

Black Rock City Glossary of Terms

Glossary of terms used in Black Rock City

Ancestors – spiraling, tornado-like dust plumes that traverse the playa, either produced by wind or by heat from large fires, such as the Man burning.

Art Bike – kissing cousin to the art car, the art bike is a decorated or “mutated” bicycle, and is the preferred method of transporting oneself around the playa.

Art Cars – a highly decorated car, truck, or bus, usually with lots of decorative objects attached to it.

Artery – is the Burning Man Art team. The Artery functions as a check-in center for artists, as well as a hub for information about art.

Art of Rangering – The set of mental awareness, emotional stability & behavioral skills which enable one to function as a Black Rock Ranger.

BAT – Burn Activities Team, specially trained & equipped Rangers who work with fire performers.

BED – Bureau of Erotic Discourse – is a grassroots effort to promote awareness and prevention of sexual assault at Burning Man.

BLF – Billboard Liberation Front, hard copy media hackers since 1979.

BLM – Bureau of Land Management – government agency which administers public lands, including the Black Rock Desert, Bordello Springs – see Frog Pond below.

BMOrg – short for Burning Man Organization, this term is actually a common misnomer. The actual name for the organizers of the burning Man event is the “Burning Man Project”.

BRAF – Black Rock Arts Foundation, The mission of the Black Rock Arts Foundation is to support and promote community-based art that generates social participation.

BRC – abbreviation for Black Rock City.

BWB – Burners Without Borders. BWB encourages Burners to get involved locally via various civic projects that benefit local communities where other systems have broken down. BWB projects are self-defined, and they spring up all around the world, often evolving through existing Regional groups.

Baker Beach – San Francisco beach where Burning Man originated.

Berlin – name of Ranger outpost station on the South side of Black Rock City.

Big Bear – Ranger Director, dedicated to the “Art of Rangering” and the Burning Man Community.

Black Rock – a large dark rock formation at the north end of the Black Rock Desert playa.

Black Rock City – the annual, temporary city created by the community of Burning Man participants.

Black Rock Gazette – newspaper that was produced on-site in the desert during the Burning Man event.

Black Rock Hot Springs – natural hot springs located near the Black Rock.

Bernal Equinox – the half-way point between two burns.

Burner – one who has attended Burning Man, and takes the spirit of the event back with them to the “default world”.

Burn, the – Reference to the actual event and activity involved with burning the Burning Man statue.

Cacophony Society – a randomly gathered network of pranksters and eccentric individuals, united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the mainstream of culture.

Camera obscura – a darkened room or building fitted with a specially designed lens which projects an outside image onto a screen or table inside.

Camp Arctica – the camp on playa where participants can purchase ice to keep their perishables fresh, and their bodies cooled. Proceeds from ice sales are donated to local charities.

Cattle Guard – a closely spaced group of horizontal pipes placed in a roadbed at a fence crossing to prevent cattle from escaping and yet allow vehicles free access.

CB – abbreviation for Citizens Bank radio.

Center Camp – large circular area and structures located in the center of Black Rock City.

Central Dispatch – center for radio communications and control, usually located at Ranger Headquarters.

Chasing Shadows – dashing across the playa in pursuit of brightly burning objects, only to arrive after the object has already burned to ashes, and then doing it again and again to the point of exhaustion.

Comm – abbreviation for communication.

Concrete Stake – heavy-duty steel stake with a series of small holes along the length.

Conflict resolution – a set of skills and strategy to defuse emotional situations.

Coyote Man – community legend about a local resident who runs with coyotes at night.

DMV – Department of Mutant Vehicles, the team of dedicated volunteers who review, approve and register art cars (or mutant vehicles, giving them permission to drive on the playa during the event.

DPW – Department of Public Works, the organization dedicated to building the city's physical infrastructure.

Danger Ranger – founder and icon hero of the Black Rock Rangers.

Darkwad - an unilluminated participant asleep or otherwise not moving in a vehicle or pedestrian area.

Decompression – community gathering post-playa to help burners re-enter the “regular” world.

Default World – the rest of the world that is not the playa during the Burning Man event.

Dehydration – medical condition that results from not drinking enough water.

Dig, the – The Monday morning ritual of excavating smoldering Burning Man artifacts.

Dispatcher – person who monitors official radio communications and acts as a radio traffic regulator.

Donner Award – annual award given to the individual, or group, who pushes the limits of personal survival through stupidity, inattention or just bad luck during the Burning Man event.

Double Hot – a boiling hot springs located in the mountains beyond the north end of the playa.

