

Merry Christmas, 2001

Winter has set in, there is snow in the Sierra, the Christmas tree in the living room is trimmed, and, as Dad used to say, "I'm warm, safe, and dry." I get to sit here and write my yearly tome to you, my dear friends and family members. I'm a happy man. Snow again – This year started out with stories about snow. I had been on a day hike, gone out to dinner, and attended a lecture with my friend Mary Jane, a geologist at work, but as the snow got deeper, we decided to ski some cross-country trails in the Sierra together. We've had minor troubles deciding if the dinner was a date or not (our friend Paul said "... if you have to ask, it wasn't" but by the time we got home from the Sierra last January, Mary Jane and I were definitely dating.

This was the year that I revisited the world of downhill skiing. I started downhill skiing at Big Bear when I was in about 10th grade and carried out my frustrated attempts at learning the sport clear into college at Humboldt. Despite years of efforts, I never got beyond stem turns. When I discovered cross-country skiing after a Rainier climb one winter, I never looked back. Well, now they have new parabolic skis that have skinny middles and fat tips and tails, and they are said to help you turn a lot. This year, at the invitation of my friend Bill, I rented a pair at REI and off we went to Alpine Meadows. My lesson was at 10:00 AM but Bill and I were on the snow by 9:00 AM. In that hour, Bill taught me to do parallel turns; I felt like I was cheating in class because I already knew how to ski (after all these years). So I raced home to tell Mary Jane and we went back to alpine ski a few weekends later. She's a lot better than I am <grin>.

Winter would also be incomplete without yet another visit to the Año Nuevo Elephant Seal preserve. I hit it twice this year: once during the fundraiser for the natural-history association, affectionately called the Sealabration, and once with my niece, Anna, and her husband, Stephane. When Anna and Stephane were visiting, it was also the night for the Peninsula Geological Society, meeting so we all gathered there – Anna, Stephane, Mary Jane, and me. Being about my birthday by then, my friend Janice snuck a cake into the dinner part of the meeting and the President of the society, Gary, had all forty people sing to me. He said something to the effect of "our esteemed Vice President turned 40." Oh, 40 or 53: As my friend Dean says "same order of magnitude." One of the people there said she had no idea I was 40; she thought I was more her kid's age (37). Well, truth be known, Mary Jane is, indeed, younger than I am; after the meeting, we went home, pulled out the camera, and proceeded to document removing most of my gray hair. Keep in mind that Anna makes her living doing facials in a spa in Hollywood and I didn't really have much of a face; that gray beard pretty well took up most of that space. That's right; Mikie shaved. Beardless Mikie. Are you over it? Get over it. Are you over it yet? Good.

Mary Jane and I have had Yosemite as our "second home" for much of our lives. Last year, in fact, when I was in Wawona with Anna and Stephane, she was on a hike from Tuolumne Meadows to Yosemite Valley (on a difficult route she claimed I suggested to her). April is the Yosemite Association Spring Forum which is also when the spring run-off is in full swing. So we signed up for field seminars, grabbed our cameras, and off we went. It was wonderful being back in our Second Home and falling in love. I recall a conversation with someone late last year or early this year where I was describing Mary Jane and saying that I'd love to have a partner "just like her." "Why not her?" he asked. And later, while doing some photography for my friend Cynthia at USGS, she cornered me, lowered her voice, and asked "have you thought about MJ?"

I have actually been doing some work this year. In fact, work is more of a joy when I can call Mary Jane and meet for coffee or when we ask the other to review a bit of text. She helped me publish the Autobiography of Philip B. King (<http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/open-file/of00-443/>) and I helped her publish a Professional Paper on rock weathering. One of our hot topics is an animation of the tectonic evolution of the circum-north Pacific (<http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/open-file/of01-261/>). I also got to be a coauthor on the revised version of a publication on volcanoes in Alaska (<http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/dds/dds-39/>). I'll be shackled to my mouse pad

all next week trying to get the Farallon Marine Atlas to the printer before the end of the year; it will be at <http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/circular/c1198/>



Mary Jane and Michael at Yosemite Falls

The Caldera web server got shut down with the rest of the U.S. Department of Interior because of a court order over Indian lands and grazing-fee proceeds. The clamp-down is easing but Caldera may not ever come up again, so I now have my little personal web site and all that fun stuff that used to be on Caldera and more will now be located at <http://www.diggles.com>, so keep an eye on it. In fact, I'd better put some more stuff there just so I can finish this Christmas letter.

I made it back to my old stomping grounds in Arcata twice this year. The first trip was when my friend Kay presented her book on the history of the folk-dance program at Humboldt; there was feasting, music, dancing, and book signing into the night. Later in the summer, I went back for the 30th anniversary of the Northcoast Environmental Center. More feasting and story telling took place by people who were past, present, future, and all-of-the-above creators of that place. For a photo essay, see <http://www.diggles.com/nec/> where one of my favorite shots is of Dr. Hewston, whose only story to the 300 gathered folks was that, when Mike Diggles was in his class in 1966, he brought a camera and photographed everyone.

We got a little bit of geology and geography in this year. MJ and I went on the Peninsula Geological Society (<http://www.diggles.com/pgs/>) field trip to Mt. Shasta and the Klamath Mountains and then hit the June picnic of the Northern California Chapter of The Explorers Club (<http://www.diggles.com/ec/>) on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. That was our first peak summit together. Mt. Livermore is the high point on the island, about 700' above the Bay. We went up with our friends Paul and Elsa. Paul and I hit the Big Sur coast on a road trip this summer as well. We loaded up his car with cameras, film for me, and CompactFlash cards for him and wound our way up Highway 1.

