

TRAVELS

Travels is a dedicated advocate for sustainability and effective waste allocation in the West Coast festival scene. He began working in waste management in 2013 with the Trash Pirates and later expanded his work with various “green teams” at festivals across the West Coast. His first season with the DPW was in 2016, though he attended his first Burn in 2011. In 2016 alone, he worked at 38 events, including Desert Hearts, Coachella, Lightning in a Bottle, and Burning Man. He actively uses and promotes the Sparks network, a volunteer coordination app. His passion for the festival scene and its community has been a driving force in his life, helping him overcome personal challenges and inspiring him to give back through his work.

This interview was conducted by “Flo,” Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2016. Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve the reading flow.



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Travels at Big Surreal 2017. Photo credit: Jenny Lynn, 2017.

My first DPW season is 2016. I came in with a subset of DPW called Recycle Camp, which is at 6 and Center, 6 on the Esplanade. Recycle Camp is an offshoot of TSA, which is the waste management department of DPW. Recycle Camp is essentially the only camp on Playa where you can take any resources to be left on Playa. So, it’s where we take all our aluminum cans to be left there. All of the money from those aluminum cans afterward goes to the Gerlach School District, which I was shocked by, and thought was really cool.

I went out there and volunteered with them, and after I worked Recycle Camp. Blue is the person who runs

Recycle Camp and also runs TSA. So, I started hearing things about DPW—I’d been hearing about DPW for years—and decided to go out there and give it a shot. So, I showed up to a morning meeting Monday, the day after Burning Man.

2016 was my first DPW season but second burn. My first burn was in 2011. This is my second [burn] and my first DPW season. But I went to morning meeting, and I met Logan/ Cobra. He pretty much was a little unsure at first. I came back repeatedly, day after day, and was like, “This is going to happen, you can turn me away all you want.” Eventually they printed me out an

ID, made me Roustabout, and then I worked my way into a position with Highway cleanup. Now I’ve worked my way into a position with TSA, with DPW, and with Litterati.

I work with a crew called the Trash Pirates [in 2013]. Cartographer, who is former DPW and former TSA and currently with Recycle Camp. Cartographer runs a crew called Trash Pirates who are... oh, the name is pretty fitting. [chuckles] We’re pirates, and we are dirty people, and we believe very heavily in sustainability and allocation of waste. We believe that we can re-use and recycle before we ever waste.

I met Cartographer at an event called Northern Nights about four years ago. I saw what they were doing. These men were out there digging through trashcans. It’s the end of the festival, and everyone’s tired and hungover and driving home. This guy, he’s out there in board shorts and fucking tennis shoes digging through every single trashcan on site! And, you know, putting every

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aluminum can in with aluminum, and every cardboard in with the cardboard, and making sure that nothing goes to a place where it’s not supposed to go. I was just thrown by this: what the hell is this guy?

I met him and started talking with him, kind of forced him to take me

on as well, started on with him for sustainability projects. Later I met Pytr Bob, who runs with TSA at Burning Man and did some gigs with him like DIRT, the green team here, and other groups that do sustainability. Pytr Bob is the one that does waste management: interesting fellow as well. I worked with him a little bit, and Cartographer mostly, and wound up doing these things for a living.

Last year I did 38 events. I don’t know [if I can list] all of them, but let’s see... Serenity Gathering, Suspended in Sunbeam, Soul-true-istic, Desert Hearts, Coachella, Lightning in a Bottle, Woogy Weekend, Dirty Bird Campout, Burning Man, obviously. Let’s see, we did Love Circle, Love Circle one more time, we did Four Moon Tribes, Mooniversary. Heart and Soulstice. We did Big Surreal; we did Rain Dance. Just everywhere.

I was addicted to heroin. This scene is the only reason I’m still alive, in my opinion. I met some people here that made me feel like I still had a family, which is something I’d never felt before. They made me feel like my life was still worth living, and pulled the needle out of my arm, essentially. Because of that, I have



Photo credit: Veeda Simonita, 2016.



