



# Tehipite Topics

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[www.tehipite.sierraclub.org](http://www.tehipite.sierraclub.org)

## Oh No! Not PG&E Again!

By Chip Ashley

I truly hate to keep bashing PG&E. Some of our members are employees and former employees of this huge utility, and surely some of them dread hearing about how bad PG&E is. The problem is, PG&E just keeps blundering and thundering along like a huge blind water buffalo drunk on too much fermented prairie grass. This blind buffalo controls the whole process of energy planning in California—for both natural gas and electricity. The California Independent System Operato, the Energy Commission and the Public Utilities Commission, are PG&E's triplet Charles II spaniels, and they are all well trained to roll over. (A raging drunken water buffalo with a pack of Charlie spaniels named PUC, CAISO and CEC—now there's an image!)

Surely you remember Hinkley, California, the community in the Mojave Desert, made famous by paralegal Erin Brokovich and the film named for her. Hinkley was the location of PG&E natural gas compressors, which used a water-based coolant—water containing hexavalent chromium to prevent rust in the equipment. This coolant was stored in unlined reservoirs. Could the PG&E engineers and management not have known that this coolant would—not *might*—*would*—contaminate the groundwater? Of course not. They knew this would happen. This was a calculated business decision, pure and simple—a decision to externalize the costs of properly storing the coolant onto the local residents and ecosystem. PG&E believed those desert rubes and leopard lizards could afford that terrible cost.

And what are the costs? Terrible illnesses and death for Hinkley residents, and the groundwater contaminated forever, causing who knows what permanent damage to the desert ecosystem.

The corporate mentality of PG&E has not changed since Hinkley. If anything, current CEO Peter Darbee's attitude is worsening PG&E's corporate mentality. According to columnist Jim Boren of the Fresno Bee, "Darbee has damaged the utility's reputation in a way that would stun his predecessors. The smart meters roll out and the Proposition 16 campaign will ultimately be the downfall of Darbee. He's betting that PG&E's credibility doesn't matter." The downfall of Darbee and of course also of many whose names we will never know. It will soon cause the downfall and destruction, as you will read about a little later, of countless trees under PG&E's transmission lines.

Smart meters could actually be good. We need such measures to improve system efficiency and reduce the need for more and more generation and transmission. Properly designed meters would save money for both customers and company. But the metering was very poorly planned and rolled out. The blind buffalo's smart meters were actually very, very dumb.

Of course, the recent tragic explosion of a natural gas pipeline in San Bruno must be mentioned. Puppy PUC rolled over and granted Big Brother Buffalo an \$8 million rate hike to maintain the gas line, but the money was spent elsewhere. And "tragic" is the right word, for as in all tragedies, this tragedy was caused ultimately by human arrogance and moral blindness. Wanna bet the \$8 million was used for Prop 16 or to "lobby" politicians or regulatory officials? Some call it lobbying, others call it, well, bribing. In any case the maintenance was not done, and—BOOM!—eleven people were burned up and many homes destroyed. Oh well, just part of doing business.

See PG&E, page 4

## Tehipite Scholarship A follow-up Report By Don Gaede

Each year for the past several years, our chapter has been giving college scholarship money to deserving environmental students at CART (Center for Advanced Research and Technology). Last year we gave \$1,000 to Elissa Blair, who is now in her 2nd year at Fresno City College. She was kind enough to send us a follow-up letter last month.

Here is an excerpt:

"Now that the summer is over and my fall semester has begun, I'd like to give you an update as to how my schooling and career path are coming along. Last week I just finished my last tour as a Wilderness Ranger Intern with the U.S. Forest Service. It was quite an amazing experience and I still have much of Sierra National Forest to see. That internship has landed me a job with the Forest Service as part of the Wildlife crew! This dream job begins for me next summer.

"I have attached my transcripts from the previous year. Because of my determination and effort, last semester I was placed on the Dean's List of honor students.

"I would like to thank you and the Sierra Club again for awarding me such a large scholarship. That really helped kick off my college career and gave me the help I needed to pay for books, tuition, and supplies. Not too long from now I will finally be applying to attend Humboldt State and plan to be there by Fall of 2012.

