



TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

by Jim Stiles

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THE ZEPHYR at 25...A SUMMARY

Trying to sum up the past 25 years, you'd think the logical opening here would be, 'I don't know where to begin.' The truth is, once you wade through this issue, you might ask yourself, 'Does he know how to stop?'

A few months ago, realizing that, against all odds, we were going to reach our 25th anniversary still standing, I played with the idea of writing a personal no-holds-barred, behind-the-scenes history, as I've seen it, of this publication's past quarter century. The effort has probably been more for me than for you, a cathartic experience in many ways; I wanted to jot down my memories, review the old print Zephyrs, and, for better or worse, reminisce a bit. It's been so long ago since the first issue went to press, I needed to clear my own head and separate my perceptions, all these years later, from the facts.

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The time spent thumbing through 158 copies of the old Zephyr, and scrolling through the last 30 online Zs, has been like riding a roller coaster on a wobbly track. We've enjoyed good times and weathered bad times and dealt with everything in between. Sometimes it has felt as if we were about to come off the rails, but here we are, intact and still smiling.

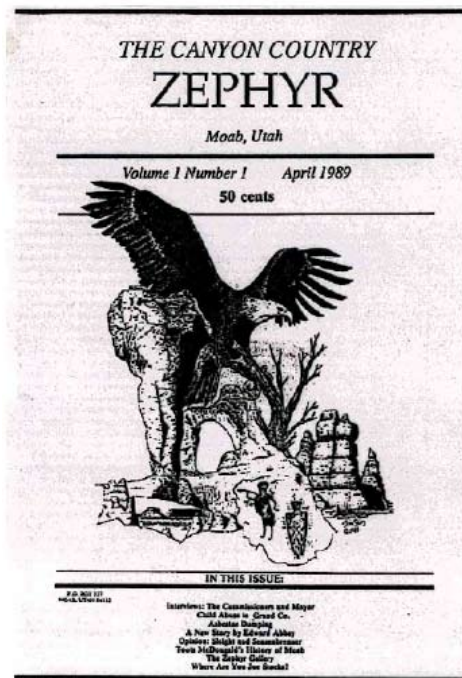
After gathering up and digesting all that information and adding my own memories to the mix, I started scribbling. My plan was to write one long "Zephyr Chronicles" and include it all in this 25th anniversary issue. But the words kept coming...and coming...and...

I could not torture my readers with this kind of longwindedness...at least not all at once. I realized the story needed to be serialized. And so, for the next five or six issues, if you're interested, you'll be able to read how this little publication got from there to here and, hopefully, I can explain, from my perspective at least, the 'whys' and the 'how comes' as well. And maybe even the 'what the ...?' too. It may still put you to sleep, but it will take longer to get you to slumberland.

In compiling this history, I've included excerpts from long ago essays and editorials, comments from readers, and when necessary, I refer to email correspondence, but have avoided any references to our personal lives. Sometimes those correspondences

did get personal, on both sides, and avoiding mention of them entirely is impossible. When it's all said and scribbled and posted over the next few months, you may want to give the 'Zephyr Chronicles' a new title, like:

'EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ZEPHYR BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK,' or more likely... 'EVERYTHING THAT ANYBODY MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE ZEPHYR BUT WERE TOLD ANYWAY.'



The beauty of it is, you don't have to read it. But for those interested parties, it will all be there, in several installments, and starting elsewhere in this issue. However, in deference to the Twitter World within which we reside, I offer a very abbreviated summary...

The idea to start an alternative monthly publication came in the wake of the November 1988 local election when Grand County citizens voted overwhelmingly to oppose a toxic waste incinerator near Cisco, forty miles upstream from Moab. The two incumbent commissioners who conceived of and supported the incinerator were defeated, though not by candidates who would in any way be described as "New Moabites."