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so much love for the scene, so much faith in the scene that I felt like I had to make sure I gave something back, to make sure it continued growing.

[There are differences within all the festivals]. It depends a little bit on what my position is with the team. If I’m coming on a voluntary basis—again, the Trash pirates are very pirate-y, and we have a reputation that precedes us of being a little robust. It’s a dirty job, it’s a hard job. We work long hours; 16–18-hour days.

With DPW, there’s a very strict policy. You get your ass up at 7 o’clock in the morning and you’re at the morning meeting, and you don’t touch alcohol throughout the day from 7 am until 5 pm when we get off shift. [The morning meeting] is at 7:30. Commissary opens at 8 am. My normal thing was wake up at 7, hitchhike my way to the Depot, go to the meeting, go have breakfast, and then get on the road and start doing work. But, if you get caught with alcohol in your system before 5 PM, you’re asking for some serious shit out there. It’s the most militant, organized... truthfully, seriously, it’s like working for a company. You know? And ironically, it’s the only



Travels parts of the Do Lab at the Woogie Weekend 2016.
Photo credit: unknown. Year 2016.

group that’s ever whipped me into shape that way. Absolutely. I never would have fallen into shape like that. Lightning in a Bottle has tried many times. Only after my first DPW season, they finally gave me my first contract with Do Lab. I’ve been subcontracted before, but I never was directly contracted because I have a reputation. I’m not willing to go by the rules.

DPW is the first organization that really got me to shape the fuck up, and really it’s just about this idea that we have a total of three months to build this thing and break it back down... and it’s a city. A 9.2 square mile city with 70,000 people living in it. We HAVE to get it fucking done, and there’s no time for bullshit. There’s no time for any of us to slack off or fuck off or do any of those things. Get your ass up, and get into gear, and go do your job. And then when you get off work, it’s party time. It’s the most militant, direct group I’ve ever seen. Strike and Resto, yeah.

[I was working] a Do Lab event, called Dirty Bird Campout, A House

party—not a party at a house but a House music party that The Do Lab throws in Southern California. It’s a three-day event with less than 5,000 people on a less than square mile property. This party is a fucking rager. It’s a giant shit show. Just to put that in perspective, Burning Man happens on a 9.2 square mile playa with 70,000 people over the course of eight days. At Burning Man, at the end of event week, we take all the trash from all the participants left over, and this year we filled, I wanna say three forty-yard dumpsters. Three. For 70,000 people for eight days. At Dirty Bird Campout we filled 13 forty-yard dumpsters. 13 forty-yard dumpsters after 3 days of 5,000 people. It was fucking huge. And to me that point struck harder than anything else did, because for Dirty Bird I had just come off the Playa. I had just come straight to Dirty Bird and experienced this. It was just like... fuck, man. How is it that so many of these events can be so conscious and so clearly so much cleaner and aware than other ones are. It made me realize that there are

parties and there are gatherings, and that the general population doesn’t see a difference between those. They see us all as being parties. They see us all as being a collective of people coming together and getting fucked up, doing drugs, and having sex and that’s all it is to the outside world. If we’re gonna make any difference in that, we have to change what we’re doing here and we have to stop being EDC, Coachella and Dirty Bird Campouts, and we have to be Burning Man. So, to me, Burning Man is the... it’s the thesis project. It’s the scale model for everything that we should be doing in this community.

[Sparks does not concern Burning Man/DPW]. Sparks network is a group I’ve been working with for about a year now. Pretty much what we do: the basis of it is software for hiring volunteers for events. What I’m doing now is I’m a go-between manager between Sparks network and the team leads. So, for this event there are build teams, and traffic teams, and trash teams, and all these things. It’s my job to discuss with the Sparks network all the things that those team leads like and dislike about their volunteers; to get their feedback; and to make sure that they are at a place with the best volunteers suitable to the job they have with them. Then we take these volunteers, and we build resumes for them because volunteer culture is a huge thing in our scene.

