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Superintendent's Message

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent

As the riding season comes to an end for a majority of the park visitors and we say goodbye to several of our seasonal staff, I want to take a moment to say thank you to all who made this another great year at the Ocotillo Wells District. Although visitation will gradually decrease over the next several months, there are several projects in the works that will be our focus. The General Plan for Ocotillo Wells will be one of those priorities. Having just completed "scoping" public meetings, staff will gather public comments that will be used to help prepare a Draft General Plan. There has been some great input so far, and I am confident that the final product will truly represent and consider the concerns of all. I encourage you to follow the progress at <http://www.planocotillowells.com/>

The recent decision by the California Department of Fish and Game Commission to "consider" the flat-tailed horned lizard (FTHL) for endangered species status will also be a focus for staff over the next several months. Already actively involved in studying the FTHL as part of a multi-agency effort, Ocotillo Wells' resource staff will work with Fish and Wildlife biologists during this study phase. Although a final determination is at least a year away, our efforts now will help ensure that we continue to balance recreation and resource protection without jeopardizing either.

Again, thank you to all of our staff, volunteers, visitors, and OHV groups for all of your efforts. Have a great summer!



OW Plan Public Workshops and Next Steps!

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist

On March 18 in Temecula and on March 21 in Ocotillo Wells, public workshops were held to present the BLM-proposed action for the Recreation Area Management Plan and Land Use Plan

Amendment, the Draft Preferred Alternative in the State Park General Plan process, and initiate the environmental review under both the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Forty-three people attended the meeting in Temecula and over 100 attended the meeting in Ocotillo Wells. Lots of questions were asked and answered and a few new ideas were hatched that the team will take a look at for the Plan. There was online activity, as well.



After the comments are gathered, the planning team will prepare a summary that will be posted on the website www.planocotillowells.com, and they will start writing the Plan and the Draft EIR/EIS.

Once the Plan and the Draft EIR/EIS are released in late 2015 or early 2016, there will be an additional 90-day comment period.

Thanks for participating.





OCOTILLO WELLS

STATE VEHICULAR RECREATION AREA

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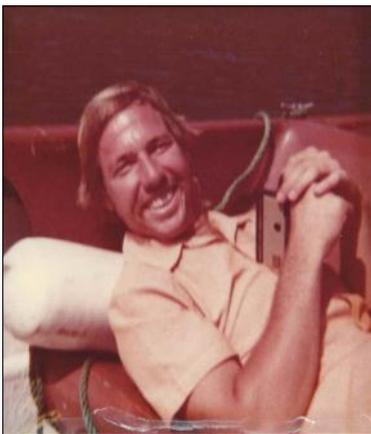
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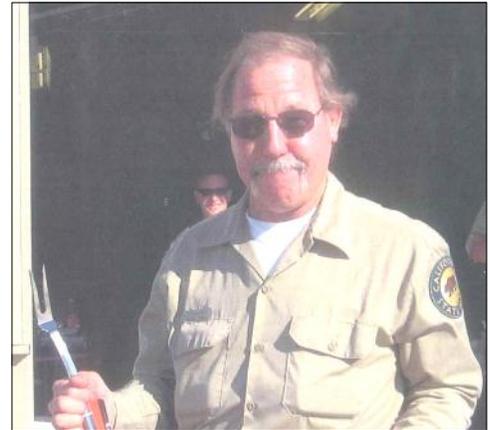
Happy Fishing (Retirement), Dennis!

By Karen Pena, Office Technician

Dennis started his career with State Parks in 1977. It was there that he met his wife, Ann. The two had three children: Mathew, Aaron and Caitlin. During his career he has worked for the following districts: Inland Empire, Hollister Hills OHV, Central Valley, Colorado Desert and Ocotillo Wells. His first job was at Los Lagos District as a



