



NEVADA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

VOLUME 43 NUMBER 6 - JULY 2017

SOCIETY NEWS

SOUTHERN NEVADA EVENTS

Southern Nevada Meetings are on hiatus until September. Enjoy your summer! Join us again on **September 11** from 6:30-7:30 PM when we feature a presentation by **Nicole Hupp**, an ecologist with the National Park Service Inventory & Monitoring Program. Meet at the U.S. Geological Survey office at 160 North Stephanie Street in Henderson.

Our program coordinator is Lesley DeFalco. If you would like email updates for Southern Nevada events, please email her at defalco@usgs.gov and ask to be added to the list.

NORTHERN NEVADA FIELD TRIPS

July 21 to July 24 – Eriogonum Society meeting in the Siskiyou Mountains.

July 29 – Paige Meadows. This trip has been cancelled unless a new trip leader volunteers. Contact John Weiser if this is you. As originally planned, this was a tour of an interconnected series of five meadows above Tahoe City near the west shore of Lake Tahoe. **Contact John Weiser at johnpweiser@yahoo.com.**

August 6 – Buckaroo Chocolates in Graeagle. As summer's heat bears down upon us, our priorities shift and we visit this excellent ice cream shop. We'll also take a side trip to Madora Lake in Plumas County, California to see *Chimaphila umbellata*, *Lilium washingtonianum*, *Pterospora andromedea*, *Platanthera dilatata* var. *leucostachys*, *Lilium pardalinum*, and other forest gems.

Meeting details will be posted in a later newsletter and are on the NNPS website. **Contact Gary Monroe: g.monroe@att.net, (775) 359-4863 or John Weiser: johnpweiser@yahoo.com, (775) 331-4485.**

Check the **NNPS web page** before field trips for changes and updates.

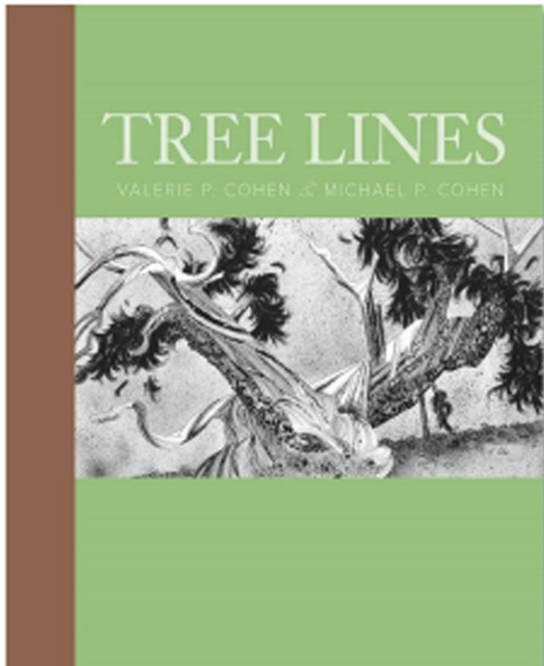
Dates are still open if you wish to schedule and lead a field trip. We are always looking for new sights to visit - lead us to your favorites. **Contact John Weiser at johnpweiser@yahoo.com or (775) 331-4485 if you have suggestions.**

Bring lunch, hiking gear, appropriate clothing, wide brimmed hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, plenty of water and don't forget your hand lens and camera.

Events subject to change.
Visit nvnpns.org for updates.

Top: Bristlecone pines in the White Mountains.

J. Johnson



TREE LINES

Valerie P. Cohen and Michael P. Cohen

2017, University of Nevada Press, Reno and Las Vegas

ISBN 978-1-943859-08-5, \$29.95

Available at [Sundance Bookstore](#) in Reno and on [Amazon](#)

"If you want to know what you think, write it. If you want to know how to see it, draw it."

— *Michael P. Cohen*

Book Review by Jan Nachlinger

This 72-page book is about trees of the eastern Sierra and western Great Basin—the result of work in parallel by an artist and her writer husband, and it touches on their relationship in exploring trees in extreme environments via the authors' unique perspectives. It has 29 pen-and-ink drawings by Valerie P. Cohen most of which are three conifers—the Great Basin bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva* D.K. Bailey), Sierra juniper (*Juniperus grandis* R.P. Adams [synonym= *J. occidentalis* Hook. var. *australis* (Vasek)

A.H. Holmgren & N.H. Holmgren], and limber pine (*Pinus flexilis* E. James). The drawings are all vertically-oriented and illustrated at the same size except for the landscape-oriented cover and front piece, "Divergence," "Great Basin Landscape #3" in the prologue, and "Spinal Tap" within the main section. This is not a scientific work nor an historical book; it is their abstractions of live and dead trees located "at the back door of California".

