

Scott Thompson

CONTINUED....

Some examples which I regret to say are real:

From 1951 to 1962 on the Nevada Test Site, which straddles the Great Basin Desert and the Mohave Desert, our government exploded roughly 100 nuclear bombs above ground. Including all the underground nuclear tests, there were over 1,000 explosions ending in 1992. The key question is: why did they pick the Nevada Test Site? I don't accept the argument that it was solely for pragmatic safety reasons. Consider: Las Vegas was a mere 65 miles to the southeast and even by 1950 its population was over 24,000 and had grown to over 64,000 by 1960. In addition, there were other towns in the vicinity, such as Beatty, Nevada, as well as the Moapa River Indian Reservation. Not to speak of towns in Utah and California. So again: why there? I think a key reason, among others, was that our military well knew that the American public perceived the Nevada desert as a remote wasteland, infinitely far away from them, and therefore safe. I also suspect that subconsciously the honchos already had that mindset themselves. In other words, the selection was as much about psychological perception, if not more so, than safety. (For generic background see "Nevada National Security Site" in Wikipedia.)

Now encountering one wind farm in over 300 miles along "The Loneliest Highway in America" didn't annihilate the solitude and serenity for us. But it wouldn't have taken many more.

A proposed nuclear waste repository within Yucca Mountain, which abuts the western edge of the Nevada Test Site, has been grinding through the system for decades. It would be a massive pit toilet for nuclear turds emitted all across America. A hole of horrors. At this time the project is on hold, but all it may take to push it back on its diabolical track is another spiritually obtuse right-wing Republican administration. That Yucca Mountain has been the site of Paiute and Shoshone religious ceremonies and is therefore a sacred site will not save it from desecration by nuclear waste, given the time and money invested in it thus far by the mainstream (sorry to say, but if it's not clear to you that money is what's REALLY sacred and that time is money you're walking around with a bag over your head). For the psychological aspects of writing this site off as a wasteland, see the Nevada Test Site above. (Cf. "GAO: Death of Yucca Mountain Caused by Political Maneuvering," New York Times, 5/10/11, and "Quarrels Continue Over Repository for Nuclear Waste," New York Times, 6/27/13.)

For decades the gambling casinos we would not permit within the standard society were allowed in Nevada. In Las Vegas over half a century ago they were often financially nurtured by gangsters. Now they have become grandiose, psychologically sophisticated enterprises, appealing to aspects of our nature that we still haven't become honest enough to openly acknowledge. The marketing hook today is that while you can gamble in a lot of places, you can't get as crazy anywhere else as you can in Vegas. Hence the motto, "What happens in Vegas

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Back to mass renewable energy. President Obama knows he won't get people with serious money to help him deal with climate change unless (1) he continues to promote ongoing economic growth, which he's doing, and (2) he can find a way to keep them (or make them) fat-ass wealthy. Therefore he plans to confiscate – er, sorry, privatize – swaths of BLM land in order to fill them with privately operated, highly profitable wind farms and solar plants.

Given that Nevada has a greater percentage of BLM land than any other state, the vast majority of which is Great Basin Desert, it's altogether possible that a solar plant or wind farm, perhaps a multitude of them, will be erected in virtually every sagebrush valley across the state.

People who have spent real time in desert landscapes know how fragile they are, even the tough-looking sagebrush steppes. They know it will take these desert ecologies hundreds of years or longer to heal from the disruption and damage they will incur from these massive renewable energy projects. Unfortunately, given the mainstream's history of indifference to the Great Basin Desert, it's a safe bet that few people outside Nevada will know or care that it's being put through a shredder.

Nor is there a reason to expect that the major green groups, even though they know what's at stake ecologically, will join forces to fight off privatizing Nevada's BLM land. Most of them are likely to see this as the only pragmatic way to significantly reduce fossil fuel emissions. For them sloughing off the Great Basin may well be an acceptable political trade-off.

Nor are Nevadans themselves, given the jobs and state tax revenues that will be at stake, likely to be in a viable position to defend the Great Basin Desert that many of them love.

