

BLACK ROCK BEACON

rites of passage GATE/BIRTH EDITION MONDAY AUGUST 29, 2011 VOLUME VII, NUMBER I

1:30 @ CENTER CAMP WWW.BLACKROCKBEACON.ORG

WELCOME TO NOWHERE

BY SUZANNE

I've heard rumors that this is going to be the year Burning Man jumps the shark.

But I think it's pretty unlikely. First of all, the Man may have agreed to stand up for an entire week with his legs spread wide — OUCH!!! — but there's no indication that he's going to be able to actually jump. I'm pretty sure that if he could jump, he'd jump off his pedestal and run away and avoid his scheduled date with a lit match on Saturday night.

And even if he didn't want to avoid becoming a big pile of ashes, if I was the Man, I'd rather jump over a duck or a rabbit or a giant shopping cart than a shark. But maybe that's just me.

Expectations

On the other hand, this is Burning Man, and you never know what could happen out in the middle of Nowhere.

You might have a life-changing experience here. You might bring with you a bunch of expectations and not have any of them met and still have the time of your life. You'll probably see some mind-blowing art that you never imagined anyone could create. You might discover that you love bacon even though you're a vegetarian (it hasn't happened to me, but maybe it will happen to you).

Bacon and Pants

And that brings up a couple things missing from the Survival Guide. They mention the importance of things like drinking enough water, leaving no trace, keeping garbage out of the porta potties, and using sunscreen. They fail to mention two important topics: Bacon and pants.

According to almost the entire Beacon staff, bacon is the best food on

the playa. It's also one of our favorite topics. If someone did a word search of the Beacon archives, the word "bacon" would probably appear at least

Two important topics Bacon and pants

as often as "the" or "and." It's supposedly easy to cook, easy to smell, easy to eat, and easy to share. As a vegetarian, I personally prefer string cheese and sour cream and onion Pringles, but I was outnumbered.

As for pants, they serve many purposes. For

example, pants prevent shirtcooking.

Wearing pants also helps you avoid what our publisher refers to as "juicing the furniture," which is a nice thing to do for whoever is going to sit in that chair after you get up.

Have a Good Week!

I have to confess that ever since the Black Rock Beacon was founded in 2005, I have wanted to do a "Bacon and Pants" edition. It's probably never going to happen, but being able to write an article about both subjects is a close second. Thank you for reading, and may you also do something you've always wanted to achieve. 🐷

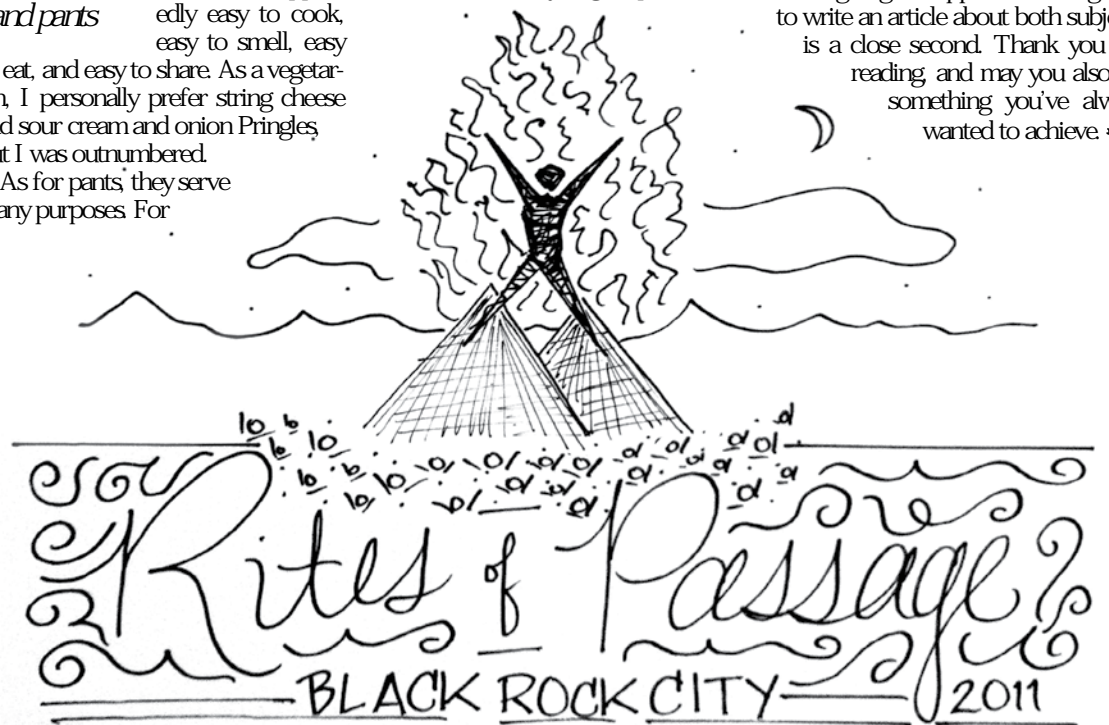


Illustration by Theatremuse

While You Were Out

BY MITCH

It's been a busy 50-plus weeks of hibernation. Here's some stuff that's been happening while you were away.

The Burning Man Project. You probably thought Burning Man was the Burning Man project, perhaps because the Burningman.com website used to say so. No more. The Burning Man Project, an offshoot of the Black Rock Arts Foundation, itself an offshoot of the Burning Man project (with a lower-case "p"), is a not-for-profit corporation meant to spiff up the San Francisco Tenderloin area around its headquarters and eventually to take over what used to be called the Burning Man project, including the Black Rock City event. It was launched Aug. 6.

