



TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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AN AUTUMN'S VIEW FROM ABAJO PEAK

Where did summer go? How could we already be into autumn, that lovely but most melancholy season of the year?

Time just isn't what it used to be.

A few weeks ago, I stepped outside at 3 AM and saw, in the eastern sky, the constellation Orion, rising again after a four month absence. It is a portent of shorter days and long nights and cold weather.

For better or worse, my life is steeped in tradition and hopeless sentimentality, and the fall always aggravates that condition. Everything I do triggers some distant memory and almost every date on the calendar is an "anniversary," a commemoration of some event that is utterly meaningless to anyone but me...

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I remember when and where I drank my first Dr. Pepper.

I have a small jewelry box that belonged to my grandfather that was given to me after he died. Decades later, it still contains the same piece of Dentyne gum he put there a few days before he passed away.

When Bill Benge died three years ago, he'd just given me a pot of his famous shrimp remoulade...I still can't bring myself to finish what remains in my freezer.

A 1963 Volvo that I bought in 1981 and which was, for years, my only mode of transportation, still resides in my back yard. It is slowly rotting into the ground and has become home to living entities I normally set traps for. But I can't seem to part with the

old car. It's a familiar and needed component of my comfort view shed.

I save gasoline receipts from 1973 and I have a champagne bottle cap that a girl who I was hopelessly and secretly in love with stuck on my thumb at a college dance.

I seem to remember almost everything. My life is full of mementoes and memories and yet I will be damned if I can ever recall where I put my car keys or my reading glasses....

And every summer I make the hike to the summit of my favorite mountain. I scribble an addendum to the cluster of notes I have hidden in a film can, 17 paces from the register box, eat my artichoke hearts and Dr. Pepper, linger a while to absorb the view, then walk back to the pass.

I've made twenty-four trips to the top since that first hike on September 3, 1985, with a friend who died just four months later. This year I returned, exactly 24 years to the hour. It hasn't changed much from year to year. Even my lungs and legs functioned almost as well as they did so long ago, for which I am most grateful.

Though a few of my friends know the destination of my annual pilgrimage, I can guarantee this...it's NOT Abajo Peak.



I visited *that* summit last month as well, though the experience is not quite the same.

No walking is required; a two wheel drive gravel road hugs the flanks of the Blue Mountains, just west of Monticello, winds around the base of South Peak and finally approaches the summit from the west side. And the view is partially obstructed by a stunning array of radio and tv towers, microwave dishes, concrete bunker buildings and an assorted selection of warning signs that tell the "peak bagger" of this particular mountain to not touch anything.

**But for me, within this panorama
is where most of my life
has played out.
For years, my Abajo Peak view
was my dream and
my ultimate destination...
a place I obsessed over.**

The view is still spectacular, but very different from my anonymous summit, where even at night, it's almost impossible to see signs of civilization. Besides the communications jungle, the land below Abajo Peak is more developed. I can see Monticello, of course, though to its credit, it has changed very little. I credit its timeless nature to the complete absence of bars, brew pubs and bike shops and that its biggest tourist attraction is the Mormon mini-temple.

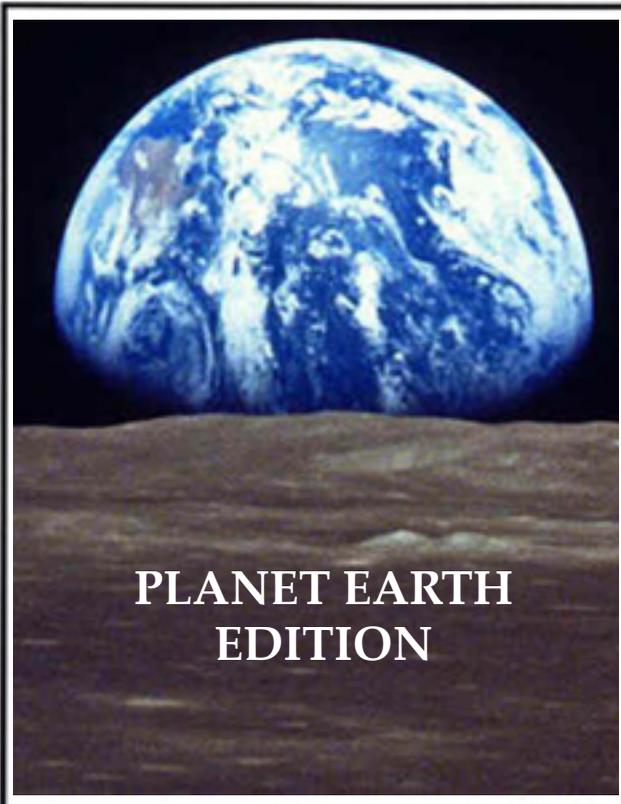
To the east the land is agricultural, looking north I can spot some of the new SITLA residential developments, and at night, I can see the glow of Cortez, Colorado and even Moab 55 miles to the north.

