Doyle**, who passed away at the age of 60 in May. He served as editor of *Portland Magazine* and wrote several award-winning novels, including *Mink River*, *The Plover* and *Martin Marten*, as well as dozens of essays. *HCN* was privileged to publish some of his work, including a heart-shivering essay on shrines to the dead, “Mute, riven, blessed” (*HCN*, 4/17/06). As he wrote in that piece, “We are alone, each and all of us, even as we swim in the ocean of love and grace that is our joyous work here; and we will die alone, each of us, leaving our bodies behind at some moment brooding in the future.”

And, lastly, our May 29 feature story “Cost of a Comeback” incorrectly described the composition of the Santa Catalina Mountains, which are mostly igneous and metamorphic rock, not sedimentary. We also misstated the source of transplanted sheep; they did not come from a captive-breeding facility, but from a herd in Yuma, Arizona. We regret the errors.

—Anna V. Smith,
for the staff



Tristan Ahtone. BROOKE WARREN

SHADOW-HIKERS

Two
populations
tackle the
first 42 miles
of the Pacific
Crest Trail

FEATURE BY
CAROLINE
BENNER

A sign warns of
dangers along the
Pacific Crest Trail.
DREAMSTIME

Against the backdrop of a desert sunrise, two human silhouettes exchange double high-fives. By 8 a.m., a bouncing crowd of a couple dozen has gathered around a group of wooden columns emblazoned with the crest of the Pacific Crest Trail — the monument that marks the start of the 2,650-mile path.

These are “thru-hikers,” people who intend to hike from the fence on the California-Mexican border, all the way to Canada. They hug, take pictures and scrawl breathlessly in the logbook: “Wow!! Wow!! Wow!! Let’s do this!” “Dreams come true!” On this spring day, up to 50 would-be thru-hikers set out, focused on the hike’s first leg, 42 miles to the town of Mount Laguna, California.

On the other side of the monument, just across the border, other hikers are assembling, unseen by the recreationists. Every day, up to 50 people wait until the Border Patrol agent’s truck peels away from the border fence. Once the truck is out of sight, they’ll slip through and begin their own journey north. These are border crossers, and they are focused on simply getting to a road, where a driver will take them deeper into the U.S. Some dash 1,200 feet to where Highway 94 swings close to the border. Some hug the Pacific Crest Trail, making occasional short forays across it; others quietly join the hoopla at the monument and try to blend in with the thru-hikers. And some hike a route that echoes the trail’s first leg, heading toward a pick-up point near Mount Laguna.

Back in 2015, I hiked the first 266 miles of the PCT. As I stepped out on the trail, I felt the giddy joy of embarking on an epic journey through beautiful country. Desert birds serenaded.

The feathery fronds of chamise, a low-growing shrub native to arid stretches of California, waved from the sidelines of the trail. The soft morning light illuminated a stampede of footprints, the impressions of strangers just ahead, some of whom would become my friends.

But long after I came home, it was the shadow-hikers, or rather the evidence of their passing, that lingered in my mind. At Mile 9, just off the trail, I saw a pair of jeans, a dress shirt and a food wrapper labeled in Spanish. Near Mile 15, I passed a caution-yellow road sign with an unmistakable warning: A striking rattlesnake, a bold sun, a cactus. “¡Cuidado!” it read. “No exponga su vida a los elementos. ¡No vale la pena!”

(“Watch out! “Don’t expose your

life to the elements. It is not worth it!”). Camped one dark night at a stream at Mile 15.5, I abruptly awoke to the percussive roar of a helicopter, its searchlight briefly flooding my tent. The Border Patrol.

These memories are why I returned to the trail in April 2017.

THIS TIME I HAVE INTERPRETERS to help me understand the trail’s dual nature. Andrew LaWall and Tekae Michael, two fit young agents from the Border Patrol’s San Diego Sector, seem as happy as any thru-hikers to be walking outdoors today. They describe how shadow-hikers navigate the first five miles, south of Interstate 8, the hot zone of law enforcement.

First comes the crossing. In some spots, barbed wire runs just north of the border fence, and the shadow-hikers dive through the barbed wire headfirst “like Superman,” LaWall says. Then comes a plunge into the chamise, whose foliage is as coarse as stubby pine needles and whose snapped-off branches can stab like sharp little spears. Between the stands of chamise are tempting empty spaces, flat and wide as the Pacific Crest Trail, but if you give in and make a dash, you will be exposed to the Border Patrol agents stationed around here. If one of them spots your footprint, he’ll call in your trajectory to other agents stationed north. You are hurtling into a trap. LaWall estimates the Border Patrol catches three-quarters of the crossers in this area.

Meanwhile, the thru-hikers have other concerns. After the euphoric first miles, they have to come to grips with the extraordinary mental and physical effort required to hike 12 hours a day. I learned to put myself in a bubble of comfort: a mylar umbrella to ward off direct sun, front-pocket candy rewards, Gatorade-on-demand via a hose over my shoulder, music and podcasts. Thru-hikers admire the scenery, play games, chat with new friends, sing, daydream, meditate and count their steps.

But shadow-hikers cannot lose themselves in hiking; the terrain and the conditions are too stressful. After the high-adrenaline miles to Interstate 8, they wait for the cover of darkness to cross the freeway and then push on through the night.

I don’t anticipate seeing — let alone meeting — any shadow-hikers on the trail, but to better understand their experience I met a few months earlier with Jose Hernandez and his wife, Guadalupe Garcia, Mexicans in their 40s who say they crossed the border well west of the trail back in 1990. From a vantage point high in the Santa Cruz Mountains on California’s central coast, not far from where they now live, Hernandez waved toward a nearby ridge, a steep cross-country plunge and climb over from where we stood. That was his pick-up point, he explained. Then he pointed to a rat’s nest of poison oak branches: “Through that.” Bending over and moving his arms like a swimmer, he said, “Sometimes, we went like this.” “Or sometimes on your butt,” Garcia chimed in. At one point, near exhaustion, Hernandez ran for an hour across an open area. Garcia told me she crossed at night, with no lights.

How does it feel to try to cross the desert at night? At 4 a.m., on my own hike this April, I turned off my headlamp and broke west off the trail into a wall of chamise. The mass of interlaced branches pressed against my thighs, hard as a stuck turnstile. Twigs raked bloody stripes onto my forearm. I pushed my foot forward in the blackness and fell into the sudden unpleasant sensation you get when you miss a step. My heart raced, and I turned back. Much later, I told Hernandez how disconcerting





I found my short foray in the dark. He looked at me and said, “But no one was chasing you.”

“Many are told Border Patrol is trying to kill them,” Francisco Cantú, a Border Patrol agent in Arizona from 2008-2012, told me over the phone. “They are terrified.” Every airplane overhead, every snapped twig, might mean the end. Garcia recalled how she involuntarily sprang up when Border Patrol jeeps raced past her hiding place in the brush, fearful of being run over. Her brother yanked her back down.