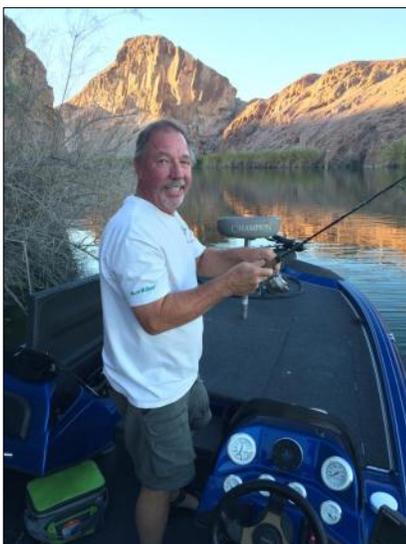
Groundskeeper. His easy going, yet get-the-job-done mentality, has allowed him to promote, promote and promote. Through diligence and hard work, Dennis



promoted from Groundskeeper to a Park Maintenance Assistant, Park Maintenance Worker I, Park Maintenance Worker II, State Park Equipment Operator and on to a Park Maintenance Supervisor. With his great knowledge of parks and his numerous skills, Dennis also worked as Interim District Maintenance Chief when needed by the Ocotillo Wells District.

Although he has moved up the State Park ladder, Dennis has remained remarkably humble and serves as a career mentor to so many co-workers. Many of them come to him with industry and career questions. He always shares his knowledge and encourages them to take on new responsibilities, to learn and promote.

Dennis has been a devoted employee to Parks. His thirty-eight years of hard work has been an asset to the Department. Although he will be greatly missed by many, all are happy he will soon be doing the things he most enjoys. With his new free time Dennis plans to fish and spend time with his new granddaughter Moira. If you would like to stay in contact him, you might find him on a boat dock somewhere near you.



Thank you, Dennis Raymond, for ALL your hard work and devotion! We sincerely wish you tons of happiness with your new adventure.



Native Vegetation

By Craig Fischer, Environmental Science Intern

In the heat of the summer some animals thrive. Lizards and snakes, those cold-blooded reptiles, scamper about drawing energy from the warmth of the sun. Even herpetofauna (the scientific term for reptiles and amphibians) have limits though. When the ground becomes too warm for even these critters, they take shelter beneath trees, shrubs, or beneath the earth's surface. But what about the trees and shrubs? How are they protected from an unrelenting desert sun? One word—adaptation. The plants in Ocotillo Wells have adapted to become desert survival experts, and they've been surviving here for thousands of years. Many of the plants here at OW are drought resistant, meaning they can tolerate periods with very little precipitation. In times of drought or heat many of these plants will “hibernate” or go dormant by dropping leaves, just as trees do before winter. One of the best examples of this is the eponymous ocotillo! After periods of rain, the ocotillo will look like a cluster of giant green pipe cleaners, but when drought-stricken the ocotillo drops its leaves revealing the plant's thorny nature. Dropping leaves allows the plant to use energy for more important life-sustaining functions.

Ocotillo Wells is home to a wide array of these specialized desert plants. The pervasive and ever-popular creosote is one of the planet's oldest-growing plants. In the Mojave Desert there is a creosote circle that scientists have aged at over 11,000 years! The smell of wet creosote is as enticing as it is distinctive. Each region of the park has different shrubs that describe the environment depending on soil type and rainfall, among other factors. Creosote is consistent through much of the

park, but in places along Pole Line Road, north of Gas Domes Trail, burro bush tends to dominate. Dune ecosystems are primarily populated with honey mesquite, and the dunes are held together by mesquite's massive root-system. Each of these main vegetation stands is punctuated with a wide variety of native annual (lives its whole life cycle in a year) and perennial (returns every year until it dies) shrubs, wildflowers, trees, and cacti. But how do these plants reproduce, and assure their survival?



Pollinators moving through the desert help pollinate flowering plants allowing seed development. Once seeds drop to the ground, certain conditions of moisture, temperature, nutrient, and scarring must be met for the seed to germinate, or sprout. After heavy rains, you'll see large swaths of land covered in seedlings (young plants). Very few of these young plants will be able to survive the harsh conditions of the desert, and most will have died by the next rains. Survival of young plants is crucial to the health of the desert biome, but

(Continued on next page...)

Native Vegetation *continued...*

becomes a major challenge in a drought like the one California currently faces. OW scientists have found a way to help these plants despite the drought.

