

## Grand Canyon Climber... The Story of Robert Eschka Benson

For the second year in a row interested GCHS members met at the historic lecture hall directly across Highway 89A from Marble Canyon Lodge. I would like to again thank the owners for allowing us to use the building these last two years. Their generosity allowed us the use of the space at no cost. Also thanks for the use of the viewing screen.

On our agenda this year was a talk by George Steck about his one-time hiking companion Robert Benson Eschka. Robert has been considered the master at long continuous walks through Marble and Grand Canyons. His trek from near Green River, Utah, to Lake Mead and his subsequent return hike to Moab, Utah, in 1982-83 places Robert at the head of the list of Grand Canyon Longwalkers.



George's oral and slide presentation was informative and interesting. The story of Robert's short life was related in detail by George and the selected slides of Robert's and George's were great. His recollections of the times he spent hiking with Robert and his scattering of Robert's ashes in the Grand Canyon brought a tear to some eyes in the audience. Robert's travails and exploits are certainly impressive, but his daring rock-climbing maneuvers amazing. On some of the shots he took, Robert would dash up the cliff after setting the timer on his camera to get into position. How he could get up the vertical walls in just 14 seconds seems impossible. On another note Robert's climb down a series of 1" diameter rods imbedded into the face of the Redwall cliff by the dam surveyors was downright scary. George later re-created the feat by using a climbing rope--no rope was used by Robert!

Before the presentation some of us met at the Marble Canyon Diner for breakfast, and afterwards for a late lunch at V.C. Bar and Grill down the highway towards the Hatch Barn, where George repeated his performance on Sunday morning for the annual Grand Canyon River Guides' GTS(Guide Training Seminar) get-together.

*[Article by John S. Azar - Fredonia AZ]*

## 2004 Outings

**April 16-18: *Tour of Phantom Ranch.*** The tour of Phantom Ranch begins at 7:30 PM. on April 16. Henry Karpinski, a local historian, has been all over the Kaibab Suspension Bridge. He will narrate a PowerPoint presentation that evening at the little amphitheater between the ranch and the Phantom Ranger Station. The next morning, after your breakfast, Mike Anderson, Pam Cox (Phantom interpretive ranger), and Keith Green will lead an in-depth tour of the history and reality of the entirety of Phantom Ranch. On the evening of April 17 at 7:30 PM, Mike Anderson will narrate a PowerPoint presentation about his research on the trails. This also will be at the amphitheater. The next day, we hike out.

Those who made the deadline for reservations through Keith will be staying in the Trail Crew Bunkhouse the nights of April 16 and 17.

**May 15: *Tour of Kolb Studio*** by Grand Canyon Interpretive Ranger Stewart Fritts (our narrator and maybe more). The Kolb Studio has been refurbished with 1930s period furniture. There are a few pieces which actually did belong to the Kolbs. The building has been attached to the wall of the canyon, so it's safe to have as many as show-up.

The tour at Kolb Studio will begin at 1:00 PM. For those interested in getting together for lunch prior to the tour, meet at 11 AM at the Bright Angel Lodge.

**June 19:** Annual Picnic at Shoshone Point, South Rim Grand Canyon (*Linda Anderson, June Outing Leader*)

**July 17:** Annual Campout at Jacob Lake, North Rim Grand Canyon (*John Azar, July Outing Leader*)

**August 21:** Annual Community Project (such as the Grand Canyon Cemetery clean-up) -- tentative (*Mike Coltrin, August Outing Leader*)

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## Letter to GCHS

Dear GCHS Renewal People,

Love the publication and bulletins! Volume 15, No. 1 arrived yesterday and I don't want to cram two renewals in the lines for one name (particularly since the back has such interesting information on scholarship recipients).

Last April my sister Anne had a letter in the paper and she **loved** it. Right now she is in the hospital and I'm sending in her renewal with mine to encourage her desire for more writings.

Our family first visited there in 1934--one have of them with dad, Anne two brothers and a family friend in January, and the other half with mother, Mary, Madeline, Janie and me (Ellie) in October 1934 to live in Arizona for dad's relief from asthma and emphysema - for which Arizona is notorious! In 1935 we lived in tents in the campground, and after a group of Bright Angel workers quit (for not having a day off for three weeks), Mattie Gordon - the mailman, Tom Gordon's wife for Supai mail trips - told her our family had grown old enough to be workers in the campground and we all ultimately went there every summer for a dollar a day and room & board. Tuition at the University of Arizona then was \$30 a semester (not \$2,500 like it is now) and whoever needed a book or a pair of shoes, etc., their savings were available.