Like, alright, if someone comes on, and they came on saying they want to do build. They went into the kitchen, and they killed it, and the kitchen loves them. They get all kinds of good reports in their kitchen. Then I go onto their profile, and I make an adjustment saying, “This person has done this this and this in the kitchen, they have outstanding reviews, would highly recommend for kitchen duty.”



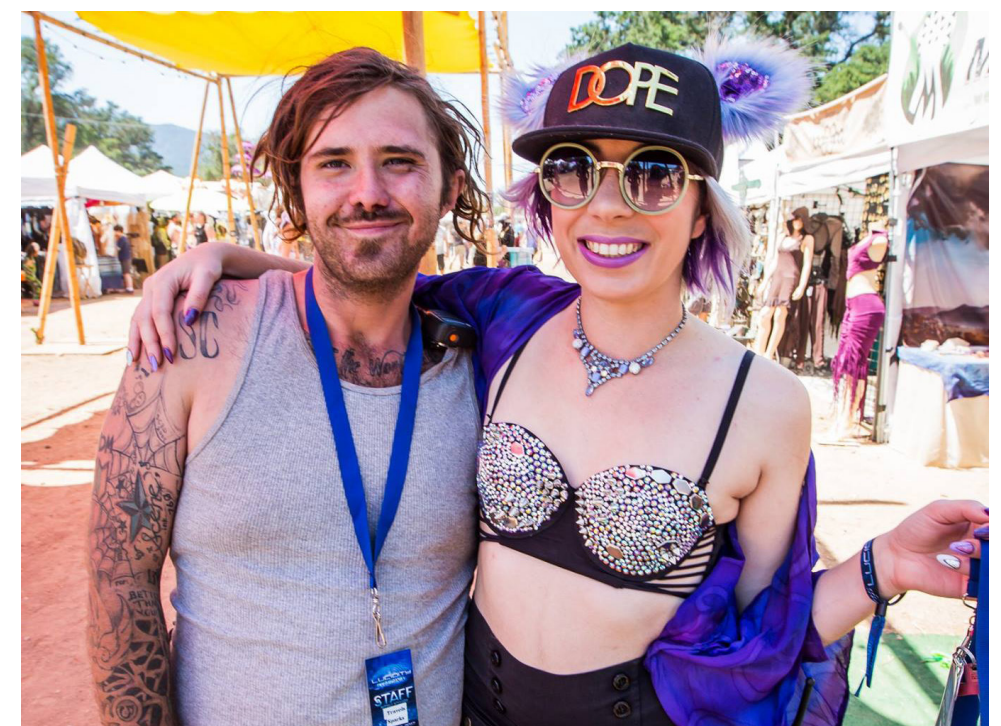
“[With Sparks (Non DPW app)] The idea with that is; that the volunteers who start off as volunteers work their way into paid positions.”

Ok? So, they can put on their thing their interests and their experience include build and blah blah blah, but I as the supervisor will go on and say, “This person also has a straight reference from me.”

The idea with that is, the end game is, that the volunteers who start off as volunteers work their way into paid positions. That way, there’s always new entry-level positions for

volunteers and there’s always, you know, a progression to be made. This should be the type of thing where if you build a skill set doing this, and you’re doing this for five years, you should not be a volunteer for five years. If you can build a fucking stage and you don’t need supervision to do it, you should be paid very well for that. It’s one of those things that’s been manipulated and taken advantage within this scene, because people are willing to come out and do it for free because they love these events so much. Same thing with myself and trash. It’s something we have to stand up for: we have to almost unionize to get taken back.

I think at this point there are less than a dozen in-house employees [of Sparks]. Myself, my directing manager: her name is Brittz. She’s the manager. She’s the person you interface with. Then our tech person and the owner of the company, Stevo. We also have Kat who’s one of our directors and coordinators. We also have Joe now, who’s the new box office coordinator and director. We have some IT guys in the back. But we have a few people on the team and it’s coming together nicely.



Travels and Britz (Sparks manager) at Lucidity 2017. Photo credit: Aline Kras Images, 2017.