But for me, within this panorama is where most of my life has played out. For years, my Abajo Peak view was my dream and my ultimate destination, a place I obsessed over from the distant green trenches of Louisville Kentucky.

It was down there that I met Ed Abbey and most of the people I still call friends today. It was where I met my future ex-wife! It's where my beloved dogs lived out their lives chasing jackrabbits and ground squirrels (in violation of federal regulations) and where they died old and happy. And it's where my cats were born and where they now, in ancient age, sleep and eat and live a life most of us can only envy.

This is where I have lived and worked and played and grieved and wandered and watched, and where I became hopelessly lost and found, again and again.

Down there is my life. And somewhere, from another peak, is yours as well. Wherever the future takes us, we will all have our memories. From this vista, on a crisp autumn afternoon, they seem particularly clear.



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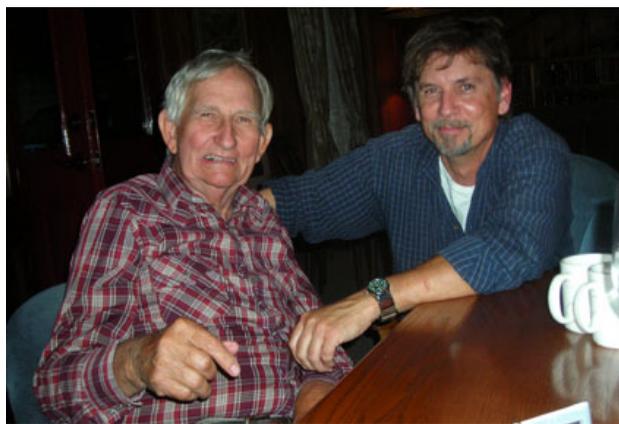
OUR BEST MEMORIES ARE OUR BEST FRIENDS.

A Belated Happy Birthday to my Pal, Ken Sleight...

From my vantage point on Abajo Peak, I'm comforted to know that my dear friend Ken Sleight is still out there tilting windmills at Pack Creek Ranch. He's probably, at this very moment, pissed off about something or telling stories or cursing his computer, or chasing a horse around the corral. I'd bet he's decked out in an old pair of boots, faded jeans, his shirttail's out and he probably forgot to shave this morning.

Thank God for Ken Sleight.

I'm lousy at remembering birthdays, perhaps because I'm so accustomed to ignoring my own, but Ken turned 80 in August and that's a milestone worth noting. The accomplishment, of course, isn't



Sleight & Stiles, 2008

the number but the life he has put into it.

I met Ken more than 30 years ago, when I was working behind the visitor center desk at Arches National Park. Ken bought some books, asked if he could write a check, I spotted his name and recognized it from Abbey's reference to him in *Slickrock*. We've been friends ever since.

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Ken has been speaking his mind for half a century. He was doing battle with the Bureau of Reclamation over Glen Canyon Dam when the Sierra Club was bending over and he's been playing Don Quixote ever since. Sleight has riled up more than his share of Westerners and taken the heat with grace and a grin. I've tried to learn from him.

But more than being a mentor, he has been a gentle friend to me in the darkest and brightest of times. We all have our seminal moments and meeting Ken Sleight was one of mine. I don't know where I'd be today had I not met Ken.

So, Ken...Seldom Seen...a belated Happy Birthday to you from one of your biggest admirers.

