



APRIL/MAY 2012

The Righteous Wrath of Ranger Stiles: My First Big Bust—in words (and in pictures, thanks to my prisoners)...by Jim Stiles

by [stiles](#) • April 1, 2012 • [10 Comments](#)

One morning, many years ago, when I still had the energy to hustle for new advertising, I stopped by a new store on Center Street. It was called Walkabout Travel Gear and I hoped the owners might want to promote their business in The Zephyr. I introduced myself to Brad Boyle and began my sales pitch but suddenly he raised a hand and advised me that we had met before. A long time ago, he explained. The face looked vaguely familiar. “Really,” I said. “Yeah,” he grinned. “You arrested me.”

As Brad told the story, it all came back to me. Slowly. Painfully. And with the slow dawn of recollection, I considered two facts. One, I can be a real asshole from time to time. And two, this guy probably wasn’t going to buy an ad.

As the tale was told, Brad Boyle, this kind, very tall man I was listening to, explained how he had unwittingly become the first recipient of a National Park Service Citation of Violation from a then-Wrathful Yet Skinny Ranger Jim-Bob Stiles. I think I was a few weeks into my first season at Arches. My uniform was still crisp...I even had creases in my loden green Levis. And I looked like I was about twelve years old. While I still object to my old pal Scott Groene’s assertion that I was the “desert’s Barney Fife,” it’s hard to deny a striking similarity to a uniformed Sonny Bono.

I had spotted Brad and his three friends— DIK Jensen, Ron Davison and Jeff Carvalho— on an old jeep track that we’d closed for ‘scenic restoration,’ out in Salt Valley. As they approached , I climbed out of my NPS cruiser (red lights flashing) and held out my hand; they were innocent as lambs and they waved and smiled as I stopped their car. I think they were convinced I was just being a friendly ranger. Instead I gave them the full weight (all 127 lbs) of my authority as a federal law enforcement officer and I decided



right then and there that these violators were going to pay the price for their environmental thoughtlessness. At the time, the federal judge in Salt Lake City hated the federal government with such a fervor that he automatically threw out of court any and all NPS citations. To get around this obstacle, we were deputized in our respective Utah counties which gave us the authority to write tickets for violations of state laws. Somewhere in the Utah state code, believe it or not, was a regulation about the destruction of natural features, so I cited Brad for heinous crimes against the plants and grasses of Arches National Park and advised them to follow me into Moab, to the Grand County Courthouse, where they had to post a bond. Feeling the need for reinforcements, I paused briefly at the park entrance station and picked up my boss, Chief Ranger Jerry Epperson, just in case these guys “tried something.”



Haskell “Heck” Bowman was Grand County’s sheriff at the time. There wasn’t much that riled Heck and this law enforcement crisis only seemed to amuse him. I had delivered Brad and his co-conspirators to the Dispatcher’s office and Heck stuck his head in the door...

“What’s goin’ on here? Who are you fellas?” he asked as he examined my creases. He was already grinning.

“I’m a ranger out at Arches and I caught these guys. They’re here to post a bond.”

“What’d they do?”

“Well they drove off the main road and...uh...rode over the...the flora.”

“The...the what?”

“You know...the plant life. The—”

“You got these boys in here because they drove over some o’ them wildflowers? Is that it, Ranger?” “Well...yeah...you see—”

“Hey fellas,” Heck called to the other deputies, “This here young ranger has hauled these fellas in here fer runnin’ over some wildflowers out to the Arches.”

Heck turned back to me. “Well hell son,” he asked, “Why didn’t you just shoot ‘em? Or at least put the cuffs on ‘em. Runnin’ over wildflowers...I don’t know...maybe we ought to jes’ lock ‘em up and throw away the key.”

I was standing there wondering if Heck might just throw me in jail instead, for annoying him, and I looked around for Jerry, for moral support, but he had already slipped out the side door, unable to withstand any more of Sheriff Bowman’s good humor. My prisoners still seemed to be acting contrite but a few more minutes of this withering assault by Heck and they may have ALL turned on me.

Finally Brad pulled out his checkbook, paid the fine and he and his buddies left. I left there as well, mortified beyond my ability to express it. I didn’t write another ticket for three years.

And that would have been the end of the story until I was reunited with Brad all those years later. Brad even had the cancelled check for the fine (and later he sent me a copy). Brad also forgave me and took out an advertisement and has been a Zephyr supporter ever since.

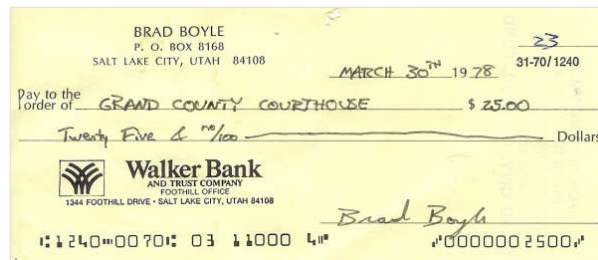
And THAT would have been the end of the story were it not for another recent discovery.

Brad sent me an email a few months ago, with some attachments. What's this, I wondered.

