

A short history of the Desert Symposium: LMFTAACE, MDQRC, MDQRS, DRS, DS

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Introduction

The 2016 annual Desert Symposium (DS) is the 30th anniversary of the “First Annual Lake Manix Arm Chair Field Trip and Air Conditioned Expedition (LMFTAACE)” group (Adams pers. comm. 1989). What follows is a brief history of how we moved from that informal gathering through some growing pains; everyone had trouble remembering what the unpronounceable MDQRC stood for, to our present DS Zzyzx meetings. The initial intent of that first meeting was to provide an opportunity for discussion among researchers interested in the Pleistocene of the Mojave Desert (Budinger pers. comm. 1985, Appendix 1). Besides, during the summer months no one really wanted to do field work anyway.

In the summer of 1985, Bob Adams and friends organized an ‘Air Conditioned Arm Chair Field Trip’ to share information about current work in the Mojave Desert. From this informal meeting in the recreational room of Bob’s apartment grew the Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Center. The second “Arm Chair” session (Appendix 2, 3) was held at the George C. Page Museum of Rancho La Brea Discoveries in Los Angeles, followed by a series of meetings in which the Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Center [MDQRC] was organized and an advisory board and steering committee was formed. By 1987, with the support of the San Bernardino County Museum and its Association, MDQRC became a formal organization, headquartered at the Museum in Redlands. —from Jefferson and Adams (1996), celebrating the 10th anniversary.

Over the past 30 years the MDQRC and Symposium morphed into the DS. In 2001 the meetings moved from the San Bernardino County Museum (SBCM) to the Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx.

History

In June of 1985, Fred Budinger sent me the following letter:

I am sounding out people about the possibility of holding a discussion group/research strategy session (bull session) on Manix Basin geology, geomorphology, archaeology etc. The summer is too hot for field work but it might be a good time to get together and discuss who has done what, who is planning to do what, etc. I’m thinking of just a small group ---- Sunday, August 25.” (Budinger pers. comm. 1985).

This first meeting was hosted by Bob Adams, and as I recall there was a tub full of cold beers available as needed. The meeting was well attended by both students and professionals from a spectrum of schools, museums and government agencies (Adams 1985, Budinger pers. comm. 2015).

About 0.00005% of the Quaternary has passed since the informal get-together last August. This time the locale for the air-conditioned expedition is the Page Museum and the date is Saturday, August 23rd; the time 9:00 A.m.” (Adams and Budinger pers. comm. 1986).

The second meeting was held in the classroom at Page Museum. Quite unfortunately we didn’t have the tub of cold beers. I am now convinced that this had something to do with deciding that the group should be more organized, have a board or steering committee and a program for the next meeting, and present papers and publish the proceedings. We also decided to meet closer to the desert than in Los Angeles or Bob’s place in the San Fernando Valley, and selected the San Bernardino County Museum as a suitable location. The SBCM offered its facilities (see Greismer below), and The Friends of Calico also made space available at the Calico Early Man Site for a field studies center, equipped with maps and library materials.

Also in 1985, Bob Reynolds organized the *Cajon Pass to Manix Lake: Geological Investigations Along Interstate 15* field trip (Reynolds, 1985). In many respects this SBCM Association Special Publication was the precursor to the present DS publications. It included a descriptive road log with stops written by Bob and a collection of invited papers on relevant sites and topics. Bob's 1985 trip and paper served as a pattern for the fledgling group, and our DS volumes still follow this format. A second field trip volume: *Geology Around the Margins of the Eastern San Bernardino Mountains*, followed in 1986 (Kooser and Reynolds 1986). Three years later a field trip was added to the annual meeting program of the MDQRC.

Our third meeting, in 1987, was held in the SBCM auditorium and was called the Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Symposium (MDQRS). For the first time, we had a program and participants presented actual research papers, not just the informal results of the past season's field work. The proceedings of that

meeting, with the theme of *Quaternary History of the Mojave Desert*, were published in an SBCM Quarterly. The topics ranged from geology to paleontology and archaeology, and the presenters ranged from students through seasoned professionals from institutions scattered across California.

In 1987 the organization was officially named the Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Center. As Allen Greismer, then Director of the SBCM, outlined at the first formal gathering in 1987, the goals of the MDQRC were:

1. To organize and hold at the Museum an annual formal symposium each spring, preferably the third week of May.
2. Organize and hold an annual workshop and field trip each fall, site to be determined annually.
3. To provide tangible resources in the form of cooperative collections, library, site files, and limited facilities (laboratory/office space).
4. To offer the potential for publication of research

in both a semi-popular and scholarly format.

