

# THE ZEPHYR CHRONICLES...PT 2

## A BIG CHANGE & SIGNS OF THINGS TO COME(1996-2001)

### JIM STILES

By the mid-1990s, Moab and Grand County citizens—especially voters—were worn out. So was I. Beginning in 1987, with Moab's economy in tatters and its elected officials proposing a toxic waste incinerator at Cisco to boost property taxes, it was one crisis after another.

A forced referendum in 1988 put an end to the incinerator, tossed out the incumbents, and installed a Democrat majority. The lame duck Republicans created an independent special service road district, with its own mineral lease funding, and moved forward on a massive highway project.

Two years later, the Republicans gained the majority on the three-person commission and appeared to be unstoppable for the next four years. But by 1992, Moabites, especially angry tourism-related business owners, were infuriated by an ill-advised Travel Council appointment. They rebelled and gained the momentum and public support, via yet another referendum, to toss out the entire form of government and install a new 7-person council.

In November 1992, the county approved the change and as of January 1, the commissioners who had been elected just two years earlier for four year terms were gone. In February a special election was held to fill the seven vacancies on the new council.

You'd think we were done, but later that year we endured another special election, a recall vote this time to throw out the new councilmen. The recall failed, but in 1994, another election tossed out at least one of the original council and others chose not to stand for election again. Power shifted yet again.

A weary citizenry, by this time, hardly noticed or cared.

In what would be our last year as a monthly publication, the big battles that had dogged Moab for years—the toxic waste incinerator, the Book Cliffs Highway, the Change of Government Vote—were behind us. Now, the effects of tourism began to show, but after a big bump in 1993, when Moab saw seven new motels built in the span of a few months, the changes were slower...more incremental. How did one effectively combat that kind of transformation? More fast food franchises came to Moab and in the spring of 1995, we learned that Wendy's had not only decided to add a franchise on Main Street, they decided to take a good chunk of a Moabite's backyard as well.



#### 'WENDY'S' TAKES ON DAVE LYLE

Longtime resident Dave Lyle owned a home on 200 North, just off Main, and had put great effort and investment into making his yard one of the loveliest in town. But Wendy's believed the historic boundary that separated their property from Dave's was wrong. By over nine feet. Dave tried to settle the dispute without legal action, and several times he thought a resolution had been found. But in late January 1995, Dave discovered a fax on his windshield, advising him to vacate the disputed property in

24 hours. The next day, the realtor handling the Wendy's acquisition, Randy Day, and a backhoe operator showed up and removed Lyle's fence, part of his patio and several 40 foot trees. Dave called his lawyer.

Months later, Judge Lyle Anderson issued a summary judgment in FAVOR of Dave Lyle. Wendy's had to restore the original property line and pay damages. A victory for the little guy (for a change).



#### 'ECO-CHALLENGE,' WILDERNESS & UN-STOPPABLE GROWTH

But those kinds of 'wins' were few and far between. In March 1995 we also heard about "Eco-Challenge" for the first time. A cross-country triathlon-esque extreme NON-motorized sports extravaganza, to be televised on MTV was strongly opposed by SUWA and Scott Groene led the charge. An appeal was filed with BLM to stop the race and among those groups listed on the appeal, in addition to SUWA, were Red River Canoe, Tex's Riverways and this publication.

But the Utah congressional delegation cleared the way for the race and parts of BLM's environmental assessment that discussed the negative impacts were deleted from the final draft. According to Groene, "The good folks at Eco-

Challenge responded to the appeal by claiming they had received telephone calls and electronic mail threats from 'eco-terrorists.' Race promoters accused SUWA of inciting these threats."

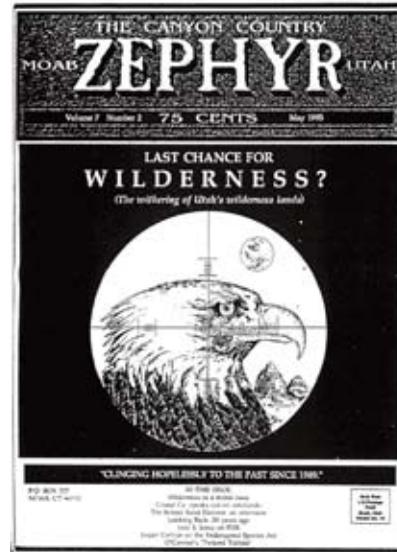
Twenty years later, it's difficult to imagine ANY environmental group opposing ANY event like this, which was promoted, in part, as a way to boost the economic advantages of a tourist/recreation non-motorized economy. But in 1995, SUWA's concerns still included this kind of activity.

