

THE
JEFFREY PINE JOURNAL

Newsletter of Friends of the Inyo

SPRING-SUMMER 2005

VOLUME III, ISSUE I



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High & Dry

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*A field guide to
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Summer on the Eastside – McGee Canyon, John Muir Wilderness

Working to preserve the public lands and wildlife of the Eastern Sierra

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Friends of the Inyo



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Friends of the Inyo is a local non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the wildlife, cultural and recreational values of the Eastern Sierra's public lands.



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The Cover Photo



Mule's Ears and White Lupine in McGee Canyon. Photo by Andy Selters, www.andyselters.com.

The Jeffrey Pine Journal, a biannual publication of Friends of the Inyo, is named after the Eastern Sierra's most aromatic conifer, *Pinus jeffreyi*. The Jeffrey Pine Journal is distributed free to members of Friends of the Inyo and is available at various locations in the Eastern Sierra and beyond. Written material and images herein are the sole property of Friends of the Inyo or are used with exclusive permission. We welcome submissions of artwork, writing and field observations.

Please send all submissions and comments to Paul McFarland at paulmc@friendsoftheinyo.org. Thanks.

President's Message

by Frank Stewart

Most of you are reading this newsletter for the first time. For this issue only, we are tripling the number of newsletters that we are printing and mailing, thanks to the generosity of a donor. You have received the "Jeffrey Pine Journal" because we think that you need to know about us. We are a growing and dedicated group of citizens who believe that the public lands and wildlife of the Eastern Sierra need to be protected. Although Friends of the Inyo has been around for a number of years, in the last few years we have really stepped it up a notch. We have an Executive Director, one conservation associate, and with help of the National Forest Foundation, we have added one more person to our staff. Our Bishop office is a pretty busy place. But then, the Eastern Sierra is also a pretty busy place. The "east side" receives annual tourist visitation numbers that rival Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon combined. Why? Not just because of its wild character and striking scenery, but because that wildness and beauty is only about a half day's drive from where most Californians live. In the long run, that close proximity is a good thing. People will always need to escape the hectic pace of the cities, yet there never seems to be quite enough time to get away. Here in the Eastern Sierra, visitors can find the tranquility they seek up a mountain trail on the same day that they left the office (as long as they can slip out by noon!). For those who can spare more time, the Sierra Nevada, White Mountains and Inyo Mountains that surround Bishop offer some of the best opportunities for backcountry travel in the lower 48 states. That opportunity is one that we would like to pass on to future generations, to your kids. We want to keep the "eastside" wild, but we are not willing to leave that to chance. We are working towards achieving new wilderness designations for the last of the best places that remain unprotected around here. Check out our proposals by visiting our website: www.friendsoftheinyo.org

This year in the high country, spring has been slow to take hold. Winter has persisted well into April. We started off with the wettest October on record. Then we got pasted with deep snows and drenching low elevation rains in late December/January. Now, with this cool spring, we are enjoying an epic desert wildflower bloom, as well as a lasting and dense Sierra snow pack. Of course, soon the heat will turn on in California, bringing the runoff in torrents. But even summer's heat will not defeat the deep snowdrifts of the upper slopes. The north faces of the mountain passes will be holding snow all year. Be sure to plan on getting up to the Eastern Sierra. It is shaping up to be a great summer.

– Frank Stewart is a General Building Contractor. He wishes he had more time for backpacking and fishing.

Outings

21-23 May - Cottonwood Creek Restoration Campout. Help restore stream banks, plant willows and cottonwoods and fix up informal campsites along the lower section of the largest stream in the White Mountains, Cottonwood Creek. In addition to on the ground work, BLM biologists and local naturalists will lead bird and wildflower walks along this remote desert oasis. Primitive carcamp, potluck, campfire & camaraderie. 2-WD vehicles OK.

4 June - Inyo Mountains Wilderness Restoration and Hike. Come out and help restore and block illegal off-road vehicle damage in the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. Back in March, FOI volunteers and FS staff raked out illegal tracks, installed Wilderness Boundary signs and built vehicle barriers only to have the work undone and the signs torn down in less than two weeks. On this trip, volunteers will redo and reinforce the restoration work done in March in the morning and then head out into the Inyos for a hike among the pinyon pines. Lunch and refreshments provided. Bring gloves. Meet at 8am in front of the FOI office (275 South Main Street) in Bishop.

