

THE ZEPHYR CHRONICLES PART 3 CONTINUED

to be sure. But the changes being wrought by the new amenities economy went far beyond the tracks ripped by fat tires. And they knew it. It was as if they were stuck in 1985. Nor could they see the connection between energy exploration and development and a tourist/recreation economy that demanded energy just to get them here.

I first found myself at odds with my SUWA allies almost 15 years ago, but it would be two more years before I shared our differences with my readers. I kept hoping we'd find common ground but it never came.

The first crack in our shared philosophy seems minor, relative to what's come since. But it marked the shape of things to come. One day in late 1999, I was having coffee with a friend and she described a 'backcountry tour' she'd taken with a new 'canyoneering' company. She talked about a remote area in Arches National Park, where she'd hiked with a small group to an unnamed arch that perched on the edge of a deep canyon. The "tour" included a rappel to the bottom of this deep crevasse and cost \$160. My curiosity was aroused; it sounded so familiar and the next day I confirmed my worst fears, when I hiked out there myself and found the riggings and ropes and hardware that had been left behind but in place for the next commercial tour.

I reported the illegal tours and the climbing gear to the Park Service and later I learned that the equipment had been confiscated. But incredibly, the NPS simply advised the tour company, Desert Highlights and its owner Matt Moore to obtain an "incidental business permit" and he could continue his tours.

For the entire story:

ARCHES, LOOPHOLES & the NPS

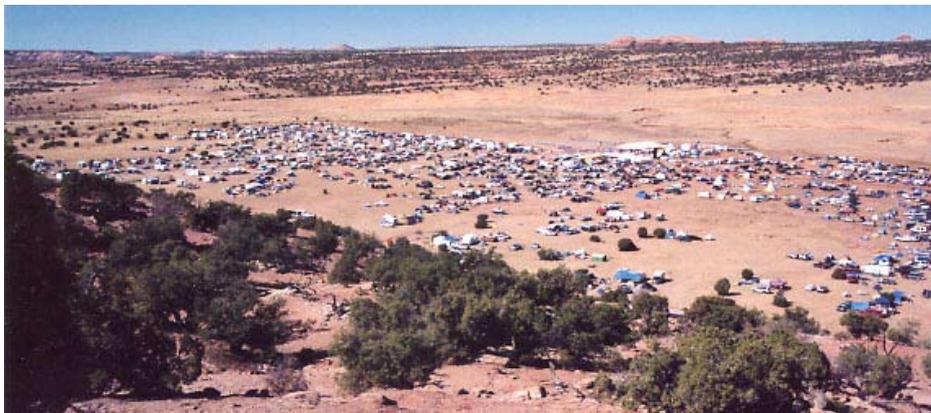
A weak climbing policy and a non-existent commercial permitting system do a disservice to the Arches backcountry...by Jim Stiles

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/aug-sept2002/arches-loopholes-nps-html.htm>

Even if the NPS refused to see the problem, I was sure SUWA would. I contacted Moab's most recent staff attorney, an affable fellow named Herb McHarg. We met at the Red Rock Bakery and I told him about my discovery. I expected him to blow a gasket. But instead he smiled and said, "Well....look. We can't be against everything."

I was surprised. It never occurred to me I'd need to convince Herb or anyone at SUWA that there was a problem with this kind of activity. I argued that if SUWA picked and chose its issues, they'd lose credibility. Later, I noticed that Desert Highlights had become a "proud business member of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance." I contacted other SUWA staff, sure that somebody would be incensed once they got the details, but they could not have been less interested.

