

ZEPHYR CHRONICLES...PART 4 (CONTINUED)

think they're legitimate but clearly, others do."

Bill's reply fell back on that same familiar old line, "Funny, you seem awfully angry." Once again, I was the angry man, just for trying to be honest.

The same night that Hedden's email burned through to my inbox, Fayhee called me about his *High Country News* story. He had a list of possible interviews and Hedden was among them. I chuckled and said, "That should be interesting. I just got a zinger of an email from Bill...It's still smoking"

Fayhee asked if he could read it and I could find no reason to say no. My letter to the board of SUWA was not a personal correspondence. I had sought their comments for publication and, in fact, Hedden had merely been a "cc" recipient.

"Sure. Why not," I said.

Later, when I sent yet another apparently annoying email, Hedden was furious. By sheer chance



he'd met Fayhee at a bar, the emails had come up, and Hedden felt violated (probably he does again NOW.) He angrily wrote, "I responded to you as a fellow member of my community whom I have known a little for a long time. Had I known that you planned to send some unspecified portion of our exchange off to newspapers, I would not have communicated with you. I don't publish a newspaper and I don't write op-eds bashing people, so your notion of a free and honest exchange of ideas is unfair."

I replied, "Bill...our emails were not private conversations...my comments and questions were addressed to SUWA board members. I was trying to find out where you people stand on some of these issues that you have all taken cover from for so long....The emails had nothing to do with our private lives. Anything we discuss related to environmental issues should be part of the free and open exchange of ideas that I've advocated for so long. As long as it doesn't get nasty or personal, how does it hurt to share your opinions with other people? And so far, the mud that's been slung seems to be coming from 'your side.'"

Again, there was no 'bashing,' unless the word means expressing disagreement. I agreed that Hedden's reply to my email had indeed made the conversation personal. He'd even questioned the value of my dear friend Herb Ringer's contributions. How could anyone NOT at least find pleasure in looking at Herb's old photographs?

And I advised him that he was free to share my end of any correspondence that had ever passed between us, with anybody of his choosing. I try to never say anything that I would be ashamed for others to hear. And after all, these emails were NOT of a personal nature. It was me, as a journalist writing to the board members of an environmental organization. But Hedden didn't see it that way and thought I was unprofessional. My apparently fatal character flaw was my willingness to be open and uncensored.

And when world class ego-climber Dean Potter made the first solo/self-promoted climb of Delicate Arch, I again asked for comments from the environmental community. Would any of them speak up? I wondered if this was still the kind of non-motorized recreation that environmental groups think represents a huge wilderness advocacy group. I hoped that maybe it was finally sinking in--that these kinds of exploits have nothing to do with wildland protection.

In response to a heretical notion (I suggested a short press release from environmental groups, condemning that kind of outdoor behavior,) SUWA board member Bill Hedden replied in part: "He was an asshole to climb Delicate Arch and I would have arrested him happily if I was a ranger... But, if you got there five minutes after his desecration, there would have been no visible trace. So, should the enviros, who really are just a few people, prioritize going after him instead of dealing with the largest oil and gas lease sale in Utah history, or the fact that Norton's parting gift was to declare that all the county road claims everywhere are valid, or Bennett's proposal, or Hatch's separate one, to sell off large blocks of public land to provide funding for water pipelines and roads and utility corridors?"

Of course, I didn't suggest they abandon any of that. And Hedden knew it. What I proposed was "a three sentence press release." What I was suggesting, even to the point of reiterating Hedden's own words was that, "Industrial-strength recreation holds more potential to disrupt natural processes on a broad scale than just about anything else." I thought that maybe he and others might finally want to speak out against the entire 'disrupting' impact of out-of-control recreation, and acknowledge that the tourist/amenities economy brought destructive impacts as well; that it was a serious component when one measured the long-term threats to the landscape of the American West. I thought such recognition might be a turning point and a new beginning for Utah's mainstream greens.

But those words from Bill Hedden had come in a different time.

(NOTE: Eight years later, as extreme sports become an even greater intrusion on public lands and wilderness, and as the impact from new "sports," like BASE jumping and arch swinging make national headlines, environmental groups in Utah continue to maintain a predictable silence. Currently, BASE jumper/stunt performer Sketchy Andy Lewis faces charges at Arches National Park; yet, Lewis might want to call Hedden as a witness for the defense. As Hedden noted regarding Potter's Delicate Arch climb, "if you got there five minutes after his desecration, there would have been no visible trace." Sketchy Andy may have allies in unexpected places)

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A DEATH IN THE FAMILY...