Later in the spring, wilderness hearings were held in Moab and a standing room-only crowd turned out at Star Hall. Then, as now, the opinions were as diverse as the com-

munity expressing them. The Zephyr covered the hearing and included long quotations from many of the citizen speakers. In the following issue, I explained my own views on wilderness, noting, "If I had my way with wilderness, I would protect it in ways that would avoid even the possibility of commercial exploitation. I would prohibit any outfitter or guide company from leading tours through wilderness areas for profit. And," I added, "if wilderness lands began to show signs of impacts from overuse, I would support the idea of closing such areas to everyone."

I knew my ideas would not be taken seriously, but it was my hope that at least my readers would understand that 'wilderness' was for more than providing a recreation-based economy—that our real purpose was to save the land for ITS own sake, not ours. At the time, not one member of the mainstream green community took exception. Years later, everything would change.

(For a detailed account of that change, look for Part 3 of this series—"The Fork in the Wilderness Road"—coming in August.)



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But Change was already coming. At Arches NP, we finally saw the paving of the Delicate Arch road, all the way to the overlook. Former Canyonlands superintendent Pete Parry had resisted the asphalt for years, but now Pete had retired. With visitation exploding and the old road frequently closed to flooding at the Salt Valley Wash crossing, monies became available to realign the road, build new bridges and pave the three mile section. The cars and the motorhomes and the tour buses rolled in. Great effort had been made to camouflage the parking lot at the view point. But the vehicles parked there could be seen for miles, their steel and glass glimmering in the desert heat.

In Moab and Spanish Valley, pastures and alfalfa fields began to vanish. For years we had feared the worst and now Reality finally caught up. In the early 90s, local resident Venice Denny had offered to sell some magnificent acreage along Mill Creek, just across from Dave's Corner Market, to Moab City for a relative pittance. I wrote a heartfelt plea in The Z, urging the city council to act quickly, to do something bold, something that we would all be grateful for, years and decades later. It would have been a wonderful addition to the Mill Creek Parkway, a green oasis in the middle of a very busy town. But the city failed to act. Venice finally had no choice but to sell it to private investors. Now, in the late 90s, the land was finally developed as the "Mill Creek Pueblos." All that open space was transformed into condos.

Even with a more 'progressive' governing body, there was the sense that not much could be done to halt what already appeared to be an un-stoppable transformation. The council attended growth workshops and talked about better planning and imposing more "impact fees," but no one seriously opposed the kind of upheaval that awaited us. Years later, in an essay called "A Reluctant Remembrance," outgoing County Councilman Bill Hedden noted, "My four years on the council convinced me that there is very little that can be done to successfully control growth...It is possible, though, to plan for and manage growth, and if we don't do that we are climbing on a greased slide to the worst of all possible worlds."

As I'd note 20 years later: Resistance was Futile.

#### A LAUGH OR TWO & GOODBYE TO THE MONTHLY

For me, after years of feeling my little rag was making a difference, even if in only some small way, now I felt utterly helpless. A feeling of resigned complacency gripped the town, though to suggest most of us felt 'gripped' is an overstatement. But attendance on public meetings declined and Zephyr interviews with public officials seldom stirred emotions. After all, a relatively 'progressive' bunch of public officials was now directing the future of Moab/Grand County.

I sought refuge in humor. In August, thanks to the morphing mastery of computer genius Dan O'Connor (who had also introduced The Zephyr's "Twisted Tabloids" series, we offered the first "Zephyr Swimsuit Issue," in August 1995.

And we held a contest to create a new Zephyr Slogan. I was bored with our old "Cling-

ing Hopelessly to the Past” banner and proposed to the readership that they come up with some new ideas. The pickings were slim until one day I discovered a passel of brilliant alternatives, each sent separately on its own post card. Their author was Moab’s own Kaki Hunter, Hollywood star and Every Man’s Dream Girl. We received a couple other late entries, but Kaki’s multiple contributions won hands down. Among her gems were:

“Moab, Utah...Looks like Hell, and it’s hot too.”

“Moab, Utah...Where Nirvana is a dirty word.”

“Moab, Utah...No composting toilets allowed.”

“Moab, Utah...Future sandbag house capitol of the world.”