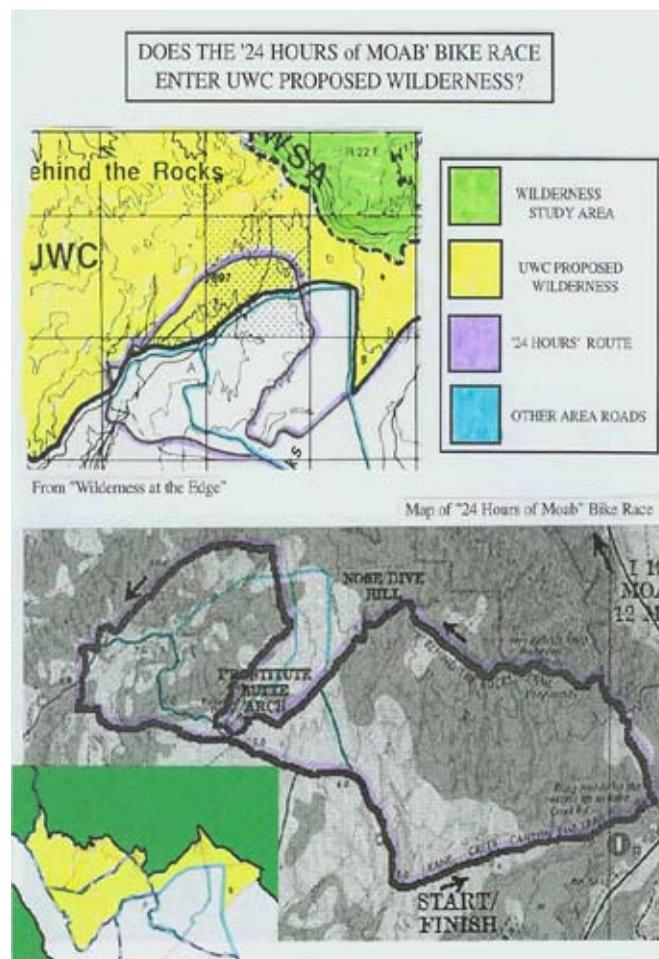
Other events came along that would have drawn SUWA's ire, just a few years earlier. The '24 Hours of Moab' bike race, a carnival-like event that involved thousands of bikers on land just inches for SUWA-proposed wilderness, would have caused SUWA scrutiny just a couple years earlier, was all but ignored. In



fact, after the first race, in 1994, SUWA did comment negatively in its Zephyr 'watchdog' column, but within a few years, SUWA failed to even send a monitor. When I emailed the SUWA rep in Moab, she'd even forgotten the race was taking place.

Later, a careful study of the race map and of SUWA's wilderness proposal even proved that, in the early years, the race was executed ON SUWA's proposed wilderness lands. They angrily denied my assertion until they finally looked at the maps. Later, SUWA actually removed the contested land from its proposal but insisted the change had nothing to do with '24.'

The story is recounted here, in this 2012 Zephyr essay:



A comparison of SUWA proposed wilderness and the route of the "24 Hours of Moab" bike race...

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE: 24 HOURS OF MOAB

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2012/04/01/the-view-from-above-24-hours-of-moab-bike-race-by-jim-stiles/>

Still, despite the continued lack of concern, I remained tenacious—annoyingly so, I suppose--- and when I persisted, I could see the bewilderment on their faces. My friends at SUWA were shocked; it was as if I had turned on a friend. Their cheery email replies to my hard questions almost bordered on the surreal. It was as if I'd attacked the infallibility of the pope, and rather than deal with it, they'd just pretend I hadn't said it.

What they couldn't understand was that, as a journalist, I felt it was wrong to let friendships sway an objective analysis of the facts, regardless of the consequences. Further, I could not understand why honestly disagreeing with these people that I believed to be true fair-minded liberals might jeopardize our friendship in the first place.

But that's what happened. Their initial bewilderment gave way to annoyance and then open hostility. For me, it was one of the most discouraging times of my life. I had for years believed we were all on the same team, and clearly we were. But somewhere along the way, the mainstream environmental 'movement' moved away from the moral high ground and chose a different path. It had to do with money.

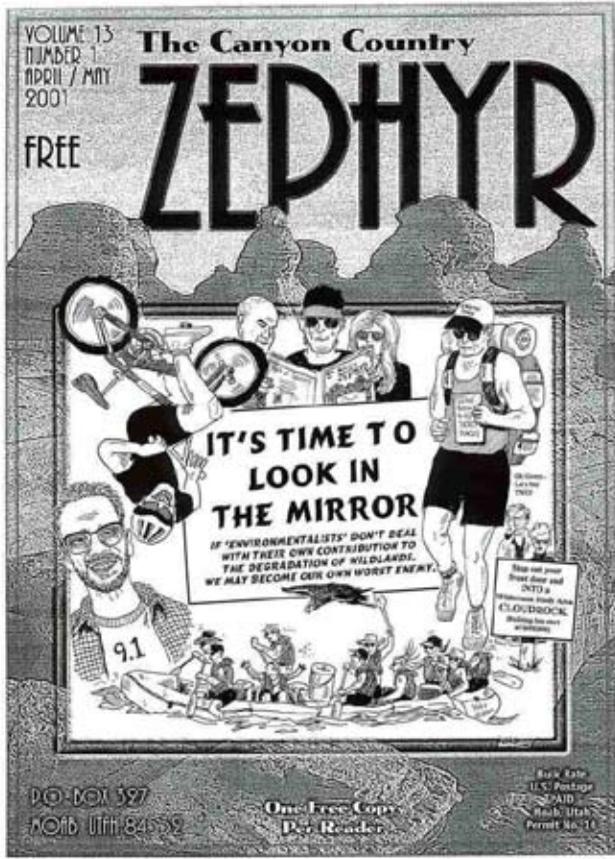
Within years everything changed. In 1994, SUWA staffers had adamantly opposed guidebooks and Groene had publicly worried about overexposure from television promotions that might "draw more visitors than the land can handle." But later, the SUWA board reversed the 'no guidebooks' policy and the staff went along.

