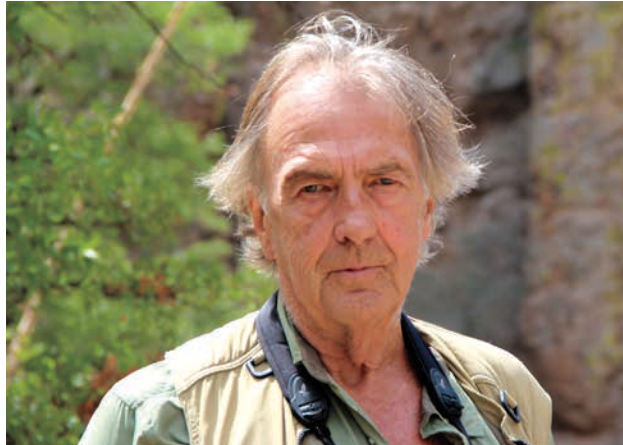


— IN MEMORIAM —

CHARLES BOWDEN

1945 – 2014

HUMMINGBIRDS. Some are as little as 2.29 inches long, and none are bigger than pocket-sized. They're among the world's smallest vertebrates, and yet, they played a large role in the life of Charles Bowden. "There is nothing in my day that matters to me beyond birds, walking and reading." That's from a recent entry in a journal Chuck called "Creek Log." He was fascinated by birds — hummingbirds in particular — and the seduction goes back to his childhood.



MOLLY MOLLOY

"As a boy," he wrote in an essay, "I'd walk the dog under a tree in the corner of the park at twilight and hummingbirds would hover just over my head. I knew nothing of their customs or various nations then. But my boy's eyes glimpsed an open door as the night came down and the promise of what I could be and learn if I left the everyday world and spun up into the sky."

The essay is titled *Mysterious Little Birds*, and it's featured on page 46. As writers, we all have access to the same set of vowels and consonants, but Chuck was the master of composition — he'd string together words the way Mozart paired notes and Monet combined colors.

"The land rose, a river cut, the entrails of the earth came into view, time beyond human comprehension loomed up like a wall and the hand could rub and feel billions of years." That's from an essay about the Grand Canyon.

In another essay, one in which I was expecting an obituary for a battered national monument, he wrote a beautiful piece about hopefulness: "I stand in the shade of an ironwood that is likely older than my nation and I have the faith of a pupfish, surviving century after century in a desert. Organ Pipe is open for business and its business is to teach the power of life in a very hot place. We made a deal with the ground and the bad times cannot touch our dreams."

Of course, his mastery of the written word went beyond the pages of *Arizona Highways*. He wrote more than two dozen books and won a long list of writing awards. He was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and when the editors of *Esquire* selected the 70 best sentences in the history of their magazine, Chuck was in the mix, along with Hemingway, Steinbeck and Fitzgerald.

As you'd expect, it's the quintessential sentence. I share it with my students when I teach magazine writing at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism. I share it and tell them to write as if every word were on trial for its life. That's how Chuck did

it, but for him, the exercise went beyond vowels and consonants. He was meticulous about his punctuation, too. Or the lack thereof.

If you're familiar with Chuck's writing, you know that he liked to write long sentences without the burden of commas. Although it kept our proofreaders up at night, the rule around here was simple: No red marks on Chuck's copy. Only he had that kind of immunity, and now there's no one.

Chuck died on August 30, 2014. I was sitting in the sand, staring at the Pacific, when I got the details from Molly, his loving partner. "Surreal" is one of the most overused words in our language — one that's rarely acquitted when on trial for its life — but the news about Chuck was surreal. I'd just talked to him a few days earlier. He'd pitched me an idea for the magazine, and we discussed some new essays. It never occurred to me that that would be it. No more vowels, no more consonants, no more inspiration. I can't put into words what I was feeling, but I remember thinking: "*Surreal*" is a word that should be reserved for the unexpected death of Charles Bowden.

I also thought about the first time I met Chuck. It was more than 20 years ago. My mentor, Dick Vonier, introduced us. Dick and Chuck had been rabble-rousing journalists in Tucson — the Butch and Sundance of independent magazines. Dick was quiet, and usually went unnoticed in a roomful of writers, but Chuck was an alluring combination of Hunter S. Thompson, Edward Abbey and Aldo Leopold. Writer, activist, teacher ... Chuck was smart. He had a degree in American intellectual history from the University of Wisconsin, and he had a lot to say. About human rights, the environment and even hummingbirds.

Although I wanted more, it's fitting that Chuck's last words for *Arizona Highways* were about his beloved hummingbirds. He was in Patagonia, working on *Mysterious Little Birds*, when he started getting sick. Just before he headed home to Molly in New Mexico, he sent her an email: "I feel better — slept. I try to comfort myself with thinking of the past."