A native plant nursery allows biologists to propagate native plants in controlled conditions. Seeds are collected from individuals throughout OW to maintain genetic integrity. With available materials, seeds are prepared by imitating the effects of a seed rolling through the desert—seeds are generally ready to sprout once a protective coating around the seed has been stripped away by the acids inside the stomach of an animal, or by the desert sands as the seed travels across sand by wind, water, or even off-roaders! Once the seeds are prepared, they're planted in desert soil prepared by the biologists, and watered according to the goldilocks principle—not too much, not too little; each species requires a different amount of water. A growing plant will be transplanted into larger pots as its size increases until it is healthy enough to survive on its own in the desert. Plants in OW with small cages around them are transplants newly trying their hand at desert survival!



Desert survival is tough for even the most specialized organisms, so please ride responsibly and help this desert grow a little greener!

Omission...

Apologies to the Trails Department!

In the last issue of the Blowsand Reader, the Trails Department's holiday door was omitted in the "Ocotillo Wells SVRA Holidays" article.

Here is their entry for the holiday contest held back in December. Another excellent entry!



Bug-a-Palooza!

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

Things really heated up for this year's Bug-a-Palooza! With temperatures hovering around 100 degrees, it was great weather for "buggin," and the visitors who braved the heat were treated to some spectacular sights!



On Friday night visitors experienced a 4x4 trail ride to Barrel Springs, a mesquite dune reserve within the interior of Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Many thousands of

insects, and dozens of species were attracted to the mercury vapor lamp, and the visitors on the Scorpion Safari walks among the dunes counted dozens of the glowing arachnids. On Saturday we were happy to have Dr. Michael Wall, head of Entomology at the San Diego Natural History Museum, join us to lead a few walks during the day, and also lend his vast knowledge to the night's activities. Due to some breezy weather, we did not have the huge numbers seen on Friday night, but we were not disappointed! Many scorpions were seen, and while the "bug magnet" didn't attract as many bugs, the ones that showed up were spectacular. The showing with the most "ooohs and ahhs" was the arrival of OW's first recorded Mexican tiger



Scorpion (top) and Madagascar Hissing Cockroach (bottom)

moth, one of the showiest species of moth that we have in the desert. Over the weekend more than 300 visitors were introduced to the world of the small, strange, and curious creatures that we call "bugs," and hopefully, most went home with a better understanding of the important role these creatures play in our ecosystems!



Mexican Tiger Moth



Junior Rangers also got into "buggin"

Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Candidacy

By Craig Fischer, Environmental Science Intern

Have you seen this lizard?

The flat-tailed horned lizard reigns supreme as the hide-and-go-seek champion of Ocotillo Wells, but recently this critter has been chosen for closer scrutiny. The flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*) has recently been elected to candidacy for endangered status in the state of California by the California Fish and Game Commission.



What exactly does this mean?

The Center for Biological Diversity submitted a petition for the FTHL to be listed as endangered, which was considered by the commission, and included input from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. On February 12th the petition was accepted, and the FTHL was elected to candidacy. Over the next year, experts, land managers, and scientists will peruse and analyze available data to determine whether or not endangered-status protection is warranted to maintain populations of this inimitable desert creature. During this one-year-review period, the lizard is to be treated as an endangered species, and is protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA).

What should I do if I see one?

Every interaction is crucial when dealing with an endangered species, so it's important to be aware when you've encountered one. It is unlawful to touch, collect, or harass an endangered species. Harassment includes prodding, chasing, or in any way disturbing the lizard. Stumbling across a flat-tailed horned lizard is always exciting, but please, once you've enjoyed it briefly from a distance, step away, and give it space. The FTHL is a sensitive organism, and under California's record-setting drought, it needs all the help it can get!

OW Maintenance News

By Karen Pena, Office Technician

Maintenance work many times goes unnoticed until a pipe breaks, a toilet doesn't flush or in Ocotillo Wells, the air conditioner stops working. The work is never-ending. Facilities need to continuously be maintained, fixed and upgraded. Park Maintenance Supervisor Dennis Raymond and his four maintenance staff do their best to keep up eight district buildings, 13 employee residences, over 50 public restrooms, three shower buildings and over 120 shade ramadas. Dennis is as well versed in the maintenance field as his

employees. Both he and his staff have past experience as business professionals performing general construction, masonry, iron works, landscaping, plumbing, electrical and flooring.



