

# Grand Canyon Historical Society, Inc.

To develop and promote appreciation, understanding and education of the earlier history of the inhabitants and important events of the Grand Canyon and surrounding area.

## The Bulletin

Volume 10 Number 6

www.GrandCanyonHistory.org

June 2006

### The Worst Commercial Airplane Accident the World Had Ever Seen

by Todd R. Berger

Many commercial airplane crashes have happened since June 30, 1956. All accidents and deliberate acts of sabotage have entered into the national consciousness, the national trauma. Semtex packed in Walkmans, faulty electrical lines inside fuel tanks, pilot error, wind shear, airliners flown into buildings on behalf of extremist religious beliefs—the list is long, but in the end the "how" doesn't really matter. It is the "what" that takes a hold of us: the interrupted lives, the burnt doll at the crash site, the heroic acts of passengers over



Dan Driskill recalling the lives lost.  
[Photo by Todd Berger]

Pennsylvania.

The "what" certainly drives the Grand Canyon Historical Society's May speaker Dan Driskill. On Saturday, May 20, in the Community Building at the South Rim, 24 members of the society and guests listened to the results (to date) of Dan's research into the 1956 collision over the Grand Canyon of TWA Super Constellation Flight 2 from Los Angeles to Kansas City and United DC-7 Flight 718 from Los Angeles to Chicago Midway.

At work on a book about the crashes tentatively titled "Vanished in the West," Dan knows well the mechanics of airplane flight, the likely series of events that led to the collision, and the history of lawsuits that followed. (This case, Dan said, ushered in the age of lawsuits against airlines for crashes, and the majority of cases from this crash on have been decided for the Plaintiffs.)

He also knew the human side of the flights. He mentioned idle flight engineer Harry Allen, who was hitching a ride on the TWA plane back to his home base in Kansas City; United Capt. Bob Shirley, who had had most of the previous week off before the flight and was considered very experienced based on the number of flight hours flown; and the fact that it is highly likely that the TWA and United passengers walked out to their planes (before the age of jetways) side-by-side on the tarmac at Los Angeles International Airport. Overall, he deftly handled a delicate, tragic subject, bringing to life the 1950s and the lives of the passengers and crew without crossing the line into the macabre. "It coulda been me on one of those flights, that day," many in the audience likely thought.

...continued on page 3

### 2006 Outings

#### June 24 – Annual Shoshone Point Potluck Picnic.

Members from across the country converge at the Canyon's edge for a potluck of good food, friendly faces and lively conversation. Everyone should bring: • a dish to share (i.e. casserole or desert); • their own drinks; • individual table service; • and, if desired, some meat to barbecue. Hot dogs, buns and condiments will be provided by the GCHS. See page 4 for map and directions.

Where: Shoshone Point South Rim, Grand Canyon

When: 11:00 AM – yellow gate unlocked

12:00 Noon – Picnic

1:30 PM – Awards

Because of the restriction on not moving picnic tables, you may want to bring a chair and shade. Parking will be limited; please carpool or plan to walk from the parking lot.

[Linda Anderson, event coordinator]

**July 15 – Annual Jacob Lake Campout.** Spend a day (and a night) in the North Kaibab Forest at the historic Jacob Lake Ranger Station with fellow Canyon adventurers.

**August 19 – *The Spirit of Grand Canyon*** by Interpretive Ranger Bob Audretsch. Bob will discuss his thoughts of how Grand Canyon inspired many writers, artists, musicians and poets, reading from the works of such people as John Wesley Powell, Henry Van Dyke, Teresa Jordan, Carl Sandburg, and Colin Fletcher. Be prepared; Bob may ask us to write an observation or compose some poetry to share (or not) with the group. The program will begin at 1:00 PM at the Shrine of the Ages, at South Rim Village - Grand Canyon. Look for members and the presenter having lunch at 12:00 Noon in the Maswik Cafeteria.

**September 16 – available**

**October 21 – Annual Board Meeting** held at Flagstaff City Library Community Room, 300 W Aspen from 10:00 AM until 12:30 PM.

