

## Whimsical publication wins readers

### Paper's purpose is to prove existence of life in rocks

**Heather McGregor**  
Daily Sentinel

MOAB, Utah — If skunks are doing handstands on Grecian columns, displays of women's underwear appear on every page and a sandstone tower is proven to have its flaccid moments, this must be the Stinking Desert Gazette.

"We really have no redeeming social value," said Gazette publisher Robert Dudek, 44, a tall, trim man who could pass as a university professor.

Sticking with facts isn't Dudek's style. "We start with a kernel of truth and take off," he said.

The Moab monthly just published its third issue, available in local eateries and watering holes for two bits.

Still in its infancy, the Gazette is Moab's answer to the San Juan Horseshoe and the Boulder Lamppoon, fathered by a guy who grew up on MAD Magazine.

Dudek's fishwrap is illustrated with original cartoons by local art-

ist Nik Hougen, an honest-to-God desert rat who lives in a covered wagon, roaming the slickrock country with his horses, mules, paintbrushes and pens.

The pair landed in Moab in the early 1970s, Dudek from Denver and Hougen from Disneyland, and worked as outfitters, tour guides and boatmen until they found their niche in the sandstone.

The Stinking Desert Gazette is their second run at the idea of a local, fun-poking rag. Four years ago, they started a more serious art publication.

"We fought each other so badly over that first issue, we never did it again," recalled Dudek. Time smoothed the rough spots, however, and now they think they'll have a success.

"We get a lot of laughs," said Hougen, "and that's real gratifying."

The paper is a mixed bag of spoof news articles, wry columns, local history, poetry, cartoons and a

healthy dose of advertising to make ends meet.

"My philosophy is to confront authority," Hougen explained. "I'm constantly poking fun. All my cartoon characters are bums, hippies, people who live on the edge."

"We deal with serious stuff, but in a light-handed way," he added.

Dudek notes that little is sacred when it comes to a good laugh.

"We poke fun at the radicals at both ends, the extreme environmentalists and the rednecks."

"We're trying to introduce a sense of ridiculousness and ludicrousness, because it's so easy to get locked into the heaviness and importance of life," he said.

That could explain the heavy-handed seasoning of women's underwear clip art in the latest issue, an element "the esteemed Frederick's Institute of Hollywood has shown...will invariably stimulate greater response in an otherwise bland advertising publication."

But don't be misled, these men do

have an agenda that rises from the fluid lines of cross-bedded sandstone and the angular, jutting Wingate spires that surround Moab.

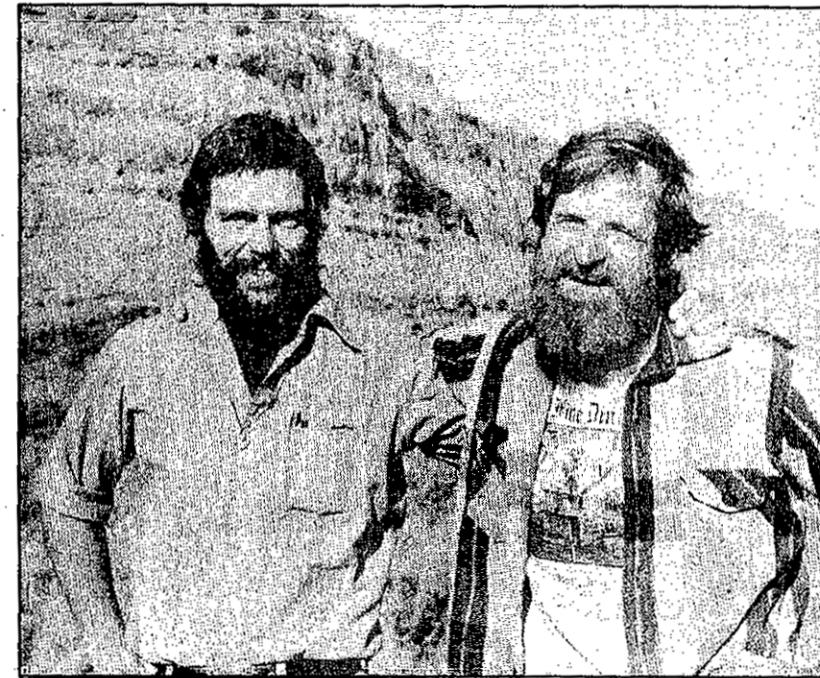
Dudek, who calls himself a Black Pantheist, explained, "We're always pushing our major theme, that rocks are living."

In the Gazette's first issue, a correspondent exposed his observations from a 24-hour vigil at Castleton Tower, when in the wee hours of dawn, the normally relentless spire relaxed and laid down like, well, like a limp spear of asparagus.

More recently, a Gazette photographer was on hand to record a surprising signal from a rock known as "the priest with buns," which flashed a thumbs-up sign to prove that local rock colonies are alive.

To Dudek, "A rock that shifts and changes is more alive than a human who doesn't."

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Robert L. Dudek, left, publishes and edits the Stinking Desert Gazette, and Nik Hougen illustrates the publication with his original cartoons. The Gazette "has no redeeming social value," according to Dudek.

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however. Already, the Gazette's circulation is between 800 and 1,000 copies.

Hougen said, "I talked to one redneck truck driver who thinks this is a subversive piece of literature and ought to be run out of town."

Dudek added, "That's the best compliment we've gotten so far."

Mail subscriptions are available for \$9 a year by writing the Gazette at Box F, Moab, Utah 84532.