Then there are the challenges of desert travel itself. On my long 2015 hike, blisters formed relentlessly in the friction between my dusty feet and sweaty socks, despite my \$18 Smartwool PhD socks, specially designed for “high output activities and warm temperatures.” Creeping dehydration outpaced my electrolyte-replacement drink, and my head pounded. I tried walking bow-legged to keep my chafed inner thighs from touching.

Rest is the antidote to the desert’s aggressiveness. Every two hours, I collapsed in the shade of the most hospitable rock. I indulged in elaborate foot care: socks and shoes off; rinse grime; duct-tape blisters; put on fresh socks; elevate feet. I put diaper cream on chafing and swallowed ibuprofen. I adjusted my clothes, packing extra layers. I binge-drank water and refilled my bottles. I ate, despite mild nausea, and napped. At night, I climbed into my sleeping bag. After a solid night’s rest, I woke ready to hike again.

Shadow-hikers try to keep moving. When they do rest, it’s hardly rejuvenating. “Two people here,” LaWall says, pointing to a depression under a splintery manzanita; “two there,” pointing to another. Foot guides, or coyotes, choose rest spots for concealment, not comfort, he says.

After you climb into your manzanita, you are free to tend your feet, but “taking off your shoes is not a good idea,” Hernandez told me, because the coyote could order you to move at any moment. In the seconds it takes to put on shoes, you might be left behind.

The extra layers of clothes you wore won’t fit in your school-size backpack, so you shed them, leaving them along the trail.

You sip water sparingly, if you still have any. Eat, if you still have food. “Most people are out of food and water when we find them,” Cantú said. Sleep, if you can, wrapped in a trash bag that holds in a little heat, and pray no helicopter spots you.

THE ONLY DEFINITIVE CURE FOR DESERT HIKING is to stop doing it. After three days of hiking in 2015, I approached the Sunrise Highway along a pleasant stretch of trail. From there, it was a short walk to Mount Laguna. I was greeted by thru-hikers toasting the first leg with morning soda and waiting for the Blue Jay Lodge to start serving mountain burgers with grilled onions. After lunch, I took a double shower and then sank onto a bed in my towel.

After eight days, shadow-hikers reach the Sunrise Highway, a few miles from the amenities of Mount Laguna. LaWall shows me a cleft in the mountains that shoot up from the desert floor. Shadow-hikers lie in there on their stomachs, he says, and wait for the signal that their ride has arrived. Ten seconds later, they may be taken to a so-called “stash house” and held for ransom. Armed men, perhaps drunk or high, will force them to sit in a dingy corner and eat McDonald’s hamburgers thrown on the floor, threatening to kill their families if the money doesn’t arrive soon.

Hernandez said his family paid the ransom, and he left. He stayed at his uncle’s while he searched for work, sleeping under the dining table. Garcia ended up in a bad part of LA, hidden under boxes in the foot space of an expensive car. Eventually they found each other and made a life together, working in the landscape industry around Santa Cruz.

But that seems a world away on this bright spring day. Today, a group of well-fed and resupplied thru-hikers are singing as they walk from Mount Laguna back to the Pacific Crest Trail. □

With the Mexican border wall as a backdrop, thru-hikers check in at the monument that marks the southern end of the Pacific Crest Trail.

SANDY HUFFAKER/
GETTY IMAGES



TRAIL BLAZING

Around the West, rural communities are capitalizing on the lure of human-powered recreation. Can it work in Alaska?

FEATURE BY
KRISTA
LANGLOIS

The cabin is so easy to reach that you can leave San Francisco in the morning, rent a car in Anchorage, and emerge from the snow-dusted spruce forest before dark, into a clearing reachable only by foot or snow machine. This is what 20-year-old Sean McGrory and 24-year-old Steven McCloud do on their first day in Alaska. They park along the Seward Highway and hike into the darkening woods, along a path that leads to two yurts, a renovated 1936 mining cabin, a sauna and an outhouse. The buildings are surrounded by mountains so dizzyingly enormous you have to crane your neck to take them in. At 9 p.m. in early April, they're painted with the surreal watercolors of alpenglow.

McGrory and McCloud are enthralled. "I can't even remember the last time I saw this much snow," McCloud says, stomping his boots as he steps into the cabin.

The trail to the Manitoba Cabin is short, under a mile, but McGrory and McCloud would have hiked it even if it were longer. They'd happily spend days in this area, hiking from yurt to yurt, sleeping in warm beds that are safe from bears, cooking their food on stoves they don't have to carry. This is the kind of experience they came to Alaska for: something that feels authentic and adventurous, but isn't too extreme. They're not up for climbing Denali, but neither do they want the canned itinerary that cruise ship passengers experience. "This is great for people like us who are in the middle," McGrory says, filling a pot with water from a nearby creek and setting it on the stove to boil. "We wanted to unplug."

I'm sitting with two other people staying in the cabin tonight, at a communal table piled with books, board games and mugs of red wine, in a room warmly lit by solar-powered lanterns and a woodstove. There's not a phone in sight, and no outlets to plug one into. McGrory and McCloud look a little shell-shocked, trying to grasp that they woke up in the rush of central California and will fall asleep here, in the starlit Chugach Mountains. They found this place for \$200 a night through a Google search.

The Manitoba Cabin system is the first of a series of huts planned by the nonprofit Alaska Huts Association, and McGrory and McCloud are exactly the kind of "in the middle" travelers the association hopes to attract. If it receives the necessary permits, Alaska Huts plans to build three more huts, transforming this quiet corner of Alaska into a New Zealand of the North — a hut-dotted destination for nature lovers who want more than car camping but lack the skills or inclination to backpack.

The association's executive director, Tom Callahan, believes that expanding access to Alaska's backcountry is critical for fostering environmental stewardship. But just as important are the opportunities that outdoor recreation can bring to isolated towns

with few other options for economic development. Before coming to Alaska, Callahan worked in New Hampshire's White Mountains, where he saw how huts run by the Appalachian Mountain Club drew some 40,000 visitors a year and helped revitalize a struggling region once defined by timber. A world-class hut system in Alaska, he says, could transform rural communities in similar ways.

Callahan's plans seem visionary in a state where outdoor recreation is dominated by hunting and fishing. Elsewhere in the West, however, they're nothing new. From overlooked communities in the Utah desert to depressed Montana mining towns, places once dependent on logging, mining and drilling are reinventing themselves through hiking, biking, climbing and skiing. And as the economic benefits of these sports become more obvious, ever more rural counties are turning to trails for a fiscal boost. Nowhere, though, is there more untapped potential than in Alaska. And perhaps nowhere are the challenges so stark.

