



Desert Survivors NV Desert Trail Dispatches

This page will have the dispatches from the Desert Relay as they are sent in from the Trip Leaders.

DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

This page contains Segments A, B, C.

Segment A: Sylvania Mountains Leader Steve Tabor

April 30-May 1, 2004

The first segment of the Relay went well. Four of us hiked from the segment's South Trailhead at the California border in Cucomungo Canyon to the North Trailhead on Nevada State Route 266. The car shuttle was easy. We used the east approach past Pigeon Spring, a route passable without difficulty, even for our three passenger cars. We noted only a few ruts on the smooth surface.

The weather was perfect: clear as a bell, hardly any wind, with great temperatures for hiking, low 70s F. at midday. It was the kind of weekend that makes you wonder why you would ever want to spend time indoors, job or no. It was the kind of uneventful weather that makes you want to go on and on into a seamless future, ignorant of sushi, ball games, taxes, wars, or any other diversions or responsibilities. It was a good time to be in nature.

On the first day, we checked out Cucomungo Spring. We fished out a dead ground squirrel in the lower spring box. The upper box, luckily, had no dead bodies. We put sticks in the springs and wedged them in, cowboy-style, so subsequent visitors could crawl out. We then entered the woods and hiked north to White Cliffs Rim with its excellent view. Woodland birds were active, including Clark's nutcrackers, nuthatches, towhees and Stellar's jays. We enjoyed an excellent camp in a small clearing at 7920', the highest point on the route.

On the second day, we day-hiked down to the old Sylvania Mine west of the route. This proved to be the highlight of the trip. The camp was deserted of humans but offered an excellent view of mid-Twentieth Century mining history: cabins filled with clothing, catalogs, books and a 1987 calendar; food in the cupboards and household items left in the kitchen sink; old trucks and cars, some still intact; a cooker and a shaker table, each mounted on a forty-foot semi trailer. The temperature setting on the cooker's control panel still worked, though the gauge was broken. One hiker found a stash of rare sheet music, another found the entire legal history of the mine. There was even an intact copy of the May 22, 1972 U.S. News and World Report laying on the ground; we read news of the Vietnam War and protest marches. We found out from jeepers in the area that the entire site is up for public auction for back taxes; starting bid is \$200.00.

The hike out was uneventful. After lunch with a view from 7814' Fab Point, we hiked down a long canyon to the north, noting a circular Indian dwelling partway down. We placed a trip register at the "Buster Claims" midway down the canyon. The approach roads had been bladed with a bulldozer, probably by RS2477 enthusiasts or county officials. That spoiled the ambience near the North Trailhead.

At-large Director Jerry Goss met us at the trailhead. I'd used his sophisticated GPS unit to record our exact line of travel. Jerry had come to download the data into his laptop computer. Hikers on subsequent routes will do the same thing. We hope to have the entire Relay route recorded in detail. Once that is done, maybe people will stop jamming me for "overestimating" distances in my guidebooks.

On Sunday, we saw off Bob Ellis and his hikers on the second segment. They had a beautiful day too. On this route I was lucky to have three of the ablest and most reliable hikers in the Survivors: Spencer Berman (who delights in discovering artifacts and old trails), Bruce Loeb (who went on the most hikes in 2003), and Robert Armstrong (who designed the DS Desert Trail pennant, with us on all Relay trips). It was a pleasure to hike with these gentlemen, who have really "made" the Relay thus far; they went on to do Segments B and C.

I had some trouble with my lungs on this trip, huffing and puffing at high elevation, but I'll be back for Segments D through G on flatter ground. I'll send more dispatches when I'm done with those segments.

Dispatch Desert Trail Segment B - South Silver Peak Range

May 2-4, 2004

Leader: Bob Ellis

After setting our shuttle cars five of us left the trailhead at Nevada Highway 266 in Fish Lake Valley heading north with warm air and clear skies. Three through-hikers were continuing from the first segment and we were given a send-off by DS Board members Steve Tabor and Jerry Goss.

Almost immediately we were greeted by a buzzing rattlesnake and several horned toads as we hiked up the dirt road past numerous flowering shrubs and annuals. As we got closer to the mountains, Joshua trees began to appear, and after leaving the graded road for an unused jeep track we began to enter the real outback. We rested at an old cabin lined with tin can sheet metal containing an occupied bird nest, and then began climbing up onto the ridge line. Here the flowers got even better and we barely stayed ahead of the rising temperatures by rising to cooler altitudes as the afternoon progressed. Our reward at the crest were the first views of the White Mountains as well as Clayton Valley and the ranges eastward.

Above 7000 feet now we entered the pinyon woods along the ridge and made our way to "Rocky Point," so named by the Desert Survivor recon team. Here we spent the night watching the almost full moon rise as the sun dropped into the Whites.

In the morning we coasted along the ridge spotting rare cactus and great views. Then we dropped down into a delightful twisting canyon, shady and cool, which led us off the ridge and eventually onto the wide wash leading to Big Spring, our water stop. A two-hour stop at the large watering hole provided us with good rest and sufficient water, but little shade as the afternoon temperatures kept rising. We said goodbye to the seven wild horses waiting for their turn and headed up toward the canyon which would lead us back up almost 2000 feet to the crest.

Heat took its toll and after several readings of the trail guide and some map review, we decided that an alternate route up a spur ridge would get us out of the hot canyon bottom before we were completely wilted. The spur route worked fine as we followed wild horse trails and made the open ridge crest just before sunset. This camp proved to be the trip highlight: snow-covered White Mountain Peak to the west, full moon rising Clayton Valley to the east, and just us on a bare ridge in between. Our fears of high winds were unfounded and we savored our luck and special location. Thanks for finding this route Steve.

North along the ridge the next day we encountered several lava rock hunting blinds used by those long ago for serious close-up work. The ridge gradually dropped in a series of ramps and we came to the McAfee Canyon dirt road by mid afternoon. Got to the cars by 4pm in time for a cold beer and a chance to recount our adventure. A group dinner was high-lighted by a five-chef meal which surprised everyone by being quite edible.

Segment B is a good, at times tough, route with a lot of variety and several surprises. Well recommended. Several folks in the Fish Lake Valley town of Dyer were interested in our hike. The store owner wants to stock literature and the B&B owner would like to connect with us about other types of trips.

See Pictures Here From Segment B

[1. Horn Toad](#)

[2. Looking South](#)

[3. Cairn Use](#)

[4. Cactus](#)

[5. Big Spring](#)

[6. Clayton Valley](#)

[7. Morning Routine](#)

[8. Hunting Blind](#)

[9. Collard Lizard](#)

[10. Piper Peak Ahead](#)

[11. Five Chefs](#)

[12. Departure and Hello Segment C](#)

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment C – North Silver Peak

Leader Paul Menkes

On May 4, 2004 I rendezvoused with Segment B participants in McAfee Canyon, in the Silver Peak Range in Nevada. 3 participants, Spencer Berman, Robert Armstrong and Bruce Loeb were continuing on segment C. Segment B trip leader Bob Ellis and Ingrid Crickmore were not, but they provided us crucial support the next day. That night, however, we feasted on fresh foods and referred to the wine jug liberally.

The next day we picked up participants' vehicles at the segment B south trailhead, and went to the tiny village of Dyer for supplies. Bob already discussed the interest in Dyer concerning the desert trail. We talked with several residents, including one who drove up to ask us if we were hiking the trail! After organizing our supplies and packs we dropped off our cars at the segment C north trailhead and Bob and Ingrid graciously took us in their van to the south trailhead.

Please note the south trailhead is a little more obscure to find since recent grading of the McAfee Canyon Road makes it very hard to see the old road that comes off of it that we follow for the first 0.6 miles. A road that leads to a spring just west of our road would now be a better starting point. Please refer to the Piper Peak USGS map and to the GPS waypoints recorded on this trip.

Other than noting the difficulty of finding the trailhead for people not familiar with it, the first day was a breeze. At one saddle we could observe apparent past Indian activity, with lots of chert and obsidian fragments present. There were great flowers including penstemon, phlox, mallow and lupine. We hiked up to Piper Peak, noting all the waypoints as we passed them. The views are still spectacular. We spent hours sunning ourselves on the rocks above Icehouse Canyon before repairing to our campsite on a small dry lake just below the summit. The wind had picked up and it was a little chilly that night, not unexpected at 9,200 feet.

The next morning we proceeded down a ridge to the headwall of Jeff Davis Canyon. We soon were in heavy pinion woodland. However, it was relatively easy going to get to Jeff Davis Spring. The flow here was light but reliable and we filled up our water containers. After an extended break at this pleasant spot we headed down canyon. Spencer Berman came across two circular rock shelters, one with a collapsed pinion log roof. We also found a small corral built with rocks and very rough pinion logs.

Jeff Davis Canyon is extremely beautiful. The narrows and the slot made a great resting place, though we started getting a lot of mosquitoes there. From there we dropped into Blind Spring Canyon proper and continued past gorgeous walls of various volcanic composition. We also spotted an unusually colored rattlesnake, orange, beige

and cream colored. Past the Pipe Spring Canyon cutoff we spooked a beautiful burro that watched us for about 2 hours while we set up camp and relaxed. Other than some persistent mosquitoes it was a very nice site.

The next day we lost an hour trying to find Spencer, who inadvertently hiked past us. After verifying he was not behind, the rest of us moved down canyon, where we found Spencer waiting for us. We continued to get great flowers. We got to the mouth of Blind Spring Canyon and we could see our landmark hillock 3 miles away across Fish Lake Valley. In that span you get to cross a lot of vegetation zones. Highlights included blooming silver cholla on the bajada, and desert dandelions. We took a final rest on some dunes before trudging the final mile across the very soft soil of a dry lake.

At our north trailhead at “The Crossing” we were met by Jerry Goss, who plied us with beer and chips. He set up a shade structure for us and we took a long time to sip our beers. In the meantime, I passed the GPS unit and battery packs on to Jerry. We then headed to Fish Lake Valley Hot Springs for a nice soak. Afterwards 3 hikers went home and Spencer continued on.

[Continue On To Segments D, E, F, G.](#)



Desert Survivors NV Desert Trail Dispatches

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DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

This page contains Segments D, E, F, G.

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment D - Volcanic Hills

May 8-9, 2004

By Steve Tabor

This was the first of four Desert Trail segments in a row for me. Hot then cold then hot then muggy then just right was the way it would go in typical “unsettled” Nevada Spring weather. In the Volcanic Hills, the state’s continuing early heat wave was the culprit.

The of us met at the North Trailhead on U.S. Route 6. Jerry Goss was also there to provide fresh GPS units and help with the car shuttle. One of our projects on the Relay is to record the entire route on map-loaded GPS units so the information can be downloaded to a computer program. This will allow accurate mileages and an accurate tracing of the route. We drove to the South Trailhead in Fishlake Valley and waved goodbye to Jerry. Then we were off to the hills.

We stopped at Fishlake Hot Springs briefly while I told stories of construction and temperatures and itchy genital rashes of the past. No one got into the water so we moved on. We crossed the outwash plain to the base of the hills under clear skies with hardly any breeze. It was 86 F. when we got to our lunch spot. On our 1997 reconnaissance we’d seen many flowers on this part of the route. In this hot Spring there were hardly any, but the number of lizards made up for it.

We hiked up a shallow canyon to the crest of the hills, taking shade when we could. I was seriously compromised by the attitude and slowed down several times to catch my breath. We topped out at a wide saddle with abundant signs of Native-American presence, mostly chips and flakes of obsidian. The top of the South Volcanic Hills is a broad plateau with long views, classic desert. I pressed the group to continue to the crest, but a cooling breeze came up and we were all tired. We camped below the crest in a patch of tall four-wing saltbush. Our bed was soft pumice spewed out from Inyo Craters near Mammoth six hundred years ago.

On the second day, we rose to the crest for a view of the White Mountains, then dropped to State Highway 773. We crossed to a small spring showing on the map at the base of the colorful North Volcanic Hills. Though flowing in 1997 this spring was now dry. There was no sign of any water; a good thing I’d told everyone to fill up. Later we crossed the North Hills under beautiful cream- and red- and grey- and black-colored volcanic rock. This was joy to walk over. We rose to the crest of the North Hills and ate lunch at the top.

On the other side we found a huge game “guzzler”, newly-constructed. The metal catchment was 30 feet by 45 feet, emptying into four huge tanks measuring five feet by twelve feet. Water in the tanks was two feet deep. This

was new since our 1997 visit. We found a single set of bighorn scat and tracks near the “guzzler”, plus those of deer. It’s hard to believe that bighorn will prosper in the small area of the Volcanic Hills, which are low in stature. Someone in Nevada Fish and Game has ambitious dreams.

In the afternoon, we hiked out of the hills to the cars. We had some hot times at our last rest stop in the canyon when the temperature reached 80 F. On the walk down the alluvial fan, those of us continuing on got to see ahead to the next segment of the Relay, where the Columbus Dry Lake beckoned. The group then returned to the South Trailhead for a welcome dip in the cool pool at Fishlake Springs.

This trip was a good warm-up for the next two segments, which would be done by a quartet of us staying on through the week. Those stories are below.