What impressed me about the election was the diversity of the people who opposed the incinerator. It would hardly fit the profile of 2014 Progressive Moab. The vote was not framed in a Right Wing vs Left Wing way, nor was the conversation as much about 'environmental impacts' as it was about preventing the degradation of our way of life. The vote had a very common sense

appeal to it.

And so I had this idea to start a newspaper, with all views presented and the hope that all of us could create something different in Moab. (Read my first 'Page Two' editorial elsewhere in this issue.) Had it just been us Remnant Moabites calling the shots, we might have even succeeded. But within a few years, as the recreation/amenities economy was pushed fast and hard by out of town investors and as all the empty homes were bought up by absentee landlords, the town began to change.

For years, my environmentalist friends were just as worried about the tourist boom as I was—they were at times my only allies, and I still held out hope that we could at least moderate the takeover. But by 2000, resistance from the grassroots greens, even in Moab, was gone. It happened with such subtlety, I was unaware of the attitude shift for much longer than I should have been. For years, we argued quietly, behind the scenes, me hoping they'd confront the impacts that our recreation economy was creating, them hoping I'd stop arguing and re-join the fold.

Finally in 2001, The Zephyr went public, with the April/May issue called, "It's Time to Look in the Mirror...When will environmentalists acknowledge their own contribution to the destruction of the wilderness they claim to love and want to protect?"

The issue was well-received by practically everyone but Utah environmentalists. As SUWA board member Bill Hedden was to tell me years later, "People tried to politely look the other way when you decided to circle the wagons and fire inward." That was the way he and others saw it and I was profoundly disappointed. I didn't think any of us was above scrutiny, which was why I included my own hypocrisies and contradictions in the 'Mirror' issue. But the rift was finally out in the open and there it has remained to this day.

Since then, The Zephyr has tried to cover the stories that no one else will, whether it's the continuing and ever-growing impacts from the amenities/recreation economy, or the influence of the mega-rich on mainstream environmentalism, or, just this month, the unexpected rise of a plan to raise the defunct Book Cliffs Highway from the grave. Or the bigger issues—like drones and war and greed and over-consumption and over-population, or the sham and farce of 'alternative energy,' or the shame of intolerance and racism. If we don't cover oil and gas impacts and ATV abuse as fully as some wish we would, it's only because they're being reported just about everywhere else in the mainstream 'green' media and we hate to be redundant.

I've loved and hated this paper, for 25 years. ..I once threatened to quit and move to Funafuti, a remote island in the South Pacific, but I lost that option as climate change threatened to drown my little would-be paradise.

Having said that, I'd be delighted if there were a media source out there who would finally pick up the wreck-reaction story. Or deal with what I once called "the rich weasel factor in the New West." I do feel a bit redundant in that regard. Frankly we're tired of carrying the load. But as you'll see, in the issues to come, there's a reason why nobody wants to touch it. As always, it has to do with money.

I've loved and hated this paper, for 25 years. I uprooted myself from Moab and went south to Monticello a decade ago. I once threatened to quit and move to Funafuti, a remote island in the South Pacific, but I lost that option as climate change threatened to drown my little would-be paradise. I once moved to Australia, thinking I could somehow run The Zephyr from there. I came back, tail between my legs, mortified at my own stupidity, but glad to be home. And now, happily married and partnered up with Tonya, who shares Zephyr duties and makes my life so much better in so many ways, I now wonder if maybe we'll even make it to 50. If we do, you'll be the first to know.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT ED ABBEY, WILDERNESS & GUERRILLA HAVENS

I'm not sure what else can be said about Edward Abbey after all these years. God knows I've said plenty and have often tried

