

Off-Counter:

curious, comic, and compelling moments from daily life at the Mono Lake Committee

Mono Lake Committee staff sometimes get asked why we have so many employees just to run the Information Center and Bookstore. Well, the short answer is there's a whole lot more to the Mono Lake Committee than talking to visitors and selling books. The Mono Lake Committee offices run year-round, with policy, education, and communications projects active even in the quiet winter months when visitors are nowhere to be seen. The goal of this periodic column is to help paint a picture, not only of what it is like to work for a non-profit organization in the Eastern Sierra, but of the diversity of exciting and truly grassroots things we do for Mono Lake—off the front counter—be they curious, comic, or compelling.

The Daring Lives of Volunteers

As part of a cooperative Conservation Work Camp volunteer program with the Global Nature Fund, DaimlerChrysler Corporation, and the Mono Lake Committee, the Mono Basin was fortunate in 2003 to receive the help of five volunteers from Germany. During their three-week stay in Lee Vining volunteers Elke, Corinna, Mareike, Fabian, and Philipp, along with Committee staffers Greg Reis and Douglas Dunaway, experienced many adventures: some funny, some exciting and some painful. Highlights included the frantic downhill run of Mareike and Greg after they inadvertently disturbed a nest of hornets while doing trash removal along the Lee Vining Creek Trail. Many stings and bites later (25 for Mareike, 15 for Greg) their beeline dash ended in the soothing waters of Lee Vining Creek. Critters and bugs seemed to be the order of the day, as Corinna soon found out. While rolling an old wooden cable spool along the trail, Corinna spotted a rather large scorpion walking along the top of the spool, keeping pace as she rolled it along, acting every bit like a small pet. Her screams could be heard echoing up and down the canyon as the frightened scorpion quickly took

refuge back inside the spool and hasn't been seen since. Everyone here at the Mono Lake Committee hopes this transplanted arachnid finds a more peaceful home at the Pumice Valley Landfill! Special thanks to the Mono County Public Works Department for waiving the dump fees for trash collected during the Work Camp!



SANTIAGO ESCRUCERIA

The Big Bang Band Rocks the Mono Basin

The Mono Lake Committee's Outdoor Experiences program never misses an opportunity to bring quality education experiences to its participants. Recently, a group of traveling musicians working as docents for the Robert Ferguson Observatory, an astronomy group in the Sonoma Valley area, contacted the Committee with an offer to provide a free educational concert to an Outdoor Experiences group. The highlight of the evening's program was "The Constellation Rap," a compilation of all the constellations, including those visible in the sky over Mono Lake. It

Shown next to this impressive truckload of Lee Vining Creek trash (including one scorpion) is Paulina Cromer, the self-described "Dump Lady."

was a treat to watch and listen to, as the performer flawlessly named 88 constellations and had the group of tough, inner-city kids wrapped in sleeping bags completely engrossed in the experience.

"Do you know where I can get a truck load of rocket fuel?"

While leading interpretive tours and working in the Mono Lake Committee Information Center and Bookstore, Mono Lake Committee interns get asked hundreds of questions: some difficult, some easy and others, like the one above, are kind of kooky and off kilter. Odd questions and funny encounters are all part of the job. Here are a couple of highlights from the summer of 2003.

While leading an interpretive birding walk at County Park, Birding Intern Randy Arnold was asked by one bird-enthusiast if it would be "possible to encourage a more desirable species other than the California Gull to habituate the shoreline?" Defining what is desirable and what isn't is certainly up for debate, but if you ask Reagan Heater, the Mono Lake Committee's youngest intern, he would possibly nominate his sighting of this rare chick. While giving an interpretive program to a small group down at South Tufa, he came upon not an avian chick, but rather a human chick, posing for a photo shoot. When pressed for details, he said he was too busy distracting the younger members of his group to remember much, but he did notice that she was wearing a bright red, fishnet see-through scarf, and nothing else! Sorry, no photos available. ❖

This issue's Off-Counter was written by Douglas Dunaway.



GREG REIS