..continued on page 3

## Grand Canyon Community Book Club

by Nancy Green

On April 25, the Grand Canyon Community Book Club met at the school library to discuss *Carving Grand Canyon* by Wayne Ranney. The variety of geologic theories on the formation of Grand Canyon were presented concisely in this slim volume. He began the book with the enigma of the formation of Grand Canyon, and the book ended with an enigma as well. We all agreed that the time frame being discussed was so vast as to be eye glazing, but Wayne tried valiantly to make it digestible for the non-geologists among us. One great focus point was that the exploration of the Grand Canyon was done by horseback and wagons in the early 1900s, and that century ended with exploration of the Grand Canyon by satellite mapping. Who knows what future methodologies may enhance our understanding of the geology of the canyon even further? A great quote from Wayne's book which we discussed at length was "Geologists suffer from thirst in a happier state of mind than most." Although the full story of the geologic processes performed here will never be known, it certainly allows for the formation of plenty of theories! We wonder what Wayne's background was to understand why the canyon affected him so profoundly. Of course, many of us in our group have also been so affected! This book really only deals with the last 6 million or so years. In this book, the layers of rock have already been deposited. This is the story of how the canyon was carved – which is a relatively new feature on a very old landscape. It just makes sense that there were SO many influences – headward erosion, stream piracy, uplift, volcanic activity, time, climate, the river flowing, spillover, the melting of glaciers, slippage of the Hurricane Fault, intermittent cataclysmic events, and erosion. So much of the evidence is missing. We all agreed that it made us feel better about Glen Canyon Dam because those huge volcanic dams eventually were washed away. I was amazed that we talked about geology for 2 hours!

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, May 30, to discuss *Vanished Arizona* by Martha Summerhayes. This is the story of a young Army wife circa 1874. This will be facilitated by Mary Gdula at the GCA office building.

To keep you on track, here is the list of 2006 readings and meetings:

June 27: *Eating Stone* by Ellen Meloy facilitated by Nancy Green

July 25: Annual Shoshone Point picnic for book selection

August 28: *Dancing on the Edge* by Charly Heavenrich facilitated by Dot Bowdish

September 28: *To Live and Die in Arizona* by Elizabeth Bruening Lewis facilitated by Libby Schaaf

October 24: *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv facilitated by Pam Frazier

November 28: *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* by Ellsworth Kolb (if GCA has this printed by then) facilitated by Keith Green

December: Pam Frazier will host a small seasonal party at her home so we can select new books for our reading pleasure.

*Keep on Reading!*

## Love a Lover of Grand Canyon History?

by Todd R. Berger

In January 2007, the Grand Canyon Historical Society will open the second Grand Canyon History Symposium at the South Rim. A request for presentation proposals went out to many individuals and institutions in April, and we expect a strong response from canyon aficionados interested in speaking. That said, we are most confident that we didn't come close to reaching everyone who has something interesting to share about canyon history. To fix this problem, we ask for the help of all of the Grand Canyon Historical Society's members.

We aspire for a diversity of voices to be one of the hallmarks of the 2007 symposium, as it was in the first such event in 2002. Even if you have no interest in speaking at the symposium, take a little time to think about people you know (friends, relatives, donut-shop owners, acrobats, etc.) who may have an interesting story about canyon history, whether from personal experience, academic research, or a vocational interest. Ask your relative or associate to consider submitting a proposal to present at the symposium.

All the details about the symposium and how to submit a proposal are available at [www.grandcanyonhistory.org](http://www.grandcanyonhistory.org). A person can also receive guidelines by sending a request to [Symposium@grandcanyonhistory.org](mailto:Symposium@grandcanyonhistory.org) or by writing to: Call for Presentation Proposals, Grand Canyon Historical Society, PO Box 10067, Prescott AZ 86304. If anybody has questions, call me (Todd Berger) at 928-638-7021 or Lee Albertson at 480-838-2710.

The deadline to submit presentation proposals is August 1. So the time is now to ask that canyon lover you know (or love) to consider presenting. Our members **are** the Grand Canyon Historical Society, and only the actions of our members can ensure an intriguing, mind-stimulating, entertaining 2007 Grand Canyon History Symposium.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Email to the Members

I'm an adjunct professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the author of three non-fiction books. My next book, for Bantam, will be the first full biography of Fred Harvey. I am wondering if there is anyone with particular interest in Harvey himself, the Harvey family and the company at the Grand Canyon, especially in the years before El Tovar opened but also in the formative years afterward. (I've been trying to determine if Fred or his son Ford actually ever visited the canyon during Fred's lifetime, and if so when.) If there's anyone with ideas about newspaper indexes, etc. from the 1880s through the time when papers are now more available on microfilm, I'd be grateful. Thank you.

