

JEFFREY PINE JOUINA CARING FOR THE PUBLIC LANDS OF THE EASTERN SIERRA

Conglomerate Mesa

Dispatch From a Clear Day

Musings From the Field



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



At Friends of the Inyo, we work to protect and care for lands that have been, for over ten thousand years, and still very much are, inhabited by the Paiute (Nuumu), Shoshone (Newe), and Timbisha peoples. Many of these lands are now known by names recognizing people who never set foot here. These lands are called Payahunaduu or Panawe by the Nuumu and Newe peoples, respectively. This land acknowledgement is a recognition of the the often-suppressed colonial history of our country.

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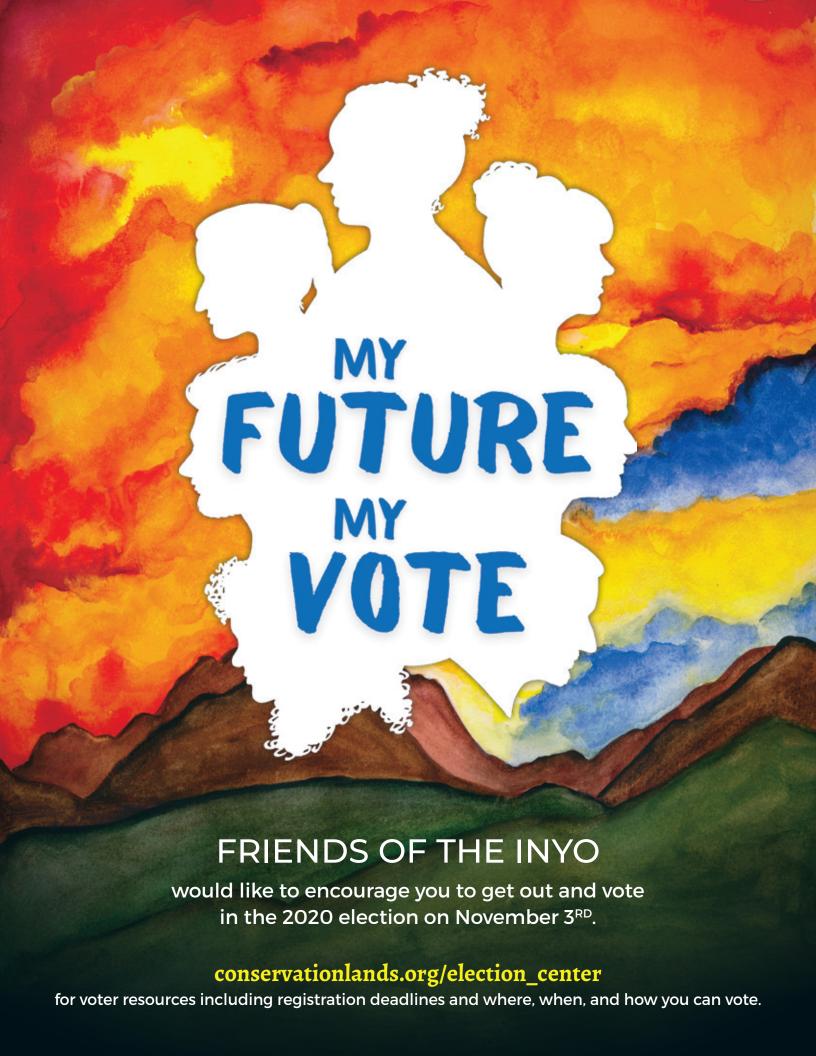
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LEAVE NO TRACE

BY LINDSAY BUTCHER, 2020 TRAIL AMBASSADOR

indsay hails from Southern California originally, but has long since abandoned the beach and traffic for the pristine granite, endless trails, and bluebird days of the Sierra Nevada. This past summer she worked as a Trail Ambassador for Friends of the Inyo on the southern and northern zones of the Inyo National Forest, spanning from the Golden Trout Wilderness up to the Mammoth/Mono Ranger District. She enjoys climbing, biking, and skiing paired with copious amounts of coffee.

I grew up visiting the Sierra Nevada multiple times every year since I was a baby. One of my first memories is of chasing (toddling since I could barely walk) a bear through the campground in Big Pine yelling, "Teddy!" I've never really considered not living near the mountains. So it's only natural, I guess, that I found myself on the infamous "East Side" by way of many seasons spent working in Yosemite.

This summer I was hired as a Trail Ambassador for Friends of the Inyo, a job which took me out onto the trails and face-to-face with visitors. I thoroughly enjoy interacting with people in the field, because no matter what background you come from, every single human is just happy to be on a walk in the verdant surroundings of the Sierra Nevada. The trails are a great equalizer in that way. For the most part, people are happy and grateful to see someone maintaining the land. I get a lot of "Thank you," and, "Keep up the good work." But I also get, "It's a shame you have to" or, "People should know better," when I'm packing out bulging trash bags.

I've been picking up pounds of water bottles, beer cans, discarded food wrappers, micro trash, and abandoned, broken gear. Yet, by far the most common litter I encounter are the clusters of toilet paper and wipes decorating the forest floor like little blossoms of manure flowers. It is discouraging. I get angry, I feel disappointed. Occasionally I question the safety of it (but I know that I am safe and wearing the proper protective equipment). Still, I haven't lost all hope.

