

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

the newsletter of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers, Inc.

March - April 2021



*White Sands National Park ~ Late afternoon sun tints the gypsum sands in pastel colors.
© 2017 William Horton*

RMOWP Conference 2021!

No one really knows what 2021 will bring, but with the increasing availability of Covid vaccines and progress on treatments, let's be optimistic and plan a conference. So, mark your calendars for September 26-29, that's Sunday through Wednesday, in Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Depending on restrictions at the time we may have a few more activities "on your own," and in keeping with your thoughts from our recent survey, we'll be looking at more outdoor activities. But at least we'll be able to see each other face-to-face, maybe even maskless!

Alamogordo (Spanish for fat cottonwood tree) is a small city in south-central New Mexico, about 90 miles north of El Paso and 210 miles south of Albuquerque. It will be our headquarters for treks to some of the most scenic and fascinating destinations in southern New Mexico.

We'll photograph the glistening white gypsum sands of White Sands National Park, explore Three Rivers Petroglyph Site with more than 21,000 ancient petroglyphs, discover the true Wild West at Oliver Lee Memorial State Park, and drop in to the New Mexico Museum of Space History for a glimpse of the beginnings of America's space program.

Headquarters will probably be the Holiday Inn Express. Don and Barb Laine expect to get to Alamogordo later this month, so expect more details soon. Or at least by the next newsletter.

Survey Results

About three dozen RMOWP members responded to our recent questionnaire on what we should do about a conference this year. The vast majority of respondents said we should go to Alamogordo, New Mexico, if it's safe to do so, although some were willing to go anywhere, saying "Let's just do something!" As you'll recall, Alamogordo, home of America's now second newest national park – White Sands – was our planned destination in 2020, but the Coronavirus pandemic put a stop to that.

Most respondents are willing to mask-up (one said "some people look better that way"). (Current restrictions in New Mexico require that people wear masks in all public places, except when eating, drinking, or under medical instruction to not wear a mask.)

Respondents also stated that they would be willing to practice social distancing (although one said he "sure will miss the HUGS"), and follow whatever restrictions are in effect at the time. A slight majority said that indoor activities are alright, but a greater number said that the more outside activities the better.

So, we're optimistic that we will have a conference next fall. See the accompanying "RMOWP Conference 2021!" article.

Another part of the survey asked if, regardless of whether we have a conference this year or not, members would be interested in participating in virtual writing and/or photography workshops via Zoom or another platform. About two-thirds said yes, so we'll get to work on that. Slightly less than half were interested in email workshops, so that probably won't happen.

We also received some excellent comments and suggestions that the conference committee will be looking into.

Announcements

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE!

If you haven't already, please remember to renew your RMOWP membership no later than March 31, 2021. Anyone who has not renewed by then will be dropped from membership on April 1, 2021. Reminder emails were sent in mid-February.

About mid-March I will be calling people who have not responded. If you did not receive either the Jan. or the Feb. renewal notices, please contact me at megaug@earthlink.net or 970-389-1099. If you are not planning to renew, please contact me and I won't call you in March.

Thanks to all of you who have renewed already! ~ from RMOWP Treasurer Maryann Gaug

NEW BY-LAWS ADOPTED 31 JANUARY 2021

The new By-laws were ratified by the membership via email ballots, with a 57% return, all affirmative. They were posted to the website February 1. You can read and download them at <https://rmowp.org/>.

Website Update

By Barb Laine

Have you tried to access rmowp.org recently, but couldn't? It's not your problem. Let's just say it's one of the joys of the ever-changing and evolving Internet, and we're hoping the issues will be resolved soon.

Actually, there's good news and there's bad news. First the good. When the website is up and running, and functioning properly again, it will be faster and better protected from malware. The bad news is that moving the site to a better platform took longer than expected and created more problems than hoped. Sigh. Isn't that often the way of things?

So, here's the scoop:

In early February, before RMOWP's 5-year hosting package with Network Solutions (NS) would run out (early March), I started looking at available options. Since we didn't want to change services, I explored the NS offerings. They had recently added a WordPress platform hosting package, and since we use WordPress I looked at it. And discussed the pros and cons with my web mentor Kit Horton.