I had a great time with Anna and Stephane in the middle of July. The three of us took off Friday and hiked about 11 miles up nearly 6,000 feet from Owens Valley to the top of Shepherd Pass in the eastern Sierra Nevada. Stephane's body wasn't happy with the altitude, so it seemed like a bad idea for him to go higher. Anna and I went on and climbed Mt. Williamson on

Saturday. The approach from base camp to the foot of the mountain was over all sorts of boulder fields and ridges and we blew three hours just getting to where the climbing began. We spent another five hours getting to the summit ridge and a fair part of that time was Anna waiting for me to catch my breath. Just before the summit ridge, there is an upper third class pitch up a 60-foot chimney. It is really fun because it has a chalk stone (boulder) stuck in it half way up and you get to wiggle under it and come out on top of it and continue climbing. We decided that going *down* this thing would be more difficult because you can't see where your feet should go. So, since we didn't want to lug the rope past here anyhow, we rigged it and I taught Anna how to do a short little rappel before we continued the climb to the summit at 14,300 feet. We could see 12 other 14,000-plus-foot peaks to the north and south, and only one, Mount Whitney, was above us. We could see the Palisade group to the north and even White Mountain Peak in my old thesis area to the northeast. I've been up five of those peaks; three with Dad. For the whole story, see <http://www.diggles.com/williamson/>



Anna and Michael on the summit

While all this was going on during my summer, Mary Jane was doing field geology in Montana with Indiana University. This made her a better field geologist and helps pump up her applications to graduate schools. It was a long six weeks and we spent a lot of money on phone calls (it was money well spent...). A week before she finished, I loaded my car with cameras and camping gear and headed northeast, via my friend Greg's house, to fetch her. My favorite camp site was smack dab in the middle of the Black Rock Desert in northern Nevada. I drove five miles out on the flats, turned off the engine, let it roll to a stop, and camped. The next morning I drove another 35 miles on that surface before I hit a road. My favorite moment, of course, was arriving at the field station for a hug and a kiss from Mary Jane. We spent another week visiting friends and family in Washington and Oregon on the way home.

Fall meant yet another Boot 'n Blister hike, this time to Morris Meadow. About a dozen of us (if you count the dog and the two horses) went up Stuart Fork of the Trinity River into the Klamath Mountains. Several of us have been up this canyon more than once. Former BnB President Maralyn and I were in a small group that came out of this canyon about thirty years ago with pretty shredded packs and no food; we left behind some poorly trained bears. I never made that mistake since. Several of us hiked up towards (some beyond) Sapphire Lake on Sunday before hiking out for a nice dinner in Weaverville. One count was that we covered 26 miles that weekend. Next year, my bicycle-shop partner, Ron, has planned a trip to the South Warner Wilderness in Modoc County. To avoid early snow in this high country, his plan is to have the hike September 20-22, 2002. Visit the BnB web site at <http://www.diggles.com/bnb/> for past photos and future plans.

Fall also brought a wonderful family event: My niece Jen's wedding to Chris. It was a family reunion as well as a holy union; I put a few photos at <http://www.diggles.com/jcoven/> Welcome to our family, Chris.

November came and it was time to go back to Yosemite for the third time this year and for the third year to the Yosemite Institute (YI) with Northridge Elementary School in Fair Oaks, near Sacramento. This year I

started out by lecturing in the classroom the Friday before we left for Yosemite. This gave the kids and me a chance to meet each other before we went to the field and I got to "drone on" about geology and Yosemite with a slideshow, some maps, and some geologic field equipment. The father of one of the students wanted her to ask what kind of rock that was on Middle Brother where he took a fall as a rock climber in his younger years. I opened up the Geologic Map of Yosemite Valley by Frank Calkins and taught her how to read it and tell *me* what rock type that is.

On Sunday we headed for the Valley where we checked in at Camp Curry. It is always a joy to pull over at the turnout where the kids get their first view of the valley with Half Dome in the distance. For many of them, this is their first view of the Sierra. On our first day with YI, we took the bus to the top of Glacier Point and hiked down the Four-Mile Trail to the Valley. This was a great chance to get a group photo of sixty children with us teachers, naturalists, and some parents. Before doing the 3,000-foot or so decent into the valley, we had my obligatory geology lecture, put together a topographic-map puzzle, and renamed Yosemite Falls "Yosemite Trickle" (only the Lower Falls had water; the Upper Falls was dry). They can tell you how the water got past the top to show up at the bottom; can you? Frank Calkins' map came out again when a student asked if the different rock types shown on the geologic map actually looked different on the cliff. He got to locate the contact between two units on the map and point it out to the others on the wall across the valley. One cold morning we went up to Happy Isles and learned how to tell stream health by the insects that are present in the stream bed. The students did a stream-health insect collection that became part of the data that will be used to establish the Merced River as part of the Wild and Scenic River system. We moved from the Valley to Wawona for the next two day sand went to the Mariposa Grove. Did you know that tannin (sap from a Sequoia tree) makes great face paint? See this year's photos as well as photos from the previous three years at <http://www.diggles.com/yi/>



Jen and Chris

My sister Barby and her husband Harold will be coming to the U.S. from France for a Christmas visit to Linda's (my other sister) so Mary Jane and I are headed down for more family closeness in a few days. You have our love and wishes for a good holiday season and a grand new year. Stay warm, safe, and dry; and peace be with you all.

Love,

Mike

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