"IT'S IRONIC," state Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins told me as I was planning my trip north. "Alaska is one of the most beautiful, wild parts of the world, and there are very few trails to get out and experience it."

Kreiss-Tomkins, a Democrat who grew up in one of Southeast Alaska's isolated island communities, has a point. Despite the vast amount of public land in Alaska, the state has relatively little infrastructure to attract the outdoor enthusiasts who flock to recreation meccas like, say, Utah. To put it into perspective, the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest near Salt Lake City has 1,700 miles of hiking trails spread over a 2,500-square-mile forest. The Chugach National Forest, near Anchorage, covers nearly 11,000 square miles but has just 500 miles of trails. And many of those trails demand considerable backcountry experience, deterring locals and visitors alike.

Even Alaska's most famous national park, Denali, is largely trail-less. In the 1950s, a trail-building effort there met with sharp resistance from Alaskans who preferred to keep the wilderness untrammeled. "Let the tourist be on his own, and not be spoon-fed at intervals," wrote famed Alaska naturalist Adolph Murie. "Let him be encouraged to keep his eyes open, do his own looking and exploring, and catch what he can of the magic of wilderness."

But in a state that's increasingly driven by tourism, the magic of Alaska's wilderness has become more of a barrier than a draw. Although tourism is Alaska's second-largest industry, after oil, the state's wilderness is so formidable that most people see it only from the window of a bus or the deck of a cruise ship. Not only does that discourage beginner and intermediate hikers, bikers and skiers from visiting Alaska, it leaves communities that aren't on major highways or cruise routes largely bereft of tourist dollars.



Toba's Yurt — during a snowy day, facing page, and under the Northern lights, left — is just a short hike in from the highway. The Alaska Huts Association hopes to build several more huts like these in Alaska's backcountry.

WILLIE DALTON, ALASKA HUTS ASSOCIATION



The Trans-Alaska Pipeline has a service road and other infrastructure along the way that Alaska Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins says would be ideal for a Trans-Alaska Trail. The pipeline operator isn't so sure.

PATRICK J. ENDRES,
ALASKA PHOTOGRAPHICS

And such communities have never been more desperate for dollars. Today, the resource extraction that catapulted Alaska from a backwater “folly” to one of the nation’s wealthiest states has stalled. In Southeast Alaska, timber jobs decreased by 80 percent between 1998 and 2012. On the North Slope, oil production has dropped 76 percent since 1989. Add to that a freefall in the price of oil, and Alaska is now facing a \$4 billion budget deficit. Small towns already reeling from the loss of major industries have been forced to absorb cuts to vital services like education and transportation. “We have reached a point in our state’s history that we need to be looking beyond oil,” Alaska Gov. Bill Walker, an Independent, said in 2016.

But how, exactly, can a state that depends on oil and gas for up to 90 percent of its revenue expand its economic base? As one Alaskan told me, “It’s not like Microsoft is going to move in.” Another ruefully noted that the state is already doing everything it can to support industries like fishing and mining. There’s just one asset that Alaska has in spades and isn’t taking advantage of, says Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins: its “grandeur and beauty and wildness.”

That’s why Kreiss-Tomkins wants to create an 800-mile path running the length of Alaska, paralleling the existing

Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Instead of being a pure wilderness trail, the Trans-Alaska Trail would be served by lodges and roadhouses already scattered along its length. Regular road access would allow hikers and bikers to tackle shorter sections, benefiting places like 45 Mile, an unincorporated community north of Valdez that’s home to several lodges.

The project is slated to start with a 66-mile pilot section starting at the pipeline’s southern terminus in Valdez, but because the company that manages the pipeline opposes having a recreational trail alongside it, there’s no set start date. Kreiss-Tomkins, however, isn’t the type to run from a challenge. When he was 23, he beat a veteran Republican lawmaker to represent a district larger than New Jersey, and he has since been re-elected twice. He believes a Trans-Alaska Trail utilizing existing infrastructure could be a “vanguard example” of Alaska’s nascent adventure tourism economy. “This is not an idle idea,” Kreiss-Tomkins told me. “This is a very real idea. We’re hoping it catalyzes a broader movement.”

KREISS-TOMKINS HAS REASON TO BELIEVE his scheme will work. When a trail running the length of Colorado was first proposed in the 1970s, it seemed impossible — the late writer Ed Quillen, a

regular *High Country News* contributor, once called it a “trail to nowhere.” Today, the Colorado Trail attracts thousands of hikers and bikers each year, and breweries, gear shops and B&Bs are thriving in trailside communities. As one county commissioner in the former mining town of Silverton put it: Recreation is Colorado’s new gold.

Nationwide, there are now 326,000 miles of trail on state and federal land, more than triple the 103,000 miles that laced our public lands in 1965. And demand continues to grow. After Cheryl Strayed published her 2012 memoir *Wild* about finding redemption on the Pacific Crest Trail, the number of thru-hikers attempting the 2,650-mile trek from Mexico to Canada jumped from about 300 a year to 3,000. In 2015, the Pacific Crest Trail had to implement a quota system for the first time in six decades to mitigate the impact of all those boots.

Trails serviced by backcountry huts or lodges, like those planned in Alaska, are even more popular than those traversing wilderness. Some 72,000 international visitors a year travel to New Zealand to hike its multi-day “Great Walks” and stay in the adjoining backcountry huts. Other hut systems, like Washington’s Rendezvous Huts and Colorado’s 10th Mountain Division and San Juan

Huts, are in such demand they must be reserved months in advance. “It’s a ‘Build it and they will come’ situation,” says Sam Demas, a retired librarian who now studies hut systems around the world. “There’s more demand than supply.”

Rural communities benefit disproportionately from America’s love of trails. The United States Bureau of Economic Analysis is in the midst of producing the first comprehensive study of the economic impact of trails and other conduits to outdoor recreation, but numerous smaller studies have already begun to capture that impact, confirming what towns like Fruita, Colorado, already know: Even trails that are close to town can have huge economic returns. Between 1998 and 2004, as Fruita developed its now-world-class mountain bike trails, sales tax revenue in the sleepy desert community jumped by 51 percent. Today, once-vacant storefronts are bustling.

Five hours away in conservative Kanab, Utah, county commissioners are hoping for a similar bump: In 2015, they allocated \$20,000 to build 100 miles of new hiking and biking trails in partnership with the International Mountain Bicycling Association. In Oregon and Washington, locals are plotting a 200-mile route connecting hiking trails in the Columbia River Gorge to small-town lodges and B&Bs. And in Anaconda, Montana, Lydia Janosko of the Anaconda Local Development Corporation is partnering with the Anaconda Trail Society to build an “adventure camp” for Continental Divide Trail hikers and long-distance cyclists.

When I spoke to Janosko by phone, she told me a story familiar to many rural Westerners, of a community that never really recovered from the loss of its copper smelter in 1980. She and others tried to promote Anaconda’s beautiful surroundings to entice new businesses, but few took her up on the offer. Families continued to move away in search of better opportunities.

