

# MOAB, the 'TOOT n' TELL 'EM' and GLOWING in the DARK

Sterve Lonie

I grew up in Portland Oregon, and when I was in the fourth grade, 9 years old (1957), my Dad sprung me for a week to go to, of all places. Moab, Utah. To this day, I do not know why. Over the years, especially once I started spending time there, he and I talked a lot about that trip. But I never asked why we went there. He worked for a local television station then, so it may have something to do with the post-war uranium craze. I don't now, nor likely ever, will know.

My teacher, Mrs. Standforth, was the classic matriarchal elementary school teacher, and she wasn't too keen on me missing a week of school "just to go to some Mormon outpost in the Utah desert". But my Dad was persuasive, and with the agreement that I would write a report and give a talk to the class about what I learned, she reluctantly let me go.

The trip was on. We loaded the Queen's '57 chevy convertible my Dad got for his work organizing the Portland Rose Festival Parade, packed a lunch, and headed for sunnier climes. I remember very little about the actual drive, but once we crossed the Cascades and put the top down, it was sunburns and whatever blew our hair back. I know we stayed in some cheesy, rent-by-the-hour motel in Nevada, with periodic visits from someone "looking for a good time", a lot of Dairy Queen hamburgers, horn blasts and waves from jealous truckers, and my Dad grinning a lot. Which was cool, because I hadn't seen much of that side of my father, who worked too many hours a day trying to keep his family fed.

My first impression of Red Rock Country was, "What a wasteland!", as was my Dad's. His ship was the first to send men in to inspect what the Enola Gray did to Hiroshima, armed and expecting conflict with the Japanese, and was so devastated by what he saw he couldn't talk to me about until I was 30. He did, however, say: "This is something like what I think we were expecting to see when we were marching into Hiroshima after the bomb. You have to remember, we both grew up in the rainy, green Pacific Northwest, and all we saw as far as the eye could see was brown and dry as a bone. I'm not sure either of us ever quite adjusted to it, but we were there to visit, not live, he reminded me, and view, not judge. As Kathryn Hepburn said in her famous line from "the African Queen", "Never-the-less...". We did stop in Salt Lake City to visit the Mormon Tabernacle, heard "the pin drop" from the back of a very large chapel, and failed to find our roots in the genealogy archives. Once we crossed into Utah, it seemed like non-stop churches with big steeples. My Dad said it was where the Mormons preached conversion and really big families.