Not only did the WordPress package promise faster loading time, it included daily auto-backups and the SSL certificate (that's what gives us the "https" and little padlock symbol showing that our website is secure). Admittedly it only included 25 email boxes and our current package offered 1000, but since we're only using six (6) out of the 1000 – and the most we have ever used was nine (9) – we decided 25 would be just fine.

Disk space is less also: 100GB as opposed to 300GB, but since rmowp.org is using just slightly over 1 GB after almost twenty years I'm not too concerned there.

Neither package offered malware monitoring but we've added that in as it's rather important.

The two-year WordPress package costs a bit less than the same time frame staying with our old hosting package.

Kit is dealing with numerous plug-in issues and I don't know what else might pop up. As soon as all is resolved, we will get the SSL certificate moved onto the new site location and our problems will be over. I hope. I'll let you all know when that is accomplished.

Didn't some wise old woman once say "Keep your expectations low and you won't be disappointed?" Well, I can attest!

Thanks to everyone for your understanding and patience.

SOMETIMES I REALLY WANT TO GO BACK TO THE DAYS OF THE PONY EXPRESS, AND WRITING WITH A FOUNTAIN PEN...

~ BARB LAINE



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Writer's Corner

The Original Photo Essay

Photos & text by Virginia Parker Staat

"Visual storytelling utilizes both language and art to pass on the essence of who we are."

~ Debbie Millman

It has been over a year since David and I visited Australia. One of the highlights of our journey was our trip to the Mitchell Falls rock art complex. These ochre paintings are believed to be among the oldest surviving rock art in the world. Some as old as 80,000 years.



We were fortunate to arrange a tour of the complex with Aboriginal guides. These guides from the Wandjina tribe explained that the rock art had multiple purposes. Some were for instruction; some contained tribal records; others provided warnings; and sometimes they were painted simply for the joy of the art itself. The rock art was also used in conjunction with various initiation ceremonies. During initiations, elders used the rock art as visual support while transmitting cultural information from generation to generation.

It occurred to me that in many respects Aboriginal rock art is an example of the original photo essay. This was especially true if the art was created to support their oral tradition.

We found one of the most fascinating rock art paintings in the Warnmarri or Brolga complex. Two brolgas were centered on a large rock, nearly touching head to head. The creatures were surrounded by a myriad of other paintings.

The brolga is one of Australia's two species of crane (see photo on page 5). Much like America's Sandhill or Whooping crane, brolgas are monogamous birds, breeding for life. They have an intricate courtship dance. Both male and female raise their young together.

The brolga has several different meanings in Aboriginal culture. The bird speaks to relationship, highlighting the sacred bond between a man and woman and how they should live together. An ancient tribal legend tells of a girl who loved to dance. After refusing to marry an evil spirit, he used his magic to turn her into a beautiful bird, the brolga. The brolga is also part of the Aboriginal Dreamtime or creation story. In Dreamtime, brolgas developed Australia's lagoons and marshlands and brought song to the people.



Two Brolgas go head-to-head in this ancient rock art.

Like a photo essay, the Aboriginal peoples may have used the brolga rock art combined with their oral traditions to relay these different stories. They may have counseled young people to emulate brolgas in their relationships. On cold nights, groups may have huddled together under the rock alcove overlooking the brolga paintings and entertained restless children by telling them the legend of a young dancer haunted by an evil spirit. During initiations, tribal elders may have used the brolga paintings to impart their creation story. In the Aboriginal culture, every detail of the Dreamtime story was critical during initiations in order to pass down their oral tradition.

In a photo essay, we do much the same thing. We select our photos based on the story we want to tell and the emotion that we want our readers to feel. We use our words to help readers connect with our message. We combine our photos and words to tell a visual story.

This integration of art and words is powerful, and the Aboriginal peoples must have known it. Modern educational research indicates people remember only ten percent of what they hear and only twenty percent of what they read. When combined with a visual, however, people retain approximately eighty percent of the information being relayed. When elders told their Dreamtime story in the Brolga Complex, did they do so knowing their initiates would more easily recall the story's details when surrounded by the rock art paintings?