In late October 2006, I was headed home from Tooele, where we printed *The Zephyr*, with a truck load of new papers and was stuck in a godawful traffic jam near Price on US 6/50. I called my best friend, former County Attorney Bill Bengé, to tell him I'd be late. Lately, Bill had been helping me unload the huge pile of 15,000 *Zephyrs* from my ancient truck to my front porch, though the last time, he'd lent a hand, I'd been worried about his blueish color and lost breath. "It's good for me," he'd wink. "You know how much I love exercise." Now I told him we'd just wait until the weekend to unload.

Bill had been an integral part of *The Zephyr* since Day 1...since before Day 1, in fact. Going back to the winter of 1988-89, as the idea of *The Zephyr* began to grow, my greatest handicap was a lack of money (what else is new?). How would I afford the computers and printers we'd need to make it work? Bill had graciously offered his own, letting me use it after hours. And he'd become a regular contributor with his "Willie Flocko's Country Kitchen."

But on that October afternoon, as I fumed in traffic, he warned me to take it easy. "Life is short, Stiles....Don't blow a fuse over nothing." It was good advice and the last time I'd hear his voice. On

Friday evening, October 20, Bill had gone to a party at the Back of Beyond Book Store. Headed home, he stopped at City Market to grab a few snacks. Standing in the checkout line, Bill suddenly grabbed his chest and without a word, fell to the floor. He died almost instantly. Earlier that summer, he had complained about a numbness in his arms and throat, and one day sharing breakfast together at the Moab Diner, he'd almost passed out from the pain. He was scheduled to see a doctor in November. Now my old friend was gone.

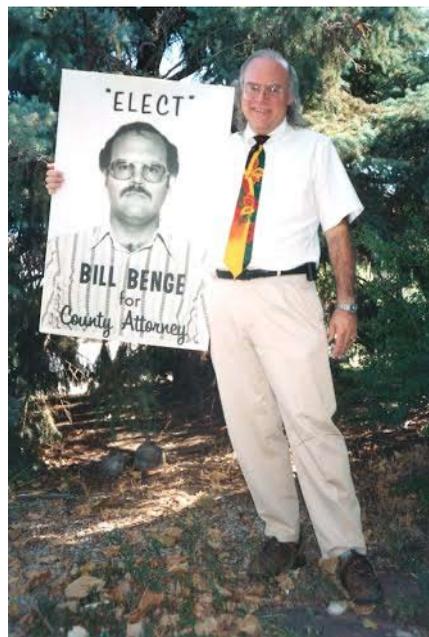
It always sounds so trite to say it, but Bill was like a brother to me. We argued, had fallings-out, made up, shared our darkest thoughts and our highest hopes and dreams...the way brothers do. He saved my life once--really; and there was a time when I was able to re-pay the debt.

In the last year of Bill's life, we spent a significant amount of our time together reminiscing and lamenting the changes that had transformed Moab in the last decade. We were very good at it. It had been, for years, a quiet, albeit oddly diverse little community; now, as we all know, in little more than a decade, Moab had become just another New West real estate market to be exploited and sold off in quarter-acre parcels. We barely recognized our old town anymore.

We often had breakfast at the Moab Diner, one of the few cafes left in Moab that didn't exist merely for the tourist traffic. That is to say, it was still affordable and the waitresses recognized us. On one of our last trips to the diner, however, we found our café so crammed with strange faces that we had to take a number and wait for a table. It wasn't the Diner's fault--it had simply been overwhelmed by its own success. But Bill turned to me and said, "It's over, Stiles."

The day Bill was buried, his will was discovered and I learned that he'd named me the executor of his estate. I spent the next 18 months immersed in the artifacts of Bill's life. It was one of the most bittersweet times, as I came upon one 'Willie Flocko' reminder after another, I'd find myself smiling at the memory, but grieving that those days were gone. After Bill left us, Moab, for me, was never the same.

Link to "Bill Bengé, Old Friend"



<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/april-may2007/bbenge.html>

BRAVE NEW WEST...THE BOOK &...THE MOVIE?

