

# "Never sell out, make your own show."

-Larry Harvey

## Introduction

On September 2, 1990, approximately 90 people gathered in the Black Rock Desert to burn an effigy of a man. This event represented a modern resurgence of activity in the Great Basin, revitalizing many long-standing traditions of the region.

## Founders & Foundations



Larry Harvey sports a furry bear coat made by Dale East  
John Barry

It is not known why Larry Harvey, along with Jerry James, constructed and burned an effigy of a man on the Baker Beach in San Francisco in 1986. Rumors suggest it was an homage to Harvey's father, or a response to romantic misadventure. Regardless of its origins, the event immediately sparked interest. One account:

*"In the instant that the 8-foot tall figure was ignited, people scattered all across the beach came running. Within moments, a circle of fire-lit faces had formed, strangers who had gathered to witness this image of a man on fire. The first recorded doubling of Burning Man's community had occurred."*

Between 1986 and 1989 a nascent community developed around the annual event on Baker Beach. Each year Harvey and James, later joined by John Law, Michael Michael and a small cadre of craftsmen, constructed and burned a man. By 1990 the event had outgrown Baker Beach. A participant reported:

*"On the trip down to the beach in 1990, individuals bearing Burning Man's arms and head and the bulky wooden footings that were used to anchor him securely in the sand encountered a uniformed motorcycle policeman... A deal was struck and cemented with a handshake. Participants might erect the giant statue, he informed the organizers, but it could not be burned."*

The man was dismantled and stored. The San Francisco Cacophony Society had been holding small events in the Black Rock Desert. It was decided that the wide open expanse of a dry lake bed would be an ideal location to burn the now 40-foot tall man. Meanwhile a tenant of the space where the man's legs and torso were stored cut up these parts for an unrelated project. The man was rebuilt in all night sessions and completed just in time for transport to Black Rock Desert.

## Black Rock the City

The encampment in the Black Rock desert grew quickly, frequently doubling its annual population in the first years. It was named *Black Rock City* in 1995, the same year of its first theme: *Good and Evil*. A coherent culture developed around self-expression and creativity. Residents were encouraged to participate and contribute to the diversity of the city, ostensibly on a voluntary basis.

Apart from notable exceptions, the use of money in the city is discouraged. A gift economy, in which participants give without expectation of remuneration, has developed. Display of corporate brands is also discouraged, and companies are prohibited from advertising or selling products inside city limits.

During the 1990s the city developed Departments of Public Works and Mutant Vehicles, as well as newspapers (notably *Piss Clear*), an airport, and a full complement of emergency services.

The Black Rock City Rangers, founded in 1992 by Michael Michael (aka Danger Ranger), are "dedicated to their role as non-confrontational mediators and providing an alternative to traditional law-enforcement models". Rangers patrol in pairs and are identifiable by their distinctive khaki shirts and Australian-styled hats. Rangers also frequently wear kilts.



Sir Bill, a typical Black Rock City Ranger

The art of Burning Man spans the gamut of human expression. Many large structures are built and burned during the event. On Saturday night the Man is burned.

In 2000, David Best built the first temple structure, which provided a place to record messages of personal significance, frequently to those who are no longer living. David Best built subsequent temples through 2004, after which Mark Grieve took over. The temple is burned on Sunday night, the last official night of the event, providing a somber close to the week's revelry.

### pla•ya (plī'ə)

The word "playa" is Spanish for beach, and is the name of the alkaline superfine tan or gray caked dust that forms the dry lake bed of the Black Rock Desert. The word is used in different ways and forms by event participants. Here are some examples:

<b>playa</b> <body-part>	effect of overexposure of playa dust on <body-part>
<b>playafication</b>	application of playa dust to an item
<b>on/off playa</b>	events occurring either in the Black Rock Desert, or not
<b>playa time</b>	difficulty of being punctual in Black Rock City
<b>deep playa</b>	areas outside the gridded city, particularly to the north & east