

From the Publisher

Author Robinson hiked his way right into history books

Climbing up Mt. Wilson all those years ago, we kids struggled to keep up with John Robinson, faculty adviser of Costa Mesa's Davis Middle School Mountaineers.

Not surprisingly either. Robinson, an avid hiker, had spent years on the trails in the San Bernardino, San Gabriel and San Jacinto mountain ranges. It was a passion that ultimately led him to write fact-laden guidebooks detailing the best hikes in those forests, which in turn spawned authoritative mountain history books.

Robinson, who will be on hand to autograph copies of his books at Big Bear Discovery Center's "History of the San Bernardinos" signing event on September 4 from 11 a.m.-3 p.m., did much of his research by taking a boots-on-the-ground approach. "I was a hiker way before I was a historian," Robinson, 81, said. "I started hiking with the Long Beach YMCA when I was 10 and joined Sierra Club in 1955."

His lengthy strides literally—and figuratively—left we middle schoolers in the dust. Interviewing my former teacher for this story, I told him I remembered him as a "Lean, mean climbing machine." "I'm a broken down machine now," Robinson, 81, chuckled. "I'm pretty slow now. I don't do the big hikes anymore."

Robinson has long since left his imprint on Southland trails. Guidebooks like *San Bernardino Mountain Trails* published in 1972—probably about the time he led Davis Mountaineers up Mt. Wilson, by the way—and *Trails of the Angeles* the year before are still considered the sport's bibles by experienced hikers. His books have seen frequent revisions and four decades later, are still better than anything out there.

"When you write a novel, after you put the pen down you're finished," he said. "When you write a guidebook you're never done because you update every year or two. I put a lot of history into the guidebooks in addition to hiking information."

Combining the two was logical because studying the past is another of Robinson's passions. *The San Bernardinos* was released in 1989—same year I began publishing *Big Bear Today*—and the coffee table-quality book has long been one of my reference mainstays.

Robinson had plenty of help on the book's Big Bear portions from the venerable late historian Tom Core. "I stayed all night several times at his house and we would go out to Holcomb Valley, Lucky Baldwin mine, the Rose Mine," he said. "Most of the things I learned about Big Bear came from Tom and he gave me several photos to use in the book."

On one occasion with Core, Robinson's two passions came together as



the pair traced the route of the old water flume that traversed the Valley's north ridge. Truly the flume was an architectural wonder, carrying water seven miles from its source to mining operations in the East Valley, built entirely by Chinese laborers and utilizing an estimated quarter-million square nails.

"We walked from Van Dusen around the side of the mountain to the mill site above Doble," Robinson said. "We were pretty tired and found some square nails along the way. (Tom) was a good hiker."

That was the fun part of his research. The tedious part came when he was reading old newspaper stories. "I spent a whole summer poring through box after box of stories," he said. "I talked to as many historians and old-timers as I could."

One of those was the late Harry James, leader of a boys outdoor group called the Western Rangers. James led 100-plus youngsters to the top of Mt. San Gorgonio—which Robinson himself has climbed many times—in 1923 and was among the first to propose the area be given Wilderness protection. "He was a very interesting person, I talked to him several times," Robinson said of James, who saw the area forever closed to developed skiing in 1964. "He also fought tooth and nail again the Palm Springs Tram development and lost that one. He felt bad."

San Gorgonio Wilderness remains a special place to Robinson. "Not many people know there used to be restrooms in the Wilderness, and four or five skier cabins," he said. "The Forest Service took those out. My real love are wild areas. Dollar Lake is the only natural lake in San Gorgonio Wilderness; Dry Lake was dammed in the 1880's by a low earthen dam. You can't hardly see it."

Gateways of Southern California, Robinson's last book, came out in 2005. "I'm all written out," he said. "That will be my last. The big surprise to me was the story of water. Before aqueducts water came from springs, and people fought bitterly for rights. I could have written a book three or four times the size of *The San Bernardinos*. It doesn't tell the whole story, but I think it hits the highlights pretty well."

Have a good one.

Marcus G. Dietz
Marcus



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- 4** **'Wake' Up to Cable Park at Holloway's**
Try wakeboarding without a boat at the new Cable Park at Holloway's Marina. It's kind of like a rope tow on the water and a great way for beginner and advanced riders alike to get in all the runs and learning they can handle. Hold on for the ride of your life...there's even boxes to hit too! It's a terrain park where the snow has melted and you'll warm up to it...
- 6** **40 Years of Big Bear Lake Oktoberfest!**
Celebrate four decades of Oktoberfest in Big Bear when the 40th annual event gets underway at the Convention Center with American Heroes Weekend Sept. 18-19. There's lots of surprises on tap but one thing hasn't changed: we still have a coupon for FREE Sunday adult admission on page 11!
- 7** **Lights, Camera, Action at Film Fest**
Awards season comes to Big Bear with three days of parties, personalities and premieres on tap as the Film Festival celebrates its 11th anniversary. Over a hundred films and honors galore will make the eyes blurry...and get a head start on the fun at Discovery Center the day before...
- 11** **Summer Snow, Films, Pass Sale at HD&HR**
The first big event of winter is in summer when Bear again hosts Hot Dawgz and Hand Rails. Top pros will be on hand to put 110 tons of snow to good use while you soak up sun and suds on the deck...and buy next year's season pass heap-cheap. Then there's two movie premieres after dark...
- 16** **Stamp Mill, Blacksmith Shop a Trip to Past**
History is hands-on at Big Bear Museum, where Southern California's only working stamp mill roars to life on weekends and blacksmiths show what it means to have their irons in the fire. Saddle up to the saloon for a sarsaparilla while the kids have so much fun they won't realize they're learning something to. In color, on The Back Page.



Explore the forest on horseback with guided rides out of Baldwin Lake Stables. Page 15

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Big Bear's most complete listings for recreation, dining, and more.

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