Muir and Me
by Heather Anderson

I like to think of John Muir as my role model, my mentor, but I am not like him in many ways, a tireless organizer, eloquent speaker, thorough, convincing, and prolific writer. Nor could I keep up with his gait over Sierra trails, up Sierra peaks, or swinging treetops in a storm. Nor would I care to jump crevasses or straddle slender snow bridges over those crevasses, as he related in Stickeen. His curiosity about the natural world was insatiable, as shown by his discovery of glacial theory gained through acute observational skills and miles of walking through glacial topography. To think that he wrote Travels in Alaska forty years after his trip there and was still able to name and describe the smallest plant life so vividly as to provide me with a mental picture of all that he saw! His energy was unsurpassed.

Early in life he walked a thousand miles from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico. A severe attack of malaria forced him to give up his plan to continue by tracing the Amazon River to its source. Instead, he booked passage to San Francisco, walked across the Central Valley, and spent the next eight years living alone and trekking cross-country over trail-less miles of the rugged Sierra. He once said that all he needed to do to get ready for an

Trip Report – Carrizo Plain National Monument
by Karen Hammer

On the first weekend in April a small group of chapter members headed south in search of abundant wildflowers at the Carrizo Plain National Monument. I had been curious about this area for some time, especially after hearing it referred to as “California’s Serengeti.” This area lies roughly between Bakersfield and Santa Maria, though it’s not indicated on my AAA map, and is about a 3.5 hour drive from Fresno. The time to go is wildflower season, but timing a trip to coincide with peak blooms is tricky. The BLM website does a good job of updating their wildflower report, but we had to plan our trip well in advance in order to reserve spots on the docent-led Painted Rock tour. Due to the cold wet spring we were perhaps a couple of weeks early for peak bloom.

In addition to being home to an extremely high concentration of threatened and endangered vertebrate species (San Joaquin kit fox, the giant kangaroo rat) this is an area sacred to Native Americans. Nevertheless, in spite of efforts to protect Painted Rock, these pictographs have been seriously degraded. My greatest excitement during the tour was sighting the stunning ghostly white
General Meeting
June 15th at 7 p.m.
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno

Movie Night: John Muir In The New World
The life and career of John Muir come to life through this inspiring and beautiful documentary set against the magnificent landscapes of the American West. The Scottish-born naturalist was one of the first nature preservationists in American history, inspiring others through his writing and his advocacy to keep the wilderness wild. During his lifetime, the impact of his powerful voice could be seen in the preservation of the Yosemite and the sequoia groves of California, and the glacial landscapes of Alaska. His vision survived long after his death through the work of the Sierra Club, an organization he founded.

Shot in high definition in the spectacular landscapes that shaped Muir and were, in turn, shaped by his devotion. A diversity of images run through the program: the Wisconsin woods of his childhood, his incredible journey on foot through the American South, the Yosemite Valley, the California fruit ranch where he lived with his wife and daughters, the Alaskan wilderness that so attracted him, and the National Parks that he was so instrumental in creating.” 85 minutes

Chapter Meetings

Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings
June 1st
The Conservation Committee meets at 7 PM
The University of California Center
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno
Join us on Saturday, July 16th, at 11:00 to help plan next year's programs. No previous experience required! The meeting is open to everyone.

We’ll meet at Charlie and Sally Magneson's home to brainstorm ideas for the 2011-12 year. We need topics and ideas for our seven regular monthly meetings, plus a featured presenter for our annual December banquet. Our May picnic is also on the to-do list.

We try to pencil in the coming year with timely issues of local, state, and national relevance. There is an effort to maintain a balance between the informational and the entertaining. If this sounds of interest to you please join us. For more information contact Rod at 723-4747.

Charlie and Sally live at 10235 El Capitan in Ballico-Cressey. Coming from the south on Santa Fe, cross the bridge over the Merced River and turn right on El Capitan just over the bridge. Their home is the first one on the right.

From the north, if you are approaching on Santa Fe turn left on El Capitan just before the bridge. If coming from Hwy 99 you may already be on El Capitan and you will just stay on that past Santa Fe and look for their house on the right.

Merced Conservation and Executive Committee Meetings
(three Thursday of each month)

Not the usual date and time - TBA, phone 723-4747 for day and time. Still at Rod Webster's home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced. Conservation meeting is first and can last 30-40 minutes. Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend.

Merced Group General Meetings
(Third Thursday of each month, except Dec. and May)

Our general meetings start at 7:00, usually over by 8:30 or so. New location- the Activity Room at the Hampshire, 3460 R St. (just before Yosemite Ave. when headed north). Through the front door, straight ahead through the lobby, to the room back left. There will be signs to assist. There will be another event going on in the lobby so just pass on through.

