

Footprints

The Newsletter of the Grand Canyon Hikers and Backpackers Association

www.GCHBA.org P.O. Box 11986 Prescott, AZ 86304 Issue 11 July/October 2004



Its Been Quite a Summer!

By Cliff Beck, Editor

Poof! Another summer has slipped by at Grand Canyon. I will try to capture the year at the canyon in the final newsletter of the year, coming up. For this issue, I have received a wealth of interest in a single subject, and so will stick to it.

As you know, we recently lost to this world another of the great backpackers ever to hike these trails. Mr. George Steck left a lasting impression on those of us who love the canyon backcountry. Probably no one has had as great an impact on our experiences as Mr. Steck and Harvey Butchart. Backcountry expert Sally Underwood provides us a report on the celebration of the Steck and Butchart legacies at a gathering of friends near Shoshone Point. In addition, fellow canyon hiker Don Mattox provides us with his perspective on Mr. Steck.

Also included in this issue is a reprint of an article written by Sally and published in the Grand Canyon Association's spring issue of their newsletter Canyon Views. If you are not familiar with the GCA, check them out at www.GCA.org. In addition to operating the Grand Canyon Field Institute and most of the bookstores at Grand Canyon, they publish many of the best book titles on the Canyon and the periodical *Plateau Journal*. (Personally, I became a life member after my third visit to the South Rim, joining the predecessor organization, the Grand Canyon Natural History Association.) The article included here is reprinted with GCA permission.

Fire activity has been light, so far, and beneficial. The woodlands off of the North Rim have been starved for relief from the accumulation of deadfall, and small fires from Swamp Point to Outlet Canyon have apparently done some good. I look forward to seeing for myself. Since the Long Jim fire gave the South Rim village a scare, there have been few closures.

Bright Angel Trail experienced some damage from heavy rains this summer. Apparently no one was hurt.

PSAR has been busy, however. Although I noticed that 2003 rescues were 269, down from previous years that tended toward about 450 incidents a year, there have been some incredible incidents. Most disturbing was the young athlete that lost her life in the Cremation Creek drainage.

A Day of Tribute and Fellowship

By Sally Underwood

Looking out across the river from Shoshone Point, I had never seen the air so clear over the canyon...it seemed that I could almost see the leaves on the sparse cottonwood trees in the Vishnu drainage. George and Harvey would have appreciated a day like this, with the breaks and routes so sharply in focus.

Sponsored by many organizations such as the Grand Canyon Historical Society, Grand Canyon Association, and the National Park Service, friends and family of George Steck and Harvey Butchart had gathered on June 19, 2004 to honor the lives of these two great men, and to recognize their contributions to the Grand Canyon.

Dr. John "Harvey" Butchart passed away on May 29th, 2002, at the age of 95 and Dr. George Powell Steck passed away on April 13th, 2004 at the age of 79. After a few words from Superintendent Joe Alston, members of the Butchart and Steck families were introduced by Tom Myers and John Azar respectively, and they shared some precious memories of these two men, not only as they related to the canyon but in their personal lives and relationships to friends and family.

This was followed by comments from park ranger Bill Vandergraff and long-time canyon hiker and climber Jim Ohlman, relating memories of times they and others had spent with George and Harvey. A

memorial service was conducted by Lee Albertson of the GC Historical Society, followed by scattering of ashes into the canyon and a pot-luck lunch.

Listening to the accounts of the lives of these two men, I was struck by the similarities: both were mathematicians (statisticians), both were quite unassuming and humble about their accomplishments, both were incredible ENABLERS and would take the time to talk to anyone who was interested in the Grand Canyon- no phone call or letter went unanswered.

Although they belonged to a very exclusive league of canyon hikers, they were far from exclusive in their attitudes towards others and were always willing to share information to veterans and novices alike. They say that behind every great man is a great woman, and this was certainly true of George and Harvey in their beloved wives, Helen Steck and Roma Butchart, who both coincidentally preceded the passing of their husbands by a year or less.

