Crossing the Line: A Nonviolent Action

by Ken Butigan

"We went to the Test Site for a really beautiful interfaith service. Then I, along with many others, crossed the line. In the desert I felt very peaceful. Everything was really reduced to the basics: earth, fire, and water... I thought a lot about the message that comes through much spiritual writing, that there is one boundless reality, and at the same time, we are grounded in our individual separate bodies. The desert was a good place to reflect on boundaries, because it did seem so limitless and simultaneously I was very aware of being one person, breathing my breath and feeling my own body on the ground. Crossing the line is an act of liberation, of declaring this is a false line that is not true. The line of the government is a false line because it pretends we are not all affected by the test site: it pretends such divisions are even possible." -Jean McElhaney

The Beginnings

On December 18, 1950 President Harry Truman approved the opening of the Nevada Test Site. Operation Ranger, the first series of atmospheric tests at the new facility began on January 27, 1951 at an area called Frenchman's Flat. Thirty years later, as the Reagan administration urged dramatic increases in U.S. military spending and the United States and the Soviet Union escalated their decades-old nuclear arms race, a small band of Franciscan sisters, Franciscan priests and brothers, and laity gathered at the gates of the Nevada Test Site simply to pray, act, and bear witness for peace.

Nuclear Abolitionists Pray at Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory

by Diana Winston

From September 5-8, we held a retreat and vigil at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The retreat was organized by people from the Los Alamos Study Group, Mountain Cloud Zen Center (both in Santa Fe, NM) and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF). The retreat had originally been planned for May, but had to be rescheduled due to the fires in New Mexico.

We met at Ponderosa Pine Campground, pitched our tents, spent several hours organizing, as many of the details had not yet been worked out, and introduced ourselves. In a parking lot in the isolated nether-regions of the lab we were

20 years of resistance to Nuclear Weapons! (LDE XX: see poster)
the humanity of people on both sides of "the line." As long time NDE participant Julia Occhiogrosso puts it: "There is a definition of approach and style. NDE has its... code of nonviolence. There is a way of seeing ourselves in the world, a way of seeing ourselves in relation to the opponent...I think the bottom line is the deeper sense of understanding who we are and recognize that we have a lot in common." Occhiogrosso attributes the persistence of this commitment - a pledge to break the spell of enmity between witness participant and NTS personnel-- to the Catholic Christian conception of the "mystical Body of Christ" which implies that "God is everywhere, and that we all somehow interconnected...We all were somehow mysteriously one."

But it's also true that the implications of this approach were drawn out and realized only through interaction. As NDE co-founder Michael Ahearn emphasizes, NDE people had as much to learn about "the desire for the well-being of all" from Nye County Sheriff Jim Merlino and Test Site Manager Bob Meggison as they had to learn from the NDE participants. And this learning took place in a kind of delicate ballet between the contending parties on the grounds of the Nevada Test Site. Over the last eighteen years, both sides of these invisible lines, have had to learn how to "cross over" to one another.

This "crossing over" was perennially dramatized in the process of NDE participants respecting their opponents even as they struggled with them. At the same time, many NDE participants have also "crossed over" to an encounter with the wounded and sacred desert. Many accounts offered by NDE pilgrims testify to the unutterably beautiful and graceful desert terrain where the Test Site is situated. It is as if this unexpected beauty re-frames one's orientation from focusing on the horrors of nuclear war to the tenderness of the world and its beings. It is not that the anger and horror disappears, but it is re-contextualized within the horizon of compassion, a sense of care and respect that the desert itself seems to counsel. For many, the desert has become a place for gently composting their own woundedness and sacredness - for "crossing over" to see both the roots of nuclearism within and the roots of its healing within as well.

"Civil Disobedience as "Crossing Over!"

Nevada Desert Experience dramatized this spiritual practice most vividly through faith-based nonviolent civil disobedience. This form of public action, while not welcomed by NTS management, nevertheless was designed by NDE to deepen, rather than scuttle, the relationship with these so-called opponents. As Julia Occhiogrosso suggests, the contrast between "threat force" and "integrative force" made a deep and consequential impact on all witnesses, including those "on the other side of the line." The symbolic language...the inspired body...helped extend a conversation to NTS personnel, but also to the wider society.