He wasn't specific in his message to Molly, but I suspect one of those memories was about a dog and a tree and a park — a place where hummingbirds would hover over his head at twilight. I hope all of his final memories were beautiful. Like the beautiful words he wrote for all of us.

So long, Chuck. Say hello to Dick.

— ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

All the Pretty Flowers

“The amen of nature is always a flower.”

The quote I learned from Oliver Wendell Holmes. The allure of flowers I learned from my father. As a boy, I remember being surprised to find an old copy of *A Pocket Guide to the Wild Flowers* on a bookshelf in his den. It didn't fit his character. I'd always associated my dad more with big-game hunting trips and diesel tractors than northern bluebells and fairy-slipper orchids. I never asked him about the book. And then I forgot about it. It wasn't until years later, when we started touring national parks together, that I remembered the book and discovered his unlikely affection for flowers.

No matter where we went — the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Glacier, Rocky Mountain — he was always taking pictures of lupines, poppies, Indian paintbrushes ... anything in nature's bouquet. Even when something like Half Dome was in the background, he'd make sure a flower was in the foreground. The amen of nature is always a flower, and that's the inspiration for this month's cover story.

Every year, for as long as anyone can remember, we've been showcasing the Sonoran Desert's annual display of spring wildflowers. This year is no different; however, we've expanded the portfolio. As you'll see, there's a lot of amen inside, including a fascinating close-up of a fiddleneck by Colleen Miniuk-Sperry, an artistic shot of owl's-clover by Paul Gill, and a panorama of goldpoppies, lupines and brittlebushes by Tim Fitzharris.

In all, there are 18 pages of booming color. It's a powerful collection of brilliant photography that's followed by something — someone — a little quieter.

Clayson Benally is a soft-spoken Navajo healer. He sets broken bones, visits ailing elders and teaches people about traditional medicines. He's also in a rock band that tours around the world. More than anything, though, he's a horse

trainer, but not in the conventional sense. “The Western way, the Buffalo Bill way,” Benally says, “is about breaking a horse — you starve it, you whip it, you beat it. But if you're riding a horse bareback, you're working with it instead of against it. If the horse is thinking something, you can sense it. That's how you're supposed to connect.”

“For Benally,” Kelly Vaughn Kramer writes in *Their Souls Blend in a Soft Whisper*, “the first step in connecting with a horse is to breathe his breath into its nostrils. From there, the relationship blooms through patience, through the asking of permission — to approach the horse, to touch it, to ride it and, ultimately, to alter the horse's energy from wild to tame.”

In her beautifully written profile, you'll learn more about the man Kelly describes as lithe and patient: “Look at the angles of [his] face long enough, and you'll believe that they've been shaped by the same winds that cut corners into the canyons of the Navajo Nation. They are sharp where he is soft.”

It's that gentle demeanor, of course, that gives the man such a deep connection to horses. It extends to other animals, too, but Clayson Benally is smart enough to stay away from Gila monsters.

Of all the lizards in the wild kingdom, only two are venomous, and one is found almost exclusively in Arizona. They are very much “Arizona creatures,” Matt Jaffe writes in *They Say I'm a Monster*, “and with their gloriously banded tails and ornately beaded scales in a mottled pattern of reddish-orange and black, Gila monsters resemble living and breathing Southwestern art — as if they were crafted by a Hohokam potter.”

Although most people have heard of



PAUL MARKOW

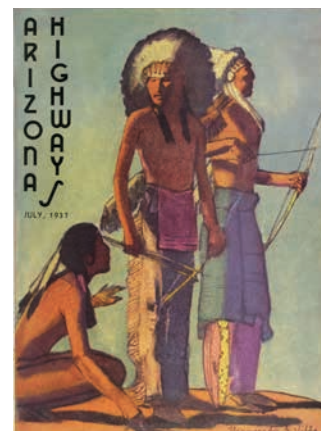
Gila monsters, few have ever seen one. “They're difficult to find,” Matt writes. “In the fall and winter, the animals spend as much as 98 percent of their lives underground.” They're elusive, like a yeti, but with enough determination, they can be found. John Sherman has seen quite a few.

One of the first was on an old mining road in the Superstition Mountains. “The lizard freaked and dashed into a patch of prickly pears,” the photographer says. “All I got was a shot of the plump tail disappearing into the cactuses.”

The next month he returned and had at least 40 sightings. That's unusual, though. It's a lot easier to find wildflowers. This time of year, they're all over the Sonoran Desert, and they usually stand still for photos. Besides, no matter what's in the background — the Grand Canyon, Half Dome or a Gila monster — it's the flowers that'll inspire an amen. This one's for you, Dad.

COMING IN APRIL ...

