

I PUT MY MONEY WHERE MY MOUTH WAS.....AND ATTENDED A BLM  
PUBLIC MEETING  
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ROCKHOUND ACTIVIST

For those of you outside Southern California, please read if you've been or plan to visit the Southern California Desert.

Southern California DESERT is a special place. If you've even been there, you'll know what I mean. Rockhounds have been collecting material from there for so long I can't pin point an exact date. Maybe it was the desert rat, with his burro who we can relate to. But I do have published books on collecting in the desert in my personal collection that date back to the 1950s.

With that said, I have been concerned with the continuing shrinking of the areas rockhounds have left to collect in. In a recent article written by Richard Crowe, 33 year retired BLM employee, who worked 29 years with the California Desert Conservation Program. Richard brought the whole desert issue into perspective, "if Feinstein's new 2011 bill passes, the 12.4 percent of land open for limited public use would shrink to 10 percent." The article was published in The Press-Enterprise, Newspaper, Riverside/San Bernardino, CA.

So I contacted everyone I had an email for in Southern California and told them the importance of attending the Desert Advisory Council / BLM meeting in San Diego, Saturday, June 4, 2011. I heard virtually nothing from anyone except Kim Campbell, ALAA Southern California Rep/ PLAC Southern Cal Assistant to John Martin and Ron Schiller of Ridgecrest. (look up Ridgecrest on the map of California and see how far he was willing to come to attend the meeting)

The fateful day arrived. When everyone signed in, we had 14 rockhounds there. Two from Long Beach G/M, Marty and Linda Dougherty; Carolyn and Kurt Jungwirth, Vista G/M and So Orange County G/M; Susan Broadway and Jim Bickner, So. Orange County G/M and Searchers; Ron Schiller and friend from Indian Wells G.M RIDGECREST; Kim Campbell, and friend Jay from Searchers, Marie Brashear, long time rockhound activist and friend and Dee Holland and myself. While I was clearly disappointed in the rockhound turnout the DAC people as well as BLM people attending welcomed us and said it was the largest rockhound group to attend their meeting in a long, long time.

The actual meeting lasted from 9am with break for lunch till 4:30pm. The meeting was held at Handlery Hotel in Mission Valley and might have discouraged rockhounds from attending when they saw the price of parking for the day, \$12. However when we arrived and checked in, the BLM had arranged with the hotel to only charge us \$3. which was well worth the price of the meeting.

Unfortunately the room was filled with off road vehicle people, both off road racing promoters and those who just enjoy the desert with an organized group. And a number of those on the DAC have ties to these off road organizations. The meeting was definitely slanted toward their interests and not for the use of others like rockhounds.

We spoke, got our thoughts about the Desert on record, and I told the Council/BLM that rockhounds were organized, the California Federation has 12,000 members in California and Nevada; ALAA has a membership of over 10,000 in just three years and was growing and the American Federation, the national organization has 52,000 members. They were impressed by the numbers, in fact the geologist on the Council told me later that she was astonished that rockhounds were as organized as we apparently were. They had been under the impression that rockhounds were individuals and small groups who visited the desert on occasion.....

Kim Campbell has applied for an opening on the Desert Advisory Council. It will take some months to find out if she made it. The application has to go to Washington, DC for approval. I also learned that Ron Schiller had been on the Desert Advisory Council for 8 years after Isabella Burns.... Who knew??? We could have used that knowledge but I for one didn't know until Ron told me at the meeting.

If you have never attended one of these meetings we urge you to make the time to attend the next one in Ridgecrest in September. Watch for an ALERT for the dates, place and time.