A couple years ago, Janosko started noticing a growing number of cyclists passing through town. She contacted the Missoula-based Adventure Cycling Association and learned it had been promoting a route that passes near Anaconda, which is between Yellowstone and Glacier national parks. Janosko also learned of a study by the University of Montana showing that bicycle tourists linger in the state three days longer than regular tourists and spend 40 percent more on amenities, particularly in off-the-beaten-path towns that motorists tend to skip. By providing free Wi-Fi, lockers, charging stations and nearby hot showers, the Adventure Cycling Association suggested Anaconda could lure these tourists to spend the night — and spend money at local businesses.

When Anaconda’s adventure camp opens this summer, it’ll be the seventh such camp in rural Montana. A local brewery is also in the works, and there’s

a new bicycle shop downtown. “We’re still bouncing back,” Janosko says, “but the energy in Anaconda is shifting.”

ALASKA’S TRAIL BUILDERS hope their communities can experience a similar shift, but an unsupportive pipeline company isn’t the only obstacle they face. Some residents are skeptical that a Trans-Alaska Trail could ever be as popular as the Colorado Trail, or that a hut system here could rival New Zealand’s. Alaska has grizzlies; those places do not. Alaska already has backcountry huts, albeit barebones ones used mostly by locals. And Alaska is too far away, people told me, to attract recreationists in any great number.

Most significantly, though, state and federal agencies in the 49th state have been slow to adapt to the changing economic landscape, making it hard for would-be trail builders to get funding, permits and support. In the Tongass National Forest, an independent analysis by Headwaters Economics found that the U.S. Forest Service spends 37 percent of its budget on timber and 15 percent on recreation, despite the fact that timber supports just 240 jobs in the region and tourism supports 6,700. In the state capital of Juneau, legislators grappling with Alaska’s budget deficit have dug deep to find money for oil subsidies while cutting recreation funding. Even the Alaska Huts Association is exploring a backup plan to build its huts on state land in the not-unlikely event it can’t get Forest Service permits.

“Outdoor recreation is undervalued as an economic driver,” says Lee Hart, director of a nonprofit called Levitation 49 that seeks to diversify Alaska’s economy through outdoor recreation. “That’s just the mindset of our state.”

Or as Lynne Brandon of the nonprofit Sitka Trail Works explained, “Alaska is still in the dark ages compared to places like Colorado.”

On the other hand, some Alaskans would rather stay in the dark than have their state overrun by spandex-clad, Instagramming hordes. Tourism, even the environmentally conscious kind, changes a place. Hardware stores are replaced by gear shops selling \$90 leggings. Loggers and miners with a multigenerational connection to the land are replaced by seasonal guides. Housing costs rise. As longtime residents of Moab, Utah, or Queenstown, New Zealand, can attest, the money that outdoor enthusiasts bring can be a double-edged sword.

Plus, even quiet recreation can harm the environment when it unfolds on a large scale. Preliminary results from a multi-year study in Idaho and Wyoming show that wolverines change their behavior in unhealthy ways when backcountry skiers hit the slopes in greater numbers; another study found a fivefold decrease in bobcat and coyote populations on California public lands that were open to hiking. In 2011, scientists reviewed 69 independent studies and found 88 percent

of them linked outdoor recreation like hiking and canoeing to negative consequences for birds, including fewer chicks.

But as elsewhere in the West, rural communities in Alaska have few alternatives. Residents can’t change the complex global forces that have led to the demise of the industries they once depended on. They can only adapt.

I went to Alaska to learn more about Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins’ plan for a Trans-Alaska Trail, but as I talked to entrepreneurs, community organizers and nonprofits around the state, I realized that Alaska doesn’t necessarily need an 800-mile trail to jumpstart its recreation economy. Changing deeply held beliefs about oil and recreation is like “steering



a ginormous ship,” says Levitation 49’s Hart, but everywhere I looked, I saw signs that the wheel was beginning to turn. In the small town of Palmer, owner Peter Schadee of the Knik River Lodge decided to buy a fleet of fat bikes to boost winter business after noticing an influx of cyclists heading to a nearby glacier. In Sitka, Lynne Brandon is working on a bike trail that connects the ferry and cruise ship terminals to Sitka’s historic downtown, expanding opportunities for Sitka’s small cadre of bike tour operators. In Wrangell, once known as the Timber Capital of Alaska, a former logger named Jim Leslie now runs wilderness boat tours. In Anchorage, Hart helped organize the state’s first outdoor recreation summit last June. And around the state, other communities are also building trails and investing in recreation.

“The number of rural communities that are looking at developing a trail system continues to expand,” says Paul Clark, who runs a National Park Service program that helps Alaskan communities construct trails on non-NPS land. “Every year there are more.”

BACK AT THE MANITOBA CABIN, McGrory and McCloud have just settled down to eat their pasta when the door creaks open again. Two red-cheeked faces peer

A world-class mountain-biking trail system near Fruita, Colorado, helped boost the economy, with sales tax revenues jumping by more than 50 percent in five years.

HOWIE SHULTZ



Backcountry skiers gather over a trail map at the Manitoba Cabin, part of a hut system in the Chugach Mountains.

MATT HAGE, ALASKA HUT S ASSOCIATION, CC VIA FLICKR

inside: a couple from Seward, trailed by a grizzled, wolfish dog with bad hips. As we gather around the table to eat and drink, a faint snowfall brushes the windows. It feels like we could be at one of the famous backcountry huts in the Alps, or perhaps New Zealand, except a little more rough around the edges. A little more Alaska.

We live in an era when trail builders have to justify their efforts economically.

But the reason trails garner economic returns is because we're drawn to them, and the reason we're drawn to them is less quantifiable, more meandering. Trails make it possible for us to get to places we'd never otherwise reach, to fall in love with places we'd never otherwise know, to meet people we'd never otherwise cross paths with. They satisfy an ancient impulse to ditch our daily obliga-

tions and embark on a journey, emerging somehow different than when we set off.

Working on this story, I was reminded of a summer I spent building and repairing trails in Idaho's backcountry. Until then, I thought the paths I hiked on were sprung from the earth, as if generations of human feet had worn them into the ground like the trails deer and elk weave into the forest floor. But as my fellow recruits and I were handed our tools for the season — saws and shovels, pulaskis and pickaxes — I realized that the creation of a trail is more often a violent, wrenching affair, born of crushed rocks and sawed trees, sweat and sore backs. Foot by foot, mile by mile, trails are built at the expense of what was there before. Sometimes the end result is better and more sustainable. Sometimes it changes a place's identity in painful ways. The outcome, I suppose, depends on your view.

