



The Stilt

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Newsletter of the Bridgerland Audubon Society

Remembering Flat Top

At a modest 9,539 feet it's not the highest mountain in the Bear River Range, but it is the meanest. Perhaps that is why so few have ventured to its lonely summit. A trip there is a real challenge, an adventure.

Dominating the eastern skyline above Cache Valley with its distinctive army tent shape it casts a long morning shadow over the city of Smithfield where I live. In late summer the heat of the valley seems to bend the light rays until the mountain looks like nothing more than a distant ridge line. But shrouded with winter's snow and ice and wearing a wreath of storm clouds it takes on the appearance of Mount Everest.

Hikers wanting to climb the mountain usually take the Dry Canyon trail, 5.25 miles long from the trailhead and the most direct. The

Green Canyon route is shorter and the Birch Creek Canyon way a mile longer. All three trails, overgrown from lack of use, converge at a saddle on the south side of the mountain, 535 vertical feet below the summit. Red Ledge Spring, near the head of Dry Canyon, flows until about the end of June, the other trails have water all season. I must mention water because it, or rather the lack thereof, is critical.

The forest obstructs one's view for the first few miles on any approach. Emerging from the trees at last a hiker gets his first close-up view of the Flat Top's higher reaches. It is a lesson in the incredible energy involved in the forming of a mountain. Huge limestone spires soar to dizzying heights and a fault line forms a cliff along the west side where some incredible prehistoric force simply sheared off part of the mountain. Even the

sparse conifers at the tree line are tortured and twisted, their gnarled roots desperately clinging to crevices in their struggle to keep from being swept away by storms.

None of the routes involve rock climbing techniques, just scrambling. I can say from sad experience not to try any other route than the trails, the country is just too remote, rugged and just plain dangerous. Several attempts to find access to the mountain over untracked approaches always ended the same. I soon floundered in the jumble of boulders and tangle of undergrowth. Also my water supply was soon exhausted, driving me nearly mad with thirst.

In view of recent tragedies involving hikers in the mountains of Utah perhaps I had better rethink solo trips.

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Remembering Flat Top

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The Boy Scout hike to the mountain was one of the highlights of my year. For months prior to the event I would psyche up the boys for the big day. Always they assured me that no mountain had ever been formed that was their equal and this pipsqueak thing called Flat Top was hardly worth their effort. Secretly I snickered, knowing how quickly the tough guys were worn out on the trail. Predictably, on the day of the hike they were soon exhausted. I have little mercy in their pleadings to slow down or turn back. Once we attained the top, gasping in the thin air and enjoying the incredible view, I gathered them for a powerful sermon on the evils of junk food and the need for physical fitness. I hope my sermon on the mount made some lasting impressions.

I pushed the boys hard on those hikes, that is until 1989. Then came a tragedy that still gives me nightmares.

We had just gained the summit after a grueling climb. Then one of the boys collapsed, turned deathly pale and started twitching. It was the potentially fatal HAPE, high altitude pulmonary

edema, or altitude sickness! It wasn't supposed to occur beneath 10,000 feet, or so I had mistakenly thought. The boy had a pulse and was breathing so I decided against starting CPR.

About the only treatment for HAPE is to get the victim to a lower altitude. Fortunately he was a featherweight so I was able to pack him back down to the saddle. When I laid him on the ground his eyelids fluttered open, he got up and immediately joined the others in a snowball fight!

The mountain is a solitary place. Only twice out of my many climbs have I encountered other humans. Once it was two Audubon Society members, binoculars in hand, in quest of birds. The other time was a most unusual experience. I had paused to enjoy the beautiful mountain meadow, the cool breeze and the fresh air. I thought of all of the people bustling about only a few miles away in the oppressive heat of the valley floor and felt sorry for them. That's when a black lady on a black horse rode out of the timber and crossed the open expanse. She seemed to be there to enjoy the grandeur and solitude as was I. I have looked for her on every trip since, but in vain. Was she real, or only a little touch of HAPE? One

of the symptoms can be hallucination. But she did wave to me....

And there was the memorable nonhuman encounter with a badger in a bad mood. He was no illusion of HAPE but had real claws and real jaws! Fortunately humans are much fleet of foot than badgers.