I give people the benefit of the doubt and hope that they aren't leaving this mess or doing these harmful things on purpose or knowingly. Maybe people who don't live intimately with our public lands just don't know or never learned proper wilderness etiquette. With the convenience of suburban life—street sweepers, Wi-Fi, and flushing toilets—Leave No Trace (LNT) land ethics are not always intuitive, obvious, or accessible (especially with Visitor's Centers being closed).

With the popularity of Insta-worthy destinations and

guide-apps like Guthook or All-Trails, getting into the remote wilderness has never been more convenient or in demand. This year in particular, it seems that due to the pandemic, people who normally wouldn't foray into the backcountry are getting out there. Simply put, social distancing is relatively easy to accomplish in open spaces. That's great-welcome to the world of adventure! However, our lands are being loved to death. Clichéd as it sounds, it's true. It has been my experience this year that a higher percentage of overnight hikers are uninformed on LNT practices, and therefore may end up hurting the very places they are visiting.

However, I can't really fault them. Honestly, on my first backpacking trip way back when, I had no idea what I was doing (but thought I did, which is even more dangerous). A friend and I just wanted to get away from the busy campgrounds and have an adventure. Together, we wanted to prove that we could be tough and brave. We thought we were prepared. We planned. We packed. We let people know our itinerary. Turns out we were clueless.

I was using my mom's archaic external frame pack that weighed twenty pounds empty. Our knowledge of proper food storage was nonexistent; I'm pretty sure we just slept with it in our tent. Yikes! We had a fire above ten-thousand feet of elevation. We made camp way too close to the lake. We took an off-trail "shortcut", which resulted in an impromptu dip in the river, pack and all. The point is we had no idea how to conduct ourselves. There we were, a couple of bumbling amateurs having a much more damaging impact to our surroundings than we were aware of.

There was no mentor to point out our mistakes before we made them. Luckily (or unluckily, depending on how you see it) we didn't run into a ranger, and with no initiative to educate ourselves, the LNT principles went unlearned. Our parents weren't any help either, as LNT wasn't established when they were backpacking in the sixties and seventies. It wasn't until the eighties that no-trace land ethics were a formal, recognized educational program.

Which reminds me of a terrible excuse for bad behavior I've come across this season: the "I've been doing it like this for thirty years" rationale. That might be true, but it doesn't mean the behavior is not wrong now. I came across a group of backpackers that admitted they burned their toilet paper instead of packing it out. They used that same old justification. Keep in mind, this is while ash was actively falling from the sky due to the multiple wildfires in the Sierra, and the Inyo National Forest had implemented an

active fire ban. I gently reminded these backpackers that old habits aren't good excuses, and safety is always smart. They nodded in agreement and walked away, tails a little tucked, but hopefully, lesson learned.

The research and information that formulates the LNT principles are constantly evolving and our implementation of the ethics must evolve too. It used to be common practice to hang food in trees to keep it away from bears (a generally faulty and problematic system), but these days we have highly effective bear canisters. It is every recreator's responsibility to keep up with current LNT expectations, kind of like a continuing-education program for how to be in the outdoors respectfully and responsibly. Eventually I figured it out. I learned each concept one by one over time, but it took years.

So without further ado, here are the current principles all in one place:





Leave No Trace SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Plan Ahead & Prepare

- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.
 Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
 Visit in small groups when possible. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups.
- Repackage food to minimize waste
- . Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent

Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.
- To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

Leave What You Find

- · Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native speci
 Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.

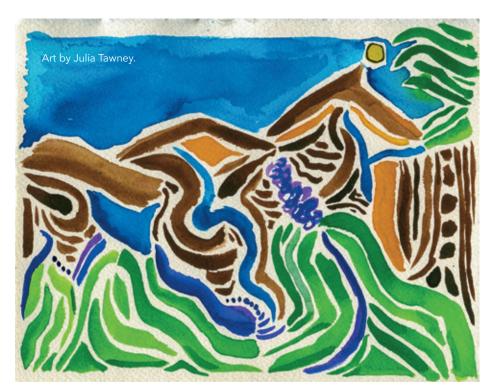
Minimize Campfire Impacts

Respect Wildlife

- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
 Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
 Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock





MUSINGS FROM THE FIELD:

Glass Creek Meadow, Owens River Headwaters Wild & Scenic River Watershed

BY JULIA TAWNEY

his past summer, Julia worked as a part-time Trail Ambassador in the Owens River Wild & Scenic River Watershed thanks to a grant from the River Network and in partnership with the Inyo National Forest. The River Network is dedicated to protecting national Wild and Scenic River systems by supporting stewardship, education, and outreach efforts with local nonprofit organizations. Friends of the Inyo received funding for the 2020 season to work specifically in the Owens River Headwaters, along and around Deadman and Glass Creeks. Julia assisted with Forest Service recreation and wilderness monitoring, trail maintenance, and created a virtual interpretive experience on the Glass Creek meadow trail.

Julia currently works at the Mammoth Lakes Library. She enjoys backcountry skiing, long alpine days, and making bagels in the Eastern Sierra.

Gazing towards patches of purpleyblue lupine, spotting white yarrow, and young Lodgepoles, I rest my eyes on Glass Creek meadow - a treasured gem in the Owens River Headwaters Wild &

Scenic River Watershed.

The Owens River Headwaters became designated Wilderness in March 2009, as part of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act, with an addition of 19 miles of protected Wild and Scenic Rivers. It is the land of the Northern Paiute (Kutzadika'a), Western Mono/Monache, and Central Sierra Miwok people. The Owens River Headwaters marks the beginning of snowmelt-fed creeks and streams flowing from the High Sierra to the Owens Valley floor. The Owens River is a symbol of Los Angeles' water supply, a renowned fishing and recreation hot spot, and supports a robust riparian and buzzing with life. wildlife system.