That night at the Manitoba Cabin, after everyone has gone to sleep, I step outside and walk to the middle of the clearing. From this vantage, the cabin looks like a tiny glowing ember nestled in a sea of wintry mountains, a tail of smoke curling from its chimney. A three-quarters moon glows through the clouds, illuminating the snow-packed path winding through gnarled spruce forest. The bases of the trees are just beginning to thaw, releasing the fragrance of wet bark and snowmelt into the air. It smells like something new — like early spring. □

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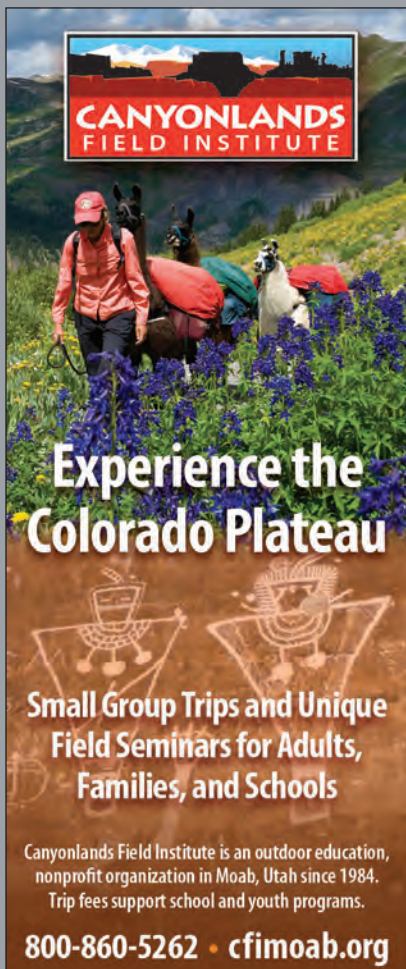


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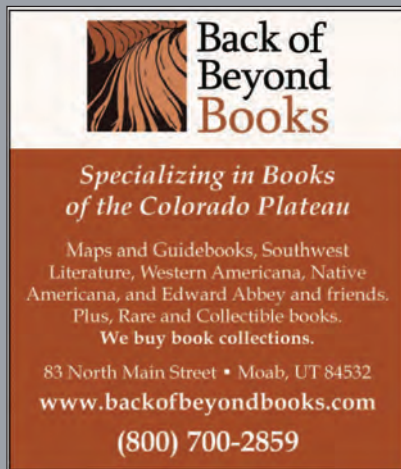
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The High Priestess would appreciate the work of Packing It Out, a team of hikers who pick up trash on their hikes. During a trip on the Pacific Crest Trail in 2016, they packed out more than 720 pounds of trash.

COURTESY PACKING IT OUT

Just call me a High Priestess

OPINION BY
MARJORIE
"SLIM"
WOODRUFF

Though someone I met on an outback trail once gave me the honorific of the "Leave No Trace Nazi," I prefer the kinder title of "High Priestess of Leave No Trace." It allows for a less punitive ambiance. What's more, a priestess may confer benefits as well as smite wrongdoers.

The High Priestess is not pleased when she is confronted with cigarette butts, facial tissue, disposable water bottles (even those tied in a cute little knot), gooey energy-gel packets and their attendant tabs, or orange peels and apple cores. She wonders: Would these discards be welcome in the perpetrator's living room? And is not wilderness the living room for its full-time residents?

A High Priestess' work is never done, and so with a sigh and ancient curses muttered under her breath (and sometimes above it) she picks it all up. Wrappers, bottle tops (what happened to the bottle?), eggshells, plastic bags. More esoteric objects have included snowmobile boots, two full-size inflatable beds (at 9 pounds each), and a car door.

Gummy energy packets and cigarette butts are the worst. They are sticky and stinky, respectively. Orange peels at least make the trash bag smell nice. And no, though you keep trying not to know this, orange peels do not biodegrade quickly; it can take them up to two years to do so, in fact.

Once, along the trail, the High Priestess found an electrolyte-replacement bottle lying in full view, now filled with mud. The Priestess emptied it and left it to dry in the sun, intending to pick it up on the way out. Upon returning, she found that it had been joined by three single-use water bottles. Apparently this had become the home of disposable plastic bottles en route to their final resting place in the ocean. Seriously, people?

You are supposed to be hikers! Buy a canteen!

Illegal campfires require their own etiquette. Also legal ones, if their creators are not following the principles of Leave No Trace. Sadly, it is not enough to just scatter the rocks. One must also clean out the trash, scatter, bury or carry out the charcoal and then camouflage the area.

One time, while dismantling a fire ring, the Priestess inadvertently uncovered a small and unhappy rattlesnake. At that point it was ordained that, in this case, "respect wildlife" would trump "minimize campfire impacts."

Rock squirrels are merely rats with good PR, but the tourists love them. Obviously, they (the rock squirrels, not the tourists) can't survive on nuts and berries alone, the old-fashioned way. They require Cheetos. When talking to animal-feeding perpetrators, I have learned not to waste time with the admonition that "our food is not good for wildlife" or "they will starve in the winter when the tourists disappear." Ask, instead, "Have you ever heard of hantavirus?"

There was a time in Zion National Park when a couple was sighted tempting a squirrel with an apple. The animal grabbed the fruit and ran. The Priestess vaulted over a rock wall, snatched the apple out of the squirrel's surprised maw, and turned to the couple. "Perhaps," she said, "you didn't notice the sign RIGHT THERE which says do not feed the wildlife?" This might have seemed just a bit overzealous to the tourists.

Graffiti is exploding in the national parks. Perhaps because increased visitation leads to increased numbers of People With No Clue. Perhaps because social media allows these vandals to share their "art" with the world. Such

antics are unsightly, but more importantly, they encourage the easily led mob to add their own decorations. Most of the time a squirt-bottle full of water and a stiff brush takes care of the problem (the graffiti, not the artists).

Cutting switchbacks destroys trails and can cause rockslides. A few years back, a hiker had to be air-evacuated from a Grand Canyon trail when short-cutters above him dislodged rocks that landed on his cranium with subsequent ill effects. After a few reminders that this behavior is unsafe and irresponsible, the Priestess pulls out a phone and informs the perps that Park Dispatch has received a video of their malfeasance. There is no Wi-Fi on the trail, of course, but do they really need to know that?

Occasionally, a miscreant is caught in the act of littering. The Priestess then is all sympathy. "If you are too weak and exhausted to carry out this used facial tissue, perhaps I should call for rescue immediately!" This usually evokes a blank stare or an occasional look of indignation, but it amuses the Priestess.

Even if the Priestess does not smite, perhaps Ma Nature will. There is, after all, such a thing as karma. Treat the wilderness like a trash heap, and it may come back to bite you.

