

From the President (continued from page 1)

the latest addition to our desert open space, the Sonoran Preserve.

If you love our Phoenix mountains and want to preserve them for future generations, there is a place for you at PMPC. Please consider becoming an active member.

To our long-time members, thank you for all the work you do on behalf of our Phoenix mountains. To our new members, welcome!

Terry Horne

When he's not on horseback in the mountains of Arizona and Wyoming, Terry Horne serves as a director of the Arizona Trail Association and on the boards of The Sheriff's Mounted Posse of Maricopa County and the Boy Scouts of America's Grand Canyon Council. Horne was elected PMPC president at the organization's meeting in May.

### Lookout

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council  
P.O. Box 26121, Phoenix, Arizona 85068-6121  
www.phoenixmountains.org

The Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council is dedicated to protecting our Phoenix Mountains Preserves for the future.

Executive Board  
Terry Horne, *President*  
Leslie Spencer-Snyder, *Vice President*  
Dale Slocum, *Recording Secretary*  
Adelheid Fischer, *Corresponding Secretary*  
Robin Salthouse, *Treasurer*

The Lookout is published by the Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council  
Adelheid Fischer, *Editor*  
Printed on 30% postconsumer-waste recycled paper.

## Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Mail to: PMPC  
P.O. Box 26121  
Phoenix, AZ 85068-6121  
Attention: Membership

Check here if you wish to receive the PMPC newsletter via e-mail.

#### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY (please circle)

Family/Individual \$20  
Organization \$30

#### AREAS OF INTEREST/EXPERTISE (please circle)

Communications Membership  
Special Events Research/Archives  
Trail Maintenance Legislative Action

#### ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT (please circle)

Slope Protector \$50 - \$100  
Cliff Protector \$100 - \$500  
Peak Protector \$500+

### EVENTS CALENDER

September 2003

Sept. 8: Members' Meeting,  
Los Olivos Park Adult Center.

October 2003

Oct. 6: Members' Meeting,  
Los Olivos Park Adult Center.

Oct. 25: Trail Work Day, Pima Canyon,  
South Mountain Preserve. For more information,  
call (480) 753-3240 or (480) 706-0172.

Oct. 26: Trail Work Day, North Mountains.  
For more information, call (602) 395-9466.

November 2003

Nov. 3: Members' Meeting,  
Los Olivos Park Adult Center.

Nov. 15: Trail Work Day, North Mountains.  
For more information, call (602) 395-9466.

December 2003

Dec. 1: Members' Meeting,  
Los Olivos Park Adult Center.

Dec. 14: Trail Work Day, North Mountains.  
For more information, call (602) 395-9466.

Spring in the Mountains will be held  
Saturday, March 6. Mark your Calendar!

TO:

P.O. Box 26121, Phoenix, AZ 85068-6121

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council, Inc



# LOOKOUT

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P.O. Box 26121, Phoenix, AZ 85068-6121

www.phoenixmountains.org

### FROM THE PRESIDENT

Visit the Phoenix Mountains Preserves on any given day and you'll see hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers and picnickers enjoying the extraordinary natural legacy that has been preserved within the City of Phoenix.

It is our responsibility to maintain this great natural amenity, add to it and keep all the little infringements from nibbling away at it. This is a broad task that requires people of many different interests and talents.

Here's how you can help.

If you like physical, outdoor work, the PMPC's trail crew is looking for volunteers to help maintain the preserves' many miles of hiking, biking and riding paths. If archival research is your interest, we need help cataloging PMPC's history into a retrievable library for researchers. Our membership chair is always on the lookout for volunteers to help spread the word about PMPC and recruit new faces with fresh ideas. And we need help keeping our members informed about preserve issues via our newsletter and website. Finally, if public policy is your passion, consider serving as a PMPC liaison at public meetings that cover issues related to the existing Phoenix Mountains Preserves and

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### Off the Beaten Path

Whether you've walked the woodlands of Appalachia or Utah's slickrock canyons, the coastal scrub of California or a park in downtown Minneapolis, you've seen them: paths that veer off the main trail and tempt you to follow as they disappear over a hill or around a bend. Sometimes they're no more than a faint trace. Others have been beaten down to dirt, their treadways so cleared of vegetation that they look manicured.

To folks in the recreational trade, they're known as goat paths, desire lines, spider trails, spur trails. Call them what you like, they're a menace, says Don Gumeringer, especially in heavily visited desert areas.

"People fail to realize that the desert is the most fragile environment in the world, second only perhaps to the tundra in arctic regions," observes Gumeringer, a 15-year veteran of the South Mountain ranger staff. Drive over the same spot in the desert just a handful of times, he says, and you will have created a road scar. "Depending on the terrain, the water, and soil and plant material," he points out, "that scar can take anywhere from 250 to 500 years to heal."

