

Summer

1996

MONO



LAKE

N E W S L E T T E R

DWP restoration
proposals

Summer at
Mono Lake

Mono Lake Newsletter

Summer 1996

Volume 19, Number 1

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IN THIS ISSUE

Summer brings a few changes to the *Mono Lake Newsletter*. This issue features a new paperstock, and we hope it will make the articles easier to read, the photos better looking, and the overall publication more attractive. The newsletter is still printed on newsprint, making it a low-cost but effective way to pass on the latest Mono Lake news. Over the next few issues we'll be adding some new features and—who knows—maybe even a little color.

On the subject of new looks, the Committee has a new World Wide Web site (<http://www.monolake.org>) which provides background on the Mono Lake issue. We'll be updating it with events, activities, and lake level information this summer, so be sure to check it out. Feel free to send any suggestions to us at the Committee's new general e-mail address: info@monolake.org.

And then there's this issue of the newsletter: news on DWP's flawed restoration proposals, information for summer visitors, Genny Smith's essay on exploring Mono Lake, an update on conservation in L.A., and more. Here in Lee Vining the streams are flowing, the wildflowers are beginning to bloom, and the lake is rising, making it the perfect time to visit. See you along the shoreline ...

—Geoff McQuilkin, Editor



Former lakebed on the north shore. Expect this tufa tower to be in the water when the Water Board's management lake level is finally achieved.

Mission of the Mono Lake Committee

The Mono Lake Committee is a non-profit citizens' group dedicated to: protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem; educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use; and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake and meet real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.

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Rising waters, changing perspectives

by Gary Nelson

Last weekend, I went to the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage. On a perfect springtime day in the Owens Valley, former occupants of the World War II internment camp and a historian from the Owens Valley Paiute tribe took us on a tour of the recently established National Historic Site.

As we followed them along the trails of their memories, only crumbling remnants of foundations or the occasional water pipe sticking up through the sage served to mark where an encampment of ten thousand once stood.

Later, at the Eastern California Museum in Independence, old photographs showed the camp at its full extent. What struck me was not the sight of a Bishop-sized settlement where sagebrush and tumbleweed rule today, but the ten-thousand-foot escarpment of the Sierra Nevada rising in the background. The jagged peaks and glistening snowfields dominating the photograph looked just as I had seen them earlier that morning.

Human history at Manzanar, from the forced eviction of native Paiutes, to the forced internment of Japanese Americans, has passed across the Owens Valley like drops of water flowing down the Owens River, meandering at the foot of the unchanging Sierra.

Being just another transitory human dwarfed by the immensity of the geologic time scale, and accustomed to the seeming permanence of geologic formations, I must confess that witnessing the changes wrought by a rising Mono Lake at South Tufa over the past two years has made me feel like some character in a time-lapse film.

Colonnades of dry-land tufa towers have evolved into peninsulas, then islands, then submerged formations that rise from the lakebottom like the columns of an ancient temple. Old submerged springs have ceased to flow. The hydrostatic pressure which pumps

fresh water out from lakebottom springs has been overwhelmed by the increasing weight of briney lakewater piling up above these formerly active underwater landmarks.

These have been replaced by a profusion of new springs along the shoreline. Some of these flow strongly, boiling to the surface as if from some lakebottom hydrant. Others are effervescent, sending myriads of bubbles upward through the water. One of our secret hot springs is only about two vertical feet above the rising lake.

This is an exciting time to be at Mono Lake. Changes we have fought so hard for, that not long ago seemed like dreams, are coming true. Today I had a rare chance to share my perspective of Mono's rejuvenation with one of the persons most responsible for it—not that it was easy.


Extricating Martha Davis, the Committee's Executive Director, from her seemingly constant grind of conferences, writing, and meetings takes luck, tact, and above all perseverance. When I suggested a walk along the shoreline, she said "Maybe around 4:30." That was encouraging. Usually it's something like "Sorry, I've got to meet with the Senator, and finish my comments before I leave for L.A. at 4:00 A.M."

At 4:30 sharp I found her at Nicely's, in a meeting of course. I sat down, looked at my watch, and gazed longingly out the door at a lovely spring day. Oblivious to my "subtle" hints, Martha continued whipping her tortured pen across a well-used legal pad, converting ideas to notes in a kinetic frenzy.

Finally, we went to South Tufa. I pointed out how the rising waters had changed familiar canoe tour landmarks. We watched Eared Grebes diving, gulls soaring, and swallows zooming through the tufa towers.

It's always great to get Martha outside

to see the changes she has worked so hard to help bring about. I've managed to do it twice in the past eight years. Maybe someday, after she "retires," Martha will have enough time to simply enjoy Mono Lake. I've already offered her a job as a canoe guide. Who knows?

Gary Nelson is the Committee's Canoe Tour Supervisor. He's always recruiting new guides. 

Manzanar National Historic Site needs your letter of support

Four years have passed since Manzanar became a National Historic Site, but it is still not fully protected because the site has not been transferred to National Park Service ownership.

Now a bill brought by U.S. Representatives Robert Matsui and Jerry Lewis will solve this problem. Please write your Representatives (Washington D.C. 20505) and Senators (Washington D.C. 20515) and ask that they support HR 3006 so that this important place will finally be protected.

Also, write to Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Department of Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington D.C. 20240, and urge him to provide full operating funds in the 1997 budget for the Manzanar Historic Site. Without adequate staffing, Manzanar is vulnerable to vandalism and to other damage.

Court rules in Mono Lake's favor

Finally! Clarification—and success—in the complicated nine month court case over restoration jurisdiction.

It all started in the summer of 1995 when the State Water Resources Control Board, which had recently issued its landmark order to protect Mono Lake, made a surprise court filing to dismiss a portion of the complex Mono Lake litigation. The Board asserted that, by virtue of their decision, their duties under the part of the litigation known as CalTrout II were complete and, thus, the court's role in overseeing restoration was over.

In response, the Committee argued that until the Water Board produces a final, enforceable order on stream

restoration, the case remains open and the court retains concurrent jurisdiction.

Then in September Judge Terrence Finney issued a ruling—and both sides claimed victory. So it was back to court for a hearing to clarify the ruling.

Now the final ruling is out. The Water Board, Finney wrote, should come back with its petition after it has complied with Fish and Game Codes, "specifically, when the SWRCB has adopted a restoration plan for the streams tributary to Mono Lake." In short, the Committee position prevailed.

It's still not entirely clear, however, why the court ruled as it did. The ruling is brief and to the point, but it doesn't shed light on the relationships between the complicated points of law underlying

the case. It's expected that Judge Finney will explain his reasoning at a later date, and it's possible that the Water Board will appeal at that time.

For Mono Lake, though, the ruling means that the Committee can seek relief through the court if the Water Board's restoration order is delayed or inadequate. It's an unlikely prospect—the Water Board is expected to produce final restoration orders sometime this fall—but it provides a measure of insurance that Mono Basin restoration will continue to be a priority.

Once the Board issues an acceptable restoration order, all the parties agree that the court's jurisdiction will end. Watch for news of that Water Board action in the fall *Mono Lake Newsletter*.

Volunteers aid creek restoration

by Greg Reis

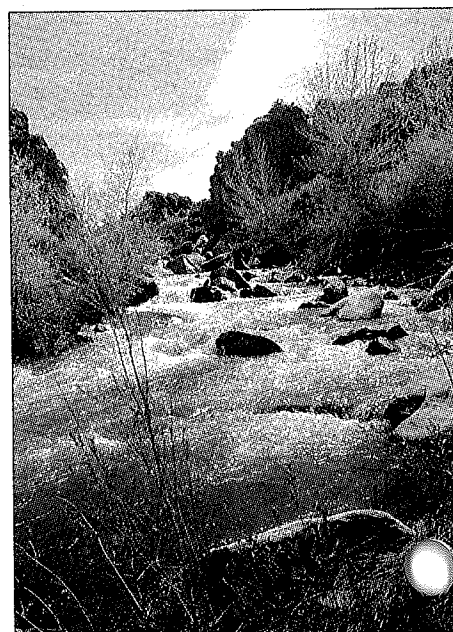
On Earth Day, the Mono Lake Committee organized volunteers to help restoration specialist Scott English plant 225 Jeffrey Pine seedlings along Rush Creek, adding to the 260 cottonwood and willow cuttings planted the previous week. It almost didn't happen, but with some administrative wrangling by MLC Executive Director Martha Davis, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) finally gave the go-ahead.

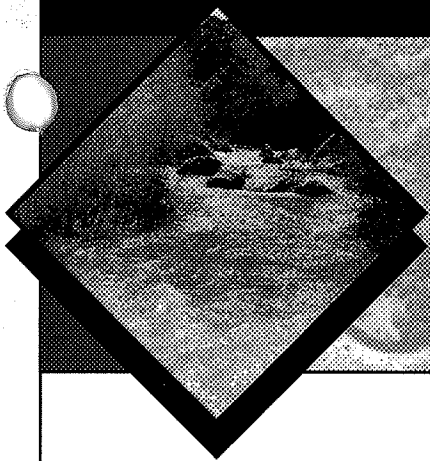
The plantings on Rush Creek were recommended by the stream scientists last October, but as spring arrived DWP still hadn't formalized any work plans despite the Committee's repeated prodding. The Committee moved quickly to salvage the project before the critical time of year for obtaining willow and

cottonwood cuttings passed.