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment E - Columbus-Candelaria

May 10-12, 2004

By Steve Tabor

Steve Perry, Lasta Tomasevich and Gary Whiteley accompanied me on the next two Relay trips. These folks, all veteran Survivors, proved to be the mainstays of my four segments, as Robert Armstrong, Spencer Berman and Bruce Loeb had been on the first three. On the segments, resiliency, perseverance and a willingness to experience hardship (what the British explorers called “privation”) would be the keys to success, for we had lots of surprises.

Columbus Dry Lake, a rectangle six miles square, occupies most of its valley. Our crossing started innocently enough. We’d set up Gary’s truck at the North Trailhead the night before, so we could get an early start. It was seven miles across to the first shelter, the ghost town of Columbus. It was warm at the beginning, already 68 F. at 8:05 am. Soon little plumes of cloud appeared over the hills to the northwest and a little breeze kicked up. By 10:00, already three miles in, we were hiding behind our packs, out on bare playa, under winds of 25 mph with gusts to 40.

We continued on north, directly into the wind, as it shot up to 30 mph. First the hills were obscured by swirling dust, then the playa itself. On our next run it was clear that we were exhausting ourselves by hiking into the wind, so I headed for the only shelter I could see, some large greasewood bushes — at least they seemed large on the flat dust-shrouded playa with no landmarks. By the greasewood were bulldozer scoops with three-foot mounds on the windward side. I called a halt there and we laid down behind the mounds while the dust and stinging sand swirled around us. I was glad to be out of the wind’s full force, barely able to stand against it, much less walk in it.

We were pinned down behind the mound for three hours. Gary and I just lay behind our packs with our faces to the lee and eyes closed. At one point the wind dropped and Lasta and Steve wanted to continue on to some sand dunes a mile and one-half away. They said the choking dust was getting in their nostrils and eyes and we would have better shelter in the dunes. I thought that unlikely and anyway it was futile to even try to move into the wind. They solved their problem by pitching a tent and getting in it, using their bodies to hold it down.

By 1:30 pm, the wind had shifted 90 degrees to blow from the west. It was still strong, but was now blowing sideways across our line of travel. The dust had mostly dropped, so we could see where we were going. We hiked across the crunchy playa then the sand. We rested in the dunes for awhile, mostly out of the wind. We then did the final crossing to the ghost town of Columbus. I knew we could use the shelter of the buildings for a windless camp, but the dreariness of the trashed cabins and vandalized grounds was not inspiring. The wind dropped further, so we turned west on the route to hike up a jeep trail. We camped at 5:05 pm at a low pass, just below some outcrops that provided shelter. We watched cloud shadows on the playa and the Monte Cristo Mountains beyond, then went to bed early.

The next day was sunny, but we still had to hide from the cold wind. There were good flowers in the Candelaria Hills and good lizards too. In the afternoon we crossed the hills to a low pass, then continued west. In late afternoon it began to cloud up and the wind intensified. It looked like we were in for it again so we hurried on. We saw an antelope on a flat near “Pink Cone”, a prominent granite outcrop on the route. The flat below the cone, which had been filled with sheaves of Indian ricegrass in 1999 when I visited, was now mostly Russian thistle, probably trashed by wild horses.

When we got to “Pink Cone”, we could see huge stratocumulus squalls engulfing the Excelsior Mountains to the north, with snow flurries, and we could hear thunder. There was no shelter from the wind, so we headed downstream in a canyon toward some high walls. We found shelter behind a vertical wall of white rhyolite. No wind! Pecked into the wall were petroglyphs, which I hadn’t seen on the reconnaissance. In our zeal to find shelter, these paled into insignificance.

We ate dinner, then once again bedded down early. In the twilight some graupel (soft hail) fell from the stratocumulus, hardly enough to dent our tents. This was the only precipitation we recorded in nine days.

After a cold night (35 F.) we set off early in the morning. It was 39 F. when we left. We hiked back up to the route, then across the hills to Gary’s truck, all of it in a brisk breeze. I never took off my long johns. We drove back to the South Trailhead, arriving at 11:00 am. Gary and I spent the rest of the day warming up and reminiscing, while Lasta and Steve drove to Tonopah to do laundry, take a shower and have a hot meal.

This segment tested our mettle, for sure. We carried too much water, a gallon extra each, and I was underclothed with too light a sleeping bag. Much of the hiking was a fight against cold winds and breezes. I was glad the segment was over, but the next segment would tax us in a different way.

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment F - Teels Marsh

May 13-14, 2004

By Steve Tabor

By Thursday, May 13, the weather had toned down quite a bit. We set up cars at the North Trailhead near Marietta, then drove to the South Trailhead on Highway 360 to start. We were on the trail by 10:00 am. This would be a short two-day trip, a lot of miles but mostly flat. It was also a light water carry because of abundant springs on the route.

We started down a wash moving west toward the first of the water sources, German Spring. This was a delightful cruise. We moved rapidly, taking a rest stop halfway. Lasta the yoga master did loosening up exercises and a headstand to show us how it’s done. I cringed when I thought of liability, but Steve stood close by to hold her in case she fell over. The weather was pleasant with only a light breeze. We ate lunch under clear skies with long views north over Teels Marsh to the Excelsior Mountain front. On this trip we brought umbrellas to shade ourselves since there was little shelter in the valley.

In the afternoon, we hiked to German Spring, which has an intact cabin and a small pool. Steve found a rattlesnake under the cabin near the door. A blue truck bed mounted on blocks was in the same place it had been in May 1997 on my first visit. Lasta was unnerved by the cowcamp and its derelict condition. I told her it was one of the cleaner ones I’d seen in my thirty years of travel in the West.

Later we walked the road to Company Spring with its large pool of clear water. Someone had put carp in the pool, but it was otherwise unchanged. An old burro came by, obviously miffed that we’d usurped the water. Our swim in the pool was delightful. Air temperature was 80 F., water was 73 F.

We reached Rock House Spring by 6:00 am. This was another easy walk. The rock house was still intact, a roofless four-walled cabin with beautifully fitted stone blocks. There was no water at the rock house, but someone had built a small pool nearby, where three of us supplemented our supply. Travertine mounds on the hills above were loaded with flowers, mostly shooting stars, a species usually found in high mountains. We bedded down at nightfall, swatting pesky gnats, endemic in this valley because of the burros. This is the center of the BLM’s *Marietta Wild Burro Range*, one of only two nationwide.

In the morning we hiked up over the range of low hills to the north. This part of the route was difficult because my guidebook did not contain adequate information and the trend of the ridges and canyons was confusing. We found our way with careful map and GPS work. If you don’t pick the right canyon here, you’ll end up 90 degrees off course in a different part of the valley. In the revised guidebook, I’ll add a couple of check stations to clarify the route.

We dropped into the canyon to the north on a beautiful burro trail, checking out several springs along the way. We rested at the mouth of the canyon under our umbrellas, then continued north to a row of sand dunes ringing

the Teels Marsh playa. Resting there, we continued directly north to “Northwest Pool” at the northwest corner of the playa. This I remembered from my first visit in 1986. It’s a bit more grown in from the sides with cattails and rushes, but the water is still good. We dipped our jugs here, then swam a bit. The bottom was so mucky that I didn’t stay in. The high temperature was 82 F., so the 70 F. water sure felt refreshing. We’d walked a lot of crunchy playa to get there, so we took advantage of the rest and umbrella shade.

In the afternoon, we crossed the north side of the valley on alluvial fans, more or less directly to the cars. I’d miscalculated the position of “Northwest Pool” so I took us too far north. We missed the last spring on the playa edge, which is now fenced. We could see it from a long way off. No matter — at 84 F., we were in a hurry to get to the end of the route. The only treats for us on the last part of the walk were several more sightings of wild burros and some evidence of flash flooding on the fan — one a wash of red soil, the other, a mess of granitic rocks, sand and driftwood. We made it to the cars by 4:30 pm.

The four of us returned to the North Trailhead for a celebration of our making it through five days of hardship together, then Gary left for home. Steve, Lasta and I moved on to Mina where the two of them treated me to a dinner in honor of my work on the Desert trail and on the trips. We called the leaders of the next two batches of segments to touch base and announce our success thus far, then retired to a camp outside Mina where we would prepare for the final segment of the four. It was a great camp, quiet and peaceful. We’d need the rest and energy we’d regain for the 2800-foot climb up the Excelsior Mountains on the next two days.

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment G - Excelsior Mountains

May 15-16, 2004

By Steve Tabor

Four more hikers met Steve, Lasta and me in Mina for the Excelsior Mountains Segment hike. We set up a car shuttle on Garfield Flat, then drove to the start point near Marietta where the three of us had left off the afternoon before. The four newbie's had never backpacked with the Survivors before so it promised to be an interesting two days.

The Excelsior route starts in the desert and advances into the trees to an elevation of 7780'. It was muggy when we started hiking at 11:00 am. The sky was covered with Altocumulus and thick Cirrostratus. It “looked like rain” and but the moisture was evaporating as quickly as it fell. The weather mostly translated into sweat as we hiked up the fan. This was a benefit. We didn’t need our umbrellas.

We found good flowers and plenty of lizards in “Trail Canyon”, our entrance into the mountains. We were followed up by a young man and a small boy on four-wheelers (“quads”) with buckets on the back. They were hunting lizards, seeking to capture them for sale to pet shops. They’d already captured five or six by the time they’d reached us. I noted the blythe spirit with which the ten-year-old boy drove right over the numerous rabbitbrush plants growing in the wash. This jeep trail had been little traveled since our reconnaissance in 1998 and the plants were coming back quite nicely, until now.

We spotted a beautiful collared lizard in the wash. Steve captured it and held it up so we could photograph it. Luckily it did not bite him and hang on like the angry specimen Pierre Edwards had picked up in Death Valley in March. After examining it, we chased it into the bushes so our compatriots downstream wouldn’t get it. They must have been lazy because we ate lunch a mile up the canyon for an hour and they never showed up.

As the afternoon wore on, we were treated to one of those great post-storm periods of cool breezes and fractured cumulus as the cloud cover broke up. Some “storm”! Our hiking was up a pebbly wash under temperatures that barely reached 80 F. We passed a great old mine shack, still intact (not burned down) since 1998 (and probably forty years before). We checked out the old corral at Mile 4.4. It was actually above wash level, necessitating a revision in the guidebook. Lasta did some work alleviating the girdling of some juniper trees by the barbed wire fence. By Mile 5.0 we were in the trees, relaxing in the shade. This part of the route was free of the wheel tracks that we’d noted in 1998; it was going back to the wild.

We knocked off early at Mile 5.6, having come up almost 2000 feet from the valley floor. This was the camp I’d envisioned, with smooth beds for tents and sleeping pads, under and behind tall trees for shade from the afternoon sun. The route gets steep just above and nobody wanted to do it, including me. We’d save that work for the

morning. We spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing, chatting and swatting the gnats that had followed us up from the *Marietta Wild Burro Range* below. After sixty-six miles of desert, it seemed so strange to be in the trees. I was lulled to sleep by breezes in the pines. It was a little bit of mountain heaven on this long Desert Trail.

In the morning we did a long uphill on a steep eroded bulldozer track. We rose quickly. The track ended at 7700', where we found the old U.S. Army trail that once linked Mina and Marietta. This was a great old Sierra-style hiking trail with a solid tread and an easy gradient. By 10:00 am we'd reached the pass at 7780', where we rested, then we hiked east across the beautiful gassy swale that extends across the crest for nearly a mile. This is surrounded by dense pinyon woods growing on tall ridges. It's grown to rabbitbrush, sagebrush and tall wild rye. This was a joy to walk, because it is so unique, so different from anything else on the DT.

At the east end, we dropped down a horse trail, probably the wrong one because we ended up in the woods without a tread and had to hike downstream. Later we found the trail again and hiked it down to "Lion Spring", so called because we'd seen mountain lion tracks before. There was water here, though only a trickle. We replenished our supply. We spent some time watching birds: grosbeaks, juncos, house finches, flickers and towhees, even a robin.

The rest of the route was a long walk down a jeep trail, downcanyon to Garfield Flat. The day was cool and breezy. We stopped at Pepper Spring to check out the water, then hiked down into the valley where our cars were waiting. Craig Deutsche, leader for the next two segments, was there too. We drank cold drinks and Steve drew up a proclamation in honor of our accomplishment — 75 miles on the Desert Trail. It was signed by all the participants and presented to me. We put it in a water bottle and installed it in the trailhead cairn to be marveled at by all who pass through here on the Desert Trail forevermore. Then we scrambled to get everybody back into their cars and on their way to new beginnings.

Steve and Lasta remained with Craig to do the next two segments. Their plan was to continue on with Dave Holten and Grant Blocher on the following two as well. That will make 170 miles for each of them. Steve is planning to continue even farther. You'll read about those adventures in subsequent dispatches.

Meanwhile the GPS record goes on. It will be interesting to see what the Trail looks like and what its true mileages are. Watch this space for more dispatches soon.

[Continue On To Dispatches H, I, J, K](#)



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DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

This page contains Segments H, I, J, K.

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment H – Garfield Hills

May 17-19, 2004

By Craig Deutsche

There were three participants on this section of the Desert Trail in addition to myself: Steve Perry and Lasta Tomasevich had been hiking for nine days previously and continued on for this and the next section. Lori Bledsoe arrived from Houston via a rental car, which she picked up in Las Vegas, and I (Craig Deutsche) had driven from Los Angeles. The guidebook was very good for this section, and curiously our only uncertainty was in spotting the cars for the shuttle.