SUWA even got into the guidebook act itself when it sponsored and promoted a number of slide shows by "legendary backcountry explorer and prolific guidebook writer Steve Allen." (Redrock Wilderness Newsletter).

Allen called his show, "Canyoneering Chronicles" and he took it to nine different cities in Utah and Idaho, as well as New York City. In a related Salt Lake Tribune story, titled "Canyoneering Allen Says More People Should See Wilderness to Save It," Allen insisted that a mass influx of non-motorized tourists to wilderness areas was the only way to preserve our threatened wildlands. "We need more people out there, not less," he said. "Right now, the wilderness lands are in flux. They're embattled. We need as many supporters as we can get...If places get too crowded, we can take appropriate steps (to limit access)." Again, no one in the environmental community stepped forward to challenge Allen's strategy. Groene's fears of "overexposure" were a thing of the past.

TIME TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR...

In April 2001, the first issue of The Zephyr's 13th year was called "It's Time to Look in the Mirror." I'd been working on this story for almost two years and I knew it would be a seminal moment for The Z. I was finally talking publicly about the growing differences between me and the Utah mainstream green community. It was not, as they would later claim, a matter of me waking up one



In April 2001, the first issue of The Zephyr's 13th year was called "It's Time to Look in the Mirror." I'd been working on this story for almost two years and I knew it would be a seminal moment for The Z. I was finally talking publicly about the growing differences between me and the Utah mainstream green community.

day and 'trashing' them. I had worked behind the scenes to create some kind of conversation but it went nowhere. Finally I was ready to talk about these issues in a public forum. Here is just a short excerpt from my Page 2 editorial from April 2001...

"Recently...the Salt Lake Tribune suggested that, "...while they (environmentalists) were battling the cattle ranchers, oil drillers and loggers, they overlooked another threat that can wipe out an area's wild character as effectively as a clear-cut: Themselves."

"To me, it at least offered an opportunity for some honest soul-searching. But the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance's response was, to me, discouraging. "While we agree that all of us have an impact on the land," SUWA's newsletter replied, "the difference between hiking and clear-cutting is profound. Implying otherwise suggests deep-seated, dogmatic opposition to the efforts of environmentalists."

"Of course, we all know the difference between a clear-cut and a footprint. But how about a billion footprints? Or ten billion? How about well-intentioned, self-proclaimed environmentalists moving by the millions into the ever-dwindling habitat of the ever-encroached wildlife? How about the exploitation of wildlands by a whole spectrum of non-motorized recreational entrepreneurs who can gain absolution from environmental groups by making a generous donation or by paying lip service support to a particular piece of environmental legislation?"

"Or how about a funky little bi-monthly publication that complains about all these abuses and yet survives on the advertising revenues of some of those very same companies?"

Finally, I asked this...

"Environmentalists can no longer ignore the invasion around us and pretend it's still 1975. The times have changed and the culture has changed. "Wilderness" is still just as important as it ever was, but saving this land is so much more than that. One of my friends put it best: "When the population of Utah grows so much and changes so much that its Senators actually want a big wilderness bill, it'll only be because we yuppies moved in and took over the state...and that's when I'd have to leave." Isn't that weird? And I'd be right behind him."

Follow these links to read stories from that issue:

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF OUR LIVES...Jim Stiles

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/april-may2001/takeitorleaveit.htm>

IT'S TIME TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR...Jim Stiles

When Will Environmentalists Acknowledge Their Own Contribution to the Destruction of the Wilderness They Claim to Love & Want to Protect

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/april-may2001/mirror.htm>

ROGUES' GALLERY

My 27 years at Rocky Mountain University...

T. WINSTON MOJO

In the tradition of literary bureaucrats Kafka, Bukowski and Miller, T. Winston Mojo takes the reader on a journey into the abyss of institutional smallness. Everybody knows that politics at the university are so vicious because the stakes are so small. Mojo's real-life gauntlet of villains at Rocky Mountain University in Big Rock, Colorado, is an exploration into just how small those stakes can be.

AVAILABLE FROM

CARNIVORES! HERBIVORES! OMNIVORES!!

We offer ethnic and traditional cuisine and emphasize the use of high-quality, organic ingredients and fresh seasonal produce.

ALL MENU ITEMS TO GO
352 N MAIN ST 259.6896

and we're on facebook!!!

LIFETIME BACKBONE MEMBER

LANETTE SMITH
Basalt, CO