The first step was to collect the cuttings and botanist Tim Messick volunteered his time to advise us on species identification and proper care. Then the Committee enlisted the help of volunteer Joel Ellis, who assisted staff in obtaining about 50 cottonwood and 100 willow cuttings from along Lee Vining Creek. The cuttings were rushed to the Lee Vining Ranger Station where Steve O'Connor snowmobiled them into a Forest Service cold service facility. Not long after collecting the cuttings, the Forest Service made 225 Jeffrey Pine seedlings available for the restoration work as well.

In the meantime, Martha Davis negotiated with DWP General Manager William McCarley and (continued on pg. 19)





STREAMS

RESTORING MONO LAKE'S TRIBUTARIES

Project: Stream Restoration Plan.

Water Board order: The Department of Water and Power (DWP) must prepare a proposal to "restore, preserve, and protect the streams and fisheries" of Rush, Lee Vining, Walker, and Parker creeks.

Timeline: The Water Board is reviewing DWP's final proposal. An order is expected in the fall.

In early April, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power produced its final proposal for the restoration of Mono Lake's tributary streams. The plan, much like the draft distributed the previous month, contained significant flaws.

The proposal is the result of nineteen months of planning work ordered by the State Water Resources Control Board, which issued a decision in 1994 requiring a higher water level for Mono Lake and restoration of the lake's tributaries. In that decision, DWP was charged with preparing a plan to rectify the damage caused by fifty years of excessive water diversions.

"DWP's proposal is disappointing," says MLC Executive Director Martha Davis, "because it fails to embrace the suggestions of the scientific experts while claiming to adopt their approach." Indeed, the proposal strongly advocates restoration "that relies on natural processes for ecosystem recovery" without delivering the peak

stream flows that an independent panel of scientists deemed necessary.

At issue is the amount of water which will flow down the streams to create so-called peak flows, which are vital to the dynamic functioning of the stream systems. Peak flows do the work of shaping the stream by moving sediment, scouring pools, flooding banks, dispersing seeds, and more.

The scientist team—which was chosen by DWP, the Committee, and other involved parties—recommended peak flows ranging up to 600 cubic feet per second to initiate the natural processes which would restore the streams. They carefully noted, however, that "if flows necessary for the stream to maintain itself are not provided, a different plan than the one proposed must be prepared." And that different plan was projected to require much more intensive (and expensive) "hands-on" work in the streams to replace to dynamic action of the higher peak flows.

Neither the needed peak flows nor the substitute labor-intensive restoration made it into DWP's proposal, a point the Committee emphasized in comments to the Water Board: "DWP cannot have it both ways. If it wishes to avoid a 'hands on' restoration program, it should provide the flows needed to justify that approach. If it wishes to deliver substantially lower flows, it must recommend an active restoration program, as the scientists explained."

Release facility unaddressed

Other issues also raise questions about the adequacy of the DWP proposal. The most important: the lack of a plan for modifying the Grant Lake Reservoir release facility.

Although expensive, modification of the Grant Lake release facility is vital to delivering peak flows to the streams. Because it was designed for diversions, the Grant Lake facility restricts the amount of water that can pass from the reservoir back into Rush Creek. Currently, it can't deliver the scientists' recommended flows.

In fact, even delivering DWP's proposed lower flows would be difficult. Recognizing this, DWP has proposed a scheme to supplement Rush Creek releases with Lee Vining Creek water transferred through the aqueduct and released into Rush Creek below the dam. But the fact remains that modification of the Grant Lake structure—increasing its capability to pass water into the creek—is the surest method of delivering the needed creek flows.

DWP's proposal also rejects the construction of fish passage facilities at its diversion dams, something the Water Board specifically ordered. Additionally, the proposal replaced the construction of sediment bypass facilities at the dams—to allow spawning gravels and other sediment to move downstream to facilitate restoration—with a plan to dredge the diversion ponds and place the material in the stream below the dam.

In contrast, the stream scientists proposed specific bypass facilities which accomplish both goals—fish migration and sediment movement—at the same time. These plans were not even reviewed in DWP's proposal.

DWP's proposal, the Committee's comments, and input from other parties have all been submitted to the Water Board and the next step is the Board's. Its final restoration order should address these issues in the fall.



WATERFOWL HABITAT

RESTORING ONE OF MONO LAKE'S LOST RESOURCES

Project: Waterfowl Habitat Restoration Plan.

Water Board order: The Department of Water and Power (DWP) must prepare a proposal to restore the waterfowl habitat lost at Mono Lake due to diversions.

Timeline: The Water Board is reviewing DWP's final proposal. An order is expected in the fall.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power produced its final proposal for the restoration of Mono Lake's damaged waterfowl habitat in early April. Much like the draft distributed in March, the plan contained significant flaws.

The proposal is the result of nineteen months of planning work ordered by the State Water Resources Control Board, which issued a decision in 1994 requiring a higher water level for Mono Lake and waterfowl habitat restoration. In that decision, DWP was charged with preparing a proposal which rectified the damage caused by fifty years of excessive water diversions.

"We're concerned about DWP's Mill Creek proposal and its method of funding habitat restoration," says MLC Eastern Sierra Representative Sally Miller, summing up comments made to the Water Board.

Mill Creek, located in the northwest corner of the Mono Basin (see *Newsletter*, Spring 1996, 8-9), was never diverted into the aqueduct but is one of Mono's major tributaries. Successful waterfowl habitat restoration in the Mill

Creek bottomlands could potentially mitigate for habitat irretrievably lost at Rush Creek and other locations due to diversions.

Mill Creek restoration requires three things that the DWP proposal doesn't provide: high spring and summertime flows in the creek, year-round base flows that emulate natural conditions, and the rewatering of distributary channels to restore the bottomlands habitat area. All three restoration components were recommended by the waterfowl scientist team, which called the restoration of Mill Creek the most important action available for waterfowl habitat after raising the lake itself.

Making an attempt to meet the flow recommendations, DWP has proposed to return its existing Mill Creek water right—currently used for irrigation—to the creek. It's a good first step, but it's not enough: DWP's existing right isn't large enough to assure peak flows, and it isn't senior enough to assure year-round flows. In fact, the water rights of nearby Conway Ranch are superior to DWP's, leaving no water to satisfy DWP's right during the drier times of year when waterfowl are most abundant.

DWP has suggested that the unused portion of the Conway rights could be put into the creek in the fall, about the time DWP's right often runs dry. However, it's not clear how the owner of the Conway rights feels about such a plan.

As it turns out, there's a more straightforward way to deliver the needed flows. The Conway water rights are currently available for sale. If DWP could acquire them for restoration use, year-round flows could be assured; the rights would go a long way toward achieving peak flows as well.

Full restoration of Mill Creek will ultimately require improvement of the "return ditch" which links the Lundy hydropower plant to Mill Creek and will, in turn, return irrigation-swollen Wilson Creek to its previous status as an ephemeral stream.

A second issue overshadows DWP's entire waterfowl habitat restoration proposal: vague financing commitments may assure restoration work never happens at all. Several of the proposed habitat restoration projects introduced in the proposal are conditioned on funding from other agencies; no funding, no project.

Most notable is the DeChambeau County Ponds Complex, a proposed restoration treatment on the flank of Black Point which DWP calls "not financially feasible without significant funding contributions from other sources" yet features as part of the restoration proposal. The complex of shallow water ponds and lagoons would also require an annual operations and maintenance budget of up to \$30,000.

Whether or not the complex is chosen as a suitable restoration project, the problem is clear: the Water Board, not DWP, should be responsible for determining what is financially feasible in light of 50 years of damaging water diversions. To craft a restoration order which depends on outside funding fairly well assures that waterfowl habitat restoration goals will not be met.

DWP's proposal, the Committee's comments, and input from other parties has been submitted to the Water Board and the next step is the Board's. Its final restoration order should address these issues in the fall.

ALTERNATE SUPPLIES

PROVIDING L.A. WITH ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND WATER

Project:

Assuring that Los Angeles replaces its Mono Lake diversions with environmentally sound sources of water, such as conservation and water recycling.

Funding:

Millions of dollars available from state and federal sources.

As restoration work proceeds at Mono Lake, efforts are underway at the Los Angeles end of the aqueduct to create environmentally sound water supplies for the city. We'll track these developments on this new feature page of the *Newsletter*.

The Committee is advocating two environmentally sound solutions to Los Angeles' water needs: water conservation, and water reclamation. Conservation spreads existing supplies farther by reducing each user's water consumption; reclamation creates new supplies by intensive wastewater treatment. Reclaimed water, which will be examined more closely in the next *Newsletter*, can be used in many landscaping and industrial situations, freeing up fresh supplies for other uses.

