Patty Rambert Photos on Facing Page

1. On top of Mt. Lawlor with Strawberry Peak in the background (HPS).
2. Carrying not only her own pack but that of a fatigued fellow hiker as well.
4. From the cover of the Winter 2004 WTC Newsletter “Peak Bagging” issue.
5. On top of Black Giant with Barbara Scholle.
6. In her full luau regalia as WTC Group 2 leader on the bus to snow camp with Ed Cottone and Jennie Thomas.
8. On the phone planning her next trip while the others lounge atop Mt. Conness.
9. On the way to Thor peak, crossing paths with Doug Mantle.
10. At the trailhead with her faithful Subaru Outback.
11. On New Year’s Day, 2005, flashing the most famous smile in climbing.

Deja Vu... All Over Again

Volunteering to take over as Sierra Echo Editor wasn’t the easiest decision I’ve made. Last year, after four years editing the WTC Newsletter, I handed the job over to fresh new blood. Patty Rambert, who, as SPS Chair, pitched the project to me. I held out for a bit, thinking I’d be nuts to throw myself back into a newsletter. But the proof in her persuasiveness is this: I volunteered before even asking for a job description. Jim Greenwald, SPS Chair, who, as SPS Chair, pitched the project to me.

Speaking of the Southern Sierra, it’s time to start planning fall and winter trips. The Southern Sierra is the overlooked jewel of California. It’s a fine area to introduce prospective members to the Sierra, and fall and winter can be ideal times to explore the sublime beauty of the region.

Climb safe. — Gary Schenk, SPS Chair

Outings Sign-up

The listing of SPS Outings begins on page 4 of this quarter’s Echo. Email contact info for the leaders of these trips appears on page 7. To apply as a participant on an outing send a SASE (or email if requested), Sierra Club member number, experience resume, conditioning routine, home and work phone numbers, email address (if applicable), ride-share information and—for restricted trips only—the medical information form. All participants on Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver, available at www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms, or from the Outings Department at (435) 977-8528. All outings designated MR or ER are restricted trips open only to Sierra Club members with the appropriate rock or snow skills and participants are required by the National Sierra Club to complete the medical information form, available at www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/participant/forms/forms/medical

On Our Cover

In a rare, reflective and quiet moment, Patty Rambert, with the all-important register at her side, quietly contemplates Mt. Whitney from the summit of Thor Peak.

The Fine Print

The Sierra Echo is a quarterly publication of the Sierra Peaks Section of the Sierra Club’s Angeles Chapter. For more information see the back page of this newsletter. All questions, copy and photo submissions should be directed to Edd Ruskowitz, Editor, The Sierra Echo, preferably via email at hikinched@yahoo.com. Mailing address is 1616 E. 4th Street, Suite 205, Santa Ana, CA 92701. The Echo will also be available in color (with leader contact info omitted) as a PDF download at the SPS website.
July 15-16 | Sat-Sun
Sierra Peaks
MR Independence Ph (11,744’) & University (13,632’)
Sat: backpack to Robinson Lk. (2 mi, 2,100’ gain) Independence Ph (1,300’ gain). Sun: climb University and hike out(5 mi rt, 3,200’ gain). CI 3 rock ice & crampons req. Medical form and helmets req’d. Send sase/email with SC# & H&W phones to Ldr: Virgil Pepco, Co-Ldr: Larry Hook.

July 21-22 | Fri-Wed
Sierra Peaks
M/ER North Guard (13,327’), Brower (13,570’), South Guard (13,224’), Jordan (13,444’), Stanford (12,638’)
Climb via loop from Onion Valley. Strenuous x-backpacking, class 3-4. Sat: moderate-paced backpack from Ledgepole in Sequoia National Park to camp at Lassen Lake and group happy hour, 5 mi 3000’ gain. Sun: climb the class 2 south slope to the summit (1200’ gain) and pack out. This trip involves much cross-country travel with high altitude gain on steep granite slabs is required. Send sase or email with H&W phones, recent conditioning/backpack experience and $5 permit fee to Ldr: Anna Maria Richardson. Co-Ldr: Scott Nelson.