Tanya Tynan and Corey Ingersoll cleaning the 300 Building

The Maintenance Department also consists of a housekeeping crew of seven. Their duties are in no way pleasurable, but definitely essential. It takes lots of hard work to provide visitors clean facilities for their use. In the course of a day, housekeeping cleans and stocks 35 CXTs, 14 flushing toilets, three shower buildings and an event



center. With high visitor count and harsh weather conditions, this is no easy task. On windy days trash blows around the park. In fact, during the season, the housekeeping staff uses 5000 trash bags. The team is also responsible for removing large pieces of

debris left in the park, cleaning unsightly graffiti from buildings, cleaning out fire rings and picking up nails and sharp objects that can damage the tires of staff, emergency and park visitor vehicles and OHVs.



Allison Boyle and Sarah Wessitsh use the water truck to clean the Hidden Valley CXT



Thank you to the Maintenance and Housekeeping teams for keeping our park clean, safe and operational—you are all doing an amazing job!

Geology Daze!

By Amanda Allen, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

Ocotillo Wells’ 2015 Geology Daze event proved to be a rock-smashing success! Throughout the weekend, visitors were invited to experience OW’s unique geology through a number of hands-on interpretive activities. The special Rock-otillo 4x4 geology tour invited visitors to explore how the park’s modern features reveal an exciting history spanning across eons of geologic change. Park astronomers brought the cosmos down to OW with an astrogeology exhibit comparing



Arroya Salado geology



Park Interpreter Lesley checks out the tilted sedimentary layers

the geology of OW to the often-times strikingly similar features found on other worlds. Even Junior Rangers got in on the action by becoming paleontologists for the weekend, uncovering a veritable zoo of fossil replicas which helped to reveal the exciting past-lives of Ocotillo Wells.

Geology Daze wouldn’t have been complete without the generous

assistance of volunteers from the Borrego Rock and Gem Club, who “made the day” for several visitors (and rangers alike!) with their geode-opening display. Junior Rangers were even allowed to take home some of the specially purchased sparkling beauties to add to their own budding collections. Perhaps most impressive of all,



Visitors explore the geology of Ocotillo Wells on Lesley’s 4x4 tour

something of an unspoken agreement arose between staff and visitors alike, managing—against all odds—to prevent the overuse of every conceivable rock-related pun, much to the surprise and satisfaction of all. In light of this relatively pun-free weekend, it is with a heavy heart and only a slightly crooked grin that we put forth the following summary:

Geology Daze totally rocked.



Pumpkins at the patch

A Gem of Knowledge!

By Jim Cassidy, Archaeological Project Leader

One of the great rewards in working for California State Parks is the opportunity to interact with our visitors and to share our specialized knowledge where appropriate. One such opportunity occurred recently when a young lady came to our Discovery Center to ask about a shiny black stone she had found in the park (Figure 1). She thought it was pretty and wanted to learn more about it and keep it with her collection.

Immediately upon seeing the stone, we knew it was special because it was obsidian, a type of volcanic glass. This material does not occur naturally anywhere in the park. It was clearly a Native American artifact and must have come from a prehistoric archaeological site that may be hundreds, or even thousands, of years old. Our Park Archaeologist explained that the closest source of this material was Obsidian Butte located at the south end of the Salton Sea (Figure 2).

The largest number of prehistoric habitation sites we find in the park occurred when ancient Lake Cahuilla, five times larger than present-day Salton Sea, filled the valley. This infilling of the valley through overflow from the Colorado River took place three times between 1500 and 700 years ago. However, when Lake Cahuilla was full, Obsidian Butte would have been over



Figure 1. Shiny black stone found



Figure 2. Obsidian Butte at the south end of the Salton Sea

200-feet below the surface and inaccessible to the Native Americans who lived along its shoreline. Thus, obsidian finds such as this are extremely rare and could be very helpful in understanding many questions we have about prehistoric life here.

If the obsidian flake was collected by a visitor, it would just be a pretty rock to be enjoyed by one family for a while, but it would likely end up in the trash after people grow older. That is why

(Continued on next page...)