Almost all of the stories I heard about George and Harvey that day had a great deal of humor attached to them- they seemed to be able to do serious work without taking themselves too seriously, a essential characteristic to getting along well in life both in the canyon or out. As we celebrated the lives of George and Harvey, I thought how the landscape of Grand Canyon has shaped so many lives- challenged them, enriched them, affected them in so many ways. Like the canyon itself, these two men have done the same in their courage, determination and generosity for all those who, like them, have grown to love Grand Canyon. Thank you George and Harvey. We will continue to remember you on those beautifully clear canyon days and always.



George Steck and Sally Underwood at the Bright Angel Trailhead November 2003. Photo courtesy of Sally Underwood.

The following has been contributed by Don Mattox. It is a write up that was published in the New Mexico Mountain Club - Outing Bulletin.

George Powell Steck

1/11/1925 - 4/13/2004

By Don Mattox

George Powell Steck died in his sleep on April 13, 2004 at the age of 79. George was a renowned Grand Canyon hiker and the author of LOOP HIKES IN THE GRAND CANYON. George was born in Berkeley, CA on January 11, 1925. After college at the end of WW II he served as a Radar Officer in the US Navy. He returned to school and obtained his PhD. in mathematics (statistics) and married Helen Smolenski. In 1955 he joined Sandia Corporation (now Sandia National Laboratories - SNL) as a statistician. He was president of the New Mexico Mountain Club in 1964-65.

It was while at Sandia that his love of the Grand Canyon (GC) began. Beginning in the early 1960s George, and his hiking companion Don Mattox, began making frequent hiking trips into the backcountry of the GC. These included "Sandia Hikes" when he and Don would leave Sandia at about 3 o'clock Friday afternoon, drive until late that night, hike for two days then drive home to be at work Monday morning.

The hikes also included "family hikes" where George and Don would take their children and George's niece and nephew along with other families with children down into the GC during the August summer school break. It was there that he began to be called "Uncle George" even by his son Michael.

George retired from SNL in January of 1980 and became a fulltime GC aficionado. He did volunteer work for the Park Service (VIP - Volunteer in Park Service); co-led GC hikes for the Sierra Club and others and generally was consumed by his interest in the GC.

His first book on GC hiking, Loop Hikes in the Grand Canyon I, was published in 1989. A second book Loop Hikes in the Grand Canyon II was published in 1993. In 2002 the two books were combined into Loop Hikes in the Grand Canyon, a FalconGuide.

George's last loop hike in the GC was in 2002 when he went with a group down Tuckup Canyon along the river and out Stairway Canyon, one of the routes described in his book. The Grand Canyon Pioneers Society presented George with the PIONEER AWARD in 1999. George is survived by his children, Stan, Mike and Rica, two grandchildren and one great granddaughter. A memorial for George was held at the Pioneer Society meeting at the Grand Canyon on June 19, 2004.

The next article is a reprint from the Grand Canyon Association's newsletter, Canyon Views, Spring 2004. The Grand Canyon Association (GCA) is a non-profit

organization established in 1932 to support education, research, and other programs for the benefit of Grand Canyon National Park and its visitors. GCA operates bookstores throughout the park, publishes books and other materials related to the Grand Canyon region, supports wildlife surveys and other research, funds acquisitions for the park's research library, and produces a wide variety of free publications and exhibits for park visitors. Since 1932 GCA has provided Grand Canyon National Park with over \$15 million in aid. We appreciate their generosity in sharing Sally's work with GCHBA members -- Editor

If Only You Walk Far Enough
by Sally Underwood

As I looked at the faces in the crowd at Kolb Studio and later at the Community Building on the evening of November 13, 2003, I wondered how many of us had stood in some obscure side canyon, sweaty hands clutching photocopied pages from George Steck's book, trying to decipher and interpret George's words. A lot of us, no doubt. Like theologians studying ancient religious texts, we debated the meaning of "gully" or "saddle" as we matched words to landscape and made our Grand Canyon pilgrimages using *Hiking Grand Canyon Loops: Adventures in the Backcountry* as a guide. How many others had spent a winter evening with maps strewn all around and Steck's book on their laps, laughing at George's wit, dreaming of spring and hikes of their own? I knew that the people gathered this evening to honor George Steck were only a small number of those who had been influenced by his writing, encouraged to get off the well-traveled canyon trails and get into the "outback," as George refers to the canyon backcountry, if only vicariously through armchair hiking.