To my astonishment, it was a series of black & white photographs of the 'incident.' Brad's buddy DIK Jensen was snapping pictures throughout the grueling ordeal but had subsequently misplaced them. For years they were believed lost. And then last fall, Brad got a message from his old friend—the arrest photos had been found! Brad passed them along to me and now...for the first time...we offer these images of the National Park Service at...
ahem...its finest.







Don't mess with Sonny Bono's Evil Twin.

To read the PDF version of this article, click [here](#).

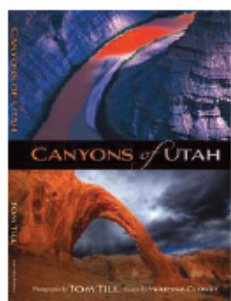
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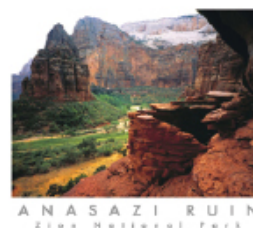
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10 comments for “The Righteous Wrath of Ranger Stiles: My First Big Bust—in words (and in pictures, thanks to my prisoners)...by Jim Stiles”

Ron "Zeb" Davison

April 1, 2012 at 7:13 pm

Well, my old friend Brad sent me a link to this fine story, and as I sit before my computer today, I attest that it is a faithful retelling of one of my first run-ins with “the law”. I applaud Officer

Stiles for his pleasant, entertaining, and self-deprecating writing style. Yes, we were all young once upon a time...how ironic that I, a “destroyer of nature”, ended up being so anti-development/pro-environmental protection. A long strange trip, indeed, but with one little thread running from that day to this: Due to the hat I wore on that trip, I’ve been known ever since as “Zeb”.

Reply

Tom Wylie

April 9, 2012 at 11:25 pm

Great story, Jim! Consider. I had arrested and cited so many people in Yosemite I hoped I would never have to do it again, and I didn’t. Canyonlands was a good place for not making arrests in those days.

Reply

jane Kosut

April 11, 2012 at 5:42 am

I will be laughing all day long....you can really retell in words a good story.

Reply

Tracey McDonnell (Morse)

April 11, 2012 at 9:00 pm

What a great story!Brought back memories of the first ticket I issued...driving/camping off road (or something like that)! Damian Fagan was with me. I was a nervous wreck! How are you doing Jim???

Reply

Jan

December 21, 2013 at 9:15 am

Great collar. Could be a great series. Law & Order: Parks & Recreation.

Reply

Tina Shay

December 25, 2013 at 10:04 pm

You are a treasure Jim! Great story!

Reply

Warren Musselman

July 4, 2016 at 12:07 pm

Shame there is no video. This should be on "Cops" Stiles... that 70's porno mustache clinches it.

Reply

Joe Blackburn

March 4, 2022 at 8:03 am

Hilarious!!! Great observation!

Reply

Donna McNeely

August 19, 2021 at 10:17 am

Thanks for this great story. My Dad was Sheriff Heck Bowman. I love reading about those stories about him. He was a great man and father.

Reply

Joe Blackburn

March 4, 2022 at 8:02 am

I just happened to run across this story when looking for a former officer from Southern Indiana. Hilariously and well told! I agree with "Zeb" about the added self-depreciation throughout the story. I also love the earlier comments by Jan and Warren Musselman; maybe you could combine the two ideas for an entertaining mini-documentary!!!

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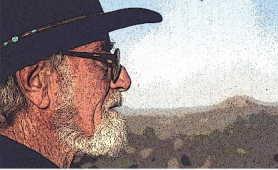




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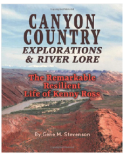


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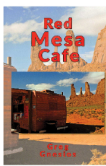
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His award-winning photography and writing has appeared in numerous journals, magazines, museum exhibits, calendars and books. When he isn't hiking or conducting trips, he sells rare books online, watches movies, and writes a blog about his adventures.

He lives in Grand Junction, Colorado.

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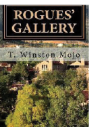
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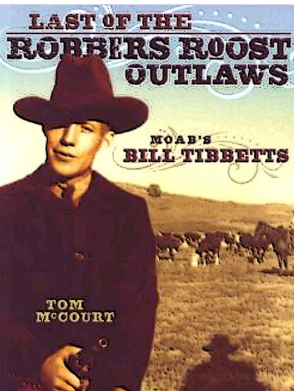



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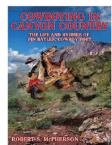
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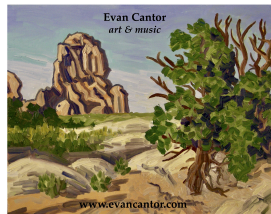
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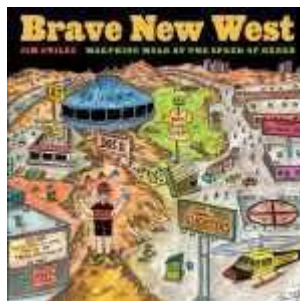
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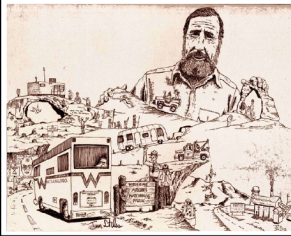




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