July 22-23 | Sat-Sun
Sierra Peaks
MR Mt Morgan (S). (13,748’)
A prominent peak along the ridgeline above Rock Creek Lake, Mount Morgan is easy to attain and offers spectacular views. Sat: backpack to Francis Lake, 4 mi, 1200’ gain. Climb the peak via north ridge Sat pm or Sun (4.5 mi, 2900’ gain). Pack out on Sun. WTC or equivalent required. Send experience, conditioning, SC# & email info via email to Ldr: Helen Qian, Scott Leavitt.

July 22-24 | Sat-Mon
Sierra Peaks
Cirque Ph (12,900’)
SPS Introductory trip in eastern Sierra geared to prospective SPSers and WTC students. Related and enjoyable pace. Sat backpack from Horseshoe Meadows at 10,000’ to Long Lake at 11,160’ (6 mi, 1200’ gain). Sat evening legendary community happy hour. Sun climb class 1 Cirque Ph (5 mi, 1800’ gain). Sun evening legendary community happy hour. Mon hike out

Aug 5-7 | Sat-Mon
Sierra Peaks, WTC
Red Slate Mtns (13,123’)
SPS Intro trip geared to WTC students and prospective SPSers. Related, causal, and enjoyable. Sat backpack up the McGee Creek to McGee Lakes at 11,040’, 6 mi, 2900’ gain. Sun climb class 1 Mountaineer Peak, 4 mi rt, 2200’ gain, considerable cross country. Mon hike out. Legendary community happy hour Sat and Sun. Send sase with $5 permit fee, recent conditioning and high altitude experience, H&W phones and ride share info to Ldr: Patty Kline. Asst: Kent Schrivid.

Aug 11-13 | Fri-Sun
Sierra Peaks
MR Junction (13,845’)
Day 1 hike into TIN (6400) over Sheppard Pass to Antil Camp (10,127’), 5 mi, 4217’ gain. Day 2 climb Sheppard Pass and class 3 SW ridge, 9 mi, 3720’ gain. Day 3 climb Sheppard Pass, 5 mi, 3000’ gain. Total stats: 19.6 mi, 8437’ gain. Restricted to Sierra Club members. Medical form and helmets req’d. Club. Send SASE / email with conditioning, experience, SC#, and $5 permit fee to Ldr: Darrick Danta, Asst. Keith Martin.

Aug 12-13 | Sat-Sun
Sierra Peaks
Mt Agassiz (13,893’)
Sat backpack from South Lake trailhead to Bishop Lake, 4 mi 1400’ gain. Sun climb Mt. Agassiz from Bishop Pass, 6 mi, 2700’ gain, then backpack out 4 mi. Send sase or email, H&W phones, $5 permit fee, recent conditioning, experience and ride share info to Ldr: Steve Curry. Asst: Anne Marie Richardson.

Aug 12-13 | Sat-Sun
Sierra Peaks
WTC Sierra Peaks
Mt Silliman (12,976’), Gayley (13,510’)
Day 1 hike from Glacier Lodge (8000’) to camp at lake 5 of Temple Crag (11,850’), 3.8, 3535’ gain. Day 2 climb Gayley via cd 3 southwest ridge, 2 mi, 1670’. Day 3 climb Temple Crag via cd 3 southeast face, 1.3 mi, 1,130’ gain, then hike out 3.8 miles. Total stats: 10.9 miles, 6650’ gain. Restricted to Sierra Club members. Medical form and helmets req’d. Send SASE / email with conditioning, experience, SC# and $5 permit fee to Ldr: Darrick Danta, Asst. Keith Martin.

Aug 25-27 | Fri-Sun
PVBS, SPS, NSS, WAS
Mont Meeker (14,158’)
SPS Intro trip for eastern Sierra geared to prospective SPSers and WTC students. Related and enjoyable pace. Sat backpack over Keough Pass to Charlotte Lake at 10,370’ in 8.5 mi and 2600’ gain. Sat and Sun evenings legendary community happy hours. Sun climb Bago in 2.5 mi and 1900’ gain and explore spectacularly scenic surrounding areas. Mon backpack out in 8.5 mi, 1500’ gain. Send sase, $5 permit fee per person, recent conditioning and high altitude experience, H&W phones, ride share and H&W phones. Send sase & $5 permit fee to Ldr: Patty Kline. Asst: Joe Wankum.