Water conservation continues to be successful in Los Angeles, which leads the state in achieving record water savings. To date, DWP has directly distributed over 633,600 ultra-low-flow toilets in the city, saving over 8 billion gallons of water each year and reducing L.A.'s annual water usage by 25,000 acre-feet—25% of the amount of water historically diverted from Mono Lake.

These water savings supplement those

achieved through other methods and add to the high rate of conservation still continuing from the most recent drought. At that time, L.A. residents reduced overall water usage by an average of 30% of historic demand. The city has sustained its conservation efforts, with water usage continuing to run 20-25% under historic levels. This is a noteworthy achievement on the city's part: L.A.'s water usage is now at the same level as it was in the mid 1970s, despite two decades of population growth.

What does this success with conservation mean? Foremost, it means that conservation works as an effective tool for making sure that the water needs of Los Angeles are met while Mono Lake is protected. There are also local benefits: DWP's water conservation programs pay back rewards both to the community and to the ratepayer.

For example, many of the ultra-low-flow toilets are being distributed by local community-based organizations. These groups, such as the Mothers of East Los Angeles Santa Isabel (MELASI) and the Korean Youth and Community Center, employ local residents and raise money for community programs through the distribution.

MELASI recently noted an impressive list of accomplishments that has been funded by the program: \$37,000 in student scholarships awarded within the past two years; 12 teenagers employed during summers to work in a Graffiti Abatement

and Mural Painting Program (a service offered in East L.A. to help remove graffiti and build pride in the neighborhood); and, at its peak, employment of 28 people to handle the hard work of loading and unloading toilets, crushing old ones for recycling, and delivering and installing the new toilets.

The local benefits also extend to the ratepayer's pocketbook: by using less water L.A. residents are seeing savings on their water bills. Additionally, L.A.'s business community received a surprise bonus this spring. A 60% reduction in sewage hook-up fees was implemented because DWP's successful water conservation program dramatically cut the amount of sewage flowing through city pipes. And the extra benefit? Less sewage means fewer pollutants entering L.A.'s Santa Monica Bay.



Photo courtesy West Basin Municipal Water District

The Mono Lake Committee joined with the West Basin Municipal Water District in April to celebrate the grand opening of the Visitor Center at the El Segundo Water Recycling Facility. The Center features exhibits which promote water awareness, recycling, and conservation. Showcased is a Mono Lake exhibit which illustrates how the use of recycled water by South Bay communities and businesses is helping to replace the water no longer diverted from Mono Lake by DWP.

Mono Basin Journal

A roundup of less-political events at Mono Lake


by Geoffrey McQuilkin

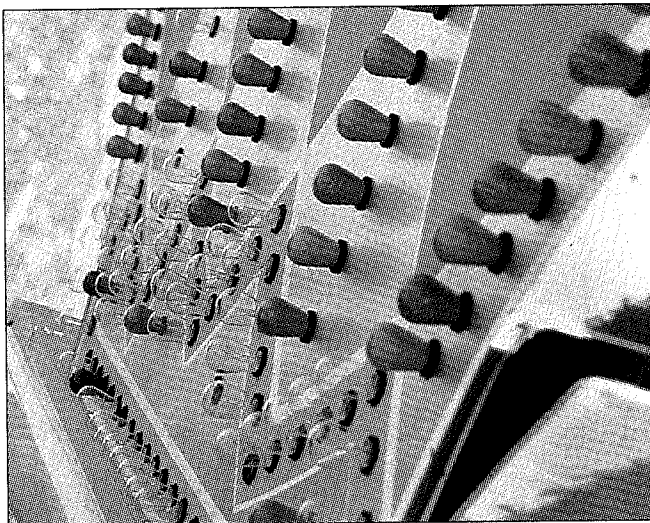
The 1990s moved into Lee Vining on the back of an old truck not long ago. New fluorescent-lit panel signs were hoisted into the air at the Best Western motel and the old sign, shaped like a crown, replete with bright twinkling lights, came down. Now the crown sits in a dusty lot behind town, its red and clear bulbs, both whole and shattered, catching the sun waiting for another chance to shine.

One night in March I glanced out my window onto the darkened street and saw a bear lumbering past the post office toward the highway. I opened the door to see better; it turned, regarded me with mild contempt, sniffed, and moved on through the light snow. The next morning

ice covered the street and casts the bear's hand-sized tracks marked its trail for a few hours before the sun took hold.

Down along the shoreline, the rising lake has thrown up snaking birms of white and grey sand. Solid for one step, they can liquify with the next, pulling a careless foot—and leg—down into the sand and cold water.

Running next to this new, tricky trail is an old birm left from the lake's last rise in the 1980s. Dry and solid, covered with yellow and green grass, it creates a solid walkway between the lapping waves and the marshy shore. But the lake is still on the move and soon that grass will waver in quiet water currents beneath the advancing waves. 



Lake Level Watch

Grant to spill again as Mono Lake rises

by Greg Reis

I just returned from a week-long vacation in a dry place: the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. Driving home, I saw the beautiful Sierra Nevada laden with lots of snow, I saw Mono Lake looking incredibly blue and fuller than it had been in years, and I realized how lucky we are.

Much of the southwestern United States is in a drought—some areas having only 18% of normal snowpack—while we bask in a glorious snowpack that is, in places, 126% of normal.


Mono Lake as of May 23 was at an elevation of 6379.4 feet above sea level, making for a rise of 3 feet since the same time last year and 4.8 feet since the Water Board order in 1994. Because it was

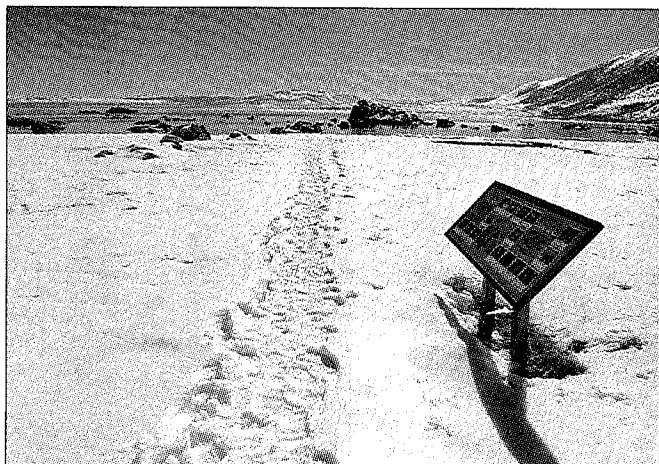
above 6377 feet on April 1, DWP will be allowed to divert 4,500 acre-feet of water this year from the lake's tributary streams. The lake will surpass 6380 this summer, however, and the prospect of larger diversions next year—the Water Board allows for 16,000 acre-feet of export at lake levels of 6380 and higher—underscores the importance of the timely approval of adequate stream restoration plans and flows.

Filling the lake to above 6380 will be runoff forecasted at 118% of normal. Unfortunately, DWP facilities will be unable to let runoff pass in the manner recommended by the stream scientists—or the manner ordered by the Water Board. The water will make it to the lake

eventually, but modification of DWP's facilities will be crucial to the future recovery of the streams.

With the arrival of warm weather, the roar of the creeks is getting louder and water is flowing again in some channels that were dry a month ago. Grant Lake Reservoir, on Rush Creek, is overflowing like it did last year, but an earlier start means it will spill for a longer period of time.

Visitors to Mono Lake this summer will find numerous changes. Tufa towers are marching into the water, the channel of water across the former landbridge to Negit Island is getting larger, and lakeside boardwalks are getting smaller. Exciting times indeed! 



*January, 1995: The boardwalk at County Park.
Lake level 6,375.0 feet.*

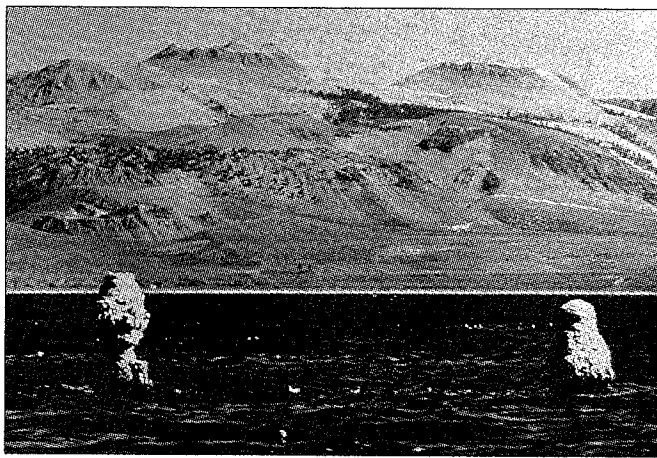


*May, 1996: The former boardwalk at County Park.
Lake level 6,379.3 feet.*

Mono Lake has risen over 4 feet in the last two years ...