Looking out at Glass Creek Meadow, I feel an opportunity to connect with the source. This meadow holds and filters snowmelt from the San Joaquin ridge and surrounding mountains, providing flood control and adequate habitat to threatened species. Glass Creek snakes past obsidian flows and Jeffrey pine forests, connecting with Big Springs and Deadman Creek to form the Upper Owens. I feel a sense of quiet and

humility in the connection of this milelong subalpine meadow to a significant water supply.

I embark on a walk in the thirsty lodgepoles on the periphery of the meadow. CRACK! CRUNCH! POP! My feet stomp on the blanketed floor of lodgepole cones and dry needles. A baby bear frolics away in the distance. Hawks and crows soar overhead, squawking at my presence. I move closer towards Glass Creek. Brook trout dart away in the stream, a small toad hops on the bank, butterflies dance from flower to flower. An abundant meadow, buzzing with life.

To encounter a place of wildness and quiet in the midst, is truly a gift. In working in the Owens River Headwaters this summer, I realize how important and unique places like this are in the Eastern Sierra. Thanks to the voices in the community and early stewardship efforts by Friends of the Inyo and other agencies, the Owens River Headwaters Wild & Scenic River system is protected as such for future generations to enjoy and seek refuge in.



Where it all begins:

A Meadow in the Moonlight

BY PAUL MCFARLAND

LA's water-the best stuff-begins here a hundred times at once from over one hundred seeps and springs,

isolated, idiosyncratic flows tucked away inside the boundary lines of the Owens River Headwaters Wilderness Some tumble loudly past crimson columbine, others weep gently through watercress and pillowed moss Many disappear down into water hungry pumice soils

And then surface, somewhere downslope, closer to LA, where this porous pumice sponge meets concrete-solid granite

We came to meet some of these springs, to walk on the sponge Climbing up Glass Creek Falls-where the granite squeezes the sponge Forcing hidden water to the sky, making silent flows sing under sun and stars Dippers-bouncing and blinking with transparent eyelids - nest here in ferny grottos under this modest fall Alongside now-wild brook trout dumped one day from a coffee can

Panting from the climb, we finally slow down enough to listen

The boisterous chorus of water over the falls gives way to a whisper

Above the falls, the pumice sponge has swallowed the creek again

Silently, under our feet, twirling downslope past the roots of willow, lodgepole, Jeffrey and whitebark pine

the water moves

Bound for the falls

Bound to tumble past Big Springs and founder in Crowley Reservoir

Bound for endless meanders spooning abandoned oxbows below Winnedumah and Williamson on the Owens Valley floor

Bound for miles of aqueduct darkness

Bound for a million sinks, tubs, and 10 qt sauce pans

Moving again, upstream, against the silent water we're bound for Glass Creek Meadow

Over a sensuous pumice ridge-the last sentence written by a dying glacie-

San Joaquin Peak, Deadman Pass, and Two Teats draw the western horizon and the watershed divide

To the west of this Sierra crest prayed-for winter snows melt into the San Joaquin, irrigates California's Canaan, and what's left flows out the Golden Gate

To the east, towards us, melt water and summer downpours flow from the crest, soak into the pumice sponge, and, miraculously, today a little bit helps quiet the dust of Owens Lake while feeding legions of birds commuting between continents

We're bound for Glass Creek Meadow For lagers, ales, wines, bread, and cheese For sitting, up here at the source, waiting to see what comes next For the walk back, landscape mellowed under full moonlight For beginning again, a hundred times at once

Paul McFarland served as an Executive Director and staff member at Friends of the Inyo. Paul led stewardship events in the ORH and interpretive hikes to Glass Creek Meadow in the early 2000's.

Tales from a Truly Unique Summer

BY ALEX ERTAUD, STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR AT FRIEND OF THE INYO

y, my, what a summer. The pandemic pushed out our start date into early-to-middle of June, and as of presstime in late-September, the National Forests of California have been closed for close to a month due to high fire danger and smoke. It has been a trying season for sure, but one that has been remarkably successful nonetheless! I'm a bit amazed at how such a season bookended by tumult could still be so successful. And yet when I ponder it, I realize it is because of the people. Lindsay Butcher and Julia Tawney, our Trail Ambassadors for the summer, did a tremendous job being flexible, patient, resilient, hardworking self-starters over the past three months. They've been a joy to work with and manage; I couldn't imagine a better couple of folks to work with this summer.

Oh wait, except that I can! Namely, all our Forest Service partners on the Inyo, Humboldt-Toiyabe, and Sierra National Forests. In a word, they have been superstars. Their dedication to working with us when they too were navigating new, challenging, and ever-changing waters with regards to COVID-safety guidelines and protocols was inspiring. From District Rangers, Recreation Officers, Wilderness Managers, Wilderness Rangers, and all the

other staff on these Forests, we have gotten nothing but positivity and "can-do attitudes" when it came to getting good work done on the land. Thank you!

One last huge thank you goes out to the Athenian School and the staff associated with their Athenian Wilderness Experience. I have long been in awe at their logistical mastery and professionalism in everything they do. They take teenagers into the wilds of the Sierra (summer) and Death Valley (winter) for a twenty-six day educational backpacking course. On these trips, we team up with them to do days of stewardship work on the land they travel through. Thanks to their attention to detail, professionalism, and rigor, they implemented thorough COVID-19 guidelines for everyone's safety, and their trips went off this summer without a hitch. Tools were disinfected after each use, face coverings were worn, and social distance maintained. We were even able to bolster our stewardship efforts and provide every backpacking group with a service day opportunity on the Inyo and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests, a first for the Athenian-Friends of the Inyo partnership. Amazing leadership from their end, and truly a five-star partner to work with.