Stephen Fried  
733 Bainbridge Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19147  
[stephenfried@comcast.net](mailto:stephenfried@comcast.net)  
215-592-1662

## The Worst...continued from page 1

The airplanes, both running late, left L.A. three minutes apart, Dan told us. As planned, they would have crossed each other's flight paths east of the Grand Canyon, in the Painted Desert of the Navajo Nation. But their original flight plans also showed they would be 2,000 feet apart vertically. Instead, they flew into each other at the same elevation well to the west of the Painted Desert, crashing into the canyon near the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers.

With little information initially, Dan said, the search was concentrated on the Painted Desert, and the Tuba City hospital was mobilized to treat mass casualties. Reports trickled in throughout the afternoon of June 30: a Navajo girl saw smoke from the reservation; a woman at Desert View in the national park saw smoke in the canyon; and Henry and Palen Hudgin, pilots for and owners of Grand Canyon Airlines, saw smoke too, initially thinking it was a brush fire set off by lightning. After returning to the Grand Canyon Airport, then near Red Butte several miles southeast of the current airport, they heard news reports of the missing planes and decided to go back up and take a look at what was causing the smoke. Late in the afternoon, Dan said, the Hudgins identified the TWA crash site, based on the trademark triple tail of the Super Constellation, the pieces of which were scattered along the bottom of the canyon. The next morning, search planes found the United crash site, hundreds of feet above the Colorado on the side of Chuar Butte.

Incredibly, Dan noted, the TWA company calendar's main image for July showed the Grand Canyon, with a Super Constellation inset above the calendar grid; people with the calendar woke up the next morning to the horrific news from Arizona and, when they flipped up the page to change the month to July, the haunting images of the canyon and the plane. A member of the audience noted that TWA directed offices across the country to take down the calendar during July.

The airlines, the National Park Service, the military, and officials from Coconino County launched a major search-and-recovery effort in unbelievably hostile terrain the morning of July 1. The canyon's swirling winds and stifling summer heat made for some tricky flying by helicopter pilots. At an earlier lecture on the crashes, Dan said that this may have been the first time helicopters flew to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. He noted that pilots who flew in Korea and later in Viet Nam said later that the scariest flying they ever did was on the recovery operation in the Grand Canyon.

United brought in a mountaineering team from Denver, Dan said. A team of Swiss mountain climbers also flew to the canyon to aid in the recovery efforts. The brother of a member of the investigating team died in the collision.

In all, 128 passengers and crew died in what was then the world's worst aviation disaster. The 70 TWA victims were buried in a communal plot at the Flagstaff Cemetery, while the remains of 29 of the unidentified United dead were buried in the Grand Canyon Pioneer Cemetery. A monument, put in



Memorial to victims.  
[Photo by Mike Coltrin]

place for the August 2 service at Grand Canyon, includes 31 names (the 29 unidentified dead and two identified passengers included on the monument at the request of their families).

The investigations that followed and the outcries from a shocked public lead Washington politicians to enact legislation creating the FAA, as well as accelerating the development and implementation of black boxes and collision-avoidance equipment. The evidence from the investigation showed that a series of seemingly mundane events, such as a request that was granted for the TWA plane to fly 1,000 feet atop the storm clouds over the canyon, which put it at the same elevation as the United plane, and the apparent decision of both pilots to veer from their flight plans to give passengers a view of the canyon, had lead to a one-in-a-million collision.

After Dan's talk, several members of the audience went to the cemetery. The monument for the United victims, with its tiny American flags and other remembrances surrounding its base, looked beautiful in the late afternoon light. Folks gathered around to hear Dan's answers to the many questions that kept coming to mind. Finally, when people ran out of questions and the time seemed right, the members of the crowd lowered their heads and slowly walked away.