Civil disobedience at the Nevada Test Site has become a spiritual journey. The culmination of the sojourn to the vicinity and the procession to the gate, [nonviolent civil resistance] has become a journey of "crossing over" onto restricted and taboo space: "crossing over" to the desert and to the government officials who occupy it. In doing so, NDE has struck a delicate balance between opposition and openness. This "compassionate confrontation" has created the possibility for many people to take part in significant and growing resistance.

Beginning with the first vigil in 1982, NDE and [the] NTS intuitively worked out a relationship that, in the end, encouraged the creation, deepening, and broadening of a modern anti-nuclear testing movement that played a decisive role in creating the moral and political conditions for the 1992 moratorium on nuclear testing in Nevada and the promulgation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Ken Butigan, a former NDE board member, has recently completed his Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "Journey through a Burning World: Nonviolence in Action at the Nevada Test Site." This study focuses on NDE and its first forty-day vigil at NTS in 1982. The excerpt above is the second installment published by Desert Voices.
Nellis Air Force Base Fails Nuclear Weapons Inspection

by Marcus P. B. Page

After notifying Major General Johnston (and two Lieutenant Colonels) of our intent to conduct a Citizen's Weapons Inspection at Nellis Air Force Base, NDE held a vigil outside of the Visitor's Gate on October 16, 2000. We invited the Base to show us their nuclear weapons (about 400 stored there on the outskirts of our town). The Base is near the enormously larger Nellis Bombing range, which encompasses the Nevada Test Site and the infamous “Area 51.” All of that land, of course, is part of the Western Shoshone Nation’s homelands known as Nevada Sogobia. But Nellis Air Force Base (AFB), so close to the “nuclear-free zone” of Las Vegas, NV, is not coming clean about their weapons of mass destruction. The official policy is to neither deny nor confirm the presence of nuclear weapons at Nellis. So it is difficult for the Base to communicate with us about these deadly facts. Colonel Delwyn R. Fallsburg sent us a letter stating: “For safety and security reasons, however, visitors are not permitted on the Nellis Air Force Base installation.”

For “security & safety” reasons? How safe are nuclear weapons? I guess all of us, (even more our institutions), are capable of ignoring cognitive dissonance and denying our truths. For the sake of the larger realm of security and safety, we are compelled to work for much, if not all, for no human is SAFE from the radioactive hazards of nuclear bombs.

The SECURITY they offer is at the expense of our lives, our freedom of conscience and international law requiring us to prevent crimes against humanity, to work to uphold moral standards for soldiers and civilians alike. We held a vigil which included passing out flyers to interested motorists and pedestrians. The flyers contained quotes from former Generals who have begun to decry the nuclearism they once defended. Coming from high-ranking pro-military individuals, these statements against nuclear weaponry should be taken seriously by other pro-military individuals. Or so we thought. As some of the Air Force personnel said from their vehicles during our vigil, they must do their jobs. Just following orders, man. We were there to remind them, that while you are part of the military, each of you has not forfeited your right to question war crimes, nor your right to freedom of thought. You are legally protected by the Nuremberg Principles (established after the Nazi war crimes trial following WWII) to take action to prevent human-engineered catastrophes.” (Excerpted from my follow-up letter to the Base.)

The Base sent photographers to videotape and shoot still photos of the first five people arriving to line the entrance to Los Alamos National Laboratory on Oct. 26, 2000. On left is Marcus Page of NDE, on right is Vilma Ruiz of Los Alamos Study Group.

Marc Page is the Las Vegas manager of NDE. In his spare time, he operates Catholic Worker Community Radio.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

supervised by University of California for the Department of Energy

Los Alamos National Laboratory

Los Alamos National Laboratory

First monthly vigil at the entrance to Los Alamos National Laboratory on Oct. 26, 2000. On left is Marcus Page of NDE, on right is Vilma Ruiz of Los Alamos Study Group.

PAGE 3, September 2000
Weekend Retreat and Action

"Remember, Reflect & Renew the Covenant"
Friday, March 2nd to Sunday, March 4th, 2001
Christ Church Episcopal, Las Vegas, NV and the Nevada Test Site
Co-sponsored by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship & All Saints Nuclear Weapons Abolition Ministry


During this weekend retreat, we will pray about the ongoing violence of nuclear weapons "stewardship", be updated on the latest developments in the weaponization of space, discuss how we feel about these issues, spend time praying amidst the natural beauty of the desert, and practice the ritual of "crossing the line" at the Nevada Test Site.