We left a car at the north trailhead exactly as the guidebook suggested – somewhat off of highway 95 about a mile northwest from the town of Luning. When we later picked up the car one of the residents across the street mentioned that he had nearly called the sheriff to report an abandoned vehicle. He recommended telling someone living nearby about the vehicle and suggested leaving the car instead at the rather large truck parking area in Luning. He felt the car would be safer there and that the post office could be informed.

The walk on the first day was largely across a flat lakebed and then a short distance into a canyon. Mercifully the sky was partly clouded. The distance was 8.5 miles. On the second day we took the recommended detour to climb Mable Peak. Although there was something of a radio antenna on the summit, we built a cairn and left a register indicating the Desert Trail with a first entry by Desert Survivors. The trip then turned into one rather long day to reach our spotted car. Steve and Lasta, who had been walking ten consecutive days, were hoping for a layover day, and if we pushed a bit, then there would, indeed, be a day between the sections H and I for some recovery. While it was never consciously planned this way, the group just kept walking. When we were wondering about making a camp the car was only two miles away, and so we finished the trip in two days instead of three.

The high point of the trip, literally and figuratively, came between Mable Peak and the descent into what had been named “Mine Canyon.” The route traveled about two miles along a high ridge with wonderful views in all directions. Largely we were following old horse trails along this section. The descent from the ridge, according to the guidebook, is marked by a cairn, some trash, two old tires, and an immense pile of horse manure. Everything was exactly as expected except that the horseshit was gone. We respectfully submit to Steve Tabor that organic trail signs are not entirely reliable. Of more interest, however, were the old mine, which lies about half a mile north of the ridge. The rest of the day was entirely downhill. In all we covered 13 miles in 11 hours.

Perhaps it should be reported that the layover day was spent variously. Steve and Lasta did washing, shopping, and eating in Hawthorne. Lori accompanied them. I drove to the Berlin-Icthyosaur Park north and east of Gabbs for sightseeing. In all, the hike went very smoothly.

Pictures from Desert Trail Segment H – Garfield Hills

[Picture 1: Three hikers: Lasta, Steve, Lori](#)

[Picture 2: Desert Trail pennant on Mable Peak](#)

Dispatch from Desert Trail Segment I – Gabbs Valley Range

May 20-23, 2004

By Craig Deutsche

This segment of the Desert Trail also had three participants in addition to myself: Steve Perry, Lasta Tomasevich, and Bob Ellis. Lori Bledsoe returned to Las Vegas after the previous segment.

As on the previous segment, the matter of spotting a car at the end of the route proved to be rather interesting. When we left a car at the north trailhead (the road east from 361 to Rawhide) we happened to meet a lady along the road who was owner of the Diamond A ranch. Her name was Dama. She suggested that we leave the car on her property about 1.0 miles farther west and 0.2 miles north (on another dirt road). She felt it would be safer there – “you don’t know what some of the teenagers might do.” She and her husband had been raising alfalfa for two years but found the soil to be too saline and were giving it up. As they had water rights and a good well, their next venture was to be fish farming for tilapia. In addition they were planning to create something of a wetland for migratory birds. Who knows, the next travelers on the Desert Trail may find gourmet dining east of Gabbs.

Along the route over the Gabbs Valley Range there were some uncertain moments in navigation, although we never lost the trail. The first day was somewhat warm going across Soda Lake Valley. We began at the truck parking flat in Luning and crossed 361 only a mile or two before entering Sphinx Canyon. We camped at about mile 8.0 between the Sphinx and Two-tone Peak. This was about the last convenient camping place with some flat ground before going into the narrower canyon near Banks Spring. There was, indeed, a bit of water here, but it was only a trickle and probably should not be considered reliable.

In the second day we traveled to a camp about a quarter mile south of Redrock-Paint Rock pass. The climb to the pass above Petrified Canyon was not particularly difficult the guidebook was accurate and helpful. As we approached the checkpoint #8 (Fork in Petrified Canyon at mile 10.1) we had some confusion. Although the guidebook does not mention it, the road goes right and north nearly as far as the “Cliff Spring” that appears on the map. As the book notes, that spring seems not to exist on the ground. At this junction we used the GPS rather carefully to determine which of the various drainages on the right was correct. The subsequent route to Ferguson pass was clear. Bob and I (only) climbed the ridge to peak 7946, and we left the register there with a note indicating that (1) this was not Ferguson Peak, and (2) if someone else later goes on to Ferguson Peak please take this register along and plant it correctly. We left this register in a cairn that is quite visible, so it seems likely that it will be found, and perhaps forwarded to the main peak. We simply didn’t have time to make the hike and still make sufficient progress along the Desert Trail for the day. The route from Ferguson Pass to the “Fork near Redrock Narrows, checkpoint #11” was clear. We did not scout Redrock Spring and don’t know if there was water or not. The route from there to our camp was reasonably clear, although we did use the GPS to confirm our position.

On the third day we traveled to checkpoint #16, detoured to get water at Paint Rock Spring, and then continued about one mile beyond Ants’ Pass where we camped. Paint Rock Spring had a great deal of water. There were some cows, but the water was not badly trashed.

The fourth day was an easy 7.0 miles down Superstition Canyon and we reached the car by 11 AM. Steve and Lasta made plans for shopping and a (real) meal before meeting the next group for segment J. Bob and I started driving for home.

This section of the Desert Trail is truly delightful. It winds through washes, follows ridges, and crosses two passes. Views are good, there is water in the middle of the third day, and only one section requires a significant ascent.

Pictures from Segment I, Gabbs Valley

[1. Bitter Root](#)

[2. Black Hills Ahead](#)

[3. Brushy Canyon](#)

[4. Soda Spring Valley](#)

[5. South From Ferguson Pass](#)

[6. Testing The Weather](#)

[7. Water At Paint Rock Springs](#)

[Continue On To Read Segment L and On.](#)



Desert Desert Survivors NV Desert Trail Dispatches

This page will have the dispatches from the Desert Relay as they are sent in from the Trip Leaders.

DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

This page contains Segments L.

DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

Segment L: Wonder
May 29-31, 2004

By Steve Tabor

Three of us hiked the Wonder route from the segment's South Trailhead on U.S. Route 50 to the North Trailhead in Dixie Valley. Jerry Goss met us on Route 50 to help with the car shuttle. Jerry had also picked up the GPS unit used by Grant Blocher and David Serviss on the Burnt Hills Segment. It's been great to have this kind of support from Jerry and Dave Holten at the trailheads.

Bob Flett, Laszlo Nadasdi and I left U.S. 50 in a chill north wind under skies dotted with little cumulus clouds. It had rained in the wee hours then stopped near dawn. It had also rained the previous morning while hikers were doing the Burnt Hills Segment. That was the first rain of the Relay, on its twenty-ninth day. The only other precipitation were a few falls of soft hail on May 11. Relay hikers have been fortunate on that score. We were happy for the storm, for it dropped daytime temperatures to a comfortable level.

Our hike was mostly on jeep trails and roads. The early heat in March had prevented flowers from sprouting, giving us mostly dry ground on the valley crossing near Chalk Mountain, a distinct change from the waves of orange mallow I'd recorded on the initial reconnaissance in 1998. We stopped for an hour and hiked around the mine dumps on Chalk Mountain. There were several shafts, an old loading chute, and several dumps with colorful mineralized rock, some of the best I've seen. We hiked 9.6 miles on the first day and camped near a game guzzler just below Badger Flat. The guzzler had water, but a lot of algae. There was good needlegrass and grama grass all around the hills there.

On the second day, we rose to Badger Flat and hiked across it on the old Wonder Road. Laszlo and I looked for the miners' cemetery that shows on the topo map but saw no trace of it. If it's there, the graves must be unmarked. Flowers under the pinyons in the canyon were fair. We dayhiked to the back side of Wonder Mountain for lunch and a look at the Wonder Mine, which is now an open pit. No trace of the "2000-foot shaft" that produced Wonder millions of dollars of silver. Some off-roaders had set up camp at the site of the old mill and spent most of the afternoon "plinking", taking potshots at cans. It was an annoyance. We met one who said that his grandfather had worked the mine so the family comes back every Memorial Day for a reunion.

In the afternoon we hiked down Hercules Canyon on a jeep trail. This one had been bladed sometime since 1998. It turned out to be bladed all the way to Dixie Valley Road, wrecking any semblance of wild country in the canyon. No indication who did it or why, but it was a lot of work and doubtless cost some money. In 1998, the road was so bad that I'd gotten stuck with my 4WD, but it's now a thoroughfare that even passenger cars could use. We were buzzed by more off-roaders in the canyon. One of them asked if we needed any help and if we'd "yet discovered the wheel". I refrained from remarking that

people who just drive around and won't hike are "sissies" who are too lazy get out on their own two feet as God intended. The dude was a jovial sort; I think he could have handled my sentiments after his "wheel" remark, but I couldn't be sure.

Taking the hint of other hikers on this year's Relay, we camped early. When the sun dropped, I hiked up a side canyon for a couple of hours while Bob and Laszlo rested in the shade. It was a cool and pleasant hike on easy pebble wash. I was daydreaming as I strolled and almost stepped on a beautiful rattlesnake stretched across the wash. He didn't rattle; probably all of his ancestors who had were killed for rattling. This canyon and its environs saw intensive human use in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. I got to within one mile of the ridgecrest, then turned back, arriving at our camp at almost full dark. It was a beautiful little canyon, a joy to walk after the roads.

In the morning, we hiked out Hercules Canyon on the hardpack bladed road. It turned hot while we did so. We ate lunch in the shade below the cutbank that defines Dixie Valley Wash. We got to the cars at Noon. Jerry Goss was waiting for us with cold drinks.

This was an easy hike, but the hardpack roads were hard on our feet. It would have been easier to hike on horse trails or cross-country, but roads pre-empted the route practically everywhere. This was a great hike for lizards and snakes. We saw two gopher snakes and at least seven kinds of lizards. Lizard sightings were about ten per hour, giving us about 165 individuals for the trip. I'm glad they're all out there.

I've looked at the topo maps and may change the route from Hercules Canyon to the ridge line and the side gulch I walked on the second day. Hercules has a couple of interesting old mine sites, but the route could use a change of pace to get away from some of that road walking. A wash-walk in the lower canyon may also help break the monotony of the road.

That's not a problem that Bob Lyon will have in the Stillwaters.

[Continue On Here To Read Segments M_P](#)



Desert Survivors NV Desert Trail Dispatches

This page will have the dispatches from the Desert Relay as they are sent in from the Trip Leaders.

DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

This page contains Segments M-P.

DISPATCH FROM THE 2004 NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY

Segment M-P

June 04-12, 2004

By Bob Lyon

DISPATCH _ LAST NEVADA DESERT TRAIL RELAY SEGMENTS M-P Day 1, June 4-5. David Serviss drove Skip Smith, a retired dentist from Oregon, Bruce Loeb, a classical musician from Berkeley, and myself, Bob Lyon, aging trip leader, to the trailhead in Dixie Valley. We arrived after midnight, Saturday, June 5, threw our sleeping bags on the ground near the road and slept. By 6:00 a.m. we were on the trail with heavy packs filled with eight days worth of food and a gallon and a half of water.

After an hour I realized we were on the wrong trail headed for Coyote Canyon. We turned south across a broad alluvial fan until we reached the high gravel banks of East Lee Canyon. The detour had cost us an hour and the day promised to be hot. At 10:00 a.m. we rested at a vertical rock outcrop, which would be our only shade until late afternoon. We began to see hundreds, then thousands, of Mormon Crickets, scattering through the Arrow leafed balsamroot in our path. These crickets would be constant companions for the first three days. Late in the afternoon we reached the upper end of the canyon and turned north to begin a serious climb toward the southern peaks of the Stillwater Range. We found a trickle of water in cow tracks near Northside Spring and filled containers with silty brown water. By 5:30 p.m. we climbed to a point near Aspen Canyon Saddle and took shelter from the strong wind in a sparse Pinyon grove. Tired from the long climb we fell to sleep without ceremony.

Day 2 began with hard climb directly up the slope of Mt. Lincoln. We climbed slowly with heavy packs and left a peak register at the summit. Descending we could see our next objective, Job Peak, several miles ahead. We hiked along the bare ridge again accompanied by Mormon Crickets tumbling clumsily in front of us. We rested in a Pinyon grove where Skip used a broken branch to repair his broken pack frame. I was out of water long before we made the steep climb to Job Peak. We left another peak register beside the Sierra Club register I'd signed on a Survivor trip in 1999. The hike continued in heavy wind along the ridge until we made a steep drop on the loose talus slope into Poco Canyon. The cool, relatively clean water of Upper Poco Creek was a welcome relief. The first two days had been much harder than we had expected.

Day 3. We passed up water at Big Box Cabin to save time, since we had filled our containers at Poco Creek. A rattlesnake slid across the path near the microwave relay. Hard climb to Cox Peak, Double Peak, and Dogleg Peak. From our camp on Silver Hill we saw dust rising hundreds of feet from Dixie Valley and Carson Sink stirred by ever-present winds. It had been a better day and we felt less tired.

