

The Tween Years

WELCOME TO AGUA DULCE,
PACIFIC CREST TRAIL HIKERS!



Editor's note: During the PCTA Annual Meeting last April, former PCTA executive director Bob Ballou said that he "felt like a proud parent" seeing the progress the organization has made in recent years. The Communicator asked Bob to reflect on what it was like at the PCTA during his five-year tenure.



Pages 20 & 21, Clockwise from top left: The community of Agua Dulce, Calif., welcomed the PCTA for a major trail project on National Trails Day in 1998, (l-r) Bob Ballou, Jim Hilton, Alan Young and David Foscoe. • The National (not very) Scenic Trail in Soledad Canyon helped prompt Congressional funding for land acquisition during the adolescent years. • Ending commercial development of private easements along the PCT was one of the threats identified as a priority for the PCTA in the adolescent years. • Dr. Ben York demonstrates the proper way to balance load using his "iron mule" during the annual meeting in Balboa Park, San Diego. • (l-r) Joe Sobinovskiy, Eric Weinmann and Don Bennett work on the Crestfest 2000 trail project. • Bob Ballou at his desk after returning from the Second Annual Executive Director's Invitational Work Party in Lassen Volcanic National Park, circa 2001.

By **Bob Ballou**

I felt like a proud parent after **Barney Mann, Liz Bergeron** and others finished presenting their reports to the Annual Meeting last April. After all, the PCTA was a not-so-young but immature organization when I assumed the position of executive director in 1996. Sixteen years later it is thriving and mature, bursting with energy and hope.

The passion brought to the trail from the 1930s through the 1950s by pioneers Clinton Clarke and Warren Rogers had lived on in the likes of **Louise Marshall, Larry Cash** and others. But by the 1990s they were getting on in years, and looking to others to carry the torch. There wouldn't have been any tween years without their vision and tenacity.

By 1993, **Dr. Ben York** had taken over the mantle of leadership. With the best of intentions and a grant from the **U.S. Forest Service**, he had convinced the board of directors to hire the organization's first paid employee. Unfortunately, that arrangement didn't accomplish its purpose, and by 1995, spirits were waning.

An infusion of new blood on the board turned despair to hope. The board adopted a strategic plan, and would hire a full-time executive director. **Alan Young**, the primary author of the plan and an early thru-hiker, led the search committee. Through a circumstance I consider an act of God, they selected me for the job.

I had hiked High Sierra segments of the PCT as a teenage Explorer scout. But I'd spent my adult life as a member of the Boy Scouts of America professional staff and as a fundraising consultant to nonprofit groups working to rehabilitate inner city neighborhoods. I had no experience with trail organizations. This was going to be an adventure.

At the PCTA, I found that Ben, **Pete Fish, Curtis Hardie, Hal Culp, Laraine Downer, Lee Terkelsen** and other volunteers shared a vision and desire but lacked the experience to grow the organization to the next level. It was going to be up to me to apply the skills learned in my 31-year career to harness and direct their energy. Easier said than done!

Though I had been selected in the fall of 1995, the Forest Service grant to pay me didn't start until May. So while winding down my consulting work, I worked part time getting to know PCTA board members and gathering as much information about the association as I could.

What a great group of dedicated men and women. By mid-summer 1996, we had developed and adopted a new membership and

benefits program and set a fundraising goal of \$112,000 for the year, of which \$57,000 was already raised from our new Trail Guardian Club and the Forest Service grant. We also set a goal to increase membership from 800 to 5,000 in five years.

By late September, the enormity of the job had caught up with me and I was beginning to run ragged. Membership was at 1,481, but fundraising needed more of my attention. I needed someone who was intimately familiar with the trail and could do more of the membership and constituency-relations work.

By year's end, we had raised enough money to hire **Joe Sobinovskiy**, a 1995 PCT and former Appalachian Trail thru-hiker. Finally, I had someone who "owned" the trail, knew it like the back of his hand and could communicate with our hiker constituency. Together, we began to work on that seemingly impossible membership goal.

We launched 1997 by setting benchmarks that gave each board committee and staff member specific goals for the year. We secured grants from **REI** and the **National Forest Foundation** for a direct-mail cam-



Left to right, both pages: Bob Nida and USFS Acting Trail Manager Peggy Hernandez point to the optimal location for relocating the PCT through Agua Dulce, Calif. • PCTA members bid during a silent auction at Crestfest 2000 held on a private estate near Castel, Calif. • (l-r) Don Bennett, Ben York, Fred Camphausen and Don Ferris were treated like royalty at Drakesbad after working on the PCT in Lassen Volcanic National Park. • (l-r) Dave Sherman and Bill Hay from the USFS and Bob Nida from the PCTA scope out a trail relocation in Southern California.

paign to recruit new members. We put a new computer and accounting system into service, and the office was moved from my home into a 12-by-12 windowless room in a north Sacramento office building.

In April, I attended the 5th Biennial Conference on National Historic and Scenic Trails, where I met and shared ideas with my counterparts from the **Appalachian Trail Conference**, **Continental Divide Trail Alliance** and other trail groups. I also saw what the ATC had accomplished by having consistent management, a dispersed staff of more than 30, and one federal agency manager for the entire trail.