Aug 25-27 | Fri-Sun
Sierra Peaks
Mt Meeker (12,919’)
WTC, Sierra Peaks
Mount Meeker weekend backpack. Sat 5 mi, 4000’ to camp and another 2,300 mi rt to Florence; community happy hour. Sun climb VanDer and pack out 11.5 mi and 2600’ gain to Cloudripper. Send email or sase with H&W phones, recent conditioning and your most outrageous culinary ideas to Ldr: Ron Campbell. Asst: Georgette Ricke.

Aug 19-20 | Sat - Sun
Sierra Peaks
WTC, Sierra Peaks
# Cloudbinder (13,528’)
Continental Divide backpack. Sat backpack to Florence for Decedent Wilderness Weekend IV. Sat backpack 7 mi, 3400’ gain to Sixth Lake for 5-day dining experience. Sun work off those calories with 2 mi, 2400’ gain to Cloudripper. Send email or sase with H&W phones, recent conditioning and your most outrageous culinary ideas to Ldr: Ron Campbell. Asst: Georgette Ricke.

Aug 19-21 | Sat-Mon
Sierra Peaks
Mount Bagu (11,870’)
Two day trip for eastern Sierra geared to prospective SPSers and WTC students. Related and enjoyable pace. Sat backpack over Keough Pass to Charlotte Lake at 10,370’ in 8.5 mi and 2600’ gain. Sat and Sun evenings legendary community happy hours. Sun climb Bago in 2.5 mi and 1900’ gain and explore spectacularly scenic surrounding areas. Mon backpack out in 8.5 mi, 1500’ gain. Send sase, $5 permit fee per person, recent conditioning and high altitude experience, H&W phones, ride share and H&W phones. Send sase & $5 permit fee to Ldr: Patty Kline. Asst: Joe Wankum.

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Sierra Peaks
Mount Bagu (11,870’)
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Mount Bagu weekend backpack. Sat backpack to Florence for Decedent Wilderness Weekend IV. Sat backpack 7 mi, 3400’ gain to Sixth Lake for 5-day dining experience. Sun work off those calories with 2 mi, 2400’ gain to Cloudripper. Send email or sase with H&W phones, recent conditioning and your most outrageous culinary ideas to Ldr: Ron Campbell. Asst: Georgette Ricke.
Sept 24: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
M Split Mtn, (14,058')
Climb another 14'er in the fall. Sat backpack up to Red Lake, approx 5 mi, 3700' gain. Sun climb the peak via the north slope, approx 10 mi at 3600' gain. Mon pack out. HTC required. Send e-mail or see with resume, conditioning, contact and ride share info to Ldr: Scott Leavitt, Helen Qian

Sept 24: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
Mt Langley (14,026')
Relatively relaxed but moderately strenuous backpack to bag the southernmost 14er in the United States. Late Sat morning pack in to Long Lake from Cottonwood Lakes Trailhead, 7 mi, 1500' gain (1200'), Summit on Sun, with 3600' gain (2900'), followed by celebratory happy hour. Relax out to reach trailhead early afternoon Mon. Send 2 safes/1 e-mail & HTC, recent conditioning & experience (WTC leader if applicable) to Ldr: Gary Beikle, Asst: Wayne Vololare.

Sept 24: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
Mount Julius Caesar (13,200')
Labor Day weekend will find us packing out of Bishop to Honeyooken Lake Sat. (5.75 mi, 3200'), then ascend the glorious viewing perch that is Julius Caesar Sun. (6.6 mi at 2700') pack out Mon. Et tu? Send 2 safe/e-mail, HTC permit, no experience (WTC leader info), HTC phones and ride share info to Ldr: Edd Ruskowitz. Co-Ldr: John W. Robinson.

