

DESERT TRAILS HIKING CLUB

A Brief History

In October, 2000, Ilse Richards and Dee Fox decided there was a need for a new hiking club in the growing Coachella Valley. Known for its numerous desert and mountain trails, the area was attracting a growing number of visitors and new residents who were eager to explore the great outdoors. Dee and Ilse, co-founders of Desert Trails Hiking Club, recruited a few hardy hike leaders, set up a schedule, advertised the offerings in *The Desert Sun*, and immediately picked up membership. By January, 2001, the club had 87 members. Several important decisions made early in the club's life guide it today. One is the philosophy that the club is for persons of all walks of life. That means it has low membership dues and a variety of hikes for persons of all skill levels to enjoy. Another is that camaraderie is an important attribute for the club, and as such, monthly socials were established. A third philosophy is that electronic communication was here to stay and so a major emphasis was placed on using the website and e-mail to stay in touch with the membership. In honor of their work, Ilse and Dee were awarded lifetime memberships in Desert Trails Hiking Club.

Several persons deserve mention as early contributors to the Club's success. Rick Bruner, in addition to leading hikes, eventually took on membership services (June, 2003) and accounting (November, 2003). Another is Rochelle Carlton, who led many hikes and set up the first out of area hiking trip. Bill Swift emerged as the person that other hike leaders sought out for advice on how to manage the hiking experience.

The Club also sponsored bike rides to acquaint members with the bike lanes and trails in the area. In October, 2004, these were discontinued.

The first Spring Getaway was held in March, 2002 in Zion National Park.

The first Members' Dinner was held at Pappy and Harriet's in Pioneertown in April, 2002.

On January 1 of each year, the popular Art Smith Trail is closed to hikers in order to leave the Bighorn Sheep undisturbed during lambing season. The Club established a tradition of holding a hike on December 31, the first of these in 2002, followed by a tailgate picnic in the parking lot. The tradition has continued despite a re-routing of the Art Smith Trail that allows it to remain open virtually all year.

The second Spring Getaway was held in April, 2003 in Death Valley National Park.

In January, 2004, it was clear the Club had grown to such an extent that a Board was needed to help manage its affairs. Membership had grown to 215 singles and 140 families. Following a well attended membership meeting, several people were identified to serve on the first board. Sydney Brown was selected as the first President. Committees were established to help spread the work load. Among these were the Hike Leader Committee led by Bill Swift and Dee Fox. Susan Dodge led the Social Committee. Rochelle Carlton headed the Website Committee. The first treasurer was Rick Bruner and first secretary was Rose Kauffman. The role

of vice president was split between Dee Fox and Jane Udall. Jane began writing newsletters and representing the club at public meetings about the proposed trail plan. Others served in various capacities. A budget was adopted and the first audit was conducted. Training in first aid and CPR was offered to hike leaders. The Board adopted the tag line "Hiking at its Best". Bylaws were adopted and forms were updated. Goals were established.

The third Spring Getaway was held in May, 2004 in Sequoia National Park.

In June, 2004, the first annual Barbara Jacobsen Memorial Hike was held from the tram to Idyllwild, to honor a deceased hike leader who enjoyed that hike very much. Her husband Marc saw the group off from the tram station. Also in June, 2004, Desert Trails participated in National Trails Day at Big Morongo Preserve, staffing a booth to promote hiking opportunities in the Coachella Valley and surrounding area.

The Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, which included a Trails Plan, was unveiled in December, 2004. The Plan called for a permit system and restricted access on many trails under the guise of aiding recovery of the Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep, a federally designated endangered species. The Club joined forces with other trail user groups in the Valley in opposition to the Plan. The Board wrote a letter to the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, and many members attended public meetings to voice opposition to the Plan. The activity was particularly intense during the early months of 2005 during the public comment period. As a result of this collaborative effort with other trail user groups, a Desert Trails Coalition was formed with seed money from The Desert Riders. The mission is to preserve public access to public trails. Jane Udall and Christy Anderson served as our club's representatives to the Coalition Board initially. Jane Udall continues in that capacity.

In January, 2005, on behalf of the club's membership, the Board made charitable contributions to the Coachella Valley Preserve and Wildlands Conservancy. Membership in January, 2005 was comprised of 204 singles and 106 families.

Various leadership transitions occurred in our early years as a board. Mary Barlow replaced Susan Dodge as Social Chair and Carl Gorretta began as webmaster following Rochelle Carlton's resignation. Bill Swift handed the baton of Hike Leader Coordinator to Rich and Vera Pringle. In all cases, these transitions have reminded us of the wealth of volunteer leadership and good will within the club.