June 16th General Meeting

In June we’ll resume our normal schedule with a General Meeting on the third Thursday of the month. Our speaker will be Sarah Matsumoto, senior field organizer from the Sierra Club office in San Francisco. She will speak on “Building Resilient Habitats.” Sarah will focus on the Sierra Nevada and California Coast, two of the most vulnerable ecosystems in North America. Climate change will increase the great strain already on the wildlife in these habitats. The increased storms, heat, fires, and rising sea levels that are projected will have great impacts. What can be done to help protect the wildlife, wilderness, and human communities that coexist in these unique ecosystems? Come hear some interesting suggestions for approaching such a daunting prognosis.

Hiatus: There will be no general meetings in the months of July and August. We will resume in September.

Summer planning meeting:

During our summer break there will be a meeting to brainstorm ideas for next year's programs. All are welcome - an exciting time of sharing and planning. Our collective awareness, contacts, and resources amaze me every year.
Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America’s natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

Get grizzly and JOIN Sierra Club.

Name ___________________________
Address ___________________________
City ___________________________ State ________
Zip ________ Phone _______
Email ___________________________

Join today and receive a FREE Sierra Club Weekender Bag!

Check enclosed. Please make payable to Sierra Club.
Please charge my: [ ] Visa [ ] Mastercard [ ] AMEX

Cardholder Name: ______________________
Card Number: ______________________
Exp. Date: ________ / ________

Carrizo, from page 1

owl that flew above and perched on the rock walls, seemingly observing us.

During a visit to this area you may also see the herd of about 50 pronghorns that have been reintroduced to this area. This exotic looking animal is the fastest in the Western Hemisphere and is the only animal in the world with branched horns (not antlers) and who sheds these horns as if they were antlers. Walking along the San Andreas fault-line or visiting remains of mining operations are other activities to pursue while at the monument, not to mention viewing the night sky with others had been part of the experience.

If you plan a trip you need to know that camping is pretty bare bones and you need to carry in water. Space is limited in the two official campgrounds and we were pretty closely jammed in with a lot of other people, but the next morning we agreed that sharing that night sky with others had been part of the experience.
Pole Cats Can Turn You Into A Quadruped

by David Georgi, Lucia Chapter

This article is reprinted from the Santa Lucia Sierra Club publication, Tehipite Topics, with the author’s permission. Tehipite member Don Gaede alerted me to this article, which we both think is a great one for hikers. Greg and I have been friends for many years, yet he is wary of some of my interests. He eyed me suspiciously with knowledge of some of my more whimsical activities, “Don’t you feel a bit foolish with those? You look like an Edmond Hillary wannabe.”

I saw that Greg was resistant to the idea that poles could help his hiking and responded, “I just know that poles give me more stability and endurance and I don’t know what sort of conditions to expect on this trail.”

Greg relented, “OK, bring them along and I may use them.”

At the trailhead, I offered to demonstrate some ways to use the poles.

He replied, “Look, I’m going to carry them and I may even use them, but you have to promise not to pester me about technique. They’re just poles and what sort of training could you need?”

As we walked down a gentle stretch of trail, Greg’s attitude wasn’t helped when we approached a group of locals heading up the trail.

One shouted out in a good natured ribbing, “Where you gonna find snow, brada?”

Another followed up with “Hey, did you lose your skis or something?”

They all laughed and continued up the trail.

I could feel Greg cringe.

We continued until the trail became steep and muddy. I said, “Poles are really helpful on slippery downhill trails like this. It’s best to extend the poles to their maximum length and keep them planted in front of you.”

He replied, “I’ll just use them at their regular length. I don’t want to keep readjusting them.”

I extended mine and took a series of short steps with the poles firmly giving me support and confidence. Greg awkwardly attempted planting his poles and was able to save several slips.

The trails of Alakai Swamp meander through dense jungle and marshy swampland, connected by many steep and uneven stairs. We came to the first of many downhill steps built of wood, some steps as high as 18 inches. It was a breeze to plant both poles on the next step down and then gracefully hop down, with the biceps serving as shock absorbers.

After a while, I looked back and saw Greg following my technique.

Four legs are better than two for hiking. Humans are not born knowing how to walk on two legs and take many months to develop the necessary muscles and coordination. Learning to walk on four legs also takes time and determination. The following anecdote explains why the Pole Cats group is needed.

Last year while visiting Kauai, my friend Greg and I decided to hike the Alakai Swamp. I knew it was in the ancient volcanic crater at an elevation of about 4000 feet. The map showed that the only trail then open started at the rim and descended into the crater. In planning the hike, I said to Greg, “I don’t know about the trail conditions. I’m going to use my trekking poles. Would you like to use my extra set?”

Greg and I have been friends for many years, yet he is wary of some of my interests.
When we encountered our first uphill stairs, I confidently planted both poles at the base of the next step and used my triceps to push my body to the next level. It felt great to be using both upper and lower muscle groups to ascend the series of steps that would have quickly exhausted unassisted leg muscles. I noticed that Greg was using the same technique.

