



Humane Borders

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Newsletter December 2016

From Dinah Bear, Chair of Humane Borders

I want to thank everyone who has supported us over the past year. We are very grateful for every donor and every volunteer who helps us fulfill our mission of preventing death in the desert. And indeed, that task continues to be very challenging. The westward trend in migration has continued, with rising deaths in the more remote, arid portions of southwestern Arizona. At the same time, deaths continue in the rest of southern Arizona, especially along the Sasabe corridor. In response, we have opened up more stations on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and our first stations on Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. We are also in the Sasabe corridor twice a week, every week.

We continue to be blessed with a good number of volunteers in the Phoenix area who cover a large portion of the west desert. I was pleased to spend 9 hours on a water run with our two Phoenix Board members, Dan Abbott and Norm Baker, on last Saturday's water run. By the time they get back to Phoenix, it is well into the evening. We do need additional volunteers based in Ajo to cover the far western regions, especially during the summer.

In April, we continued our tradition of having a variety of local clergy from southern Arizona come to our truck yard for a "Blessing of the Fleet" event. And our very aging fleet continues to make it up and down rock, hilly roads, over and over again. We have had some expensive repairs this year, as we do virtually every year.

We have spent a fair amount of time this year focusing on fixing or improving various administrative processes – the kind of work that isn't very interesting but will help put us on a better footing to continue operations. Elsewhere here, you'll note two of these changes – the addition of Neil Novack helping out with operations and a new and improved website.

We are very grateful to have the continued support of the Pima County Board of Supervisors and the County Medical Examiner as well as the City of Tucson. Pima County and Tucson are perhaps the most supportive local governments on the U.S.-Mexico border when it comes to humanitarian assistance to migrants.

We have hosted several school groups this year for water runs and related events. Please understand that we have limited resources for this, but we will always do what we can to educate people about what we do. We have also participated in a number of local community events in Tucson and are in the process of adopting a mile of Highway 286.

As 2017 approaches, I am optimistic that – with your help – we will meet whatever challenges we face.

Humane Borders Mapping of Migrant Deaths

Maintaining our network of water stations isn't all that we do at Humane Borders. We also map the locations where border crossers have died in the desert (and their remains were later found by someone) using data collected by the Pima County Medical Examiner's office. We use this data to locate our water stations, and journalists and researchers and other desert relief groups use it as well. It is also available to you on your home computer. It's called the "Arizona OpenGIS for Deceased Migrants." Here is a guide to how it works.

If you go to the home page of the mapping project (<http://humaneborders.info>), you'll see that it offers three different types of map tools that serve different purposes. The first, most general tool is "Map of Migrant Mortality" (also available in Spanish as "Mapa en español"). Once you select it you'll see a blank map with a variety of search options. If you like, you can ignore the options and just hit the Search button to display the locations of all the recorded deaths, more than 2,700 of them since 2001.

If you hit Search, after a few moments the map will be covered with a mass of red dots and a table will appear below listing details from each case. At the top right corner of the table you'll be able to see the number of "cases matched" (in this case, the total number of cases in the system). At this point you can zoom in on the map with the + button and drag the map within its frame to see how the deaths are distributed. Another way to zoom in is to click on the magnify icon on the left side of the frame and draw a rectangle on the area you want to zoom in on

The search options are useful if you want to narrow your focus. You can look for a known person by typing in a last name. Once you start typing a list of possibilities will appear, allowing you to select one of them. Or you can obtain search results by selecting one or more of the other options. For example, if you want to know if any women were found in Pima County during 2015, just make the appropriate selections for "Gender," "Year of Death," "County of Discovery" before clicking or touching the Search button.

Unless you have a large computer screen you may not realize that below the data table there are two links, "Download Map" and "Download Spreadsheet." These are for the more technically minded. The first downloads a KML file you can open in Google Earth or use with other specialized software. The other is raw data that can be opened by a spreadsheet or manipulated in other ways.