Day 4. We hiked down Silver Hill breaking dead branches in the thick Pinyon forest and were rewarded with a beautiful walk along the ridges. We dropped our packs and hiked down Shady Run Canyon to collect water. My water bag looked like an aquarium with a beetle and several water bugs swimming in the silty water. We continued by hiking the transition to the Wild Canyons Segment. Got lost among the trees near Poorview Peak and found our way down the canyon leading to Buffaloberry Spring in Fondaway Canyon. The spring was badly fouled by cattle. Since we still had water from our earlier stop we decided to wait to refill in Cottonwood Canyon the next morning. During our evening meal about 8:00 p.m. a light rain began. We put up two tarps. Skip had brought a large tarp and Bruce had no shelter so they shared the space. A hard wind drove rain into our shelters and blew the tarps down several times.

Day 5. By morning the rain had turned to snow and the surrounding hills were covered in white. I was up at 5:30 a.m. too wet to sleep. Bruce and Skip thought we ought to wait to see if the rain would let up. By 8:00 a.m. it was clear the rain wasn't going to stop, so we packed wet gear and set off for Cottonwood Canyon. The ground was wet and thick mud clung to our boots. So much for lightweight footwear. We started down the extremely steep drop into Cottonwood Canyon mostly sliding instead of walking. The poor footing was cause for a conference. Bruce and I had hiked Wild Canyons last August and knew we had two deep canyons to negotiate. If the rain continued our situation could become dangerous. It would be nearly impossible to climb out of the canyon on steep hillsides, which had already turned to thick goeey mud. Safety and common sense dictated turning back. We hiked in rain and mud back to Buffaloberry Spring to refill water containers and then we hiked down Fondaway Canyon to Stillwater Road. Turning back had been a highly emotional decision. I hated the idea of not finishing the route, but the risk seemed too great. By the time we reached the mouth of the canyon the rain stopped and we joked about going back. But there was now the lure of showers, dry beds and restaurant food. Skip had brought a cell phone and we managed to make several calls. I reached my wife, Mari, to tell her of our decision. She would come to pick us up in the morning. By then the sun was out and the skies showed patches of blue. We decided to continue by walking to White Cloud Canyon and hiking the North Stillwater Segment. Unknown to me Mari had called Steve Tabor, Dave Holten and Skip Smith's wife to tell them we had aborted the trip. She had also called the Churchill County Sheriff to be on the lookout for us. Fortunately the cell phone lasted long enough for another call to tell her we had decided to continue by an alternate route. We hiked along the road then across the alluvial fans to reach the ruins of Coppereid at the mouth of White Cloud Canyon before dark. The stream was running and the water was welcome. We had light rain during the night but morning dawned clear.

Day 6. We hiked through the rock pools and narrow walls of White Cloud Canyon, through thick riparian tangles to Mineshaft Spring. Bruce and I sank to our knees in water mixed with cow dung. The spring, which had seemed so pristine the year before was literally covered in cow pies. Hope the iodine works. Then we turned north on a Jeep trail and began a steady climb to the Ridgecrest. Beyond a meadow in an old burn area we camped on a knoll. Our spirits were good and we felt rejuvenated. We put up tarps again but no rain came.

Day 7 began with a 700-foot climb to White Ledge Peak. The climb seemed inconsequential compared to the climbing we'd done in the past few days. We were on the home stretch. The rest of the trip would be mostly downhill. Cowflop Spring turned out to be much cleaner than most of our water sources on the trip. We paused at an old corral made of stacked untrimmed logs and wondered how a cattle operation could have operated in so remote a place. Shortly after, we were lost in thick forest. Unable to see landforms through the trees I used the GPS for the first time to find a saddle. We were unsure if this was the correct route until we reached Muddy Spring. Beyond the spring we found a Jeep road and easy travel to Copper Kettle Creek. The creek was barely a trickle and the water tasted badly, but it was enough to wash off the grime of the past seven days. We slept under a Juniper on the bank and dreamed of creature comforts.

Day 8. We started purposely late in order to meet the greeting party. At 9:15 a.m. we were surprised to see Dave Holten walking up the wash to meet us. We talked briefly and took photographs. Dave continued walking up the wash and the three of us hiked westward toward the Carson Sink. We were preoccupied and missed the turnoff onto an old double track. Looking south I saw several moving figures about half a mile away and realized we had passed the hikers who had come out to meet us. By this time Skip was in gallop mode and far ahead. I signaled to him and we headed cross-country to reach the hikers. They had seen Bruce's orange pack and stopped to wait for us. A joyful reunion ensued. Solar shower Mari brought for us, twenty dollars. Cold beer and agave tequila to celebrate forty dollars. Hiking the Stillwater range _ priceless.

[Continue On Here To Read Segment "The End"](#)



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

Segment Q: Carson-Wildhorse
Leader Steve Tabor

May 7-9, 2005

The start of this year's Nevada Desert Trail Relay presented problems. Heavy rains had turned dirt roads and ground into a sloppy mess. Bob Flett and I met at Toulon on I-80 near Lovelock after a night of rain. We positioned Bob's car on East Road at the segment's end, then drove in my car toward the starting trailhead at the base of the Stillwater Mountains, where we'd left off the previous June on last year's relay. We never made it. My car slipped and slid on the road over Wildhorse Pass, then skidded in 6-inch mud down a particularly nasty slope on the downside. We continued on in the valley on flat slick mud until we were stopped by a running stream in a three-foot-wide, one-foot-deep channel bisecting the road. We left the car right there and hiked east over the mud toward the Desert Trail route, hoping to intersect it at Packard Wash. That would be the start of this year's relay.

We labored for three hours over slick mud that squished under our feet. The whole muddy valley was saturated with water. We usually sunk down two-three inches, except on the tops of mud hills and on the sides of running streams, where six inches was the norm. I was reminded of the Eskimos and their "seventeen words for snow". We quickly identified the different subtle conditions in various muddy substrates and modified our hiking accordingly. It was a unique experience. Squishy mud, sloppy mud, mud-dry-underneath, slick uphill, slicker downhill, cryptogam-with-silt-underneath, etc. The best footing was in the bottoms of washes (flowing or not) and on formerly hard mud-cracked playa surfaces (flooded or not). Both remained firm.

We headed for the line of sand dunes ringing the playa, where we had a cruise of relative ease on compact sand, which was heaven. We camped early and pitched our tents just in time for a heavy afternoon shower, which we mostly slept through. The sun shone brightly afterward and we thought the storm was over.

In the morning it was clouded in again. We crossed the remainder of the valley on slick mud. Packard Wash was flowing four feet deep. Judging from nearby swept-over terraces, it had been eight feet deep the day before. We ate lunch at Wildhorse Spring. In the afternoon, we backpacked up over Wildhorse Peak. A fresh series of showers with cold sharp winds hit us about two-thirds of the way up. We put on all of our rain gear, including gloves, and covered our packs. We crested the ridge at 5:00 pm, then headed down rapidly to get a camp. Each of us found a clearing barely large enough to fit a tent, but we were glad for it.

The third morning, the rain stopped long enough for us to break camp. We headed down Horsehead Canyon, which had flowing water in several places. We emerged from the canyon by 9:15 am and got to the cars at 9:45. On the way out I realized I'd been talking intensely to Bob and had completely missed seeing the game guzzler we'd recorded on the reconnaissance trip in 1999. I'd also missed the four-foot granite bedrock drop adjacent to it. Hmmm... Incipient Alzheimer's? On down the fan we began to see pieces of the guzzler: twisted aluminum chunks, rebar, shards of fiberglass. In the intervening years a flashflood had come down Horsehead and ripped the guzzler out! It had been made of metal, eight feet on a side, raised

three feet above the ground, with a tank measuring 8x4x2 feet. All gone. The four-foot drop had been filled in by fresh gravel. We'd walked right over the site and never noticed it.

Since my car was stranded on the other side of the mountain below the squishy mud slope, Bob drove me into town to get food for the next two segments. We had a celebration meal at a restaurant, then he dumped me off at Toulon and waved goodbye. I hiked into the desert, pitched my tent, and dried out my clothes and gear in bright sunshine and a dynamic fresh post-storm wind. It was a wonderful end to a wet and difficult segment.

Segment R: Humboldt Crossing

Leader Steve Tabor

May 10-11, 2005

In the morning, At-large Director Jerry Goss walked out from Toulon to greet me. Jerry is providing logistical support for the Relay this year, showing up with his vehicle to help shuttle hikers, and downloading and freshening our GPS units, with which we are documenting both route and check stations for the whole Desert Trail, as we did last year. I was glad to see him.

Later on Steven Shigley showed up at the exit, and the three of us drove in Jerry's rig to the Carson Road to get my stranded car. I was amazed to see the mudhole we slid down turned to dry ground after only three days. It's likely that the previous afternoon of sunshine and wind had done the trick. We ferried my car to the start point on East Road, then Jerry left Steven and me to our fate in the still wet valley.

The whole sky was clouded over as we started west on the south side of the Humboldt River. Our objective was to hike the desert south of the river, cross the river and the mud flats and swamps to its north, then hike sand berms and open desert on the north side of the valley to Toulon. The river was now flowing due to the recent rains, but we couldn't tell about the mud flats. If the Irrigation District was letting water down its drainage canals, we could be swamped. Nothing to do but proceed and see how far we could get. After the success of the mud crossing in Carson, I had high hopes that we could get through, unless the water was really deep and the channels had turned to quicksand.

We hiked for nine miles on the desert floor. There was some mud and we had to cross a few channels. There was nowhere for water to drain in the initial part, but after a major canal, we could see that it was serving as a drain for the rest of the desert floor. It was catching all the water, so the rest of the surface was solid. The river was accessible. Recent drought years had killed all the tamarisk south of it; we walked through easily to the place where we'd crossed on the reconnaissance trip in 2000. The river was flowing one foot deep across a series of gravel bars. Elsewhere it was deeper. Everything was working out.

I hadn't used a GPS on the original recon, so we had difficulty locating my most important check station north of the river. That was an important point, because all subsequent bearings to get across to the other side of the valley would be calculated from it. That point, "Brown Tank", turned out to be fully one-half mile off-line. We located it after some wandering around, then camped there.

As usual, the Humboldt Bottoms had great wildlife. A burro wandered into our camp. So did a coyote. Curlews called from the nearby swampy river. Pelicans flew overhead. Red-wing blackbirds were in full mating mode, calling constantly and showing off their epaulets. Three years of drought had forced the typical shore birds to abandon the lakes, but the area around the river itself was still lively.

For the rest of the crossing, we followed a straight bearing of 320 degrees to Humboldt Lake, which was dry. Its various inlets were also dry. To accurately record the mapped route for Jerry Goss, Steven and I "simulated" the route, hugging the shore "as if" the lakes were full, though we could have just strode across the valley on dry ground if we wanted to. We found our way to a critically located sand berm that rose above

the general level. This showed on the map. Then we followed an old jeep trail from there through the Humboldt State Wildlife Refuge to the north. Our last four miles near Toulon Lake were a cruise in open desert in a fresh west wind.

At the end, Steven drove me from Toulon to my car. We discovered it had been broken into. The battery had been stolen, along with all my food. We rushed into Lovelock and got to the auto parts store just as it closed. The owners let me in and sold me a battery. Twenty minutes later, we were back at my car and got it running. Steven left and I went back to town and bought enough food for the next segment. I went to the Sheriff's Station and made out a police report, then headed back out to the desert. During the night, the sky cleared off. The storms were finally over.

S: Trinity-Bluewing Segment

Leader Steve Tabor

May 12-15, 2005

On Thursday, May 12, five hikers met me at Toulon for the third Relay segment, across the Trinity Range and Granite Springs Valley. This one would be 33 miles in four days. By now the roads were dry. Jerry Goss helped us set up a car shuttle, then we were off on our hike.

The weather was delightful: sunny and warm. On the first day we crossed the remainder of Humboldt Valley amidst fresh breezes and colorful flowers. We stopped by a series of tufa towers, two of which had raptor nests made of sticks and branches. The four-day schedule allowed us frequent rests and time to look at the flowers, even "belly flowers" growing in sand and volcanic cinders. We camped in the foothills of the Trinity Range in a brushland that had been largely taken over by cheatgrass. Here and there we found native bunchgrasses, which was heartening. By the time we left camp, even the cheat grass seemed beautiful, its red seed heads waving in the wind.

We got water at a game guzzler, then headed up a canyon carved in volcanic lava and tuff. After lunch, we crossed a beautiful patch of brush and grass that was entirely native. In this place I had seen a rare cactus, Parish's club cholla, in 1999. We found it again this time, five plants. All were battered by recent drought, but still alive. They'll come back to full size, with runners along the ground three feet long like before. The pair of prairie falcons nesting at Junction Buttes were also still there, as five years ago, now joined by a hawk. We climbed 860 feet to the top of Trinity ridge and made camp on soft ground with fine views both east and west.

On the morning of Day Three, we did a dayhike along the ridge to the north, 2.5 miles to Trinity Peak (7337'). We saw several pronghorn on the hike, which was mostly a cruise along the crest, excellent "sky-walking". We also spotted a snake and several lizards, finally out now that it was sunny. After enjoying the view fifteen miles west to the Sahwawe Range, we placed a peak register and returned to camp. Two of our hikers, Stacy Goss and Spencer Berman, would be doing the next segment over there, so getting that view was especially inspiring for them.