There aren't a lot of birds to see on such a hike. Inevitably I flush one of the three or four types of grouse that live up there. And I always see a Cooper's hawk. The mountaintop is one of the last places where one can see a bluebird, which makes all the effort worthwhile. On hot summer days a variety of swallows swoop and soar on the updrafts catching bugs carried up from the valley.

Perhaps I won't be going there anymore. I turned the speed limit last year and I noticed the hikes were getting harder. The scouts noticed it too and discharged me.

They invited me along for one last hike, I think only because I was the one person who knew the trail. We were still a quarter mile from the summit, I was falling behind, gasping like a fish out of water, and begging to turn back. They showed me no mercy.

—Warren Johnson
with Cora Johnson

Audubon Calendar

September 2003

3 Board of Trustees Meeting. BAS Board of Trustees meet this Wednesday at 7 p.m at the offices of Bio-Resources, 135 E. Center, Logan. All interested are invited to attend.

6 A Wild Ride through the Wilds of Western Box Elder County. In response to requests from some of last year's participants, we are offering this outing again this year. One called it the funnest field trip he had ever been on. If you've never been to western Box Elder County, you owe it to yourself to come on this one. We'll head out to the Spiral Jetty and Locomotive Springs via the Golden Spike National Monument. Then we'll come back northeast to Snowville and have a late lunch at Molly's Restaurant—a salty, one-of-a-kind place—before returning to Cache Valley in fairly late afternoon. Bring binoculars and plenty of water. Meet at 8 a.m. Saturday at the parking lot between Café Ibis and the Logan Fire Station (50 East 150 North, Logan). Carpooling will be available. For more information, call Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653.

11 General Meeting. BAS's first general meeting this fall will be at 7 p.m Thursday at the Logan City Library's meeting room, 255 N. Main Street, Logan. Watch for an announcement of our September speaker in The Herald Journal.

12 Fall Hawk Migration in the Goshutes. The Goshute Mountains along the Utah-Nevada border south of Wendover are one of the primary autumn raptor migration routes in the U.S. Many thousands of hawks and eagles pass through this corridor between mid-August and mid-October, several hundred can be seen on a good day. Join us for a weekend trip there to see raptor species in very large numbers soaring through our field of vision at close range. We will hike overnight Friday night in Wendover, get up early Saturday morning and drive to the place where we hike to the observation point. We will then spend a good part of the day observing, overnight again in Wendover, then return home on Sunday. Please let Dick Hurren know in advance if you plan to attend this event so that we can arrange carpooling if needed and meeting places in Wendover. For additional information, call Dick (435) 734-2653, or Keith Archibald, 752-8258. Gear needed will be the same as that described for the annual trek to the top of the Wellsvilles (page 4).

20 Annual Kokanee Salmon Run. We will visit the streams around Porcupine Reservoir with local fish expert Ron Goede to view and learn the spawning habits of this inland salmon variety. Ron will explain the ecology and natural history of this unique fish. An excellent family trip. We will leave at 8:30 a.m. from the parking lot between the Logan Fire Station and Café Ibis (50 E. 150 North, Logan). Bring binoculars and a snack. We will plan to return around noon. For more information call Ron at 752-9650 or Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653.



If you'd like to come along on a field trip but do not have binoculars, call Dick Hurren (435) 734-2653. He'll try to find a pair for you to use.

27 Annual Trek to the Top of the Wellsvilles. Hike up to the crest of the Wellsville Mountains to witness one of the wonders of the avian world. As with the Goshute Mountains, thousands of raptors migrate along the Wellsvilles during the fall migration season. On a good day we'll see over 100 raptors, and the mix will be quite different from that seen in the Goshutes. With hiking guide Jim Sinclair we'll hike up Deep Canyon to a station monitored by Hawkwatch International and get a report from this year's monitors on how their count is progressing. The trail gains 3,000 feet in approximately 4 miles (much steeper than the Goshutes hike), so be prepared and be sure to wear adequate footwear. We like to sit on top for a couple of hours to watch the hawks, and since it is usually cool and windy on the ridge, a change of layers, a warm sweater, and a good wind shell make the experience more comfortable. Bring binoculars, lunch, and water. Leave at 8 a.m. from the parking lot between the Logan Fire Station and Café Ibis (50 E. 150 North, Logan). Carpooling will be available. For further information call Jim Sinclair, 752-0061 or Dick Hurren, (435) 734-2653.