12 June - Glass Creek Meadow Hike. A moderately strenuous 4 mile roundtrip will take us up to Glass Creek Meadow past tumbling Glass Creek falls. Glass Creek Meadow, the largest subalpine meadow in the Eastern Sierra, is home to over 40 species of butterflies, Yosemite toads and dazzling wildflower carpets. A hidden gem, there are few places as magical as Glass Creek Meadow. Meet at 9am at the Obsidian Dome Road turn-off, 11 miles north of the Hwy 395 and 203 junction.

15-19 June - White Mountain Crest Hike with Sierra Mountain Center. See sidebar on page 9.

2 July - Glass Creek Meadow. Come out and celebrate the freedom of America's public lands on a moderate, 4 mile hike to Glass Creek Meadow in the Proposed Owens River Headwater Wilderness Additions. The eastside's largest subalpine meadow, Glass Creek Meadow is home to over 40 species of butterflies, Yosemite Toads and dazzling wildflower carpets. Meet at 9:30 am at the Obsidian Dome Road turnoff, 11 miles north of the Hwy 203 junction and 3.5 miles south of the June Lake Junction on Hwy 395.

Photo: Norman Herterich

9 July - Protect our Headwaters Upper Owens River Stewardship Day. The Owens River is without a doubt the single most important river in the Eastern Sierra. Join us for a productive and rewarding day of fixing fences and campsites, installing new informational kiosks and restoring illegal off-road vehicle tracks up and down the Upper Owens River. Together we can help ensure a long life for this beautiful river. Meet at 9am at the Big Springs Campground (Head a bit over 9 miles north of the Highway 203 & Highway 395 junction. Turn east off Highway 395 on to Owens River Road. Drive 2 miles east and turn north (left) into Big Springs Campground). Event cosponsored by Friends of the Inyo, the Sierra Nevada Alliance and California Trout.

30 July - Schulman Grove of Bristlecones. Walk among the world's oldest living trees on one of the Eastern Sierra's most spectacular trails. This 4.5 mile walk along the Methuselah Trail among the world's oldest trees winds along the roof of the Great Basin in the White Mountains. Meet at 10am at the parking lot of the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Visitor's Center, 9 miles north of Highway 168 on the White Mountain Road.

20 August - Green & Brown Lakes. A moderately strenuous 6.5 mile roundtrip stroll through aspen groves leads up into a perfectly carved hanging valley of granite, flowery mountain meadows and cool alpine lakes. Meet at 9am at the South Lake Trailhead parking lot.

10 September - Second Annual Eastern Sierra Coastal Clean Up. Last year, over 50 participants cleaned up over 250 pounds of trash from the Bishop Creek Drainage in this first annual fall clean up. Location and times to be announced, but you can bet on a day of beautiful weather, colorful creekside forests and plentiful prizes for participants.

Outings Details

All hikes are free (except White Mtn. Crest hike), and open to ALL! Please also visit our website – www.friendsoftheinyo.org – for more hikes and projects throughout the summer. For more information, please contact Paul at **760-873-6400** or **paulmc@friendsoftheinyo.org**.

Giving Back to the Land

FOI establishes the Eastern Sierra Wilderness Stewardship Corps

The Inyo National Forest, located along the eastern edge of California, is one of the most heavily visited National Forests in the Nation. Within a five hour drive from four of the west's major (and growing) metropolitan areas – Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay, Reno and Las Vegas – the grand mountain and desert vistas, pristine mountain streams teeming with wily trout and thousands of miles of backcountry Wilderness trails draw more visitors each year than Glacier, Yellowstone and Grand Canyon National Parks combined.

Unfortunately, just as more and more people head for the hills to recreate, the capacity of the Inyo National Forest is rapidly declining. For fiscal year 2005, the Inyo National Forest may lose up to 20 field and specialist positions due to budgetary shortfalls. Given the current trend of decreasing budgets and increasing use, ongoing Wilderness management issues, such as trail condition, off-road vehicle incursion, resource damage and exotic weed invasion may seem insurmountable.

Shovels in hand!

To combat the perfect storm brewing in the Eastern Sierra with increasing visitor demand coupled with decreasing Forest Service management capacity, Friends of the Inyo, through a generous matching grant from the National Forest Foundation, is establishing the Eastern Sierra Wilderness Stewardship Corps as an ongoing program to develop projects and recruit volunteers for work in Wilderness Areas on the Inyo National Forest.