5. To provide a computerized listing and storage for unpublished literature in all relevant disciplines including field notes, photographs, and indexes of aerial photographs.

At that time the MDQRC consisted of a secondhand 4-drawer file cabinet located in Bob Reynold's office in the basement of the Museum.

By 1988, we had attracted folks from out-of-state, and had merged with the biannual Anza-Borrego Desert Foundation symposium on the *Value of the Desert*. We also added an evening speaker (Harris 1988), and a second day of talks.

In 1989, following Bob Reynolds' 1985 template (Kooser and Reynolds 1986, Reynolds 1989), a field trip road log and associated papers were added to the annual symposium

MOJAVE DESERT QUATERNARY TIMES

No. 1

September 25, 1985

MEETING HELD AUGUST 25, 1985

Pleistocene lake beds, geology of Lake Manix, Recent tectonics in the eastern Mojave desert, 14C dates from "dirty" carbonate materials, ostracods and paleomagnetism of poorly consolidated lake sediments were among the topics for discussion at an informal "arm-chair" field trip where persons with varied interests in the Pleistocene history of the Mojave Desert region met in an air-conditioned hall in lieu of an actual trip to the desert in mid-summer.

Twenty-seven invitations were sent; fourteen persons attended. After the "show and tell" presentations, the consensus was that there was a need for such a forum where various disciplines are represented and information about the many independent investigations going on in the area could be presented for an interchange of ideas. Among the proposals was the establishment of a library at the Calico Early Man site along with the solicitation of donated papers, both published and unpublished, to be made available to all interested persons. Also, the compilation of a bibliography of the literature pertaining to the Mojave Desert region geology, geomorphology, paleontology and desert processes was heartily endorsed.

Another consideration was the acquisition of a small tract of land on the west side of Manix Wash at "Bassett Point" to ensure access to the type section of the Lake Manix beds there. The last idea is being investigated; the library and the bibliography are already in process: an initial reference list has been prepared and books and papers are being accumulated at the Calico site which, incidentally, seems a good spot because of its central location in the region and its permanence for more than twenty years.

Lake Manix will be the site of the Friends of the Pleistocene field trip next year (1986) with George Jefferson of the Page Museum as moderator. This year's event will include the posited lake-system sill at Ash Hill, near Ludlow; geomorphology of Silver Lake; and Lake Tecopa basin October 25 - 27.

A SMALL BEGINNING

A separate building at the Calico Early Man Site has been reserved for use in connection with research and field work other than the regular archaeological operations of the Site. Fred Budinger, Jr., has donated his personal library of literature on Lake Manix and a few other contributions have also been received. The cabin is modestly equipped with the necessary table and chairs, it even has a bed for optional use by visitors for longer stays.

GOINGS ON

JANET BOLEY of Caltech plans to take oriented samples of Lake Manix sediments for paleomagnetic determinations this fall ... JIM STEINMETZ wants to take a look at the ostracods in the Lake Manix sediments for determination of water character, temperatures and possible correlations throughout the area ... NORMAN MEEK will be geologizing at Lake Manix for his doctoral dissertation at UCLA ... BOB ADAMS will continue his search for lake beds throughout the Mojave Desert to test the "great lakes" hypothesis ... ROY SHLEMON and FRED BUDINGER are working on a detailed geological field survey of the Calico Site area ...

HELP WANTED

Unpublished papers, abstracts, bibliography references, ideas, suggestions, comments, dating service (sic), anything else. Send to R.W. Adams, 5501 Newcastle Ave. #40, Encino, CA. 91316 or Fred E. Budinger, Jr., P.O. Box 274, Yermo, CA. 92398.

KEEPING CURRENT

Wells, Stephen G. and John C. Dohrenwend, "Relict sheetflood bed forms on late Quaternary alluvial-fan surfaces in the southwestern United States: Geology, v.13, p.512-516, July, 1985

Hershler, Robert, "Survey of the rissoacean snails (Gastropoda: Prosobranchia) of the Death Valley drainage system, California: The Florida State Museum, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, FL., 32611

OPEN INVITATION

2nd Annual Lake Manix Arm-chair Field Trip

About 0.00005% of the Quaternary has passed since the informal get-together last August. This time, the locale for the air-conditioned expedition is the Page Museum and the date is Saturday, August 23rd; the time 9:00 A.M.

