

Burning Man Mail

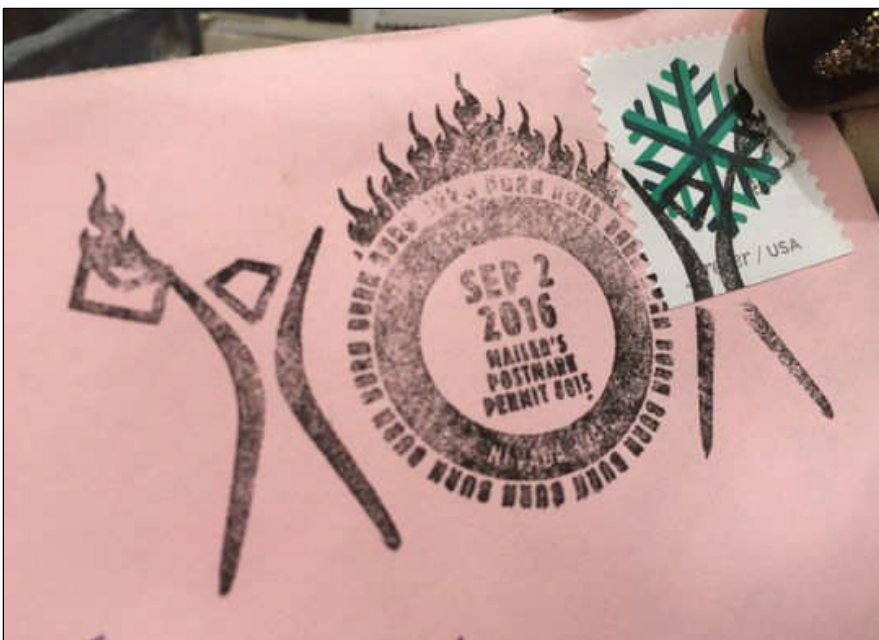
by John Walter

As we all know, Burning Man occurs the week before Labor Day in the Red Rock Desert north of Reno. This year 70,000 burners arrived from around the world. Over the years I have talked with many Burners as they either journey north, after picking up supplies, or on their return to Reno to "dust off." This year I spoke to a few burners in front of Staples on Plumb Lane. A guy from San Jose just picked up his friend at the airport coming from the East Coast and they had a huge (long) tri-motorcycle. It took up two parking spaces and it was filled with a skeleton sitting in back and lots of supplies - food, water, weird clothes, etc.

The Wednesday after Labor Day, my wife and I were at the Grand Sierra Resort and Lo And Behold there were at least 50 dust covered vehicles in the south parking lot - cars, RVs, wildly-painted buses, and pickups overflowing with "stuff." Since the burners have to take everything out with them which includes the trash, these vehicles had mattresses, plywood, lots of boxes all stuffed with their belongings. An interesting sight by itself.

As we entered the Grand Sierra I asked where some of the folks came from. The Netherlands and California were top of the list. Other states were Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, along with British Columbia and Alberta, Canada. Most of the Burners had fresh clothes on, but all with the burner look, even men in skirts. You just had to smile at their outlandish outfits. But they were all happy about the experience and very talkative.

The reason I am writing about Burning Man is that a recent online article appeared on the Reno Gazette Journal webpage about the mail "system" for the event. It's something I never really thought about. The article and photos were done by Jenny Kane. The official Burning Man 2016 postmark is below. Has anyone ever seen a cover from Burning Man - if so please bring to a club meeting for a show-and-tell.



The Black Rock City Post Office postmark is stamped onto one of the letters mailed out from Burning Man. (Photo: Jenny Kane/RGJ)

Jenny Kane reported that "friends and family of Burners may be receiving mail back after the event since the Black Rock City International Post Office decided to halt all incoming mail to Burning Man, a new organization policy this year. While the mail makes it all the way to Gerlach, a 200-person town outside of the Black Rock Desert, all of the letters and packages boomerang right back to wherever they came from.

"Since 1990, volunteers delivered envelopes and packages from the "default world" to Burners' camps all across Black Rock City, where nearly 70,000 free spirits live for a week. The post office is run out of a three-windowed makeshift black box with a dusty floor and piles of postcards and envelopes stacked on a single table in the back.

"For people sending mail to Burning Man, they were asked to put people's real names, playa names, camp names and even a description of what their tent or hut or RV looked like to make it easier on the courier.

"In recent years, there was just too much mail to deliver. Not to mention, last year Bureau of Land Management rangers started inspecting packages for contraband. The packages were especially problematic since couriers had to deliver slips to people, who then had to come down to the post office with the slip and identification."

The Black Rock City Post Office will continue to send mail out from Burning Man. Each day, about 500 letters and postcards are taken to the Gerlach Post Office after stamping them with the Burning Man stamp, the only signature postmark in the country certified by the U.S. Postal Service outside of its own universal postmark.

"Couriers also still deliver letters between camps on the playa, and another office handles mail to and from Department of Public Works volunteers, who are on the playa a month before and after Burning Man. They are still able to receive mail because they're out in the desert for so long.

"About two dozen volunteers help, some of them wearing red bras exposed underneath their uniforms and some wearing blue hair underneath their caps. When people come to the window, they have to tell a joke or show a talent to send out mail. Sometimes the volunteers even write letters to strangers."

The mail system sounds as interesting as the people who come every year for this counter-culture event.



Some of the outfits seen at the GSR



The symbol for this year's Burning Man



Pictures by Any Barron/Reno Gazette Journal, 2016.