SPECIAL THANKS goes out to the following organizations who helped fund our stewardship activities this summer:

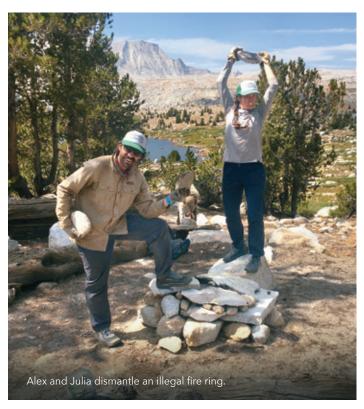


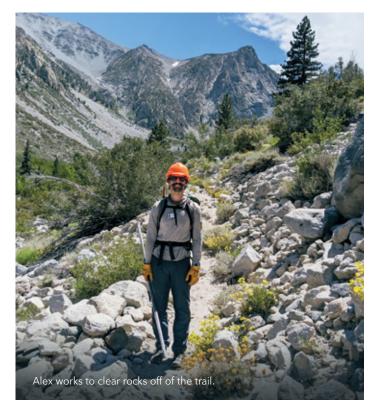






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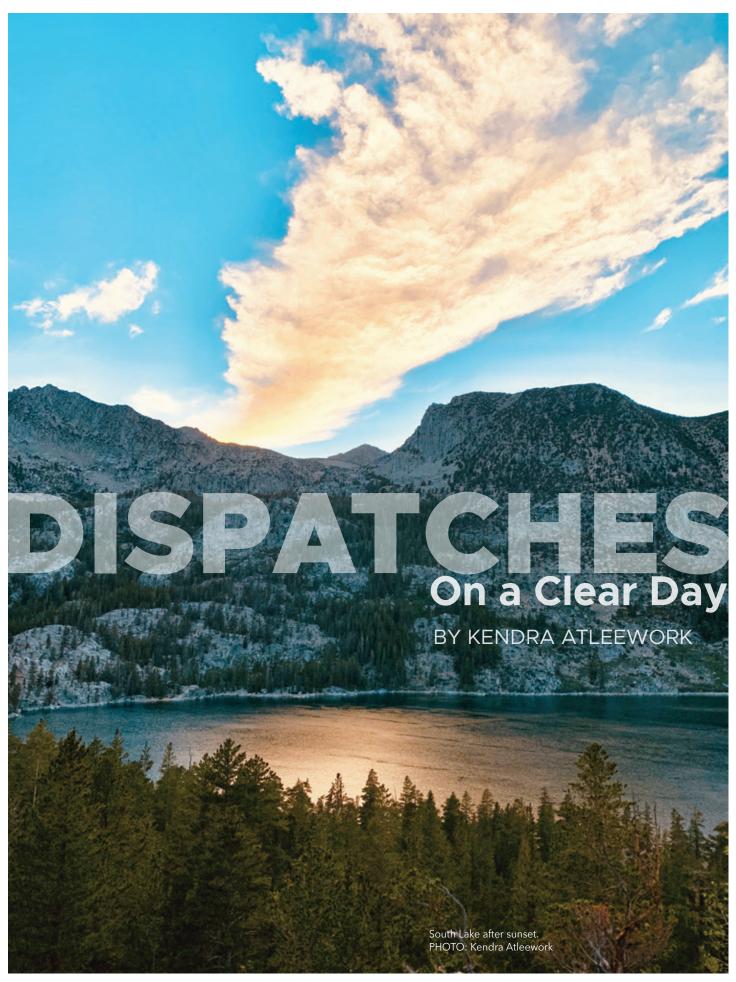




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SEPTEMBER 28TH 2020

besides the bare essentials-when the garden's getting weedy and I had to thrice-wash a load of towels because the ash began to settle while it hung on the line-it feels important to remember all the reasons I love my home.

I love my home because it is cradled between the White Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, so no matter which way I look, I know exactly where I am.

I love my home because chances are I know you-even beneath your mask I know you-and chances are I'll see you at the post office, or at Manor Market, or at Dwayne's.

I love when I can hear the rumble of something going on at the fairgrounds. I love when I can hear coyotes in the fields. I love when little green frogs hop across the dusty road alongside the canals and skunks dash boldly around my yard. I love when everyone trades produce in the summer and helps each other get firewood in winter. I love when seasons change; I love when seasons douse us with their essence, in their prime.

I love the deep shade of the lawn in front of the Bishop High School, even on the hottest days, where my friend Ranae and I sit and write with our pastries from Great Basin and our drinks from Looney Bean, where the flag on its pole clicks in the breeze-half mast again, seemingly all the time these days—and a couple walks their dog and a family plays hide and seek amongst the huge old trees.