*On June 30, 2006, at Shrine of the Ages on the South Rim, the Grand Canyon Association and Grand Canyon National Park will sponsor a panel discussion on the 1956 air disaster, including Dan, Grand Canyon Airlines Chief Pilot Mike McCombs, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Professor William Waldo, and moderator Richard Quartaroli of Northern Arizona University. The panel discussion, which is free and open to the public, begins at 5:30 p.m.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## 2006 Outings...continued from page 1

**November 18 – Seeking Summits Below the Rim: The Stories and History of Climbing in Grand Canyon**, by Mathieu Brown (2005 GCHS Scholarship recipient). Seeking Summits is a project to document the stories of early climbing in Grand Canyon. Despite the prolific activity of a handful of climbers little has been publicly written and documented on their pursuits. Like any time period in Grand Canyon history, that of the early summiteers carries its own perspectives and adds value and depth to our collective understanding of the Grand Canyon and its influence on the human individual and regional meaning. Although not publicly documented, the knowledge of early Grand Canyon climbing remains rich. It is held in the journals, letters, photographs, and memories of the individuals active in the pursuit. Luckily, many of these stories have yet to vanish and sit waiting to be uncovered and rediscovered from the climbers themselves on a local and regional scale.

**December – No meeting.**

### May Outing Attendance

Many turned out and traveled far to attend Dan Driskill's presentation on May 20 at the Canyon:

- Corey Gallus – Kentucky
- Darin McKinney – Ohio
- Shirley Y. Patrick – San Diego, CA
- Aubrey & Olanda Driskill – Menifee, CA
- Mike Coltrin – Tucson, AZ
- Jim & Janece Ohlman – Kayenta, AZ
- Laura Cole – Williams, AZ
- Norma McDowell – Williams, AZ

From Grand Canyon:

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Linda Anderson | Steve Owen      |
| Todd Berger    | Ken Phillips    |
| Jackie Brown   | Thomas Ratz     |
| Ian Hough      | Bil Vandergraff |
| Brad Houston   | Brad Wallis     |
| Tom Martin     | Slim Woodruff   |
| Ellen Miller   |                 |

\* \* \* \*

### Welcome New Member

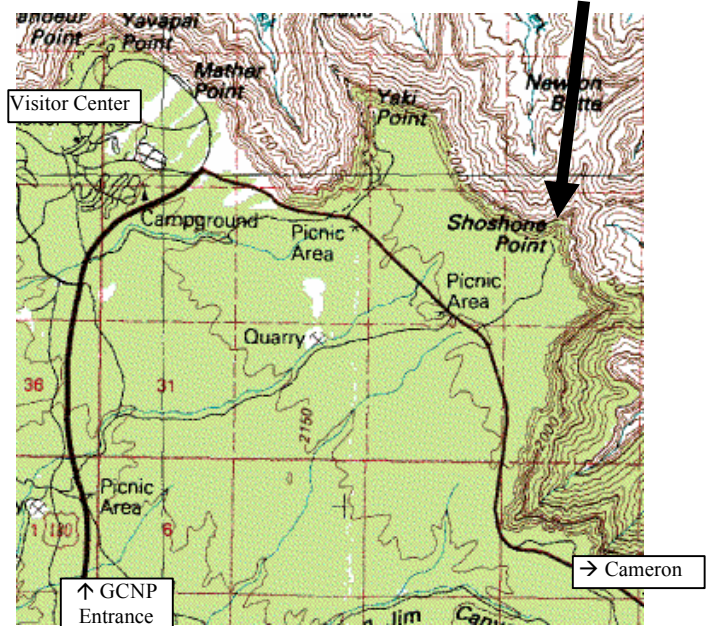
Phillip Timper – Prescott AZ

### Annual Picnic: June 24

Join the Pioneers for the biggest event of the year at the Annual Picnic on June 24. The picnic will be at Shoshone Point (but, if it is moved, a notice will be posted at the entrance station and at Shoshone Point gate; the Recreational Center has been reserved as an alternate location.)

To get to Shoshone Point from the main entrance:

- Take the East Rim Drive
- About 1.5 miles beyond the road to Yaki Point, turn left into a parking area and look for the yellow gate



**Outings/Programs:** If you have a suggestion for a future outing/program or a question about an upcoming event, contact the **2006 Outings Coordinator:** Mike Coltrin, 2041 West Brichta Drive, Tucson AZ 85745; phone: 520-624-1831; email: Coltrin1@cox.net.

**The Bulletin** welcomes comments, stories, or reflections and remembrances. Please send them to Diane Cassidy at 2112 Demerse Avenue, Prescott, AZ 86301; email: Pioneers@GrandCanyonHistory.org.