To avoid unnecessary damage to the desert, Gumeringer urges users to stay on designated

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trails. They have been designed not only to visually complement the terrain but also to handle foot, bike and horse traffic without causing undue environmental harm to the surrounding landscape. And well-planned trails are plotted to take advantage of the choicest parts of a landscape while avoiding ecologically sensitive areas.

Motivated by curiosity or simply the desire to take shortcuts, however, people wander off trail—with disastrous consequences for places like the desert. According to Scott Frische, coordinator of the PMPC's volunteer trail-work program, desert trailblazers often are unaware of the damage they cause. It starts, he says, with the breaking of the desert's fragile surface layer, what scientists call the microphytic crust ("micro" meaning "tiny" and "phytic" meaning "plants").



As its name suggests, this top layer of desert soil, which measures a mere one-tenth of an inch (the width of a piece of cardboard), is occupied by a diverse community of small primitive organisms including cyanobacteria, algae, lichens, mosses and liverworts. Together they form a kind of living glue that binds soil particles and small stones in a sturdy matrix. This stabilizing crust is so strong that it can resist pressure from driving monsoon rains and punishing winds.

The microphytic crust also provides desert plants with critical supplies of scarce nutrients, such as nitrogen. And the crust acts like a giant sponge, its nubby surface slowing the flow of water runoff during the desert's brief, violent rainstorms. This allows the tissues of many organisms in the crust, which swell with moisture, to absorb more water.

Providing a reservoir of moisture close to the surface is especially important for desert plants. Take, for example, saguaros. Each cactus sends out a skirt of roots as much as 100 feet in every direction. To maximize their absorption of moisture during seasonal rainfalls, most of these roots lie within a few inches of the ground's surface.

Walking or driving over the desert, Gumeringer points out, breaks the threads of the microphytic crust. Not only do these disturbances compromise the ability of the soil to collect water but they also expose the underlying loose soil to erosion from wind and water. At the same time, crushing fragile roots decreases the ability of plants to absorb precious water. Before long, plants begin to die and erosion sets in.

Even the most innocent footstep can set in motion a cascade of ecologically destructive effects. "It doesn't take more than two or three people and you suddenly have a footpath," Gumeringer says. "Then pretty soon you have more people following that footpath. It might lead into an extremely fragile area or on steep slope. The foot traffic dislodges rocks and compacts the soil. And where does water go when it goes downslope? It takes the path of least resistance. And if you have a footpath that's already packed down, the water is going to go right down that channel and rip out the soil, rock and plant material."

In the worst cases, the paths become scoured down to bedrock, like the great vertical scars that stripe the flanks of many hillsides in South Mountain. Bringing life back to these steep hillsides is a difficult task. Many of them were created by off-road vehicles before their use was banned in the preserves.

Decades later, the bare-rock surfaces still show little signs of life. Indeed, vegetation is not likely to return to these sites for thousands of years since, in the desert, the soil needed by these plants can take between 5,000 and 10,000 years to form.

In these scoured areas, Gumeringer and his colleagues have helped nature along by using a trail-rehabilitation technique in which rows of rock are placed horizontal to the slope. These check dams help to capture fine silt,

### Doin' the Five-finger Pickup

The five-finger pickup—it's a growing fad in the desert preserves, so hot it's positively steaming. So get ready to spread the word!

Exactly what is the five-finger pickup, you might ask? Well, it's putting all five of your fingers inside a plastic bag and using them to pick up your dog's feces, uhmm, poop. Oh, come on, don't tell me you haven't heard of this! Okay, let's suppose you haven't. In that case, you might want to know that there are city, county and state laws that require you to pick up after your pets. (In case you're really out of the loop, you're also required to keep your dog on a leash in the desert preserves.)

When it comes to the five-finger pickup, practice makes perfect. Just slip all five fingers into the bag, pick up the entire pile and turn the bag inside out over the poop. Of course, for a big dog you might need to use the ten-finger pickup; that is, place both hands in the bag while you hold the leash with your knees. Never mind what you look like from the rear!

But why, you may ask, do you need to pick up feces in a place that could obviously use a little extra fertilizer? Well, for one thing, organic materials, not to mention glass and plastics, don't biodegrade very quickly in the desert. That goes for orange peels and Kleenex as well as dog turds.

Second, trails littered with feces negatively impact the desert experience for your fellow

hikers. Ever had to pick dog doo-doo out of the lug soles of your hiking boots or the carpet in your trunk? And after a monsoon storm, have you ever headed out into the desert to savor the aroma of creosote only to get a hit of reconstituted dog feces instead?