A Gem of Knowledge! *continued...*

there are Federal and State laws that protect archaeological sites. Visitors who come across historic or prehistoric sites should leave all artifacts in place, take photographs, get a GPS (global positioning system) location, or some other location on a map, and notify a park representative. In this way the material remains are left in their natural context and may yield valuable information when examined by professionally-trained archaeologists. Knowing this, the young lady opted to accompany the archaeologist to where she found the obsidian and was able to help identify many more items (Figure 3).

With the help of our visitor, we now have plans to further investigate this important site to answer many questions, such as:

1. Through geo-chemical sourcing of the material, we can identify where it came from.
2. If it came from Obsidian Butte, this can help inform us about the nature of valley occupation and ecology during a period of time when Lake Cahuilla was not present. This is a subject about which very little is known at present.
3. If it came from another source located outside of the valley, it will help us understand the nature and complexity of long-distance trade.
4. After an obsidian rock is broken, the flake absorbs fluid at a constant rate and can be used to determine the age of the site.
5. The technological characteristics of the obsidian flakes found in the site can help to identify the types of tool making and related human behaviors that took place.

The site will probably yield other types of materials that can also be used to answer many more scientifically-interesting questions. Once the research potential of this site has been retrieved, the results will be made available in publications and to the Native American descendants who make up part of our great nation, in addition to all levels of education, the general public, and our future park visitors. All of this is made possible by thoughtful park visitors who express an interest in our resources and are motivated to help.

Thank you, all!



Figure 3. Obsidian location

Heber Dunes Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

What will you discover at Heber Dunes today?

Maintenance on the move...

With Heber's maintenance crew now fully staffed, the park has begun the new year with a mid-winter house cleaning. Park Maintenance Aides Luis Martin and Cesar Casillas have been busy assisting Maintenance Worker I, Martin Rubalcava, with the annual maintenance



The twin palms get a hair cut!

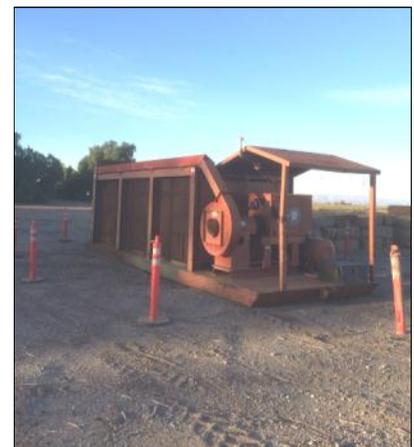


shop inventory and equipment condition assessment. Then it is out to the field with loppers and chain saws in hand to continue with the tamarisk and brush trimming and removal. As the photograph above shows, their hard work is paying off. The curtain burner is almost completely surrounded with trimmings and is now barely visible.

Cesar trimmed the twin date palms while Luis bucked 100+ new rice straw hay bales into place adjacent to the youth training area. As busy as they were, all three then took the time to provide valuable input into the redesign of the youth training/practice area. For Luis and Cesar it was back out to the field to trim the park's perimeter road, and into the office for Martin who had a very large pile of paperwork to wade through.

Preparing for the fair...

February brought a change of pace for the maintenance crew as the Mid Winter Fair preparations literally put the curtain burner project on the back burner. Cesar got crafty and built a display shelf



The curtain burner aids in controlling pollution during burning of wood waste

(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

for the After School Junior Rangers’ weather vane exhibit. In the meantime, Luis and Martin hitched up the trailer and transported the interp-a-quad wagon to the fairgrounds. Both spent the better part of an afternoon cutting out letters and assisting Jaime Mendez, Interpreter I, in preparing Heber Dunes’ booth for the fair’s opening day. This year’s fair was an “AG venture” for Heber’s entire staff!

Shhh—Junior Rangers at work!

The staff at Heber Dunes wasn’t the only one preparing for the fair. All five of the After School Junior Ranger Clubs—75 Junior Rangers in all—were busy tracing, coloring, cutting, and assembling weathervane models to display at the fair booth. In true Junior Ranger tradition, whenever someone needed assistance or was absent, other Junior Rangers pitched in to help complete that Junior Ranger’s project. This way everyone had the opportunity to have their craft displayed at the fair.



The shelf that Cesar built



After School Junior Rangers working on their fair projects.

The weathervane model activity was part of the Junior Rangers’ weather study. The best lesson of all for the Junior Rangers, though, was experiencing the positive effect of teamwork—a job well done!