“Moab, Utah...Where 99.999% of everything is absolutely nothing..  
So why bother?”

“Moab, Utah...Where everybody is naked under their clothes.”

“Moab, Utah...One billion T-shirts sold.”

and my favorite

“Moab, Utah...We’re all DOOMED!”

But by November, I had lost my sense of levity. In a page 2 essay for that month, I barely managed to put words together. It began with this warning: “What you are about to read might best be described as ‘filler material.’” In that regard, I was true to my word. I was seeking to fill two pages with text, usually about 2500 words, and I ranted about a variety of subjects, from the deadfromtheneck state of politics in Moab, to a brief description of a woman I met on the Upper West Side of New York City, who called me “Mistah Millionaire.” This total stranger had become mad at me in the checkout line of a local market because I failed to heed her advice regarding the availability of a cheaper toothbrush at the Duane Reade pharmacy. I explained that I was a tourist and in a hurry and she retorted, “But it’s just a block away! Sixty-six cents! You’re paying a buck eighty-nine!!! If you’re not a millionaire, then I have to think there is something



WRONG with your HEAD!”

She was right, of course, but for the wrong reason.

In the same issue I even mocked the superintendent of Capitol Reef National Park for creating something called “a web site” on some contraption called the “World Wide Web.” I suggested that the park super “had been dropped on his head at an early age,” and I could not see the value in his offer to post important park documents on their web site. I just didn’t think this internet stuff would catch on. Still, a friend of my pal Restaurateur/Madman Mike Marooney persuaded me to buy the domain name [www.canyoncountryzephyr.com](http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com). For years, it sat there unused—an utter waste of money, I believed.

By Christmas, I had begun to consider a big change. Though I had great writers and someone to help now with the subscriptions and distribution—all 2000 copies—The Zephyr was still a one-man show in many regards. I did all the ads, most of the stories and interviews—though Ken Davey was a great help to me in those years—and I drew all the cartoons and took most of the photos. I did the layouts, all using a hand waxer, layout boards and a pair of scissors. On press day, always the first Tuesday of the month, I rose at 5 AM to travel 125 miles to Cortez where Larry Hauer and the gang printed the latest issue. I’d get home by 5 PM, drop off the subs and the local distribution-Zs, then, the next day, I’d haul a couple hundred to Grand Junction. I’d rest for three or four days and then start the process again. I was tired.

Finally, I considered my options. I could quit, of course. Or I could hire a staff and try to figure out how to pay them. Everything I considered required a huge increase in revenues which meant charging more for ads and even the cost of the paper (which in 1995 had risen to 75 cents from 50). The problem with depending on newsstand sales was that hardly anybody paid for them in the first place. On the ‘honor stands’ which constituted the vast majority of my distribution, about 75% of the Zephyrs were stolen. I was happy to see them read, but the payback was awful.

I once sat at the Broiler and watched a family at a nearby table. The husband saw the stand and said to his wife, “Honey, get me one of those Zephyrs.”

She walked to the display but saw the price. “But it’s seventy-five cents,” she said.

The man glanced around. He half-whispered, “Just take it.”

“But it’s...” he cut her off.

“Nobody will notice. Just give me a paper. I need something to read.”

So the wife reluctantly pulled a Zephyr from the stand and gave it to her deadbeat husband. He opened the paper to page two and it’s hard to say which of them first noticed that the grainy black and white image in the upper left hand corner bore a remarkable to the man sitting at an adjacent booth. But there was that unmistakable moment of ‘oh shit’ recognition.

The Broiler was a tiny place and of course I could hear everything.

“What should we do? I heard the wife say with just a hint of restrained panic in her voice.

He thought a long while. “Just put it back on the rack. I’m not paying 75 cents.”

They returned the now mustard-stained Zephyr to the stand. I did not press charges.

And so it went. I needed to do something different. Finally, knowing I could not significantly raise ad rates and that I’d never consider hiring a staff and complicating my life with those kinds of employer-type responsibilities, I came up with one viable option...

#### THE ZEPHYR GOES BI- (NOT ‘BYE’)

I would end the monthly grind of publication. After seven years, I couldn’t keep up the pace. I’d replace it with a bi-monthly version (every other month) and shift the focus from purely local issues to broader themes that would appeal to a wider readership. And

by doing that, I planned to increase the circulation from just 2000 per issue to 15,000. And we’d distribute them not just in Moab, but also in Grand Junction, Bluff, Blanding, Monticello, Salt Lake City, Flagstaff, even my old home town of Louisville, Kentucky.