I love a certain locals' hiking trail, and seeing locals on it, and I love the hidden trail that picks up where that one leaves off and makes its journey to a certain lake. I love bushwhacking and getting a little lost and using a topo map to figure out which crags and peaks surround you, feeling your way, spotting the lake below you, a turquoise bowl; throwing your clothes off, jumping in screaming, sitting naked in the sun until you scare some out-of-town backpackers coming unsuspecting down the trail. I love eating snacks in the sun, covered in goosebumps, up here in this rock and stone world that feels so different as to be magic, so strange and vertical and with a quality of light that changes by the minute, from the clean cool of morning to the ticking afternoon to the slanting blue of early evening

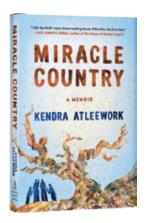
hen the smoke is too thick to do anything outdoors that fades again to cool. And I love the return to the valley, a warm bowl you sink back into, your car winding down 168, the last of the sun slipping over the top of the Whites, and back in town there's sand and pebbles to shake from your shoes and Burger Barn or the brewery or Salsa's, and then the exhausted sleep after a hike that was longer than you planned and involved some surprise cliffs and backtracking but that's okay, everything's okay after a day in the mountains. I love the cool air that begins flowing down, so that by midnight when you are long asleep and sore in your bed, showered and fed, over your quiet house the Milky Way is a great gossamer ribbon across the sky, the satellites small and steady, the stars blazing in their otherworldliness, following some private course, streaking here and there, subsuming one another, flickering out.

> This morning I opened my window for the first time in weeks. And I smelled September, as I have known September since my first: the coolness of night warming out of the grass, off the asphalt; the summery smell of the fields and the canals, the tang of the first falling leaves, which have started to gather in my yard. I pulled my nose away from the screen and opened the rest of my windows and listened to the birds, which was thrilling, and listened to the neighbor's lawnmower, which was also thrilling after weeks of living shrink-wrapped alone inside my house hearing nothing but the air filter.

> The year is 2020, and thus I am overjoyed by the simple fact of the neighbor's lawnmower and clean-ish air. I am reminded that I love my home. Reminded, after weeks of an eerie semi-dusk, and refreshing the AQI app until it crashes, and wincing on behalf of the mail carrier who makes his rounds on foot, masked, not for the virus but the smoke.

> Let me remember this. Let me remember what it feels like to open my windows. To go freely into the high country. To hug my friends. To be in a place I know full of people.

> Let me remember until I have it back. And then, let me remember what it feels like to lose. Let us never forget how we love all the things that make our home. Let us hold them so tightly, so gently, place them with such honor in our lives that we nightly pray to whatever we believe in: may we never go without them again.



Kendra Atleework was born and raised in Bishop, California. She is the author of the book Miracle Country, her love letter to the Eastern Sierra—a story of flight and return, bounty and emptiness, and the true meaning of home. Miracle Country was published by Algonquin Books in July 2020 and is available wherever books are sold. Kendra is the recipient of the Ellen Meloy Desert Writers Award and was selected for The Best American Essays, edited by Ariel Levy. She received her MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota and now lives in Bishop. Say hello at Atleework.com.



CONGLOMERATE MESA: Worth More than Gold

BY ALEX ERTAUD, PHOTOS BY KEN ETZEL

ike most of the best places in the Eastern Sierra, Conglomerate

Mesa is a drive-by.

Thousands speed by it south-bound on the 395 or east-bound on the 190, without registering it on their mind's eye, or their eye's eye. With a quick left shoulder-check as they cruise south from Lone Pine, past the Owens Dry Lake, they would see the not particularly descript end of the Inyo Mountain range. But should they inquire, maybe pull out a map (or perhaps realistically pull up an app on their phone), they would see that what they're looking at is in actuality a set of three distinct areas, a peak and two mesas. From north to south they would be looking at Cerro Gordo Peak, Conglomerate Mesa, and Malpais Mesa. An old mining ghost town, an area under threat of mining, and a Wilderness area, respectively.

Back to the speeders-by, I must say I can't fault them. I had never heard of

Conglomerate Mesa until I started working for Friends of the Inyo. With so much easily-accessible terrain out there, and Conglomerate Mesa's rough roads and general lack of trails (or any infrastructure really), it is not a huge surprise that it is rarely visited. Of course as I type those words, I worry that I might be the one to let the cat out of the bag. Will I be the one responsible for the overrunning of Conglomerate Mesa, the culprit for yet another place being "loved to death"? I'm optimistic that that won't be the case. In no small part because we have written about Conglomerate Mesa in this here publication, the Jeffrey Pine Journal. And those were Get Outs!, our version of a guide to getting out in a particular place. The first was in 2011, the second this past spring. And to my knowledge, it has not been overrun. No Inyo rock daisies are getting trampled, no new roads being created (at least not by recreationalists-but more on that later), no heaps of trash strewn about. So it is with great

pleasure that I allow myself to share my impressions of this place, unfettered by any qualms, concerns, or feelings of consternation as to what I might be exposing. I can take you along on my sensory journey, without fear for the land's well being. In fact, I think it'll do just the opposite; I hope it will inspire you to visit (responsibly) and grow to love this place too. For it needs our love, now more than ever.

Being on Conglomerate Mesa is nuanced. To the north lies Cerro Gordo: remnants of the old mine and accompanying infrastructure and ghost town, and around that a Wilderness Study Area on the land that meets that particular standard. Beyond that still, lies the Inyo Mountains Wilderness Area. South of Conglomerate Mesa we find Malpais Mesa Wilderness Area. Looking west, we find Owens Dry Lake, a man-made environmental disaster turned billion-dollar mitigation project whose full story is worthy of an entire book. It is a success story in the way









that things are better than they were, though not as good as they have ever been. And to the east lies Death Valley National Park, all 3.4 million acres of it, the largest National Park in the contiguous United States.

To the west and north, we find locales with clear marks of a history of industrial-level impacts. An optimist would use the past tense when describing the industry of the area, as these areas are protected by designation (Cerro Gordo) and lawsuit-mandated remediation (Owens Dry Lake).

