

MAPS at Burning Man



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Amid the colorful parade of art cars, the pounding of dance beats, and the milieu of fantastically costumed participants, dozens of Burners opted to spend their afternoons sitting still in a quiet dome, and listening to—what else?

The results from scientific research on psychedelic psychotherapy.

For the first time, MAPS brought our own theme camp to the dusty environment of Black Rock City, the 30,000+ community of the annual Burning Man festival. Also for the first time, we hosted the annual Palenque Norte talks, organized by Lorenzo Haggarty. The talks, this year called the MAPS/Palenque Norte series, serve as an on-playa psychedelic conference.

Thanks to the experience and enthusiasm of Bop Camp, a group of energetic Chicago Burners with whom MAPS joined forces this year, we had a fantastic set-up, prominently placed along Burning Man's main drag, the Esplanade. Our camp boasted two large domes, a teepee, a kitchen, and incredible people from all over the country. Over 50 people lived in MAPS Camp for the week, bringing together old and new friends to celebrate MAPS' mission and participate in the indescribable event that is Burning Man.

Working at Sanctuary

Though this was our first attempt at a MAPS-themed camp, it was the third year that volunteers from MAPS have joined the Black Rock Rangers (a volunteer team that patrols the event and assists participants) in staffing Sanctuary. Sanctuary is a safe space created by the Rangers to temporarily shelter folks who are having a tough time at the event, including those having difficult psychedelic experiences. MAPS has offered our expertise in working with this group, bringing psychiatrists, therapists, and experienced peers to sit with Sanctuary visitors.

Returning from past years were myself, Dr. John Halpern and Dr. Andrew Sewell of Harvard Medical School's McLean Hospital, Sandra Karpetas and Leah Martin of the Iboga Therapy House, trauma therapist Kate Sorenson, MAPS staffer Valerie Mojeiko, and MAPS

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president Rick Doblin. New this year were Brian Richards Psy.D., and Matt Johnson Ph.D, both from Johns Hopkins as well as many other new volunteers. This year, we had so many requests from would-be volunteers that we offered a brief mandatory orientation early in the week, allowing us to introduce a number of new faces to our team.

Most of our core volunteers have also participated in Ranger training, and some of us, including myself, also work as Rangers.

Throughout the week, our volunteers assisted the Rangers at Sanctuary. We staffed Sanctuary in eight-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, so that we had at least two members of our team working at all times, from Tuesday morning until Monday morning. During that time, almost 100 visitors came through Sanctuary. Most were brought by Rangers, though some were brought by campmates or came on their own.

Their reasons for coming to Sanctuary were diverse. Some were simply lost and cold, needing a place to regroup before finding their friends. Some were facing emotional and relationship problems. Those under the influence of psychedelics were just as diverse in their needs, wanting a supportive listener, practical help finding lost campmates, or simply a quiet place to reflect. We did our best to help each person with their unique needs, above all providing a safe space for their experience to unfold.

Under the direction of the Black Rock Rangers, MAPS volunteers provided a valuable service to the Burning Man community, logging over 300 person-hours in Sanctuary. We helped to decorate the space, donated clean bedding and snacks, and we participated in keeping a thorough log of visitors. With the help of so many skilled and compassionate volunteers, we were able to send many participants



MAPS logo by koko paulli

back out to the playa whose difficult experiences, psychedelic and otherwise, were transformed into positive ones. We're particularly proud that nobody going through a difficult psychedelic experience had to be taken by ambulance to a hospital for emergency psychiatric services.

We also provided a valuable service to the Burning Man organization. By helping those in difficult psychedelic states move through them before they escalated, we reduced the need for law enforcement or medical intervention. This in turn reduces the perception that Burning Man is a dangerous, drug-soaked event, a perception that could threaten its survival. By lending our expertise to the organization, we are able to plug into a cooperative system that links event organizers, law enforcement, medical staff, and hundreds of volunteers, helping to ensure the safety and sustainability of Burning Man.