We came to a stream with algae covered stepping stones. I planted both poles alongside the first stone and felt the carbide tips securely grab the slippery bottom. I supported a large part of my body weight and stepped to the next stone, repositioning my poles and repeating the process across the stream. Greg followed and when he made it across, he said, “OK, I’m starting to see how these things can be useful. They really helped going up and down the stairs and this stream would have been scary without them.”

We finally reached our objective, an overlook above the Na Pali coast. Clouds at first obscured the view, but soon began opening and offering brief glimpses of the jewel-like ocean and verdant valleys below. We took in the beauty around us while enjoying some trail mix and a long drink of water.

On the way back, we ascended and descended the flights of stairs in reverse order. Seeing that Greg’s attitude toward poles was improving, I sought opportunities to elicit positive perceptions from his personal experience as a strong skier. On one strenuous uphill stretch, I asked if he could apply any techniques from using ski poles. He sarcastically responded between exhausted breaths, “I don’t often ski uphill.” I decided not to pursue the issue.

By the time we neared the trailhead, Greg said, “You know, I don’t think I could have made it without these poles.” He didn’t ask for any pointers, however. Weeks later, he told me he purchased a set of his own. And, yes, Greg and I are still friends.

Greg’s response to trekking poles is common. Most people assume you can use them intuitively. I have found that to use poles optimally, training is needed to develop appropriate muscle memory. Then you can realize such benefits as:

- Using all muscle groups for more endurance, strength, stability and efficiency
- Getting a full body workout and cardiac conditioning
- Reducing injuries and impact on hips and knees
- Increasing fat burning

October 2008 Prevention magazine has an interesting article about how hiking reduces belly (visceral) fat. If you exercise enough to lose 10% of your body fat, you lose 30% visceral fat. It says increasing the MET (metabolic equivalent hours) and using off-again bursts of energy gives the most time-efficient calorie burning workout possible. Add poles and you have a near perfect way to keep fit.

The recent technical advancements make poles high tech hardware. To optimize these advances, the appropriate software is needed. Mobility consultant Jayah Faye Paley has developed a training program that includes a number of skill sets to develop muscle memory that allows optimal pole usage.

When I first bought some poles, I assumed anyone could use them instinctively. One day, I forgot them at the trailhead after a hike and decided to replace them. Looking through a recreational equipment catalog, I noticed Paley’s training DVD for poles. On a whim I ordered it and upon watching it immediately saw that I was doing everything wrong, including potentially harmful practices. I began practicing using individual skill sets on my hikes and found that my muscles could develop proper memory after applying the training principles for several miles of hiking. It took me about six months to get the entire set of skills down pat. I attended some seminars given by Paley, who verified that I was coming along learning her technique.

I started Pole Cats to share this revolutionary technique. All Pole Cats hikes are easy and include uphill and downhill sections and brushed over areas. I demonstrate basic techniques of using poles for uphill by planting the poles a little ahead of my feet, and as I walk past them, fully extend my triceps to give forward momentum. My legs love the assistance. By concentrating, I can incorporate other muscle groups. As the trail becomes steeper, I take shorter steps and increase how often I plant the poles (from alternating steps to every step). For the steepest and longest trail segments, I combine use of poles with the rest step, where I lock my knee for an instant each step giving my leg muscles an instant to rest (much like the heart between beats). This lets me continue, however slowly, for hours, adjusting my pace to my heartbeat.

For downhill sections, I adjust the poles to their maximum length and use them to reduce impact on hips and knees. Pole manufacturer Leki estimates that this technique can reduce 250 tons of impact on an eight hour hike. Optimal pole usage exercises biceps, triceps and other muscle groups. Think about it: if Tyrannosaurus rex had used poles, he would not have evolved those puny little arms. (Or better, don’t think about it.)

Paley observed, “You cannot change the terrain, but you can change your response to it. Hence the (need for) frequent adjustments of length and body awareness of core muscles.”

When encountering brushy trails, I use the cruising mode, in which I point my thumb and index fingers straight down and lift the poles off the ground with my ring finger and pinky. Holding the tips of the poles together behind me lets me walk through brushed over trails easily.

The benefits of using trekking poles extend to those with mobility issues. Poles give strength, confidence and stability to those who may be frail or uncoordinated. When former Sierra Club president Ed Wayburn was in his nineties, his physical condition forced him to give up hiking. Paley showed him how to use poles and he was able to continue outings for several years. They allowed family members with less hiking stamina to be able to keep up with the stronger ones. Anyone afflicted with one or more of the insidious O’s: Old, Overweight, Out of Shape, and Optimistic can benefit from poles. I represent each and find the most insidious one is Optimistic, in which I convince myself to attempt tasks that are above my ability level.