Benchmarks

... but it's still 13 feet below the ordered level



1962: Twenty years of water diversions have lowered the lake 23 feet, revealing the tops of two tufa towers. Lake level 6,394 feet.



Spring, 1996: The "benchmark" tufa high and dry. At the Water Board-ordered lake level they will be partially submerged. Lake level 6,379.3 feet.

Summer at Mono Lake

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Summer activities are plentiful at Mono Lake and throughout the Mono Basin! For information on everything that's happening, stop by the Mono Lake Committee's Information Center and Bookstore in the middle of Lee Vining. Our staff can provide you with activity schedules, lodging information, suggested hikes, and even a map or two.

Here's a sampling of places and programs available for your enjoyment. If times, locations, or directions aren't indicated, just ask at the Information Center.

Programs

Canoe tours

Experience Mono Lake from a different perspective! Canoe tours depart every Saturday and Sunday morning at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00. Reservations are required through the Mono Lake Committee Information Center (619-647-6595).

South Tufa tours

Conducted three times daily throughout the summer, these walking tours are an excellent introduction to Mono Lake. Tours last about an hour and meet at the South Tufa parking lot.

Guided creek walk

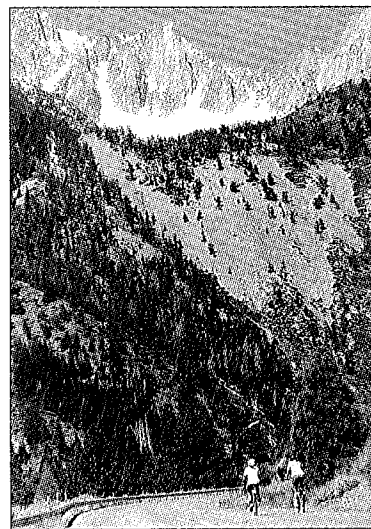
Join a Mono Lake Committee naturalist for a walk along Lee Vining Creek. Learn about the restoration work being done on the creek as well as the plants and animals of the area. Meet at the Information Center Wednesdays and Fridays at 9:00 A.M.

Friday evening program

Meet at the Committee Information Center at 8:00 P.M. for an evening of storytelling or slides about the natural and cultural history of the Mono Basin.

Stargazing

Join State Reserve Rangers Dave and Janet Carle for an evening of stargazing and astronomical lore at Navy Beach.



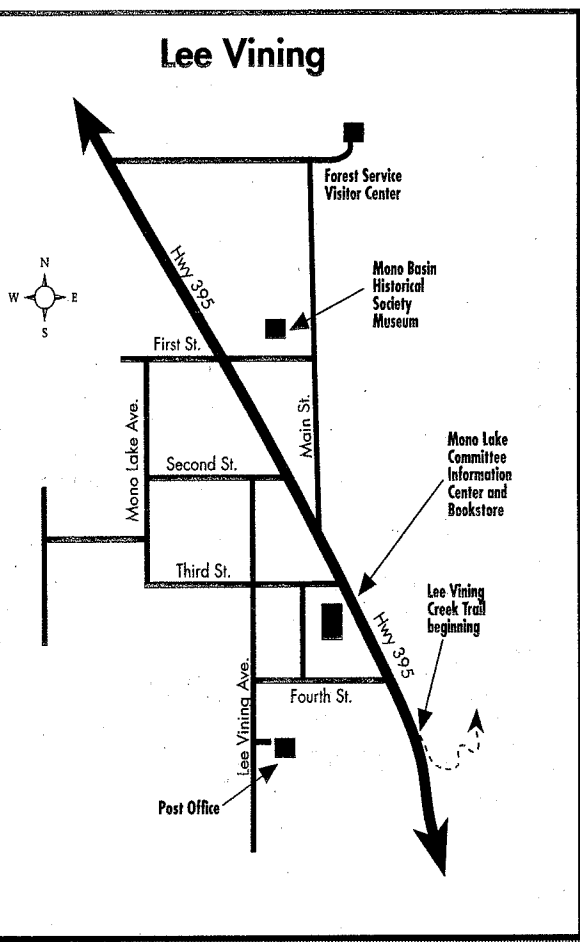
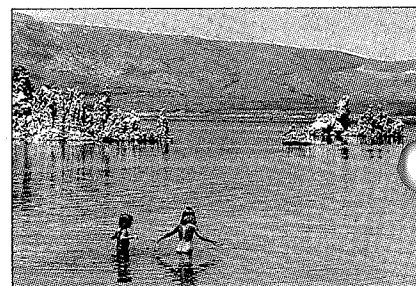
Places to go and things to do

Panum Crater

Come face to face with recent volcanic activity! Formed only 640 years ago, Panum Crater offers lots of interesting terrain to explore on your own. Guided tours, led by the Forest Service, are also available.

Lee Vining Creek trail

Connecting the town of Lee Vining with the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center, the creek trail takes you down close to one of Mono's recovering tributaries. Be sure to pick up a copy of the self-guided Creek Trail Brochure at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center for profiles of the plants and animals you may see, as well as the history of the water diversions and restoration work which have shaped the creek.





County park

A great spot for picnicking, bird-watching, and visiting the lake. A boardwalk to the lake departs from the bottom of a large grassy area. Restrooms available.

South Tufa

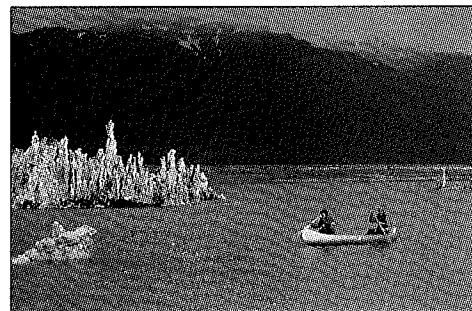
The best spot to visit the lake! A self-guided nature trail takes you among the tufa towers and along the lakeshore. Guided walking tours are also available.

Birdwatching

Mono Lake hosts over 95 species of water birds and has been designated an International Shorebird Reserve. The diversity of habitats in the Mono Basin create a wide range of birding opportunities.

Fishing

Try your luck along Lee Vining, Rush, or Mill creeks, or at Ellery, Tioga, Saddlebag, and Lundy lakes. Wherever you go, you'll find scores of lakes and streams stocked with trout. Lee Vining stores



provide bait, tackle, and information on where the fish are biting!

Photography

The varied and vast scenic beauty of the Mono Basin offers endless opportunities for photographers of all skill levels. Visit glacier-clad mountains, aspen-lined streams, ghost towns, and tufa towers.

Exploring

The Mono Basin is yours to discover. Walk the lakeshore, hike through the sagebrush flats, or explore the stream corridors. All kinds of discoveries await your curiosity.

Visitor Information

Mono Lake Committee Information Center and Bookstore

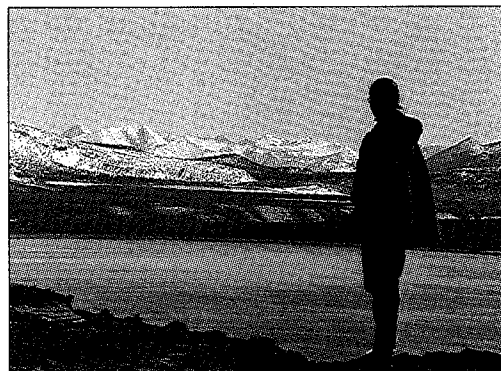
Stop in for all the information you need about summer activities. Educational exhibits and free video presentations discuss the natural and political history of Mono Lake, and an excellent selection of regional books, T-shirts, maps, and other merchandise is offered. Located in the middle of Lee Vining, next to Nicely's, the Center is open daily from 9 A.M. to 10 P.M. for the summer (9-5 the rest of the year).

Mono Basin Historical Society Museum

Located in Lee Vining at Hess Park, the Historical Society Museum houses a fascinating collection of materials from the Mono Basin's past. See Native American artifacts, gold mining implements, and even the old Bodie bar, all kept within the former Mono Lake schoolhouse.

Forest Service Visitor Center

The Forest Service Visitor Center, just north of town, features an excellent view of Mono Lake, educational exhibits, an art gallery, and selections from the "At Mono Lake" photo exhibit. Also featured are special patio talks, evening programs, and a movie about Mono Lake.