The key here is that the Project with a capital "P" is a not-for-profit, while the current purveyor of Black Rock City is a limited liability corporation owned by six Black Rock luminaries who are planning to cash out after decades of nurturing the event. The exact timing and method of the transfer is either unknown or they're not telling, but it won't happen imminently. The six LLC directors are also on the 17-member Project board.

In a perhaps related development, the Burning Man payroll ballooned last year, rising 155 percent, to \$7.3 million. There wasn't a binge of hiring, and although the population rose to a record 51,525 last year, that was only an 18 percent increase, so there wasn't an obvious need to double the staff. It seems fair that if the board members are going to cash out, the rest of the crew should at least get something, and they did get 401(k)s and bonuses after a pretty fabulous year.

The overall budget for 2010 was \$180 million, and divided by the population, the cost of providing Burning Man was \$349 per attendee. It had held steady around \$280 for the three previous years.

The financial data comes from the annual figures posted on the (old) Burning Man website and can be taken with a grain or two of salt in either direction.

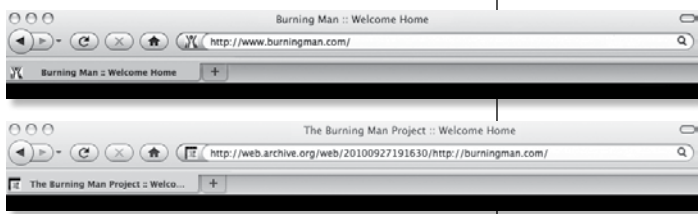
Ticket Snafu #1. The first day of on-line ticket sales, Jan. 19, was pretty much a horror show. The site crashed, people got thrown out of line, people got told they were thrown out but weren't, etc.

Will Chase, editor of the Bmorg's Burning Blog website, wrote, "The annual ritual and excitement for opening day of tickets was matched with an equally overwhelming feeling of frustration at the ticket sales process." In Ticketing the vendor (and an organization run by Burners), fessed up that "some information given during the course of the day may have been incorrect."

Last year was better, and they promise next year will be too.

Ticket Snafu #2. Burning Man sold out. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, the mad rush for first-day tickets, there's a big if metaphorical No Vacancies sign on Black Rock City this year. Working with a 50,000 population cap mandated by the federal Bureau of Land Management permit, the Bmorg stopped ticket sales late in July. They're not saying exactly how many were sold, but the issue was touchy this year because the BLM permit was only for 2011, not the usual five-year agreement, and the hope is that the population

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Know Your Rites: A Week of Life

BY DURGY

Throughout life there are personal rites of passage, others' rites of passage that you attend, and shared rites of passage. In the one week of Black Rock City, 50,000 people will experience and re-experience many of these in microcosm.

First Rite

The earliest rites do not carry any cognizant memory, but echo throughout our lives. Conception, when egg met sperm to make zygote, was your first rite of passage as the chromosomes matched up and you were off to the cell-splitting races. Conception is also a rite that our parents were going through at the time, but from a different, creative angle.

Though some babies may get made this week, coming through the Gate is also an analogous moment of conception into life at BRC for each of us; we need to have our chromosomes lined up. Ticket, food, water and shelter formed those essential building blocks for life, and maybe you have some enhancements in your BRC gene pool (art projects, fabulous adomments). After the pregnant pause of the Gate road, you rolled past Greeters (and maybe around on the Playa) and were born into this strange new world with a slap on the butt or a ring of a bell. After taking some baby steps to set up camp, it became time to wander and explore.

Potty training was a rite of passage

that (hopefully) we all went through. Who among us can recall that event? Parents remember it as a day of freedom from changing diapers. The parents among us remember the joy when their offspring could voice the request to "go potty." In BRC we descend into the blue loos and relive this rite of passage, perhaps pinning for the good ol' days when we could just poop in our pants and have someone else clean up the mess.

Your Experience

Over the years there were the confessions, the confirmations, the communions, the bar mitzvahs, the merit badges, the proms, the graduations. We lived some of these rituals as the culminations of commitments that we personally made to see a project through to completion. We were observers at others and consequently ate a big celebratory meal. Some of these rites of passage are reflected in the events that our fellow citizens pose as group events in BRC. Participate fully in these as you find them to enrich your experience and the experience of those around you.

Double Rainbows

Some unplanned and sometimes unwanted rites of passage crept into our lives: Schoolyard fights, going to jail, miscarriages, broken bones, getting fired and so many other events that shaped who we are today. Since it didn't kill you, it made you stronger or maybe a bit bitter, but otherwise helped mold the modern you. Ah, if BRC could be a week full only with

double rainbows and perfectly fried bacon. But I expect one will need to take the good with the bad.

BRC offers many opportunities to live rites of passage

There will be weddings signaling a new life for two committed people. Since 50,000 people times one week is about 961 years, statistically there might be death and there will certainly be the immolation and spectacular demise of the Burning Man. When the Temple burns we have the reflective funeral as a rite of passage to remember those that are gone but also to renew and support the collective spirit of those that remain.

BRC offers many opportunities to live and re-live the rites of passage that got you here, and await you in the future. Take them as they come and bring your best. Mazal tov! 🐷

THE RITES STUFF

Rites of passage generally break down into five categories — birth, coming of age, marriage and putting down roots, seniority, and the last rites — and they reflect what is important to a culture. We're going to cram those into a week of Beacons.

Black Rock City's birth, at least according to its own legends, occurred when the first Burners crossed a line drawn in the sand at the entrance to the Playa in 1990. They were told that once they passed it, "Everything will be different."

Following in those footsteps when you passed through the Gate, it was as if you were born again in the middle of Nowhere to a new and different Black Rock City and a new and different you.