In the afternoon, we dropped steeply down off the south side of the ridge to Lowry Well, the most important natural spring in the area. We reached it at 2:20 pm and proceeded to dip and pump water. The well had filled in quite a bit since I'd first visited in 1998. It needs some work. Algae was growing in full sunlight, so we had to be careful while dipping and filtering. With another gallon or two each, we headed out west toward the sunset.

It was still 15 miles to the cars. We hiked six of them in what was left of the afternoon. It was difficult hiking directly into the broiling sun, but we managed. We had a great camp far out in the valley, surrounded by open space and a dynamic sky full of Altocumulus clouds. Burros and pronghorn were all around us, both evening and morning. Coyotes howled. After the trains and roads of the Humboldt, the silence and peace of

this valley were a blessing.

The next day we started early to hike the final nine miles. A lot of the valley was grown to untrampled cryptogamic soil, but some ground had taken a beating from sheep grazing; only old tufts of native Indian ricegrass attested to a grassland in the pre-sheep days. We hiked directly west toward a PVC pipe “tower” that Dave Holten and I had erected in 2003 to guide hikers in and tell them when to change their bearing from west to northwest. Sure enough, it was there, right where we’d left it at Mile 29.8. It had lost its pretty pink ribbons and was leaning over in the wind, but it had withstood the test of time, testimony to the power of engineering.

We reached the cars at 1:30 pm. Jerry came out to meet us. It had been a great hike under big wide skies on mostly dry ground. None of the route is formal Wilderness, but it sure felt like Wilderness to us. Like lots of Nevada, the land was largely empty of humans and full of wildlife.

Four of us left the trailhead, but Stacy and Spencer would be back to do Bob Lyon’s three hikes and would carry the Survivors’ Desert Trail pennant forward. Watch this space for more dispatches from the Desert Trail as we continue northward.



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

The Kumiva Sections

Leader Bob Lyon

Sahwawe Range, Desert Trail Segment T

5/16/05 Sunday. It's 11:00 p.m. before I pick up Lawrence Wilson in San Francisco. Talk about dedication to the Desert Trail! Lawrence has flown 6,000 miles from Brighton, U.K., the day before in order to hike several of the DT sections. We stop about 45 minutes to sleep sitting up at a roadside rest, then drive through the night to the Toulon exit near Lovelock, Nevada.

5/17/05 Monday, 5:30 a.m. I throw my bag on the ground despite a light rain. Lawrence prefers the cramped front seat of the Jeep. At 7:30 a.m. we drive to Lovelock for gas and a breakfast sandwich from McDonalds. When we return to the meeting place Kevin Kingma and Jerry and Stacy Goss are waiting. We wait briefly for Francisco Santos, but at 9:30 Kevin and I follow Jerry on the very muddy Ragged Top Road to the trailhead where we meet Spencer Berman.

Jerry drives Spencer to the shuttle end point. An icy wind is blowing so hard it's difficult to stand. Dark clouds threaten a downpour and it looks like a bad start. We begin hiking about 11:00 a.m. into the wind toward the Sahwawe Range. When we reach the fault scarp at the mouth of Bob Spring Canyon, Lawrence suggests we stop for lunch. No sooner have we dropped our packs than the rain begins to pour and changes quickly to hail. Since we can't eat lunch in the hail we hike up canyon until there's a break in the weather. Rain and hail continue throughout the afternoon. We put rain gear on, then take it off, then put it on again. The canyon turns into a series of dry falls, which require climbing hand over hand. I'm very tired from little sleep and Lawrence has turned pale and is feeling queasy. Later we attribute this to mild altitude sickness, since he's made the jump from near sea level in England to over 7,000 feet in one day.

By late afternoon we reach the upper end of the canyon on the flank of Juniper Mountain, the highest peak in the Sahwawe Range. We had hoped to place a Desert Trail peak register on the summit but it requires another 1,300 feet of climbing and darkness will overtake us before we can get back. But mostly we're exhausted from climbing in the rain and hail all day.

We round the ridge below the peak, then drop into a valley hiking to "Cutbank Spring." The water is less than appetizing, so we leave and hike up the valley to a stand of Junipers and make camp. Five of us huddle behind a large Juniper for a shield from the relentless wind. As soon as dinner is done, and before dark, all of us are under shelter to sleep. A light rain falls during the night.

5/17/05 Tuesday. I'm still tired and sleep late. The sky is dark but the wind has calmed. We begin hiking about 9:00 a.m. climbing up the narrowing canyon to a spur below the ridge. There are great views to the east toward Granite Springs Valley. If anyone feels badly about missing the climb to Juniper Peak, it isn't mentioned. Our route is cross-country skirting jagged rock outcrops below the ridge. We climb Peak 2259, which is not on the route, but gives impressive us views of the Selenite Mountains and Kumiva Valley to the west. Kumiva Peak in the Selenite

Range seems impossibly steep. To the north we can see our next objective, Black Mountain in the Bluewing Range. Below to the west we see an inviting cabin tucked into a canyon.

We head down toward a water source Steve Tabor calls "Big Bank Spring." A water seep comes from the canyon amidst willows trampled with hoof prints of burros and cattle. Kevin pumps water from a small pool that appears relatively free of hoof prints as we stop for lunch. Nearby is the real "Big Bank Spring," a shallow pool several feet in diameter. A blood filled burro hoof depression along the side of the pool discourages us from taking water.

We leave the canyon and follow a contour at an elevation of about 5,600 feet and try to identify Steve Tabor's landmarks, "Spooky Tooth," "Embayment", "Tower," and "Capitol Rock." His description of the rock he renamed "The Tower" is particularly puzzling until we are well beyond it.

We pass by Capitol Rock and finally reach a crest between two peaks that Steve Tabor calls "North Pass" and begin the descent into the valley. In the distance 1,200 feet below can see Jerry's and Spencer's trucks at the Juniper Pass Trailhead. We hike in a broad wash and meet Jerry Goss hiking toward us over a low hill. When we reach the cars Jerry offers cold beer and chips with salsa - a real treat since the day has warmed up considerably. We retrieve my jeep from the Granite Springs Valley Trailhead and say goodbye to Kevin Kingma who has to return to work the next day.

Back at the Juniper Pass Trailhead amid budsage, shadscale, and hopsage, Jerry has prepared a delicious dinner of spaghetti with black olives, bread and salad. Sure beats trail food! Cloud cover was dark but we had only a brief sprinkle during the night.

Black Mountain, Desert Trail Segment U

5/18/05 Wednesday. Today we'll do the Black Mountain ascent. The approach seems wrong. The peak rises sharply to the west, but the hike is north along the west side of the Sahwave Range. The weather is cool and overcast as we hike two hours up the gradual slope of the wash. Finally our course turns sharply left. The Black Mountain Segment is rated moderate so we don't expect the climb to be difficult, but it is an imposing peak that looms darkly above us. The grade gets steeper as we get closer.

After a steep climb we stop for lunch on the ridge of a spur. The Tabor route is clearly defined and will turn north as we ascend. But we have a peak register to place on the mountain and I decide to alter our course to take us directly west to the peak rather than winding northwesterly and backtracking south to the summit. We wind around the south flank of a lesser peak then climb the steep spine on the north side of the mountain. I am, not surprisingly, the last to reach the top where Spencer Berman and Stacy Goss are trying to re-erect an old wooden antenna. No sooner do they have it in place than it falls to the ground. We write our names in the peak register and survey the Kumiva Valley below, looking back over the Sahwave range where we spent the last two days. The wind is very strong and makes walking difficult so we don't linger on the peak, but descend around the west side of the next peak and walk along the ridge of the Bluewing Mountains. The wind is constant and dust storms rage on the playas below us to the east and west.

In two hours we see a patch of green in a saddle that marks our way out to the playa below. There are three springs in the canyon with water at each one. The first is a patch of light colored grass with a seep of water trickling down canyon. We read in the guidebook of better water below so we move on. The canyon runs due west to the flat playa of Kumiva Valley. The main spring is choked with willows. I make the mistake of trying to go down on the south side but have to bushwhack through the thickly tangled riparian undergrowth which leaves my hands bloody. The others have wisely kept to the north side of the canyon. Below the confluence we find a few small rocky pools and refill our water containers. It's a pleasant place, green and cool, with the sound of running water that's always welcome in the desert. We continue down canyon. Near the canyon mouth is another spring, not so inviting but often used by wildlife. Tracks of burros, horses, pronghorn antelope, and cattle are abundant. Just above the greenish pool of water is a hunting blind made of wire fencing with brush affixed to its sides and on top. We pass on and since the hour is late find a campsite on the sandy alluvial fan overlooking the immense Kumiva Lake playa. Clouds have dissipated but the threat of rain remains so we put up tents and tarps. The mood is more festive than the previous two nights, perhaps because the weather is clear or because we're not as tired as before. We gather in a small circle in the wash to cook and eat. Stacy thinks the wind on Black Mountain made it harder than

the Sahwawe Range, but the rest of us feel it was easier. After dark, a candle lantern serves in place of a campfire. We share stories and sip tequila. It's nearly 10:00 p.m. before we head for our sleeping bags.

5/19/05 Thursday. I wake late and can see the others having breakfast in the wash below. By the time we're hiking it's nearly 9:30 a.m. Today's hike will be eleven miles and entirely flat, mostly along the side of the dry lake. Spencer chooses to walk along the low dunes at the western shoreline while Lawrence, Stacy and I hike on the dead flat playa surface. We find a number of rocks on the surface and wonder how they got there. Were they windblown as on Death Valley's Racetrack, or is there another explanation? We find a few survey markers including one defining a range-township section corner. There is a set of wheel tracks that the map shows as the continuation of a road. At one point I look back and see Lawrence laying on the ground and wonder if I should go back to see if he's O.K. But he's resting against his pack with his legs crossed and looks comfortable so I continue and catch up with Stacy to suggest we make a lunch stop. Since our course is headed toward the shoreline she suggests we stop there. It seems logical and I agree. To the south we see a vehicle coming driving through the low hills that border the playa. In the distance it looks like a jeep but as it gets closer we realize it is Jerry Goss. He drives onto the playa and we chat briefly then continue along the double-track to the playa edge for a lunch stop.

When Lawrence arrives he announces that we have to start taking regular breaks. At first I think he's joking, but quickly realize he's serious and not at all pleased with the trip leader. I always think Lawrence is strong as a horse and can't imagine him getting tired. Lunch is quiet. I apologize and announce we will begin taking hourly breaks. We bid goodbye to Jerry and begin hiking south to the southern extremity of the playa. Behind us the mass of Black Mountain looms like a giant, dwarfing everything below. Tomorrow we'll have a different picture.

We finally reach the south end of the playa and head due west through greasewood, budsage, and shadscale. There is a herd of burros to the south and a pair of pronghorns directly ahead. Both groups of animals watch us from the distance. The burros trot off out of sight. The pronghorns move every few minutes not allowing us to get any closer. Except for the animals the straight trek across the flat is monotonous. When we can see our trucks in the distance it seems to make the walking easier. When we reach the vehicles Jerry is again there with cold beer and chips. He makes dinner as well, pitas filled with corn and beans flavored with peppers along with a salad. I could get used to this kind of hiking. Over dinner we talk about tomorrow's climb up Kumiva Peak. It's 2,700 feet to the ridge and the steepness is abundantly clear from our vantage point. Lawrence sets his tent and I put up my tarp between trekking poles. The others sleep in their trucks.

Kumiva Peak, Desert Trail Segment V

5/19/05 Friday. We're up early today. We shuttle Spencer's truck and my Jeep to the trailhead at Kumiva Pass. The creek along the road is flowing full. Jerry reports that yesterday morning the road was impossibly muddy. But a day of sun and wind has dried the surface to make travel easy. We wait at the trailhead hoping Bob Flett will find us. Jerry says there hasn't been a car on this road all week, but this morning there are four. I think each one is going to be Bob Flett, but it's just ranchers and the road grader.

By 10:00 a.m. we decide not to wait any longer and begin the hike. It's five and a half miles to the base of the mountain before we can start climbing. At least that part should be easy. Most of the clouds have gone. It may even be hot today. Except for our first day of rain and hail in the Sahwaves the weather has been good, neither too hot, nor too cold. So many plants are in bloom, purple larkspur, blue lupine, red Indian paintbrush, and lots of smaller flowers. The mountainsides are bright yellow from the sunflower-like blooms of arrow leafed balsam root.

As we head nearly due west we begin to notice the ground is wet. Ahead a large brown object blocks our path. The steer jumps up, surprised by our intrusion, and stands in a defensive posture. I shift slightly left, a move that will cause us to miss our next waypoint. We begin to hear running water and move further south toward the sound. It's a small steady flow that's strong enough to carry sand and gravel with it. The flow is good, two to three gallons per minute. The streambed is new and shallow, not deeply eroded. The tiny creek is unexpected, not mentioned in the guidebook, but intriguing so we follow it. It leads us to the foot of the mountain. We cross a road near a parked yellow grader. Pershing County road crews have been busy since the storms arrived. We enter a recess in the mountain front looking for Redwood Spring. We find a bright green meadow with running water. There is a long trough filled to overflowing with water but mostly covered with algae. A small pipe extends out of the bank spewing a steady flow of water. This will be our lunch break. Spencer scrapes the algae away and fills his water

bags. The rest of us follow suit. Spencer declines to treat the water, but I play it safe and add iodine. I follow the main flow up canyon to its source a quarter mile above the meadow amid rocky outcrops and willow thickets.