Dust Devils – see Ancestors.

Esplanade – innermost road facing the Man in BRC.

Exodus – the process and organization of the mass participant departure from the playa at the end of the event.

Exploding Man – legendary fireworks performance.

Fire Breathing – a technique whereby someone blows a flammable liquid across a torch a large burst of flame.

Fire Dancing – the art of dancing with fire, usually in the form of poi, staff, hoops, clubs, fans, or other devices.

Fire Jumping – a technique of jumping over a burning fire, sometimes with negative results when two opposing jumpers collide in mid-air.

Fire Walking – a technique of walking barefooted on live embers, best performed after moistening the feet.

Fluffer – volunteers who drive around BRC handing out drinks, candy, water, ice, etc to crews building the city pre-event.

Frog Pond – a warm water artesian pond where frogs were raised in the 1950's. Renamed Bordello Springs by Danger Ranger in 1992.

Fly Hot Springs – a hot water geyser surrounded by several large man-made pools.

Gate - We are the first people to welcome participants into the city after they turn off the highway and drive onto the playa, and we are the last people to say goodbye as they return to the default world.

Gifting – a core tenet of the Burning Man ethos, gifting is the act of giving something (material or otherwise) to another person without any expectation of receiving something in return.

Greeters - We are the grinning faces of Burning Man. Greeters Welcome participants into the city with hugs, dust and bell-ringing. Greeters pass out the valued collated material and impart important information.

Grey water - is produced from cooking, dish washing, and hair and body washing. Our permit from BLM does NOT allow us to dump grey water directly onto the playa.

Guru Lane – a folk-art, monument-lined road next to highway 34, near Gerlach, built by Doobie Williams, who passed away at age 76 in 1995.

Harvey, Larry – founder and director of Burning Man.

Heat exhaustion – a more serious form of dehydration.

Helco – fictional corporation which attempted to buy Burning Man in 1996.

ICS – abbreviation for Incident Command System, an action plan to be used by the Rangers in the event of a serious emergency.

Jack Rabbit Speaks – internet based newsletter produced by Burning Man organization.

Java Cow – community legend which appears with hot coffee at sunrise on the morning of the burn and asks the question: “Do you want cream or sugar with your coffee?”

Juplaya – a non-official 4th of July camping experience held in the Black Rock Desert.

Khaki - member of the Ranger Shift Command team acting as dispatcher; monitors communications and coordinates Ranger activities throughout Black Rock City.

Khakis – durable, tan-colored clothing which has become the standard uniform of the Rangers.

Khaki dot, the – a mental point at which a Ranger applicant understands the basic philosophy and concepts of being a Black Rock Ranger, i.e. “getting it”.

LEAL –Law Enforcement Agency Liaison; a Ranger Department special team.

LLC – abbreviation for Limited Liability Company. Black Rock City LLC is the legal entity which organizes and produces the annual Burning Man event.

LNT – abbreviation for Leave No Trace. The art of leaving no trace once the event has closed.

Lamplighters – the volunteer group who lights kerosene lanterns each night of the Burning Man event to illuminate the esplanade and promenades, providing participants with valuable navigational aids.

Lamp posts – the series of vertical lighting fixtures which line walkways and delineates areas of BRC.

Lingam – Indian term for a large, phallic-like structure.

Man, the – term used for the wooden Burning Man statue.

Mentoring – the process by which an experienced Ranger passes on the Ranger way to a new Ranger.

Moop – matter out of place, a term for litter or trash on the playa.

Newbie – term used for first time participants to Burning Man.

Nose tators – playa dust nostril plugs that form during the event; spelling derived from a contraction of “No Spectators”.

Obtainium – any useful and valued material which is found or obtained for free.

Open Playa – the portion of the playa that is within our pentagonal event space, but is used exclusively for art installations rather than camping space.

Paperman – the legal entity which holds the trademark name ‘Burning Man’ and protects it from corporate commercialization.

Participant – everyone in BRC is expected to be interactive and play an active role in the community.

Piss Clear – the 2nd newspaper to appear in BRC. The name is derived from the survival axiom “Drink so much water that you piss clear.”

Placer – placers help participants locate their allotted space when they enter BRC.

Playa – Spanish word for beach.

Playa Chicken – community legend of a rare species of vicious, carnivorous chicken reputed to live in the Black Rock Desert. Any strange phenomenon that is not readily attributable to any known cause may be blamed on Playa Chickens.