Those of us who pick up after others are often rewarded with fine weather, the best campsite, or just plain good luck. Those who trash the place may be rained out, or refused a permit. Bad luck may stalk them all their days on the trail. Malevolent spirits will plague them. Mother Nature bats last. □

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WEB EXTRA

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A straight line in a contoured world

OPINION BY
RICK BASS

Suppose that nearly 50 years ago, a man in a faraway city, who knew nothing of the blank spots on a map, thought it would be nice to bulldoze a straight-line, high-use recreational hiking trail through the Pacific Northwest. It would resemble the moving walkway at an airport, only with a “zone of disturbance” a thousand feet wide, and it would run through the heart of the region’s rarest and most unprotected ecosystem.

And even if the draftsman knew nothing of the country — that it was public land and home to the greatest concentration of threatened, endangered and sensitive species of any national forest in the West — a rational person might assume that such a shortest-route, Golden-Spike-railroad application might not be the most intelligent, ecological or economical choice, nor even the most enjoyable for the travelers the trail-dreamer prophesied.

This, however, is not the opinion of the Pacific Northwest Trail Association, which continues to push for a 1,200-mile trail straight from Montana’s Glacier National Park to Port Townsend, Washington. And what lies between those two points? The association seems not to know, but I do. In a stretch that is proposed to follow the Canadian border in the Yaak Valley of northwestern Montana lies 50 miles of swamp, bog or orchids, mosquitoes, dark interior forest with no sightlines. There are also 20 grizzly bears, hanging on for dear life. The bears are protected only by the Endangered Species Act, and by the dark shadows of those swampy patches dedicated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to their recovery, according to law and the wishes of the American public.

Fish and Wildlife says it wants to recover the grizzly population in the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem to 100. Achieving that goal is a borderline fantasy, given that the Yaak Valley is in the Kootenai National Forest. Local forest managers have never been good to the Yaak’s grizzlies, pushing one controversial timber-cutting sale after another. And, so far, the Forest Service — claiming it has no time to do otherwise — has backed the trail, which would send up to 4,000 hikers a year through country the Forest Service has also deemed core grizzly habitat.

Three distinct grizzly populations exist in Montana, each isolated from the other. The Cabinet-Yaak grizzlies are by far the smallest and most fragile. Just two, or possibly three, breeding-age females remain. Lose one, and the population tips toward extinction. So why would anyone, especially anyone who claims to love the wild, want to blast a human highway through their last stronghold?

One can love a resource without killing it. There are still a few places in the world that are simply not appropriate for high-volume industrial recreation. To argue otherwise is like arguing that because we drive cars, we should drill in the Arctic — as if there is no sanctity, as if everything must be diminished or destroyed. And here, it would be done in the name of fun — *our* fun. As if there is nowhere else to play.

The concept of a long-distance trail running along the Canadian border from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean was the linear idea of a Georgetown University student named Ron Strickland, who founded the Pacific Northwest Trail Association in 1977. The association convinced Congress to authorize a feasibility study in 1979-1980, but the U.S. Forest Service found the trail would be too expensive to build, and too environmentally harmful. At subsequent public meetings in Montana, every speaker opposed the trail. But the idea wouldn’t die, and hikers kept building segments of the trail on their own. In 2009, then-U.S. Congressman Norm Dicks, D-Wash., attached a midnight rider to a bill, authorizing the trail and creating a

federal advisory committee to consider route options. The committee doesn’t meet often — just three times since October 2015 — and it is still taking comments from the public. Environmental groups and Montanans are severely underrepresented, and so far the Forest Service has not seemed interested in altering the route through the Yaak.

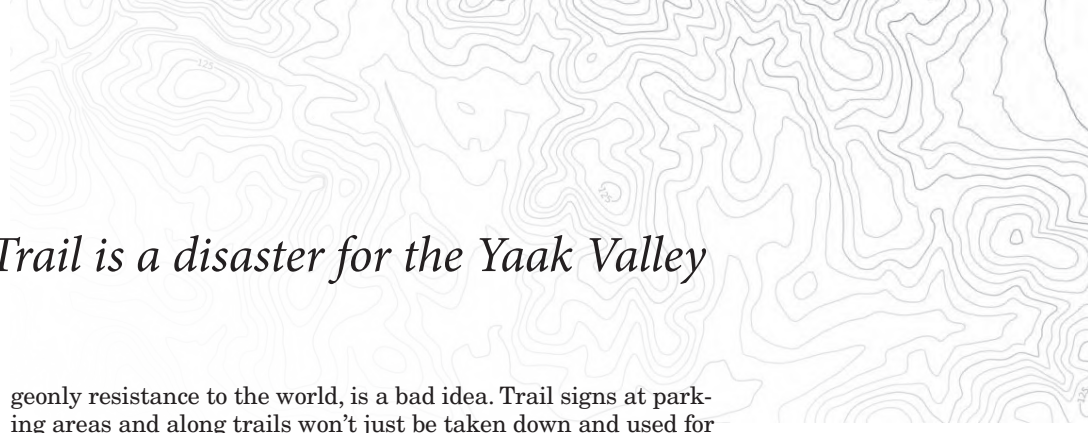
The Pacific Northwest Trail Association is already distributing maps and posting blogs and social media advice on how to travel through the area. Some trail users are passing on messages claiming that once thru-hikers leave Glacier National Park, they don’t need to worry about grizzlies because there aren’t any in the Kootenai. They’re telling one another that, in the Yaak, they can run their dogs off-leash, because there’s nobody around. This is a dangerous narrative that continues to be fueled by the local Forest Service office. One agency biologist said last fall he thought the route through the heart of the Yaak would probably be all right, because hikers got along with grizzlies in places like Glacier and Yellowstone national parks. But those parks are four times larger than the Yaak and have vast wilderness cores protected in their interiors, with an incredibly low density of road networks. The Yaak has no permanently protected wildlands whatsoever. Plus, hikers and bears don’t always get along so famously in Glacier and Yellowstone.

Beyond bears, the proposed trail ignores a long legacy of collaborative policymaking. Montana’s Democratic senior senator,



A trail leads out of a dense, dark forest in the Purcell Mountains of Kootenai National Forest in Montana.

RANDY BEACHAM



Why the proposed Pacific Northwest Trail is a disaster for the Yaak Valley

Jon Tester, and community groups representing stakeholders from all walks of the region — mill owners, loggers, snowmobilers, environmentalists, the whole shitaree — spent decades mapping areas of common ground in the Yaak, once-upon-a-time epicenter of the worst of the timber wars. Tester rewarded that community for its trust-building and problem-solving moxie by including its recommendations to protect the wild quality of roadless lands in core grizzly habitat — not open them to high-use, high-density recreation — in a 2009 bill that, though it never received a hearing in a partisan, polarized Congress, still embodies local wisdom.