At the retreat in Las Vegas and at the nearby nuclear Test Site, we will "Remember, Reflect and Renew the Covenant." Friday, there will be an optional day-long tour of the Test Site. Saturday, we will hear Bruce Gagnon of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. Corbin Harney (Western Shoshone Spiritual Leader) will invite us to take action, Janet Chisholm (Interim Co-Director of Fellowship of Reconciliation) and Tom Gumbleton (Catholic Bishop, Detroit) will lead reflections on "Following Jesus into the Desert." Sunday, the Reverend Shari Young will preach and celebrate the Eucharist in preparation for Nonviolent Action at the Test Site. Registration is $75/person includes the program, optional bus tour and five meals Friday lunch through Saturday supper ($50 before January 27). Sleeping bag space will be available at Christ Church. Motel rooms are available at additional expense.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE FOR TEST SITE TOUR IS JAN. 27TH

PLEASE REGISTER USING FORM AT RIGHT

These Arms of Ours
The Journey of Embracing Nonviolence
Co-sponsored by NDE, Center for Action非violence
Monday to Saturday, February 5th to 10th, 2001
or Monday to Saturday, May 21st to 26th, 2001
Join us for a new week-long immersion experience where we will explore the violence of nuclear weapons, the spirituality & practice of active nonviolence and the discipline of contemplative prayer. We will also practice yoga.

It is possible, even probable that New Mexico has the most extensive nuclear weapons research, management, testing and training facilities in the world. We will enter into this "nuclear colony" through an on-site visit to Los Alamos National Lab and respond to it by joining in a public witness condemning the weaponization of space. This week is a chance to learn about society's greatest expression of violence: weapons of mass destruction.

Undergirding this experience will be our prayer and reflection. THESE ARMS OF OURS is for anyone who desires to grapple with the reality of nuclear weapons.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: FOR TEST SITE TOUR IS JAN. 27TH

PLEASE REGISTER USING FORM AT RIGHT

Nevada Desert Experience, P. O. Box 46645, Las Vegas, NV 89114-6645, Phone 702-383-0971
Prayer Service

Praying Prayer: Action at the Nevada Test Site, with Catholic Bishop Tom Gumbleton.

Active Nonviolence and Contemplation

Pace Bene

Ons from a faith perspective, and who is committed to an in-depth exploration of one's own woundedness and sacredness, as well as that of one's opponent.

Presenters Include: Cindy Pile, Kathleen O'Malley, Bruce Gagnon, Jim Reale & Richard Rohr.

The FEBRUARY version of this program costs $475 and includes meals, transportation, and materials. It does NOT include housing. Scholarships and payment plans available.

The later (MAY) version of this program—only for college students and full-time young adult volunteers—costs $200 and includes sleeping bag accommodations. (Please note that the fee is subsidised for the May 21st-26th version as to be affordable for this specific non-wage-earning population.)

Please contact Center for Action and Contemplation for more info: P.O. Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195 or phone (505) 242-9588. Or call Cindy Pile of NDE: (702) 646-4814, Web: NevadaDesertExperience.org E-mail: nde@igc.org

Walk from Las Vegas to the Test Site

Sunday, April 8th to Friday, April 13th 2001

Walk 65 Miles in 5 days! WALK INCLUDES Desert Seder meal and Nuclear Stations Of The Cross.

TO REGISTER SEND IN FORM BELOW

SEND THIS FORM TO: Nevada Desert Experience, P.O. Box 46645, Las Vegas NV 89114-6645

Name(s):
Address:
City: State: Zip:
Phone(s):
e-mail:

I WILL ATTEND THE WEEKEND RETREAT.
I WILL ATTEND THE D.O.E. TEST SITE TOUR. (Deadline is Jan. 27!)
I WILL JOIN THE PEACE WALK.
ENCLOSED IS $15 FOR THE VIDEO: NDE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE
Here is my/our registration fee: $50 $100 $150
Other

The RETREAT costs $50 per person. The WALK costs $50 per person. (No one is turned away for lack of funds.)
I can't join the WALK nor the RETREAT this year. Here is a donation to sponsor others: $
I will drive a car to the RETREAT (with room for people)
I will drive a car for the WALK (with room for people)