I’d need to increase ad rates but not enough to drive many of my Zephyr supporters away and, in exchange, their ads would be seen by more than seven times as many readers as had viewed them before. I took a deep breath and proposed the idea personally to each of my advertisers. Incredibly, virtually all of them decided to stay with me. It was a gratifying moment.

I notified my friends at Cortez News where the Zephyr was printed. The chief press man, Larry Hauer, was delighted. Larry was a perfectionist and was always frustrated by our short press runs. He’d shoot a couple thousand copies through his five-web press before he thought the quality was good enough to start counting. All those trees---I used to agonize over the waste. Now, with 15,000 copies to print, he could really get the presses humming. But the larger count meant I also needed to find a better way to transport the Zs. Until now, incredible as it might seem, I hauled all 2000 copies of the old monthly in my 1963 Volvo 544—‘Moby Dick,’ I called her. Now I needed something bigger and my buddy and computer whiz Charlie Peterson agreed to sell his 1986 GMC pickup for \$1500. Finally, I owned a truck and the new ‘Zephyr Transportation Fleet.’

The first bi-monthly Zephyr appeared on newsstands March 15, 1996. What I liked best about the new schedule was that it gave me more time to hone my skills. My writing didn’t feel rushed anymore and even my cartoons improved. I no longer had to capture the essence of a face in 10 minutes. If I had more time, I was less likely to render an unflattering portrait of people I was really trying to please (albeit for money!). Still, complaints from toon victims declined and I was grateful.

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But they didn’t vanish altogether. One night, I stopped by Back of Beyond Books to take a photo of the woman then working the evening shift (I’ll leave her name out...no sense in causing trouble twice). She was a friend of mine and was actually pleased to learn I planned to cartoon her; she willingly posed for the shot. But each time I took her picture, my friend tended to widen her eyes, as if she had just seen a ghost. I told her I was worried she might look a bit bug-eyed if the photos came out as I feared. But she laughed and said, “Oh who cares? That’s the way I look.” I was relieved and grateful to find somebody who didn’t take my tooning so seriously or think I was trying to be insulting.

But a few weeks later, after the issue came out, she stopped me as I was walking along the street, in tears. “How could you?” she cried. “Why did you draw me bug-eyed?”

I reminded her of the conversation and she admitted she hadn’t been particularly offended when the paper first came out. I realized it was her ‘friends’ who had riled her up. She told me how several of her comrades had “offered their sincere condolences” for the way I had “maliciously” misrepresented her and “embarrassed her before the entire community.”

“We are so sorry,” one friend opined, “for what ‘he’ did to you.”

We had a very long talk and when we were finished, we both concluded it was her friends who’d been malicious, not me. I was glad she’d brought up the issue instead of just seething about it. For once, I got to clear my name.

The slower pace also gave me time to plan issues ahead, reach out to new writers, and best of all, to broaden our themes and the scope of our stories. The next four years were especially gratifying as The Zephyr took on issues that affected all of us in Moab and southeast Utah and across the West. And sometimes around the planet. And we were often able to showcase remarkable individuals who never received the recognition they deserved.

#### A PLETHORA OF ‘THEMES’

I enjoyed the next few years, though it was clear Moab and the World were rapidly changing. The Zephyr’s bi-monthly issues were built around themes that I had always wanted to pursue. It may be that I’m simply not the best or most organized planner in the world and that I needed more time to put these kinds of topics together than others might. But finally, starting with that first issue, I felt good about the work we were doing.

The first bi-monthly Zephyr included essays about over-population but also offered profiles of local artist/hermit, one-of-a-kind Nik Hougan; writer Barry Scholl celebrated the lives of Glen Canyon legends Cass Hite and Arth Chaffin. And as always and in keeping with our unshakable belief that ALL sides deserve a voice at the table, I introduced a column called “Radical Boneheads,” which offered contrasting views on a variety of subjects.

In the premier bi-monthly writers David Swift (on the Left) and longtime Moabite Jerry Stocks (on the Right) took on the issue of federal management on public lands. The views from each might have been predictable but I felt good that we were providing the contrast.

Over the next several years, The Zephyr featured multiple-stories about the future of Glen Canyon Dam and the future of the water-buried canyon that waits upstream for its own return to dry land.

In ‘GLEN CANYON: Can We Restore a Masterpiece?’ I wrote:

next page...