

BUILDING BURNING MAN

The Newsletter of the Burning Man Project

Spring 1995

Burning Man Draws 2,000 Revelers to Desert Wilderness

BLACK ROCK DESERT, NEVADA—As twilight Sunday on the dead cracked playa yielded to an inky, star-pocked sky, the faithful gathered on the edge of camp as they do every year now.

Whoops from the encircling throng competed with drums whomping a cacophonous cadence. A line of earnest revelers young and old tugged a rope attached to Burning Man's belly—raising him to his 40-foot height.

Blue neon illuminated the 1,500-pound effigy's limbs and ribs as children drew ropes raising his arms above his Japanese-lantern head.

Finally, two naked performance artists flung lighted spears at Burning Man's diesel fuel-doused legs igniting the pyre punctuated by 100 pounds of fireworks ... and which several minutes later sent the idol-like figure crashing backward in a shower of sparks and smoke, drawing forward the throng.

Each with their own reasons for being there.

For Rick Brown, 51, a self-employed electrical engineer from Silver Knolls who has attended the past two years, Burning Man is primarily a party—but more.

This year, he and his 10-year-old son, Austin, showed up with green dinosaur heads.

Austin likened the event to Halloween—"only weirder."

"Halloween doesn't have naked dancers with nipple rings."

Brown calls Burning Man a true distillation of communalism:

"The original Woodstock was a show where you went to watch. This is not that way at all. You're supposed to do and be."

Which almost everyone did.

The weekend saw workshops to make figurines to sacrifice, "drag races" for cross-dressers and an archaeologist's lecture on Lake Lahontan, which filled the basin 12,000 years ago when camels and saber-toothed tigers roamed.

Vehicles outdid each other in eccentricity in the oval encampment. The finned "sharkmobile" was covered in spray-can foam

painted silver. A church bus was emblazoned with "Our Lady of Whatever We Have In Common."

Other highlights:

- The Grudge Match of the Millennium took place in a makeshift ring. Characters depicting the Forces of Good grappled with the Forces of Evil. Joan of Arc pulled the "18 minutes of missing tape" from Nixon's suit and had him in a chokehold when a free-for-all ensued ... only to be interrupted by Albert Camus, who read a statement. "Life has no meaning ... meaning was created by mankind out of abject weakness ..."

Good and Evil joined to vanquish the French existentialist and the referee declared a draw:

"Good and Evil shall rule the universe together!"

- A desert fashion show was also a morality play. Fashion police arrested two nudes in boas.

- A bronze dragon breathed 20-foot tongues of flame.

- Participants explored a labyrinth housed inside a mysterious white pyramid. At its center, they discovered a revolving panorama of the surrounding desert—a camera obscura.

The 46-year-old Dr. Frankenstein of all this, Larry Harvey, describes Burning Man with a stony, Rod Serlinglike message on his answering machine.

"It is difficult to transmute into words the oddness of an image. The comic grotesque distortions of inner time and space, the weird amalgams of feeling that leave people perhaps a little more aware of their deepest responses to life, and a little more unsure of the artifice with which they so often cover themselves. Please leave a message."

Or consider the words of 10-year-old Austin Brown:

"They just build a man and light him on fire."

—Michael Sion
Reno Gazette-Journal
September 6, 1994



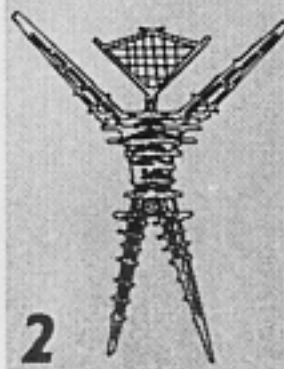
Raise your Man if you're sure: 2,000 people attended last year.

Photo by George Post

“What a way to spend Labor Day weekend! Erect a 40-foot-tall wooden man, limned with blue neon lights and stuffed with fireworks, in the desert about 100 miles north of Reno. Let him tower for three days over an irreverent arts festival and impromptu community that creates its own newspaper and several competing radio stations. Participate in performance art, go naked, playskeet-golf or go to the drag races — foot-racing 50 yards in drag.