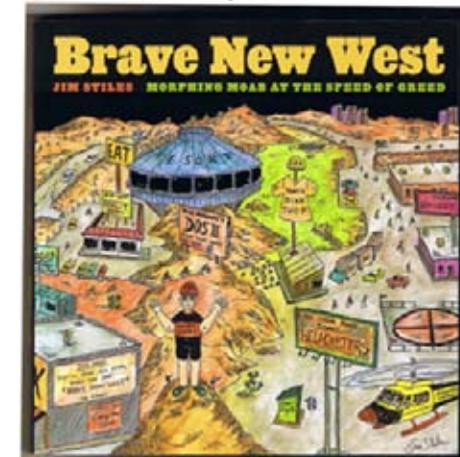
Back in 2003, the University of Arizona Press contacted me about doing a book. At the time, I doubted my ability to complete the project, but a year later, they asked again and I decided to give it a try. The project dragged on for years. I sent them a proposal; the submissions editor sent it to her advisory group for review; while one reviewer feared the book might become little more than an anti-mountain bike rant, enthusiasm was still high. But somehow the proposal was set aside and misplaced and languished in a box for months. When I jogged editor's memory, I was sent a contract inside a week.

I wrote the book in a year and submitted it by the August 1, 2005 deadline to assure it would be published by October 2006. But the manuscript sat a while longer and finally, when 'Brave New West: Morphing Moab at the Speed of Greed' was finally published in the Spring of 2007, the book was already outdated. I could have filled another book and updated much of the information that BNW contained. Much of the background to BNW would have stayed the same, but as the 'New West' exerted its influence at an ever increasing and alarming rate, the last half of the book was already outdated. At least the theme was still current and I made the best of it.

I knew from the get-go that university presses rarely have the financial resources to promote a book the way they'd like to, and I have never been much of a self-promoter either. The University of Arizona Press set up readings in Moab at Back of Beyond and at Ken Sanders Books in Salt Lake City. UAP set up an interview with KCPW public radio in Park City and attempted the same with KUER, but we never heard back from the latter. In Salt Lake we had a great turnout. My old friend Ken Sleight came up from Moab to introduce me, and since my fear of public speaking borders on phobia, Ken was there to catch me if I passed out. Fortunately I survived the evening. The event in Moab was also a great success, but when it came to me scheduling events of my own, I was a miserable failure. And when we did manage to gather a group--we had readings in Grand Junction, Springdale, Utah and Torrey, Utah--the organizers had trouble obtaining copies for BNW for me to sign. Not having books to sign at a book signing was not an optimal situation.

The 'Salt Lake Tribune' did a story on the book, but even that experience was a mixed bag. I received a call from Trib reporter Anne Wilson (no relation to Moab's AW). I met her at the Moab Diner and she introduced herself by saying, "I'm the food editor at the Trib, I haven't read your book and I've never heard of *The Zephyr*...But here I am." It was an inauspicious beginning.

But Anne seemed like a nice person and I did my best over the next few days to explain 'The Zephyr' and the 'Brave New West.' We traveled to Arches with photographer Ramin Rahimian for pictures and we almost got arrested by a ranger for not having a film permit. Fortunately an old friend and NPS staffer Anne Corson intervened on our behalf (Though my recollection is that she first instructed the ranger to arrest us.)



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I had some good chats with Ms. Wilson and on our last day, we went to lunch at the MD Ranch House. Over a burger and fries, Wilson smiled and confessed, "You know, you're nothing like what my editor told me to expect."

"Really? I said. "...how am I?"

"I like you a lot," she exclaimed. "And you're even funny."

I was taken aback. "Well...what did your editor say I was like?" I asked.

Anne replied, "He said you would be very difficult and that you are a hermit nutcase."

A hermit nut case? I had to wonder if this was the same editor who'd been so receptive to Scott Groene's 'Stiles as Barney Fife' essay, but I never discovered his identity.

When the story came out, the editors distilled everything I'd talked about and the entire content of the book into the headline: "Activist Says Adventurers are Ruining Moab." The rest of the story did a fairly decent job of recounting my fears about the changing West and that mountain bikes and adventure tours were merely symptomatic of a recreation culture that was creating its own kinds of impacts. And yet, my passing references to departed friends Herb Ringer and Bill Bengé seemed to assume more column inches than I would have expected. The fact that I was still spreading Herb's ashes and still had some of Bill's gumbo in my fridge made me sound like some kind of a ghoulish collector of artifacts of the dead. But as my friend Ken Sanders advised, "Never complain about a front page story, even if it's bad and even if it's below the fold."

Elsewhere, the reviews were good, though High Country News chose a 27 year old mountain biker to offer an opinion about 'Brave New West,' and the author penned an opinion called, "You

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Ain't From Around Here, Are You?" and depicted me as some kind of shit-kicking redneck who didn't take kindly to uppity newcomers.