Building community: The MAPS Camp and Palenque Norte

The Palenque Norte lecture series is named for the psychedelic conferences convened by the late Terence McKenna in Palenque, Mexico. Though the lectures were held in one of the largest domes on the playa, several of this year's talks were so well-attended that some people had to stand outside. Five days of events included panels on ayahuasca and ibogaine, several psychedelic researchers presenting their results, and mind-expanding discussions on the nature of reality and our place in it.

After dark, the sculpture was lit in blue and green, and the spokes on the wheels were animated, spinning through the night. Inside, DJs also spun through the night, as did the fire spinners who moved to the music.

Speakers included familiar names like popular author Daniel Pinchbeck, virtual reality guru Bruce Damer, MAPS President Rick Doblin and MAPS-funded researcher Dr. John Halpern, as well as a number of new faces. Johns Hopkins drug researchers Brian Richards Psy.D. and Matthew Johnson Ph.D. spoke about the spiritual and scientific aspects of psychedelic psychotherapy, respectively. Holotropic Breathwork practitioner Sheelo Bohm offered two Holotropic Breathwork workshops. For a complete list of the speakers and their topics, go to <http://www.matrixmasters.com> and click on the Palenque Norte box. While we intended to record the talks, because of a misunderstanding this unfortunately did not happen. However, you can download Palenque Norte talks from past years at the site above.

The talks were held in a huge parachute-covered dome, measuring 30 feet tall and 60 feet across, generously donated by Cliff Wilkerson for this purpose. It was a recognizable landmark, adorned with a metal sculpture of Albert Hofmann on his bicycle, which commemorated the LSD inventor's famous ride home during his (and the



Audience members use the stage for extra room during Daniel Pinchbeck's talk, which filled our camp's 60 foot dome to capacity. Photo by Valerie Mojeiko

world's) first intentional LSD trip. After dark, the sculpture was lit in blue and green, and the spokes on the wheels were animated, spinning through the night. Inside, DJs also spun through the night, as did the fire spinners who moved to the music. Hung with giant batik tapestries, by day the dome was just as beautiful, an inspiring setting for the lectures and workshops.

The MAPS Camp was a success because of the efforts of dozens of people, an example of the “radical participation” that characterizes Burning Man. From DJs to chefs to construction crews, the people who made up this group offered amazing gifts. While I initially planned to list some of the people who made this project happen, I gave up when I realized that there are too many whose contributions deserve recognition.

All of these contributions helped us to bring MAPS to Black Rock City, a community whose values make it one of the most receptive to MAPS' mission anywhere. Burners prize both individual expression and responsibility, not to mention collective freedom and community responsibility. As we work to create a world in which policy is shaped by reason and compassion, not money and politics, Burning Man is a great place to find allies.

Planning for next year—you're invited!

We are already planning to make MAPS' Burning Man project bigger and better next year. To improve our work in Sanctuary, we're coordinating with the Rangers and with our team to generate and implement suggestions. These changes include more preparation for volunteers, better data collection, an improved shift schedule, and a clearer division of responsibilities. We're excited to build on this



MAPS President Rick Doblin enjoying his last day at the burn. Photo by John Halpern.

project, creating a structure that will allow us to continue growing and improving.

We had such a great experience this year that MAPS has begun preparations to celebrate our 20th anniversary at Burning Man 2006. (In an interesting coincidence, this is Burning Man's 20th anniversary, too). Again collaborating with the Burners—formerly-known-as-Bop Camp, MAPS hopes to offer more talks, more interactive workshops, a separate large dome for visual art, and more ways for everyone to get involved. If you'd like to help, please

contact MAPS staffer Valerie Mojeiko at valerie@maps.org. We will need help of all sorts, including financial, to make this happen.

We chose to mark our anniversary at the event partly because so many MAPS supporters attend Burning Man anyway, making it easier for many people than other suggested locations (like Sarasota and Jamaica). We also chose it, however, because Burning Man is a place where MAPS is in action. What better way to mark 20 years of MAPS than at an event that brings together working, learning, and playing? Join us as we celebrate the accomplishments of the past, work to answer the needs of the present, and dare to imagine the possibilities of the future.



Participants ecstatically chase a water truck near MAPS Camp. Photo © dimitre.com.