In March, 2005, the Coachella Valley Hiking Club asked members of Desert Trails Hiking Club to assist them by serving as sweeps for the annual Hike for Hope in the Indian Canyons. Many responded to assist in the effort. This collaborative effort has continued in the subsequent years with Desert Trails now leading many of the hikes.

March, 2005 also found several members in Maui, for the first off-shore Spring Getaway. Subsequent Getaways were held in Sedona (2006) and Zion National Park (2007). In all cases, Rochelle Carlton has been instrumental in planning and organizing the events, and her contributions are greatly appreciated.

An annual Members' Dinner was held at Pappy and Harriet's in Pioneertown in April, 2005. Annual Members' Dinners have continued all subsequent years in various locations as a way to especially recognize hike leaders and their spouses and significant others and to kick up our heels to some good ol' rock 'n roll after a nice dinner together.

Each hiking season has seen an increase in the number of "specialty" hikes offered. In addition to occasional overnight camping trips, we began adding naturalist-led hikes, full moon hikes, hikes to learn more about digital photography and compass and GPS use, hikes focused on conditioning, and a gourmet lunch hike. The expanded variety came about because of an increase in the number of hike leaders with special interests.

January, 2008 was marked by the death of an original board member, Rick Bruner. Rick was a well-liked and respected hike leader and served as the club's treasurer and membership coordinator. The club made a memorial contribution to The Living Desert in honor of Rick's life. Verna Rutledge stepped gracefully into his role and began serving on the board right away.

The end of the hiking year, spring, 2008, marked a transition in leadership, with Christy Anderson succeeding Jane Udall, who served as president of the club for 3 years, 2005/2006 to 2007/2008.

Red Rock Canyon near Las Vegas was the site of our 2008 Getaway and our 2009 Spring Getaway was held in Anza Borrego State Park, chosen to encourage us to learn more about this nearby treasure. Verna Rutledge graciously and competently organized this Getaway.

Our 2010 Getaway was held in Death Valley National Park. Some hardy souls camped, others stayed in the Furnace Creek Inn. Carl Gorretta arranged the hikes, John Green coordinated the fine cook-out, and Justine Hill and Jane Udall coordinated. It was a well attended and fun Getaway.

The 2010-11 hiking season brought a number of changes. As the result of a retreat held to reflect on our ten years of existence, several actions were taken. The Board of the Club evolved into a Communications Council with rotating chair to lead the three meetings held each year. A formal mission statement was adopted. Traditions like the New Years Eve hike at Art Smith, fun and well attended monthly socials, work parties to help local preserves and monuments, an annual dinner-dance, and the spring getaways were affirmed as important activities that distinguish our club as a welcoming, fun, active group.

March 2010 saw the following Mission Statement adopted:

Desert Trails is an informal and friendly club. Our mission is to provide members a variety of hiking, social, and stewardship opportunities.

Long time contributors Dee Fox, Verna Rutledge, Rich Pringle, and Vera Pringle rotated off the Council. Their contributions and leadership are deeply appreciated.

The Club makes contributions to organizations supporting open space acquisition and trail usage in the areas we hike as our fund balance permits. Over the past three years, we have made donations totalling several thousand dollars to:

- Wildlands Conservancy (Pipes Canyon and Whitewater Preserves)
- Joshua Tree National Park Association
- Friends of the Desert Mountains (SRSJ National Monument)
- San Jacinto Natural History Assn (San Jacinto State Park)
- Big Morongo Preserve
- Mojave Lands Trust

- Anza Borrego Foundation and Institute (AB State Park)
- Center for Natural Lands Mgmt (Coachella Valley Preserve)

In a break from tradition, the Club headed west for its annual spring getaway, organized by Larry Fox and ably supported by Gail Baum, Christy Anderson, and John Green. The beautiful Santa Monica Mountains and the gracious hospitality of the Homewood Suites received kudos from all.

April 1, 2011 saw a distribution of \$2,000.00 to 8 local non-profit groups who maintain our forests and trails

Continuation of club work parties to help improve trails in the valley with coordination efforts with CVHC.

New Hiking season for 2011/2012, started out with 3 new council members: Dave McGuire, Dave Luckwell and Cathy Luckwell.

This year the getaway was organized by Mary Settle, with our club venturing out to Laguna Beach. Good fellowship and a Great time was had by all, even with the trails being somewhat slippery the first day with the rain that was received in the area.

The year also included hike leading training and meetings; our monthly socials; trail maintenance work parties; another \$2,000.00 donated to various organizations that support desert usage; website updated; annual dinner; club working with desert coalition;

New Hiking season for 2012/2013 saw the DTHC website updated over the summer with thanks to our Website co-ordinator Dave McGuire. Pushing to have DTHC members frequently check website for updated information.