South and east however, sit examples of protection without the level of scarring. Malpais Mesa is a Wilderness Area, with only a sliver of a cherrystem around a road that climbs onto the mesa. And Death Valley is, well, a National Park. There are roads here and there, sure, but the park boasts 91% of its acreage as Wilderness, and from the view at Conglomerate Mesa, it stretches as far as the eye can see, clear into Nevada.

And in the middle lies our Conglomerate Mesa, the nuance. Will it remain un-industrialized and join Death Valley and Malpais Mesa, as forever-protected parcels of land?

of protected space as habitat for the vulnerable desert species that call it home? Do we want to give fragile species, the Joshua tree, the Inyo rock daisy (to name but a few) the space, the opportunity to survive, perhaps even thrive? These species that call the high desert home have a hard enough life, dealing with temperature extremes, sparse precipitation, and fierce winds. Will we appreciate the wild stars and truly dark night skies we get up there enough to save them? Strewn up there like a series of shimmering garlands, on a backdrop so dark the black void of light seems nuanced, with pockets and shades of darkness. Onyx here, absolute black there, soft-black in between. And those stars are so plentiful it's dizzying as they flicker on and off, as gaseous flare after gaseous flare reveal themselves to our ocular senses that intellectually we know are only capturing at best a tiny percentage of what is out there. Can we honor the legacy of Paiute and Shoshone people that have called the area home since time immemorial? They are the first, present, and future stewards of these lands, and visit

Can we forever protect the corridor of protected space as habitat for the vulnerable desert species that call it home? Do we want to give fragile species, the Joshua tree, the Inyo rock of Conglomerate Mesa for pinyon nut harvesting and hunting purposes. Will we ruin that legacy and lesson of using the land while also respecting it? Are we willing to give all that up?

For what? For an open-pit cyanide heap-leach gold mine (which is a mouthful and just as bad as it sounds)? Will our thirst for industry lead us to a calamity we come to regret akin to what we have at Owens Dry Lake? Let's appreciate the value Conglomerate Mesa has for us at the moment. Biodiversity, unparalleled night time skies, rich human history, and a sense of quiet amid a cacophonous world come together to present a place that makes us feel human and humble in all the best ways. Are we willing to give that up for some gold? I think you know my answer, but invite you to (respectfully) head up there yourself to see what you think. Gaze at the night sky, peer into Death Valley, kneel down to see the world from a floral point of view, and see how this place makes you feel. Ask yourself if you can bear to see it irreparably excavated for some shiny ore. See Conglomerate Mesa for yourself, and you'll see that it is worth more than its weight in gold.

Stewardship Spotlight:

SIERRA TRASH ELIMINATORS

BY ALEX ERTAUD & KYLE HAMADA, PHOTOS BY ERICA JOHNSEN

ews spreads quickly through the community of the Eastern Sierra. So when one group of volunteers started picking up trash, people noticed-and joined in.

Erica Johnsen is the creator of the Facebook group, Sierra Trash Eliminators (STE). At the time of publication, the STE boasts nearly 1,200 members. Instead of a trout in one hand and pole in the other, these folks raise a heavy trash bag in one hand and a trash grabber in the other. Members are encouraged with messages of "Thank you!' and "You Rock!" following every post. There's even a real sense of friendly competition between those who can pick up the most trash by weight, by count of bags, and even by amount of cash found on the side of the road! The STE are an organized, dedicated, and impactful group that Friends of the Inyo is proud to support. Friends donated dozens of trash-grabbers and hundreds of trash bags to the cause.

As fall has now arrived, Friend of the Inyo Stewardship Director Alex Ertaud met (virtually, of course) with Sierra Trash Eliminators creator Erica Johnsen to talk about this summer's work.

ALEX ERTAUD, FRIEND OF THE INYO: Sierra Trash Eliminators (STE) have taken the summer by storm, getting out there and doing amazing work! How would you describe what STE is, and how you see it fit into our Eastern Sierra community?

ERICA JOHNSEN, SIERRA TRASH ELIMINATORS: STE is a group of volunteer members that rapidly joined together to make a difference in the Eastern Sierra. I decided [that] waiting for areas to be cleaned up was no longer an option and I needed help from new members and we would get after it ourselves. Encouragement is very important. The frustration of seeing our communities overrun with litter during such a busy summer has now turned into a sense of pride as we have worked independently or as a group (following COVID regulations). We share our pictures of littered areas, come up with solutions and get it cleaned up! STE volunteer members are what was needed with so much underfunding and staffing shortage in our Forests and communities.

AE: How did the idea come about, and what spurned the desire to start such a group?

EJ: I decided to start this group after making a post on the Mammoth/Bishop Community [Facebook group] board pleading for the County to be more proactive in cleaning up our trashed trails and communities. I

needed to bring awareness to the issue and show photos of the trash and graffiti in my current home town of June Lake and was hoping to reach a lot of people. This sparked a huge upset and many people shared my post. Visual images of what was really happening out there got people fired up! I gave a date and time to get it taken care of making sure to note, "Please follow Mono County COVID regulations". I said, "I don't care if it's just me out there, if anyone wants to help, come join me". Larry Palm came to my rescue to help remove some graffiti and Brianna Nieto helped me get a clean up event going at June Lake Beach where about ten people showed up to help. From then on it grew rapidly.

AE: How do you see STE moving into the future? Any grand plans? Happy with things as they are now?

