

Merry Christmas, 1995

I hope this letter finds you doing well this holiday season. I am staying dry by staying home. A storm shut down most of this town including my office, but hey – I’ve got a laptop computer and can’t be stopped. This little home of mine is, in fact, quite a nice place to hole up. I’ve added four book cases including two rather large ones and have had a lot of fun filling them with books that have wanted out of their boxes for some years. Truth be known, I added a few dozen natural-history titles from this summer’s “book-buying binge” while on outings. Perhaps next year I can get Chris out on one of these trips. The poor guy has been working his present job for over a year now and has paid vacation he doesn’t know how to use. He’s never had that problem before. At the very least, we have planned another mountain-bike trip in Marin and are daring each other to run the Bay To Breakers foot race again in the Spring. Martha and I are about to become drapery hangers really quickly here so we can get her house looking all nicer for Christmas. We helped her brother Bob with his remodeling in San Diego during several trips there this year. With the addition of the work we did on Martha’s new Sacramento office (ceiling, crown molding, wallpaper, paint, carpet, lighting...), this has been a good year for making nice space.

My main accomplishment this year was to finish my work on the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) and to write my manuscript. The paper made it through several reviews including the copy editor’s and is back for typesetting even as we “speak.” I included sections of mineral resources and their environmental issues as well as text and maps on earthquakes and volcanic hazards. The final report goes to Congress in a few weeks. I made two public presentations on our results, one at a fairly formal gathering at U.C. Davis and the other at a town-hall meeting in a former mining camp called Jackson. The Jackson audience ranged from back-to-the-land eco-freaks to back-to-the-land militia survivalists. Both came with fears that we were out to steal their property rights. I had half a dozen trips related to SNEP including a workshop at the Forest Genetics Institute in Placerville and one in the Tahoe Basin at Richardson’s. We held a couple field seminars on forest ecology including fire issues. One trip was to the large Arch Rock burn in Yosemite National Park and we took in several old-growth and second-growth forest stops as well. I always used to see those trees as the things that grew on the dirt that covered up the rocks I wanted to see. I made a trip over to Owens Valley to see the lush green results of the re-watering of the Owen’s River Gorge and visit a co-author at the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Lab (SNARL). My old bike-shop partner Ron took me

nine miles down the Lower Rock Creek mountain-bike trail while I was over there. I never worked so hard to *loose* 2,000 feet on a bike. After I stopped by Hetch Hetchy reservoir to photograph the dam (in case San Francisco gets religion after reading the SNEP report and tears the dam down), I visited Mesa de Oro. We have nicknamed this gold-country housing tract (built on a mine dump) Mesa de Arsenic. I plotted about 120 arsenic-rich mine sites, four of which are big ones like this, within a ten-mile stretch of the Mother Lode. It sure is a good thing that, with 31 million Californians, some 625,000 of whom live in the Sierra Nevada, that there is a minerals-issues team of scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey. Well, it *used* to be a good thing. The government cutbacks resulted in all but about five of us loosing our jobs. I was quite lucky during all that and got snatched up by the Publications group to stay on at USGS. I packed up my office and moved across the parking lot and have begun a new life as their geologist in charge of CD-ROM publishing. I guess I should get a CD drive for my Mac now, huh? I am still given time and support to finish my SNEP work so I’ll get to see that paper come out with the rest of the ecosystem chapters from U.C. Press next year. New projects on my desk include CDs I’ll produce for geologists on the Northridge earthquake, the Alaska Volcano Observatory, the Columbia River ecosystem, an abandoned-mine database with maps, and some report that drifted in from a guy named Diggles on the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project.

I got in several fun play trips and several fun work trips this year. We got in quite a lot of cross-country skiing last winter (and it looks like we can begin again next weekend). Martha and I hiked two days in and two days out to Iva Bell Hot Springs in the Ansel Adams Wilderness this summer. We needed to stay fairly low in elevation because the snow stayed so late in the high country. We had a very nice time skinny dipping in the warm pools in the hot sun and then taking photographs of the wildflowers in the meadow around the swimming holes. It gave new meaning to the term “nude photography.” We had another backpack to Dingley Creek under Mt. Conness in Yosemite. That trip included Katherine, her best friend Margie, and Margie’s dad Mike (I became Michael). We played a game of “pass the tummy flu” that whole trip but still managed to see some wonderful country and get the kids up above timberline. The Boot ‘n Blister trip this year was back to Canyon Creek in the Klamath Mountains. It was an all-time short hike with an all-time small number of folks – just over a dozen folks. It was also an all-time beautiful fall-color display. Katherine carried her pack full of Barbie Dolls, the

dog carried a pack full of dog food and more Barbie Dolls, and I carried the tents – one for us and one for the Barbie Dolls. Put the weekend of August 24 on your calendars for the Boot ‘n Blister car-camp and day-hike trip to Crater Lake National Park in Oregon.