This gathering, sponsored by the Grand Canyon Association, Grand Canyon National Park, and Xanterra Parks & Resorts, honored George Steck for his many contributions to Grand Canyon, including his years of work as a VIP (Volunteer in Park), his work correlating place names with topographical features, his service as an expert resource for search and rescue operations, and his writing prowess in authoring *Hiking Grand Canyon Loops*. As friends and family looked on, Grand Canyon National Park Deputy Superintendent Kate Cannon presented George with a "Lifetime Achievement Award" for his service to and positive impact on Grand Canyon.

Born in 1925, George Steck's first love was Glen Canyon. George completed several float trips there before the dam was erected and Lake Powell flooded the canyon. Thereafter, George turned his attention to Grand Canyon, at first through exploratory hiking trips with friends like Don Mattox, and later through extended backcountry hiking vacations with his family. In 1977, he hiked from Lees Ferry to Lava Falls on a

six-week trek with family members and friends. A decade later, George repeated the hike, but extended the trip a tad: He hiked all the way from Lees Ferry to Grand Wash Cliffs and Lake Mead. In addition to such grand adventures, George found he enjoyed week-or-so-long hikes in the backcountry that could be done as a loop -- starting and ending in the same place -- and the idea to write a book was born from this interest. Even if one doesn't plan to venture off the rim, his very readable book is full of useful information and wonderful stories. Although informative about the two things that matter most to backcountry hikers -- breaks through cliffs and water -- George's book is not a spell-it-all-out-for-you tome. The reader is given the main ingredients for a safe and fun trip but is also left with plenty of opportunity to explore and discover things on his or her own. Perhaps there are many Grand Canyon hikers who have covered more miles, found more breaks, and climbed more buttes in Grand Canyon, but few have facilitated and empowered so many others to get out and hike the canyon outback. George Steck is a great friend to Grand Canyon and canyon hikers.

George subtitled one of the chapters in his book "Talus in Wonderland," obviously a play on the title of the famous book by Lewis Carroll. Coincidentally, this passage from *Alice in Wonderland* has always reminded me of George:

"Would you tell me, please, which way to go from here?" . . . "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. "I don't much care where," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat. "So long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation. "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the cat, "if only you walk far enough."

Thank you George, for helping us get out there by foot or by page, to enjoy the wonderland that is Grand Canyon.

Sally Underwood is a naturalist and fitness trainer, as well as an instructor for the Grand Canyon Field Institute and Museum of Northern Arizona.

Current Board of Directors
Doug Nering, President
John Nanke, Vice President
Hank Schnieder, Treasurer
Cindy Kleist, Secretary
John Azar
Bob Ribokas
Pat Davis
Tom Martin
Cliff Beck



Volunteer Service Projects

By Mike Coltrin
Service Project Coordinator

Indian Garden Campground

October 18, 2004

One of our regular assignments is to assist the rangers at Indian Garden with a variety of projects. This project is booked up, so get in touch with me if you are interested in working with us next spring. Spring typically finds us doing a number of projects at Cottonwood campground. Stay tuned and stay in touch.

**GRAND CANYON
HIKERS & BACKPACKERS ASSOC.**



Grand Canyon Hikers and Backpackers Association
P.O. Box 11986
Prescott, AZ 86304

Membership

We would like you to encourage others to join in preserving the bipedal enjoyment of the Grand Canyon experience. New members should send name, address, phone number, and email address along with a check or money order of \$20 for the first year's dues to:

**Grand Canyon Hikers and Backpackers Association
P.O. Box 11986
Prescott, AZ 86304**

We are a tax-deductible non-profit group organized under section 501c3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

If you would like to receive your issues of Footprints by Internet, drop me a line at www.cheyava@aol.com with "Footprints" as the subject.

The next board meeting will be on October 17, 2004 at 10:00 at the Grand Canyon Recreation Center.
