

RECLAIMING THE HIGH SIERRA:
A CREATIONIST'S REVISION OF THE "EVOLUTION GROUP"
by Chard Berndt © 2002

In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. – Psalm 95:4



Photo 1. Outlet of Hungry Packer Lake.

Three days ago I completed six weeks at ICR's graduate school, and today (July 28, 2002) I rest at 11,071 ft. beside Hungry Packer Lake in the High Sierra. Our annual "Big Trip" reunites Christian brothers allied through outdoor ministry in central Idaho, and the Sierra provides our first California venue. In the remaining six days, we five will negotiate forty miles of backcountry trails and terrain, scree, boulders, and alpine tundra.¹ Knowing the God of creation, and respecting this divine attribute, it is ironic that we will trek among places named to honor influential evolutionists.

When I worked as a trip outfitter, I packed heaps and hiked scores of mountains---so I have permitted myself to label some landmarks along the way. Yet now that I have instructed creation science for some years, and am fresh from ICR, I feel compelled (if not officially authorized) to do some *renaming* here, among the Evolution Group.²

As it happens, years ago I inquired of the USGS naming policy, which required that 1) the place was presently unnamed, and that 2) the petitioned name belonged to the deceased. In light of this, I forewarn that I will break rule #1 in every case, and rule #2 once. Thus, the map will not officially change—it is only my fancy. But I would like to narrate my unofficial revisions nonetheless.

Tonight as alpenglow illuminates the granite fortressing our lake, I look southwest at the magnificent Mt. Haeckel spire. Named by Theodore S. Solomons³ in 1895 among six peaks in the original Evolution Group, this 13,418 footer honors Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), a famous German Darwinist and originator of the embryonic recapitulation idea. Yet Haeckel's concept that "ontology recapitulates phylogeny" (that is, the development of an individual embryo "relives" the supposed evolutionary ancestry of that population) was logically flawed. Furthermore, he bolstered his ideas with hand-sketched "recordings" of embryonic stages, manipulated to fit his theory. Haeckel undoubtedly had illustrative skills, but I do not like to see forgeries and imagined phylogenies honored.

So, as the distant waterfall's roar oscillates with the periodic breeze, I consider instead another gifted illustrator and innovator: Italian Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Unlike Haeckel, da Vinci regarded the Bible and honored man's place in the creation. He had a penchant for physics (establishing the discipline of hydraulics) and, when illustrating living subjects, pursued "vital activity" and the science of movement. For example, his straightforward yet authoritative *The Proportions of Man* produced anatomical representation superior to that of early Renaissance painters. Given this remarkable insight and skill in illustrating the creation, and his frequently biblical subjects (*The Last Supper*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *Virgin of the Rocks*, et al.), I am compelled to rename Mt. Haeckel as Mt. Leonardo.

Along the same spine rises Mt. Wallace (13,377 ft.), hidden from my view. Solomons also coined this landmark, in honor of Alfred Russell Wallace (1823-1913), a Welsh evolutionist who specialized

in “biogeography,” differentiating between the faunas of Australia and Asia. Of course, he extrapolated observable allopatric speciation to the general theory of evolution, assuming (as evolutionists still do) that geographical uniqueness is accounted for by new information, rather than the bounded expression of extant hereditary factors. Tomorrow I will climb “his” mountain from Echo Lake for a personal ceremony.

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Yesterday’s Los Angeles-to-11,000-ft. rise worked us over. I did not comfort the group much when explaining that our erythrocyte count would still be climbing to acclimatization by trip’s end. Through headaches and shortness of breath, we made a day-trip to Echo Lake for the opportunity to hook *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (rainbow trout). While my brother-in-law Marty pursued fly-casting with fervor, and the others reclined on tundra, I began the 1700 ft. scramble up Mt. Wallace. Several monstrous, out-leaning slabs in the final twenty feet (along with some good judgment that comes from having a wife and two children) prevented my full conquest. So, I found a nook, pondered the newly named Mt. Leonardo to the northwest, and considered another remarkable man: chemist and biologist Louis Pasteur.