DTHC along with other Coachella valley groups participated and had good visibility at the "Wildflower Festival" on March 2nd by staffing the Desert Trails Coalition table, at the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.

35 Desert Trail Hiking Club volunteers stepped up to help for another Hike 4 Hope fundraiser.

It is with heartfelt appreciation that DTHC coordinating council bids farewell to Mary Barlow from council this year. Mary has been an intricate part of running DTHC, having held the positions of social chair and secretary for a total of 8 years.

Charlene and Jack Hope were added to the DTHC Council. Gary Ward will stay on as Treasurer; Charlene Hope will act as secretary; Carl will stay on as Hike Leader Chair; Dave McGuire will continue as webmaster; Sandy will continue as Social Chair; Cathy and Dave Luckwell will continue as Communication chairs; Rich will continue on as Scheduling Coordinator; Jack Hope will take over the Trail Maintenance Work Days coordinator.

What a great getaway in Sedona from April 7-10, 2013. The natural beauty was breathtaking. Weather could have co-operated more, however hiking was still the name of the game. Mary Barlow, along with her committee of Al Perella, Wendy Carson and Carl Gorretta, planned an event that ran smoothly. DTHC hike leaders also assisted in leading specified hikes for this getaway.

DTHC had taken part in the trail maintenance on the Garston, Herman's Peak x 2, Randall Henderson trails, along with a new trail in Whitewater preserve, and the Sawtooth trail in Pioneer Town. Bill Baker, a great volunteer at the National Monument, offered to help with graffiti removal using funds donated by DTHC to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for that specific purpose.

Donations were committed to the Desert Trail Coalition, and to the Center for Natural Lands (Coachella Preserve).

2013/2014 Season

Lots of trail work - Big Morongo Canyon Preserve; Hopalong trail between Ramon Creek and Stone Eagle's golf course entrance; Desert Trails Hiking Club worked side-by-side with an all-veterans California Conservation Corps crew to make repairs along a stretch of Hopalong Cassidy Trail; March saw 14 volunteers worked at Whitewater Preserve

DTHC has donated again this year to the following agencies and preserves where DTHC hikes; Friends of Desert Mountains; Center for Natural Lands Management (Coachella Valley Preserve); Friends of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve; Wildlands Conservancy (Whitewater); The Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association (ABDNHA); Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Hike leaders Jim Sherb, John Tang and Carl Goretta helped lead hikes for a hiking club out of Victoria Canada while in desert.

2014 DTHC Getaway to Borrego Springs, California with 47 participants– organized by Rich Jarvinen.

Sandy Reed resigned from council after countless years of organizing great socials for the club.

Rich accepted the position of Social Coordinator for the 2014-15 season. Dave Luckwell moved to co-ordinate the Hike Schedule for the club. All other council members stayed on in the same positions.

2014/2015 Season

Over the summer a new hike scheduler was worked on and unveiled on the website for the fall hiking schedule 2014

Work Hikes were done in the following locations: Coachella Valley Preserve three times; 1. to fix the south side of the Herman's hike trail and a good portion of the Willis Palms trail 2. to clean up the Smoke Tree Ranch trail and to better delineate the North Indian Palms Trail through each of the two groves; 3. worked at Hidden Palms trail; Whitewater Preserve; to retrieve and re-locate a footbridge and to re-align the PCT trail near Red Dome with rocks and to build large cairns to guide hikers. DTHC has also worked with Friends of the Desert Mountains on several occasions on trail maintenance as well

DTHC still very much involved in the hike leading and sweeping for the Hike4Hope event.

Getaway in Santa Barbara from March 15-18 for 75 hikers.

Carl Gorretta will be stepping down as Hike Leader Co-ordinator from council, after holding this position for 8 years.

That a donation of \$1500 be given to the Desert Trails Coalition on condition the funds are used to acquire additional funding from CVMC to create and maintain the Indio Hills Palm Trail.

2015/2016 Season

Our year ended with 389 members.

A special event category was added to the Hike Scheduler

Our Social “team” which included Jane Udall, Alta Hester, Helen Mandry, Gayle Connelly and Mary Barlow, were involved at different times to organize DTHC’s socials throughout the year.

Facebook and hikes advertised in the Desert Sun, continued for the club.

Various work hikes were done and included Herman’s Peak, Pushwalla, the West Fork trail in Mission Creek Preserve, and hopefully Chaparossa Peak in the near future.

An online publication by Palm Springs Life was done with the assistance of Jane Udall in Cathy’s absence.