"Thank you,  
Elissa Blair"

Even in these tough economic times, I hope our chapter will be able to continue giving scholarships to deserving students like Elissa Blair.

# Chapter Meetings

## General Meeting

December 15th at 7 p.m.  
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno

### December Program:

#### ICELAND: LAND OF FIRE AND ICE A DIGITAL SLIDE SHOW BY HELEN GIGLIOTTI

Iceland, the westernmost country in Europe is unique with its peninsulas and intricate coastline, cut with so many fiords and dotted with rocky islands on which resides a myriad of bird life. The dramatic features of the island are shaped by 'fire and ice', the continued effects of volcanic activity and glacial weathering. The Viking heritage, the folklore, the quaint country churches, the ancient sod structures, the fog and the engaging capital city of Reykjavik make Iceland a special destination. **Join Helen as we circle and explore the island of Iceland.**



## Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings December 8th

The Conservation Committee meets at 7 PM

The Executive Committee meets at 8 PM

University of California Center  
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno



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# Merced Group

## Merced Group

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## Conservation and Executive Committee Meetings

(the first Thursday of each month)

Next meeting is Thursday, December 2, 7:00 P.M.

Rod Webster's home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced

Conservation meeting is first and can last 30-40 minutes.

Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend.

Come just to get informed or get as involved as you wish.

## Merced Group General Meetings

Usually the third Thursday of each month (except Dec. and May)

BUT this month we have our annual banquet instead (details below)

## Annual "Banquet" (a Pot-Luck this year), Saturday, Dec. 4th

"Travels to the Two Ends of the Planet- the North and South Poles"

Presenter: Dr. Lloyd Bever

A new twist on our annual banquet- join us this year for a pot-luck dinner and a vicarious journey to literally- the ends of the Earth. No cost this year other than a Saturday evening and one of your favorite dishes to share.

The event begins at 6:00 at United Methodist Church in Merced, 899 Yosemite Parkway. At 6:30 dinner will begin as we explore our collective culinary talents. Announcements and the presentation begin around 7:15, with desserts and door prizes to follow. We should wrap up the evening by 9ish.

It promises to be a great program. Dr. Lloyd Bever is well known in the area for his wildlife photographs taken in exotic travel destinations. For us he will share the images of his trips to the North and South poles. Many people think of them almost interchangeably, a huge disservice to the uniqueness of both. Dr. Bever's program includes reflections on the similarities and differences between the two continents and the animals that inhabit them. This "tour" of the ends of our planet, some 7,000 miles apart, promises to be a provocative evening.

## No tickets required.

In the interests of a balanced diet for the evening we are recommending: A to J - hot dish, K to Q salad, R to Z dessert.

Parking is available in the lot behind the church located between Laurel Ave. and Cypress Way. Enter the social hall through the gate at the parking lot or the door on the Laurel avenue side.

## Questions? Contact Rod Webster.

## What is wilderness?

*As the Wilderness Education Conference on Outdoor Leadership approaches (February 21-23, 2011 in Estes Park, Colorado), we ask what is "wilderness"? I would like to invite my fellow Sierrans in Tehipite Chapter to send in for publication their thoughts on what wilderness means. Here's my try at a definition. **Chip Ashley***

When I was hiking up the South Fork of the San Joaquin River last summer, I had to ask myself how hard it would be to get back to this area without well made trails like the one I was using, much of which required significant amounts of explosives to make it relatively easy to walk up and down the canyon. I could only imagine how hard it would have been to get up to where I was

See "Wilderness," page 7



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



### Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America's natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

#### Get grizzly and JOIN Sierra Club.

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Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
Student/Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32

Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletters.

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PG&E, from page 1

Because PG&E has such massive power over the planning and regulatory processes in California, our state is moving very slowly to renewable energy. Because of PG&E's influence, small businesses—the real heart of our economy—are being discouraged from building small, distributed generation, which does not have to go through the laboriously slow permitting process large generators must undergo. Now, because of a recent ruling at the puppy dog CAISO, small generators of 20 megawatts or less will have to go through the same convoluted interconnection process as large generators. Since prospective small generator owners do not have the do-re-mi to pay attorneys and other staff to negotiate the long and winding uphill path of the Large Generator Interconnection Process (LGIP), most will not bother trying. The little guys will have to get in the same line with the big brutes with financial and legal backing from Wall Street banks. They don't stand a chance.