By engaging and empowering visiting and local Wilderness users in the active management of their public wilderness resource, we hope to address real, on the ground concerns with real, on the ground

solutions. With the perennially shrinking land management budgets, groups like Friends of the Inyo are needed more than ever to step up with creative solutions to help solve the problems facing our public lands.

Get Involved

The success of the Wilderness Stewardship Corps will depend in large part on YOU! As co-owners of our Wilderness, we need you to help restore the trails



Mt. Whitney and the high peaks of the John Muir Wilderness rise above a blooming desert.

you love, reroute tracks out of down-cutting meadows, pull spring-sucking tamarisk and help inform visitors how to enjoy the Wilderness sustainably. Your reward will not only be the satisfying ache in your muscles after a day of rolling boulders and the sense of accomplishment that only comes from working with others toward a realizable goal, but also the smile on someone's face as they meander a well-designed trail drinking in the beauty of Sierran Wilderness

and listening to the raucous call of a Clark's Nutcracker. To find out how you can take active care of Eastern Sierra Wilderness, please call Jamie Anderson, Stewardship Coordinator, at 760-873-6400, or visit www.friendsoftheinyo.org.

National Forest Foundation

The National Forest Foundation, chartered by Congress, engages America in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 192 million acre National Forest System and accepts and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. To learn more visit www.natlforgest.org.

Defining the Roads Less Graveled

A bold step toward a manageable and sustainable road network

Roads through public lands are a hot topic in the Eastern Sierra. Some folks think there are too many (over 3,500 miles on the Inyo National Forest alone) and some think there are too few (e.g. those proliferating new routes along the west slope of the Whites or in the Buttermilks). Regardless of individual opinions, the fact is that no matter what you drive or what your recreational persuasion, we all rely on this extensive network of roads and trails to get around on the Inyo National Forest.

To help sort out what can be the rather confusing, redundant, sometimes damaging and just plain unmanageable system of roads out there, all National Forests in California have begun a five-step process to finally create a legal system of DESIGNATED roads.

The need for a designated system of roads and trails on public lands was first ordered by President Nixon in 1972. Even then, land managers realized the need to “establish policies and procedures that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands” (Executive Order 11644).

Over two decades later, the current Chief of the Forest Service, Dale Bosworth, said recently that this “isn’t just a matter of a few user conflicts or a few user-created trails here and there. In 2003, we figure we had more than 14,000 miles of user-created trails on the National Forest System. That’s a lot of unmanaged use, and it costs a lot to repair. It can lead to lasting damage.”

The Process

The five-step process that will lead us to our destination begins with an Inventory of the roads & trails now on the ground. The Inyo N.F. is currently taking public comment on the Inventory maps it released this past winter (see sidebar for how to get a copy). Once the Inventory has been studied by the public and agency specialists, the Inyo N.F. expects to craft a Forest Order limiting travel to these inventoried roads and trails. Some call this the “stop the madness order” because, believe it or not, it is still legal to drive off-road in some National Forests! With this order, the Inyo N.F. will have the tool they need to successfully cite those who irresponsibly drive or ride wherever they please.

Once the Inventory is in place, the real work begins

with steps 3, 4 and 5 – pairing down the unwieldy spaghetti bowl of roads to a manageable system of routes that provides responsible motorized access for all Forest users. In some places where four roads go to the same destination, this may mean choosing the best one while restoring the others; or it may entail the creation of a signed singletrack motorcycle or mountain bike loop opportunity, or perhaps, an old reclaiming road can become a much-needed, signed, frontcountry foot or horse trail.



Some unsustainable routes, such as this one through Black Canyon Creek, will need to be repaired, moved or closed in favor of alternate routes.

Common Ground

Everyone who enjoys public lands has a stake in this process. While some are already dredging up the old tactic of trying to divide the community into “off-roaders v. conservationists,” the truth is we’re all “off-roaders” as far as the route designation process goes. We all drive or ride to get to where we want to go on the Forest. This process is not just about motorcycles or four-wheel drives vehicles. It is about ensuring we can continue to enjoy our forest while protecting what makes us want to get out in the first place – the wild and freedom of our public Forest lands.