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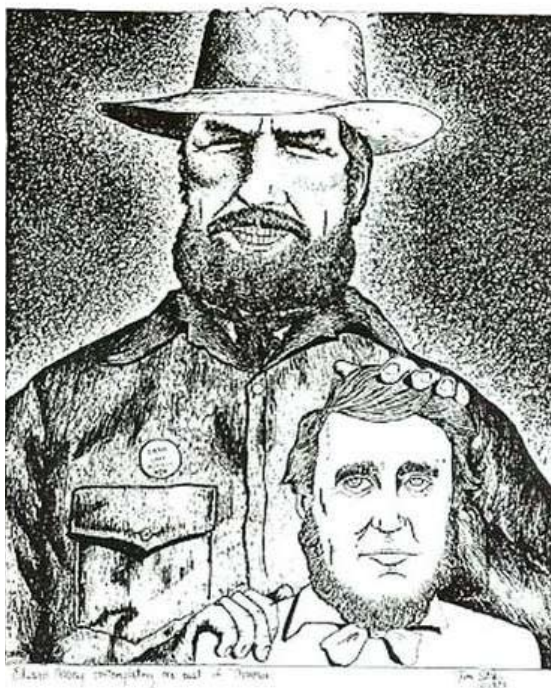
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to speculate 'What Cactus Ed would've done,' as we race through the second decade of the 21st Century. What concerns me, I admit, is the inability of so many latter day Abbeyphiles to consider how he might react to the world we face today, had he lived to see it. For so many, not only is Abbey frozen in 1989, the issues are as well. To suggest that he would have turned a blind eye to changes even Ed might not have expected a quarter century ago does him an injustice.

Many of the issues he felt so passionately about seem, at first glance, to have changed little since he left us in 1989. Consider 'wilderness.' It's been a half century since Abbey first wrote so passionately and eloquently about the subject. He once selflessly suggested, "We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it."

In 'Desert Solitaire,' Abbey also offered this unique proposal: "The wilderness should be preserved for political reasons. We may need it someday...as a refuge from authoritarian government, from political oppression. The Grand Canyon...may be required to function as a base for guerrilla warfare against tyranny."



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Whether the revolutionary guerrillas could find common ground with BASE jumpers, mountain bikes, 'adventure companies,' and Corona Arch Swingers is debatable. The "excessive industrialism" he feared has been more insidious than even he imagined, despite his own early warnings about "industrial tourism." His notion of wilderness would perplex most 21st century wilderness advocates who insist that its commercial exploitation via a "tourist/amenities" economy will generate untold revenues for the Rural West.

It is certain that, twenty-five years after Abbey left us, saving wilderness for its solitude, remoteness, and as a base camp for revolutionary warfare, is not high on anyone's agenda.

Abbey lived in Moab for many years, but in 1980 he decided to make a move to Arizona. In early May I drove out to say goodbye and found him alone, wresting a piano into a U-Haul truck. I offered a hand and we spent the rest of the day grappling with the remainder of his furniture. Almost everything fit, but he eyed a long pile of heavy lumber and complained, "I guess I'll have to leave all that behind."

"What's it for?" I asked.

Abbey grinned, "To build my adobe houseboat on Lake Powell. Remember? I don't make everything up."

Afterwards, Abbey invited me to join him for dinner at the old Sundowner. We ordered a red wine and big Porter House steaks and talked about Moab's future. Recently, uranium prices had plummeted and the nearby Atlas Mill was shutting down. What would happen to Moab next? Neither of us had a clue.

The wine came. But the waitress had placed the bottle in a bucket of ice cubes. Quietly he moaned, "For Christ's sake, typical Moab. Don't they know you DON'T chill a red?" As we sipped our icy drinks, Abbey softened, "I can live with an icy red. But leave our canyons alone, eh Stiles?"

Barely a year before he died, Abbey spent his last summer in Moab. I took him to the Sand Flats one day to see the re-discovered "Slickrock Bike Trail." Moab was on the verge of being transformed—transmogrified is more like it—into the "Mountain Bicycle Capital of the World." But Ed, at first, came to the bikers' defense.

"I like bikes," he complained. "You're more negative than I am!"

"Well, I defended myself. 'Have a look first.'"