Playafication (adj.:playafied) – the process by which all participants’ shoes/feet, hair, tents, carpets, furniture, vehicles, etc. become the same serene shade of playa-tan due to ubiquitous dust build-up.

Playa Foot – a common malady where one’s feet become dry and cracked due to prolonged exposure to the highly alkaline desert floor.

Playa Info – location at center camp where participants can find all the answers to all your Burning questions.

Playa madness – mental condition that occurs after being out in the Black Rock Desert for more than a week at a time.

Playa Name – originally spawned by the need for unique names on the staff’s 2-way radios, playa names have become almost ubiquitous, and are sometimes used to provide an individual with an “alternate” personality or persona. Playa names are traditionally given to a person, rather than taken on.

Playa platforms – what your footwear becomes after it rains and 2 to 3 inches of mud adheres to the bottom of your shoes.

POSSE – Ranger senior management organization for Planning, Organization & Strategy.

Potlatch – American Indian term for a gathering or festival in which gift giving is featured.

Project, the – term for the Burning Man Project, organization name.

Promenade – the spire-lined pathways that lead out to the Man.

Quinn River – located at the north-east side of Black Rock Desert, this spring-time river empties onto the playa and then dries up during the summer.

REMSA – abbreviation for Reno Medical Services Association.

Radio codes – numbers used to shorten and clarify radio messages.

Radio handle – a short name used by a Ranger for radio communications.

Radio protocol – a clear and simple set of rules to make radio communications flow, even in times of high usage.

Ranger HQ – the primary building and base of operations for the Rangers.

Ranger Station – the general, public accessible, campsite\complex and base of Ranger operations.

Re-bar – cheap steel rods often used for tent stakes.

Recompression – parties and events put on by Burners before Burning Man to get inspired for their upcoming playa experience.

Regionals – the global representatives of Burning Man who help connect Burners with fellow burners off playa, while producing events and upholding the 10 principles.

Repeater Station – electronic device which receives radio signals and then re-broadcasts with increased power to increase range of radio communications.

Rocket run – term used for a quick driving trip to the Black Rock Desert and then back home, usually within a 24-hour period.

Rumor control – the technique of managing and controlling information that may be false or harmful to the community.

Scanner – an electronic device used to listen in on radio communications.

Shift Commander – the on-duty Ranger who is responsible for all Ranger functions and city operations.

Skimmer – a vehicle or art car which is traveling on or in a prohibited roadway or playa area.

SkyKing – name of early radio wrangler.

Solifuge – a swift, non-poisonous, nocturnal insect which thrives on the playa during the dry season, taking refuge in the larger cracks during the day. Also known as Sun or Wind Scorpions.

Spacewalker – a participant who walks out onto the playa, away from camp at night with no flashlight, usually in an alter state of mind. “Wowlookatallthetarts,” is the comment often heard.

Spike – name of dog which died in 1993 after its owner allowed it to jump into a hot springs.

SRL – abbreviation for Survival Research Laboratories, a robotics machine performance group.

Stick, the – nickname for the Man.

Survivally-challenged – politically correct term for any participant whose judgment is impaired by drugs or alcohol.

10 Principles – the 10 core guiding concepts of the Burning Man project.

TAZ – abbreviation for Temporary Autonomous Zone(term coined by writer Hakim Bey).

Texas Rangers – early law-enforcement organization established in the 1800’s on the Texas frontier.

Theme Camp – a campsite which artistically presents an idea or concept and is designed to be interactive.

Tengo dos pollos – a Ranger expression which means “Don’t take things too seriously”.

The Way It Is (TWII) – Annual meeting at BMHQ.

Trego Trench – a long, hot springs-fed, ditch created by Southern Pacific with a back hoe in the 1950’s.

Trigger words – any word that may result in a heightened emotional state (i.e. bitch, stupid, etc.).

Tokyo – name of Ranger outpost station on the North side of Black Rock City.

UHF – abbreviation for Ultra High Frequency band width radio.

Verbal Judo – a set of skills/techniques to deflect verbal attacks and control verbal communications during an emotional situation.

Village – affinity group of theme camps.

White-out – a dust storm which produces near-zero visibility.

Yellow shirts – name used, somewhat affectionately, for the yellow0shirted REMSA medical staff.

Zone, the – the area outside the fenced Black Rock City boundary. The first burning Man held on the Black Rock Desert in 1990 was promoted as 'Zone Trip #4' by the San Francisco Cacophony Society, which took the term from the 1979 Russian movie, 'Stalker' by Andrei Tarkovsky, where it was the name of a mysterious, forbidden wasteland that changed when you were not looking at it.