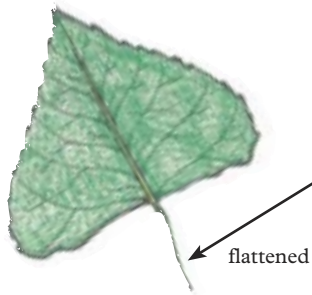
How to Get Involved

For a detailed introduction to Route Designation, download the Route Designation Guidebook at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/rwhr/ohv/route-designation/index.html>

To obtain a CD of the current Route Inventory, pick up a copy at any Inyo National Forest Office or call Nancy Erhardt with the Inyo at **760-924-5532**.

Riparian Trees of

POPLAR FAMILY – SALICACEAE



flattened

HINT: roll the petioles between your thumb and pointer finger to see if they are round (roll smoothly) or flattened (roll lopsided).



round

Fremont Cottonwood – *Populus fremontii*

The quintessential marker of desert oases, the Fremont cottonwood, or Alamo as it's called in Spanish, is restricted to the **valley floor, alluvial fans and lower reaches of mountain streams in the Eastern Sierra (<6500')**. Distinguished from the Black Cottonwood by its **broad, shiny green, strongly triangular leaves with strongly toothed margins and flattened petioles** (see drawing). Cottonwoods get their name from the **fluffy white down which coat their small seeds and fill the air** as desert streams reach their peak spring runoff. Take a moment to sit under a cottonwood on a breezy day, and listen to the leaves sing a song of desert rain.



Black Cottonwood – *Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa*

As you travel up from the valley floor, the desert-loving Fremont cottonwood yields to the **mountain stream-hugging Black Cottonwood**. Found as high as 9500' in the Eastern Sierra and White Mountains, Black Cottonwood **leaves are more rounded than the Fremont's with much smoother edges, rounded petioles and much darker green on top with a lighter color underneath**. In some places, such as McAfee Canyon on the eastern slope of the White Mountains, Black and Fremont cottonwoods hybridize where they overlap at middle elevations forming trees that mix the leaf characteristics of these two cottonwoods.

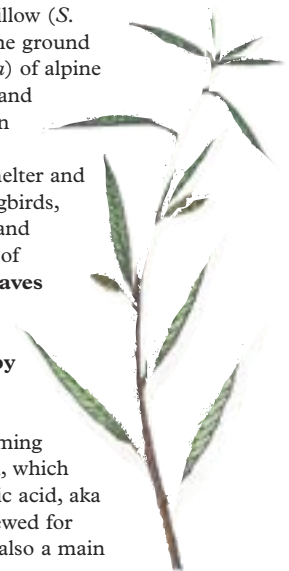
Quaking Aspen – *Populus tremuloides*

Found across the continent, the Aspen is a **characteristic tree of high Sierra and White Mountain meadows**. With its characteristic **smooth, whitish bark, small, rounded, bright green leaves and generally straight, slender trunk**, the Aspen is unmistakable. Rather than reproduce by seed, most Aspens actually reproduce by cloning – a mother tree will send out underground roots that shoot up new trees when conditions are right, such as after a fire. As such, Aspens are often found growing in genetically identical groves. While an individual tree may live for only 50 years, the clone group may be thousands of years old. Like the scientific name, *tremuloides*, suggests, even the slightest breeze sets the, **flat-petioled leaves trembling**.



Willow – *Salix spp.*

From the tree-sized Arroyo Willow (*S. lasiolepis*) of the valley floor to the ground hugging Arctic Willow (*S. arctica*) of alpine meadows, willows are a diverse and important component of Eastern Sierra riparian communities. Willow thickets provide food, shelter and nesting sites for a variety of songbirds, forage and cover for mule deer and nearly everything for a plethora of insects. Identifiable by **green leaves which are usually much longer than wide**, most Eastside Willows will be **shrubby bundles of smooth barked, vertical twigs or small trees with dark, furrowed bark** teeming with life. Willows contain salicin, which is closely related to acetylsalicylic acid, aka aspirin. In addition to being chewed for toothache, the pliable twigs are also a main component of native basketwork.



the Eastern Sierra

Riparian Areas are the wet areas along desert streams and around springs, seeps and meadows – are the single most important habitat in the Eastern Sierra. Not only do these areas provide much needed water for thirsty critters, but the lush plant life found in these scattered oases provides homes, shelter, food, nesting material and shade for everything from buckeye butterflies to black toads to mountain lions. With over 90% of the riparian areas in the West damaged or destroyed, we need to zealously guard what we have left. There's no better way to learn the importance of these life-giving sanctuaries than to visit them, listen to the birds and learn who lives there.