California is actually going backwards instead of forwards like Germany, which has one of the world's best renewable energy programs, based on Feed-in Tariffs, which encourage little guys to put up small renewable projects from a few kilowatts capacity to a few megawatts.

And it's not just about clean energy. It's also about democracy—or the lack of it. Most of us, if given the opportunity, like to have control of our lives. And local energy is about democracy. The late Hermann Scheer, the German politician who could be called the father of the Feed-in Tariff, called distributed renewable generation "the people's energy" because it lets ordinary folks out from under the jackboot of the powerful utilities.

According to Scheer in an interview with Amy Goodman of Democracy Now, "The big mistake in the energy debate is that most people think, because they believe that there is a monopoly and the expertise for all energy activities in the hand of the existing energy players. Many people, including governments, including many scientists, who get their orders for studies from them, they believe and think that the present energy suppliers, the present energy trusts, the companies, they should organize the transformation. And this is a big mistake—a big mistake—because this part of the society is the only one who has an interest to postpone it. The only one. All others, all the others, have an interest to

speed it up. But as long government think that it should be left to the energy companies, we will lose the race against time." (See: [http://www.democracynow.org/2010/10/15/hermann\\_scheer\\_1944\\_2010\\_german\\_lawmaker](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/10/15/hermann_scheer_1944_2010_german_lawmaker))

Unfortunately, much as we as a culture ballyhoo the idea of freedom, we have increasingly become a nation of consumers trading our freedom for mere convenience. Freedom has become an abstraction we celebrate on the Fourth of July. When it comes to electricity, most of us are not much concerned about where the electricity comes from to make the wall switch work. We are not aware of the sacrifices, necessary and unnecessary (unnecessary like Hinkley and San Bruno) to get the juice to that switch. We do not feel guilt—when it comes to energy, and in this way, we have become a nation of sociopaths!

For most of us electricity comes from that magical land of Away—the place where we send our garbage and where sweatshops operate to make our toys and clothing—to supply us our bread and circuses. Away is not so magical to the people and creatures that live there. We do not feel guilty about our exploitation of the land of Away because we have been trained to be like the mushrooms in the old joke—you know, "They keep me in the dark and feed me bull pucky." (The joke used another word.) PG&E may sell you electricity to turn the lights on, but morally speaking, they keep you in the dark and feed you bull pucky. And that's okay with PG&E. Business as usual.

Even if we had the collective will to get out from under PG&E's big heavy butt—and a very few have actually succeeded so far—the corporation and its attorneys and execs do all they can to prevent it. And mark my words, despite the efforts of all the king's lawyers and all the king's skills, the blind buffalo is dying, the writing is on the wall. But the death will be slow and arduous and full of many powerful and destructive throes, writhing, and spasms. It is just a matter of time, of evolution. It is now possible for us to make and store our own energy, and more and more are doing just that. As Hermann Scheer recognized years ago, renewable energy—especially solar, which falls nearly everywhere on this planet in useable quantities—rings the death knell for PG&E and the other behemoths. The market is evolving. PG&E is running scared. No doubt

the company's economists have sounded the warning of things to come, and the buffalo is snorting, pawing and flailing about, as blind buffalo do when frightened.

California law, under Assembly Bill 117, the Community Choice Aggregation provision passed in 2002, allows communities to form their own joint powers authorities to aggregate and buy and make their own energy. Two so far have tried to implement AB 117. The San Joaquin Valley Power Authority succeeded in getting approval from the PUC in 2007, but PG&E failed to cooperate with SJVPA as AB 117 requires. PG&E buried SJVPA in creative lawyering and money, forcing the CCA to use up its limited resources. So SJVPA never started serving customers.