You can return to the home page by clicking or touching the rectangle with the title and silhouette of the mountains at the top of the page. The other two search options, "Bounding Box Spatial Search Map" and "Case Number-based Spatial Search Map," work similarly but allow researchers to focus on a specific area. For the "Bounding Box" search, zoom to the area you wish to look at, and hit "Set" before starting the search. The "Case Number" search allows you to use a known case as a starting point; it will identify other cases involving remains discovered within a given radius.

Our thanks go to Humane Borders Research Director and Board Member Dr. John Chamblee for managing this project and to Mike Kreyche for keeping it up to date.

New Website; New Ways to Donate

We have a new and vastly improved website at www.humaneborders.org which is filled with photos and easy to navigate. You can make an on-line contribution and get an immediate, IRS-friendly acknowledgement; learn more about what we're doing; find out how to volunteer; see profiles of our Board members; read weekly volunteer reports; and watch videos. You can also donate to Humane Borders indirectly by ordering from Amazon on its alternative website for that purpose, smile.amazon.com. If you go to that site, you can direct Amazon to make a contribution to Humane Borders based on the amount of your purchases.

Encountering Migrants by Stephen Lee Saltonstall

Encountering migrants is a relatively rare event on our water runs. Migrants usually hide when they hear or see our trucks, fearing that we are with the Border Patrol or some other official agency seeking to arrest and deport them. On a run this summer, Guillermo Jones and I drove up to a water station where the barrel's spigot had been left partially on. The ground underneath the spigot had just started to get wet, and there were fresh footprints leading to and from the barrel. So we inferred that a migrant or migrants had fled the water station when they heard the sound of our truck's engine. Guillermo called out in Spanish that we were there to help, but there was no response.

Occasionally we do see migrants, usually when they are in distress and unable to run away. In this situation we offer the person water, food, and basic medical supplies such as bandages, antiseptic and moleskin for blisters, but it is unlawful for us to offer a migrant a ride or to give aid other than to call law enforcement to seek medical assistance. Joel Smith, our Operations Manager, recently found a migrant by the side of the Arivaca Road, severely dehydrated and near death. Joel felt that his only reasonable and lawful course of action was to call the Border Patrol, and the man's life was saved.

One morning this past June, Humane Borders volunteer Jorge Soto and I spotted a 19 year-old migrant from Chiapas, Mexico under a tree near our Ross Mine water station in a remote area off the Arivaca Road. This young person, whose first name begins with the letter N, had crossed the border on foot in Sasabe, about 15 miles south of where we were when we found him.

N told us that his goal had been to get to Gadsden, Alabama, where his brother lives. He had no idea how far away Alabama is from southern Arizona. He said that he felt too debilitated to continue his journey. He told us that he had been in a group of six migrants, and that they had been chased all night by Border Patrol agents using dogs, all-terrain vehicles, horses, and a helicopter. He was the only person in his group able to elude capture, but now he was at the point where he felt so weak that he wanted to surrender to the Border Patrol, and asked for our help in doing so.

We were out of cell phone range, so after handing out food and water, I left Jorge with N and our truck and I walked to the main road, where I flagged down a Border Patrol truck. By the time N. was finally taken away to detention in Tucson, five Border Patrol trucks and a Pima County Deputy Sheriff's car had deployed to our location. Given the amount of public resources used to hunt down and arrest N, one might think that he was an escapee from a maximum-security prison, rather than a teenager desperately trying to reunite with a close family member. (This isn't meant as a criticism of the Border Patrol, which was doing its job, but as an observation of our country's arguably skewed priorities.)



N was able to give Jorge the name and telephone number of his brother in Alabama, and he, and later Juanita Molina, spoke with him to let him know what had happened to N and what he was facing: an appearance in federal court in Tucson, a prison sentence, and deportation after serving his time -- probably somewhere between two and six months. He will have a permanent criminal record, and if he is caught again in the United States without proper documents, it will mean a felony charge.

