

Chicken Soup for the Nature Lover's Soul: Inspiring Stories of Joy, Insight and Adventure in the Great Outdoors

By Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen

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For anyone who enjoys spending time in the great outdoors: hikers, mountain climbers, snowboarders, kayakers, campers, beach-lovers, tree-huggers and more.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen are the #1 *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling authors of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. They are professional speakers who have dedicated their lives to enhancing the personal and professional development of others.

Steve Zikman is the author of *Chicken Soup for the Traveler's Soul* and *The Power of Travel: A Passport to Adventure, Discovery & Growth*. An avid outdoorsman, especially hiking, canoeing, and kayaking, Zikman is a popular keynote speaker and workshop facilitator in the travel & outdoor industry. He lives near Los Angeles, California.

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Burroville Back in 1974, when I was in my early twenties, I befriended a group of hikers who were mapping a desert trail from the Mexican to the Canadian border. Offering to try a few routes for them through Death Valley, I made the drive to a base camp near Ulida Flat, where I camped for the night.

At first light, I started my trek up an alluvial fan into an unnamed canyon in the Cottonwood Mountains. After about an hour of hiking through the rock-strewn wash, I made my way deeper into the shadows and the bray of a burro told me I wasn't alone. With slow, careful steps, I rounded a bend and found myself in Burroville. Population: 100. I looked around and saw that the majority stood in little groups along the slopes while several others were perched atop the perpendicular cliff walls.

I continued walking and was soon met by an imposing welcoming committee—a dozen big Jacks with massive heads, standing shoulder to shoulder and daring me to approach. Though they stood a good thirty feet away, their resolute stance and effective blockade of the canyon ahead made me pause a while to consider my next move. I'd never heard of anyone being killed by a burro, but it was clear they had no plans to let me pass.

Several moments went by until one of the big Jacks pawed at the ground with his hooves and another looked behind him, as if to check the rear for a surprise attack. That's when I saw what the burro was actually looking at—a Jenny and nursing foal standing close beside the canyon wall about twenty feet back. Our eyes met and the female's flanks shuddered as she watched me with a wariness that only a true wild thing can display.

When I lifted my gaze to scan the slopes behind her, I was surprised to see other females and their young, planted in groups of two and three all around me. Suddenly I realized it was the time of year for foals to drop, and the big males were merely protecting their mates and babies. I must have let out a big sigh, because one of them pricked up his ears and raised his head as if waiting for me to speak.

“Don't worry, guys, I'm just passing through,” I called gently.

No response, just a flutter of flanks and a few ear twitches. Clearly, the subtle approach wasn't working, so I picked up a rock and lobbed it near the biggest Jack. It fell at his feet and he lowered his head to sniff it.

Clearly the burro had no intention of moving, so I reluctantly turned and began to make my way back down the wash in defeat. That was when a loud bray made me about-face once more.

To my surprise, the big jacks were lumbering out of the wash and making their way toward the northern walls of the canyon. Now, only the biggest of them remained at the edge of the bank, staring at me. Suddenly, the way was clear; I'd won the standoff. I started up the canyon but was stopped by the look in the burro's great brown eyes. As we stood there staring at each other, a shudder passed through me.

In that instant the message he sent me became clear: he was asking me to leave the canyon. Politely, and with some measure of supplication, but plain as day. And I knew then I couldn't go on, couldn't violate his trust. So I turned and headed back down the canyon.

As I retreated, I considered my role in creating a desert trail that hundreds of hikers would traverse each year. Today's unknown route through a rugged canyon might well become a dotted red line on some future map. Was it so important that people knew about this place?

I began to think it wasn't.

Maybe what this earth really needed was a few more unnamed canyons. Maybe there's some intrinsic value in knowing that some mountains will never be climbed, that a handful of jungles will remain unexplored. Must we really clamber up every alluvial fan, map every desert canyon, and slap a name on every dry lake and rocky outcropping?

Perhaps, in the end, it's enough just knowing they're out there—somewhere.

John Soennichsen

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