This is the agenda of the yearly Black Rock Arts Festival, known informally as Burning Man. Organizers refuse to pin down Burning Man’s meaning. It is described as a spiritual-mystical experience, a construction project, an art performance, a community or, last but not least, ‘an excuse to party in the desert.’ ”

—The New York Times Magazine, Sunday, October 2, 1994



Playing With Fire

AN INTERVIEW WITH LARRY HARVEY

by Darryl Van Rhey

Darryl Van Rhey: *I’m told attendance tends to double every year at Burning Man. Do you think increasing numbers could overwhelm the event? How do you control 4,000 people? How would you control 10,000?*

LH: We don’t. Of course, we have the Black Rock Rangers. They’re dedicated to insuring public safety. But, with all that space at hand and so much creative participation occurring, we don’t have many of the problems you’d associate with large-scale events. We’ve never had a fight and only two real thefts I know of. Our medical team this year treated five or six injuries and the only serious one occurred off-site. Statistically, people were safer than if they’d stayed at home. Our challenge comes on Sunday night when people gather en masse for the Burning. It’s dark, crowded, many people are newcomers, and everyone’s straining to witness a spectacle. People have become anonymous and isolated. The raising of the Man used to function as a focal point for participation. Now only a small percentage of people are involved. We need to reinvent our ritual, expand it to again include everyone. This year we plan to form a huge human circle around the Man. What more accessible image of community could one imagine? Then we’ll spiral it in toward the figure. We’re looking for volunteers who are willing to practice with torches. We also need drummers, costumers and dancers, a core of people. Anyone interested should call our volunteer hotline now.

DVR: *I’ve heard you describe the ritual of Burning Man as sacred.*

LH: Sure—if you view the experience in terms of how it works, what it does, and how people respond to it. It’s true we’ve never claimed it’s supernatural. We have no metaphysical doctrines that people have to believe, but all of that’s unnecessary baggage. Functionally and phenomenally I’d describe it as sacred. Consider what we do. We build this giant statue that is larger-than-life and which glows in the dark. Then we take it to the desert—stage a pilgrimage. Our art’s always playful, yet most of it is cast in a ritual form. There are torchlight processions, visionary spectacles, and all of this culminates in an act of sacrifice. Priests and shamans have employed these methods since the Stone Age. I also know encounters with the sacred inspire certain powerful emotions: awe, fear, delight, a sense of the uncanny, and over all, a peculiar sort of transcendence.

DVR: *Why do you do this?*

LH: Because it’s the thrill of a lifetime. I look around me on the playa and see all these people painting themselves blue, driving weird cars, wearing strange costumes, and they seem to be on fire, like lighted gas jets. Each one is saying “I am!” It’s so radically, so creatively expressive. It’s more real than real. This alone is worth the price of admission. But if you’re searching for a broader moral purpose, then think of the burning of the Man as a kind of collective “I am!” Here’s a fire shared by everyone that has the power to consume the differences that normally divide us.

DVR: *Does this make Burning Man some kind of god? Are you its priests?*

LH: No, not at all. Burning Man is just a wooden statue that we build and burn. It facilitates experience. If we were priests we’d probably call it God. In fact, we’d claim we were on particularly intimate terms with God and, if you too wanted to get close to Him or Her or It, you’d have to believe a lot of things we told you. We’d interpose ourselves and limit access. We’d build a dam and say the Divine was behind it. Then we’d offer everyone a drink from our private spigot. Our rule is that we never interfere with anyone’s immediate experience. The desert is a place to be and do. All we’ve ever really done is play with fire.

Darryl Van Rhey is still an impoverished artist in San Francisco. Larry Harvey is the founder and director of the Burning Man Project.



Illustration by Sebastian Hyde

S•U•R•V•I•V•A•L

Burning Man is entirely supported by participant contributions. We need your support to survive. The Project concludes 1994 \$2,000 in debt. Your help now will insure that our celebration continues. Burning Man receives only a portion of the purchase price of any video or T-shirt, and our advance tickets are sold at a discount (see back page for details). To really contribute, why not add a sum of money to any check you send to Burning Man? You will receive absolutely nothing for doing so, apart from our conscious gratitude and the satisfaction that you are helping to make Burning Man a reality year after year. T-shirts, videos, and advance tickets can be purchased by mailing in the order form on this newsletter's back page.

Materials: The Project needs lengths of PVC pipe, quantities of wax, canvas or any other shade producing fabrics, and many other materials. We are *always* looking for storage space in San Francisco.