For me, the best part of hiking with poles is using all my muscle groups to glide through the landscape as a quadruped. And, as far as hiking is concerned, quadrupeds definitely have more fun. Join me on a Pole Cats hike and become an honorary Pole Cat. Bipeds are always welcome.
Outings Schedule

Required Liability Waiver

All participants on Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver. If you would like to read the Liability Waiver before you choose to participate on an outing, please go to: http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/, or contact the Outings Department at (415) 977-5528 for a printed version.

Redwood Canyon Day Hike
Saturday, June 4, 2011 - 5:30pm
Intermediate day hike, distance 9.3 miles. Descend 2400 ft.; climb 2400 ft. Max elevation 6900 ft. This is a hike of the loop trail through Redwood Canyon in Kings Canyon National Park. I am hoping to be there at the right time to see the dogwoods in bloom at the creek crossing in the middle of the hike. Leaders: Karen Hammer and Jim Wall. Contact: Jim Wall, 559-661-0604

Ascent to Glacier Point and post hike barbecue
Saturday, June 11, 2011 - 7:30am - 8:30pm
Day Hike, Rating: Intermediate
Ascend to Glacier Point via the 4 mile trail with views of Yosemite Falls across the valley. This is moderately strenuous and is for hikers who are reasonably fit and accustomed to doing hikes of this length and elevation. Bring a minimum of 2 Leader: Karen Hammer 298-5272

Flyfishing Upper Twin Lakes Car Camp
July 8 & 9, 2011 - 7:30 PM - 7:30 PM
Ever want to try your hand at casting a fly for trout? Want to have a better than even chance of catching something on your first trip? Like hiking the high Sierra? Here's an opportunity. Car camp Friday evening. On Saturday Morning, we will break camp and head for Upper Twin Lake. This is a moderate hike, all on trail (no cross country). Fishing here is good for brook and rainbow trout, all wild (not hatchery raised). We will practice catch and release with barbless hooks. If people arrive at the campground in time, the leader will go over basic knots, how best to handle trout to be released, and answer any angling questions the group may have. The leader will be going up Friday morning in order to secure a campsite, so the participants will have to organize their own caravan/car pool, or simply drive up on their own. Email flyflinger78@yahoo.com for a printable topographic map of the hiking area.

Mount Whitney Summit
Saturday, July 30, 2011
Trip is currently filled with a waiting list.
Difficult day hike; climbing and descending elevation 6,000 ft. Max elevation 14,505 ft.
Interested in climbing the highest peak in the 48 contiguous US states? We are excited to offer this fabulous trip. It is one of THE premier hikes in the country, not only because of Mt. Whitney’s “highest 14er” status, but because of the hike’s extreme, rugged beauty. This is simply a must do hike. We will ask $15 from each participant, to hold a space on the trip. This covers your share of the US Forest Service permit fee; it is non-refundable. We plan to carpool (a six hour drive) to Lone Pine the day before the hike and then car camp at the trailhead. Some people may be able to stay at a motel or hostel in Lone Pine, if they wish. We will assemble at the trailhead at 4:00 AM to begin our hike. Don’t forget to bring a headlamp! Expect a very long day on the trail. If we’re lucky, we may be down in time to eat dinner in town. Everyone will be tired, so we encourage participants to car camp at the trailhead or get a room in town. We will carpool back to Fresno area the following day.

Gerald Vinnard is primary leader, assistant leaders Marcia Rasmussen and John Rasmussen. Aside from the $15 permit fee, participants will need to share campground fees or pay their own motel/hostel expenses. Bring your own food. Riders are asked to share carpool expenses.

Gerald Vinnard, 559-431-5780 or gvinnard@hotmail.com or Marcia Rasmussen, 559-332-2419 or Marcia@BigBaldy.com
Grosbeaks in Watts Valley

by Chip Ashley

A few years ago, my wife, Julie, asked me to put up a birdfeeder in our front yard that would be visible from our front window. This feeder has provided many hours of entertainment and has taught us a great deal about our local ecosystem.

This year I noticed two birds I had not previously seen. One is a blackbird-sized, strikingly colorful, stocky, thick-billed bird with a black head and bright yellow brow. I hurried to my grandmother’s old bird book and soon identified our visitor as the evening grosbeak, Hesperiphona vespertina. The other is a bird of similar size but somewhat slighter build, the black-headed grosbeak, Pheucticus melanocephalus.

The black-headed grosbeak, same family as the cardinal, likes deciduous patches and thick cover in coniferous forests, so it is also a little out of place in Watts Valley, which is blue oak woodland. Could climate change be the reason?

These large finches forage in trees and bushes, sometimes on the ground. They mainly eat seeds, berries and insects. Outside of the nesting season they often feed in flocks. As coniferous breeders, they are a little out of their range in Watts Valley in the spring. A result of climate change?