2023 Afterburner Report

Best. Year. Ever!

Our fourth year, 2023 was the biggest year ever for the Future Turtles. We had the biggest camp and interactive area ever, more campers, more events and interactivity, and more participation than ever!

Not gonna lie, it was an interesting year weather-wise for Burning Man. You always expect the playa to throw something at you to make things difficult—whiteouts, dust, wind, heat, locusts—we just hadn't known that hurricanes were a thing we should watch out for.

This year the remains of Hurricane Hilary kept Black Rock City closed for the first two days of build week. That meant that the early build team was stuck in Reno, playing VR games and escaping escape rooms and hanging out by the pool in the casino, for two days, when we should have been building.

Luckily, when we did arrive, the weather was beyond perfect. It was not too hot, not windy at all, and there was absolutely no dust, which meant that we could build the camp in record time. Simple things like staking down tarps, which had taken hours in the windy conditions of 2022, were trivial.

With the help of some Friday and Saturday early arrivals, we got everything built on time by Saturday night. As planned, we held our antenna-lighting and build-closing-ceremony when the gates to the city officially opened at midnight Saturday, and hosted the first party of the neighborhood as Burning Man participants started pouring into Black Rock City.

Reno Preparations

Everything was made easier by the incredible amount of advance preparation work we had done in Reno in the spring. During that time we had:

- assembled 50 new bicycles
- set up a tool fort container so all our tools and supplies were easy to find
- painted beautiful murals on the side of our two new containers
- repaired and maintained all our lighting, DJ equipment, tools, and generators
- built strong decks on top of the new containers which created an amazing new upper-level observation space
- built the new camp water distribution system
- and a million other little tasks to get ready for playa.

Some Infrastructure Improvements

We love the smaller size of the Future Turtles camp. We don't want to be a big institution. We want to keep the quality of the campers high and make sure we have a camp where everyone feels at home and knows and trusts each other. That means we have decided that anything we do to increase the program and do more on playa needs to be done in a way that does not require more shifts, more work from individual turtles, or just adding more strangers to the camp. That was the focus of all our infrastructure improvements. We got new storage containers. We bought new camp bicycles. And we put down tarps on the ground in the camper tent area, making that area much cleaner and even helping when it rained. On Tuesday morning we received the Gayflower, which arrived as a gift from friends at Rootpile, accompanied by bluegrass music.

We also got the Food Fort, a kitchen trailer. It has large walk in fridge and ice maker and a huge cooktop. This allows us to feed the camp to a standard we have never had before with less work. The food team had spent the year competing to come up with great recipes and all of the meals were pretty amazing by any standard. Best of all, the air conditioned trailer allows us to tow the kitchen in, complete with enough refrigerated and frozen food for the week, from Reno, instead of having to build a kitchen in the dust.

The public décor of the camp keeps getting better and better. We brought back camper cubbies and improved the dining area. We had new, magical, lights, rugs, cushions, a huge decorated backdrop for the DJ, tapestries, better seating areas for the public, a dressing room for the pillow fort, air conditioning for the cuddle fort, a second bar for non-alcoholic drinks, better shade, two observation decks, and more.

The Event

The first five days of the event were picture perfect. The shared hardship of rushing to build the city had created a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie. The weather conditions continued to be pretty excellent. Even when it got windy, the previous rains had packed the playa dust enough that the wind didn't bring the usual whiteout conditions. And the playa itself was solid and packed perfectly so biking was incredibly easy compared to 2022.

At the Future Turtles, we were excited to discover just how much our new location on the corner of 7:00 and Encantado was a huge boon. This was the first time we had been on an avenue corner and it meant we had way more foot traffic to all our events. Our location, literally at the epicenter of the queerborhood, was ideal. We were near a lot of other things (like Comfort & Joy, the Pink Gym, the Orgy Dome, and all the LGBTQIA+ camps around us) that fit nicely with our interactive offerings. By the end of the week, our neighbors had figured out that the Pillow Fort is a much nicer, more intimate alternative to Afterglow.

We ran several well-attended parties: our welcome sunset party on Sunday, a Naked Pub Crawl event Wednesday afternoon, and our Queer Ritmo Night on Thursday for Spanish speakers. All of these parties benefited greatly from the central location and our cool new observation decks. Our DJ team this year was amazing, with four turtles who had learned to DJ in the last year joining. We

love the fact that when you come to a party at the Future Turtles you'll be hanging out with turtles, listening to turtles' spin, and interacting with turtle bartenders.

The daily morning HIIT workouts continue to be a hit (get it? Ha-ha) with more attendees than ever, in a larger, shaded space with tarps on the ground and new, creative, fun exercises, along with the usual smoothies. Those are popular with both turtles and visitors who appreciated the earlier start time (10 am) when it's a bit cooler.