Migrant Deaths at Same Level Despite Fewer Border Crossings

It is beyond dispute that, based on Border Patrol statistics for the number of arrests, fewer undocumented migrants are crossing the border. In the Tucson sector, the number of arrests in 2015 (a little over 63,000) was about half of the number of the 2013 apprehensions. But the number of remains of deceased migrants found in the desert has remained relatively steady. By mid-November of 2016, the number of remains processed by the Pima County Medical Examiner's office was 138, more than for all of 2014 (136), and the number of dead this year will likely exceed the 2015 total (143).

It's important to keep in mind that many more migrants die in the desert than are found. These are vast areas, and it's only by chance that someone finds a person's remains. It takes only a few days to a week for a body to be skeletonized by predators, and soon thereafter, bones are scattered.

Sadly, our mission to save as many migrants as we can from a horrible death by dehydration and exposure continues to be a humanitarian necessity.

Profile of Neil Novack

Neil Novack returned to Tucson this summer, and resumed his role as one of our most skilled and trusted volunteers. So much so that he now has a title: Deputy Operations Manager. In that capacity, Neil is responsible for ensuring that our trucks, including the quirky water pumps and hoses used to fill our desert water stations, are in good working order and safe to operate. Neil is also in charge of maintaining our Tucson truck yard. He is living in the basement of our Tucson headquarters, and his presence has been a deterrent to visitations by vandals who have managed to break in and do damage to our trucks and offices in the past.

Neil is a professional driver with a commercial driver's license. He has driven everything from tour buses (primarily in Alaska) to big rig tractor trailers on routes in the southwestern United States. Neil enjoys taking extended road trips on his BMW motorcycle, especially into Mexico. Neil says that his motivation to work for Humane Borders stems from his love for Mexico and the Mexican people.

Neil's driving expertise has raised the level of skill of our other volunteer drivers. He is quick to give helpful driving pointers to us, and to correct our mistakes when we make them. Whatever Neil does, whether on the road or in our offices, we all benefit from his greatest assets: his wry sense of humor, laid-back attitude, and unerring friendliness.



Profile of Stephen Lee Saltonstall

Stephen Lee Saltonstall began volunteering for Humane Border in the summer of 2015 after moving to Tucson from Vermont. He joined our Board in September, 2016. Stephen drives the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge water run every Friday, and the Arivaca route at least once a month. He credits the humanitarian values taught him by his mother as his motivation for volunteering for the life-saving work of Humane Borders.

Stephen thinks of his involvement with Humane Borders as the culmination of his work life, after 40 years in a private law practice that concentrated on criminal defense for low income people, representation of political protestors, free speech cases for the ACLU, and legal work for national and local environmental organizations.

In his early years, Stephen was kicked out of high school for activities in the peace movement, including a refusal to “take shelter” during a Civil Defense day atom bomb drill in 1961. He was a foot-soldier in the civil rights movement, participating in efforts to desegregate the Cairo, Illinois swimming pool and to extend voting rights in Selma, Alabama. When he isn’t working for Humane Borders, Stephen enjoys walking to nearby Agua Caliente Park, reading novels and history books, and listening to the jazz music of the Bebop era and the orchestral works of Johannes Brahms.



Volunteer Profile: Guillermo Jones

Guillermo Jones began volunteering for Humane Borders in the late spring of 2015. He is a veteran of the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge water run, and he now drives the more remote and difficult Arivaca route. Guillermo is a member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and he works as an IT field service technician. He is also a skilled actor who is in much demand by Tucson's numerous theater groups.



Guillermo found Humane Borders through Joel Smith's Facebook page. Fascinated by Joel's photographs, he came to a volunteer meeting.

"I always obey my conscience, which was telling me to get involved. People are crossing the desert just to have a chance to survive. In the desert if you don't have water, you're dead. We know that our water gets to people who need it. Even if only one life is saved, I know that I am doing the best I can to help. The vandalism of our water stations only stiffens my resolve."

Guillermo's vivid accounts of his experiences in the wilds of southern Arizona are legendary to those who have ridden with him on water runs. If you volunteer and you ask him about it, he will describe climbing the sacred mountain Baboquivari and encountering a mountain lion who was tracking him. Luckily for him, and for us, he made it home safely.