'Brave New West' sold out its first press run in 2010, but I received a letter from UAP, explaining that because of the complexity and cost of re-printing a book with so many illustrations, they would be unable to do a second run. The book is now out-of-print, except for the 100 copies I still own and distribute to new members of The Zephyr Backbone. I've thought of approaching other publishers to put BNW in print, but sloth and a total lack of ambition has kept me from doing so.

A year before 'Brave New West' was published, I got a call from a documentary filmmaker Dru Carr. He and Doug Hawes-Davis owned a production company in Montana called High Plains Films and had recently learned about The Zephyr from occasional contributor Ned Mudd. They were interested in coming to Utah and pursuing the idea of a short film about my little rag. We met in the spring on 2006 and for the next year or more, they were frequent visitors. Doug and Dru are salt of the earth guys and I enjoyed my time with them, so sometimes I grew weary of being

'wired' all the time. One day we went to Moab to visit a few of my favorite hangouts. I was having a bagel with my old pal Bill Koci, and Doug and Dru wanted some shots of us walking down Main Street. I was in an especially grumpy mood that day and as Bill and I did our performance walk, Bill said, "Who are these guys anyway?" I snapped, "They've been following me around for months. It's driving me crazy." When we turned around and made our way back to the camera, Dru grinned and said, "You know, your mic is hot. WE can hear everything you're saying." Never had I felt so mortified.

"Brave New West," the film, came out in 2008. It aired at festivals around the country and eventually appeared on public television channels across the country, but I don't think it ever aired on the PBS station in Salt Lake City, KUED.

Here's the link to the film:

http://www.highplainsfilms.org/hpf/films/brave_new_west

AND FINALLY...THE AUSSIE EXPERIMENT, AN UNEXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT & THE GREENING OF WILDERNESS 2

By 2008, the inevitable seemed unavoidable. The Zephyr was no longer a Moab-based newspaper. Main Street businesses were dominated by "Adventure" signs. I didn't know the businesses and I didn't know the people who owned them. They were now Moabites and the future of the community would belong to them. My ads declined further; in fact, after about 2007, I even quit looking for new revenue sources. There was something liberating in all this. I had been working for a year on a sequel to my 2005 "Greening of Wilderne\$\$" story. "Greening 2" appeared in the August/September 2008 issue. To give you an idea how little I was concerned with being anything but honest, the introduction to the cover story was called,

ON THE RECORD? OFF THE RECORD? POLITICALLY CORRECT? POLITICALLY INCORRECT? I SAY, "SCREW IT."

I wrote, "When I started the Zephyr, I had to make a choice that I didn't even realize when I made it. I could either be honest (to my own values at least), even painfully blunt, or I could try to be liked. My ornery personality probably made that decision for me.

"Over the years, as a result, I collected more than any man's fair share of enemies and adversaries, especially in Moab. But I came to appreciate the opposition, if they would just express themselves as openly and honestly as I challenged their perspectives."

The problem was, the 'opposition' wouldn't say a word, at least not in print. My introduction continued:

"This is no ordinary time. A few weeks ago, the Associated Press ran a story called, 'Everything Seemingly is Spinning Out of Control.' From natural disasters to the price of airfares, the falling dollar, the rising cost of gas, the sports scandals, global warming, wars—where do we go to feel better about anything? Or should we? Is it Reality Time, at long last? The AP story concludes, '...maybe this is what the 21st century will be about — a great unraveling of some things long taken for granted.'

"Old solutions don't work anymore and thinking, in this day and age, that the end somehow

continued on next page...

NEW BACKBONE MEMBERS for December 2013/January 2014

Michael Yates
Boulder, CO

Scott Grunder
Boise ID

Chris Carrier
Paonia, CO

Sara Melnicoff
Moab, UT

Becky Morton
Oakland, CA

**ALSO..The Un-Tooned
New Backboners...**

Barbara Brown
Idaho Falls, ID

Keith Harger
Jackson, WY

Garrett Wilson
Sandy, UT

William Dunlap
Lake Oswego, OR

**AND THANKS TO
THESE FRIENDS
AS WELL...**

Lewis Downey
Salt Lake City, UT

Julie Zych
Milwaukee, WI

David Wegner
Alexandria, VA

Izzy Nelson
Moab UT

Michael Bloomberg
Fenton, MO

Lynn Curt
Salt Lake City, UT

Linda Jalbert
GRAND CANYON, AZ

Andrew McGregor
Glenwood Springs, CO

AmeriCandy Co, Inc
Louisville, KY

Catherine Lutz
Aspen, CO

Kelly Rowell
Flagstaff, AZ

Pamilla Bina
St. George, UT

Patrick Flynn
Paradox, CO

Rand Hirschi
Salt Lake City, UT

