



FRIENDS OF THE EASTERN CALIFORNIA MUSEUM

Preserving Inyo County's Past for the Future

FECM is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

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NEWSLETTER Winter 2022

UPDATES: WHAT'S NEW

Museum Update: The Museum is currently open Thursday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed to the public on Wednesdays.

In this issue: We are very excited to share Andy Selter's enthusiasm for the legendary Smoke Blanchard, who is the subject of the Museum's current exhibit, curated by Andy. The exhibit will be open through March 24, 2023, and we hope many of you will be able to stop by and enjoy it in person.

And to share a different, but equally adventurous, perspective, we excerpt snippets from Belle Ragsdale Andrew's dictated memoir; Belle is known as the second woman to hike Mt. Whitney in 1924. The entire story is quite long – 48 pages – and is in the Museum's archives.

In addition, we are delighted to show you some photographs of our October BBQ Fundraiser, which was attended by roughly 80 people.

For our FECM members (and we encourage everyone to join in our efforts to support Museum activities), in January we will be mailing you our annual ballot and annual meeting information.

A QUESTION: In 1950, sisters Maxine and Marian Steineke, both members of the Stanford Alpine Club and avid mountain climbers, ascended Mt. Darwin, Mt. Wallace, Mt. Haekel, and Mt. Powell while accompanied by Jim Koontz. Norman Clyde stopped by Base Camp and regaled the sisters with stories. If you have information about Jim Koontz or know the identity of the man on the right, please contact us at info@fecm.org.

From left to right: Jim Koontz, Norman Clyde, and unknown at Base Camp, 1950. Photograph by Maxine Steineke Courtesy of Donna Goad.



Our best wishes for 2023!

REFLECTIONS ON SMOKE BLANCHARD

The Museum's current exhibit is about legendary mountaineer Smoke Blanchard. The exhibit was curated by Andy Selters, also an experienced mountaineer and guide. Andy recently shared his thoughts about what he found so compelling about Smoke's life.



All photographs courtesy of the Eastern California Museum

Andy moved to Bishop from Washington State some 30 years ago, about six months after Smoke died in 1989. He first heard about Smoke from the equally legendary Galen Rowell (many of our readers will remember the Mountain Light Gallery in Bishop). At that time, Andy was a mountain guide. He and Galen were talking about how guiding people in the mountains can be a tough challenge, when Galen said, referring to Smoke, “for some, it’s right in their blood ... he’s a natural.”

Through time, Andy kept hearing about Smoke by word of mouth, from climbing partners and others, men and women. Something unusual about Smoke always kept coming up. He pioneered rock climbing in the Buttermilks above Bishop. He was a good friend of Norman Clyde. In the 1970s, when climbing became popular in Bishop, the folklore started, focusing on Smoke and Norman. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mountain Travel was established to lead mountain treks, essentially a pioneer in international trek travel, and Smoke helped in its development.

Smoke hiked and mountaineered in Alaska, the Southwest, up and down the California and Oregon coastlines, Nepal, Kenya, Bhutan, Japan (where he appreciated the respect for mountains, rivers and the environment), and more. In Nepal, Andy met a Sherpa who remembered Smoke. And around 2000 in a Mazamas mountaineering and climbing conference, the “leader emeritus” of the organization said to Andy, “You must have known Smoke Blanchard. He was the best climbing partner ever!”

The more Andy looked, the more there was to unravel about what was so special about Smoke. A lot of what he found resonated with him, as it resonated with people who knew him and resonates with those of us who follow.

At the core, Smoke's climbing accomplishments were not as important to him as sharing his joy in the mountains and encouraging people to find their better nature by going into the mountains. He was gregarious, playful, and creative. He would invite people for a walk, whether at 4:30 a.m. to watch the sun rise, followed by a home-cooked breakfast, or 2 p.m. to enjoy the area. These walks could take a couple of hours or a couple of months.

For all his love of and engagement with the mountains, Smoke's history was even broader. His early years had been hard, living through the Depression and poverty, with a difficult family life. He moved to Bishop in 1940. He was a truck driver, and trailblazing rock climber Warren Harding joked that he was the only Buddhist truck driver west of the Mississippi. With a big library (including a large library of Zen writings), he would memorize literature like Shakespeare and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam to keep himself engaged on his drives. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco was a favorite stopping place. And these are just the outlines.