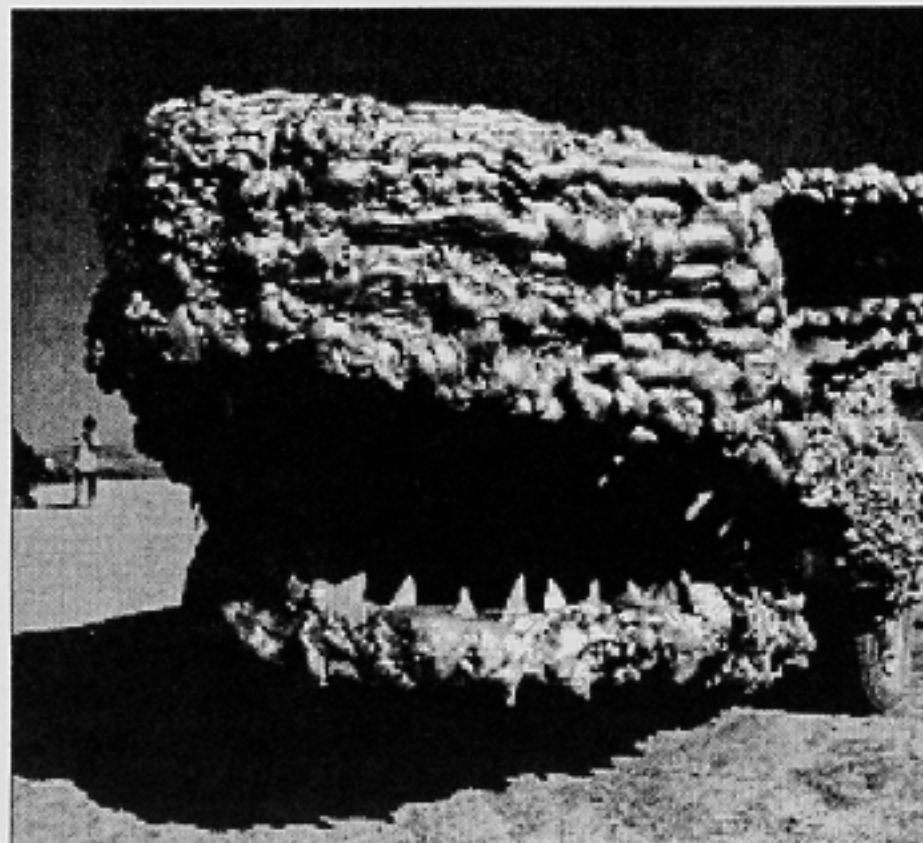
Join Our Staff: Become a Burning Man organizer. If you feel you have a skill that will contribute to the Project please call our hotline at (415) 985-7471. Become a Desert Ranger, assist us with printing, mailing, and computer work, help out at Black Rock Station, our advance desert outpost, or aid in the construction of our camp. There are hundreds of tasks. This year, in particular, we are looking for a volunteer coordinator to help us organize the influx of talent.

Ritual: The Burning Man Project encourages participants to innovate rituals. Over the last five years in the Black Rock Desert we have witnessed the sacrifice of many effigies, burning dogs, kids, clowns, and what appeared to be a burning prawn. The raising and the burning of the Man, of course, is the one fixed ritual at the center of this creative explosion. This year we plan to elaborate our ritual experience in order to give increasing numbers of people attending the festival a chance to participate. We are assembling a troupe of performers to help guide people through a large-scale pageant Sunday night. If you're hankering to carry tall torches, make costumes, dance, drum, or organize and choreograph this spectacle, call our Hotline. Meetings and rehearsals will be held during the coming year.

Primal Urges: Calm-Excitement-Tension-Release ... these responses are hard-wired to the physical being and can be triggered by many things both internal and external, from beating hearts to pounding surf. Primal rhythms are everywhere. Unconsciously they affect us ... move us ... drive us. Drumming can elevate any emotion through pulse, power and passion. Join our ongoing workshop to explore some of these avenues. Let's take a collective primal organism to the Black Rock Desert and move thousands of people as one. Contact Chris Campbell at (415) 873-8380.

Theme Camps: Recent celebrations of Burning Man have witnessed the emergence of a genre called the "theme camp." Examples include Tiki Camp, whose visitors enjoyed a unique ambience complete with full-scale paper palm trees, burlap quonset hut, detailed hula instructions, and a virtually unlimited supply of Spam. The host and hostess of Tiki Camp, Black Rock Gazette publisher Lloyd Void and his wife, Paisley Hayes, lavished unlimited hospitality on all comers to this burgeoning desert oasis. Another recent production, Christmas Camp, provided all those camping near it (excepting those who moved away) with 24 hour Xmas music, a resident Santa, and one elf. Visitors were *required* to consume a slice of fruitcake before enjoying Santa's custom blended eggnog. If you intend to create a theme camp, you may wish to contact us. In 1995 featured theme camps will be located along our central camp circle. Our sole requirement is that your offering be interactive. Be ready to invite other campers into your fantasy. Call now to reserve your spot on our main street. Those who wish to participate in a theme camp workshop and share ideas and hard-to-find resources with other Burning Man participants, should contact Harley at (415) 826-6063.

