2022 Afterburner Report

We went home!

For the 36 turtles who came to Black Rock City this year, it was an incredible year.

The conditions were… hard. Burning Man is always hard, but this year was worse than usual. The weather was hotter. There were more dust storms and whiteouts, which always seemed to be at the least convenient times (the build team put up most of the camp in super windy whiteout conditions). The things that we depend on the Burning Man organization to get right (roads, ice, fuel, gate and exodus) … were not right.

As a camp, we had doubled in size, and a majority of us (24) had never been to Burning Man before. We were way more ambitious in terms of the camp we built, the interactive programs we put on, the quality of the food we made, and a lot more.

There was a ton of work, but we were ready for it, and we got it all done. Everybody pitched in, even the sparkly newbies, so, thank you, sparkly newbies.

Advance Work

One of the things that made Burning Man easy this year was a large amount of work that was done in advance to get ready. We had two work weekends in Reno getting all our gear cleaned, sorted, and ready to go. Our San Francisco turtles built a beautiful wood bar and DJ booth that will serve us for years to come.

Early Build Week

The early build team converged in Reno a full week before the start of the event. We loaded trucks and unboxed new gear, and bought a lot of supplies, before heading to playa and arriving at a city that was still mostly empty. We could see the Man from our tents because the entire area from Esplanade to D was unbuilt.

For the first night, our priority was just to build our own tents so we had a place to sleep. Unfortunately, at about 2am, a major wind storm swept through our little camp. We had built a minimal shade structure without side tarps, which became something of a sail in the wind. Unprotected by tarps, the Shiftpods started to blow away.

After a few minutes we realized that we had to wake up, find masks and goggles, and rebuild the entire camp, in the midst of an incredible windstorm and whiteout conditions, and make it much

stronger so we could go to sleep again. Which is what we did.

The whiteout and windy conditions continued for much of build week. There were some breaks, but most of the week was incredibly difficult. Try to imagine spreading out a 14 x 48 canvas tarp on the ground in 20mph winds and getting it nailed down to the playa smoothly… now do that six times.

By the third evening on playa we had assembled enough infrastructure to shower off (with a garden hose and kiddie pool), finally, which was probably the highlight of build week. Even though we got dusty again 20 seconds later, it was nice to get clean for a minute.

Late Build Week

Deliveries started arriving at our camp site: a big generator shared with Gender Blender and 8-bit Bunny, the two trailers with all our gear, an insane amount of produce which we stuffed into our limited refrigerators, ten cases of corn on the cob we never ordered, a big tank of water that we used up in two days, a big empty tank for grey water, and two porto-potties. The camp started to take shape.

Meanwhile more turtles were arriving in Reno trying to gather up and pack the rest of the gear we needed: huge amounts of food and groceries, an insane amount of liquor, an annoying trailer with three dozen bicycles, and every other little thing that could not be obtained on playa.

Arrivals

Most turtles take the Burner Bus Express… we love this because you don’t have to wait in huge lines to enter and exit the event. People trickled in on Saturday, Sunday, and as late as Monday, but everyone made it in time for our big kick-off party Monday night.

Our location, in the middle of a block, did not have much traffic walking by, so our events were for the most part attended by neighbors who noticed our incredible DJs and our attractive camp, or people who had heard about the legendary turtles and who came to see what everyone was talking about.

Desert HiiT Workouts

It seems unlikely when the temperatures are in the upper 90s, but we had plenty of takers for our daily 11:00am high intensity interval training workouts. We took this a lot more seriously than some of you may remember from 2019. All the exercises were done in pairs which added a nice social element. People got a real workout, and a lot of them kept coming back throughout the week; on some days our space was at capacity.

A real music program

With two great resident DJs, several guest DJs, and even a couple of newbies learning the ropes, we always had great music. Our sound system with six big speakers sounded **amazing** in the clear desert air.

It's always hard to find and play the kind of music that everyone likes, but our DJs did it. I was pretty astonished to have multiple people come up to me and say that they love, love, loved **all** the music … including several people whose musical tastes I know to be completely non-overlapping.

We had a very specific vibe in mind at the Future Turtles: cheerful, progressive, melodic house, one strict rule ("no pop!") and the intent that you should never hear anything that you've heard in the real world before—the idea was that you should never hear a "song" that you recognized that reminded you of the default world, because Burning Man is most powerful when you can get absorbed in the alien world and never get yanked back to the default.

Turtle Tea Thursday (Listen on Soundcloud)

Great Food

With so many burners subsisting on granola bars and gifted pickles, we actually got a huge delivery of fresh produce and produced two amazing, nutritious hot meals a day, with options for vegans and unlimited snacks available 24/7. Our team of designated chefs (with the assistance of literally everyone, who did one or two kitchen shifts) produced food that was consistently healthy and tasty and really kind of astonishing given the conditions in which it was produced.

Bar

We had an organized bar with a full drinks program including premixed alcoholic and non-alcoholic cocktails every evening. We were surprised to find how popular the non-alcoholic options were.

Everything was super tasty. We even had everything we needed to make custom drinks for people (if we liked them enough, of course). Another huge highlight of the drinks program was Jorge's cold brew coffee every morning.

Oh man, that Pillow Fort

Thanks the creative design of Oscar with tons of help from Andre and other turtles, we created what was probably the most magical space on the entire playa, a quiet, soft, air-conditioned underwater aquarium space that was dedicated to naps during the day (to catch up on sleep) and adult activities during the night. With magical dayglo decorations, Arduino-controlled black light animations creating a "wave" effect, magical music and even a scent program, the pillow fort was truly a spectacular new feature of the camp.

I've been talking about a lot of stuff. Burning Man is about the people.



To be honest it’s easy to get wrapped up in describing our infrastructure, but the whole camp would have sucked if we didn’t have such great people. And there’s no way to sum up the life-transforming experiences of 36 lovely turtles—heck, there’s no way even to convey the insane experiences we all had.

We saw a glimpse of the greatest work of collaborative art ever created in the history of mankind, an artwork created in the audacious medium of a civilization, cooperatively created by 70,000 untrained artists.

We danced, and we slept through dances.

We explored, and we missed 95% of what there was to find.

We faffed, but we got there.

We learned how much more we are capable of than we thought, and we also learned how to ask our neighbors for help.

We fucked up massively, but we always got our shit together.

We were together. We had moments of insanely painful loneliness.

We apologized for past mistakes, and made new ones.

We felt the greatest joy we had ever felt, but also cried our hearts out.

We found love, and lost love.

We were transformed.

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