BIRCH FAMILY – BETULACEAE



Water Birch – *Betula occidentalis*

The **deep coppery red bark, warty twigs and egg-shaped, sharply toothed deep green leaves** set Water Birch apart from its other riparian neighbors. Often growing as a **shrubby tree with many trunks**, the water birch lines the banks of fast moving desert and mountain streams up to around 8000'. Much more widespread during the last Ice Age, the Water Birch, like many western riparian trees, became restricted to wet canyons and desert streams as the climate warmed and dried.

DOGWOOD FAMILY - CORNACEAE



Creek Dogwood – *Cornus sericea*

Often part of the understory community below aspens or black cottonwoods along Eastern Sierra streams and meadows, the Creek Dogwood is recognized by its **long, whip-like purplish, red twigs, largish opposite leaves with prominent veins, and, in early summer, a dome of small, white, 4-petaled flowers** which mature into small white berry-like fruits.

OLEASTER FAMILY – ELEAGNACEAE



Silver Buffaloberry – *Shepherdia argentea*

A sometimes overlooked member of the riparian community, the **green, silver-speckled leaves** of Buffaloberry almost glitter in the sun (*argentea* means silver in Latin). The small scales coating the leaves help reflect the sun, thereby reducing water loss from the desert sun. The **shaggy-barked, slender stems** of Buffaloberry often **grow straight up forming a tall, dense shrub**. If the **small bright red, edible berries** that mature from **miniscule yellowish flowers** don't get your attention, the **thin stems reduced to sharp thorns** might. Buffaloberry can be found along desert streams such as Furnace Creek on the east slope of the Whites or Lee Vining Creek in the Mono Basin.

ROSACEAE – ROSE FAMILY



Wood Rose – *Rosa woodsii*

Walking along many desert streams is a reminder that every rose has its thorn, and in the case of the beautiful Wood Rose, it has thousands of them! The **thorn-coated, reddish-stemmed** Wood Rose is often the first plant to recolonize a disturbed riparian area. The distinctive **5-petaled, fragrant pink flower**, so loved by bumblebees and flowersniffers, matures into a deep **red, urn-shaped fruit** called a rose hip. These hips form an important part of many critter's fall diet, and also make a wonderful tea or jam rich in vitamin C. Dense thickets of thorny Rose provide a relatively safe nesting site for migratory songbirds.

White Mountains Hike

The best backpacking trip (not) in the Sierra

by Todd Vogel

As a mountain guide, outdoor educator and (nearly) twenty-year resident of the Owens Valley, I've had the privilege to explore many of the area's finest mountain places. Of the many exceptional hikes and ski tours I've done in the Sierra and environs, a hike that stands out as truly exceptional – in a land defined by spectacular hikes – is a walk that is not in the Sierra at all.

Across the Owens Valley from the Sierra Nevada, the White Mountains receive much less attention than their big brothers to the west. From the valley floor “the Whites” appear to be dusty, brown, dry and desolate. A veritable wasteland. There's little fishing (though there are fish) and you need to work hard to get wet there, much less go for a swim. Travel is mostly rugged, high, and off-trail, and access is via poorly maintained dirt roads. There are no outhouses at the trail-heads. Why go at all?

Perhaps best known for the Bristlecone Pine, one of Earth's oldest living things, the Whites are full of mystery and surprise, not to mention the best views of the Sierra obtainable with your feet still on the ground. A surprise: there are nearly 40 named streams in the Whites, a range barely sixty miles in length. And a mystery: many Native American artifacts remain there, including remnant trails and ancient hunting blinds at over 13,000'. What was it like to earn part of your living in such an inhospitable place?

After years of looking at the Whites from “across the street” and countless day hikes up the streams and canyons on the west side, I gave in to temptation and decided to take a hike along the length of the range.

The route finding is easy enough: with the exception of some options at the start and end, there really aren't many ways to go. It's one long ridge top after all. But, as they say, the devil is in the detail. One big challenge of the hike is how best to deal with the extreme elevation. Hikers and mountaineers have long known that too fast a trip to high altitude can lead to illness. After studying the map, a sequence of camps that fit with a cautious approach to the elevation became apparent. Ideally, we'd position ourselves so that our first

night's camp was at 10,000', the second at 11,000, and so forth. We began near White Mountain Research Station's Crooked Creek facility, placing our first camp comfortably near 10,000' in the northern part of Cottonwood Basin.