One of SJVPA's problems was a lack of allies, part of which may have due to the kind of generation the CCA wanted to deploy. A 500 MW natural gas generator was planned for the Selma, Kingsburg, Parlier area. Indeed, as much as Tehipite Chapter activists like the concept of community energy, we could not support natural gas generation. Natural gas generation contributes greatly

to global warming and to criteria pollutants, such as sulfur and nitrogen oxides—ozone precursors. This would have been very bad for the often stagnant San Joaquin Valley air basin. And it is not enough just to keep pollutants at the same level as the current offset program provides. Thousands of people die each year in the San Joaquin Valley from the pollution produced by gas-fire generators. So Tehipite chapter activists joined community groups to oppose this plant. (As I look back on it now, I have to question whether some of these community groups may have been sock puppets for PG&E.)

At a recent meeting with the San Joaquin Valley Democratic Club, SJVPA general manager David Orth explained that if SJVPA starts up again, the CCA will be based on renewable generation. I strongly believe that Tehipite Chapter's activists, as well as Sierra Club California, would proudly join such an effort.

The Marin Energy Authority is the first CCA actually to start providing energy to customers in Marin County. MEA vice chair Shawn Marshall, also speaking to the

## Great San Joaquin River Clean-up

Please contact Richard Sloan at 559-696-2971, [riverrich1509@aol.com](mailto:riverrich1509@aol.com), Steve Starcher, 559-289-8874, [sastarcher@gmail.com](mailto:sastarcher@gmail.com) or Steve Haze, 559-970-6320 re opportunities to help clean up the San Joaquin River.

SJV Democratic Club, gave colleague David Orth of SJVPA tons of credit for breaking the path for CCA in California and making it possible for MEA to succeed. Marshall, who is also the mayor of Mill Valley, told horror stories of PG&E's often illegal efforts to stop MEA, including making large contributions to public officials and expensive giveaways to ratepayers—more examples of why your PG&E bill is so high. Of course, state law requires that only stockholder money can fund such PR campaigns. But the distinction between ratepayer money and stockholder money is at best artificial.

According to a source quoted in the North Bay Business Journal, PG&E poured “millions of dollars into a special interest lobbying group that is aggressively seeking to kill a local program designed to provide residents and businesses with twice the renewable energy as the giant utility for the same price.” A PG&E spokesperson said PG&E was in compliance with the law—which just goes to show that even a blind buffalo can buy a good mouthpiece.

I will end with one more blind buffalo story. To add insult to injury, PG&E is now doing what amounts to clear-cutting under its transmission lines. This means that millions of trees will be destroyed. This action is totally under the radar. I found out about it when a neighbor in Watts Valley called and said he had discovered a PG&E contractor on his property marking trees with blue spray paint and the fellow told him the trees were going to be removed. I recalled seeing an unmarked white pick-up parked at the locked entrance to the PG&E easement on our property. I also recalled receiving a call from a vegetation contractor who informed me he would be entering our property to “look at some trees.” Assuming this had to do with the usual tree trimming, I



The middle sized blue oak at right is at least 30 feet from PG&E's Helms-Gregg 230 kilovolt transmission line on the left. Yet PG&E officials say this tree and thousands of others must now be removed to guarantee system reliability. The line has been here for 26 years and the trees have not caused a problem during that time. So why do the trees need to be removed now?

said okay (since he would go in even if I said it wasn't okay), hung up and forgot about it. Well, come to find out, it wasn't the usual tree trimming, and the fellow had lied by omission in failing to explain to me what he was all about. Surveying the PG&E right of way through our place, I counted over 100 trees marked with the blue death sign in less than a quarter of a mile. Most are blue oaks, some of which are large mature trees 200-300 years old.

I remarked to myself that many of these trees were here when the local community was called Ko-Ko-He-Bah by the Holkoma Mono (from ethnographer C. Hart Merriam's records) and the only electricity was lightning in a spring or fall thunder storm. The Mono and Yokuts people gathered acorns under these old grandmas, and if let alone, these trees would still be here when the ugly Helms-Gregg line had rusted away or been sold for scrap metal.