THE FUTURE SHRINKING COLORADO RIVER...

On the morning after Ed Abbey died in 1989, a reporter visited Ken Sleight at his Pack Creek Ranch home. Full of emotion and still reeling from the shock of his friend's death, Ken said, "The greatest tribute we could ever pay Edward Abbey would be to drain that damned Lake Powell."

According to researchers at the University of Colorado, Mother Nature may someday grant that wish. Abbey always had more faith in Nature than he did in the wisdom of Man, so it makes perfect sense. However, it may take a while to see his dream realized. In the meantime, recreationists water ski in oblivion, agri-business and developers keep sucking water from the great reservoirs and power users turn up the air conditioning. After all, it's their grandchildren who will pay the price for our stupidity...who cares?

But if climate change continues to reduce Colorado River flows by 10% annually, the chance of total reservoir depletion jumps to 25% by 2057. And if flows fall by as much as 25% annually, the odds of total depletion are 50-50.

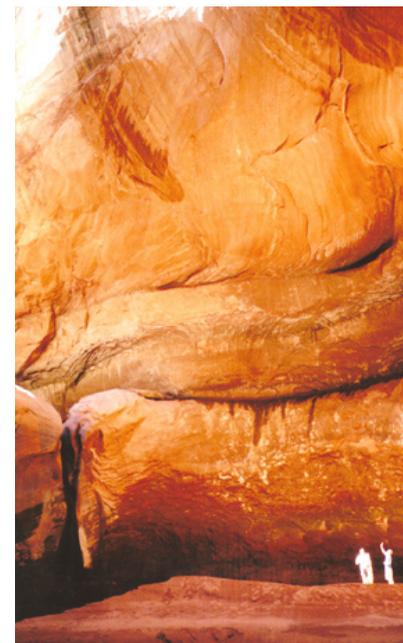
Balaji Rajagopalan and other researchers at the university believe that the massive storage reservoirs on the Colorado River might sustain the needs of a growing southwest population for a few more decades if water management policies are changed. Their findings were recently published in the journal, *Water Resources Research*, by the American Geophysical Union (AGU).

But Rajagopalan warns, "...the more severe the drying with climate change, the more likely we will see shortages and perhaps empty reservoirs despite our best efforts."

Ken Nowak, a graduate student with CU-Boulder's Center for Advanced Decision Support for Water and Environmental Systems, and the study's co-author says. "The important thing is not to get lulled into a sense of safety or security with the near-term resiliency of the Colorado River basin water supply. If we

do, we're in for a rude awakening."

When a prolonged drought reduced the reservoir level of Lake Powell by almost 150 feet and its total storage capacity shrank by almost two-thirds, the public's interest in water issues and the restoration of Glen Canyon grew dramatically. But our short attention spans and the lack of long term dedication to a cause seems to always be our undoing.



In 2005, the drought exposed parts of Glen Canyon that had been submerged for decades, including Cathedral in the Desert.

In 2009, its is once again, under almost 100 feet of water.

Two wet years in the Colorado River basin have raised reservoir levels at Powell to within 60 feet of maximum pool level again and subsequently, the "rude awakening" Mr. Nowak speaks of hardly raises an eyebrow.

But the study's long term predictions are sobering.

Because the storage capacity of the larger reservoirs contains as much as 60 million acre feet of water, the researchers believe there is less than a 10% chance of fully depleting water storage in any given year by 2026. But if climate change continues to reduce Colorado River flows by 10% annually, the chance of total reservoir depletion jumps to 25% by 2057. And if flows fall by as much as 25% annually, the odds of total depletion are 50-50.

And again, these projections are based on the assumption that dramatic changes are made in the way we store Colorado River water and the way its 30 million consumers use it. Without serious conservation efforts, these projections mean nothing.

Somehow, I suspect if Abbey were here right now, he'd say, "Drink up my friends. Turn on the tap and let it run...let's get this over with NOW."

For more on this story follow this link:
www.agu.org/sci_soc/prrl/2009-20.html

Better a cruel Truth,
than a comfortable delusion.

Edward Abbey

For Art Goodtimes