Meanwhile back at lunch camp we ponder. This is clearly not Redwood Spring. I conclude that the steer moved us south off our course so we've arrived at "Pipe Spring." Spencer believes we're north of the mark, and thinks Redwood Spring lies ahead to the south. Tabor described a twelve-foot diameter trough at Redwood Spring and the presence of cattle. There are no cattle and no circular tank, but this spring seems to fit the description of "Pipe Spring."

We follow a jeep road over to the next canyon to the south. At the mouth of the next canyon is a nine-foot diameter tank of water. Could this be the elusive Redwood Spring? Did Steve Tabor miss-measure the tank? But this tank appears to be fairly new and was probably installed since Steve's reconnaissance trip. The rest of his description fits as we follow the jeep road up canyon to another grassy meadow that is wet enough for mud to stick to our boots. This spring, which shows on the map was described as dry in the guidebook. We're on track and continue up the canyon. When the canyon opens up we stop and admire the view down to Kumiva Lake. Black Mountain still dominates the horizon beyond the playa. We've climbed 900 feet from the base of the mountain and still have 600 feet to go to reach the saddle. The canyon opens to a broad saddle but is dense with brush making movement difficult. The four of us try different routes through the tangle. Lawrence finds the quickest way and we can see him waving to us twenty minutes before we reach him. Beyond the dense brush we talk about alternatives. The saddle is still 200 feet above and promises to be extremely windy. The mountain ridge is another 1,200 feet above the saddle and will take about two hours to climb. We decide to camp below on a Juniper clad spur. It's a beautiful spot with a dozen weathered Junipers and wonderful views of Nightingale valley to the south, Black Mountain and Kumiva Flat to the northeast and the Sahwave Range due east. We can visually trace our path of the last four days. Cold gusts of wind blast through our camp. Each of us finds space beneath a Juniper to find shelter from the chill wind. The clouds have mostly cleared and it's the first night without a clear threat of rain so none of us will use tents tonight. Tucked in a niche beneath a Juniper it's the best night's sleep yet.

5/20/05 Saturday morning is bright and clear. This will be our last full day of hiking. We have 1,500 feet to climb to the ridge but no one seems anxious. The first part, 300 feet to the saddle is easy enough, but then it seems the way is straight up. This is the first time on this trip I'm glad to have trekking poles. With each step up the pack pulls your body down and back. The poles allow the arms to do some of the pulling, counteracting the eccentric force of the pack. Climbing the steep slope is easier than I expected, until we reach the rock slabs, which have to be climbed hand over hand, or backtracking to find another route.

In the rocks I can't see the others. 700 feet above the saddle the ridge flattens out briefly and after some time we're together again and take a welcome break. We continue climbing the remaining 500 feet to the first peak. The Junipers have disappeared. It's too high and too cold above 8,000 feet. The ridge is bare and windswept. The scene below to the east has undergone a dramatic transformation. Black Mountain, which dominated our view the past two days, has now become a minor landmark, dwarfed by the immensity of Kumiva Flat. Ahead along the ridge is Kumiva Peak, at 8,237 feet, the highest point in seven days. When we reach the peak we write in the new Desert Trail Peak Register. We also read and sign the register placed by Sierra Club. The most recent entry is more than two years old. This range gets few visitors. We find entries from other survivor trips, Bob Ellis in 1994 and Steve Tabor in 1998. I re-pile the rocks to make a cairn with a recess to hold the two registers. In the distance we can see Kumiva Pass and three tiny specks which are our trucks. I signal to Jerry with a signal mirror.

We stay along the ridge for most of the afternoon stopping only for lunch and to admire the view. To the south we can see Purgatory Peak and beyond it Winnemucca Dry Lake. To the west is the San Emedio Desert. To the north we can see the villages of Empire and Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert beyond. To the east are the Sahwave and Blue Wing Mountains and Kumiva Valley.

We reach the final summit in this part of the Selenites. Far below is a green patch we know to be a meadow with running water. It's a difficult drop down the steep spur. The meadow is less pristine than advertised, littered with cow pies, some cattle bones and two shovels, perhaps left here to remove cow dung. After a long break at the meadow we hike along the creek below searching for running water. Everyone is a bit skeptical about drinking the green tinted water from the meadow. Despite the green color, Spencer reports that the taste is good, well maybe not

good, but at least palatable. We leave the canyon and cross to another drainage to begin our search for “Twin Juniper Saddle.” It proves elusive.

We find a forest of junipers on a saddle with good flat ground and decide to stay. I drop my pack and hike to the ridge. Below, about a mile as the crow flies, are the trucks at Kumiva Pass. We’re still looking for “Twin Juniper Saddle,” but there are too many Junipers in every direction to qualify. The weather is clear so there will be no tents tonight. We sit in a circle for communal dinner as we have for the past five nights, recounting our travel. Just after getting in my sleeping bag I hear something nearby and sit up. The animal, whatever it was, darts away in a flash. In the morning we find fresh deer and mountain lion tracks.

5/21/05 Sunday. We’re awake earlier than usual for our final trail meal. By 7:30 a.m. we’re hiking through the Junipers over the last ridge heading for the pass. As for most of the trip we follow deer or burro trails when possible, but much of the hiking is simply cross-country dodging sagebrush, greasewood, and rabbitbush. As we near the trucks we can see Jerry walking along the road to meet us. We hike the final half-mile together. At the trailhead Spencer leaves first on a long drive to Ventura. It’s time for real food (like biscuits and gravy). Lawrence, Stacy, Jerry and I head for Bruno’s in Gerlach for brunch.



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

Segment W: Selenite Range
Leader Paul Menkes

May 23-26, 2005

Our visit from the spirit oha was brief and quiet. Bound, bound, bound, and he was gone. Nonetheless we were quite moved by this and all of the other wonders we saw on segment W, which runs the northern length of the Selenite Range in Nevada from Kumiva Pass to the edge of the Black Rock Playa a few miles west of Trego. Four of us made the four day, 33 mile journey (plus side trips up mountain summits).

The first day was awesome, if a bit tiring. We walked about 8.8 miles, mostly on jeeps roads going up and down, up and down, not following the contours of the range but built with the logic of the internal combustion engine. Still, we hiked amongst many different kinds of flowers and visited several springs. We also found time for a sidetrip up Luxor Peak, with fantastic views of the trail ahead and behind. Our camp was near "Pebble Pass".

The next morning we hiked cross-country, sometimes on wild horse trails, 1,000' off of the crest to "Empire Pool". Due to the constant rain there was more running water than expected and we loaded up with two-and-a-half days of water. Then we trudged back to the crest, and once on the crest to its lowpoint and thus began the climb to the shoulders of Selenite Peak. While climbing a ridge we witnessed two stallions battling. A couple of dozen horses watched the fray, paying four hikers no heed. We got to "Granite Pass" and, looking over the other side of it, discovered it was not 24 horses but 68+ horses peacefully grazing. After watching the herd for a while one of the stallions finally signaled it was time to go. All of the horses left. We continued in our granite and flower wonderland to "Wedge Pass". We decided this was the optimal jump-off point to climb Selenite Peak, which 3 of us did the next morning. Selenite is not as high as Luxor, but its placement north of Luxor at a bend in the range gives it even more spectacular views. We placed a peak register (as we had done at Luxor) and continued hiking around 9:30 AM in the morning. We got around the bulk of Selenite Peak and started losing elevation. All of our traveling was on wild horse trails and it was really easy going. Our camp that night was still at 5200', but it was warmer. It was also a bit buggy - another consequence of the rains, besides the great flowers.

Day 4 we continued along the ridge, losing elevation but with constant stunning views of the Black Rock Playa. We observed a lake in the western side of the Playa. Segment X hikers would have to deal with that. Too bad I couldn't join them! We also observed recent motorcycle tracks and came upon an abandoned art installation of mirrors that had to be Burning Man related. It was designed to catch the last rays of the sun and reflect them towards the Burning Man encampment. Some mirrors are still in position; other are broken, littering the wilderness. As we got to the end of the ridge, we could see the north trailhead and the cars. Interestingly, the route suddenly veers southward away from the trailhead, towards a wave-cut platform near the bottom of the ridge. I was ready to give the guidebook writer, Steve Tabor, who was hiking with me, an earful. Most hikers will head straight to their cars. But I must admit it was very nice taking a last rest in wilderness with great views before heading to the trailhead. All in all segment W is one of the crown jewels of the Nevada Desert Trail.

At the trailhead, Jerry Goss was there to meet us, provide us with shade and grab the GPS to download our route. The next day Steve Tabor, Jerry Goss and I helped with the car shuttle for the segment X hikers. It would have been great to continue with them!



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

Segment X: Black Rock Crossing

Leader Bob Ellis

May 27-30, 2005

What a Great Time We Had! - A double-punch dust storm, a three-hour rain and thunder storm, two wade-in-the-mud river crossings, some heat, two hot spring dips, inspiring support, the entire east side of the playa to ourselves, miles of wide open landscape, historic and pre-historic discoveries, and oceans of flowers!

Jon Wilkinson, Bill Harper, Lawrence Wilson, Ingrid Crickmore, and Bob Ellis made a four day backpack crossing of the Black Rock Desert Playa Memorial Day weekend. Our trip was made possible by the assistance on site of Jerry Goss (heroic water cacher and GPS guru), Paul Menkes, Dave Holten, and Steve Tabor who set up our shuttle cars and allowed us to start our Desert Trail Relay segment right off on Friday from Trego with an assured water supply mid-route.

We got the news fast at Bruno's Cafe in Gerlach Friday morning: **THE BAD:** A large lake of water remained on the playa draining off from the Spring rains and mountain snowmelt. No direct access across the playa was possible to either the Black Rock or Double Hot Springs. **THE GOOD:** Jerry Goss had spent an entire day bumping along four wheel drive roads up to Soldier Meadow and down the east side to spot twelve gallons of water just south of Double Hot Springs where a bog blocked the road. Steve and Paul would drive our shuttle car to the trail end and Steve had already walked the four miles to Trego Hot Spring, both tasks we thought would occupy our time Friday. We were therefore able to start immediately and allow three nights on the trail, giving us more slack for unexpected circumstance.

Friday: With four colorful umbrellas raised we started across the flat salt-mud-crust-ed playa edge heading directly for the Black Rock 15 miles away. Gradually the salt and dampness disappeared and we were on the smooth dry light tan silt surface of the playa. After a few miles the mirage surrounding us was well formed and the lower edges of our horizon showed as water-like blurs or upside-down reflections. In the vast openness our perspectives became altered with our bodies having a discrete scale separate from the surrounding white table surface. The heat was not bad, in the high 80s with a slight breeze.

We saw no evidence of the large water body also on the playa to the west and north of us. We were enclosed in mirage. Eventually some tree-like objects appeared in the distance, signaling the course of the Quinn River. In most past years by this time the Quinn's waters have dried and a few ditches are the only obstacles expected. This year we feared many water channels and wet mud in this area. We turned somewhat east and came upon the main Quinn River. After a couple tries and some muddy feet and legs we waded across a point thigh deep using trekking poles to steady ourselves in the slick goo. Nervous about other wet spots we started again to discover only one small wet crossing was required. The ground while sometimes soft and puffy was generally dry. We camped at the playa edge by a small dirt berm. Dark thunderheads had by now formed south at Trego where we started but it was clear for us.

Not for long - a dust cloud we thought had arisen from drivers on the other side of the playa to the northwest became larger and larger. We realized just in time that it was a dust storm heading southeast blowing toward the dark thunderheads. Gritty gusts blasted us for half an hour as we rode out the dust storm. It cleared showing towering dust columns to the south. We had barely congratulated ourselves when the wind changed and the whole thing blew back over us! This time the half hour of dust was followed by three hours of rain, lightning and thunder. It was late in the evening before things calmed down and some sleep was possible. We were lucky that no equipment blew away and that our bodies and psyches survived the assault. Now we were surrounded by a sea of mud as an inch or more of the playa surface was wet slick goo.

Saturday: By morning the playa was again mostly dry. The billowing clouds were not threatening, and away we went. Five miles of playa, mud/sand greasewood hummocks and some rocky alluvium got us off the flats, to the Black Rock and the nearby Black Rock Hot Spring. Jon who got here first met a cowboy on a Suzuki Samurai from the Soldier Meadows Ranch looking for lost cattle. He was surprised to meet a foot traveler.

It was a bit hot, we had a soak, and headed north after lunch to the water cache and Double Hot Springs. Now we could see the lake of water on the playa to the west keeping out other holiday celebrators. Our route followed the old Applegate High Rock emigrant trail north past a couple warm springs under the dramatic cliffs of the Black Rock Range. We five took the twelve gallons of water Jerry had left with none to spare as we planned our next two days. About six pm we arrived at Double Hot, with no other people to be seen, and nice hot tub waiting.

Sunday: A nice slow start as we headed north again, this time angling northwest along the wet meadow area draining from the hot springs. The grass around the springs began to fade as we got onto larger bare but mostly dry mud flats. Another muddy river crossing allowed us to get to the west side of the Mud Meadow Wash. Here the flowers, which had been starting to show up the previous day, became a dominant feature of the trip. We hiked north atop remnant vegetated sand dunes covered with shades of yellow flowers of many species (bee plant predominant).