Local Resources

Lee Vining and Mono Lake

Mono Lake Committee Information Center: (619) 647-6595
Lee Vining Chamber of Commerce: recorded information (619) 647-6629
U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center: (619) 647-3044

Yosemite Information

General information and inquiries: (209) 372-0200
Campground Reservations: (800) 436-7275
Hotel and Motel Reservations: (209) 252-4848
Wilderness Permit information: (209) 372-0307
Wilderness Permit reservations: (209) 372-0740
Backcountry conditions: (209) 372-0310

Southbound on Hwy 395

Mammoth Lakes Forest Service Visitor Center: (619) 924-5500; recorded info: 934-1094
Devil's Postpile: (619) 934-2289
White Mountain Ranger District (Bishop): (619) 873-2500
Lone Pine Interagency Visitor Center: (619) 876-4252

Northbound on Hwy 395

Bridgeport Ranger Station—Toiyabe National Forest: (619) 932-7070

General

California Road Conditions: (800) 427-7623
Inyo National Forest Wilderness Permits: (888) 374-3773

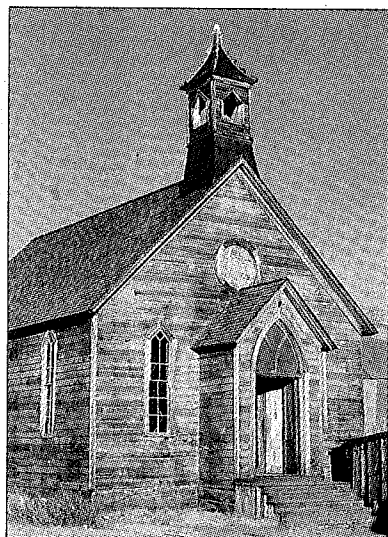


Photo by Don Jackson

The Eastern Sierra

Bodie ghost town

Bodie, located about 30 miles from Lee Vining, offers a glimpse into California's past. The gold mining town is preserved in a state of "arrested decay" and was once one of the largest towns in the state. Today, you can roam the streets, looking through windows into preserved homes and businesses. Rangers lead tours and offer special programs. \$5 admission per car, open 9 A.M. to 7 P.M. during the summer.

June Lake loop

The highway 158 loop is a terrific drive

through a glacier-carved canyon with views of towering peaks and quiet lakes. Popular for fishing and camping, the loop makes an enjoyable scenic drive as well.

Yosemite

Ever popular with visitors, Yosemite is one of the crown jewels of the nation's National Park System. A visit to the valley offers the chance to see towering waterfalls, sheer cliffs, and many famous landmarks. But be sure to visit the rest of the park as well; easily accessible from Mono Lake in the summertime is Tuolumne Meadows, which offers an excellent sampling of High Sierra wildflowers and hiking.

Special events

Photo Exhibition

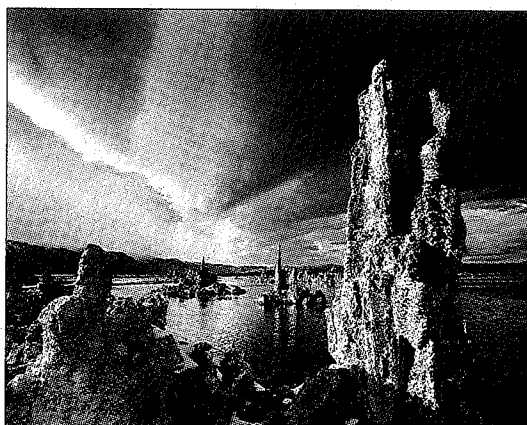
Beginning in mid-June, the Mono Lake Committee Information Center will be hosting a special exhibition of photographs by renowned local photographer Jim Stimson. The exhibition is free and open to the public, so be sure to look for it on your summer travels.

Titled *Sister Lakes—Mono Lake and the Great Salt Lake*, the exhibit features photographs of both of these inland saline seas taken between 1994 and the present. Stimson has roamed the shores of both lakes to gather the images on display.

In fact, the exhibit is a preview of a book which Stimson will be publishing in collaboration with noted Salt Lake City author Terry Tempest Williams. The book will compare the two lakes in words and images.

All the photos on display are new work for Stimson and have never been displayed previously. "I've really enjoyed making these images" Stimson notes. "Mono Lake has a wonderful sense of solitude and wildness while the Great Salt Lake is striking in its luminosity and vastness."

Funded in part by a grant from the Mono County Arts Council, the exhibit will be available for viewing through September.



Photograph by Jim Stimson

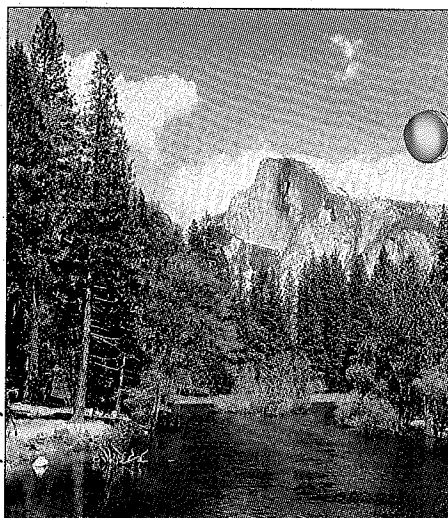



Photo by Don Jackson

Devil's Postpile

Located beyond the town of Mammoth Lakes, Devil's Postpile is an unusual geologic formation of columnar basalt. The surrounding area offers spectacular scenery and the hike to nearby 101-foot Rainbow Falls is popular.

High Sierra hiking

Find a trail and head off in search of wildflowers, lakes, and solitude. Numerous trails are available for day and overnight hiking in the Sierra. Stop by the Mono Lake Committee Information Center for maps and advice. 

Help us protect and restore Mono Lake!

A week of fun!

The Mono Lake Restoration, Exploration, and Century Week & the Mono Lake Committee Annual Meeting

The Mono Lake Committee is planning a Restoration, Exploration, and Century Week—including the Annual Meeting and Rehydration Ceremony—beginning the week before Labor Day. You're invited to be there!

The week of activities, which have evolved from the traditional Mono Lake Bike-A-Thon, are open to all participants. Bring your family and take your pick from the wide range of events, or join us for all of them! Please call and register for the Exploration Days and Century Ride to assure yourself a spot—and if you're planning to stay in motel, make your reservations now!

Exploration Days

August 28–29

Explore Mono Lake and the surrounding area with a Committee naturalist. Canoe Tours, Creek Walks, and other special activities for families will occur on both days. With enough interest, we'll also be organizing half-day bicycle rides in the area on both paved and dirt roads. Please call the Mono Lake Committee to reserve a spot before they fill up.

Restoration Day

August 30

Take part in the real work of rebuilding Mono's health! We'll spend a day planting and watering trees to help restore the damage caused by fifty years of water diversions from the Mono Basin. A great opportunity to see and do restoration work first hand.

Torch Bearers

Beginning August 26

The Torch Bearers will trace the route of the original Bike-A-Thon, beginning in Los Angeles and ending at Mono Lake. This year, though, the ride will be faster-paced and more aggressive but also smaller scale. Reminiscent of past rides, the Torch Bearers will carry water dipped from the reflecting pools in front of DWP. If you're interested, be sure to contact us as soon as possible for details and requirements.

Rehydration Ceremony and Annual Meeting

August 31

Following 16 years of tradition, the annual Rehydration Ceremony will take place at Old Marina the morning of August 31st. Water brought from Los Angeles by the Torch Riders will be returned to the lake in recognition of the commitment made by Los Angeles citizens to conserve water so that Mono Lake can be protected.

Following on the heels of the Rehydration Ceremony will be the Annual

Meeting of the Mono Lake Committee. Bring a lunch and join us at County Park for a round of updates on Mono Lake, stream and waterfowl habitat restoration, and other current news. Music and camping will be available at the park Saturday night.

The Mono Lake Restoration Ride

September 1

This 100-mile ride will be a fundraiser for the Committee's ongoing restoration work and an exciting time for those involved. The route will begin in the Mono Basin, loop through spectacular parts of the Eastern Sierra, and return to Mono Lake via the Jeffrey Pine forest to the east. Expect spectacular views, varied terrain, and a great group ride.

A shorter version of the Restoration Ride is also planned south of the lake for those not wanting to attempt the full 100 miles.

Please call to register before the rides fill up.

More information

All these activities are still being finalized, so you'll want to be sure to contact the Committee for a more detailed schedule of events and a more thorough description of the activities.

Call Kay at 619-647-6595 for further information; you can also write to her via e-mail at KayO@monolake.org.



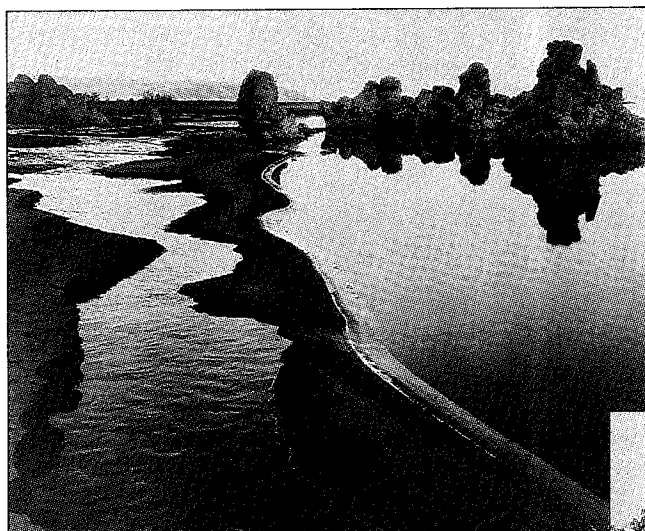


Photo by Brett Weston, used courtesy of Weston estate
1961: lake level 6,396 feet. View to the east at County Park, on Mono's north shore. The lake here is slightly higher than the Water Board has required.