The proposed trail also ignores the harsh realities of land management in the West. Imagine 4,000 hikers starting 4,000 campfires — imagine 28,000 user-fire-nights, up there in the drying-out backcountry along the border, and see how the Forest Service and local county firefighting budgets like the results. And do the trail-pushers realize that opening the proposed route will likely force the Forest Service to close at least that many miles of currently open roads, in order to meet its legal obligation to maintain core grizzly security habitat in the upper Yaak? That will not only upset longtime road users, but it will restrict the agency's own ability to prescribe logging treatments along roads that had once been open — dealing another blow to the small timber industry that hangs on here.

Aggravating the locals, who are celebrated for their curmud-

geonly resistance to the world, is a bad idea. Trail signs at parking areas and along trails won't just be taken down and used for campfires; they'll be relocated. Thru-hikers will find themselves suddenly standing on a hot day amid one of the Yaak's myriad clear-cuts with no trail in sight.

I have nothing against people getting out into the woods, or even trekking long distances across the West's landscapes. A little exercise away from the daily grind of urban life is a good thing. If you want to be around a lot of people and get a little cardio workout in, then these official loops and permitted through-routes are one way to go. I've done it myself. But there are tens of thousands of miles of these kinds of trails already, and, as with mining, or clear-cutting, or road-building, we should not be continuing to build more, more, more to the ends of the horizon. There are simply some places where rare and higher resources must be protected. What's not just greedy about this proposed route, but dumb, dumb, dumb is that better alternatives exist.

“The trail's coming whether you like it or not,” the association's director, Jeff Kish, recently told Jessie Grossman, the Forest Watch coordinator for the local grassroots environmental group, the Yaak Valley Forest Council. Grossman is also chair of the wilderness committee of the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders' Coalition, a coalition of timber interests, recreationists and environmentalists, which has been recommending common ground land management proposals for sensitive areas on the forest. Grossman has been working to educate people about the dangers and drawbacks to the proposed upper route. She believes there are better alternatives.

So did a prominent bear biologist, long before the congressional study came out. Charles Jonkel of Missoula, who died last year, ascertained that 28 of the trail's Montana miles were in critical grizzly bear habitat. He published an independent report that not only declared the Yaak route harmful, but diagrammed a better, safer and more visually appealing route to the south, down along the east side of the Koocanusa Reservoir, hopping from one mountaintop fire-lookout tower to the next, and down into the sylvan Treasure Valley.

This route would not only avoid designated grizzly habitat, it would provide more lookouts, icy summits and old-growth cedars along the wide rushing Kootenai river, a major tributary to the Columbia. It would course through old mining ghost towns and past numerous waterfalls. Merchants in small nearby towns, including Troy (population 900) and Libby (population 2,900), would be well-situated to re-provision trail users.

Jonkel dreamed and mapped this route like a prophet, and now, almost half a century later, the trail association is spurning his research. Why? I can't quite fathom it. The group continues to cling to Strickland's original vision of a route entirely along the border. His motto was “stay high for the views.” How ironic that those carrying his legacy today are unable to see that the Jonkel route would actually take them physically higher while being less destructive to the wild landscapes and creatures they claim to care about.

It's not too late to change course. The federal advisory committee is still accepting comments, and the Forest Service has all the authority it needs to do the right thing. But barring some unanticipated open-mindedness from the trail association, and some uncharacteristic backbone from the agency, it's on to court again, it seems. The Kootenai National Forest will continue to be unproductive for everyone but attorneys. And the Yaak's tenuous, tenacious grizzly population will suffer.

What a shame. □

Thru-hikers will find themselves suddenly standing on a hot day amid one of the Yaak's myriad clear-cuts with no trail in sight.



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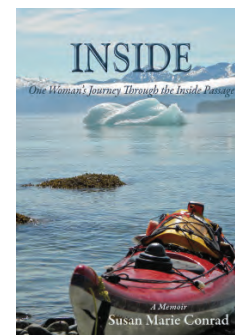
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Gravel-Grinding

ESSAY BY
JT THOMAS

In the nascent stages of any adventure, an innocent beer can open the gateway to wanderlust, which can quickly lead to a road map spread out on a table.

Late last winter, my motorcycle-riding buddy Stephen — alias “Barnstormer” — pointed at a map of Utah and announced: “Snow permitting, we’re gonna gravel-grind the thumpers over the Abajo Mountains, float the red dust of Butler/Comb Washes and Valley of the Gods, up the Moki to Muley ... Cedar Mesa to Hall’s to Bullfrog ... Burr Trail to Boulder ... and then, yep, the Hell’s Backbone. We’ll loop through desert canyons, Kokopelli riding bitch ... avoiding slab at all costs. Light and fast, baby.”

We charted Barnstormer’s objectives on the map, following

ever-thinner lines until they washed out into the blank spots of southern Utah. Some of our goals were clearly marked on the newly designated Backcountry Discovery Routes, a network of backcountry trails on public lands mapped by the BDR, a non-profit organization, with the help of volunteers in the Western U.S., and as of this summer, along the Eastern seaboard as well. Others were obscure spurs off — oftentimes very far off — those designated routes.

Questions emerged as the beer warmed and the night stretched on: Was there really a road or trail there or not? Would we have enough fuel to make it there, and, more importantly, back?

Like me, my companions in this adventure were lovers



◀ Brett Lannan (foreground) and Stephen Barnes scope out the last stretch of the Burr Trail leading toward Boulder, Utah, after 4 days riding, top. Brett Lannan navigates a series of washed-out sandstone ledges in southeast Utah, bottom. JT THOMAS, ROB HARSH

the West



Robert Edison Fulton Jr. in 1937, when he rode his motorcycle around the world.
ONE MAN CARAVAN

of wilderness, and many of the remote places we intended to explore were essentially roadless. Our plan was to ride until we couldn't, and then hike, scramble and climb to our destination, traveling on foot as light and fast as we could on our stripped-down motorbikes. Save for the obvious carbon footprint and the knobby tracks in the soft sand, our multi-day, two-wheel adventure ride would adhere to the Leave-No-Trace ethos championed by backcountry bipeds. We would be heard, seen, and then gone.

Most of the adventure-loving motorcyclists I've met emerged from previous or parallel lives also spent in the backcountry, whether as climbers, skiers, trail runners or hikers. We have simply supplemented our backcountry lust — and age-induced

loss of testosterone — with a bump of octane.

And a new vocabulary. Our slang is as unique as the colorful place names spread across the canyon country of the Colorado Plateau. But tease apart our subset of off-road, adventure-driven, motor-head lingo — slab, gravel-grinding, thumpers, oilheads, airheads, hexheads, etc. — and you can see a common denominator that traces back to the days when people like Robert Edison Fulton Jr. hemp-strapped a few rucksacks and a movie camera to his two-cylinder Douglas motorcycle and set off to ride solo around the world in 1932. (See his book, *One Man Caravan*, published in 1937.) His objective was no different than ours today: to penetrate distant lands by self-sufficient, independent means, for the sake of adventure.