Every culture on earth has used storytelling to keep people connected with their past, to inform, and to entertain. Visual storytelling, a combination of words and art, promotes an extremely powerful learning tool to connect people to their culture. Photo essays are simply a modern-day version of this ancient art form. What remarkable visual story will you tell?

President's Column

Emerging from Hibernation

Text and photo by Virginia Parker Staat

The freeze was record shattering. Just before Valentine's Day, South Texas received over four inches of snow. It stayed on the ground nearly a week. Winter storm temperatures plummeted and stayed below freezing for three days in a row.

Texas hasn't recorded this kind of weather since 1893. Everything froze... plants, roadways, and, especially, water pipes. In many respects the resulting impact was much like a very cold hurricane. The aftermath included the same kind of power outages and water damage. This time, however, the water came from broken pipes inside homes rather than from rain and flooding outside.

At our house, we lost power for a mere 14 hours in comparison to many who lost it for several days. Only two of our water pipes cracked, and both were outside and easily repaired. Our indoor temperature dropped to 48 degrees during the outage. Thankfully, camping experience and gear paid off. We ate meals cooked on our backpacking stove in front of the fireplace.

With the nearest snowplow located in Dallas and working there around the clock, authorities begged people in South Texas to stay at home and off the roads. We bundled up and tried to take a walk, but the snow on the street had turned to ice and was too slippery to navigate.

I spent most of the three days of freezing temperatures helping our feathered friends and various four-legged visitors. We had birds we have never seen before at the feeders, including a Hermit thrush, Yellow-throated warbler,

and, most surprisingly, a Bobwhite quail. Disoriented birds were everywhere. As an example, our local newspaper reported a juvenile Brown pelican was rescued just a few blocks from our house. How he ended up 68 miles inland from the coast remains a mystery.

One of my most important jobs during the winter storm was to keep the hummingbird feeders from freezing. We have three female hummers overwintering this year, including one Ruby-throated and two Rufus. If I didn't change their sugar water every two hours, it would begin to ice. Each morning, I made fresh nectar because the liquid had turned into a solid sugar popsicle.



Hummer in torpor.

On the coldest day of the three, the temperature dipped to eleven degrees overnight. Early the next morning, I spied one of the Rufus hummingbirds on the feeder that is suctioned to our kitchen window. She was fluffed up and breathing strangely. I ran to grab my camera. When I returned, she had rotated from an upright position to horizontal. The poor thing had gone into torpor, a hummingbird's involuntary mini-hibernation to mitigate cold weather. Torpor is a fascinating state. A hummingbird's metabolic rate can drop 95 percent. Her body temperature can drop 50 degrees, and her heart rate drop from 500 beats to 50 per minute. (Fortunately, it appears our little hummer survived her ordeal.)

It occurred to me that currently RMOWP is in a similar state. We are in a torpor-like condition because of the pandemic. This vibrant group is basically on hold. We are waiting for pandemic numbers to lower. We're waiting for restrictions to be lifted. Perhaps most importantly, we're waiting for the opportunity to hug once again.

Temperatures have risen nearly fifty degrees in Texas from last week. I watched our little Rufus hummingbird take a bath in one of the fountains yesterday. This morning I discovered that our redbud tree is blooming. A pair of Carolina wrens is building a nest in our Christmas poinsettia.

I know that RMOWP has the same kind of resiliency. We will soon emerge from our torpor-like state and get back to doing what we do best. I'm looking forward to seeing each of you in Alamogordo next fall. Until then, please stay warm and healthy.

Happy Spring!



*The fascinating and elusive Easter Jackalope wishes you a happy Easter!
(As sighted at the KOA in Douglas, WY.)*

© 2013 Don Laine

Board Meeting Wrap-up

By Barb Laine

On **Wednesday, January 13, 2021**, the RMOWP Board of Directors held their 2020 Annual Meeting electronically – or virtually as the new terminology demands – by email. Historically the annual meeting has been held in conjunction with the annual conference, but we all know what happened with that this past year. Hence an electronic meeting to take care of business.

Call to Order ~ President Virginia Staat called the meeting to order at 9am, CST. A quorum was established in minutes, and within a short time all board members were in attendance along with Executive Director Don Laine and Conference Committee member Jack Olson.

Minutes from the 2018 and 2019 board and general membership meetings were presented and approved.

Treasurer's Report, Maryann Gaug ~ The December 31, 2020 bank balance was \$13,051 and membership stood at 87. Our 2020 income exceeded our expenses by about \$1450. With the closing of both the scholarship and photo workshop in 2019, those funds were rolled back into RMOWP's general fund. The report was approved with a few last-minute additions.

Website Report, Barb Laine ~ Although the website did not change significantly during 2020, tweakings took place in several areas, and more are expected as we go forward. Our hosting service package (a 5-year package purchased in 2016) comes due in February and we will be looking at our options. Barb will be working with Kit Horton to determine the best package for our site.

Bylaws Committee Report, Barb Laine, Virginia Staat and Maryann Gaug ~ The proposed by-laws had been sent to the board and no questions were raised. The board voted unanimously to repeal the current By-laws and adopt the reorganized and clarified version. The weekend following the board meeting the committee will send the proposed By-laws to the membership for ratification.

Annual Contest and Awards Report, Frank Zurey ~ There were 13 entries this year compared to an average of 25 for the last five years, resulting in 45% fewer entries in photos (234) and written works (14); video entries were the same as the five-year average at fourteen.

The Australian Brolga.
See "The Original Photo Essay" on page 3 for an ancient rock art depiction of this lovely bird.
© 2019 Virginia P. Staat



Conference Committee Report, Don Laine, Jack Olson, Cecilia Travis, Kenita Gibbins, Maryann Gaug, Virginia Staat, Diane McKinley ~ Plans for the 2021 conference remain up in the air due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but the committee suggested RMOWPers block out early October for wherever we might go. Additionally, the committee will send out a short survey to the membership to discover if they would be comfortable attending a conference later in 2021, and what locations they would prefer and feel safest in.

Executive Director's Report, Don Laine ~ No major change to duties, except that day-to-day administration is taking less time while other tasks have become more complex. RMOWP is also making an effort to have more people involved in organizing conferences, so that should be a separate budget line item, although it was suggested that the executive director continue to be the conference committee chair. It was noted that contractors receive reimbursement for printing, paper, envelopes, and postage (primarily for the newsletter), but no compensation for travel, phone, Internet, or other out-of-pocket expenses. It was therefore requested that the compensation for executive director, while not changing the bottom line, be broken down differently. The board approved this change.

Old Business ~ items passed by email vote, and hereby incorporated into official minutes:

On October 29, 2019 the Board, via email, approved raising dues to \$60 with applicable breakdowns.

On November 22, 2019 the Board, via email, approved suspension of both the scholarship and the photo workshop. Motion carried.

Meeting Adjourned ~ 4:30pm CST, January 13.

The Gift of Reading

By Richard Holmes — December 2020

I begin this the day after Thanksgiving, a day of giving special blessings for family, for friends, and for the abundance in which I live. And for my good fortune to live in this country. And for my good health. I am fortunate in many ways and probably take most of them for granted. However, one good fortune never taken for granted is the gift of reading.

Reading is fulfilling. It expands my horizons. It is such a wonderful enrichment to my life. Like music, reading can elevate my spirits, stir my emotions. The intricately woven plot of a well-written novel can be so compelling I am completely drawn into it. Or a story so uplifting I am left in a state of emotional euphoria.

Reading not only enriches my life, but it keeps my mind sharp and curious about the world around me. As I learn more about this world, I learn more about myself.

But most important for me is that reading allows me to get into another person's mind—a person I've never known and will never meet. There are some truly brilliant people throughout the world whose minds are waiting to be discovered. I want to read what they have to say.

Every year I discover another remarkable mind—sometimes through fiction, sometimes nonfiction. I'm currently reading a novel by Jonas Jonasson, a Swedish author whose imagination runs rampant as he relates the tale of a 100-year-old man who climbs out a window and disappears.

There are many reasons for reading: to be informed, to learn, to be entertained. Or digesting the news. A book or essay can examine a subject more comprehensively than by what is generally gleaned from radio or television. Reading also becomes a welcome diversion, filling periods of solitude or aloneness. We can vicariously live another person's life.

I suppose we all have our favorite authors, be it from subject matter, style, or narrative skill. I find that as I mature in my literacy acumen I tend to gravitate toward authors with more complex thoughts, deeper thinking.

Over time I learn new words, many inadvertently. I've found these words help to express myself more accurately, more clearly, and perhaps more efficiently. Some of these new words I retain and use in speaking vocabulary. Or writing. Others drop off from disuse and are forgotten.

Two new words discovered just this year seem relevant to the times. Bloviate and periphrasis. To bloviate is to talk on and on without saying very much. This always occurs during an election year. Periphrasis is the use of more words to say something than are necessary. I think the author Edward Abbey summed it up more eloquently by defining it as the fine art of saying as little as possible in the greatest number of words. Politicians are good at this. Bloviate I will use.



*"Moose in Sprague Lake" © Frank Zurey
2nd Place, Image from Last Conference
2020 RMOWP Contest*

Periphrasis probably not, and it will fall into the dustbin reserved for promising, but unwieldy non-used words.

I've known people who only read fiction, and others only nonfiction. I'm guessing those folks are missing out on a lot. There is just too much good writing in the world to categorically exclude a sizeable chunk of it. My own reading is selected on the merits of the book, and I couldn't care less whether it is fiction or not. Most titles come from recommendations by others and from occasional reviews.

Long ago I began keeping a list of every book I read—a new page each year. I now have 35 pages. I don't remember the reasoning for the list at the time, but I've derived some use from it. One, of course, is to see what I have read over the years. Another is to avoid unintentionally reading the same book again—or to keep track of certain authors. Some novelists are quite prolific, and I have a sub-page just for them.

At the bottom of each annual list I make a count of fiction versus nonfiction. It seems to be a balance. Some years are more fiction, others the opposite. I've looked for a trend over the years, but I don't see any.

It's pleasant to occasionally read through these lists. Sometimes it provokes me to reread a book. Steinbeck's "Travels with Charlie" gets a reread every fifteen or so years. The same with Joseph Heller's "Catch-22". I am amazed how we discover from a reread things missed the first time around, little nuances we weren't aware of. Did we really not see it—or maybe we were not yet ready for it. Over time, our minds evolve such that we comprehend more and view things from a different perspective with a reread.

So, on this day after Thanksgiving I will have more pumpkin pie, continue with another book, and give thanks for the gift of reading, the gift that opens my mind, the gift that touches my soul.

Member News

CONGRATULATIONS MARY TAYLOR YOUNG!

Colorado resident **Mary Taylor Young** won the 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Colorado Authors' League, an organization of professional writers formed in 1931. Mary, who has authored 20 books on nature, is a longtime member of RMOWP, judge of RMOWP's annual writing contest, and has presented a number of writing workshops at RMOWP conferences.

The award was presented at the group's first-ever virtual awards ceremony, held last June. Mary also won first place in the Historical/Biographical category for her book, "I Found You in the Mountains," which also took first place in Cover Design.

MEMBER PROFILE

Recent conference attendees will remember **Debbie Holte**, and her dog Annie, who attended several conferences. Debbie divides her time between Denver and the Taos area, in particular a casita next door to Barb and Don Laine. Debbie owned a business in Denver that manufactured and sold top-quality dog beds online, and she donated quite a few dog beds and related items to RMOWP's annual auction.

Debbie retired from the dog bed business several years ago, but she tells us that after about six months, she was "bored, bored, bored." That's when Debbie started a new business, "Wow What a Website," to help small business owners like herself design websites specifically for E-commerce, with an emphasis on search engine optimization, commonly known as SEO. She tells us that to successfully sell anything online you must have an SEO-optimized website, and the best way to accomplish that is to combine SEO into your website design from the very beginning.

For information, see Debbie's websites: www.wowwhatawebsite.com and www.seosuccessfulsolutions.com.

NEW MEMBER

RMOWP's newest member is **Steve Cochran** of Rangely, Colorado. Steve is a freelance photographer and writer, and also a lecturer. He is skilled in audiovisual presentations, with a bachelor of science degree in business information technologies.

Steve tells us that his interests include travel, wildlife, hiking and backpacking, guiding, and photography workshops. To see some of Steve's photography visit www.photoblog.com/scochrane, www.stevcochranephotography.com, or on Instagram: @stevcochranephoto.

RMOWP LOSES TWO FRIENDS

Bruce Farkas, of Highland Beach, Florida, passed away in December, 2020. A member of RMOWP since 2014, Bruce and his wife Debby, both photographers, attended the 2014 conference in Glacier, Montana, the 2017 conference in Sierra Vista, Arizona, and the 2018 conference in Alamosa, Colorado.

About Bruce, Debby tells us, "Bruce was a force of nature and always searching for new places to see and photograph. He is sorely missed by all of our family and friends. I think that the essence of him was 'on to the next.'"

George Gibbins, 82, of Denver, passed away February 14. A member of RMOWP since 2016, his smiling face was seen at RMOWP conferences long before then with his wife of 61 years, Kenita. George helped with the auction and preparing conference food, and his skills included writing. But he also said, "I can take pretty good pictures and carry Kenita's (photographic) equipment."

He was a member of the Littleton Fire Department for 20 years, and retired in 1988 when he became legally blind, after which he completed a blind rehabilitation program and began a second career as a shop owner at the Air Force Finance Center-Lowry. He was an avid fisherman, walker, and lover of animals. Survivors include his wife Kenita and their three children.



*"Cape buffalo Browse" © Dan Bernskoetter
1st Place, Black and White
2020 RMOWP Contest*

Jack's Jaunts

A Rare Wildflower



Text and photos by Jack Olson

Your wildflower of the day is the endangered wood lily, also known as a Rocky Mountain lily and a red lily. This flower is very, very rare. I've been in Colorado over 50 years and have only seen it blooming in the wild twice. The first time was in the late '60s or early '70s. There was a known patch by a popular trail in Rocky Mountain National Park. I saw them there once, but they were not seen again and I'm afraid someone picked them or dug them up.

The second time was in July 2011. Longtime friends Don and Joanne Roll had been hiking at Meyer Ranch Open Space Park in Morrison, Colorado, southwest



Two images of the beautiful wood lily.



of Denver. They saw a big patch of wood lilies. Joanne called me and we went up there where I saw quite a few wood lilies blooming off the Lodgepole Loop Trail (take the right, or west, fork of the trail for those of you who might want to go up there).

These were in the high foothill/montane area at a little over 8,000 feet, and were mostly on the right side of the trail.

They grow mainly in meadows or forest openings, with flowers about 2 1/2-inches wide, and bloom from June through August. This was an exceptional experience and I can thank Joanne for that.

By the way, I can thank Joanne's daughter-in-law, Devra, for taking me for the first time to the Secret Garden. I had been up on Shrine Ridge, near Vail, many times but had never discovered it. That's because it's secret. Shhhh...

(See *Jack's Jaunts* about Shrine Ridge in the July-August 2019 RMOWP newsletter at www.rmowp.org.)

NPS ~ Good News for Photographers

The National Park Service (NPS) has announced a change in its requirements for commercial filming on NPS properties. The new, interim rules, are in response to a court decision that found that the park service's permit and fee requirements for commercial filming were unconstitutional.

Under the new rules, low-impact filming will be exempt from advance notice and permit requirements, while other filming activities may need a permit to address potential impacts to resources and the visitor experience. At this time, the NPS will not require location fees, application fees, or additional cost-recovery charges.

Also, the NPS will no longer distinguish among different types of filming (commercial, non-commercial, news gathering), and low-impact filming in areas open to the public may occur without any advance notice to the NPS or the need to obtain a permit. "Low-impact" is defined as outdoor filming in areas open to the public (except wilderness areas), by groups of five people or less, and involving equipment that will be carried.

The NPS said these regulations will eventually be replaced with regulations addressing filming activities that are consistent with the outcome of the litigation.

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