Third, and most important, dog feces pose a health hazard to native wildlife, particularly to their canine relatives, the coyotes. Even a dog that has just had its vaccinations can slough off dangerous viruses in its feces for up to ten days. So please, do the wildlife a favor even if you don't care about your fellow trail users.

Here's how I make the five-finger pickup more fun and exciting for myself. After my dogs do their thing, I look around to see if there is any other refuse that I can pick up and add to the bag. I give myself bonus points if the bag is completely full before I tie it off. My dogs have joined me in the game. I always make them wait until I pick up every poop and piece of garbage that I can. As a payback for making them wait, they refrain from pooping until we're well past a convenient garbage can and still have a mile to go to the next available one. I'm sure they're thinking, "I put it there for a reason. Can't you just leave it alone?"

Well, have fun and, uhmm, happy, uhmm, hunting!—*Leslie Spencer-Snyder*

seeds and organic debris as they course down the hillsides in rainfall.

The technique has had some success. But the regrowth of plants in the desert is slow and the need for restoration is overwhelming. Tom Fitzgerald, the trails coordinator for the City of Phoenix Parks, Recreation and Library Department, points out that there are more than 100 miles of designated trails in the Phoenix Mountains Preserves. Over time, preserve users have carved another 125 miles

of illegal, secondary trails. With only a skeleton crew of three paid workers, Fitzgerald says they are able to rehabilitate a mere two miles of damaged trails each year.

That's where volunteers can help. "The City of Phoenix has one of the most fabulous resources anywhere in urban America," Gumeringer observes, "and it's being proactive by acquiring more land to the north for the Sonoran Preserve. But the only way that we can successfully manage this is through

#### NEWS BRIEFS

PMPC Announces New Board  
At its annual meeting on May 5, PMPC members gathered for a dinner

under the stars at the Desert Botanical Garden to elect a new board.

PMPC's new officers include Terry Horne, President; Leslie Spencer-Snyder, Vice President; Dale Slocum, Recording Secretary; Adelheid Fischer, Corresponding Secretary; and Robin Salthouse, Treasurer.

Members of PMPC's Board of Directors are as follows: Jean Anderson (past president), Steve Alonge, Michael Goodman, Betty Lou Haldiman, Wendy Hodgson, Amy Prince, Craig Weaver, Tom Chapman, Valerie Denny, Scott Frische, Ken Gometz, Betsy Gometz, Ruth Hamilton, Pam Kalish, David Gironde, Maxine Lakin, Chuck Lakin, Susanne Rothwell, Laura Watson and LV Yates.

Special thanks go to outgoing president Jean Anderson for her hard work on behalf of our Phoenix Mountains Preserves. Thanks, Jean!

Fundraiser Buys Trail-work Tools  
The PMPC's wine-tasting benefit, held on April 12, raised more than \$450 toward the purchase of trail-work tools for South Mountain Preserve. Special thanks go to Ted Rodgers of Beaulieu Vineyards who provided an informative and entertaining guide to the world of wines. Beaulieu Vineyards also

the help of volunteers. We can't do it alone." Paul Paonessa, a North Mountain ranger who regularly supervises PMPC trail projects, agrees that volunteers are critical to the task of healing the damaged areas of our mountain preserves. But far and away "the best thing you can do for the preserves," he advises, "is to stick to designated trails."

—*Adelheid Fischer*

*If you enjoy a physical workout in the great outdoors, consider joining PMPC's volunteer trail crew. See the calendar on p. 5 for dates.*

donated wines for the tasting as well as a bottle of wine to the event's raffle.

Thanks also go to the Town & Country Trader Joe's and the Ahwatukee Safeway stores for donating food for the evening. And we extend our gratitude to long-time PMPC members Maxine and Chuck Lakin for sponsoring PMPC's use of the Sheriff's Posse of Maricopa County clubhouse for the occasion.

In July, the fundraiser's organizer, Robin Salthouse, presented South Mountain ranger Don Gumeringer with trail-work tools that included rock chisels, chipping hammers and a freight frame for packing heavy materials into remote areas of the park. Also included in the donation was a clinometer which allows trail planners to measure the heights and slopes of hillsides.

Kudos to Alternative Copy  
Tempe's Alternative Copy has donated paper and printing services for the next four issues of "Lookout." Our special thanks go to store manager Kris Watanabe for his generosity, professionalism and community spirit!

An electronic version of the "Lookout" will be available with the fall 2003 issue. If you'd like to make the switch to a cyber copy and haven't already notified us, please contact Adelheid Fischer at (480) 753-3240.