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# MOAB SUN NEWS

## A beautiful affair turned ugly

**Robert Hamblen: Guest columnist**

Bob Hamblen is a writer and city planner from Saco, Maine, and a long-time visitor to the Moab area.

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I've put this off and avoided it for years, but – it's true confession time. This fall will be 33 years since the start of a long, emotional affair. Never too obvious, occasionally intense, always sweetly physical, we've enjoyed each other's most obvious assets and also the less tangible, sharing frantic rendezvous and lingering goodbyes.

For years the only thing that kept us apart was my working-stiff schedule. We'd steal weekends, always three days, occasionally four, meeting in out-of-the-way spots: Behind the Rocks, Klondike Bluffs, the Apache, out along the River Road. The place didn't matter as much as the reconnecting.

Some times and places were special, such as the Fiery Furnace, before a permit was required for ranger-guided tours. The Furnace drained us – too much fun, and that evening in a low-blood-sugar trance a coyote trotted up to the picnic table at our campsite, snagged a block of cheese and loped off as we watched, lifting nary a finger. Next morning, a dusting of snow worked its magic on the red rock, and I was pretty sure I never wanted to leave.

But, life got in the way. I moved back east; she stayed. Contact has dwindled, but in late May of this year we had a chance to rekindle. And, to my immense sorrow, I found our spectacular, bewitching Moab area has changed.

I remember when no oil wells slandered the scenery on view from state Route 313, the “Scenic Highway” that leads to Dead Horse State Park and to the Island in the Sky section of Canyonlands National Park. I'm sure most of you likewise remember the “pre-wells” view of the tablelands and the La Sal range beyond. Now that they're in and operating – or not operating, as the one I looked closely at didn't seem to be doing much – and more are coming, I'm told. Allow me to say: the oil companies have blackened the eye of a beautiful woman.

The oil leases have allowed a spectacular landscape to be fouled by machines that belong in an industrial park or on a brownfield site in a rustbelt city, not at the doorstep to Utah's finest state park and one of this country's most unique national parks. We now gaze from a Scenic Highway – the irony – toward the La Sals and our eyes have to adjust to reminders of obscene corporate profits and our national appetite for guzzling gas.

In all likelihood, it is federal land upon which these unsightly contraptions have been sited. If that is correct, perhaps locals got a chance to comment prior to installation, maybe not. Yup, I know – jobs and revenue. And clearly the Grand County Council serves those two masters well. Well, there's a place for everything, including jobs, and this long-time suitor to Moab and the rest of beautiful southeast Utah gathers that the inmates are running the asylum if the place for oil wells is where "they" have chosen to locate them.

Federal lands are your lands. Vote the bums out and do what is right.

[http://www.moabsunnews.com/opinion/article\\_a9723e6a-0cf8-11e4-847c-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.moabsunnews.com/opinion/article_a9723e6a-0cf8-11e4-847c-001a4bcf6878.html)