We drove his old Ford truck up the switchbacks above town and saw the hordes of pedaling recreationists who had made the Moab Pilgrimage. We watched the crowds overflow the parking lot as the bikes fanned out, like a thousand spiders, over the vast sandstone expanse; Abbey noted some of the cars and license plates—lots of BMWs and Saabs and Audis. Many California plates...Marin County.

Ed shook his head. "I had no idea." And he flashed back to our conversation of almost a decade earlier.

"One thing's for certain," Ed sighed. "When these people drink a red, they'll know not to chill it."

Abbey thought of bikes as a way to replace cars, not feet. This was something new. We crept down the switchbacks in silence. The next day Ed drove south in that battered Ford F-150 of his, back to Tucson. He never got back to Moab.

Twenty-five years after his death, Abbey's 'wilderness,' has lost some of its poetry; it was, in fact, Cactus Ed who once swore that the movement "needed more poets and fewer lawyers." Today, the canyon country is fought over by two opposing forces—one wants to exploit its energy resources; the other half wants to exploit its beauty for tourism dollars. Now Abbey's option—just leave it like it was—is but a quaint reminder of a time that never existed.

His last glimpse of the slickrock was our first glance of a future we never imagined. When Ed said, "What our perishing republic needs is something different...something entirely different," I don't think this is the future he had in mind.

THE BOOK CLIFFS ZOMBIE HIGHWAY

A Bad Idea Rises From the Dead

In the very first Zephyr, I wrote a long article about a road building proposal that would be debated for years. In late 1989, the lame duck Grand County Commissioners created a self-funded, autonomous special service road district, with the specific goal of building a multi-million dollar, modern, paved highway that would connect Grand County and Moab in the south with Uintah County and Vernal to the north. They called it the 'Book Cliffs Highway.' Its purpose was to provide better access for oil and gas development, but the highway was also pitched as a tourist road that would increase recreational traffic and shorten the travel distances.

Elsewhere in this issue you can read a narrative of the battle to stop the road. Opposition was light in the beginning, but by 1992, those of us who opposed the road began to gain some traction. Eventually, a change of government in Grand County and a negative environmental impact statement by the BLM killed the idea. We thought it was dead for good.

But last week, word came that the Grand County governing body is again pursuing the idea, via a letter to their council-counterparts in Uintah County. The proposed alignment is different this time; instead of following existing dirt and gravel roads on the far eastern end of Grand County, as the plan suggested in 1989, the council wants to create a new 'transportation corridor' through Sego Canyon, north from Thompson Springs and I-70.

Uintah County is flush with money these days. Oil and gas development has boomed in recent years; it has transformed the area and dramatically increased, for better or worse, its population and its tax base. The boom has also put incredible strains on its citizens and its infrastructure. I will always argue that these booms eventually cause more harm than good, but trying to get any politician to admit that, be they from the Left or the Right, is almost impossible. Grand County's current administration wants some of that boom to come its way.

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In a letter to the Uintah Council and approved unanimously by the Grand County Council, chairman Lynn Jackson wrote, "In the spirit of cooperation envisioned by the newly formed Seven County Eastern Utah Economic Development Coalition, and a desire for closer coordination with our adjacent county neighbors, Grand County would like to advise you of a concept we are considering in regard to enhancing access and transportation systems in northern Grand County. We suggest such potential access enhancements could also be of interest to Uintah County."

But the route the county proposes, through Sego Canyon is—or should be--- a dead end for future development and has been for decades, thanks to the Ute Indians. Jackson explains, "In the mid-1980's the Northern Ute Tribe placed a gate across the route

on their boundary to guard against trespass onto their lands by unauthorized hunters and fishermen. Prior to closure this road continued for another 7-8 miles on SITLA lands to an old gas well location."

Indeed. After a century of seeing their lands defiled and taken away, the Utes said ENOUGH. The gate has been in place for more than three decades. Now Grand County proposes a way around this. The letter continues, "(We) would like to investigate the feasibility of improving transportation in this area between the SITLA block and the I-70/railway corridor, and perhaps additional routes between our counties."