Sept 8-10: Fri-Sun Sierra Peaks
Wwonoga Pk (10,371') Redux
Leisurely paced ascent of a panoramic but unlisted peak coupled with two nights of extended upper-noon reflections to mark the near end of the SPS 50th Anniversary Celebration. Trip will emphasize renewing acquaintances with long time friends and welcoming newcomers. Camp both Fri and Sat nights at BLM Tule Cr facility (5120') near Lone Pine. Car pool Sat am up paved Horseshoe Mdw Rd for climb of Wwonoga or explore the gentle terrain at road's end (10,000'). Wonoga climb starts on Little Cottonwood Cr trail and ends with Cl MR. Total gain, 1100', 3 mi rt. Sun, for those interested, an optional car camp at Powers Well. Send sase or email with recent experience and conditioning to Ldr: Gary Beikle. Co-Ldrs: Mark Roberts, George Wysup. (12,033'):

Sept 15-17 / Fri-Sun Sierra Peaks
ER Clyde Minaret (12,281')
Class 4 climbing up this mountaineer's Peak and high point of the Minarets may also be attempted. Fri backpack about 8 mi, 2500' gain to camp in picturesque lake near base of peak. 2500' gain to summit Sat, hike our Sun. Experience on class 4 rock and appropriate fitness required. Restricted to Sierra Club members. Completed medical form and helmets will be required. Send e-mail or see with HTC resume including conditioning, SC#, email address, phone #, carpool info to Ldr: Gary Hudson. Co-Ldr: Larry Tindall.

Sept 21-24: Thu-Sun Sierra Peaks
MR Junction Pk (13,888'), Mt Tyndall (14,148')
Backpack up Shepherd Pass Trail (11 mi, 1700' gain), possibly to explore the gentle terrain at road's end (10,000'). Is good experience for technical climbing on Sierra peaks.约 3 mi, 2500' gain for the day. Participants must have harnessed, belayed, and clipping gear. A restricted trip, to participate you must be a member of the Sierra Club and have suitable rock climbing experience. Send resume info, completed medical form to Ldr: Ron Campbell. Asst: Virgil Shields. (12,033')

Sept 9-11: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
WTG, Sierra Peaks
MR Matterhorn Peak (12,279'), Twin Peaks (12,323'), Whorl Mountain
Sat backpack 3 mi, 1600' gain to camp near Horne Creek. Sun climb Matterhorn 1 mi, 1600' gain by southeast slope. Optional climb of Twin Peaks 1 mi, 1700' gain. Mon climb Whorl 2 mi, 1400' gain via southeast chute and out. Recent 3rd class rock experience required. Restricted to Sierra Club members. Medical form and helmets required. Send e-mail or see with HTC phones, recent conditioning and climbing resume, ride share info to Ldr: Ron Campbell. Asst: Virgil Shields. (12,323')

Sept 9-11: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
WTG, Sierra Peaks
MR Bloody Mtn (12,562')
SFS intro trip to a new and prospective SP's and WTC students. Moderate backpack for class 2 pk south of Mammoth. Sat backpack 8 mi, 2600' gain to Dorothy Lake. Sun climb Bloody 4 mi rt, 2400' gain, mostly cross country. Mon backpack our 8 mi, 2600' to lo sa. Legendary community happy hour Sat and Sun evenings. Send e-mail, HTC permit for person, conditioning and high altitude experience, HTC & Cell phones, ride share info to Ldr: Patty Blane. Asst: Kent Martin.

Sept 9-11: Sat-Mon Sierra Peaks
WTG, Sierra Peaks
MR Mount Langley (13,680'), Mt. Irvine, (13,770'), and Mt. Mallory (13,850')
This trip emphasizes backcountry skills. optic, mouse and camp setup. Strenuous two day trip including McAdie and possibly both Irvine and Mallory depending on the speed of the group. Sat backpack in via the Meyers Lakes trailhead. Climb to the Irvine Malhoy saddle and then to Mt. McAdie via Arc Pass. Restricted to Sierra Club members with 3rd class climbing experience. Send e-mail (preferred) or see with HTC phones, recent conditioning and climbing resume, ride share info, completed Medical Form and $15 check for the Whitney Zone permit fee to Ldr: Jennie Thomas. Asst: Neil Robbins.