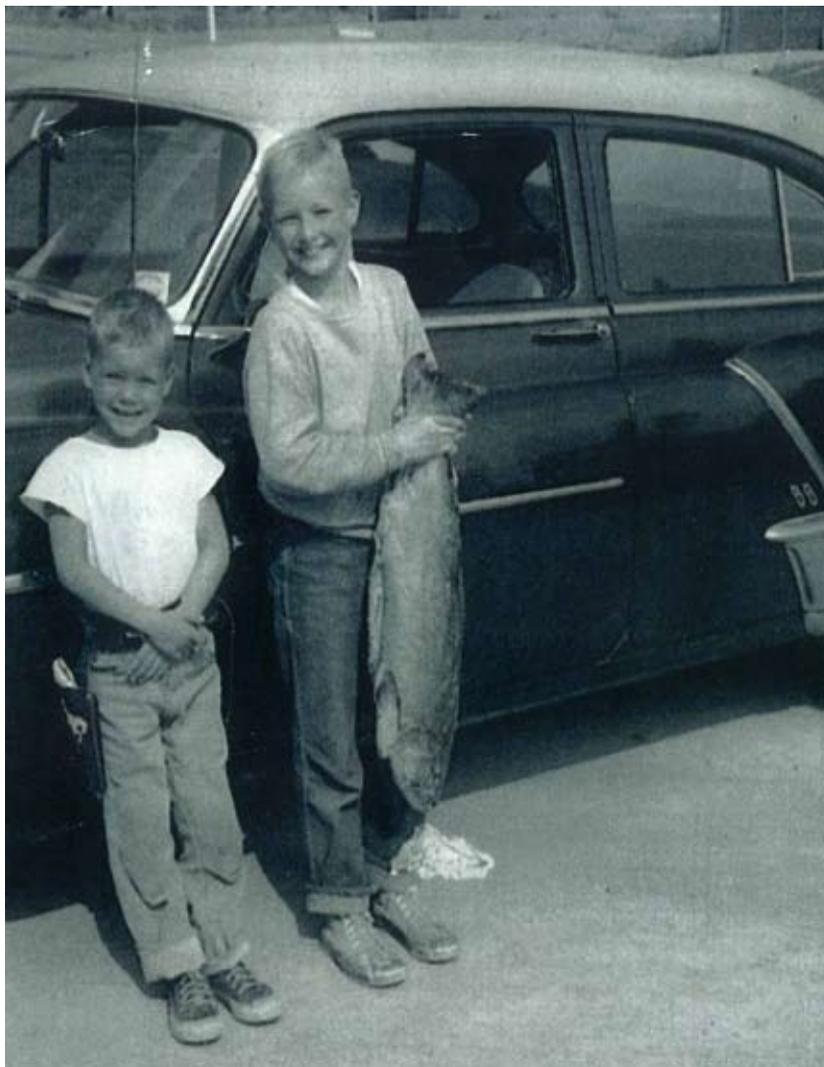
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At any rate, once we got to Moab, our first mission was to find a motel, which I remember was the Red Rock Lodge because we stocked up on matches: he for his cigars, me for the firecrackers we bought along the way because they were illegal in Oregon. I found a book of those matches years later in a box of childhood junk, and had the wherewithal to dig them out when I realized I was going, again, to Moab Utah, this time to work for The Colorado Outward Bound School.

I showed them to the desk clerk at the motel, told her the story, and gave them to her, bracing for stories of times past. They were plentiful.

Back to '57. Our next quest was for quick, cheap food. We found the Toot-n-Tell 'Em, a drive in with a menu so limited that by the time we stopped there for the third time and the carhop asked if we needed a menu, my Dad's response was, "I think we have it memorized". Then it was back to the motel and the sleep of the dead, for we had a pre-dawn appointment at the uranium mine the next morning.

And that, as they say, was A trip! Some guy picked us up in a dusty red jeep, wearing dusty, red coveralls, a dusty red hard hat, dusty red boots, smoking a dusty red (well, not really) cigarette, and drove us somewhere out of town. After a dusty red ride (sorry), we pulled up to what looked in my nine-year old eyes like the biggest construction sight I had ever seen. Mountain after mound of dirt piles, piled higher than the tallest building in Portland, everywhere. And really big earth-moving machines. With REALLY big tires. The red guy told to go play on the dirt piles, don't get run over by the trucks, and not to go into the mine shafts. ("What's a mineshaft?" "Just go anywhere dark; stay where you can always see the sun". That part was easy; I hadn't seen the sun since last summer, and even then, only briefly. And those dirt piles; a kid's paradise.



We spent three days in Moab, all of it (with the exception of our sorties to the Toot-n-Tell 'Em and the Red Rock Inn) at the mine. The first two days, while my Dad did whatever he was doing, I ran up and rolled down those huge uranium tailings piles. Our third and last day there, the "red guy" took us way down in a mine shaft, hard hat, carbide headlamp, et al. My Dad later said it was like being in a Robert Mitchum movie, and as I look back on it, all those miners sort of looked and grumbled like Robert Mitchum.

What I remember about the ride was it took a long, long, LONG time to get to the bottom, and the track was really steep. We walked all around in those tunnels, long enough that when we got back to the top, it was getting dark. The best part was, the miner guys gave me a piece of uranium ore the size of a softball to show my friends. That rock sat in my desk for a week until Mrs. Standforth was able to

scrounge a geiger counter. In the mean time, we passed that rock around the class several times, other kids kept it in their desks for a while, sometimes it just sat out on the teacher's desk all day. We were fascinated by it. All we knew then was: uranium gave off strange vibes, was probably worth more than gold, and was somehow responsible for blowing the shit out of the Japanese during the war. We even took it out to the playground one recess to see if it would stop the rain. It didn't.