One: (702) 646-4814, Web: NevadaDesertExperience.org E-mail: nde@igc.org
Nevada Desert Experience (NDE) Executive Director Sally Light represented NDE in a Dec. 2-3, 2000 event in Washington, D.C., the Conference of Women for Responsible National Security. 140 women from across the country attended the event, which is the kick-off of a two year public education campaign, headed by Peace Links, on nuclear and missile defense issues. Participating on a panel entitled "Community-Based Organizing," Sally Light spoke about NDE's past accomplishments as well as its plans to rapidly expand its activities in order to meet the challenge of the U.S.' current rise in militarism, including nuclear issues. Others on the panel included Deborah Cogan of Peace Links in Elkhart County (Indiana), Infinity Heights of Church Women United, Annette Kane of the National Catholic Women, Mary Lou Nelson of Milestones Alliance of Pacemakers, and Wendy Stimson of Nuclear Reduction/Demilitarization Initiative. "The conference was an excellent opportunity for networking and forging ties with eminent women activists and their respective organizations," stated Sally.

FOR MORE INFO, contact Charlie Hilfenhaus: Phone: (702) 648-1575, email: <chilfenhaus@juno.com> or contact Marcus: Phone: (702) 646-6414.

50th Anniversary of First Nuclear Explosion at Test Site!

January 27th, 2001 will be the 50th anniversary of the first nuclear explosion at the Nevada Test Site. This weekend is sponsored by the Alliance of Atomic Veterans (AAV) and will include a SATURDAY RALLY & ACTION activity. Test Site, a TEACH-IN on Friday in Las Vegas, focusing on atmospheric testing, nuclear submarines, deployed uranium, atomic workers, and other issues, and a SUNDAY SOLIDARITY SPEAK-OUT in Las Vegas. For the MDMDUALS PARTICIPATING:

FOR THE LAB WORKERS:

I do not know what we were eating in a setting such as this. Food is always a source of comfort and nourishment, and yet it is also a reminder of our mortality. What does it mean to eat? To ingest? To chew and swallow? To digest? To absorb? To assimilate? To nourish the body? To sustain the spirit? To nourish the soul? To give back to the earth? To give back to the community? To give back to the world?

FOR THE INDIANAS PARTICIPATING:

Yes. Several of us felt we had learned a lot about the issues and about what it meant to sit in meditation and solidarity for our brother.Just as we were about to leave, a woman, clearly a lab worker, walked into our parking lot, and stood looking at us with an expression of neither anger nor distress. She was just there, observing us, and listening to what we were saying. I wonder if she understood us, or if she was just there to listen. I wonder if she was there to support us, or if she was there to challenge us. I wonder if she was there to comfort us, or if she was there to challenge us.

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College Student Immersion Experiences

FOR EACH OTHER:

sincerely had insight into the ways in which my powerlessness. We are all fearful and are seeking ways to make the world seem un-
ter the control. We all want power and fear of your school. You can probably receive a beating-down sun, as embarrassing as it was, as well as obstacles which keep us from viewing such violence by visiting the Las Vegas Strip. We will consider the hu-
man, economic and environmental costs of nuclear weapons by working with home-
less people through the Catholic Worker and learning about the stories of the Eastern Shoshone people whose land has been used for testing. We will conclude our time to-
gether by traveling to the Nevada Test Site and holding a prayerful, nonviolent public witness which the group will help to create. This experience will include prayer, re-
fection, on our shared experiences and the dynamics of violence and active nonvio-
ence, as well as nonviolence training.

CONTACT Cindy Pile AS SOON AS POSSIBLE for more information or registration forms: (510) 849-1540 or cindy@cindyprod.org.

PS. If you are a high school student and are interested in a similar experience, please give us a ring, as well.

FOR THE FUTURE OF NUCLEARISM? Well, it certainly was a way to make us feel like a tiny pebble in a vast ocean, but this is where my trust in the dharma is mysterious and as we used as a refrain many times on this retreat: sometimes we forget that the power of love and compassion is stronger than the power of violence and destruction. The earth was happy we were there. This much we knew.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM:

Diana Winston is part of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. THIS RETREAT GAVE BIRTH TO A DESIRE FOR REGULAR MONTHLY VIGILS OF THE LAB entrance sign holding an NDE banner proclaiming "Abolish Nuclear Weapons!" Upon contact with Lab Security, the vigil ceased and was voluntarily moved off of LANL’s property for the day. In November, permission was obtained from LANL for proper leafletting, and vigiling on LANL’s property. Contact Cindy Pile AS SOON AS POSSIBLE for more information or registration forms: (510) 849-1540 or cindy@cindyprod.org.

FUTURE OF NUCLEARISM?