Even though we had some ups and downs and some soft spots, the going was easy. We were cheered by the variety of green shrubs, purple, blue, red, orange, and yellow flowers. Our main problem was the necessary stops for each new species encountered. Competing with the botanical attractions were the frequent findings of prehistoric artifacts and remains of recently demised meadow denizens. We had lunch at a deep cut channel Steve describes as walkable and a source of shade. We found it flowing wall-to-wall with mud-water. We had to crouch under sagebrush for sun screen. By late afternoon we came to a berm giving some shelter to a growing north wind and settled down for our third night. Here the highlights were two: the thunderheads bypassed us and no rain fell; "Cecil," the horse-bone sea serpent constructed by Bill, met Lawrence's well-traveled teddy bear. No words were spoken. Monday: Nice weather, a bit cooler - we had a beautiful flowerfilled (white desert evening primrose, purple nama and more) six mile hike to the Wheeler Dam trailhead. As the dam neared we could see Dave Holten's truck waiting for us and we pushed through the last tall sagebrush barriers for a great trail's end welcome just after noon. Enthusiasm was running high and the reality of sore muscles, mosquito bites and red skin would not find us until the next day. We felt we could accomplish whatever came at us: Veterans of the Black Rock Crossing 2005.



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

Leader – John Wilkinson

Reported by Lawrence Wilson

Segment Y – Pahute Peak Backpack

June 1-3 2005

Other Participants – Kevin Kingma & Lawrence Wilson

Starting at a little after 9.00 from the southern trailhead in the north west arm of the Black Rock Desert it was an easy hike along a jeep trail towards our first water crossing. Having scouted it out the previous afternoon we were quickly through a little dense undergrowth & wading up to our knees across Mud Meadow Creek. A jeep trail on the other side presented more easy walking and we soon reached an intersection with the historic Applegate Trail used by immigrants headed for California in the nineteenth century. A little further on we came upon a small rattlesnake by the road. Eventually we arrived at the mouth of the small canyon that was to lead us up into the mountains. We sat in an idyllic spot in hot sunshine by the proverbial ‘babbling brook’ relaxing and eating our lunch watch by a sage grouse in the rocks above.

In the afternoon we followed the creek upwards for a while, in the process negotiating an eighteen foot high waterfall, before collecting some water. Not long after we climbed up the right hand side of the canyon, paralleling it from high up until about 15.30, when still in bright sunshine, we reached a spring and an old prospectors cabin whose mud roof had largely collapsed. From there we took a horse trail & when we came upon a large ‘flat’ area we decided to camp at around 17.00. After a rest we hiked up to the ridge line above for some great views southwards down along the Black Rock Desert to the small triangular peak by Trego. Later, after dinner, we watched the sunset from a little knoll above the camp.

The next morning we were off by 8.00, continuing along the horse trail we had been on the previous afternoon up onto the ‘ridge’ above. We hiked along the ridge for the rest of the morning, steadily and relentlessly climbing upwards. Down on the Black Rock Desert the small triangular peak at Trego could be seen clearly reflected in the large lake that had formed across the desert floor. We were subject to a number of light snow and rain showers as we progressed. Eventually we hit a jeep trail & followed it for a while. We came upon twenty or more wild horses near a snow bank where we collected a little snow for later refreshment. A few of the horses were very curious & came back to check us out. Some of the slopes seemed to go on upwards for ever, with always one more little rise ahead. By 14.00 we had all reached the summit of Pahute Peak at 8,694 feet, a climb of over 3,000 feet since we had started that morning.

We were all pretty knackered and huddled around the large stone cairn at the peak to try to shelter from the biting wind. The views were terrific in all directions, you really felt like you’d achieved something by climbing the peak. However, the cold wind eventually drove us down after we’d taken some photos and deposited a Desert Trail branded peak register protected in its weather resistant peanut butter jar shell. In the original non-branded peak register we discovered that the last name entered was in fact that of our

illustrious leader, John Wilkinson, who was on the peak previously almost exactly a year ago to the very day. My attempts to offload my eight day old 'Trader Joes' Disraeli & Gladstone British Muffins to fellow hikers proved as unsuccessful as my ongoing mission to offload my mouthwatering packets of ramen noodles.

At 14.50 we began our descent, part of which was really nasty and steep over loose rocks, to a little rocky knoll. But this had looked far easier than the recommended route, described in 'the desert trail guide', which ran to our right. Below large stands of aspen trees was 'Horse Spring' at check station 15, which we reached at 15.40. Here we found a good flow of water from a pipe from whence we replenished our water supplies. An hour later we reached a further spring, 'Running Water Spring', at check station 16. Nearby was another spring, 'Trough Spring', where a plastic pipe had been added since John Wilkinson's previous visit in 2004, and made collecting water very easy for us hikers. We camped a short distance away by some rocky outcrops. I, for one, was completely washed out after the day's exertions and spent an hour or so crashed out on my back gazing into the sky, a little alcohol adding to my state of total inertia.

The next morning there was frost on the foot of my sleeping bag and camping mat. Our illustrious leader was chomping at the bit ready to leave a good hour or more before I could muster the wherewithal to get going, but by 8.00 we had hit the jeep trail again. Topping up with water from the nearby 'Trough Spring' we followed the jeep trail until we dropped into a gorgeous canyon, named 'Color Canyon' by Steve Tabor in his 'trail' guide. Filling our water containers proved to be unnecessary, though, as there was water flowing all the way down the this flower filled canyon. We crossed & re-crossed the creek as it lead us down to the floor of Black Rock Desert. We took a number of rest stops in the bright sunshine just to enjoy our idyllic surroundings and be thankful that Steve Tabor had found such an amazing little route down out of the mountains. Back on the desert floor it was simply a question of walking across to the other side of this arm of the Black Rock Desert where a vehicle was waiting for us at the northern trailhead. The only impediment was some thick undergrowth in Mud Meadow Wash where I managed to loose one of the detachable legs from my pants after re-crossing Mud Meadow Creek, and now looked even sillier than usual. Our vehicle was reached by 13.15, thus completing a very enjoyable few days of backpacking.

Segment Z: Box Canyon Backpack

June 4-5 2005

Participants, Co-Leaders & General Good Eggs:

David Oline (Oregon) & Lawrence Wilson (Brighton, England)

This segment started in exciting manner when the official leader of this unofficial DS trip, John Wilkinson, shredded two tyres on his RAV4 on a dirt road whilst setting up the initial car shuttle. The single spare tyre left the RAV4 somewhat mobility challenged. Luckily the only passing four wheeled vehicle that morning gave David Oline a ride back to his truck, & he was then able to drive the three of us to the local metropolis of Gerlach. Here John Wilkinson bailed out of the backpack to try and resuscitate his vehicle. Overcoming the challenge of the antiquated third world public phone system one finds in this country a distress call was made to mission control in Sparks, Nevada. Dave Holten manning the helpdesk rose valiantly to the occasion & readily agreed to meet the two remaining backpackers at the northern trailhead at 17.00 on the following day. However, he was most insistent on warning us of the rocks, the size of cars, strewn across the floor of Box canyon in several places. His warning proved to be most apt.

The backpack thus commenced several hours later than originally planned at 15.35. By 19.05, though, we were roughly only half mile short of our original planned camping spot at mile 6.0 where side canyons came in from both the north & south of Box Canyon. The first two and a half miles had been easy walking, mainly along jeep trails until a game guzzler, primarily for birds, was reached. After this the canyon narrowed & soon we saw how accurate Dave Holton's description had been. Huge rock falls covered the sides of the canyon, and rocks the size of cars, and even Dave's truck, blocked our way across the canyon floor. There

was no easy discernable route through, so we had to do the best we could, encumbered as we were by our backpacks, clambering over, round & between these impediments. No sooner had we negotiated one obstacle course, than we seemed to come upon another. Our progress was further complicated by thick undergrowth amongst the rocks. This was not exactly my idea of a fun way to spend a Saturday evening, even in deepest darkest Nevada, but we persevered. By 19.00 we were beginning to tire, but as luck would have it we came upon a few openings in the brush just large enough to pitch a tent, so we decided to call it a day and camp close to a running stream.

By 7.30 the following morning our two intrepid Desert Survivors were on their way again, unperturbed by the further imminent difficulties foretold in the 'desert trail guide'. Unforeseen challenges soon presented themselves though, namely two 'lakes' running almost completely across the canyon floor. These lakes had not existed during the drier conditions of the route reconnaissance, but we managed to skirt them on their left hand sides, in places hacking through some unfriendly rose bushes & clambering on loose rocks in the process. The brown water of the second lake looked especially uninviting, no doubt coloured in part by the abundant nearby horse droppings. Several more rockfalls across the canyon floor were negotiated before the final ascent of the rockfall at the head of Box Canyon. This proved to be not so daunting as I had imagined, and by 10.05 we had climbed up it and were relaxing in the sunshine and enjoying a gentle breeze. The rest of the ascent involved easy walking, except for the spot where David Oline tried to headbutt the ground, and an hour later we were gazing down onto the dried out bed of High Rock Lake.

Following a dry creek bed and horse trail lead us down to the lakeshore in another twenty minutes. We cut across the lakebed towards some abandoned cabins, but soon 'detoured' to our left for a closer look at a mass of yellow flowers. The vistas from the lakebed of the surrounding mountains were outstanding in every direction. We continued on to an assortment of old abandoned ranch buildings all in a general state of disrepair and suffering from much vandalism. Having taken some photos we followed the historic wagon road come jeep trail to the northern trailhead at the mouth of High Rock Canyon. In this way mile 13.0 was reached at 13.25. We lunched and hung out for a couple of hours in this beautiful spot and even speculated if we would get rained on, until our saviour, Dave Holten, arrived. He ferried Dave Oline back to his truck at the southern trailhead, and myself to Sparks where I was generously showered, fed and accommodated for the night before being dropped off at the Reno Greyhound bus station the following morning to journey on to San Francisco.

Meanwhile, our erstwhile leader and companion John Wilkinson had spent a sobering weekend partaking in the many delights of Gerlach before the inspired efforts of a local BLM ranger enabled him to make his escape and limp back to the Bay Area in his vehicle. The Desert Relay was still on course, thanks primarily to the sterling efforts of Dave Holten who spent many hours of his Sunday driving several hundred miles across the wilds of Northern Nevada to collect us from the northern trailhead.

[Continue On To Next Segment](#)



2005 Nevada Desert Trail Dispatches

Leader: Steve Tabor

Segment AA: High Rock Canyon

June 9-12, 2005

The High Rock Canyon trip was the first of the final three Desert Trail Relay segments. With ten hikers, it was the most popular of the lot. In terrain it was one of the easiest, but few of us were prepared for the six-hour, 179-mile car shuttle. In this we were aided by Ed Nagel, who joined us on the trip, and Dave Holten, who had already come up from Sparks twice in the previous week to bail out hikers on the Relay. Both had large 4WD rigs, which were needed on the horrendous jeep tracks between the central Sheldon Refuge and the mouth of High Rock.

It had rained the night before. We started backpacking at 2:15 pm under cloudy skies and occasional showers. The long wet Spring of 2005 was continuing. Wildflowers were excellent. We hiked on jeep trails for the first two days, most of it straight up the old immigrant route of 1846. We stopped at the pioneer inscriptions at Mile 3.1 for photographs and a rest. In the evening we camped at Mile 5.4 at the mouth of Pole Canyon.

The camp was cool and humid. Frost lay on our tents in the morning. We found clear water in the stream below. Most of the second day we hiked up the jeep trail in the canyon, crossing the flowing stream many times and enjoying the predictable stratigraphy of the horizontal rhyolite plateaus and their vertical cliff tops. Underneath the rims in many places were white and yellow ash beds. The best were at Yellow Rock Canyon and just downstream.

On the second afternoon we veered off from the pioneer road and hiked east to Cottonwood Canyon under a beautiful sky of fair-weather cumulus. It always looked like it was going to rain, but didn't, until nightfall. We found pools of water in Cottonwood at its start, surrounded by a beautiful green meadow. We followed the alternately dry and wet bed of the canyon through subdued country loaded with wildflowers, camping at a sand bar that had been created in May's big floods. Coyotes howled in the canyon nearby as we bedded down. It was great camp after a long 15-mile day.

We followed the Desert Trail Association map another ten miles on the third day. The route alternated between jeep trails, wild animal trails and cross-country. Wildcat Gorge in the afternoon was a joy, a trench carved deep into lava rock with cool pools, willows, and a neat horse trail. The shallow canyon beyond with its low Utah-style cliffs and deep arroyo was also a joy. We camped that night at a delightful green meadow with water, darting swallows, loud frogs and curious rabbits. It was a restful, peaceful camp where we could catch up on our sleep.

On the last day we visited Cottonwood Spring, which was located in an isolated lava trench filled with green grass, rushes, colorful mushrooms, large currant and serviceberry bushes, and aspen trees. After 35 miles of desert it was wonderful to walk barefoot in the cool grass. In the afternoon we'd discovered that I'd led the group 90 degrees off-course on a wide detour to the north. We corrected this by hiking rapidly over the

plateau to the southeast and then to the cars. Even that laborious detour had its attractions: a large burn area grown to beautiful native bunchgrasses and mountain mahogany, a difficult ending to a long but not overly strenuous hike.