Then, the geiger counter arrived. As soon as the teacher waved the wand over that rock, the geiger gauge pegged. I mean, it went bazooey. It clicked so loud and hard, we all thought it was gonna blow, and did the old air-raid drill: hit the floor, put your head between your knees, and...well... you know the rest.

Before we came to our senses, Mrs. Standforth grabbed that rock, marched it down to the principal's office, and they locked it in his safe. The very next day, some "federal guys" who we all thought looked like used car salesmen came, interviewed us, geiger-countered both all of us and the entire room, and put "the rock" in a heavy metal box with a lock on it. They told us it was a lead box, and "even Superman can't see into it". Then they gave a stern lecture about the dangers of uranium and told to never, ever, play with uranium again. Rather prescient advice, I would say.

*STEVE LONIE has been a guide and instructor for 30 years throughout the mountains, canyons and rivers of the West. He lives in Prescott, AZ.*

# NEW BACKBONE MEMBERS for August/September 2013 #1

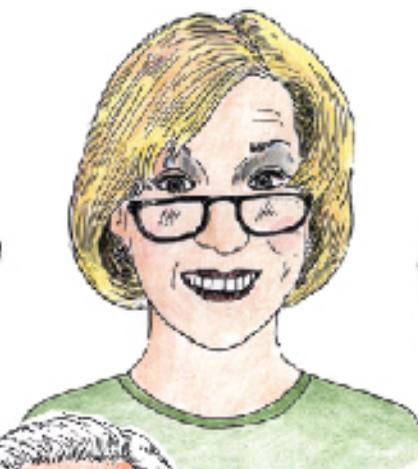
**HOBART CLEMS**  
Nebraska



**PAUL VLACHOS**  
NY, NY



**CATHY SEABOLD/STEVE BAIL**  
Louisville, KY



**MIKE MAROONEY**  
San Diego, CA



**MATT ROBERTS**  
Austin TX



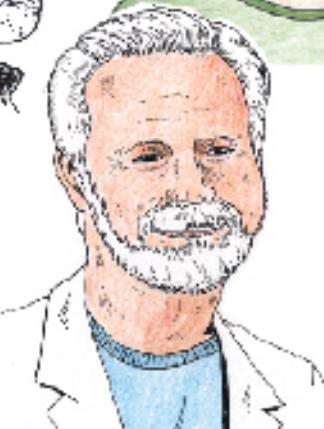
**ALAN MIKUNI**  
Fremont, CA



**RICH INGEBRETSSEN**  
SLC, UT



**STEVE SMITH**  
Louisville KY



**GREG KROLL**  
Santa fe NM



**ALAN JOSLYN**  
Highlands Ranch, CO

**JOHN TYMOCHKO**  
USA



**ANNE CROSMAN**  
Sedona, AZ

**DON BAUMGARDT**  
El Paso, TX



**ANNIE PAYNE**  
SLC, UT

**PAUL CLEARY**  
Tulsa OK

**ALSO JOINING THE BACKBONE (but UN-Tooned), THANKS to...**

- LISA KILLEN, Springdale, UT...ROBYN S PHILLIPS, Del Mar CA
- CARSTEN NAEHER, Vevey, Switzerland
- KEVIN JOHNSON, Moraga, CA... NANCY ADKISON, Blanding UT
- JANNIK SCHOU, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, CANADA
- MARGIE WILSON, Grand Jet, CO...STEVE BUZZELL, Eliot ME
- CRAIG GOODKNIGHT, Grand Jet CO... DICK & ANNE BOELTER, Laramie WY

# BACK BONE

## #2