One local diligent defender against the blind buffalo arranged a meeting with the head of PG&E's vegetation management department. On November 9th, eight Watts Valley people met with the department head and two contractors who would be doing the work. We made an effort to reason with these people, but they would simply not negotiate—not an ounce of give in 'em. Most of the trees within the 120 foot right of way would be removed, starting before Christmas, 2010. My impression of the department head is she is emulating the Darbee attitude, trying to move up in the PG&E organization, and she is not going to let trees or hillbillies get in the way.

The reason for the tree removal is what is called in trade parlance "reliability." PG&E is apparently concerned that the 230 kilovolt lines will ground out on a tree and cause an outage. A single outage could result in a fine of millions of dollars from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Fire isn't the reason, although the hard-driver department head tried to use fire to ply us by playing on our fears. Removing the trees would protect us from fire, even though money is the real reason the blind buffalo is chewing up these trees. PG&E claims to be keeping costs down for ratepayers. Well, I'll bet if most ratepayers knew of this tree murder, they would be willing to pay a few extra cents each month to save the trees. Trouble is, of course, ratepayers don't know about the tree removal, and PG&E certainly isn't broadcasting the news.

PG&E is concerned about "fall-ins" and "grow-ins"; that is, trees might fall into or grow into the lines. Hard-driver department head described it thus: "These trees might encroach on the lines," she opined. I had to ask, just who is encroaching on whom. I noted several trees at the edge of the right of way, whose limbs were at least 40 feet from the lines. "Oh, that tree might grow into the lines in a few years," said one of the contractors I nicknamed to myself Rosencrantz. I know blue oaks because I have lived among them and observed them for 60 years, and this was a mature tree no longer getting bigger. "Oh yes," chimed in contractor Guildenstern, "or it could fall into the lines." Rosencrantz had earlier tried to impress me by dropping the scientific names of a couple of common local wild flowers. Despite the name-dropping, R&G's intellectual where-withal did not exactly impress me as being the very button on fortune's cap. These courtiers to hard driver department head did not understand the damage they were set on doing so there was no point in talking with them.

I should be easier on these workers. They are just doing their job, trying to make a good life for their families. They are caught in the same dilemma most of us are caught in: the dilemma of corporate capitalism that forces most of us to do jobs we don't really want to do, jobs that often force us to choose between doing the right thing and earning a living.

The facts are that even the strictest NERC (North American Electrical Reliability Council) standards require a 27 foot clearance, and that is for 500 kilovolt lines. The Helms-Gregg is a 230 kilovolt line, with much less potential to ground. During the 26 year history of the Helms-Gregg, there have been no outages caused by either grow-ins or fall-ins. The previous vegetation management regime, which required trimming to maintain a 15 foot clearance, has worked quite well. Therefore, one cannot help but ask why the sudden change to the draconian measures that will be implemented shortly.

Furthermore, NERC rule FAC-003-1, which requires utilities to maintain a Transmission Vegetation Management Program, does not require tree removal. PG&E decided on the tree removal. It is a stone-cold calculated business decision somewhat reminiscent of Hinkley, and PG&E is counting on the public's remaining uninformed and oblivious.

It is hard to get into the mind—what little there is of it—of a demented blind buffalo, so I can only hazard a few guesses. One guess is that this is PG&E's way of paying back its service area which voted to soundly defeat Prop 16 in the May 2010 primary election. Prop 16 was PG&E's fifty million dollar effort to squash Community Choice Aggregation in California. PG&E may be coming to Watts Valley in particular because locals have fought hard against the mad buffalo's plans to build a 500 kilovolt line through the area with a 40-acre substation in Watts Valley to tie into the Helms-Gregg. Again, who knows what demented buffalo think? But one thing's for sure: anyone with any common sense at all can see that the new tree removal plan is unnecessary overkill.

On its "environmental" web page, PG&E claims, "we are committed to being an environmental leader and demonstrating this through our actions." How does cutting millions of trees, a natural form of carbon sequestration, demonstrate "environmental commitment"?