Sarah Weinstein is part of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. THIS RETREAT GAVE BIRTH TO A DESIRE FOR REGULAR MONTHLY VIGILS at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The vigils are now on the last Thursday of each month (except December). LANL failed to give permission for such an activity for the October prayer and employees were quite upset when three people stood in front of the Lab entrance sign holding an NDE banner proclaiming "Abolish Nuclear Weapons!" Upon contact with Lab Security, the vigil ceased and was voluntarily moved off of LANL’s property for the day. In November, permission was obtained from LANL for proper leafletting, and vigiling on LANL’s property. Contact the Los Alamos Study Group to get involved with this faith-based resistance: (505) 982-7747.

National Space Organizing Conference & Protest

Huntsville, Alabama March 16-18, 2001

Join us at the home of the Army’s Space & Missile Defense Command where space weapons and the nuclear rocket are being developed.

Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space

The United States is developing the nuclear rocket and is being considered as the space-based battle test site. This conference and protest will bring together key activities like South African poet Denis Brutus, Janet Cuevas, Bruce Gagnon, Holly Grinn, John Paul, Quaker Friends, George Sauter, and others. This event will be co-sponsored by the War Resisters League and Veterans for Peace (North Alabama Chapter).
NEW VIDEO AVAILABLE!

This new video explains the purpose and activities of Nevada Desert Experience in the context of the movement to abolish nuclear weapons. It also summarizes the history of both nuclearism and nonviolent activism to stop the nuclear industries. $15, see order form on page 5.

Nevada Desert Experience
P. O. Box 46645
Las Vegas, NV 89114

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

U.S. CONDUCTS NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING!

On December 14th 2000, the Nevada Test Site exploded another subcritical test (Oboe-6).

Nevada Desert Experience is a nonprofit group, with 501(c)3 status, so your donations are tax-deductable. If you need a receipt for your tax records, please don't hesitate to ask! We are happy to provide receipts upon request for your donations.

Nevada Desert Experience
P. O. Box 46645
Las Vegas, NV 89114

Calendar of Faith-Based Nuclear Abolition Events

January 26-28, 2001: Remember Operation Ranger-50th anniversary of nuclear bombing at the Nevada Test Site (see ad on page 6); for more info e-mail Charlie Hilfenhaus of the Alliance of Atomic Vets: chhilfenhaus@juno.com or call Marc Page of NDE: (702) 666-8814.

February 5-10, 2001: Embracing Active Nonviolence at the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in New Mexico (see ad on page 4 & 5). Please contact CAC for more info: PO Box 2464, Albuquerque, NM 87195 call Tepeyec: (505) 343-1846. This event is co-sponsored by CAC, NDE and Peace Bene (see poster page 4 & 5 for details).

February 10, 2001: Noon to 1:00 p.m., Protest Vigil at the 18th Nuclear Space Symposium; Albuquerque, NM; contact Global Network for more info: (352) 337-9274 globalnet@mindspring.com www.space4peace.org

February 28, 2001: Ash Wednesday Prayer and Action at Nevada Test Site (see poster on page 4 and 5)

March 2-4, 2001: Weekend Retreat co-sponsored by EPF & All Saints Episcopal Church Nuclear Weapons Abolition Ministry of Pasadena, CA.

March 16-18, 2001: Conference and Protest re: Nuclear Space: Huntsville, Alabama; see ad on page 7 or contact Global Network for more info: (352) 337-9274

April 8-13, 2001: Peace Walk, Holy Thursday Seder & Good Friday Nuclear Stations Of The Cross at the Nevada (Nuclear) Test Site.

May 6-11, 2001: Shoshone Spirit Run around Nevada Test Site. Contact Shundahai Network for more info: (775) 537-6088.

May 11-14, 2001: Mother’s Day Gathering at the Nevada Test Site. Contact Shundahai Network for info: (775) 537-6088.

May 21-26, 2001: Embracing Active Nonviolence at the CAC, youth focus, see February 5-10 for info.

NDE’S SPECIAL MAILING LIST

Once in a great while, we share our mailing list for one-use only on specific solidarity work with other peace & justice groups. Desert Voices currently has a circulation of 4,600. Only 7 people have asked to not be included at such rare times that we share our mailing list. Anyone who wishes to NOT have his/her/their names given out for these occasions should let us know, so we may protect their names on our database from being shared periodically with other groups. If you so desire, please notify us so we may keep your name from being included on any list that we occasionally give out.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE:

www.NevadaDesertExperience.org