I also learned about the annual Outdoor Retailer Show. I arranged for a pass and got **Bob Irvine**, a board member and president of Caribou Mountaineering, to give us some space in their booth for a small display. Too late to secure lodgings near the Salt Palace convention center, I stayed at a youth hostel and hoofed my way to and from the exhibit each day while my counterparts stayed in hotel rooms and wine and dined with the manufacturers. I was determined to do better the next year!

I worked closely with the volunteer editor of *The PCT Communicator*, Lee Terkelsen, to improve the black-and-white-newsprint magazine. Before long he had converted it to a full-color magazine that was the envy of all the other trail organizations.

The long hours were beginning to pay off. By the end of 1997 we had more than 2,500 members and \$32,000 net income. We moved to a new office, and with help from **Ben Go** and **Jeff Schaffer** we published the first *PCT Data Book*. Thanks to board members **Lesya Struz** and **Bob Nida**, we received not one but two \$20,000 grants from the **Lewis Anthony Dexter Foundation** in England to identify all the threatened sections of the trail. It was thrilling to receive international recognition for our work, and their grant led to a matching grant from the National Forest Foundation.

We made progress on the challenging goals of our long-range plan. Then Joe learned from trail angels in Agua Dulce that a move was afoot to develop a subdivision on BLM land that the PCT crossed. Joe made an impassioned presentation to the board of direc-

tors. They decided that the PCTA needed to put as much effort into protecting the trail as it had into preserving it. The BLM eventually removed that property from its disposal list at our request.

That summer we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with all the federal and state agencies with management responsibilities for the PCT. It recognized the PCTA as “the major partner in the management and operation of the PCT.” The PCTA board went on record calling for the appointment of a Forest Service PCT program manager – a job now held by **Beth Boyst** – to oversee consistent application of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the PCT over its entire 2,650-mile length. This was a huge step, and one that would be seen as critical for the trail.

I went to Hike the Hill and met with congressional staff members. As a result, the PCT was put “on the radar” for future funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund by California Senator **Barbara Boxer**.

The workload increased to the point that the board approved the hiring of an administrative assistant and a person devoted to researching the threatened sections of the trail.

One of the most rewarding things I did that year was to work with hiker/photographer **Bart Smith** and authors **Karen Berger** and **Dan Smith**, to publish *Along the Pacific Crest Trail*, a magnificent coffee-table book. Hikers and would-be hikers were clamoring for a map of the entire trail, so when we received a \$20,000 challenge cost-share grant from the Forest Service for that purpose, we sought and received funds to match the grant from **Eugene “Bud” Reid** and his wife.

The tragic death of a young couple run down along the trail by an errant motorist that fall was turned into hope with the establishment of the **Jane & Flicka Memorial Fund**, providing the seed money for an endowment fund. We received a \$5,000 grant from *Backpacker Magazine* to purchase 10 trail crew kitchens, and after seeing what the PCTA was doing, the **Coleman Company** donated most of the items we needed without being asked. It was so fulfilling to see companies recognizing our hard work without having to beg for a grant.

By year’s end, membership had grown to 3,079.

The year 1999 was one of joy and angst for me personally. My wife and I had purchased land the previous year for an eventual retirement home in the Carson Valley east of Lake Tahoe. Then she landed a job that required our moving to Minden. For the next two years I camped out under my desk each night and went home on weekends.

David Foscue and **Bob Nida** joined me during Hike the Hill that year. A few weeks later, Rep. **Howard “Buck” McKeon** authored an appro-

priation request co-signed by 14 members from both sides of the aisle. As a result, the Forest Service received \$1.5 million for land acquisition to relocate the trail off the road in Agua Dulce. Once again, the PCTA was beginning to earn serious recognition for its work protecting the trail. We drafted or adopted policy statements relating to timber management, ski areas and mountain bike use on the trail. The millennium ended on a good note.

We Hiked the Hill again in 2000 and secured \$3 million for land acquisition, \$250,000 for a multiregional land acquisition team, \$100,000 for a full-time PCT manager’s position and increased overall funding for trail maintenance. By year’s end, the board had adopted a “Vision for Resource Management Along the PCT,” and we had received an unsolicited \$50,000 grant from the southern **California Wildlands Conservancy** that recognized our achievements in the area of trail protection

In 2001, as winter turned to spring, the PCTA had grown bigger and stronger. Membership topped 4,000, the number of trail projects and maintainers had grown exponentially, our advocacy efforts were paying off with more funding from Congress for land acquisition and maintenance, and the Forest Service turned to the PCTA for advice on which easements along the trail should receive priority for acquisition.



By May, I could feel the burnout and announced I would like to retire in October. In August, **Liz Bergeron** was selected for the position from a pool of 19 applicants. I couldn’t have been happier since I knew she would do an outstanding job.

So it was with great pleasure that I handed off the now mature PCTA to Liz in October 2001 and headed to British Columbia for a little vacation and to get reacquainted with my wife ... and my life. It was a terrific run and a satisfying way to end my career in the nonprofit world. 🐦

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