There is a technical side to the rush. For the uninitiated, the differences between the motorcycles we use and the other off-highway vehicles buzzing around the public lands are difficult to grasp. Adventure bikes come in many shapes and sizes, each with its strengths and weaknesses. An Enduro dirt bike is not a dual-sport, but it could be with the right modifications. Some dual-sport bikes can go anywhere a dirt bike can go, or farther. Others cannot even make it up a gravel driveway. It all depends on suspension, fuel capacity, tires, gearing, the weight of the machines and, most importantly, the rider's skills and judgment.

But the real joy comes from anticipating and then experiencing the places these machines take us. Advances in technology have produced lighter, stronger and faster motorcycles, backcountry snow machines, river jet boats and all manner of three-wheel, four-wheel and six-wheel ATVs, and now there are few places outside the national parks and wilderness areas that aren't accessible to motorized visitors. Do I have mixed feelings about this? Of course. But, as with any craft, it's all in how you use your tools.

Our group — composed of Barnstormer, a mountain guide-turned-outdoor-industry advocate on a 640 Adventure (which, unfortunately, fell off the back of his truck at 60 mph that morning); a SpaceX engineer/Latin American poet on a BMW 800GS; a Brooklyn-based bombardier on the smallest thumper; an ultra-runner/adventure racer-turned Ayahuasca vision-quest guide; and me, thumping along on my 650 bullet-proof "Pig" — converged for the first time at the top of Utah's Moki Dugway, a sinuous set of desert switchbacks on the southern toe of Cedar Mesa.

We bivouacked under the full moon on the still sun-warmed rocks of Muley Point above the Goosenecks of the San Juan River. By the light of our headlamps, Jetboil camp stoves and a small sage-infused piñon fire made on a vintage hubcap firepan to avoid scarring the sandstone, we spread out the BDR and quadrangle topo maps to powwow about the morning's route across Cedar Mesa to the ferry crossing on Lake Powell. Our wet and dusty gloves, Kevlar-reinforced pants and jackets hung from the handlebars of our machines, drying in a gentle desert breeze. We swapped stories and moto-jargon, true and false, under a star-studded sky.

This was a backcountry brotherhood forged in the same spirit of the many wilderness treks that littered our collective pasts. The next morning we cleaned up our camp, straddled our motors and headed out again, eager to encounter the mysteries at the end of the next road. □



▲ Stephen Barnes navigates the switchbacks through a gap in Waterpocket Fold along the Burr Trail while on an 800-mile trip through southeast Utah. JT THOMAS

HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BRIAN CALVERT

CALIFORNIA

President Donald Trump's recently minted neologism, “covfefe,” will now be immortalized on license plates across the state. The president coined the seven-letter word in an incoherent tweet in May, which announced, simply: “Despite the constant negative press covfefe.” *SFGate* reports that the word, which fits perfectly on California plates, has been snatched up in all its iterations. Los Angeles attorney Craig Cooper told CNN he thought the word funny even after the “initial excitement wore off.”

More initial excitement was reported from the Golden State after lawmakers passed a law to extend bar hours to 4 a.m. The new law gives bars the option of serving drinks for an additional two hours, and, according to state Sen. Scott Wiener, D, “recognizes that ... local communities can make responsible decisions.” Absolutely: The bar at 4 a.m. is where most responsible decisions are made.

ARIZONA

Rare footage has emerged of a former Republican governor of Arizona describing his experience with a notorious mass UFO sighting. In an interview with UFO hunter James Fox in 2006, Fife Symington called the March 13, 1997, “Phoenix Lights” incident “our first major encounter with the unknown over Maricopa County.” Fox released footage of the interview for the 20th anniversary of the sighting, during which thousands of people reporting seeing a huge object glowing over Phoenix. The event has never been explained, though we support the theory that it was then-Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s giant ego temporarily leaving his body.

Speaking of weird lights: A semi flipped on an Arizona freeway near Tempe in early June, spilling thousands of cans of Bud Light from its trailer. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Footage taken by KCRA, a Sacramento, California-based TV station, shows a half-dozen local law enforcement personnel gathered around the overturned truck and its glittering cans of watered-down



COLORADO Bearthoven, no doubt playing the famous composition “Für Elise.” KATIE HAWLEY

lager. They were probably cursing their luck: Of all the beers in all the trucks in all the world, it had to be Bud Light?

COLORADO

A school bus driver in Colorado Springs got into a tight spot after trying to squeeze the bus between two large rock formations at the Garden of the Gods. Officials told *11 News* that the bus sustained most of the damage, after it was stuck for nearly two hours. A witness said some of the bus wheels were lifted off the ground, which makes us wonder how hard the driver tried to get through. It was unclear whether the driver will face charges. We hope not; the world could use more of that kind of can-doism.

Less optimistic, it seems, is a Denny’s franchiser who suddenly closed all his restaurants in Colorado Springs. Employees say the closures happened with no warning whatsoever, and *11 News* reports that customers were forced to leave one restaurant, near Chapel Hills Mall, in the middle of their meals. The Colorado Department of Revenue says the owner, Abe Imani, who has been accused in the past of not paying his employees, owes nearly \$200,000 in back taxes. Welching on workers and taxes,

eh? Perhaps our man is prepping for a presidential bid.

In Vail recently, a bear climbed through an open kitchen window and began foraging for food and music, according to *Steamboat Today*. The homeowner initially reported a burglary, but after checking security camera footage realized that a bear had entered the apartment, taken food from her freezer, and eventually clambered onto the piano for a few notes. Vail police said in a statement after our own hearts: “The chords captured on video were unbearable and the tune was equally grizzly.”

CANADA

How do you stop a wedding if you’re not a guest but still don’t want to hold your peace? A beaver found a creative way to make its objections clear during a wedding in Saskatchewan, *CTV Saskatoon* reports. Kim and Calum Martin were to be married May 27 at a lodge in the woods in Cypress Hills, but a beaver chewed through a nearby power pole, knocking out electricity across two towns. The guests took it all in stride, we suppose, Saskatchewan being no stranger to weird animal stories. In 2016 alone, the province reported stories about a dog named Arrow that survived being struck by one; a man who fought a bear off with a wine bottle; a family of ducks escorted across the street by police; a deer that crashed through a master bedroom window; and the rescue of a goose that singed her wings on a set of power lines. In this particular incident, generators and candles kept the ceremony going, and the Martins were eventually wed. No word on whether the beaver has moved on.

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos #heardaroundthewest on Instagram.



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“I, too, wander the West looking for the best berry patches, swimming holes and gorgeous mountain meadows.

Sometimes I encounter a grizzly or wolf.”

Bethany Cotton, in her essay, “Returning wolves and grizzlies should be celebrated, not shot,” from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr