

Merry Christmas, 1999

I send you all yet another 20th-century holiday greeting; we won't be able to get away with that much longer now, will we? This was "supposed" to be one of those days when I got a lot done around the house, like cleaning out my gutters and adding tar and gravel to the roof. ...Or, I can sit here and write to you about a wonderful year. Guess which I chose?

This was a very Family sort of year thanks to my sister, Linda. She wanted to have a reunion at her house in southern California at a time when all of us could attend. Dream on. There was no way all these busy folks could find a common week free. So, the obvious solution was to have *two* reunions a month apart. Well, I went to both of 'em, natch. It was a joy seeing folks I have not visited in a few years and getting to meet some new family members who either weren't born yet or we hadn't captured via partnerships the last time we gathered. We paid homage to those we have lost and celebrated those who could not attend. Speaking of family in the summer, Christopher needed a roommate about when school let out and I was elected. He and I did this single-men-living routine all summer long until he finally found housing back in San Francisco. I found myself cooking a lot better, making a lot more, and having no leftovers; funny how that works with a hungry son living back home. Chris took this quarter off from school to work but plans to finish up his Master's in Politics at San Francisco State starting next month. The plan is to graduate next June. The next family gig was small but it was actually at my house; I cooked our Thanksgiving turkey in the back yard in my Weber barbecue and a handful of us had wonderful and thankful fellowship.



Photograph by Mikie

The year was sprinkled with trips of various kinds. Rather than start at the beginning of the year, I'm gunna jump to the fanciest trip first. With Frequent-Flyer miles burning a hole in our wetsuits, Martha, Katherine, and I headed for Hawaii again in June and July. We hadn't been there in a couple of years and that's how long it takes a little 8-year-old to become a much bigger 10-year-old. We stayed on the Big Island this time, mostly over at Kona with a stint up at Volcano House. We had a good dive operator who takes both SCUBA divers and snorkelers on the same trips so Katherine could be on the surface while Martha and I got in some bottom time. Katherine has become a marine mammal. One of my co-authors came down from Hawaii

Volcano Observatory and took us out to Huahena. She had Katherine swimming a quarter mile offshore in forty feet of water for nearly an hour with Spinner Dolphins coming up to us.

Well, the other trips were all wonderful as well starting, as my last 22 years do, with going out to Año Nuevo to visit the Elephant Seals. The weather was clear and cold; just right for both the seals and my dragging my camera gear out there. I got head-and-shoulder shots of these critters that I used in my talk to the Explorers Club in October (see <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/EC1999/EC99-10.html>).

March is when the Spring runoff is in full swing in Yosemite so we borrowed a second little girl and headed to the Yosemite Association Spring Forum. I got photos of the kids bouldering and looking down off of Oh My Gosh Rock and used these in a presentation I made to Katherine's fifth-grade class just before they went back in the Fall with the Yosemite Institute. The other Spring trip in the Sierra was the Sierra Century bicycle ride in May. Now lest you think "Century" means everybody rides 100 miles (some do), we commonly shoot for 100 km and this time went for the Family Fun Ride of 17 miles. Oh, but 17 miles for Katherine on her little Schwinn was plenty for all of us. We got to see some grand country, eat a lot, coast downhill all too fast, and it is Katherine's longest ride to date.

We didn't leave the high country untouched. In August, five of us grownups hiked out of Bishop from North Lake, over Piute Pass, to Muriel Lake. We made a wonderful base camp there and took day trips all over Humphries Basin. During the obligatory afternoon thunderstorm, we were so civilized as to be eating home-made cornbread under the tarp lean-to whilst the hail fell all around us.

I usually manage to go on these trips with Martha plus or minus Katherine but we all had our fair share of trips on our own as well. I went to the Yosemite Association annual meeting in Tuolumne Meadows in September and got to give a little talk about the history of the granites on a naturalist hike. Phil Frank was the featured presenter at the meeting and I came home with a 2'x3' Farley cartoon he inscribed to me that is now on my office wall. It shows the four urban bears at the Park entrance and one of them is carrying an ice chest labeled "SNEP Beer" (as in: my Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project). Chris was going to go with me on this trip but he had to work that weekend. He and I were going to climb Mt. Hoffman and I wasn't inclined to go up alone. On the day after the meeting, therefore, I slept in, had a nice breakfast, went on a Ranger hike for an hour, hit the bookstore sale, looked out at the Valley from Olmstead Point, and decided (about 1:00 PM), to wander up to the end of the road by the mountain just to "have a look." Well, I strolled up the trail to see what it looked like. Then I found where a good place was to leave the trail and head up toward the peak and I headed up there "just a little ways." Up close, the series of ledges before the base of the peak looked better, so I thought I'd see if I could find a route up there for the next time I got here with Chris. Well, by this time, the peak is looking awfully close (can you tell where we're going with this story?) OK, the view from the summit is spectacular and the late-afternoon shadows made it even more wonderful. I hooked up with some French mountaineers there who wanted to use my route back so,



after a brief lecture around the geologic map I “happened” to have in my (French, no less) Millet rucksack, we all got back about a half an hour before dark.

Katherine and Martha really wanted to go on the Boot ‘n Blister hike to Granite Lake in the Trinity Alps. The place was on fire, though (west of us). Only a few folks were dumb enough and/or had lungs strong enough to gasp up the hills in that smoke. Happily there was a bit of a north wind and it pushed the stuff down to the Yolla Bollys for the most part. We still managed to have about a dozen of us attend the trip and it had all the elements of a classic college hiking trip. We had beer, we went skinny dipping, we had a pot-luck dinner with all the stoves running at once. We had a range of ages (one hiker was *not* in her 50s!). See it all at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/bnb/BnB.html>. Y’know, I can’t tell you if we decided where we should go next Fall. Yosemite comes to mind. We could do Mt. Conness from Young Lakes out of Tuolumne. We could do it on Columbus Day again for a change. What do you think about that?



Photograph by Katherine

Well, I went to the mountains without Katherine so she went without me. Her fifth-grade class spent half the Fall studying Yosemite and then went to the Park for a week with the Yosemite Institute. They had so many parent volunteers that the teacher had us all submit resumés to thin us out and mine and Martha’s were rejected. Well, Katherine’s friend Margie’s sixth-grade class in another school didn’t have enough parent volunteers so when her mom found out I was out in the cold, she salvaged me and took me to their Yosemite-Institute trip in

November. See <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/hlatondre/>. I got to give a couple of little talks about stuff like Josiah Whitney and John Muir’s argument about glaciers and fun stuff like that. We hit Oh My Gosh Rock yet again plus spots I didn’t know were even there (Spider Cave, Muir’s Patio, Lemon’s Orchard...). One of the heros on the trip was a little insulin-dependent diabetic 11-year-old girl. She just did her little blood tests on the trail and I kept dextrotabs handy. We did Spider Cave with no flashlights, just guiding each other through the dark. I cheated and smuggled a light along in case I had to use her Glycogon injection kit, but she always had it under control.

Martha holds the record for going off places without the others of us. She got called off to Paris to help present on training for group psychotherapists. She had a nice lunch with my sister Barby and it was a good warm-up for, yup, more such gigs. She’s headed for Istanbul to present next month and Jerusalem next summer.

Oh work? Yeah, I did some of that this year. I think I broke fifty pubs online and I’ve put out another half a dozen or so CD-ROM titles. I’m a co-author on another report on Siberia, Alaska, and Canada; this one includes a large collection of digital map layers available to users. I also produced and was a co-author on a photo and text presentation on the Loma Prieta earthquake of ten years ago. We put this out for the tenth-anniversary of the earthquake to help get the public focused on preparedness. Speaking of earthquakes, not but a single day had passed between the Chi-Chi earthquake near Taipei in Taiwan and when one of the seismologists called me at home (while I was cooking one of those good dinners for Chris) with a publishing request. He had just finished a paper on the strong-motion data acquired the day before and he wanted me to put it online, “...tonight, please.” So I finished the dishes, built a Web page out of his report, got into my office server via CompuServe, finished my wine, and made it to bed before midnight. See <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov> for eight such papers I have there now. Finally, I now have the hardware to begin publishing DVD-ROM and DVD-video titles next year and may get far enough along to present that work at the USGS Open House next May. Come join us there.

Katherine, yet again, is doing Nutcracker performances. Last year I wrote you that she had worked her way up from one of the Tiny Mice to a Sweet Marshmallow, to a Party Child. Well, Party Child is still there, but now she’s also a Soldier, a Large Mouse (not the same performances since they fight each other, remember?), a Page, and an understudy to a Flower. A bunch of us will go to her performance up in Auburn in a couple weeks for a celebration.

I hope that this Christmas finds you in safe travels and with warmth and love with friends and family members.

Love,

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