Smoke, the person Andy has found so compelling through the decades, presents us with an example that is as pertinent today as it was in his time. He was freethinking and intelligent. He had a resonance with the terrain. He brought people to see the mountains in a positive way. He was more interested in living life than in gaining recognition – it was not about mountains he climbed, but rather who he was as a person contributing to all. He knew how to make the most out of every day, enjoying all the lessons to be learned along the way.



Smoke's autobiography is out of print, but some years ago, Smoke's nephew James Blanchard, who followed in his uncle's footsteps as a lover of the outdoors, asked Andy for help in getting the catalog of Smoke's photographs and other items to the Museum, the result of which you can see in the current exhibit. It is open through March 24, 2023. We hope you'll be able to stop by to see it!



The Museum has a 48-page memoir by Belle Ragsdale Andrew, who in 1924 was the second woman to hike Mt. Whitney together with Mary Ince McPherson. Belle's friends Frances and Maynard accompanied them to Cottonwood Lakes, where they stopped and fished while Belle and Mary climbed. Belle recounts many adventures, many amusing, all inspiring. The document is typed as written in the original. Photo of Belle courtesy of ECM.

MOUNT WHITNEY

Story by Belle Ragsdale Andrew

Notes taken by Mary Ince McPherson.

“I know a mount, the gracious sun perceives ----
First, when he visits, last, when he leaves.”

For a long, long time my eyes had been turned wistfully toward this mount; Joyous days spent on the winding trails of our own beloved Sierra Madre and San Gabriel mountains, made me realize the more keenly what this further land would be like. Sunday afternoons motoring along the foothill boulevards---- vacation weeks---- glorious weeks of travelling along valley roads; the air heavy with the perfume of Orange blossoms, or along coast highways with the tang of salt air in your nostrils---- camping in wooded canyons and beside sapphire lakes ---- creeping along tortuous mountain roads as high as our throbbing, boiling, gasoline consuming steed would take us, crossing sage-grown, or sand blown deserts---- Oh, it was all wonderful, thrilling; but still ---- my eyes turned toward this mysteriously beconing peak that rears it's majestic head above all other peaks in the United States.

Then came the day I made up my mind to climb this mount, how wonderfully simple and easy it was---- this making up the mind----- I wondered why I had not done so before. The next important step was to find a fellow adventurer; A woman cannot say as a man:

“My heart aspires unto the heights;
I will away.”

A man may slip into his hiking togs, slip his knap-sack across his shoulders and whistling gaily, start out to the world's end—not so, a woman.

Many people laughed at me when I tried to persuade them to make the trip with me.

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Mary pulled a beautiful red flower and we were discussing it's extreme fragrance when a brilliantly-colored Hummingbird lit on it---- sipping it's nectar, unafraid of the human hand that held the stem.

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There would be tough going and discouragements, but Mary and I found them only giving added zest to our adventure.

So, too, does the sincere soul, on it's upward climb toward the summit, find that rugged paths serve to strengthen, and discouragements cannot long find lodgement in the heart that harbors a zest for overcoming obstacles. Perhaps the pleasant places will be far apart. perhaps barren wastelands of treeless hills surround you, yet Faith whispers her comforting thought that, perhaps, just over yon rocky ridge and down it's farther side, to the pleasant vale beyond, at least a short respite awaits you, all the sweeter for the hard way just traversed.

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As we approached the summit, we saw something we had read about, but I had forgotten; -----a small three roomed house, with thick walls of the native rock, the roof, doors and windows were of iron. It had

been erected by the Smithsonian Institute as an observatory. The only one of it's kind in America at that time.

Then began our strenuous climb up the long slope to the summit. If you want to know what soft living in the low lands does to your endurance, just try it out on a gentle slope fourteen thousand feet above sea level.