Change is coming, and the blind buffalo is on its last legs. The only question that remains is how much damage the beast can do before it finally slumps over. How's this going to happen? Here's an example: I was offered a deal by a solar provider the other day to build a 100-kilowatt solar farm in Watts Valley. It would take up half an acre. I wouldn't have to put up a dime and would actually be paid some \$3000 per year. This solar farm would generate enough electricity for 20-25 average homes. The energy would be available on hot summer afternoons when locals need it most. I'm seriously considering this proposal, and may be writing about it in a future issue. This kind of solution is getting more and more common, and small businesses like the one that made the offer are proliferating. The change would happen much faster with the help of a decent feed-in tariff—a legal rule requiring utilities to pay small generators for the electricity they "feed in" to the grid. But even without a feed-in tariff, the market place is slowly driving a stake called distributed clean energy through the buffalo's greedy power-mad heart. It's only a matter of time.



## Outing Ratings

Distance	Elevation Gain
1) up to 6 miles	A) under 1,000 feet
2) 6 to 10 miles	B) 1,000 to 2,000 feet
3) 10 to 15 miles	C) 2,000 to 3,000 feet
4) 15 to 20 miles	D) 3,000 to 4,000 feet
5) over 20 miles	E) over 4,000 feet

Our Tehipite Chapter Outings Chair is Marcia Rasmussen, Marcia@BigBaldy.com, 559-332-2419. Please contact Marcia with any questions concerning our outings program. Contact the trip leader directly if you are interested in one of the listed trips.

Tehipite Chapter outings are free and open to the public. All leaders are unpaid volunteers assuming responsibility for a good trip, and your cooperation is mandatory. Please review additional trip and participant requirements at [www.tehipite.sierraclub.org/outings](http://www.tehipite.sierraclub.org/outings).

Steve Cosner (559) 281-5983, email: [stevec@sfsu.edu](mailto:stevec@sfsu.edu) maintains this webpage.

CST #2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California. California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund (TCRF) under the California Seller of Travel Act. The TCRF is not applicable to these Outings. The law requires us to advise you that you would not be eligible to make any claim from the TCRF in the unlikely event of default by the Sierra Club. California law also requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond.

The Sierra Club has such a trust account.



## Sierra Club California Needs Your Help

You have great people in Sacramento lobbying to protect the Sierra and on other critical issues like climate change. Bill Magavern, Jim Metropoulous, and Annie Pham do a terrific job, and they need our help. Please go to the terrific Sierra Club California web site at [www.sierraclubcalifornia.org](http://www.sierraclubcalifornia.org) and donate generously.

## Required Liability Waiver

All participants on Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver. If you would like to read the Liability Waiver before you choose to participate on an outing, please go to: <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/>, or contact the Outings Department at (415) 977-5528 for a printed version.

### Intermediate cross-country ski trip

**Dec. 11th**

Place to be determined depending on snow conditions. Walt Taguchi 435-2818

### Intermediate cross-country ski trip

**Dec. 18th**

Place to be determined depending on snow conditions. Walt Taguchi 435-2818

### San Joaquin River Gorge Loop Trail (2A)

**Jan. 8, Sunday**

Moderate day hike. Karen Hammer 298-5272

### Beginner XC ski lesson and ski tour

**Jan. 8th**

Place to be determined depending on snow conditions Walt Taguchi 435-2818

### Beginner's Snowshoe Hike (1A)

**Feb. 6, Sunday**

Since it's Super Bowl Sunday, we may have the trail to ourselves! Plan to go to Coyote and take the Eagle Trail to Shaver Lake Vista. This is an easy trail, but level of effort required is dependent on snow conditions. Bad driving conditions will result in trip postponement.

Karen Hammer 298-5272

### Carrizo Plain National Monument (1A)

**Tentative dates: March 19th or 26th**

Plan is to take the guided tour and hikes on Sat. (9:30 - 2:30 p.m.) which will enable us to visit Painted Rock and Soda Lake among other sites. Timing is also planned in hopes of catching a good wildflower display. Option to camp out overnight Fri. and/or Sat. night. Rustic conditions. Must carry in water. Karen Hammer 298-5272

"Wilderness," from page 3 without the trail. It would have been extremely difficult to negotiate the steep canyon walls above the raging torrent below. I might have been able to do it, but it would have required a great deal more up and down and a than most people would be willing to do, not to mention a great deal more time. It would also have been significantly more dangerous.

