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Roger Garing, a Greenwood

Contractors that Garing is insur-

Stinking party

Desert's title very official excuse for fun

Terry Link
Daily Sentinel

Sol Lovato spoke with a tone sometimes used for legends.

"I said, 'Hey that stinker' ... I said, 'Hey, I wonder what that was?'" Lovato said, describing his initial reaction to the official-looking, green highway sign.

You could almost hear the "Who-was-that-masked-man?" tenor in his voice.

Lovato, 54, was hauling a load of wood along U.S. 50 to Delta with his wife, Bella, when there the sign was, whizzing by outside the truck window. "Entering Stinking Desert National Monument," the sign said.

Lovato didn't know what it meant. Officials will tell you there is no federal or state monument between Grand Junction and Delta.

Down the road, others knew.

Jim Horton, 64, the secretary of the Oddfellows Lodge in Delta, knew. Members of the Oddfellows and local chapters of the Rebekah Lodge were giving away cookies and drinks at a roadside stop.

Their kindness had nothing to do with the legend. They knew its story, nonetheless.

"It started about five years ago," Horton said wisely. He appeared wise because he was sitting in the shade in the middle of the stinking desert heat.

He told of how some long-distance bicyclists had pedaled one day between Delta and Grand Junction.

"I can see how a bicycle rider going through here would say, 'By God! I'm never gonna get out of this stinking desert!'" Horton said.

Soon after that fateful ride, Elmo Mepps, who on most days in Grand Junction is known as real estate agent Paul Nelson, appeared at a point on U.S. 50 just south of Kanab Creek with an official monument sign. He declared that a non-act of Congress had proclaimed the area the Stinking Desert National Monument.



Photo by William Daily Sentinel

Merveous Tremont shot some plastic pink flamingos with his rattlesnake squirt gun and his camera in the Stinking Desert National Monument. The monument got its name by a 1979 "non-act of Congress," according to legend.

Mepps' 1979 Labor Day weekend christening of the monument received media attention, perhaps because there was nothing else going on that day. The seed was sown.

When Mepps has held season openings on Labor Day weekends since then, his re-appearance, his stinking friends and their sign have attracted continued coverage.

These days, a few locals grumble about what has become an entrenched legend upon their high plains, Horton said. "It might not be pretty, but it's not stinking either," he explained.

According to Mepps' official-looking pamphlets, the land isn't fit for habitation. The pamphlets' version of history speaks of an expedition through the area by the Spanish and one Father Francisco Dominguez.

"No one in their right mind would live in this stinking desert,"

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Photo by William Daily Sentinel

Monument founder Elmo Mepps, center, and some friends showed up for a ceremony Saturday. Some claimed to be from Venus. From left, Trixie Topo, Acer Negundo, Mepps, Esperanto LeCar, Ferd Pillar and Helen Annum.

Decade magazine to be part of Sunday

Desert_____I

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Father Dominguez is reported to have declared.

And that's why Mepps restricted his season-opening speech to about 10 seconds Saturday.

He and nine friends, some claiming to be from Venus, showed up for the ceremony. It was a solemn occasion.

A legendary mood was set by a kazoo rendition of "Home on the Range."

A man identifying himself as Merveous Tremont shot some plastic pink flamingos with his rattlesnake squirt gun.

Tremont took some pictures of the others.

They took some pictures of him.

They heard the speech.

They quickly tackled the champagne they brought.

It was beginning to get warm in the 90-degree heat.

Soon they left.

Meanwhile, Lovato and his wife were stalled a mile or so down the road. Lovato guessed he had a problems with his fuel pump. Heat waves shimmered up from the black asphalt as it snaked southward through the brown and barbed-wired landscape.

Bella leaned out the pickup truck window.

"This is really a stinking desert," she said.

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