Last year, nearly everyone present took the opportunity to comment on some phase of the ongoing investigations in the Mojave Desert, presenting much new information. Since then, some steps have been taken to provide for the continuation of such meetings: the San Bernardino County Museum has offered its facilities for additional meetings, as well as their library and computer data bank, to aid in Quaternary studies in the Mojave Desert. Other proposed functions of the Museum are: (1) Providing a repository for unpublished papers and reports; (2) Soliciting such papers; (3) Maintaining a computerized bibliography on publications about the Mojave Desert; (4) Publishing pertinent papers through the Museum.

At the Calico Early Man Site, one building has been made available for a Field Studies Center to be equipped with maps and a library of publications and to serve as a field headquarters for investigators in the region, courtesy of the Friends of Calico.

The main thrust of these efforts is to encourage further studies of the geology, geomorphology, paleontology, archaeology and desert processes in the Mojave Desert, especially in the Lake Manix area. Lake Manix furnishes a veritable field laboratory for such studies and information garnered there can greatly contribute to our understanding of the history of the region.

This non-structured open forum is available to all persons interested in any phase of any discipline pertaining to the desert. Prospective attendees are urged to indicate their intention to one of the following persons:

R. W. Adams
7400 Tampa Avenue
Reseda, CA. 91335
(818) 342-8320

Fred E. Budinger, Jr.
P.O. Box 274
Yermo, CA. 92398
(619) 254-2110

Page Museum
5801 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA. 90036
(Enter from parking lot in rear)
Saturday, August 23, 1986

Time: 9:00 A.M.

2nd Annual Meeting Announcement

publications. This appeared as a separate SBCM Association Special Paper, prepared in conjunction with the MDQRS. The Abstracts and Proceedings of the meeting were still in a separate SBCM Association Quarterly. The proceedings (see 1990 MDQRC/MDQRS Program) averaged about 30 presented papers. Registration for the two day meeting in 1990 was \$5.

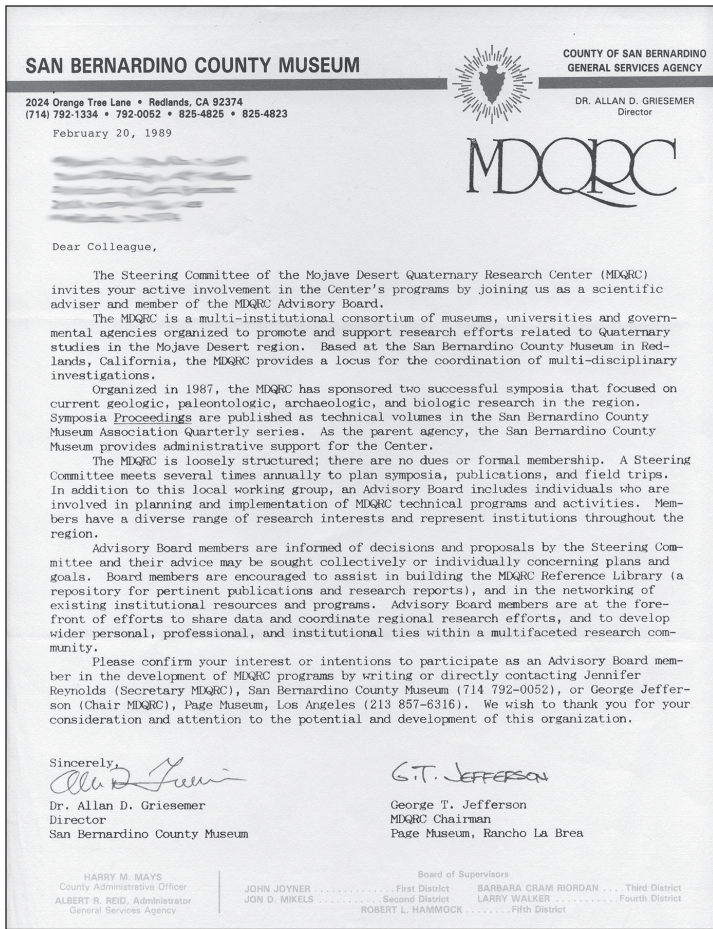
In 1993 the MDQRS and the Desert Studies Consortium Symposium (DSCS) meetings were jointly held at the SBCM and co-sponsored. This worked well for both groups. The DSCS had met in conjunction with the Southern California Academy of Sciences. The Academy meetings focused on marine topics, not the desert. The name of this new conference was the Desert Research Symposium (DRS). Meetings were held under this name until 2000, when it was shortened to the Desert Symposium (DS). By this time the group had expanded to include not only archaeology/history, geology, and paleontology but also all of the biological sciences.