This area is part of the John Muir Wilderness, yet because it is relatively easy for many people to get here, should it properly be called "wilderness"? To my mind, probably not, at least not right along the John Muir Trail, which I have heard referred to as the John Manure Trail.

That doesn't mean that there are not pockets within what the government has des-

ignated as the John Muir Wilderness that are indeed wilderness. I have been to areas which showed very little sign of previous human visitation. I recall one area my dad's old backpacking partner Dick Moller, my brother and I reached after seven or eight grueling miles of cross-country bushwhacking and canyon climbing, starting from a point about 12 miles out of Giant Forest in Sequoia National Park. Fatigued and brush-scratched after the arduous hike, we found a camp site with an old fire ring at the lake Dick had chosen for our destination, but I would be willing to bet no other humans had been there for at least ten years. The fire ring was unused at least that summer, and there were simply no other signs of human use—no bits and pieces of paper and plastic and such. We did find one old rusted tin can that looked by its design to be from a bygone



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Deadline for *Tehipite Topics* is the second Friday of each month. Please submit material to [TehipiteTopics@gmail.com](mailto:TehipiteTopics@gmail.com).

era. This was wilderness, or so it seemed to us. We had the place to ourselves with no concern that anyone else would fight the willows and manzanita we had struggled through up the side of that canyon, at least not anytime soon. So we relaxed for a couple of days and feasted on the large fat rainbow trout—up to 18 or 20 inches—we caught from this pristine lake. We had to cut those trout into thirds to get them in the fry pan! (And, no, I'm not going to tell you where it is.)

But even this lake doesn't fit my definition of wilderness. The great-great grandparents of the beautiful rainbows we stuffed ourselves with had been stocked, probably by an air-drop many years before. This stocking changed the place and profaned the notion of wilderness. But it was pretty close to wilderness. Pretty darned close.

When I think of wilderness, I often think of Ed Abbey's stories in *Desert Solitaire* and *The Journey Home*. In one story, Abbey writes of how he climbed up out of the Colorado River Canyon the better to view his favorite Mount Tukuhnikivatz and then tried to find a shortcut back down to his campsite. He followed a little stream

down and got trapped in a gully with walls almost glass smooth. He wondered if someone might find his bones many years later in that gully or if they might get washed down the river and pulverized in a spring flood during some frog-strangler of a rare rain. Finally, after many hours of focused concentration, Abbey was able to find just enough traction on the gully's walls to reach the lip of the previous gully just above. With great exertion he managed to pull himself out and live on and save his bones for the final hidden place his friends found for them in the desert Abbey celebrates in his books. During his hours in that gully, Abbey had the chance to experience wilderness.

Wilderness involves the kind of risk Abbey took when he chose to try that shortcut. He could easily have died in that lost wild place. Because of risk, there is great value in such experiences, which bring about in those lucky enough to go through them a thrilling feeling of freedom, a feeling of being at one with nature and the elements in a way that ancient uncivilized humans must have felt during the Paleolithic, long before the coming of agriculture made it possible for the oligarchic few to enslave the rest of us with bread and beans.

The killing of the last grizzly in the Sierra Nevada in the 1920's did much to remove the mystery of wildness from the Range of Light. We used to carry in this newsletter an ad promoting the reintroduction of *Ursus arctos* to the Sierra. Then on a Sierra Club outing last summer, one of our members complained to me that she did not want Grizz to be reintroduced. She would not hike in the Sierras if grizzlies once again roamed the high country meadows. Black bears were one thing, she said. She could manage with black bears, "but Grizzlies, they are mean and they will eat you!" After a couple months of deliberation, I removed the ad. I did not, however, remove it because grizzlies are dangerous. I think it is a valuable wilderness experience for one to contemplate that one is realistically on the menu, that one is just part of the food-chain. Such thoughts concentrate the mind and put one's life into perspective. No, I removed the ad because reintroduction would be almost as much a profanation of the notion of wilderness as extirpation of the great bruin had been in the first place. Reintroduction would just be one more example of human tampering with wild places.