We did repeats on three of our favorite “civilized” outings. Martha and I went to Año Nuevo Elephant Seal Preserve again this year. We got 28 tickets and I preceded the trip with a banquet in Santa Cruz and a marine-mammal slide show. We have 43 tickets for next month and it’ll be my 20th consecutive year to visit those big critters.

My canoe still floats and saw a lot of use at the Discovery Learning Center’s daycare campout at Lake Tahoe. We got to see a camp bear take on a Coleman cooler and a fire extinguisher take on a Coleman stove. The Colemans, neither of which were from our family’s camp, were both subdued.

The Gilmore “kids” hadn’t been to Yosemite Valley together since they were little tots so we got rooms in Yosemite Lodge, met Bob and a friend there, and saw the sights. The sights included the usual collection: big-wall climbers, brunch at the Ahwahnee Hotel, a controlled forest burn, and the view from Glacier Point.

Next year’s “civilized outing” will be the family get-together at my sister Barby’s house in France. She lives near Dijon off the north slope of the Jura Mountains which is the place where Jurassic rocks were first described. Cousin Peggy will teach a watercolor class there and Martha and I would like to get up to Scotland whilst in that hemisphere.

This was a good year for presenting talks. Besides the two SNEP talks, I gave three others starting with being the March speaker at the Northern California Chapter of The Explorers Club. With 19 years of geologic mapping, I had a lot of slides from which to choose. You can get on the Internet and view a few of them on the World Wide Web at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/EC.html> but I didn’t use color until May so the shot of the March speaker is in black-and-white. I wrapped up my third term as Secretary of the Chapter this month but will stay on as Chapter Webmaster.

The Yosemite Association meets every other year in Tuolumne Meadows and I decided to attend this year. I met old friends, made new ones, and heard some good presentations. I got recruited (OK, I offered...) to give a little talk on a Ranger-Naturalist hike on the geology of the Sierra Nevada and I got carried away and included the paleogeography of western North America.

At the risk of getting busted for impersonating a glaciologist, I submitted an abstract for the glaciation symposium at the White Mountain Research Station up (11,000 ft up) out of Bishop. I discussed my favorite rock glacier in the

South Sierra Wilderness and showed some of my age data on downcutting of the canyons there. One of the field trips took us out of South Lake mostly on trails. A little group decided to join a grad student to her field area up on a glacier near the Sierran crest. I blew out my light trail shoes kicking steps in the ice but the REI sale came to my rescue when I got home.

I am still Vice President of the Peninsula Geological Society where the year’s lecture series was good and the field trips were great. We had a trip along the San Andreas fault as part of a larger meeting in San Francisco. I got to be the photographer at the Tom Dibblee Award for field geology at that meeting and you can view photos and text on all of that at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/PGS.html> on the Web. The second field trip was to the New Idria serpentinite south of here where we had a two-day campout and got to collect jadeite and asbestos. I always do a good job of washing off my boots and the inside of the jeep when I return from trips like that. At least I do asbestos I can.

Martha and I had high-school reunions back to back this summer. It was her 20th and a week later my 30th. It’s a good thing mine was a week later or it would have looked like we are ten years apart (“It’s ten.” “No, it’s only nine.” “A mule.” “A horse.” “Tastes great.” “Less filling.”). I got to add to my Web pages as well as my photo collection and may get some of my shots of her reunion picnic published in the Memories book. You can view them on the Web at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/Paly.html>

We gathered in San Diego for Thanksgiving and will gather much of our families at Martha’s house in Carmichael for Christmas. Katherine is in First Grade now and also got cast as a Tiny Mouse in her dance class’s production of The Nutcracker. We both have our respective kids (ages 6 and 28) for Christmas this year so that will be nice.

The power still isn’t back on but my batteries lasted nice and long. I’ll figure out some way of getting this printed off later. I should have some nice thawed chicken for dinner by now (and some nice thawed ice cream for dessert). It’ll get dark soon so I’d better move some firewood around the front and dig my Coleman lantern out of the attic. I wish you happiness and love this Christmas and the year to come.

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<http://geodata.wr.usgs.gov/pub/html/index.html>