Our sister, Mary, married Jack Verkamp Jr. in 1939 and Mike, John III, Steven, Janie and Susie are there or in Flagstaff or Laos, etc. Jack's dad Joka George Verkmap I had a tent right next to the picture of Kolb Studio where he sold Indian jewelry. At that time he was a sheep and cattle raiser and lumberman and when on those jobs traded food, blankets, etc. for the jewelry. He opened his self-built store where it now stands in January 1906, where a foot path began east to Yavapai Point. Lee Albertson might include mention of this for elder folks going to 1904 Lookout, El Tovar 1905, I think the Hopi House same day for dances, and Verkamps for telescope viewing in 1906. (My sister Mary, Jack's first wife, died in 1957; and he happily married Betty as his second wife. They are gone home, both of them.) As an almost 80 year old, I can't make a trip to the Canyon (oxygen tanks and at almost 7,000 foot altitude).

*Eleanor O'Leary Bernard  
Tucson AZ*

## GCA Canyon Country Lecture Series: Living with Change in the American Southwest

On February 19, 2004, Cline Library hosted another excellent presentation in the Spring Canyon County Community Lecture Series. These are being sponsored by Northern Arizona University, Grand Canyon Association and the Grand Canyon Semester.

This one featured Michael Collier and Rose Houk, each with their own list of impressive credentials. Michael attended NAU working on a degree in Geology, went on to receive a MA in Geology from Stanford, and a MD from the University of Arizona. Along the way he became a river runner, a pilot and a photographer. He also became Rose's husband. Rose worked as a ranger at Grand Canyon National Park, going on to become a writer/editor for the Grand Canyon Association. She has written many books, including "An Introduction to the Ecology of Grand Canyon," and *The Peaks*. She also writes for many of the other cooperating associations in the Southwest.

This lecture was to kick off the publication of their joint effort, *The Mountains Know Arizona*. This magnificent book features superb photos of areas all over Arizona by Michael, with text by Rose. Together they presented a very sensitive multi-media program concerning the concept of landscape within the changes of the Southwest.

Change is so prevalent here. There is language used in the halls of government to describe the land that has a very different view than how the people who live in the Southwest see and feel about this land. Government tends to quantify land in terms of resources and water rights. But the people, who have moved here, despite low wages (poverty with a view) and remote settings far from the easy pickings of urban settlements, do so because of the personal and intimate experiences that this great land can bestow upon those who walk it.

As Rose read from her book on Capitol Reef, the lights dimmed and slides appeared depicting precariously balanced rocks, steep canyon walls, the power and frightening cleansing of a flash flood; beads of water dripping from an overhanging cliff--creating a constantly moving curtain shimmering in the sun, slices of vivid blue sky between sinuously twisting canyon walls, fall leaves floating in a black bottomed creek; the art work of the ancients on a prehistoric townhouse, red sandstone mud in side canyons

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forming upraised puddles of treacherous footing, a silhouette of a woman standing between upraised rock pinnacles with the sun above shooting rays out in all directions. There are images of the Southwest which we have all seen, and which hold us to this magical landscape.

The resources the government viewed with favor in the past such as mining and timber have been reduced or ended. Now the last resource is open space. With our world's population over 6 billion, that makes this wide open land a value in itself. Those of us who love this Colorado Plateau are charged with the uneasy task of living with change while trying to manage it. Pristine landscapes today are vulnerable to change and especially to development. We need to cultivate not the developers who come to scrape, dig and run, but the people who come here in good faith, attracted to the same spectacles which captivate and awe all of us in love with this area. Those of us who have been here a long time and remember the way things used to be need to take a step with these newcomers to realize that there is always beauty abounding in the Great Southwest. IT will always astound us with its weeping panoramas and subtle, startling details. It will be up to all of us, both the people long committed to his area and the wide-eyed recent arrivals to protect our land and guide the changes yet to come.

*[Article submitted by  
Nancy R. Green - Grand Canyon AZ]*

### **Thank You**

...for your generous gift to the GCHS Scholarship  
Fund:

Charles Hoffman - Flagstaff AZ

Marilyn Abraham - Tucson AZ

Joan Maloney & Dennis Peterson - Prescott AZ

Robert Phillips - Encinitas CA

George Steck - Albuquerque NM

Frank Wilson - Tucson AZ

### **Raised at Grand Canyon**

*by Jeanne Schick - Sedona AZ*

I was born and raised at the Canyon and lived there until time to go away to high school. I felt I was the luckiest person alive to have had that incredible experience. One would think I would tire of that beautiful setting but how could one tire of that beauty?