EJ: I am now partnered with Mammoth Lakes Recreation (MLR). They help facilitate donations and also bring awareness to our group efforts. I am just taking it day by day. I get ideas from everyone and try to find solutions. I hope we can partner with Invo National Forest so they can utilize our volunteer members as well as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The more people to help the better, right? I want our local disposal companies to allow our members that have an STE hat to dispose of their litter collected instead of jamming their personal trash cans. I want to see more dumpsters in heavily recreated areas such as the [Hwy] 158 Junction at the Shell station paid for by the County. How about more recycling dumpsters instead of small crammed chutes in the park (i.e. Gull Lake) that don't get emptied frequently enough? Lots of new ideas everyday to make our busy seasons run more smoothly. Not all tourists understand the "pack it in and pack it out" concept. I am incredibly happy with the difference all our members are making. Without them and their sharing, the group page wouldn't be where it is now. I just get to watch it all happen before my eyes, I love it!

AE: We'll end on a fun one...favorite place in the Eastern Sierra? (Hard questions, I know!)

EJ: My favorite place in the Eastern Sierra is Mono Lake by far. It's a healing sanctuary and needs to be treated with tender love and care.

To join the Sierra Trash Eliminators, search "Sierra Trash Eliminators" on Facebook where you can request to join the group.









A Morning in Solitude

BY SAM ROBERTS

Sam is the current Board President for Friends of the Inyo. He has been coming to the Eastern Sierra since before he could walk. His interests progressed from camping to backpacking to climbing and then mountaineering. It was while working as a rock climbing guide in Joshua Tree National Park that he found another passion: photography. Sam has also been active in several other conservation groups including the Friends of Joshua Tree, the LeConte Memorial Lodge and the National Parks and Monuments committees of the Sierra Club, and the California Wilderness Coalition.

The large bear tugged and tore, drooling, with muscles rippling in the morning light. No, this wasn't an attempt to break into a thoughtless owner's car, the cinnamon colored bruin was tearing into a downed tree looking for breakfast. I was witnessing this event partially hidden by an enormous red fir in Solitude Canyon. I had been following ancient game trails and heard the commotion before I saw it. At first I thought someone was chopping wood but then I remembered where I was: mid-way up a rugged, trail-less canyon. It would be surprising for someone else to even be here let alone scavenging firewood. I stood transfixed awash in a feeling of absolute wildness more akin to being deep in the Wilderness than being just a few miles from a major tourist destination. Wendell Berry's words come to mind: "As I go in under the trees, dependably, almost at once, and by nothing I do, things fall into place. I enter an order that does not exist outside, in the human spaces. I feel my life take its place among the lives – the trees, the annual plants, the animals and birds, the living of all these and the dead – that go and have gone to make the life of the earth. I am less important than I thought, the human race is less important than I thought. I rejoice in that."

I continued up the canyon reveling in the wild character of the place. Everything felt pure and intense, no distractions. In contrast to the nearby canyons and their busy trails, my morning hike was filled with, well, solitude. And space, silence, and as Allan Bard once said, more light than air. What a privilege to have such an experience! As I approached a saddle at the head of the canyon, the trees thinned and the game trail braided out. Reaching the saddle I was surprised by the effect that seeing people, even if they were at quite a distance, had on me. In my heightened state of awareness, all the bikers, hikers, boaters, campers, horseback riders, fishermen in the Lakes Basin were just too much... I turned and headed down back the way I came. Shadows were filling the quiet canyon below me. Time to go home.

Friends of the Inyo is working to protect Solitude Canyon from a proposed trail development project. To learn more about our work to protect Solitude Canyon, visit Friendsofthelnyo.org/SolitudeCanyon.

partner profile:

Charlotte Lange

Chairperson, Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe





he Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe's ancestral lands include the Mono Lake, Lee Vining, and Mammoth Lakes areas in Mono County. The Tribe is recognized by local federal agencies such as the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management as a political entity to be consulted with on federal actions affecting their ancestral lands. On September 11, 2020 Rep. Paul Cook introduced Bill HR 8208, the Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe Recognition Act, to the United States House of Representatives, and the bill was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources. Friends of the Inyo (FOI), along with many other regional and national nonprofits, submitted a letter in support of the bill. As part of our policy initiatives in 2020, FOI and partner organizations will work to generate public support for passage of the bill.

On Oct. 1, 2020, Wendy Schneider had the pleasure of talking to our partner Charlotte Lange:

WENDY SCHNEIDER, FRIENDS OF THE INYO: Why did you decide to take a leadership role with the Kutzadika'a Tribe?

CHARLOTTE LANGE, MONO LAKE KUTZADIKA'A TRIBE: My family has a history of advocating for Tribal rights, especially the right to occupy our ancestral lands. My own experiences growing up demonstrated to me how important it is to have a land base to come home to. I was born in Bishop, California, grew up in Carson City, Nevada, Lee Vining, and Big Pine, California. I would spend summers and vacations in Lee Vining, an area much closer to our ancestral lands, with my grandparents. It was always a pleasure listening to the Elder's, family, and friends telling stories of what it was like living at Mono Lake in the old days. My grandfather, Frank Sam, and others in the Indian community continuously contacted Washington asking for the tribal recognition and advocating for our people to secure land for our tribal members. I became involved about 20 years ago in tribal leadership as the chairperson for the Mono Lake Kutzadika'a Tribe to carry on their efforts and to bring our relatives home.

WS: Can you tell me more about your grandfather's work?