Our DTHC’s getaway was to Tucson, Arizona and was organized by Carl Goretta and Jonelle Dedrick. It was well organized and included lots of hiking of varying levels, an outdoor picnic, along with other fellowship get-togethers.

Desert Trail Hiking Club volunteers again helped another Hike 4 Hope fundraiser on March 6, 2016 in beautiful Indian Canyons, under the guidance of Jonelle Dedrick, our Hike for Hope co-ordinator for the DTHC club.

Our Secretary and Work Day Coordinator, Charlene and Jack Hope, will not be returning next year to the desert and in their absence, Dave McGuire is attempting to handle Char’s secretarial responsibilities and Rich is coordinating workdays for Jack.

2016/17 Season

Coordinating Council began the season (Nov 2016) with the following members: Rich Jarvinen, Cathy Luckwell, Dave Luckwell, Dave McGuire, Mike Ovesen and Gary Ward. Charlene and Jack Hope were on sabbatical to assess their future plans and ultimately resigned, having decided that they would not be able to return to the desert. They had been enthusiastic members on Council (Jack for workdays & Char as secretary) and were sorely missed. Dave McGuire stepped up to cover Char's secretarial responsibilities.

Membership as of December 2016 was 469.

As the season proceeded, Dianne Delong joined Council as Social Coordinator. Bernard Rochet joined to assist Mike with hike-leader business, and Herbie Rochet joined to take over documentary jobs from Cathy Luckwell, who resigned as of March and had been constructing the Newsletter and skillfully handling public relations for the Club for many years.

The Club said farewell to Dee Fox, who, with Ilse Richards, had founded DTHC in 2000. Dee left the Valley for Carlsbad, CA and with her went our heartfelt thanks for her commitment to the founding of the Club and its principles.

A Hike Leaders meeting was held by Mike on Feb 6th, at the Friends of the Desert Mountains facility.

Rich Jarvinen and the DTHC participated again in the Friends of the Desert Mountains Wildflower Festival on March 4th as volunteers in the Desert Trails Coalition's booth, providing information about hiking opportunities in the Coachella Valley.

On March 5th, DTHC participated in the Hike-4-Hope. Jonelle Dedrick coordinated the Club's participation once again, recruiting hike leaders and sweeps.

The Annual Hike-Leader Dinner was held on March 7th at Cimarron Golf Resort in Cathedral City.

The 2017 Getaway was held in Julian in March (20-23). It was organized by Rich Jarvinen (hikes) and Dave Luckwell (accommodations & socials) and was enjoyed by 55 members.

Desert Trails Hiking Club was instrumental in the process of bringing the 'East Indio Hills Trail' from idea to reality. Volunteers coordinated by Rich Jarvinen contributed many work-day hours to construct a seven-mile-long trail that will be dedicated by the City of Indio in 2017 and will include a paved parking lot and directional signage.

As the season came to a close in the Spring, Rich announced that he would like to reduce his time commitment on Council but remain as a Member-at-Large for the next season. Cathy stepped down and was applauded for her years of service on the Council, and Dave McGuire announced he would like to step down after one more season.

2017/18 Season

Coordinating Council began the season with the following members: Dianne Delong, Dave Luckwell, Dave McGuire, Mike Ovesen, Gary Ward, Rich Jarvinen, Bernard Rochet and Herbie Rochet.

Membership as of 31 December 2017 was 427.

A Hike Leaders meeting was held by Mike on Feb 9th, at the Palm Desert Pubic Library.

Rich Jarvinen and the DTHC participated again in the Friends of the Desert Mountains Wildflower Festival on March 3rd as volunteers in the Desert Trails Coalition's booth, providing information about hiking opportunities in the Coachella Valley.

DTHC participated in the Legacy Hike at Indian Canyons on March 4th. A variety of hikes and a 5k run were organized by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians to honor their late Chairman Richard M. Milanovich and to raise funds for the educational fellowship in his name at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. Jonelle Dedrick organized our Club's

participation, recruiting 7 hike leaders and 21 sweeps.

The Annual Hike-Leader Dinner was held on March 6th at Woodhaven Golf and Country Club.

The 2018 Annual Getaway was organized by Mary Barlow and Diane Stielstra for March 23-26 in the Santa Monica Mountains/Agoura Hills area. Unfortunately the event had to be cancelled at the last minute due to bad weather on the coast, which compromised hike safety in that area.

At the end of the season, Dave McGuire resigned from Council after years of service in several capacities. Rich Jarvinen also stepped away from Council, though he will continue to represent DTHC on the Desert Trails Coalition and with the Friends of the Desert Mountains and keep Council informed about volunteer work-day projects, trail stewardship news, etc.