Photo by Jim Stimson
1993: lake level 6,375 feet. A recent view at the same location. Today the lake is four feet higher than when this photo was taken, yet these tufa remain distant from the shore.

Mono Lake benchmarks

50 years of water diversions by the Department of Water and Power changed Mono Lake dramatically, and today's landscape looks quite different than that of fifty—and even thirty—years ago.

Take a tour of Mono's past to see the changes that have occurred. Printed here are photos showing what the lake and its tributaries were like in days gone by, and what they look like now. Compare these views to your own as you travel the Mono Basin today.

For reference, the current lake level is 6,379 feet above sea level; the level before diversions was 6,417 feet. In the past year, wet winters have raised the lake three feet. The State Water Board order of 1994 requires that the lake rise to 6,392 feet, which is expected to take about twenty years.

As you visit spots like these, consider keeping a personal record of the lake at today's elevation. If you revisit the same spots over the years, you'll have a valuable chronicle of Mono's return to healthy levels!

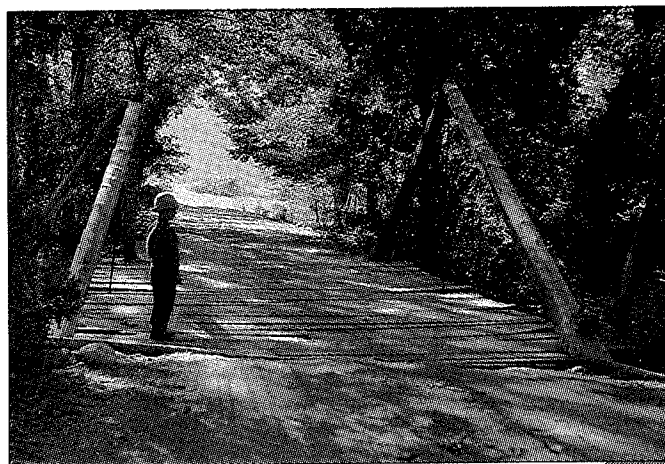


Photo by Wallace Woods
1946: Bridge over Lee Vining creek before diversions. The size and extent of the riparian vegetation surrounding the bridge is notable.

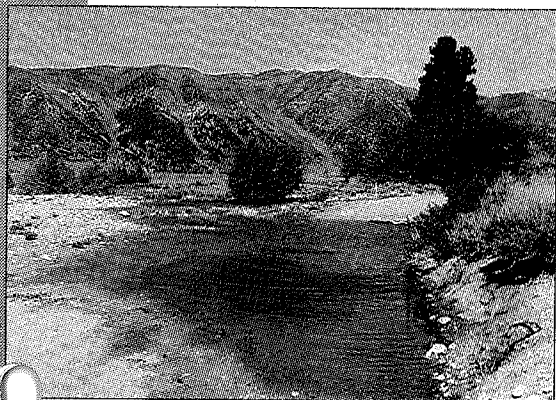
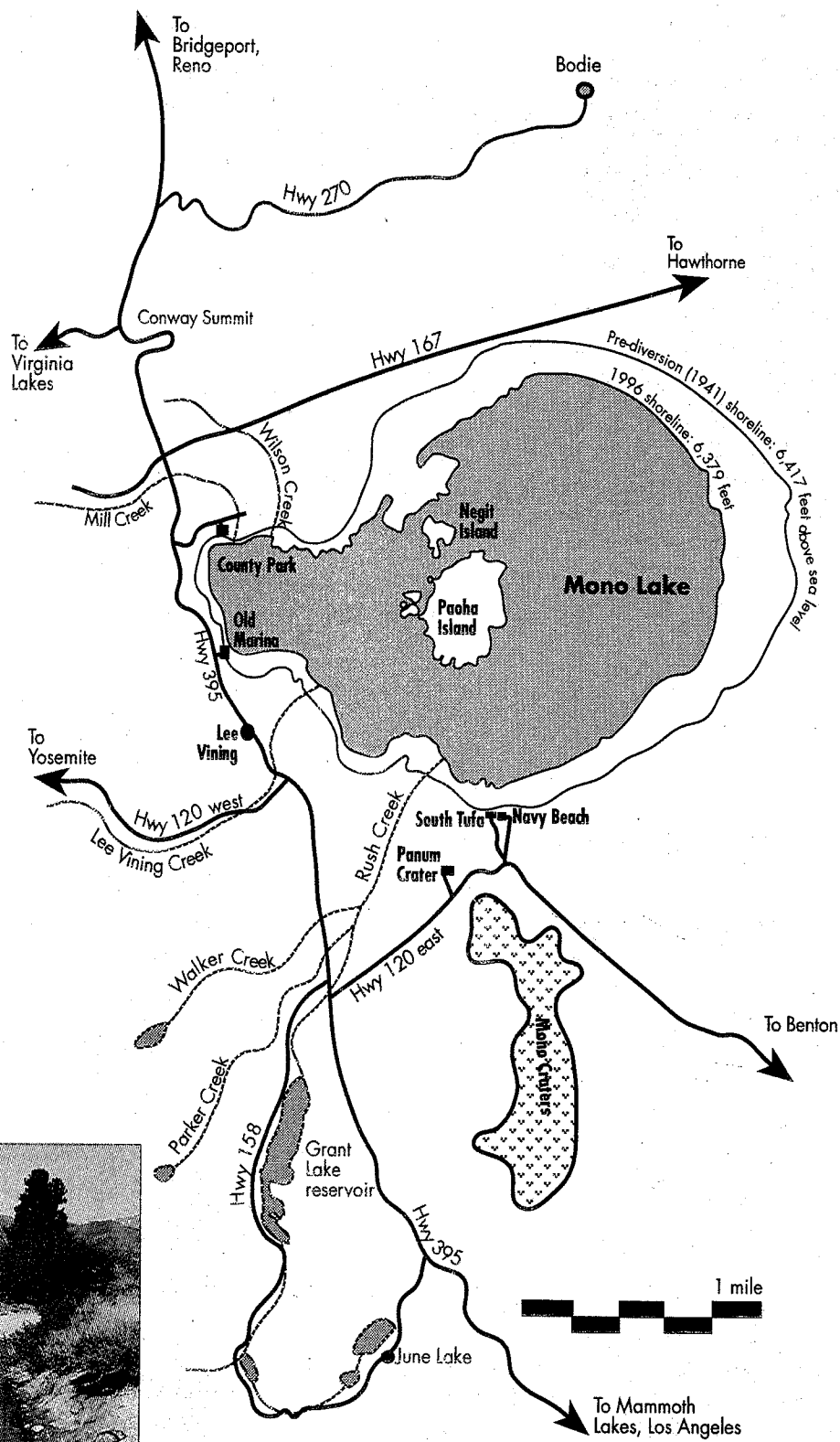


Photo by Ilene Mandelbaum

1994: site of the Lee Vining Creek bridge.
 Riparian vegetation is almost entirely gone, a casualty of decades of water diversions.

Wandering Mono's wildness

by Genny Smith

Editor's note: Several years ago, Genny Smith wrote of the Mono Basin's wildness in the following essay for the Mono Lake Calendar. Genny, a longtime member of the Mono Lake Committee Board of Directors, is an author, editor, and publisher of many books about the Eastern Sierra. When she wrote this essay, the news of the day was court-ordered stream flows; now it's Water Board-ordered restoration, but that same elusive wildness is still one of Mono's most valuable characteristics. With the exploration season upon us, we reprint her article here.

You've heard of Mono Lake, of course. Judging from letters the Mono Lake Committee has received from such varied locales as Bolivia, Germany, Russia and even China, it seems much of the world has heard of it. People know that this strangely beautiful lake is close to dying. The huge lake east of Yosemite National Park has dropped 40 feet since 1941, when four out of its five streams were

diverted into an aqueduct that supplies water to the city of Los Angeles, 350 miles away.

Yes, many people have heard of Mono Lake. But how many know about the

importance to the birds by the hundreds of thousands that nest, rest, or refuel on its food-rich waters, that perhaps we failed to keep the lake in perspective. It's just one part of an extraordinary basin

So focused have we been on Mono's plight that perhaps we failed to keep the lake in perspective.

Aeolian Buttes? Mono Craters? Devil's Punchbowl? How about Mono Mills, Lundy Canyon, or the Dana Plateau? These are all lesser-known but important elements of the wild, magnificent basin that nurtures Mono Lake and contributes water, sediment and chemicals to it.

It may seem that we have neglected the wonders that surround Mono Lake on every side. So focused have we been on Mono's plight, on its beauty and its

flanked on the west by the abrupt Sierra scarp, a basin whose highest peaks tower 6500 feet above its lowest waters.