CL: My grandfather worked for the State of California Highway, Edison as

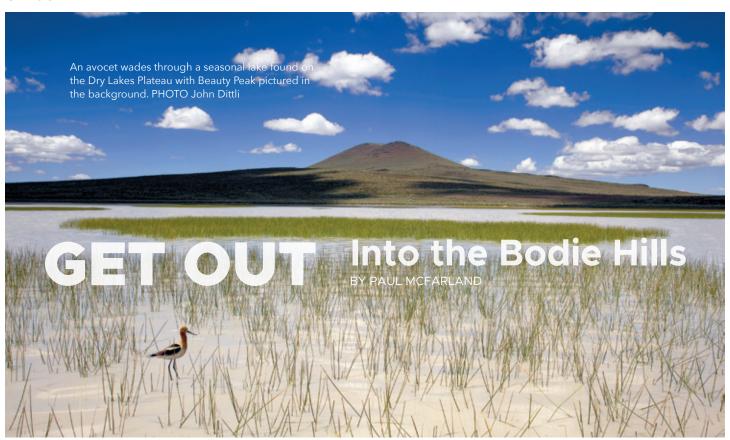
a ranch hand, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) Tunnel Project, and the Cattle Company. My grandparents lived at Farrington Ranch up near Lee Vining. Mr. Farrington told my grandfather that he would give him some land, which included the piece of property with the two old houses north of Cain Ranch on Highway 395. DWP started buying land and talked Mr. Farrington into selling to them. DWP extended my grandfather a 99 year lease, of which 40 years remain.

WS: When you got involved 20 years ago, what was the main focus of your work?

CL: Recognition, land base for the tribe, having a voice to protect our ancestral lands, and cultural resources. Education is important whether learning our language, preparing traditional foods, recognizing and the uses of medicinal plants.

WS: There is one last thing I wanted to ask you about: You have indicated that the Kutzadika'a Tribe supports protection of projects that will be destroying habitats, terrain, and plants; places such as Conglomerate Mesa. You attended a recent meeting of the Keeler Water Board to express opposition to that entity supplying water to the mining company that wants to explore for development of an industrial mine on Conglomerate Mesa. This area is geographically distant from the Kutzadika'a ancestral lands, could you say a few words about why its protection is important to the tribe?

CL: All lands are important to preserve and protect for our future generations. Water is scarce and a precious resource all over Pavahundaduu. [In] the Keeler area, as well as the whole state, there are issues with the water supply. There is certainly not enough water to supply local users and an industrial mining operation. The water that Keeler might consider supplying to a mining operation, that water would come down from our area near Mono Lake. It is all connected. We want the mining company to know that the money they will promise could never be enough to make it worth tearing up and polluting Mother Earth. The habitats, plants, insects have no voices and we need to be that voice. Water is life and [when] you keep abusing the water supply there is no life.



he ease of simply wandering-walk this way, that way, over here, maybe over there-is one of the main things. I love about the Great Basin desert. Largely lacking in pesky thickets of trees or impenetrable swamps, the low sagebrush steppe, clear-edged aspen groves, and open pinyon-juniper woodlands invite you to just wander. You can see where you're going, you can see where you've been, and you can see for hundreds of miles to millions of other places you've loved and would love to visit.

The Bodie Hills, a high plateau broken by volcanic ridges, cut with aspen choked canyons, and blanketed with sagebrush meadows, presents some of the best wandering country in the Eastern Sierra. Blessed with charismatic megafauna-the speedy pronghorn antelope, mule deer, and even a bear or two-as well as a rich diversity of feathered friends, from the strutting Sage Grouse and resident Golden Eagles to gaudy Western Tanagers, the Bodies combine outstanding wildlife watching with abundant cultural history. The mining town rusting away in a state of arrested decay at Bodie State Historic Park may be the most well-known history here, but the Bodies also house a rich and living Native American story. While an extensive and inviting network of mostly rough roads criss cross the Bodie Hills, there are no designated hiking trails. Thanks to the volcanic soils, this road network presents some of the best mountain biking in often-sandy Mono County, and with light traffic, these same roads make for great walking, as well as four-wheel-drive exploring.

There are few ways to get a better handle on a place then to climb to the highest point, catch your breath with a tasty beverage and some cheese, and have a good, long look around. Here in the Bodies, those perching places

would be Bodie and Potato Peaks.

GETTING THERE

From Highway 395, turn east on State Route 270, the part-paved, part-gravel, seasonally-open route to Bodie State Historic Park. This designated scenic byway meanders along sprightly Clearwater Creek for about 5 miles before climbing out onto a broad sagebrush plateau. The high, conical, classic treeless peaks-Bodie at 10,168' and Potato to the north, just 69' higher-are now visible to the northeast. Here's where your journey becomes your own.

BEING THERE

Remember, this is wanderin' country! There are as many ways to climb these great peaks as there are sagebrush plants between Mormon Meadow and Murphy Spring. Get a map! Not just to understand that joke, but to get yourself to the peak. I recommend the old classic-the USGS Bodie 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle. From the south, you can park along State Route 270 and head northwest along a rough fenceline road to just below the peaks. From the east, you can wander up the Rough Creek draw to the watershed divide at the gentle saddle between the peaks. From the north, you can walk along a high ridge from the Aurora Canyon Road. While from the west, you can take your time and walk from Bridgeport. However you choose to get there, please respect the wildness of this place. In a world shrinking and growing at the same time, places like the Bodie Hills become more valuable every day.

This article was first published in Friends of the Inyo's Jeffrey Pine Journal, Fall 2014 edition.

thank you

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