On Wednesday morning we all woke up before dawn (those of us that hadn't stayed up all night, at least), and headed out to the art car Titanic's End, where, as the sun rose, we celebrated the engagement of two of our campmates.

This was also the year that we inaugurated a smaller interactive space meant for streetside encounters. It hosted the Turtle Minibar (a bar with enough room for about two patrons), our daily Storygami workshop, Ürkish Coffee fortunetelling, and a burn barrel. The smaller space made it possible to make intimate connections with passers-by right at the street that might have been harder to draw into our main space. One night we even opened an impromptu grilled-cheese station when the lines at Mooncheese just seemed too long and we realized we could whip up grilled cheese sandwiches for ourselves—and anyone else passing by—without waiting in line.

Mudpocalypse

OK, yeah, then it rained.

On Friday morning it started. And BMIR kept saying, yeah this will only be another hour or so, but they kept saying that every hour and pretty soon it was Saturday morning and it was *still*> raining and the camp was basically flooded and we were told to "shelter in place." Driving and cycling became impossible, and even walking was difficult due to the muddy conditions. We were concerned that we didn't know when the rain would stop, when the sun would return, and how long it would take for the playa to dry out so we could get moving again.

In the meantime, apparently, the world media had some kind of bizarre collective hallucination and was reporting that some kind of Fyre Festival dystopia was happening, so our friends and families off-playa started worrying, even though nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, we had too much food, as usual, people were having a great time, and burners universally helped each other out, taking in people whose tents had flooded. Despite the fact that the news seemed to think some kind of Katrina-style FEMA evacuation was underway, Burning Man continued, although the difficulty in riding bicycles meant it became a little more local and felt a little more small-scale, like the Burning Man of the 90s.

Around Saturday afternoon we realized the Man Burn was not happening that night. Many of the camps in the neighborhood had decided that Burning Man Was Over and were slipping around in the mud trying desperately to pack up. We decided just to wait for everything to dry before we packed up, calculating (correctly) that would be much easier. Why not turn on the music?

Our Mudpocalypse Disco started around 2pm and people started peeking in wondering what the heck was going on.

As the afternoon went on, our party rapidly grew more popular. By nightfall, our entire space was crammed with hundreds of people, and spilled all the way out in front of the camp to the street. Both observation decks were full of happy burners dancing. We announced that we would go until 2am, but the crowds did not abate. Around 2:00 we told the attendees that we would continue if they would do a moop sweep, which they did, and then we partied through until sunrise, concluding with an epic sunrise set. All told it was about 18 hours of nonstop happiness that left the turtles, and most of the neighborhood, having just witnessed the best party ever in the history of parties.



Strike

Our original hope had been to strike on Sunday and be done by Monday morning. In fact, waiting for the sun to come out meant that strike happened about 24 hours late. Fortunately, some turtles were able to delay their departures to help, which made a big difference. We do feel like we were able to do a decent job of drying everything out so that it doesn't develop mildew (fingers crossed). And we did hours of moop sweeping, although the mud this year has us worried that there is probably a lot of hidden moop folded into the hard mud piles that were beaten down by foot traffic.

On Sunday night, lacking a Man burn, we decided to burn our own wood Turtle effigy, which had adorned our space all week.

On Monday night the org announced that the Man would finally burn. This was the first time since 1990 that the Man burned so late. The dozen-odd turtles that were still here for strike headed out to playa. The experience was surreal; by this time, most of the city was gone, and the roads were ripped to shreds. But on playa, it was still Burning Man. There was a full complement of art cars in a ring around the Man, the fire conclaves were doing their thing, a lot of the playa art was lit up and in good shape, and the party was in full swing. Thanks to DaveX and his crew we were treated to possibly a beautiful array of fireworks—orders of magnitude better than anything Burning Man has ever seen!

The People

People describe Burning Man as “contrived hardship” intended to build community. Well, I don’t know how much of it is contrived, but the community of turtles that was built out of the hardship of the rain and mud could not be stronger.

This was the year that every turtle, both new and returning, really stepped up to contribute in a big way. The crew this year really understood the ten principles in ways both large and small. Turtles volunteered as a group for Lamplighters. Others volunteered individually for other things on playa, helping out with Placement, other artist’s art projects, and more. Others built interactive projects and art independently with beautiful results.

We came together for each other when things got hard, and helped each other have a terrific burn. The number of turtles who really understood the principle of do-ocracy and just *did things* to make camp better, to create gifts for turtles and burners, and to make shit happen without waiting to be told, made this our strongest year yet.

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