Cottonwood Basin is one of those surprising places. Granite rock formations dot the landscape, and dense groves of aspen trees line the edges of vast sagebrush covered meadows. Cottonwood Creek is too big to easily jump across in many places, and in the North Fork, fearless endangered Paiute Cutthroat trout wait their turn for insects to float by. The fish were stocked here decades

ago, but that's another story (sorry, no fishing!). Here the trail follows the creek through dense riparian thickets alive with birds and other critters. This is the arid wasteland I mentioned before?

A day later, the crest of the mountains are gained near McAfee Meadow. A brief but welcome stint on the old White Mountain road leads

to the top of the Range's namesake peak, which at 14,246', is higher than all but two of California's “fourteeners”. Most travelers turn back here, but this trek is just getting into high gear!

Just past White Mountain Peak is a bit of interesting terrain. In guide speak that means challenging stuff ahead... Travel here is not technical, but at 14,000', it's hard enough. It takes a couple of hours to weave through the snow patches and loose rock that guard the entrance to the north



Photo: Todd Vogel

Sunset Bristlecone at the head of Cottonwood Basin

Continued on next page

White Mountains Hike...continued

half of the Whites. Day two closes at a camp at the saddle between Birch and Cabin Creeks, a fitting end to a marathon day. Another interesting place: though 500' from each other at their headwaters, one creek flows to the west, the other to the east. Arrowheads and obsidian chips are abundant here.



Walking atop the Great Basin near Mt. Dubois.

Photo: Todd Vogel

The northern end of the Whites rise to the spectacular Pellisier Flats, a five mile long rolling plateau at 13,000'. Stunning views are plentiful: it's possible to see the peaks of Lake Tahoe to the north and the peaks of southern Death Valley to the south, a distance of nearly 300 miles. More unexpected discoveries: just south of Mt. Dubois, the high point of Pellisier Flats, a spring emits a steady flow. Others have found this spot – an ancient hunting shelter is nearby.

What goes up must eventually come down, and the end of the White Mountains hike is something to be prepared for. A descent off the top of the

Whites is a strenuous (some would say brutal) initiation to hiking in the range. It seems that up and over Boundary Peak is the best way, as most of the elevation is lost on steep trails and an old dirt road. Other options exist, but whatever way you choose you'll have earned your end of trip beer!

Floating above the Great Basin desert sea, it's easy to imagine these mountains as islands. As the hike unfolds so does the mystery: Questions answered but, reason enough to return since many more occur.

Walk the Crest

Sierra Mountain Center, LLC is offering this hike this year as a fundraiser for FOI. All proceeds less food and shuttle expenses will be donated to Friends of the Inyo. Space is limited to six people. Dates are **June 15-19, 2005**, and cost is \$750.

Visit www.sierramountaincenter.com or call **760-873-8526** for more information.

For more information

For a map of the route taken please go to

<http://www.sierramountaincenter.com/graphics/maps/summermaps/whitemtnhike.gif>

Many more photos can be found at:

<http://www.sierramountaincenter.com/gallery/gallery/White-Mountain-Hike>

Protect & Preserve

America's largest desert mountain range also happens to be the second largest unprotected roadless area in the Lower 48 States! By preserving the White Mountains as designated Wilderness, we can ensure that many more will be able to wander its wild crest or rest under an ancient pine. Go to www.friendsoftheinyo.org to learn about preserving this unparalleled desert range.

Pinedrops...notes on issues affecting Eastern Sierra Public Lands

by Paul McFarland & Keith Glidewell

A Good Deed Undone...

On a beautiful early spring Sunday, nearly a dozen volunteers and Inyo National Forest personnel met in Independence to begin tackling an ongoing off-road vehicle problem in the Inyo Mountains.

Organized by FOI Board member, Todd Vogel, the target of the day's work project was to replace signs, build barriers and rake out illegal off-road vehicle tracks running up a hillside into the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. Despite the fact that the area has been off-limits to vehicles for over 10 years, motorcycles, jeeps and ATVs routinely violate the wilderness boundary north of the road to the Betty Jumbo Mine.