What they propose is a bypass of sorts. The letter calls for joint feasibility studies that would consider, "upgrading and paving the existing Class B Grand County Sego Canyon route to handle vehicle and truck traffic, and would also look at potential for pipelines. They would also analyze extending this road system through the SITLA land block to connect with existing northern Grand and southern Uintah County road systems." This linking of north and south would require the construction of a road along an entirely new alignment, a task even more daunting than the 1989 proposal.

Of course, the plan touts the benefits of this 'transportation corridor,' as it moves forward to sell the idea to the public. It argues that Grand County residents "could receive substantial economic gain through development on lands in northern Grand County and the Uintah basin, with minimal adverse impacts other than a road," by opening access to currently inaccessible SITLA lands, and even tries to link the project to a boost in tourism, claiming it would "provide additional commercial exchange between Grand County and the Uintah Basin of all forms, particularly recreation and tourism." That sounds so much like 1989, all over again.

This is all very, very early. I only learned about it a few days ago and the letter itself is just a feeler of sorts, to see if there is a mutual interest in Uintah County. But questions arise..

Blazing a new road altogether, circumventing the Utes land and connecting north and south, would be a serious undertaking. It would also split in half a vast roadless area. If there was ever a parcel of land worthy of wilderness designation, it's this. But specifically, how many miles of new road would be constructed? And how drastically would the existing road be 're-aligned'?

Second, if this road were built and all the economic advantages came with it, what would Grand County do with the money? I mean, what's the point? What is it that Grand County lacks that all this infusion of money would provide? Why do politicians always think that increasing the tax base is a good thing? Do proponents realize how it could transform the area? I'm sure Grand County residents would specifically like to know how the revenues could be used and still allow the county to maintain a semblance of its rural self.

When SITLA first announced the Anadarko lease of more than 100,000 acres, the very state land block Grand County is so eager to exploit, Utah sportsmen were furious. And what about the adjacent Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation? As noted, the Utes have long considered their land sacred. Have they been consulted by Grand County officials?

The letter from Grand County says, "Indications are that funding to build and maintain this road could come from developers, not Grand County residents." But if the oil and gas people can easily transport their product north via existing paved roads, why would they want to pay to build a new road via Sego Canyon to I-70, and submit to fees, so they can go south instead? I can't see this kind of benevolence from the oil industry. Have they actually expressed an interest in this?

And finally, Jackson's letter notes that, "Under provisions that could be placed in the Bishop public lands legislation bill, Grand County would be given RS 2477 ownership of the Class B County road in Sego Canyon, along with required widths to accommodate upgrade."

Is this a trade-off that environmentalists are willing to make? Elsewhere in this issue, Ashley Korenblat of the Utah Outdoor Business Network, offers her support for the Bishop Land Initiative. Is THIS what she and others have in mind? To sacrifice untouched parts of northern Grand County in exchange for recreation-rich lands, protected for their tourist revenues, elsewhere?

Like I said, we stand at the very beginning of this process. But it could be a long and difficult fight, for everyone involved.

A SHORT COMMENT ON ASHLEY KORENBLAT'S 'REPLY' TO THE 'BORG' STORY

Last issue, I wrote a long essay called "Moab is Assimilated. Bike Borg Moves South...Is Resistance Futile in San Juan County?" The essay included long quotes from Ashley Korenblat's presentation to the San Juan County Commission last June. After the story was posted, Ms. Korenblat asked for the chance to reply. We offered her 1500 words and she used 750. But her comments only addressed her support for the Bishop Land Initiative and never addressed anything from the Borg story, and specifically my concerns that the kind of recreation/tourist growth she imagines for San Juan County would do little to address the economic needs of the county's current population. Though some of her peers in the recreation industry took issue with us, suggesting I'd given Korenblat "a bum rap," I was pleased to see she apparently had no quarrel with any of the specifics of the Borg story.