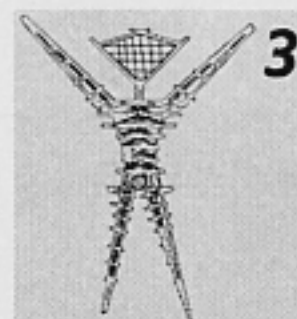
Wired: Check out our World Wide Web connection on the Internet... <http://www.well.com/www/tcircus/Burnman>. Our file includes photographs, text and Quicktime movies, soon it will also feature a gallery of participating artists as well as a conference. Can you help us maintain and develop this site? Contact our Hotline.



Sharky's Machine: Tom Kennedy's shark car.

Photo by Barbara Traub

BUILDING BURNING MAN, SPRING 1995
EDITOR: STEWART MCKENZIE



"One night, marveling at the raw beauty of the landscape, I told someone that I finally understood what the desert's appeal was—so horrible when it was raging, so exquisitely serene at peace. Like being in love with a crazy person. 'And there the crazy person is,' my fellow camper said, pointing to the neon-lit, soon-to-be Burning Man."

—Richard von Busack
San Jose Metro
September 8-14, 1994

UPCOMING EVENT

"Out There,"
an interactive art environment evoking the Black Rock experience, will be presented this summer at the SOMAR Gallery, 934 Brannan St., San Francisco. During the first two weekends of August 1995 we will fill the gallery, hall and theater of the South of Market Cultural Center with fire, dance, music, computer art, monumental sculpture, interactive performances, and of course, the Burning Man. Come dressed as anyone or anything the desert might inspire you to be. Check our hotline this summer for details.

Burning Man Project
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 San Francisco, CA 94142-0572



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BURNING MAN 1995

INFORMATION/REGISTRATION

Burning Man / Black Rock Festival

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31 THROUGH MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1995

The annual celebration of BURNING MAN will take place over the Labor Day weekend in the Black Rock Desert of Northern Nevada. Please use this coupon to order the following items. If you are purchasing tickets you will receive a certificate and registration number. You will receive your registration packet (including 1995 map, survival guide, and schedule of events) approximately one month before the festival. **This advance ticket offer expires on May 31, 1995. Advance registrations must be received before that time.**

Video: Be chased by a giant shark. See visions in a pyramid. Witness a jet-propelled rocket car. These are a few of the scenes you will see in "Weird America at Burning Man." We're now offering this 1/2 hour color documentary on video. Price: \$15.
T-shirts: Buy a Burning Man T-shirt. 100% cotton shirts are available in all sizes (we have large, Xtra-Large and Double-X-large shirts in stock. Allow more time for delivery of medium and small sizes). The image that appears on the shirt is also displayed on page 2 of this publication. Price: \$15.
Tickets: Purchase a ticket now for Burning Man, August 31 - September 4, 1995 and receive a \$10 discount off our normal \$35 price. We will mail you a certificate and registration number. Your actual ticket, complete with survival guide, map, and a schedule of events for 1995 will arrive approximately one month before the event. Have any friends you'd like to bring to Black Rock? Buy them a ticket for their birthday.

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

VIDEO / "Weird America at Burning Man"

QNTY: _____ X \$15.00 = \$ _____

T-SHIRTS (BLACK)

QNTY: ___ DBL-XLRG ___ XLRG ___ LRG ___ MED ___ SML

TOTAL SHIRTS-QNTY: _____ X \$15.00 = \$ _____

ADVANCE TICKET - OFFER GOOD UNTIL MAY 31, 1995*

NUMBER IN PARTY: _____ X \$25.00 = \$ _____

If you wish to register anyone separately from your party please indicate:

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

NUMBER IN PARTY: _____ X \$25.00 = \$ _____

OPTIONAL EXTRA CONTRIBUTION: _____ = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED = \$ _____

**Make checks payable to
 BURNING MAN**

Detach this coupon and mail, with payment, to:

Burning Man
 P.O. BOX 420572
 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94142-0572

Burning Man is a 100% participant-funded event, entirely dependent on your support. *\$35 after May 31, 1995.