At Bateman Spring, Jerry Goss met us with cold drinks and encouragement. Jerry has supported the Relay throughout both May and June. I decided that Bateman Camp in Sheldon Refuge and the nearby Summit Mountain Road would be the new trailhead for the segment, as the road into Cottonwood was too high-centered. We had a leisurely camp with good conversation and fine wine as we waited for the next day's hike to begin.

Segment BB: Sheldon Refuge Segment

June 13-16, 2005

In the morning, Jerry brought in two new hikers from Virgin Valley Campground in the Sheldon Refuge. Li Miao and Julian Holt joined Lynne Buckner, Lawrence Wilson, Laszlo Nadasdi, Ed Nagel and me, all hikers from the previous trip. The seven of us started hiking at 11:30, east from Bateman Camp to a pass on Mahogany Mountain. Unlike the High Rock trip, this four-day backpack in the Refuge would be mostly cross-country with many ups and downs, not one smooth uphill gradient. In elevation gain it would be twice as much work as the last one.

From Mahogany we had an excellent view east into the drainage of Virgin Creek. High craggy mesas, eroded in many forms and tilted this way and that, lay below. All was green except for white tuff beds and brown lava rock. We ate lunch at the pass and marveled at the scenery. This was the first of three climbs of 500 feet or more. The Sheldon is known for its wildlife, especially its big animals. We would not be disappointed.

We found a wild horse trail on the descent into Virgin that led us down to Pothole Spring. The stream there was flowing strongly. More green meadows. Proceeding downstream, within a mile we came upon a herd of sixty wild horses. They broke up into several big and small groups, each with its own large stallion or mare. The horses seemed not to know which way to turn; they'd probably not seen humans in quite awhile. We caught them by surprise and got several good photos of them running. When they'd gone we hiked further downstream where we spotted a coyote. The animal ran up a hill, stopping several times to glance back, giving us a good look at him.

Farther down the trail we found a dead bobcat. It was young, still with spots. I surmised that it had been kicked by a mare when it got too close, but that's just a guess. I was impressed through this stretch by the thickness of native bunchgrasses on the north-facing side of the canyon. Extensive cheat grass (a weed) grew only on south-facing slopes. We camped that night at a wide bend in the stream, the only flat place not densely grown to six-foot-tall sagebrush. We had a great view of Summit Lake Mountain to the southeast, still with thick snow banks.

In the morning we hiked east to Alkali Reservoir which had a lot of water and abundant wildflowers growing along the shore. We hiked 825 feet up the slope to the east, marked "Wild Horse Pasture" on the map, then along the top of it. Views on the way up were excellent. We ate lunch, then climbed farther up onto Rock Spring Table, topping out at 6760'. This was done in a 20 mph wind with gusts to 30. Views were again excellent, though we were tuckered out from the climb. We walked north a mile to a large lake hidden in a sinkhole that showed on the map, an interesting feature in this otherwise sage-covered territory.

The lake was full and overflowing onto nearby grass in the hole. It was about 1/4-mile across. Several of us took a swim in the cold water. It was refreshing, but we didn't stay submerged long except for Lawrence, who is used to colder swims in Britain. The cold wind didn't help either. Lynne and I photographed flowers, especially shooting stars, a mountain species I'd seen in other sinkholes elsewhere on the plateau. I named this "Lake Geneva", after a similar wind-blown lake on the Mogollon Plateau that I visited in the Fall of 1981. Cowboys in the West do have a sense of humor when it comes to standing water.

Later we walked to the east rim of the Table for a look at Onion Lakes, then to the head of Sagebrush Creek. Curious pronghorn watched as we hiked, wondering just what these large humpbacked creatures could be. The DTA map says you can get down into the canyon at the but it doesn't show exactly where. A large dryfall, abundant talus and thick mahogany block the whole upper canyon, but we found a way down off the cliff and over the rocks about a half-mile along the west rim. Before the drop, we found many signs of Native-American use: a rock foundation, lithic scatter and petroglyphs. We also saw pikas, chipmunks and a marmot, residents dating from back in the Ice Age when the Table had a tundra-like climate. In the canyon bottom, we bounced along on rocks and through brush, not good for the feet and ankles. We arrived at East Rock Spring Camp at 7:00 pm, just in time to cook dinner before dark, thoroughly exhausted.

East Rock Spring Camp is one of the gems of the Refuge, a grassy oasis with dense aspen shade and abundant year-round water. As at Cottonwood, we were surrounded by greenery, a welcome contrast to the rocks and sagebrush. We stayed long into the morning, just enjoying the ambience. From the looks of it, the camp had not been used in years. The grass was not tamped down, wheel tracks leading to it were sparse, even the carvings in the aspen were old, only one from 1998 and one from 2002. For all intents and purposes, the camp has been abandoned. Even pronghorn hunters don't want to bother with it; it's too far even to drive, much less walk.

The next day we hiked out the largely unused jeep trail in Sagebrush Canyon. The stream was intermittent. In places meadow grass had grown up solid in the jeep trail and the tracks were difficult to find. In the middle and lower canyon, long stretches of jeep trail had been washed out, with fresh gravel piled four feet high, almost at a level with the terraces on either side, scoured from channels upstream that had been gouged deeper. I GPS'd the worst places and took several photos, some of which I'll submit to Refuge management with a recommendation that the road be closed. It cannot be driven without damage to the meadows and the gravel bed; the land deserves a rest.

The hike down-canyon was pleasant under breezy blue sky with wind-driven cumulus. This was the first hot day of either trip; at one point I measured 82 F. We camped in the lower canyon near Virgin Valley CG after a frantic search for water in the flood-scoured bed, which had been drastically rearranged. We couldn't camp nearby because the terraces had been badly scoured by flood waters, and where they weren't, large anthills occupied all the large tent sites between shrubs. Nighthawks swooped as we bedded down for the night, gorging themselves on the abundant mosquitoes.

On the morning of Day Four, we cruised into the campground and plunged into its main feature, a natural warm pool (85 F.). Jerry Goss met us and drove us back to Bateman to get our cars, then fixed us a big Italian meal that really hit the spot. In the afternoon, while the others took shelter from wind and showers, I explored the upper end of Thousand Creek Gorge near the campground. I decided it was too rough for backpacking, even on the Desert Trail. The next day we would meet more hikers for the final carcamp.

Segment CC: North Border Segment

June 17-19, 2005

The last trip of the Relay was a carcamp, three days of hikes from Virgin Valley Campground to the Oregon border. Thirteen Survivors did various of these hikes, coming and going and coming back again. The longest was the first day's, from the campground to Big Hot Spring near the Sheldon Refuge border. The second went from north of Bog Hot over the Pueblo Mountains to the east and down to near Denio Junction. The third went on a dirt road northeast to the border at the town of Denio. It was a great 28 miles, and a great finish to a very successful Relay.

We set up cars at Bog Hot then hiked toward Thousand Creek Gorge. We were moving fast, for this was a fourteen-mile hike. Near the gorge we turned up a jeep trail and onto the hill above. This climb had more great flowers; colorful blooms stayed with us almost 'til the end of the Relay. There were larkspur, mallow, balsam root, Phacelia, Penstemon and many others. We did a side hike to an overlook of the gorge that

provided a spectacular view, 500 feet down. Many of the hikers wanted dayhike it someday. Maybe next year I'll lead a carcamp to do just that.

After lunch we continued on the jeep trail east off the mountain. We found a small ball-like cactus flat to the ground, *Pediocactus simpsonii*, variously called "plains cactus" or "Simpson's foot cactus", a common grassland species ranging into Idaho and Montana at that elevation. Unfortunately it was past bloom time. At the east rim we had views down onto the valley floor, of lakes left behind by the May floods and of reddish seed heads of cheat grass blowing in the wind. To the northeast was the long black sinuous mesa of Railroad Point, which the DT ascends and crosses. Bog Hot is on the other side.

We hiked quickly across the greasewood valley to the base of the point. It was only two hundred feet to the rim, but steep. Much to our surprise we ran into a trail halfway up that provided an easy ascent. It even had switchbacks. I guessed that it was constructed by the U.S. Army in the old days as a conveyance from Virgin to the base of the Pueblos. An irregular trail went northeast along the rocky mesa in our direction. It could barely be seen on the ground. We hiked east and north toward an obvious drop, blessed by more good flowers. We stopped briefly at a vernal pool showing on the map. It had an inch or two of muddy water and was loaded with little bug larvae swimming around in what was left, soon to evaporate. I named this "Lake Placid". We rested at the next rim, then hiked the trail, still intact, downhill to the next valley.

The last three-mile stretch was glorious! We saw many of the same old flowers all along the way, and thick native grasses, along with cheat. Most striking were vast numbers of four-foot-tall prince's plume (*Stanleya*) waving in the breeze. Most had bright yellow flowers extending a foot or more at the top of the stalk, making yellow patches all up and down the valley. It was flower heaven. We were indeed fortunate to be here in one of Nevada's most glorious Spring seasons ever.

We staggered to Bog Hot and our cars after 8:00 pm, then fetched the remaining autos and put Humpty back together. Back at the spring, some folks fixed dinner, some drank, and some just got in the hot pools (98 F.) before doing anything else. What a day!. Asleep at 11, in bed the next morning until after sunrise when swooping nighthawks woke me up.

On Saturday we set up another shuttle, then walked north from Bog Hot to a cold springs then east to the Pueblo Mountains. More flowers, even though we were in lower country. Large caterpillars, those of the sphinx moth, were chewing away on pincushion flowers. The country was grown to dense wiry greasewood and budsage, but Ingrid Crickmore still had a field day identifying flowers, some of them new species we hadn't seen before. In the afternoon we started up the Pueblos on a jeep trail that led to the crest. There were more species there, including blooming purple sage, *Ephedra viridis* with fruiting bodies, lilies (*Calochortus*), and a rare round-leafed milkweed. I have a picture of Ingrid with handfuls of flower specimens to take home and key. She'll press them into a card file, eventually.

We crested the ridge after resting and consuming electrolytes and snacks. On top we had views of the road below past Chokecherry Spring. The route down Chokecherry Canyon looked steep, so we hiked down easy slopes to the road, gaining a great view north into the valleys behind the Pueblos Mountain front, Alberson and Denio Basins. That view was an inspiration (for next year's Relay in Oregon?). It looked so green in this dynamic year that it resembled the lurid colors of the DTA's Pueblo Mountains Desert Trail Guide, published in 1981. I had thought the colors on that to be an aberration, the result of a primitive four-color printing process, until I'd gotten this view. My previous trips here had been in summer, when yellow grasses dominate the scene.

Below we hopped a fence and walked through chewed-down cattle country. What a difference from the land outside! Cows had cropped all the needlegrass down to within four inches, eating everything above, including all the seed heads. So this is how range gets degraded! In all other places we'd been, native grasses were coming back, their seed heads waving tall in the breeze. We made sure to close the fence gate behind us to keep the cows from straying outside and spoiling more land.

The rest of the day we hiked down past Chokecherry Creek (flowing) and out into the valley on the road. Hikers in front of the pack spotted a deer and a fawn. We convoyed back to Bog Hot to camp that night.

Loretta Bauer had driven in to Winnemucca to get new tires and picked up a fine chicken-and-salad dinner for us. Sure beats cooking! At sunset a bunch of us went to the hotter pool upstream where 105-degree F. water compensated for the hungry mosquitoes. Afterward I was tempted to walk back naked in the dark but wore a towel.

The last day was an anti-climax. We spotted cars at Denio, then walked the road into town. Down here the flowers were just about baked dry. We found a few lilies and one deep red poppy, probably an escaped Mexican poppy from the town. Lizards were active on this sunny day. Once again, the weather was holding well. It doesn't get really hot up north except for one month out of the year. Later in the day I measured a high of 79 F.

We hiked toward Denio on Rodeo Drive, named after the famous street in Beverly Hills. There is only a slight resemblance; there are no shops here like those in the latter town, and Beverly has no shot-up dead rabbits (except those on display in fur shops). We took a right on "Sunset Place", named after the Hollywood strip, then walked beside Highway 292 to the Oregon border, marked by a cattle guard. We discovered that the border fence is off the 41-degree mark by about 24 seconds of latitude, an error we chalked up to inferior 19th Century technology, since our GPS units are always correct. Denio residents drove by us with some interest. There was nobody walking on the street except us.

At the border we cracked open the champagne. We drank (or spilled) it all. The hikers presented certificates of appreciation to Jerry Goss and me for our efforts, me for designing and promoting the Desert Trail, and Jerry for supporting almost all the segments with shuttle services, meals, beer and GPS units. Lawrence Wilson introduced the First Annual Desert Survivors Travel-Writing Award for my inspiring description of the formerly pristine "Green Meadow" on the Kumiva Segment. He read my lurid praise of this wilderness locality from my guidebook, then offered a half-gallon of dark brown water culled from the meadow after wayward cattle had made it their home for several seasons. Some of this was drunk and some was poured through the cattle guard at the border along with the remaining champagne as a symbolic "giving-back" to the desert and a pledge that we'll be back (next year?) to finish the job. I thanked Lawrence for the gesture and lamented that the number and weight of new cow flops at the meadow prevented a full appreciation of my error. We were left only to imagine the magnitude of the problem. My book needs a rewrite.

After the ceremony, it was on to home for most. I went back to Bog Hot to clean up my notes and do new GPS work. It was a grand end to a great Relay, 99 miles in eleven days, just before summer came down. I will remember it always.