Looking Ahead

October

Utah Audubon Council Fall Retreat. Great Salt Lake Audubon will host this year's Audubon State Council Retreat on Saturday and Sunday, October 4 and 5 at Camp Kostopulos in Emigration Canyon. For more information or to preregister, contact Mary Gracia (801) 581-0345 or gracia@greatsaltlakeaudubon by October 2.

November

Utah Ornithological Society Fall Conference. The Utah Ornithological Society is hosting their annual fall conference November 7 to 9, 2003 at the University of Utah, Aline Wilmot Skaggs biology building. There will be a keynote address and reception on Friday evening; scholarly, general interest and member presentations on Saturday; and field trips on Sunday. The Utah birding community is invited to participate in an informative, interesting and fun weekend of events. UOS members and non-members are welcomed.

Frank Howe, Non-game Avian Coordinator at the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, opens the conference with a keynote address, *On a Wing and a Prayer: Monitoring Utah's Songbird Populations*, at 7:30 p.m. in the Skaggs biology auditorium. A reception and opportunity to share stories with fellow birders follows Frank's remarks.

On Saturday, noted Utah birders, ornithologists and graduate students will deliver a variety of short talks related to birds and birdwatching, as well as current academic research projects. During the Birder's Hour, conference attendees will have an opportunity to share birding-experiences, pictures and travels. Local experts will lead the Sunday field trips.

For detailed information please visit the UOS website at <http://www.utahbirds.org/uos/> and follow the link to conference information and registration form. If you have any additional questions contact John Cavitt at 801-626-6172; jcavitt@weber.edu OR Jeanne Le Ber at 801-532-7384; jeanne_leber@hotmail.com. Contact Jeanne if you would like a copy of the print brochure.

Chapter Notes

Board Member Hops the Fence

Saundra Schimmelpfening has moved from the Cache Valley to pursue employment as a 5th grade environmental educator in Santa Barbara, California. Saundra only recently joined our board, although throughout 2003 she gave board members key advice and insight for weighing the pros and cons of several proposed conservation easements in our region. Saundra and her small Conservation Corps crew (plus several Audubon members) were also responsible for the entire process of fencing in the north boundary of our Barrens Sanctuary, and making good headway with the task on the south boundary. Choosing materials, locating best prices, transporting posts and wire, lining up along legal boundaries, learning to set solid

corners that will last, fence stretching, you name it, Saundra did it all! Give a look, her fence is true and solid! Corner posts on the south end are recycled from discarded telephone poles cut with the help of Brian Walker and made available by Utah Power, to whom we are grateful. What you may not know is that Saundra is also a graceful contra dancer and a practiced target shooter, and served with the Peace Corps in Thailand (yes, she can read Thai!). Saundra, for all of your good-natured, earnest contributions to our Audubon endeavors, we thank you and wish you well in your new home on the Pacific Coast. You are already missed!

A note on the fencing: We decided to put up two strands of smooth-wire (not barbed) fence

along the roads that bound the north and south edges of our Barrens Sanctuary. The point is to make a statement about property ownership. The only "animals" we hope to impede are those that would do damage to the Sanctuary, primarily through off-road sprees on motorized vehicles or illegal dumping. Our own David Drown produced and deployed some durable signage all along the fence, inviting folks without guns and on foot to enjoy the Sanctuary. Unfortunately, nearly all of these were shot up soon after by some &*()%&* \$# with a shotgun, who apparently found great sport in testing his aim at 5 paces.