2018/19 Season

Coordinating Council began the season with just 6 members: Dave Luckwell, Mike Ovesen, Dianne Delong, Gary Ward, Bernard Rochet and Herbie Rochet. Bernice Lepera joined Council as secretary in December 2018.

A final Hike-4-Hope (20th anniversary) occurred in the Valley on 2 December. Jonelle Dedrick served one last time as coordinator for DTHC's participation, recruiting 20 hike leaders and sweeps for this charity event in the Indian Canyons on behalf of the City of Hope.

Membership as of 31 December 2018 was 392.

A Hike Leader workshop was presented by Mike and Dave on Feb 1st, at the Palm Desert Public Library. Attendance was low, so Council brainstormed about ways to improve hike-leader interest and attendance at next year's Hike Leader meeting.

Rich Jarvinen and the DTHC participated again in the Friends of the Desert Mountains Wildflower Festival on March 2nd as volunteers in the Desert Trails Coalition's booth, providing information about hiking opportunities in the Coachella Valley. The Festival's venue was changed from the Santa Rosa-San Jacinto Visitors Centre to the Palm Desert Civic Center Park, and attendance was great, higher than in previous years.

The Annual Dinner was held at the Woodhaven Country Club on March 5th. It was a lovely venue and the food was good, but attendance (32) was poor. To that discouraging fact was added the absence of a Getaway this spring. No one among the membership expressed an interest in organizing an out-of-town hiking trip. In view of the poor turnout for the Annual Dinner and the absence of a Getaway, Council decided to survey the membership's interest in and suggestions for continuing both those activities.

The winter months were wet and windy this year, and many hikes had to be cancelled or rescheduled. Some areas (e.g., Whitewater Canyon Preserve; Indian Canyons) were closed for extended periods in February and March while rain-related damage to roads and trails was repaired. **But the upside of the wet weather was a splendid wildflower display!**

2019/20 Season – constrained/cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic

Coordinating Council began the season with 7 members: Mike Ovesen, Dianne Delong, Gary Ward, Bernard Rochet, Herbie Rochet, Bernice Lepera and Dave Luckwell.

Signs of water damage from the Valentine's Day storm of February 2019 were still evident on some trails into the fall. Though Whitewater Canyon Preserve finally opened again in November, some trails there (e.g., Rainbow Rock Canyon & Tootain Canyon) remained choked with debris and were impassable beyond certain points.

The Club enjoyed another New Year's Eve Hike and Potluck get-together on December 31st, with the usual range of hikes from the Art Smith parking lot off Highway 74.

Membership as of 31 December 2019 was 350.

A DTHC Hike Leader workshop was organized by Mike O. in conjunction with Rich Peregrin and Ellen Burns of Coachella Valley Hiking Club on Feb 19th at the Palm Desert Pubic Library. A representative of Desert CrossFit also gave a brief talk on opportunities to improve fitness for hiking. Attendance was low, reflecting a recent trend that we have yet to understand.

A new version of Hike-4-Hope took place on 23 February. Jonelle Dedrick stepped in at the last minute to help recruit leaders and sweeps from among our members. Multiple hiking venues were offered on trails throughout the Valley (Bear Creek Oasis; Savannah Storm Trail in the Indio Badlands; Art Smith (2 options); Hike to the Cross; Pyramid Canyon/Mecca Hills; Randall Henderson).

Rich Jarvinen and the DTHC participated again in the Friends of the Desert Mountains Wildflower Festival as volunteers in the Desert Trails Coalition's booth on March 7th at the Palm Desert Civic Center Park.

Neither an Annual Dinner nor a hiking Get-Away was offered in 2020. Interest in the Annual Dinner had waned, so Council discussed alternative thank-you| gestures for our hike leaders. And once again this season, no one among the membership expressed an interest in organizing an out-of-town hiking trip.

November and December were wet, but heavy rains and wind did not come again until late February/early March, when some hikes had to be canceled or rescheduled. Whitewater Canyon Preserve closed briefly for washouts in March, and then the COVID-19 pandemic descended on the continent. Many hike leaders and members from elsewhere left the Valley by mid-March as travel restrictions and health concerns began to limit social and commercial activities. By the end of March, Whitewater's Ranger station, washrooms and picnic area were closed (though one could still access the PCT & other trails from the road), and Joshua Tree National Park's visitor centers were closed to the public and some park access points were closed to vehicular traffic (but remained open to cyclists & hikers).

For public health safety, the March Council meeting and the April Social were cancelled, and everyone began to hunker down everywhere, according to local regulations.

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