Unfortunately, it took less than two weeks for someone to tear down the rock wall, rip out the signs, winch boulders out of the way and scar the adjacent hillsides with new tire tracks. That's a lot of work to drive illegally, especially when you consider there are 3,500 miles of open road in the Inyo National Forest!

Join us on the 4th of June as we head back into the Inyos to restore the hillclimbs, barriers and signs (see schedule on page 3).

Breaking the Law

It appears that some public land managers need some basic lessons from parents and teachers – namely, that you don't reward bad behavior if you ever wish to keep some order.

For the last couple of years, conservationists and the Forest Service have documented increasing illegal snowmobile use in the proposed Hoover Wilderness Addition just south of Highway 108 near Sonora Pass. Not that the illegal use has been any secret; a quick Google search will reveal dozens of images of snowmobilers blatantly flouting the law. First closed to snowmobiles over two decades ago to protect this classic

Sierra landscape of towering cliffs, alpine lakes and rich trout streams, illegal use has exploded recently, even spilling over into adjacent Yosemite National Park and the Emigrant Wilderness.

Rather than enforce the standing closure order, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is proposing to simply rewrite the law and open the area to snowmobile use.

How do our public land managers ever expect to get a handle on the explosion of illegal and damaging off-road vehicle use if purposeful illegal behavior is rewarded with rule changes?

Smoldering at Furnace Creek

Rather than put out the ongoing fire over the protection of Furnace Creek, the Inyo National Forest and the Ridgecrest Office of the BLM reignited the controversy with their recent gasoline-soaked Environmental Assessment (EA).

A unique desert stream draining the east slope of the White Mountains, Furnace Creek has unfortunately become a flashpoint in the battle over the appropriate use of off-road vehicles on public lands. After conservationists documented ongoing damage to this fragile oasis, the Forest Service and BLM moved to protect the stream from ongoing vehicle damage in March, 2003 (go to www.friendsoftheinyo.org for more information and photos).

Despite the fact that both agencies have found that vehicle use in Furnace Creek damages rare and vital riparian habitat, 5 of the 6 alternatives proposed by the agencies would allow vehicles to drive through this desert wetland. Apparently bowing to political pressure from the off-road vehicle lobby, the agencies are seriously considering spending dwindling taxpayer dollars to build a new motorized route through Furnace Creek.

Thankfully, concerned citizens turned out in force, both in person and through letters, to vociferously oppose the proposed damaging and wasteful new route. While the agencies are mulling through the public comment, Furnace Creek continues to quietly restore itself.

Run for the Hills!

On a beautiful Saturday morning, April 23, the First Annual Friends of the Inyo Eastern Sierra Earth Day Race was held in the Buttermilks west of Bishop with great success. 93 runners converged on the 10K/5K course that wound through desert meadows and giant boulders below the magnificent Sierra Crest.

Thankfully, the weather cooperated and we had a sunny, windless day for a fantastic race. Runners were greeted at the finish line with drumming by the Rhythm Method, refreshments from Great Basin Bakery as well as great prizes from Montrail, Patagonia, Eastside



The pink flag in the center of this picture marks the path of the proposed new motorized route through Furnace Creek

Continued on next page

Pinedrops *(continued)*

Sports and InTouch Micro Spa in Mammoth.

Thank you to all our volunteers who made this great race happen: Jan Gnass, Laura Schappert, James Wilson, Gretel Enck, Alan Murdock, Dr. Stacey Brown and the Rhythm Method

And a huge thank you to our great sponsors without which we would not have been able to provide our runners with great prizes and refreshments: Patagonia, InTouch Micro Spa in Mammoth, Andy

Russell of Montrail, of Wilson's Eastside Sports, Skandar's Custom Sculptures, Great Basin Bakery, CalTrans, City of Bishop, Northern Inyo Hospital and Rayni Chase with Balance Bar.

Thanks also to the Inyo National Forest and the Department of Water and Power for their permits.

See you next year for the 2nd Annual Friends of the Inyo Eastern Sierra

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Photo: Keith Glidewell

Runners get set as the clouds break



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Photo: Roberta McIntosh

Marie Louise Lake, John Muir Wilderness

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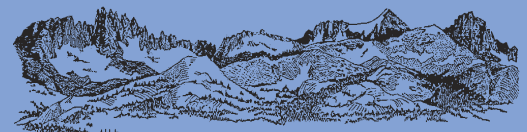
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