Bob Adams died in 1995, 10 years after the first "Arm Chair" meeting (Jefferson and Adams 1996). In his honor, the DS instituted the Bob and Bobbe Adams Award for the Best Student Paper. The award was first presented at the DS in 2004 (Presch pers. comm. 2015). It is unfortunate that none of our biology students have followed up on Bob's ground breaking research into the ecology of the elusive *Subterranean mojavensis* (Adams 1989).

The year 2000 was a time of change, and not just to the new century. Transition from SBCM to the California Desert Studies Consortium, Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx had been under discussion. Gerry Sherba of California State University San Bernardino, Bill Presch of California State University Fullerton and the newly appointed Director of the Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx, and Bob Reynolds of LSA worked together that year, setting up plans to move the DRS to the heart of the Mojave Desert at Zzyzx. Planning and logistics for the meeting, then reaching an attendance of 100+ participants, was ongoing in 2000. This was the last year that the group met at the SBCM.

The first meeting of the new DS was held at Zzyzx in 2001. Since that time, the organization has continued to grow, and recent attendance numbers are challenging the Zzyzx facilities. Maybe we should start selling admission tickets? At 335 pages, the 2015 DS Field Guide and Proceedings was more than ten times the early page count and over twice that of most of the more recent editions.

Throughout the history of the MDQRC/DRS/DS, USGS geologists have conducted mapping projects in the Mojave Desert, and have participated in the symposiums and field trips on a regular basis. The DS and particularly Bob Reynolds' efforts are now legendary. "This has inspired USGS geologists to help and lead field trips, organize themes for the talks, and help guide the DS, by contributing two members to the Steering Committee" (Miller pers. comm. 2015).



Letter of invitation, MDQRC Advisory Board, 1989.

Memorable events and stories

“The 2008 trip to Blythe and Salton Sea started with a stop near Amboy, which was up rough roads to an outcrop of the Bouse Formation. [From there to Blythe] a total of 9 flat tires resulted (but of course none for yours truly, who led that trip stop and warned folks not to spin their tires on the sharp rocks). We limped to Blythe [a few long after dark], with some folks using a wrong-size spare from someone else’s vehicle... anything with the right number of lug nuts because it was the 2nd flat for that vehicle. The Blythe tire shops open Sunday morning had lots of business” (Miller pers. comm. 2015).



1998 “Finding faults” field trip. Dave Miller, left foreground; Bob Reynolds, right center.

In defense, Bob replies “I always encourage desert travelers to carry two spare tires.” (Reynolds pers. comm. 2015).

On a more personal note, an evening presentation by Ted Fay on the history of the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad (T&TRR) cost me tens of thousands of dollars. Inspired by Ted’s talk, I now have (still a work in progress) a model railroad patterned after the T&TRR in a stand-alone building behind my garage.

Dave Miller recalls:

The 2015 trip, late in the afternoon of Day 1, I led a stop that involved driving down a major wash south of Alvord Mountain. We posted guards at tortoises encountered along the route, and found several more out foraging near where we stopped to walk along outcrops. A total of 7 were seen in an area of perhaps 4 square km. For several desert lovers, it was their first sighting and for all it was a record number in such a small area on a single day.” (Miller pers. comm. 2015).

Acknowledgements

Credit is due to Dave Miller, Bill Presch, and Bob Reynolds for helping piece together the events and players in the DS history, and for some fun stories. Lyn Murray provided considerable assistance organizing Table 1 and in reviewing the draft manuscript.

MDQRC

Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Symposium

Friday and Saturday, May 19 and 20, 1989

Special Evening Lecture by G.I. Smith, Saturday, May 20, 7:00 pm

San Bernardino County Museum, Redlands, California

Field Trip Sunday, May 21, Kramer to Afton Canyon

FRIDAY, May 19

1:00 pm Registration

Session 1: David P. Whistler, LACM, Chair

1:20 pm Introductory Remarks.

1:30 pm P.A. Koehler, Bilby Research Center, N. Ariz. Univ. MID-WISCONSIN TO HOLOCENE VEGETATIONAL CHANGES FROM THE OWENS VALLEY, CALIFORNIA.

1:50 pm J.W. Cornett, Palm Springs Desert Museum. THE DESERT FAN PALM--NOT A RELICT.