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Sept 9-10: Sat - Sun Sierra Peaks
MR Mt. McAdie (13,680'), Mt. Irvine, (13,770'), and Mt. Mallory (13,850')
This trip emphasizes backcountry skills. Strenuous two day trip including McAdie and possibly both Irvine and Mallory depending on the speed of the group. Sat backpack in via the Meyers Lakes trailhead. Climb to the Irvine Malhoy saddle and then to Mt. McAdie via Arc Pass. Restricted to Sierra Club members with 3rd class climbing experience. Send e-mail (preferred) or see with HTC phones, recent conditioning and climbing resume, ride share info, completed Medical Form and $15 check for the Whitney Zone permit fee to Ldr: Jennie Thomas. Asst: Neil Robbins.

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Outing Leaders Contact Info

Leader contact information has been omitted for this online edition. Please see the print edition of the Echo or the Angeles Chapter Schedule of Activities for contact info.
TRIP REPORT
Mt. Williamson
JUNE 3–5, 2006
by ALEX AMIES

Five of us, Tom McDonnell (Assistant Leader), Greg Mason, Alexander Smirnoff, Augie Medina, and myself, departed from the car park at Shepherd Pass (Symmes Creek) trailhead at about 8 a.m. on Saturday. The plan was to climb the West Face of Mount Williamson. Greg negotiated the drive in over a dirt road labeled 4WD on the topo the night before with style in his Dodge minivan.

We hiked for about 7 hours up the trail to Anvil Camp where we spent Saturday night. Anvil camp was about half clear of snow and was where the snow began covering the trail.

On Sunday we departed camp at 5 a.m., heading up through the forest adjacent to camp. As we approached Shepherd Pass we spotted a herd of 7 big humps headed up the snow covered gully. We put crampons on and got our ice axes out for the ascent up to the pass.

Once up the pass it was a long hike up and down the talus and snow covered slopes to and across Williamson Bowl. From the east side of the second lake we got a good view of the chute that we were about to take up the West Face from nearly exactly where the photo in Secor’s High Sierra was taken (contrary to statements on Summitpost.com). The black stained rocks mentioned were wet with a waterfall during our trip.

We headed up the chute which was a little loose but mostly good climbing. The top 700 feet was covered in snow. At the top of the chute we found the class 3 chimney / crack. I set up a belay for a second happy hour before sleeping. The next day was the snow-covered slope leading to the summit. We topped out at about 3 p.m.

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Having done a better job on following the trail on the way down, we packed out to the cars, arriving in the hundred-degree heat of Owens Valley.

We reached Lone Pine late Saturday afternoon. We all stayed at Anvil Camp with us. Coincidentally, our location was also that of the trip report. Greg Mason and the others had the same idea. The plan was to go take a look at the summit of Trojan Peak. We all returned to the cars and drove on to Lone Pine to refuel.

The weather was perfect, sunny and not too hot. We were able to set up a campsite without too much trouble. We all agreed to lead them with us. Darrick Dunta, Susan Livingston, Harry Langenbacher, and Dave Gonzalez joined us on the trip.

The views from the summits of Trojan and Barnard were beautiful. The Sierra interior peaks were white with snow and sunlight sparkled on the mountainsides. Mt Whitney, Mt. Williamson and all the adjacent peaks were a mix of snow and rock.

The route back up Barnard was easier than up Trojan. The snow on Barnard was also mostly gone above the saddle – but the rocks were smaller, more like scree. On Trojan the rocks were large and had to be climbed over and around.

On Sunday we put on snow shoes and headed out of camp by 7 a.m. to climb the peaks. For first 1000 feet we hiked in snowshoes as the night had been warm with temperatures above freezing and the snow was soft. We were not able to put on our crampons till we were well over 10,000. Once crampons were

TRIP REPORT
Mt. Barnard & Trojan Peak
MAY 6–8, 2006

To avoid possible trailhead problems we all met in Lone Pine at the park for what was almost everyone’s 1st backpack of the season. Everyone was trying despite snow gear to reduce weight. We can remember the days when a 50–60 pound pack was considered “normal.” This weekend included crampons, ice axe and snow shoes, and most of us kept our packs in the mid to high 30s.