Perhaps we have seldom talked about them, but those of us who know Mono Lake intimately have always felt the intricate connections it has with the surrounding land and its creatures. Recent court decisions make clear how vital those connections are. Much of the Mono Lake news today centers on court-mandated stream flows. Work has begun to restore life to Mono's long-dry creeks, paid for by the City of Los Angeles.

These newly-reborn streams depend on the meltwater from the snow-spangled Sierra crest and the high-mountain forests that hold the moisture through the summer. And so it goes—the sagebrush uplands, the glacier-carved lakes, the volcanoes, the alluvial gravels, the pumice that blankets most of the region, the long arid summers—all this makes Mono Lake what it is—an alkaline desert lake three times saltier than the ocean that produces amazingly abundant food for nesting gulls and migrating shorebirds.

[The Mono Lake Calendar], then, makes up for our seeming neglect of Mono's wonderful surroundings. It puts

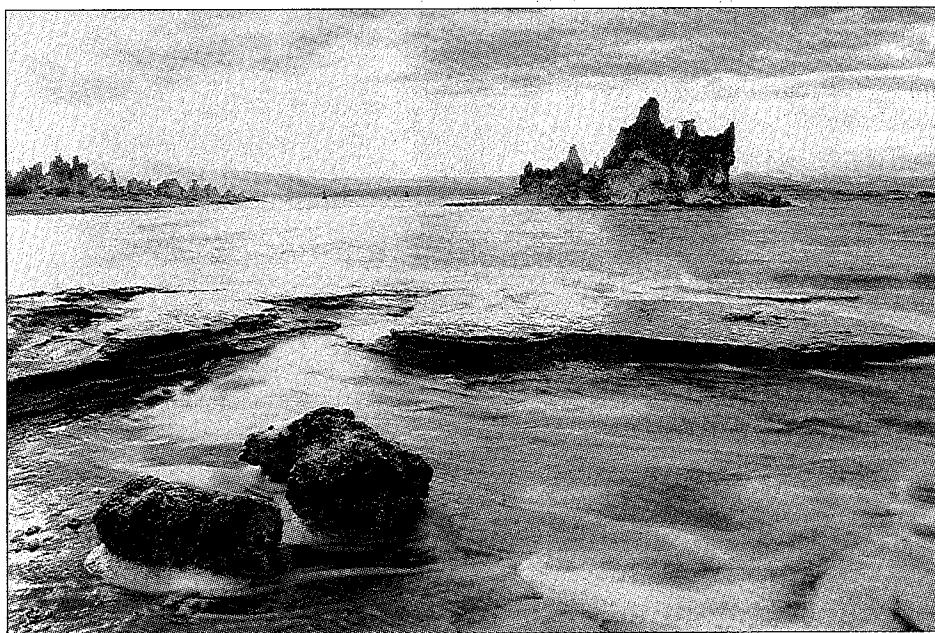
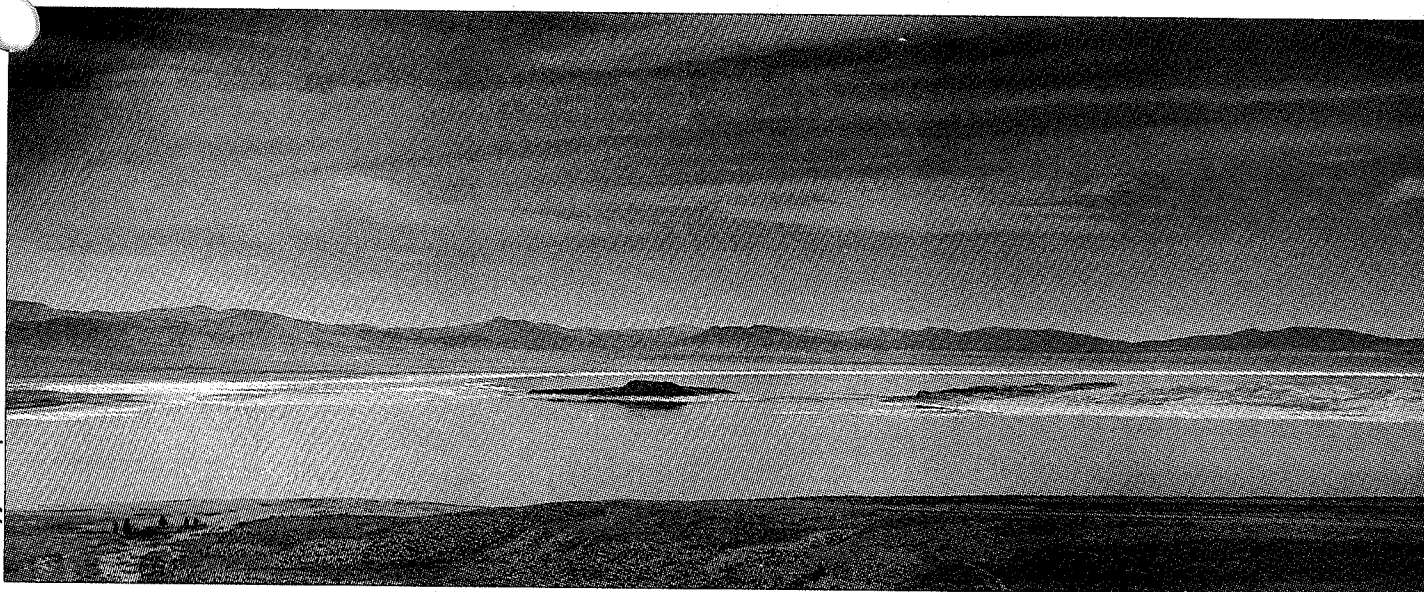


Photo by Bob Smith



the lake into perspective and invites you to explore the *entire* basin of Mono. Invites you to walk the roads that lead to abandoned mines and logging sites and deserted ranches. To hike the trails that lead far up Lundy Canyon and Rush Creek to the snowbanks that nourish the streams' headwaters.

Most important of all, it invites you to leave the roads and trails behind and wander—wander *away*, anywhere up, north or south or any direction in between. Much of the Mono Basin remains wild; with just a little effort you can discover some of its wild places and the wild things that live there. Not that we can supply you with a map and say, "Go west two miles and then turn north..." No, wildness just doesn't appear that easily, on command.


The thrill of wildness comes from those rare, unforeseen encounters when you happen upon the unexpected. As when, in the sagebrush, you discover some old irrigation ditches or bits of the Bodie and Benton Railroad bed, or a jackrabbit, so still that often you will fail to see him. Or when, amidst an alpine boulder field, you hear a pika's nasal call and then find him spreading out his hay on the rocks to dry. Or, upon a snowfield, you see a flock of rosy finches feeding on frozen insects. Or, under a waterfall, a dipper flying in and out feeding its

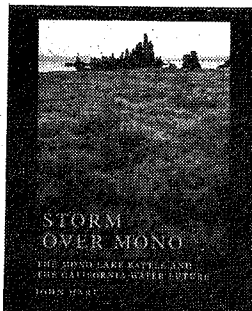
young. Or, on a high, rocky slope, an unexpected field of bright blue polemonium. Or a bighorn sheep, the same color as the granite, calmly looking down at you. Or among the stately Jeffrey pine, you discover a sudden splash of reddish-purple mimulus, tiny monkey flowers carpeting the white pumice.

So open is this country—and much of it unfenced public land—that you can walk for miles in almost any direction. Who says you have to hike a trail or drive a road? Have you never thought of just starting off toward some point you want to get to? Or following a stream as it meanders to...who knows where? Or just wandering with no destination in mind at all, enjoying the space, the sky, the silence? Then as you listen, you may realize it's not silence at all, only the

absence of man-made noise. A quietness that lets you hear the earth's songs—insects buzzing, wind stirring leaves, the faint rustling of lizards and ground squirrels as they hurry to hide from you. Gentle noises you seldom hear.

But no matter where your wanderings take you, from any one of a hundred viewpoints that you discover, always below lies that magical lake with its ever-changing colors—now sky-blue, now silver, gray, green, rose, or hues with names that you have never imagined.

Fascinating as the lake is, Mono Basin's uplands, its streams, its nearby volcanoes and surrounding mountains offer different but wonderful worlds to wander in. We—and they—invite you to miles of wildness, countless surprises and endless days of wonder and discovery. 



Do you have your copy yet?

Storm over Mono has been receiving nationwide acclaim as the authoritative history of the Mono Lake struggle. The *San Francisco Chronicle* writes that author John Hart "defly threads through the legal thickets, politicking, and environmental grandstanding while at the same time dispensing colorful geological and Old West lore." Order your copy by calling the Mono Lake Committee Bookstore at 619-647-6595! Softbound \$29.95; hardbound \$50.00.

Staff migrations

by Martha Davis

Each passing season is bringing a new combination of faces to the Committee. As we celebrate the arrival of new colleagues, we always find it hard to say goodbye to old friends.