The black-and-white tree drawings are comprised primarily of bold spaces and close parallel lines drawn on rough watercolor paper, a feat that is almost incomprehensible to my unartistic self. They are texturally detailed and finely depicted. Parts of the trees often bear resemblance to animal morphology, including bones, sinew, veins, muscle, ribs, eyes, and mouths—or at least that's my interpretation. For an obvious example, compare "Harlequin" and "Spinal Tap," although they are reverse images of background, they both exude stark suffering, agony, and longevity. And speaking of background, I am in awe of the diversity of Valerie's techniques and imagination. There are contour maps or tree rings depending on your interpretation, fireworks of foliage, tiny splatter and larger ink blobs, black or blank, virga-like rain showers or dust storms, cursive notes for her drawings (as described in the afterword) or musical score symbols, and basin-and-range topography. They are undeniably detailed and precisely drawn beautiful works of art.

Valerie includes two different executions of the same two bristlecone pine subjects in "Learning to Lean" and "Two Degrees of Separation." And, she has two closer versions of the same Sierra juniper subject in "You Never Can Tell" and "Grace of Melancholy," possibly for comparison of her techniques over time or to show her different artistic results.

Each drawing is accompanied by text written by Michael P. Cohen, a distinguished writer of environmental history and politics. His writing is austere, blunt, poignant and personal. Sometimes words flow from

the perspective of trees or sometimes he suggests the artist's psyche. It is brazenly anthropomorphic, or often subtle, but includes accounts of trees with grace, restraint, travails, and "hunker down and wait" behaviors—the latter descriptive of the tree's strategy for survival for hundreds or thousands of years in harsh environments. His emphasis on writing abstractly and specifically about trees is deliberate and there are only few mentions of the greater Sierran-rainshadow landscape within which they are rooted. Michael's ascetic words convey a tremendous sense of the tree's environment, such as mountains and valleys, rills and rivers or the Great Basin described in "Local Knowledge" on page 14.

In four short paragraphs the text on page 34, entitled "Spaces," is a complete ecology lesson. It's all there: form and function, patterns and time, life history and demography, dispersal and animal interaction, ecophysiology and resource allocation, the cosmos and the multiverse. While he concludes that the locations of trees in the White Mountains not determined by our doing, one wonders if perhaps the more recent patterns of reproduction of even these long-lived trees have been influenced by our direct impacts to their environments and by climate change more broadly. Indeed, research indicates changing patterns among bristlecone and limber pine youngsters.

The final section of the book, "Afterword," explains further their independent work and their relationship to each other as well as their tree subjects even though much is earlier revealed in Michael's text. We learn that the book was an unplanned project which at some point simply presented itself. This is the only section where scientific names are given and mistakes were made—a misspelling of the epithet of limber pine and the use of the outdated scientific name for Sierra juniper which recently changed as a result of botanical interpretation of the western juniper complex. It does seem a bit silly to point these things out as the trees have no opinion how we refer to them, only book reviewers do.

Besides being an artist, Valerie is a writer and an advocate for environmental and social causes. She grew up mountaineering and has been a ski patroller and a ranger in our western national parks. From her long term relationship with the mountains she has developed an acute fondness for subalpine trees. She married her high school sweetheart, Michael, who is an accomplished writer and a past teacher of humanities. He wrote the engaging and heavily researched book **A Garden of Bristlecones: Tales of change in the Great Basin**, also published by University of Nevada Press. After a lifetime of climbing and mountaineering he now skis and bicycles when not visiting trees with his wife.

The book will likely inspire you to make your first, or yet another, visit to the White Mountains to walk among these legends and listen to the bristlecones living and dying slowly. Closer to Reno, you might want to take a trip to the Echo Pass and Echo Lake areas to visit majestic Sierra junipers perched on solid granitic bedrock. Together, Valerie's drawings and his words "speak in the first person plural" based on a lifetime of shared experiences, personal perseverance, acceptance, and mutual respect for their independent talents—all elements in making the book such a great artistic and literary shared work. And in case you're wondering: Valerie and Michael are my friends and I am a collector of Valerie's work.

Adventure Scientists, a conservation citizen science non-profit, is seeking volunteers to survey butterflies and their host plants while hiking in Great Basin. The goal is to develop the first large-scale dataset of subalpine butterflies and their host plants across the west for public land managers to inform actions such as prescribed burning, protection of threatened species, and forest planning. Apply today at adventurescientists.org/pollinators to adopt sampling sites from July 1 through October 31, 2017.

Nevada Native Plant Society
PO Box 8965
Reno NV 89507-8965

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Newsletter preference: Paper Electronic

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