2:10 pm L.P. Fay, Earth Sci. Div., SBCM. COON CANYON LOCAL FAUNA (?HOLOCENE), FROM THE MOJAVE DESERT OF CALIFORNIA.

Session 2: Jim Mead, NAU, Chair

3:10 pm S.W. Conkling & S. H. Edwards, Jr., Clark Interp. Center. A FLORAL AND FAUNAL ANALYSIS OF CLARK REGIONAL PARK (LA HABRA FORMATION: RANCHOLABREAN), ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.

2:50 pm D.P. Whistler & J.D. Stewart, Sec. Vert. Paleol., LACM. A LATE PLEISTOCENE RANCHOLABREAN ASSEMBLAGE FROM THE NORTHWESTERN MOJAVE DESERT.

3:30 pm Collections and Lab. tours

SATURDAY, May 20

9:00 am Registration and coffee

Session 1: Walt Schuiling, SBCMA, Chair

9:30 am D.L. Stout, Cypress College. EVOLUTION OF GEOLOGIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOJAVE DESERT.

9:50 am M.J. Rymer, U.S.G.S. NEW QUATERNARY AGE CONTROL FOR STRATA WITHIN THE INDIO HILLS, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

10:10 am J.P. Ford, R.E. Crippen, and R.G. Blom, JPL; & R.K. Dokka, LSU. LATE CENOZOIC STRIKE-SLIP AND NORMAL FAULTS REVEALED BY ENHANCED LANDSAT IMAGES, MOJAVE DESERT, CALIFORNIA.

Session 2: George Jefferson, Page Museum, Chair

10:45 am J. Parks, B. Stout, G.J. Miller, P. Remeika, & V.E. Waters, Imperial Valley College Museum. A PROGRESS REPORT ON HALF-MILLION YEAR OLD MARKS ON MAMMOTH BONES FROM THE ANZA-BORREGO DESERT IRVINGTONIAN.

11:10 am R.E. Reynolds, Div. Earth Sci., SBCM. MID-PLEISTOCENE FAUNAS OF THE WEST-CENTRAL MOJAVE DESERT.

11:30 am R.H. Brady, III, CSU Fresno; R.M. Negrini & B. Robin, CSC, Bakersfield. GEOPHYSICAL EXPRESSION AND GEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF BOTANICAL LINEAMENTS, EASTERN SODA LAKE, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.

Session 3: Dorothy Stout, Cypress College, Chair

1:20 pm R.J. Adsit, CSULA. GEOMORPHOLOGY AND LANDSLIDES OF THE BLACK HILLS, KERN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA.

1:40 pm M.L. Stout, CSULA. LATE QUATERNARY GEOLOGY OF BLACKHAWK CANYON, SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

2:00 pm T.T. Taylor, Div. Env. Affairs, SCE. A REVIEW OF CURRENT THEORY REGARDING FORCING AGENTS IN PLEISTOCENE CLIMATIC/ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE.

2:20 pm J.S. Schneider, Dept. Anthro., UCR. FRESH WATER BIVALVES AS PALEOENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS.

Session 4: Jim Mehegan, CSUSB, Chair

3:10 pm C.J. Pluhar & J.L. Kirshvink, Calif. Inst. Technology; & R.W. Adams, Reseda. PRELIMINARY MAGNETOSTRATIGRAPHY OF PLIO-PLEISTOCENE LAKE SEDIMENTS NEAR MANIX WASH, CENTRAL MOJAVE DESERT.

3:20 pm N. Meek, UCLA. RECONCILING THE LAKE MANIX AND LAKE MOJAVE HYDROLOGIC RECORDS.

4:00 pm Contrib. from the floor.

SATURDAY EVENING SESSION

7:00 pm Dr. George I. Smith, U.S. Geological Survey, Menlo Park, California. MOJAVE DESERT VS. TIBET--GEOMORPHIC AND PALEOCLIMATIC SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES.

SUNDAY, May 21

FIELD TRIP **The west-central Mojave Desert: Quaternary studies between Kramer and Afton Canyon**

8:00 am Convene in Museum parking lot and caravan in personal vehicles. Travel will be on paved roads or good graded roads; passenger vehicles are appropriate. Bring lunch, snacks, beverages, and adequate water. Gas tanks should be full at start. The last stop of the trip will be in Afton Canyon; the trip ends at Interstate 15 between Barstow and Baker. Field trip guides are available at the Museum.