The last time the Larry & Barbee had been up George Creek was in 1986 and 1989. We had memories of major bush whacking, hiking in the stream, and lots of water. Conditions up George Creek, like the weight of our backpacks, have greatly improved. There is now a use trail that can be followed most of the way from the start to about 9200 feet where we encountered snow. There are sections where bushwhacking occurs and the use trail seems to disappear in the brush, but it did seem easier than in the 1980s. This is still a hard route and travel wasn’t fast. We crossed the creek 5-6 times on various logs, scrambled up loose scree, ducked under or around many a branch and crawled though or over a few bushy places.

Barbee Tidball & Patty Rambert needed the peaks and Larry agreed to lead them with us. Darrick Dunta, Susan Livingston, Harry Langenbacher, and Dave Gonzalez joined us on the trip. The weather was perfect, sunny and not too hot.

Saturday the group backpacked up to about 9500’ where Harry found a perfect dry place for our campsite. Tents were set up and after dinner everyone went to bed early, tired from the day’s struggles.

On Sunday we put on snow shoes and headed out of camp by 7 a.m. to climb the peaks. For first 1000 feet we hiked in snowshoes as the night had been warm with temperatures above freezing and the snow was soft. We were not able to put on our crampons till we were well over 10,000. Once crampons were

We made good time back to the cars and sent those in a rush on to the highway home. — Barbee & Larry
AUBURN DAM IS CONSIDERED AGAIN!

Some bad projects just never seem to go away. House Republican Conference Secretary John F. Doolittle (R-Roseville) announced that the House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee has approved over $187 million for water control, and watershed restoration projects throughout Northern California in the Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07) Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill. Included in the measure is $5 million to fund a feasibility study for a multipurpose dam on the American River at Auburn and $1 million to assess the feasibility of relocating Highway 49 where it crosses the American River between Auburn and Cool, California.

BEAR BRIGADE PUTS CANISTERS TO THE TEST – SACRAMENTO BEE

Food container for campers withstanding mauling

By M.S. Enkoji – Bee Staff Writer

Originally Published Friday, May 12, 2006

http://www.sacbee.com/content/newsstory/142545285-1070105.html

A few sliced-up honeydews and apples, bunches of grapes, melded with only sardines and a side of tortillas. It’s a meal that’s as much for a bear as it is for a human. Life is a balance at the Folsom City Zoo Sanctuary. The only problem is that the bears considered ignoring the canisters. “Bears are bottomless pits, pretty much,” van der Molen said.

Another set of bears, though, attacked a 700-cubic-inch model for a full half-hour. They slammed it, heaved it, packed it at and one point, one of them nudged it up the hillside and plunged into a pool with it. In the end, no one got any tortillas. BearVault canisters will be among the brands recommended by Sierra Interagency Black Bear Group for use in the Sierra.

The Folsom zoo crew actually did a good turn for their wildlife cousins who are endangering themselves when they come too close to humans. The canisters will discourage bear-people conflicts, which usually means the bear loses. Canisters in California backcountry have replaced other long-held methods such as stringing food in trees, which bears have learned to unstring. They can recognize an Igloos cooler almost like they can read the name.

The problem is spreading to wilderness areas in other states, said Hogan, who is picking up more sales on the East Coast. Overnight campers and hikers at Adirondack Park, the 48 contiguous states, were required to use bear canisters for the first time last year in certain portions of the park during camping season, said Lee Huesy, a manager at the Adirondack Mountain Club in Albany, N.Y. The nonprofit club owns land in the park.

As the campers grew, bears in the park began aggressively seeking human food, which left them unable to get their own food and created conflicts, she said.

“It’s not a bear problem,” Huesy said. “It’s a people problem.”
We were rounding a curve on Italian highway A2, two or three hours southeast of Rome, when the outline of Mt. Vesuvius suddenly loomed up before us. There were eight of us squeezed into the big Ford diesel van—our three grandkids, a son, two daughter-in-laws, and Jo and me—plus a jumble of luggage. Although we were scheduled to continue on to Positano on the Amalfi Coast that evening, we planned to return the next day to climb the mountain and to visit neighboring Pompeii. In the meantime, to test the grandkids’ grasp of history, I asked them what, in their opinion, was the most famous volcano in the world. Soon everyone in the van was involved in the discussion, and although not able to agree on any one single volcano, we came up with, in no particular order, our list of the world’s five most famous active spouters. See if you agree: Mauna Loa/Kilauea, Krakatou, Mt. Fuji, Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Vesuvius.