In 1859, Pasteur (1822-1895) devised an innovative experiment to put to rest loopholes in Redi’s, Needham’s, and Spallanzani’s prior experiments. In doing so, he refuted spontaneous generation



(the origin of life from non-living substances) in both air and liquids, and demonstrated the pervasive existence of microorganisms. Today, evolutionists are forced to devise hypothetical early-Earth conditions to explain something neither observed or replicated. In essence, Pasteur’s work falsified a central tenet of general evolution, pushing the whole theory into past speculation. In addition, Pasteur demonstrated the nature of optical isomers, contributed to fermentation control, developed vaccines, and devised the pasteurization process. Mt. Wallace, on which I stood earlier, I have renamed Mt. Pasteur, to honor the creationist and Christian who said “The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the Creator.”

Photo 2. The team ascends “Col Route Access” from Granite Lake (visible at top left).

Trekking back to our camp I had a distant look toward the most imposing

mountain within miles, Mt. Darwin, named after evolutionism’s high priest. Two days hence, from Darwin Canyon, I intend to rename both. I am beginning to consider which creationist, in like fashion, initiated a significant movement to counter Darwin’s own, authoring a revolutionary tome based in science and scripture....

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The third day of our passage at last took us off trail, away from other parties, and into group solitude here at the remote Granite Lake, at 11,480 ft. Granite cliffs encircle it on one side, large boulders on the other, and a grove of limber pines⁴ crown a wonderful point just above. This will be a viewpoint for watching tomorrow’s sunrise through the descending valleys to the east. For the final hour of today’s hike, we seldom touched the “ground,” stepping from one desk-sized boulder to another, suspended confidently on a massive, speckled, angular pathway. Occasionally, the persistent work of lichen produced enough material to host a splendid assortment of wildflowers in surprising places, including perfect versions of columbine, my favorite. I was reminded of Christ the Rock in Scripture, and after dinner we discussed the splendid “clothing” of wildflowers, and our Lord’s charge to trust rather than worry. It was a timely thought considering the 400-ft. chute that we have all but committed ourselves to scaling tomorrow.

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A reading of Psalm 84:4-7 activated our fourth day, stating “blessed are they who have their heart set on pilgrimage” and speaking of renewal “from strength to strength.” We were to use the northern chute to reach the more traveled route up to Lamarck Col.⁵ We realized that this “Col Route Access,” as we named it, was a less-traveled approach, and though we scaled it uneventfully by God’s grace, we could see why.

Lamarck Col (12,960 ft.), and its adjacent Mt. Lamarck (13,417 ft.), were named by the USGS in 1909 in honor of Jean Baptiste de Monet de Lamarck (1744-1829). Lamarck, a pre-Darwinian evolutionist, supposed spontaneous generation of multiple lineages, and believed that progeny can inherit acquired characteristics. Arrogance and wordiness marked his presentation—but his ideas became oddly winsome in the late Nineteenth Century context. Although present evolutionists employ other mechanisms, variations of Lamarckism still endure, and his influence is unquestionable.



Photo 3. Coarse sand (“kitty litter”) below small glacier on the east slope of “Cuvier Col.”

Lamarck’s contemporary and primary opponent was Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), a creationist who originated the fields of comparative anatomy and vertebrate paleontology, and who increasingly denounced Lamarck’s theories. His approach to systematics was innovative and industrious, extensively comparing not only external structures, but internal ones as well. So, in the stead of arrogance and unempirical imaginations, I have chosen to honor the respectful manner and work ethic of this biologist, and christen these two places Cuvier Col (which has a nice ring) and Mt. Cuvier.

Darwin Canyon cradles a chain of five pristine lakes, and there I enjoyed lunch and a dose of UV as I thawed out from a dip in lake number two. We came over Cuvier Col, a route that provided expansive stretches of coarse-grained reddish sand, or, as one companion described, “kitty litter” among scattered boulders—quite different from yesterday.