It's certainly possible, however, that for one reason or another the Great Basin Desert will luck out – dodge this bullet. Or that humanity's better nature will suddenly make an appearance and stave the thing off. It does happen.

Or perversely the Great Basin Desert might be saved, at least temporarily, by the machinations of the fossil fuel industry. If those black-hearted knaves can continue hanging onto their subsidies and thwart EPA regulation of CO2 emissions by power plants, they may continue to lure enough investors away from renewable energy to keep it flat-lined.

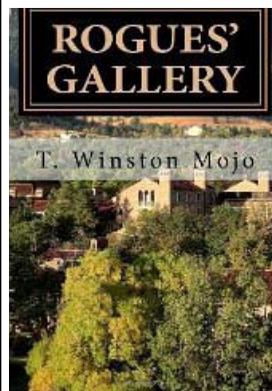
Meanwhile the question isn't whether the Great Basin Desert is worthy of our attention, but whether we're worthy of its austere magnificence.

The answer remains very much in doubt.

Note: valued resources were Ann Zwinger's The Mysterious Lands, 1989, pp. 229-297, and Gretchen M. Baker's Great Basin National Park, 2012.



SCOTT THOMPSON is a regular contributor to *The Zephyr*. He lives in Beckley, WV



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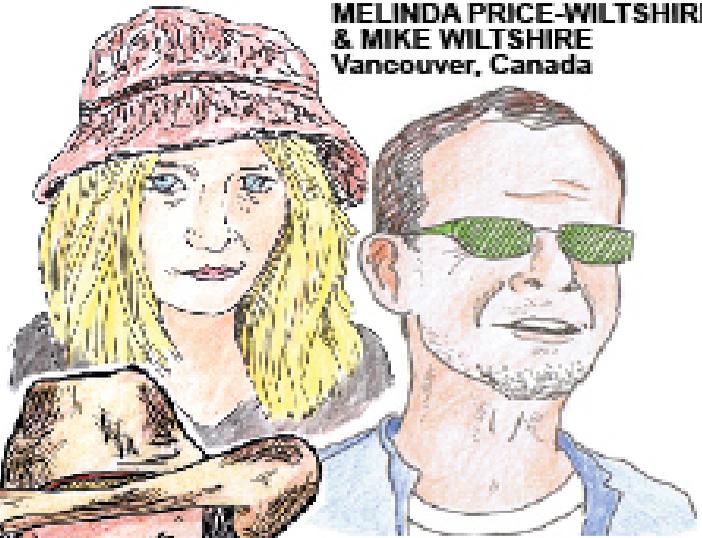
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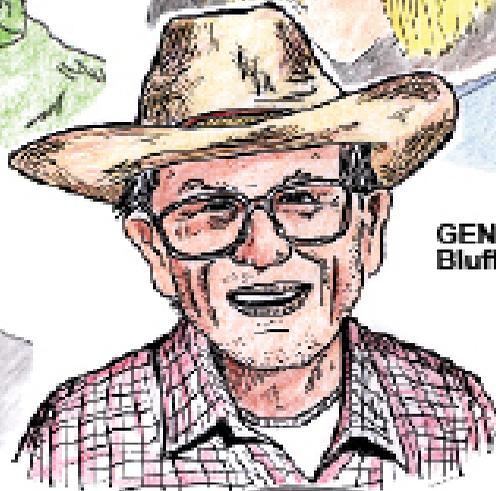
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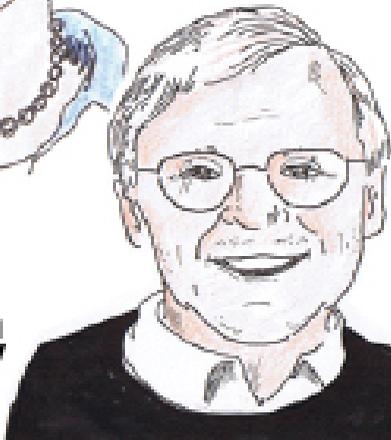
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