The point is that, almost two thousand years after its epic eruption, Mt. Vesuvius remains quite well-known. Located two-thirds of the way down the west coast of the Italian peninsula, 11 air miles east of Naples, 16 air miles NNE of Sorrento, and rising 4,202’ (1,276 m) above the shores of the Italian peninsula, Mt. Vesuvius is the only active volcano on the European Continent (Etna and Stromboli, also active, are on islands off the Italian coast). The volcanic activity in the Vesuvian area (including the nearby Phlegrean Fields, where in mythology the giants fought the Gods) dates back two million years, and is caused by subduction of the African plate, sliding northward beneath the Eurasian Plate at about one inch per year, a process which is slowly closing the Mediterranean Basin. Indeed, an ancient, much larger peak, Mt. Somma, once formed where Mt. Vesuvius now stands, eventually reaching 10,000’ in elevation. Seventeen thousand years ago, however, that peak blew up in a spectacular eruption, leaving only the arc-shaped north-eastern rim of its caldera still standing. Not long afterward, Mt. Vesuvius began to grow in the very middle of the Somma caldera, erupting every so often, but most notably in 79 AD, at which time the Roman cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae were destroyed. Since 79, at least sixteen less-devastating Vesuvian eruptions have been recorded, the most recent having taken place in 1944, during World War II.

The August 24, 79 AD eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, however, is the main reason why the volcano remains renowned today. And, as luck would have it, two Romans of note were nearby at that fateful time, one of them setting off to get a closer look at the phenomenon, the other one staying behind in safety to write letters in which he accurately described the event.

Meanwhile, his nephew and ward, Pliny the Younger (62-113 AD), remained in Misenum, where he observed the following: “(the eruptive plume’s) general appearance can best be expressed as being like a pine rather than any other tree, for it rose to a great height (one estimate is 66,000’) on a sort of trunk and then split off into branches. I imagine because it was thrust upwards by the first blast and then left unsupported as the pressure subsided, or else it was borne down by its own weight so that it spread out and gradually dispersed. Sometimes it looked white, sometimes blotched and dirty, according to the amount of soil and ashes it carried with it.” In recognition of the young Pliny’s description, this type of event is now known as a Plinian eruption. The May 18, 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, in fact, has been classified as Plinian.

Young Pliny goes on to describe what his uncle probably encountered off the coast of Pompeii: “Ashes were already falling, hotter and thicker as the ships drew near, followed by bits of pumice and blackened stones, charred and cracked by the flames . . . . Meanwhile on Mount Vesuvius broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points, their bright glare emphasized by the darkness of night.”

Turned away by the thick showers of hot cinders, pumice and rock, Pliny the Elder and Pomponianus decided to make their way back to the town of Misenum. Meanwhile, his nephew and ward, Pliny the Younger, ever curious, decided to see for himself what was going on. Arranging for a few ships to accompany him, he set sail for Pompeii, across the Bay of Naples.

Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), an indastrious Roman General and the author of the world’s first encyclopedia of natural science—the 37-volume Naturalis Historia—was that summer in command of the Roman fleet stationed at Misenum, just west of present day Naples. Observing the first stages of the eruption, he, ever curious, decided to see for himself what was going on. Arranging for a few ships to accompany him, he set sail for Pompeii, across the Bay of Naples.

Pliny the Younger continued: “We also saw the sea sucked away and apparently forced back by the earthquake: at any rate it receded from the shore so that quantities of sea creatures were left stranded on dry sand. On the landward side a fearful black cloud was rent by forked and quivering bursts of flame, and parted to reveal great tongues of fire, like flashes of lightning magnified in size. . . . We had scarcely sat down to rest when darkness fell, not the dark of a moonless or cloudy night, but as if the lamp had been put out in a closed room. You could hear the shrieks of women, the wailing of infants, and the shouting of men; some were calling their parents, others their children or their wives, trying to recognize them by their voices. People bewailed their own fate or that of their relatives, and there were some who prayed for death in their terror of dying.”