We lived a short distance from the school and walked to school each day. Some days we were chased by deer and were very fearful of them -- particularly "Smoky." He never harmed us, but we thought he might!

My Dad was a mule guide and was a favorite among the tourists because of his knowledge of the Canyon -- many guests requested he be their guide year after year. He majored in Geology so the Canyon was an ideal setting. Mother was a Harvey Girl and worked at the Bright Angel Lodge and other places along the Harvey line. She and Dad were married at the Canyon and lived there many years.

My experience as a teenager was working for Emery Kolb. My duties consisted of welcoming tourists to Kolb Studio as well as walking up the rim and passing out cards "advertising" the Kolb lecture and film about Kolbs' experiences on the River and other incredible adventures. Mr. Kolb taught me how to run the projector. When it seemed I had a problem, he would run up the stairs to help me splice the film.

Mr. Kolb came to visit us in California when he had a doctor's appointment and many times stayed at our home. He was a delightful guest and our kids loved him. When we visited him from time to time at his home, it was very special. On Thanksgiving one year, he greeted us at the El Tovar where we were to dine as his guests and he was dressed in his tuxedo. Emery never touched his dinner, as he was so busy reciting the Gettysburg Address.

Other jobs I had at the Canyon were Secretary to the National Park Superintendent as well as J. E. Shirley who was in charge of the Fred Harvey Transportation.

My jobs up there were for periods of time before I joined the WAVES, along with two best friends. We were to board the bus in front of Babbitt's Store and it was a thrill to see the "whole town" there waiting to bid us farewell. Art Metzger, a very dear friend was concerned that we three girls didn't know the principals of marching so each evening he worked with us so we could learn the principals of marching. Imagine what the tourists through as we "marched" up the streets!

## 2004 Outings ...continued from page 1

**September 18:** *Harvey: The Adventures, Tragedies and Legacy of Grand Canyon's Greatest Hiker* by Elias Butler and Tom Myers. Held in conjunction with the 3rd Annual Prescott Book Festival.

Elias Butler, a journalist as well as a photographer (whose work have appeared in publications like *National Geographic Adventure Magazine, Arizona Highways, Backpacker Magazine, Plateau Journal and High Country News*), and Tom Myers, author of *Fateful Journey - Injury and Death on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon* and *Over the Edge - Death in Grand Canyon*, will talk about their upcoming book about the life of Harvey Butchart.. Lecture from 10:30 to 11:00 in the Sharlot Hall Museum . (Book signing until 2:00 PM.)

**October 16:** Annual Board Meeting (*Nancy Green, October Outing Leader*)

**November 20:** Search and Rescues Director Ken Phillips -- tentative (*Tom Myers, November Outing Leader*)

**December:** No meeting

## March Outing Attendees

Among our attendees at the Robert Benson program by George Steck were: Don and Adair Peterson (hiking partners of George from Albuquerque), Dan and Diane Cassidy and Ann Reynolds of Prescott; Mike Coltrin of Tucson; the Ohlman Family of Kayenta; John Azar, Ethan Spears, Paul Calloway and Tom Gunderson (who just finished a long solo hike of his own) of Fredonia; Tom Myers, Scott Thybony and Don Lago of Flagstaff; Lee Albertson of Tempe; and Peter Eno of Phoenix...fun was had by all.



*Long-time hiking buddies:  
Adair Peterson, George Steck and Don Peterson*

## Welcome New Members

Marilyn Abraham - Tucson AZ

Kenneth and Mary Lea Adkins - Prescott AZ

Jon Horton - Batavia IL

Joan Maloney and Dennis Peterson - Prescott AZ

David Scheier - Page AZ

Preston Schellbach - Decatur IL

## Trivia

The Grand Canyon/Williams News is in need of Grand Canyon trivia questions. Every week the newspaper asks a Grand Canyon history question, with the answer published upside down under the question, so people have to quiz themselves first before checking the answer. You will be given credit for the submission in the newspaper. This is the chance to impress us all with your Grand Canyon Knowledge!

Please submit your questions AND answers to:

Jackie Brown  
Associate Grand Canyon Editor  
PO Box 285  
Grand Canyon AZ 86023  
928-638-9223  
gcnews@grand-canyon.az.us

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**Outings/Programs:** If you have a suggestion for a future outing/program or a question about an upcoming event, contact the **2004 Outings Coordinator:** Keith Green, PO Box 1986, Grand Canyon AZ 86023-1986; phone 928-638-0666; email: Keith\_Green@nps.gov.

**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.