Next month, *Arizona Highways* will celebrate its 90th anniversary. To commemorate the milestone, we'll take a look back at the first nine decades of the magazine and showcase some of our favorite memories, including our historic July 1937 cover.



ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

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This Land Is Your Land

I saw a black bear in the Blue. I was hiking the Steeple Trail, almost 25 years ago, when I heard a deep, throaty sound behind me. I stopped, turned around ... and there it was, about 30 yards away, right in the middle of the trail. She was staring at me — I think it was a female — and grunting. Her behavior wasn't aggressive. It was just harmless bluster from a nervous bear. I never felt threatened. Instead, I was staring back. Captivated. I've seen a lot of bears over the years, but that was my first encounter in Arizona. It was thrilling. And also unexpected.

With hindsight, I shouldn't have been surprised to see her. The Blue Range Primitive Area is bear country, a land of rugged mountains, steep canyons and stark ridges. It's also been described as "a chaotic mass of very precipitous hills." Or, as Kelly Vaughn so beautifully writes in *The Blue*, "the state's most unsullied landscape — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's forest primeval made real by murmuring pines so dense that, once in them, you find yourself swallowed by their long shadows."

Although it's remote, and seemingly untouchable, the Blue is uniquely vulnerable. In 1933, it was one of 63 areas in the United States to be protected as "primitive." That was the ultimate protection at the time. Three decades later, in 1964, the Wilderness Act took those safeguards to an even higher level. Eventually, all but one of the primitive areas in America were elevated to wilderness status. The only one left out was the Blue.

In her story, Kelly recounts the bureaucratic history of the area. More importantly, she looks to the future of the Blue. Specifically, she examines the environmental threats to a place where Aldo Leopold began formulating his "land ethic." It was a philosophy that called for a new relationship between people and nature — an "ecological conscience" — and set the stage for the modern conservation movement. If you want to know how special the Blue is, think about how it inspired Mr. Leopold. Time will tell if it ever gets wilderness protection. It probably won't, but 200 miles to the

northwest, just south of Flagstaff, a coalition of citizens is getting closer to their dream of protecting one of the most beautiful canyons in the Southwest.

As Annette McGivney writes in *For Land's Sake*: "Walnut Canyon meanders through wild country that harbors sparse roads and rare stands of old-growth ponderosa pines, as well as a rich riparian area filled with the canyon's namesake Arizona walnut trees. Pronghorns roam the open, grassy plateaus. And tucked away in Walnut's 400-foot-tall cliffs are dozens of ancient archaeological sites."

The most important cliff dwellings are protected in the 3,580-acre Walnut Canyon National Monument, "but the scenic, ecological and archaeological resources of the canyon extend well beyond the park boundaries." That's why Ralph Baierlein, a retired Harvard physics professor, is spearheading a grassroots movement to protect the entire canyon. "This is Flagstaff's canyon," he says. "It is a unique and special place that is a recreation resource for the whole city."

The coalition's original goal was to establish a national park, but the study area didn't meet the necessary guidelines. It did, however, pass the test for a national conservation area, which is defined as offering "exceptional scientific, cultural, ecological, historical and recreation values." At press time, the coalition was reaching out to members of Arizona's congressional delegation to see if any of them would sponsor a bill. If somebody does, and if the bill passes, Walnut Canyon will join San Pedro Riparian, Gila Box Riparian and Las Cienegas as the only national conservation areas in Arizona.

Like the Blue, time will tell. Meanwhile, not far from Las Cienegas, there's another special place that's already gotten its protection. In fact, it's been 30 years



PAUL MARKOW

since the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge was established to protect an area of grasslands and wetlands, and a gorgeous sycamore-shaded canyon. Jack Dykinga calls the refuge our state's version of the Serengeti. In *The Grass Is Always Greener ...*, you'll see why. It's a beautiful portfolio that shows the effect of summer

monsoons on Southern Arizona. As our photographer says, when the rains come, "the Buenos Aires explodes with color."

In addition to the landscape, the refuge was created for the reintroduction of masked bobwhite quails, which had been extirpated from the United States. Pronghorns have been reintroduced, too. There's a lot of wildlife in the refuge. Some of the more common species are mule deer, Coues white-tailed deer, foxes, bobcats, javelinas, four types of skunks, ringtails, coatimundis and mountain lions. On extremely rare occasions, even jaguars have been spotted in the rugged west end of the refuge.

Although I've never been lucky enough to see a jaguar in the wild, I have seen a lot of bears, including a black bear in the Blue. I was staring at her. She was staring at me. And somewhere, I think, Aldo Leopold was smiling.

COMING IN AUGUST ...

Next month, we apply our "Best of Arizona" label to the landscapes of every county in the state. In addition, we'll tell you about Mexican wolves on White Mountain Apache land and show you what a California condor looks like up close.



JACK DYKINGA

ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

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