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Appendix 2. Desert Symposium, the start

Prehistory of what is today the annual Desert Symposium at Zzyzx

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During my tenure as the Site Curator at the Calico Early Man Site, I met people who were interested in desert studies of various disciplines. Many were geologists; others were zoologists and botanists. I often told them that they should contact such-and-such a person, who shared very similar interests. The idea evolved that there should be a way and a venue to gather together professional and avocational scholars for a “beer-and-pretzel” gab-fest. I was thinking of old-time college bull sessions, not organized and not the formal annual meetings of the Southern California Academy of Sciences. I was already working with people from Caltech, USGS, and USC etc. I was always impressed at how eager they were to share their knowledge and enthusiasm about features and phenomena peculiar to the central Mojave Desert.

The first person I told was R. A. “Bob” Adams. Bob had driven into the Calico Site one very rainy winter day. He had been washed out of his studies in Afton Canyon. We talked for hours about Calico *per se* and other interesting features in the area, especially those of Quaternary age. Bob continued coming out to Calico, especially in calmer weather. After about a year or so, I told Bob about my idea of inviting other “Desert Rats” to an informal bull session. Bob, who had studied geology at UCLA, until studies were interrupted by WWII (during which he worked as an aerial photo interpreter) was immediately interested in such a gab-fest.

My idea was to pick a month that was too hot for field work and have an “air-conditioned” field trip. My growing Rolodex file at Calico already held many names of people who might consider getting together – as long as it wasn’t formal and constraining. Bob suggested that he could probably get the use of the recreation building at his apartment complex in Encino. I quickly agreed to the venue. Most of the folks I had thought of inviting were from the LA–Orange County and Inland Empire areas. Attracting them to a large building with air-conditioning would be easier than getting them out to Barstow (during the hot summer). I worked up a mailer

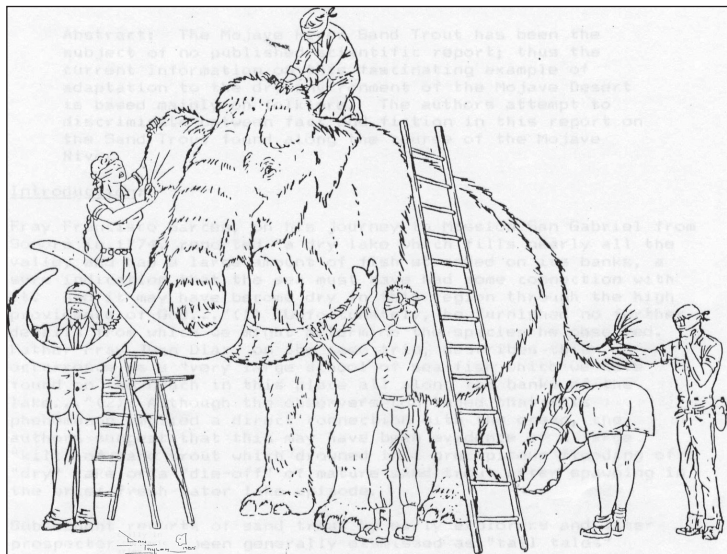
and selected names for a first mailing list. We would meet in August 1985 in Encino.

The “bull session” came off well. Attendance was good. People got to know each other. They shared particulars of their individual disciplines. It wasn’t a free for all. We spoke one at time, but interrupted with questions and comments freely. We all recognized the value of interdisciplinary perspectives. I was pleasantly surprised at how major scholars spoke to the lesser accomplished attendees. All were true educators. They were not put off that some in attendance were still young and without long resumes of publications. It was wonderful. It was much more than I had envisioned in my mind’s eye.

We could have talked all night, but that wasn’t practical, given individual schedules. I proposed that we meet again the following year. Most agreed. The following year Bob Adams couldn’t get the use of his rec-room. The gathering was hosted by George Jefferson at the Page Museum, La Brea Tar Pits in L.A.

The third year, we moved out to the San Bernardino County Museum. We had big plans to establish a center (library) and name it the MDQRC (Mojave Desert Quaternary Research Center).

After being at the San Bernardino County Museum for many years, MDQRC was moved to Zzyzx (Soda Springs) and renamed the Desert Symposium, with the administrative help and management of Cal State Fullerton, especially Bill Presch.



The Lake Manix Task Force. This drawing by Dan Taylor summarized the mid-1980s perceived state of knowledge about the Pleistocene record of the central Mojave Desert. It first appeared in *The Friends of Calico Newsletter* and was adopted by Bob Adams and others, and a later version includes a pennant, attached to the ladder, titled *The Lake Manix Task Force*.