During that stretch, I decided who shall replace the eminent Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882), of whom Mt. Darwin and this canyon are named (as well as a glacier and a bench). I thought first of



Newton, yet he worked in physical sciences, so I also regarded Agassiz—but later realized that a Mt. Agassiz had been assigned prior to the naming of the Evolution Group. I also considered G.W. Carver, and some living creationists that have impacted me, including Dr. Wayne Frair and Dr. Jerry Bergman. Yet this is an exercise in making corresponding, respective replacements, and neither of those persons offered a true parallel to Darwin. As I wrote earlier, I wanted to honor a creationist who has launched a movement, particularly through time-honored writings. In this vein, I could not help but picture that orange tome *The Genesis Record*, and, along with it, *The Genesis Flood*, unquestionable contributions to the revival of creationism and catastrophism. Dr. Henry M. Morris, whom I met for the first time this summer, has been a voice in the atheistic wilderness. In hindsight one can see that after more than twenty technical papers in hydraulics, and

Photo 4. Looking west over four of the five “Morris Canyon” lakes. The Pacific Crest Trail cuts a few miles below, just beyond the “Morris Bench.”

various books and university professorships, Dr. Morris was only getting warmed up. In thirty years since, he has contributed prolific writing and remarkable leadership. I spoke with him briefly, so my impressions of his brilliance and integrity come mostly from the words of others to whom I spoke, who know him well. It is appropriate that the 13,381 ft. Mt. Darwin, the highest and most impressive peak in the region, along with its corollary features, be renamed after Dr. Morris.

Ceremonially, I followed lunch with the proclamation, and then read aloud Genesis 1 and 2 against the background of glacial runoff and a reverent hush. This canyon hangs above the oft-traveled and wider Evolution Valley, which cradles the famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Our route avoided those crowds, so from several miles away we renamed it the Creation Valley.



Photo 5. “Morris Mountain” (right of center) and Mt. Mendel (right of “V” in skyline) looking south from Alpine Col area.

Interestingly, we were also looking up at Mt. Mendel (13,710 ft.), a magnificent mass on the same ridgeline as Morris Mountain. The Sierra Club proposed this name over 45 years after the Evolution Group was christened, and in an ironic twist, thought they were adding “one more evolutionist.” Although Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) was clearly recognized as non-Darwinian, perhaps it was outside their paradigm that such a clear thinker and rigorous experimenter—the “father of modern

genetics”—would dare to think outside evolution at all. So, this creationary botanist and monk preceded me unawares in the Evolution Group invasion.

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We are exhausted today at Muriel Lake (11,336 ft.), as easily-stepped boulders gave way to elephant-sized ones; hours of scrambling, sliding, and leaping have taxed our minds as much as our legs—this also because we scaled Muriel Peak (12,937) along the way. Last night’s stay was at an unnamed lake to the north of Morris Canyon, a desolate, cold, windswept tarn, boasting translucent, sweet, sediment-free waters, and, on that night, hosting a splendid show. The Lord provided a turquoise-blue, rain-cloud splashed, lavender-plumed sunset, streaked by sharply defined rays of light. Underneath the sky, pink highlights smeared the cliffs, and underneath those, dark shadows segued into silent scree. The rain fell all around, but not on us—there was joy in His presence.

To the northwest, underneath that performance of light, rested Mt. Goethe [gə(r)ʔə] (13,264 ft.), and today from Muriel Peak we saw its impressive north face and moraine-mottled cirque, and later skirted along Goethe Lake’s boulder-strewn shoreline.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), was a great German poet, dramatist, novelist, lawyer, and scientist, and worked also in biology. In 1949, on the 200th anniversary of his birth, Erwin Gudde named this mountain in his honor. The lake and cirque were also named Goethe by another. Goethe penned *The*



Photo 6. View of “Mt. Lewis” and “Lewis Cirque” southwest from Muriel Peak.