Leaving us in June after twelve years of passionate work for Mono Lake is **Sally Miller**, the Committee's Eastern Sierra Representative. Sally unites a deep love for the Sierra with a profound commitment to our Eastern Sierra community. Her gift for understanding the heart of issues will be greatly missed, as will be her political intuition and her ability to ask (and find answers to) the really hard questions. Dave would be proud of all that she has accomplished for Mono Lake. Those looking for Sally this summer will find her as far away as she can get from computers, faxes, and telephones. She'll be on the rugged trails of the Sierra's high country enjoying the land she has done so much to protect.

Also departing the Committee this spring after two years as MLC's Education Director is **Stacey Simon**. Stacey single-handedly built our successful Outdoor Experiences educational program, which now brings up to 150 youth from Los Angeles community groups to Mono Lake each year so that they can learn about the special place

that lies at the end of L.A.'s water taps. We are deeply grateful for Stacey's willingness to sail courageously into the uncharted waters of MLC's education programs—and impressed at her unfailing success at everything she did. We wish Stacey the best at Boalt Law School where she plans to take up environmental law (but we'll keep lobbying for more local occupations).

Finally, MLC's Sales Manager and master photographer, **Rick Knepp**, is moving up and on to the management of his own store in Mammoth Lakes called The Great Outdoors. Rick arrived three years ago as we were starting the remodel of our Information Center (surprise!) and took on the formidable task of transforming our sales program into an effective fundraiser for Mono Lake. Many rave reviews later, MLC's Information Center is now considered one of the finest bookstores in the Sierra. Thank you, Rick, for helping us grow and prosper. May you do the same at the Great Outdoors!

Jumping fearlessly into the MLC breach are two wonderful new staff members. **Bartshe Miller** is taking up the educational programs challenge, joining MLC as our Education Director. Bartshe comes to us from the U.S. Forest

Service where he provided Mono Basin interpretative programs for thousands of visitors during summer seasons. Like Stacey Simon, he is committed to providing high quality, hands-on education programs in the southland as well as at Mono Lake. After only a month on the job, he's already organizing L.A.-based classes and has lots of plans for expanding the Committee's highly regarded outreach

programs. We are fortunate to have such a talented person join our staff.

Tom Siewert takes over as our new Sales Manager just in time for a trial by fire with the upcoming summer season—and he's already got the store jumping. Come take a look at our new books and products, or just stop by to say hi. Tom brings an impressive background in retail work to the Committee as well as a wide range of interpretive skills owing to many years of work with the National Park Service. One of Tom's many talents is storytelling. He will be offering evening storytelling events as part of a new Friday evening summer program at the Information Center—make sure you call to find out when he will be performing when you plan your trip to Mono Lake this year!

Two summer positions are being filled by former Committee interns, and we're happy to have them back. **Michelle Hofmann** will be the Canoe Program Coordinator and will lead the Committee's water-based education work. Michelle just graduated from Humboldt State University with a degree in Natural Resources Planning and Interpretation. **Matt Moule** is joining us as the Outdoor Experiences Coordinator after completing his degree in Science and Management-Environmental Sequence at Claremont-McKenna College. He'll be handling the details of the six trips planned by inner city community groups to Mono Lake this summer.

A new crew of interns joins us as well. **Nathan Bomer** leads off the team and comes to us from Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a strong interest in the environment and Mono Lake. **Juliet Breckenridge**, a student at the University of Alaska, writes that she is excited about increasing her environmental education and interpretation experience. Having just graduated from Colby College, ➡

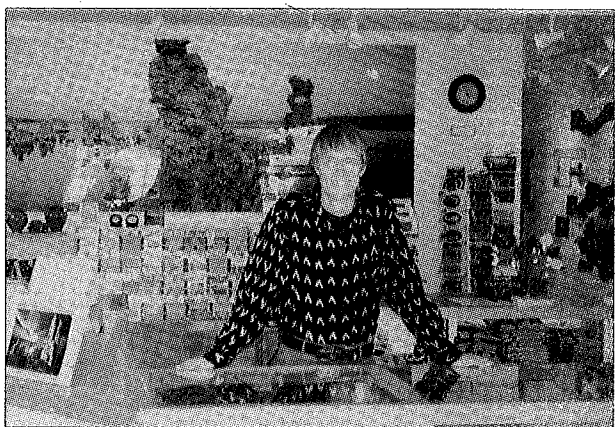


Photo by Jim Pyacek

New Sales Manager Tom Siewert, ready for summertime.

Volunteers plant trees

(continued from page 4)

an agreement was reached for DWP to fund the planting if the Committee would provide volunteers to complete the necessary labor. Scott English and his assistant Steve Koskella, both involved in Mono Basin restoration for some time, arrived in mid-April and conducted the planting operation. On short notice, we managed to round up wonderful volunteers **Ilene Mandelbaum**, **Jack Trefry**, and **Augie Hess** to help plant the cuttings and seedlings. The Committee volunteered staff members Laura Maltby, Bartshe Miller, Kay Ogden, Stacey Simon, and Greg Reis. It was fun, rewarding, and a great way to spend Earth Day.

While in the basin, Scott saw an opportunity to get additional work done. DWP also agreed to allow the removal of the limiter logs on Lee Vining Creek, another measure the restoration scientist team had recommended for 1996. Limiter logs had been previously placed across the entrances of rewatered channels in order to protect them from erosion by limiting inflow. However, the

logs caused last year's high flows to drop sediment at the entrances, partially or fully blocking them off. The removal of the logs was fortuitous because they would otherwise have remained in place until after this year's high flows, potentially causing further problems.

The planting work was also intended to help the creek accommodate high flows. Most of the work done was on Channel 10 of Rush Creek, which was rewatered last summer. The plantings will help protect the channel from erosion, and they will eventually help replace the riparian forest lost due to DWP's diversions.

Evidence of that historic forest still exists, and to plant a healthy young seedling next to a large, long-fallen log is a powerful experience. Thanks to everyone who made this future forest possible!

Greg Reis is the Committee's Information Specialist. He's bringing order to our library of research documents. 🐸

◆◆ **Kristen Drake** will be driving out from Maine and is excited about educating people on Mono Lake's natural history. Also traveling from the East Coast is **Paul Levine**, a sophomore at Brown University with a life-long interest in Mono Lake; he's excited about a summer exploring the region. **Matthew Newman** has just finished his degree in Engineering at Harvey Mudd College, making him a likely candidate for a few much needed technical projects at the office. Last but not least, **Wendy Stanford** from Scripps College is interested in environmental research and

is enthusiastic about studying the impacts of human actions.

Leaving us mid-summer, but not going far, is **Jim Pyacek**, who has weathered a springtime internship which had him discussing Mono Lake with visitors one minute, and building storeroom shelves the next. Jim will be working down the street at the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center, where we wish him the best.

Martha Davis is Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee. She's thinking about a future career as a canoe guide. 🐸

Accolades

Special thanks go out to two in-kind donors who have provided the Committee with needed supplies:

Don Hilliker, who works with **Kodak**, donated 50 rolls of black and white film for this newsletter. Thanks Don!

Steve Paterson and Paterson Floor Coverings, in Redwood City, donated carpet tiles so we could finish off our office space in Lee Vining with style.

Executive Director search continues

The Mono Lake Committee is still looking for someone who can fill Martha Davis's shoes in the position of Executive Director.

After announcing her plans to leave the Committee last summer, Martha kindly offered to stay on until a replacement was found. Little did she know she'd still be here a year later.

Nonetheless, an intensive search has been ongoing to fill the job. The Committee has been through one full round of the process, interviewing some excellent candidates along the way. One applicant was offered the job but, after several weeks of discussions, he declined. So we're conducting a more extensive applicant search utilizing the services of a consultant. Interviews are planned for late in the summer.

The good news is that Martha still vows to stay until her replacement is found. In the meantime, you'll see her signing letters as "Executive Director *pro tem*" to remind us that, really, she will depart someday.

The 1996 Mono Lake Restoration, Exploration, and Century Week

CARRYING ON THE BIKE-A-THON TRADITION

A u g u s t 2 6 – S e p t e m b e r 1

READY TO RIDE?

PREPPED TO PLANT TREES?

EXCITED TO EXPLORE?

RARIN' TO VOLUNTEER?

**YOU'LL NEED MORE IN-
FORMATION WITH ALL
THE DETAILS, SO ...**

CONTACT KAY OGDEN

AT 619-647-6595

OR VIA E-MAIL AT

KAYO@MONOLAKE.ORG

Torch Bearers (Beginning Aug. 26)

A group of hardy fundraisers who will travel the traditional Los Angeles to Mono Lake route in record time

Exploration Time (August 28–29)

A chance to explore and discover the Mono Basin with experienced guides via foot and canoe

Restoration Day (August 30)

Take part in the real work of rebuilding Mono's health and help raise funds for future restoration projects

Rehydration Ceremony and Annual Meeting (August 31)

A Committee classic

The Restoration Ride (Sept. 1)

A hundred-mile ride through the Eastern Sierra to raise funds for restoration



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