



Editorial

>> Marc Cheves, LS

THE American Surveyor

A FOOT IN THE PAST... AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

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PUBLISHER Allen E. Cheves
allen.cheves@chevesmedia.com

EDITOR Marc S. Cheves, LS
marc.cheves@chevesmedia.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Joel Leininger, LS
ASSISTANT EDITOR Jacalyn Cheves
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER Jason Metsa

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Dale Beeks | Jeff Lock |
| Joseph Bell, LS | Dan Martin |
| Joe Betit, LS | John Matonich, LS |
| Shawn Billings, LS | Jerry Penry, LS |
| J. Anthony Cavell, LS | Al Pepling, LS |
| C. Barton Crattie, LS | Walt Robillard, Esq., LS |
| James J. Demma, Esq., LS | Fred Roeder, LS |
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| Chuck Karayan, LS | Patrick Toscano, LS |
| Gary Kent, LS | John Wilusz, LS, PE |
| Wendy Lathrop, LS | Robert Young, LS |
| Thomas Liuzzo, LS | Rj Zimmer, LS |

The staff and contributing writers may be reached via the online Message Center at [amerisurv.com](http://www.amerisurv.com)

GRAPHIC DESIGN LTD Creative, LLC
WEBMASTER Joel Cheves

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT Edward Duff
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Richard Bremer
CIRCULATION Mirta Ryker

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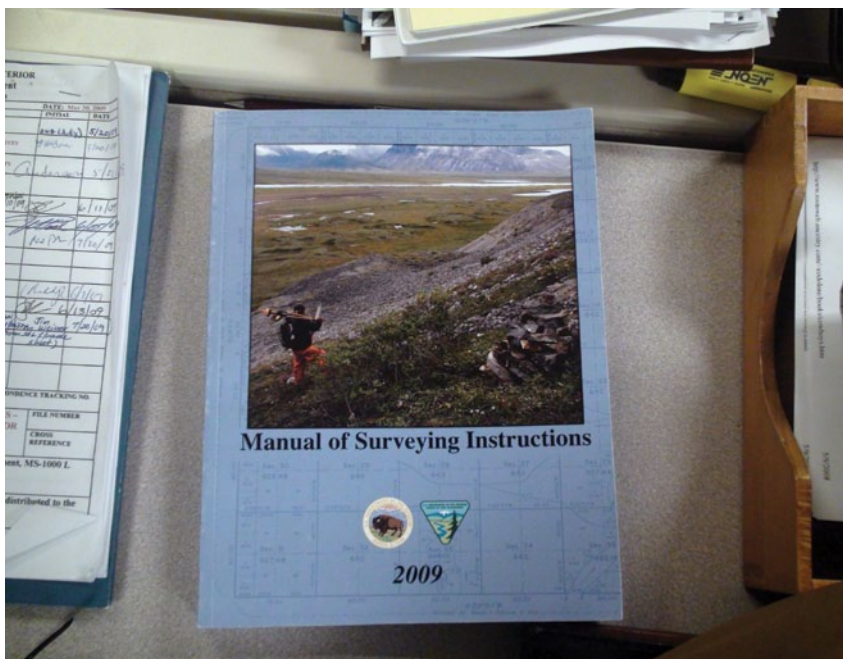


America the Beautiful

After a rough wagon ride up to Pikes Peak in 1893, it was the view from the top that inspired Katharine Lee Bates to write a poem that became known as “America the Beautiful.” Later set to music by Samuel Ward, its images have become part of our national conscience. Few there are who cannot sing at least one stanza of the four. It’s no secret to surveyors that many of us chose this profession because it allows us to work outside—amidst those spacious skies, amber waves of grain, and purple mountain majesties. What a marvelous career path!

Like many of you, I enjoy the stories surveyors tell about challenging jobs and unusual circumstances. This month’s cover story by Daryl Moistner seemed a fitting tribute to modern technology, the pioneering spirit of surveyors, and the rugged beauty of the land that holds their footsteps. Who among us wouldn’t love to ride a helicopter to work in pristine, untrammled areas? Of course, his tales of Alaskan mosquitoes are enough to dampen my ardor these days, but probably wouldn’t have when I was younger...

A native of the UK, Moistner is perhaps one of the best surveyor/photographers in the U.S. One of his photographs was selected as the cover art for the new *BLM Manual* (see below). On the next page is a photo that didn’t make it into the article due to space limitations, but is nonetheless one that will resonate with surveyors. The fisherman in the photo is helicopter pilot Mark Shelton, who was part of the work crew. It’s not often that one gets the opportunity to go fishing while



working! (The situation reminded me of a conversation I once had with one of our party chiefs. When I inquired about the pillow and basketball he kept in the back of the work truck, he vigorously defended his right to take a nap or shoot a few hoops on his lunch break. It was a chin-stroking moment for me....) For more of Moistner's great photos from various locations, check out his website, www.nevadasurveyor.com.

Creating Capital in Developing Countries

At the ESRI User Conference in 2002, Kari Mikkonen, a GIS Specialist at the Finland-based consulting company Soil and Water Ltd., gave a presentation about a project his company had worked on in Palestine. Even though the people living there knew where their property was, because land titles didn't exist, the property owners were unable to borrow against their property. Because of this, a formal banking system didn't exist, something that is vital for creating businesses and growing

economies. As a surveyor, I remember wincing when Kari mentioned that they were using photogrammetry to establish the cadastre, but he went on to say that on-site visits involving all the adjoining allowed the interested parties to agree as to where the property boundaries were. In other words, these people knew what they owned even if they didn't have a piece of paper to prove it. Once they received the title to their property, they could leverage that into economic opportunities.

At last year's User Conference, one of the keynotes—Mapping the Invisible—was made by Hernando de Soto, the world-famous Peruvian economist. De Soto has championed cadastral systems and land administration systems in the developing world as a means of lifting people from poverty. His book, *The Mystery of Capital*, details how, without written land ownership, the cycle of poverty cannot be broken. I highly recommend de Soto's keynote, which can be watched here: <http://www.esri.com/events/uc/agenda/plenary.html>.

In this issue Peter Rabley, of International Land Systems in Maryland, writes a heartwarming story about one such experience in Ghana. One image in particular jumped out at me: the office in which the land ownership records are kept. As surveyors who deal with records-keeping, I'm sure many of you will be able to relate to the image, realizing that digitization is the only way to deal with increasing amounts of information. And as an aside, I have repeatedly said that surveyors need to move towards being the purveyors of information. I hope you'll take the time to read the article and view the de Soto video.

Looking Ahead

2009 marked a dismal construction economy. In talking with surveyors across the country, some "have a little work," and most don't have any backlog, but the doors are still open. Here's hoping that things will pick up in 2010, and you'll be able to continue doing what you love doing. *AS*