—Jim Cane
BAS Board Member

Chapter Notes

Teasel Beheaded

One fine morning in early August, a small volunteer crew composed of Nick Strickland, Jim Hoffman, Linda Kervin and Jim Cane arrived at the north end of the Barrens Sanctuary, clippers and buckets in hand, to lop the flowering heads of teasel. Our objective was to curtail seed production of this weed that seems to have been encroaching at our Sanctuary property for some years. Two hours later, we had 12 packed bushels of flower heads for the GreenWaste bin (flower heads must be taken away, for seeds will continue to mature even once clipped). The sobering reality, though, is that we only cleared seed heads from ½ of one of the 10 or so patches proliferating on the west side of our Sanctuary! In contrast, we were easily able to remove

all seed heads from the stragglers in a small test plot whose teasel plants had been individually spot-sprayed with Round-up herbicide last March.* Because only teasel was green at that time, only it suffered the consequences; by August, salt grasses were spreading back into the areas made bare by the former shading of the overlapping canopy of teasel leaves. It appears that, given a good turnout of volunteers (this means YOU) in March and again in August of 2004, a combination of the two strategies will be effective and safe for greatly diminishing the impact of these European weed at our Sanctuary, especially if we can persuade some of our neighboring property owners to likewise remove the plant from their properties.

*"Round-Up" is a trade name for the herbicide glyphosate. It inhibits synthesis of aromatic (remember that ol' benzene ring?) amino acids (protein building blocks) which only plants produce. It has little toxicity for birds, mammals and fish. It degrades in 4 days in sunlight; upon soil contact, it binds tightly to clay particles, rendering it biologically inactive until soil microbes degrade it over several months. Its decomposition products are considered harmless. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) uses it as one means of controlling invasive exotic weeds at their reserves. More details can be found in TNC's online "Weed Control Methods Handbook".

—Jim Cane
BAS Board Member

Welcome to BAS

Renewing Members

Mr & Mrs John Barnes
Beth Booton
John W Devilbiss
John W Evans
Diana T Glenn
Diane Hanson
Larry J Jacobsen
Bill Jensen
Bradley Kropp

Dr E H Berry Laughlin
Steve & Jeanna Livingston
Diane Browning Oblock
Loye L Painter
Ivan G Palmblad
John N Ream, Jr
Carl J Saunders
Jim Sinclair
M Coburn Williams
James L Woodson

New Members

Gordon Bosworth
Janna & Clay Custer
Lynne Goodhart
Quentin E Snow

Transfers into Chapter

Melanie Spriggs

Bridgerland Audubon contacts

Trustees

2001-2004 Merr Lundahl, 753-1707; Dave Drown, 752-3797; Jack Greene, 563-6816
2002-2005 Jim Cane, 713-4668; Joyce McMullin, 713-4399; Dick Hurren 435/734-2653; Jamie McEvoy, 753-3559
2003-2006 Ron Goede, 752-9650; Kate Stephens, 755-0608; Andree Walker, 755-2103

Bridgerland Audubon Contacts

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Outings Dick Hurren, 435/734-2653, hurrens@aol.com
Secretary Jamey Anderson, 881-1244, jameya@cc.usu.edu
Treasurer Susan Drown, 752-3797, drown6@attbi.com
Wetlands Alice Lindahl, 753-7744, alindahl@bridgernet.com
Forest Issues Kathy Gilbert, 752-0946, gilbert@mtwest.net
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Webmaster Chris Wilson, 753-3769, cwilson@sisna.com
Sanctuary Jim Cane, 713-4668, jcane@biology.usu.edu or Bryan

Membership in the Bridgerland Audubon Society includes a subscription to *The Stilt*, as well as *Audubon* magazine. The editor of *The Stilt* invites submissions, due on the 15th of each month. Send to stiltnews@hotmail.com.

National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to contribute to Audubon and receive the Bridgerland Audubon newsletter, *The Stilt*, and the *National AUDUBON* magazine, as a:

- _____ New member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.
- _____ Renewing member of the National Audubon Society and Bridgerland Audubon.

My check for \$_____ is enclosed (\$20 membership dues)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____



Please make all checks payable to National Audubon Society and send with this card to:
National Audubon Society
Membership Data Center
PO Box 51001
Boulder, CO 80322-1001
W-52 Local Chapter Code: 7XCHA

Note to new National Audubon members: To get on *The Stilt* newsletter mailing list without the usual 8 week delay, contact Susan Durham, 753-5637, sdurham@cc.usu.edu.

Prefer the local newsletter only? Send \$20 and this form to: Bridgerland Audubon Society, PO Box 3501, Logan, UT 84323-3501 for a subscription to *The Stilt*.

National Audubon occasionally makes its membership list available to selected organizations. To have your name omitted from this, please check this box.