Sorrows of Young Werther and the two-part masterpiece *Faust*. Though he studied Christianity, he grew skeptical and later became enamored of ancient Eastern faiths. He epitomized the poetic, lyrical, and creative approach that draws audiences not only to a theme but to a worldview, and to epic thoughts and imaginations. Ultimately, though, his context was pantheism.

Like Goethe, Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), challenged imaginations with the pens of both fiction and non-fiction, with words scholarly and popular, and with a penchant for allegories. He too



Photo 7. Sunrise on Mt. Humphreys, north from Muriel Lake.

penned dramatic, epic works (*The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Pilgrims' Regress*, *The Screwtape Letters*) incorporating the themes of temptation, metaphysical realities, good and evil, and deity. The difference is that Lewis renewed minds toward Christian theism and a biblical view of suffering and redemption; he did not treat the matter of evil as myth or with dark comedy, but as one of utmost concern. Throughout his life he was not outspoken against evolution, yet, confidently consistent in his worldview, he never compromised to appease the apparent clash of theology and "science." As such, he later spoke of organic evolution as a "central and radical lie," and its defenders' attitudes as "fanatical and twisted." As such, I intend to

honor both the methods and the message of this man, in christening Mt. Lewis, the Lewis Cirque, and Lewis Lake.

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Here on our final evening, in solitude just minutes from the dusty John Muir trail, we have enjoyed five well-prepared *Salmo trutta* (brown trout) at Lake Emerson (11,219 ft.). Again Marty blessed us, reeling them in methodically over three hours, in a strong wind. We mused over how Jesus might have acquired his fish for the shoreline breakfast offered to the disciples (John 21:9). Did he create them, catch them conventionally, or call them forth from the waters? During Marty's labor of love, I led two others above, over a succession of terminal moraines, to hear the roar of glacial runoff beneath, and feel occasional blasts of emerging coldness. So, with a satisfied appetite, I reflect in thankfulness that we did not become pinned by one of innumerable, unstable boulders that blanket the living remains of that glacier. God is good.

We were never in proximity to Mts. Fiske, Huxley, and Spencer during this escapade (they were southwest of the Pacific Crest Trail that we eschewed). As such, I have decided to let their names stand—for now at least. Nonetheless, my pen has invaded the Evolution Group, including its original and expanded membership. I find satisfaction not so much in my notes, but in the reality that an empty, albeit cherished ideology is indeed being assaulted in our time. The names of the Biology Group (as I now call it) are only those of men, but the ideas that they proclaimed are destined to either ebb or endure.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.
– Isaiah 40:7b-8

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Notes

- ¹ Our trip began at Lake Sabrina, on the USGS "Mt. Thompson" topographical quadrangle, but the majority of our trek took us through the USGS "Mt. Darwin" quadrangle. These maps may be ordered at <<http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/inyo/esia/maps.htm>> or by calling (760) 873-2500. Wilderness permits are available at this phone number, or through <http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/inyo/vvc/wild_permits/permits.htm>. Larger scale shaded relief maps (this area is well within the "Bishop Pass" map) are available at <<http://www.tomharrisonmaps.com/online%20order.html>>.
- ² This is the Sierra Club's term for the collection of places in the Sierra named after evolutionists. Theodore S. Solomons named the Evolution Group in 1895, but the Sierra Club has since appended the list. The original Evolution Group included Mts. Darwin, Fiske, Haeckel, Huxley, Spencer, and Wallace. Solomons was an explorer and mapper who also developed what has become the northern half of the John Muir trail.
- ³ Background on place names is taken from <<http://www.snowburd.com/bob/etymology>>, which cites Alroy, Browning, and Gudde, referenced under "Sources."
- ⁴ I think these were limber pines (*Pinus flexilis*), though I am still learning to differentiate between the less-densely needled populations of bristlecone pines (*Pinus longaeva*) and the windswept, stunted populations of limber pines; They are likely varieties of the same kind, along with the more easterly *Pinus aristata*.
- ⁵ "Col" is short for the French word "couloir," a deep mountainside gorge or gully. In the High Sierras, however, several passes (low points on ridgelines) are erroneously called "cols" for some reason.