We had no breath for talking and very little for anything else. We would take no more than eight or ten steps without stopping to rest---- and get our breath. We did not have to sit down to rest, but just stood breathing deeply for a moment, then were ready to go on. Once, and only once, to test out my endurance, I forced myself to take thirty steps without stopping. I believed if I had taken one more step I would have dropped. My heart almost sufficated me, and my head felt as if my blood was ready to gush from my nose, my mouth, ears and even eyes. For the first time, since reaching the top of the Chimneys, I sat down to rest. I was not so foolish again. A stunt like that might easily prove fatal. Thereafter, we took it in easy stages of from four to six steps, then pause to replenish our overtaxed lungs. Of course, had we time to become accustomed to this rarefied air, it would have been a different proposition.

The door to the east room had been torn away---- probably by storms. The room was half filled with ice and snow. The door to the west room was closed, but not locked, so we went in and found ourselves in an orderly kitchen and store room. There was a cook stove and a generous stack of wood. On a shelf there were matches in a jar, and a few groceries---- canned meats and vegetables-----supplies that would keep for months ---- life savers for people like us who might be stranded here by storm or injury for a few days, or even weeks.

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We had not reached the real summit yet, and the time was flying. Dropping the iron bar of the door back in it's socket, we hurried---- (Hurried? A joke) eastward, toward the edge of the precipice that is the eastern wall of Mt. Whitney. We climbed up on the boulders on which was embedded a brass plate that declared this spot the top of Mount Whitney AND the United States. Fourteen thousand, five hundred and two feet above sea level.

Westward, far down below us, was the "Sea of wood, in wild unmeasured miles." North and south the peaks that---- "Stretch from Cariboo to Mexico". Oh, how foolish of me to have hoped, even for an instant, to picture in words the vast scene spread out before us. Yet, let me just mention a few of the geographical features that you can fill out in detail, and color, by standing yourself, as we did, on that tenth day of August, nineteen-twenty four. Far to the east and north-east, we could see the mountains in Nevada. A bit nearer yet, nearly a hundred miles away, we looked down on the Paniment Mountains and the Argus range. and then the great depression that is Death Valley.

Nearer still, is Owen's Valley, along whose edge there were green squares of trees and other vegetation that we had seen while in the car headed toward these mountains where we now stood. Of course the details of this vegetation were unseen from this distance. Almost at our feet were the Alabama Hills, then the sharp, upward sweep of the Sierras themselves to where we stood on the brink of a three thousand foot cliff that formed the whole eastern wall of the Mount Whitney summit. At the foot of the precipice, a blue lake lay imbedded in the rock, fed by a glacier banked high against the wall that curved around the southern end of the lake. With clasped hands and bated breath, together we crept to the very edge of the cliff, forgetful of everything save the immensity of the scene spread out before us.

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WILD ABOUT MARY'S BARBECUE

On October 15, 2022, FECM held a fundraising barbecue on Museum grounds. The theme, Wild About Mary's, honored locals Mary Hunter Austin and Mary DeDecker.



Kelly Bahr speaking about the Mary De Decker Native Plant Garden



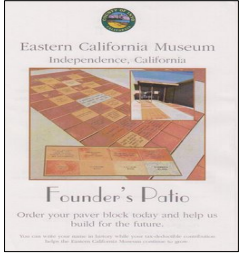
Residents listening to Dave Wagner speak about the Rock Garden

Richard Potashin discussing the equipment yard



A beautiful afternoon enjoyed by all!

BYLAWS: The Board of Trustees is pleased to advise our members that the revision of FECM's Bylaws was approved unanimously in the October 2022 meeting, as advised in the Fall newsletter. The revision updates, streamlines, and incorporates current best practices into the document.



**FRIENDS OF THE EASTERN CALIFORNIA MUSEUM
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THANK YOU!

Join the Friends of the Eastern California Museum

The Friends of the Eastern California Museum work to promote, preserve and protect the important collections and memories that make up Inyo County's only regional museum. The Friends raise funds and contribute time and work to help maintain and improve the Museum's buildings and grounds. We support special exhibits and arrange for speakers, field trips, and programs that inform and entertain Inyo County residents and visitors who come from far and near. We have partnered with the Carson and Colorado group to display and promote the restored Slim Princess steam engine. We also provide funds to maintain the Museum's collections and enhance its permanent exhibits. Every March we hold our Annual Meeting, with a potluck dinner, silent auction and guest speaker. We invite you to join with us to support the Museum. FECM is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Members receive a newsletter, email invitations to special events, programs and field trips, and a 10% discount at the Museum Bookstore.

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