The eruption is thought to have lasted approximately 19 hours, during which time the volcano ejected about 1 cubic mile of ash and rock. The rim of the caldera of the ancient Mt. Somma protected the towns and villages lying to the northeast of Vesuvius, however Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and other towns to the west, south and southeast were in the direct path of the destruction. In Pompeii alone two thousand people are believed to have died, the vast majority as the result of suffocation by volcanic ashes and gases. Bizarrely, some of the Pompeian dead were immortalized—their bodies having left cavities in the hardened ash which were later filled with plaster—in casts preserving them much as they appeared at the time of their death.

Herculaneum, a seaside city with a population of about 5,000, which lay much closer to the crater, was buried under 75 ft. of ash deposited by a series of pyroclastic flows and mudflows. Due to the absence of bodily remains it was long believed that its inhabitants had escaped, but in the 1980s hundreds of skeletons were discovered in the former beach-side boat yard, where they had taken shelter. Many of the victims were carbonized by the intense heat, which reached temperatures of up to 750°. Some (continued next page)
of the victims were found with the tops of their skulls missing—their brains having exploded.

In total, it is estimated that as many as 10,000 people were killed during the event of 79 AD.

Survivors and looters carried out extensive salvaging operations after the eruption, but Pompeii and Herculanenum were never rebuilt. The towns’ locations were eventually forgotten and remained so until their accidental rediscovery in the 18th century.

To climb the still smoldering Mt. Vesuvius today is both easy and popular—the locals, in fact, claim that Vesuvius is the most visited volcano in the world. Arriving either by car or bus at the 3,800’ parking lot on the peak’s western side, and after paying an entrance fee of 6 Euros ($7.20) each, a mere 20-30 minute hike up a broad cinder path will lead one to the 3,800’ southwestern rim, overlooking the 1,800’ wide, 650’ deep crater.

Unfortunately, on the warm August day that we climbed Vesuvius, a dense cloud was clinging to the mountain top. After staring blankly into the fog-filled crater for a few minutes and then perusing a huge array of postcards at the rim-side souvenir shop, we hiked counter-clockwise about a third of the way around the crater, until we reached the trail’s end, where a sign, a fence and the proprietor of yet another souvenir shop all indicated that we could go no farther. What a disappointment! The fact is that during the 79 AD eruption, it is estimated that the crater floor was raised 20 to 30 feet to subject in change in elevation during every new eruption, creating the current out-of-bounds to peak baggers.

Retracking back toward the south rim trail, our fortunes improved a bit when a stiff wind came up, and, as if by magic, the cloud cover lifted. For a few moments, we could view not only the bottom of the crater, where disappoitingly little if any steam was arising, but also, off to the west, the waters of the Bay of Naples glinting in the bright afternoon sunlight. We took a few photos, hiked down to our van and then headed for Pompeii, which, we were not this climbing journal, would be worthy of several pages on its own.

All and all, it was a fascinating day, and Jo and I would like to think that, as a result of it, our grandkids (ages 10, 13 and 15) All and all, it was a fascinating day, and Jo and I would like to think that, as a result of it, our grandkids (ages 10, 13 and 15) and all would be knowledgeable about the eruption of Vesuvius and its aftermath.

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Was it not so long ago that the sparkle of laughter rang among the hillsides?

Yet she is a treasure, surely, for with an easy smile and grace,
Drawn from some secret place,
She charms beyond our measure...
Giving freely from some special place she finds within:

From the nowhere she comes into view,
... sometimes by design,
...... sometimes by chance meeting,
In the farthest reaches of the land:

But always with an aura of the mountain wildness about her,
Draped in a perfume drawn from distant meadows,
... From lofty peaks shrouded in snowy slumber,
...... From sere desert ridgelines abiding peacefully until the earth is reborn in
the welcome rain:

She is the joy of the mountain adventure, the very spirit of the tall summits:
She is vitality, the fullness of life:
She is Patty.     — Tom Hill