(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

Meanwhile - behind the scenes...

For Jaime Mendez, Interpreter I, fair preparation began long before opening day on February 27. Fair preparation and planning activities actually began in October 2014 with the filing of the official fair entry form. Then it's hurry up and wait for the fair contract to arrive, get approved, signed, and the check mailed for the booth fee.

The exhibit work begins in earnest in January. Every fair has a theme. The Mid Winter Fair takes its themes to heart, and fair participants are encouraged to be creative in incorporating the fair theme into their booth. This year's fair theme was *Adventure*—a perfect fit for a park literally surrounded by and created from agricultural land. “*Too salty to farm - Sand too deep to bulldoze - Great place to ride!*” was the booth theme. Heber's interp-a-quad wagon featured an interactive relief map of Heber Dunes SVRA and a working anemometer hood ornament. The weathervane display and a Tread Lightly! Tic-Tac-Toe game completed the booth's exhibits.

Then they let the people in...

And in they came—all 98,000 of them. Of those visitors, 2,916 stopped by the Heber booth—a record 1,037 on closing day! Even an unprecedented rain closure couldn't keep visitors away.



Lydia, Lawrence, and Lauren pose for the camera

The wagon and map were a big hit! A shout out to volunteer Jim Rue who helped on weekends at the fair, and gave three ATV Safety classes at the park as well.



(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

Back at the park and at school..

Even though fair exhibit preparation and all things booth—before, during, and after the fair—loom large during fair season, other interpretive programs and responsibilities don't just stop. Prioritization becomes the key word during this very busy time. Some deadlines are shifted to accommodate the ten days spent staffing the booth, while other programs require a more creative approach. The After School Junior Ranger program is a good example.

Every activity—from making the craft for the fair exhibit to creating a “while Mother Nature is at the fair” project—is all planned in

advance and followed up after the fair. Instructions and supplies are delivered to the schools before the fair, and everyone is invited to visit Mother Nature at the fair. This year's project was brainstorming the contents and then decorating a Habitat Exchange Box.



McKinley's Habitat Exchange box stops for a visit



Until the fair comes 'round again...
happy and safe trails to you and yours
From all of us at Heber Dunes

Trails News

By Greg Bingham, Senior Maintenance Aide, Trails

Telecommunications Project at Toner...



Ryan Walasek, Greg Bingham, Rob Speicher and Anthony Beepath set in the first section of conduit.



Anthony Beepath uses the GPS unit to map the location of the new communication line.



Adam Asche starts the beautification process by backfilling the trench.



The trails crew is installing the new entrance fences and gates at five locations on Hwy 86.



Pete Coy and Ryan Walasek clean out the holes to install peeler core logs for the fence.

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*

Sun-baked interpretive panels...



After years of interpreting in the sun at Shell Reef, even our interpretive panels get burned.



Anthony Beepath and Maribel Bonillas hard at work giving the interpretive panels at Shell Reef a face-lift.



Let's welcome the new addition to the Trails team's fleet (left). When traveling long distances and needing to get supplies to areas of the park in a hurry, we can now make this happen. Our off-road dump trailer has put on the miles in the last few weeks.



Carlos Gales and Rob Speicher construct barricades near Arroyo Salado Wash.



Pete Coy, Greg Bingham, Ryan Walasek, and Victor Garcia prepare the barricade posts for assembly. These and a few others are located in Arroyo Salado Wash, and were installed under the direction of the Resources Team to help protect sensitive areas.

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*

Cleaning out the obstacles...



With the help of an inmate crew, we were able to get all the sand cleaned out from the obstacles and get the 4x4 training area prepped and ready for a weekend of fun with TDS.



Here at the bottom of Dusty you can see that there was a lot going on for the TDS weekend. Nothing but smiles all weekend.



At Crossover Camp (left) our fearless leader Shay McGhee teaches the Trails team the basic steps on building trails using a clinometer. When used correctly and following trail construction guidelines, our state park trails system will last a lifetime.

In the background Pete Coy and Ryan Walasek practice creating a trail incline using the clinometer.



Second Annual Kids Adventure Connection

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

Ocotillo Wells SVRA held their Second Annual Kids Adventure Connection on January 17-18, 2015. The event which is based on the California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights was generously sponsored by Tierra Del Sol Jeep Club. The event was enjoyed by over 50 adults, children and volunteers.



The Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Department took the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights and rewrote them to be more OHV friendly. The event kicked off with the kids learning about Tread Lightly! principals and trail safety while having fun with the remote control Rubicon Jeeps. An off-road family trail ride was taken to one of the park



destinations to discover California's past. The Imperial Gem and Mineral Society was on hand to talk to the campers about the history of prospecting and let the kids pan for gold. Once back at camp, the games began! An interpretive version of the Olympics topped the afternoon fun.

The kids jumped like jackrabbits, did push-ups like an Iguana, howled like coyotes, and identified smells like a kit fox in hopes of winning the coveted gold coyote paw medal. A hot dog dinner was provided before the group visited the night sky program. The evening was topped off by a blazing campfire, songs, stories, s'mores and camping under the stars.



The kids jumped like jackrabbits, did push-ups like an Iguana, howled like coyotes, and identified smells like a kit fox in hopes of winning the coveted gold coyote paw medal. A hot dog dinner was provided before the group visited the night sky program. The evening was topped off by a blazing campfire, songs, stories, s'mores and camping under the stars.

On Sunday after a hearty breakfast was provided, families spent the morning exploring the desert around them, playing tug-o-war, participating in a pick-up football game and doing arts and crafts activities. Then the campers assembled for the big awards ceremony where they were



presented their Safe Rider T-shirts, coyote paw Olympic medals and received their very own Ocotillo Wells map bandana.

Everyone who participated commented that they could not wait for the next year's adventure!

Meet Izak Ginnis, Junior Ranger Extraordinaire

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

Izak Ginnis has accomplished something no one before him has ever done and possibly something no one will ever do again. Ten-year-old Izak Ginnis has attended 108 Junior Ranger programs over the past five seasons while coming with his family to Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

I sat down with Izak recently to find out what it was that drove him to accomplish such a feat. He said it all began when he started coming to the Caffeine Kick Start program on Saturday mornings and met State Park Interpreter III Steve Quartieri. The two would mingle over a cup of hot cocoa and talk about a common interest—their feathered friends who live in the park. Steve nurtured Izak's love for nature, encouraging him to come to a Junior Ranger program and learn more. And as they say...the rest is now history.



Izak Ginnis with District Superintendent Garratt Aitchison, left, and State Park Interpreter III Steve Quartieri



Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I and Junior Ranger guru, with Izak Ginnis and Steve Quartieri

Izak also shared that the Junior Rangers program, along with the park's special events such as the Kids Adventure Connection, Roughneck Rendezvous, Bug-a-Palooza, Geology Daze and the Astronomy Festival are his favorite things to do. But he also admitted that riding with his dad in his buggy and playing Minecraft on his computer were pretty fun too.

I think the thing that made the biggest impression with me during our conversation was when Izak shared that the best part of coming to Ocotillo Wells and participating in all the great activities was meeting new friends and spending time with his family. I found that statement to be very astute coming from a 10-year-old. Sounds to me like our future is in pretty good hands with kids like Izak!

Miss Sharon...as Written by Izak

My friend Miss Sharon and I first meet when my parents took me to a Junior Ranger class. She is my instructor. I was about the age of 5. She made me feel conformable in the class even though I was very young. She started class by having us kids say our name and something about ourselves. The classes are amazing and very educational. I've learned valuable things about our desert in these classes.

Miss Sharon is a short amazing woman. I'm sure by next year I may be at least a ½ inch taller than her and I will only be eleven. She wears her light brown hair short. She has brown eyes covered with thick black framed glasses that make her look knowledgeable. She is always wearing khaki uniform shirt with California state patches on both sleeves. Green pants with enormous pockets and black belt. I'm not sure on the shoes, so I will have to take a closer look next time.

She loves kids and treats them with respect. She encourages kids to try their best and helps them when they need help. But yet Miss Sharon can put a firm hand down when needed. She teaches informative classes, and yet still makes them exciting and interesting. She interacts with us kids instead of just talking all the time. Miss Sharon also made everyone feel like part of the group, no one is left out.

Her favorite animal is the badger. Favorite bird is an owl, and her favorite color blue. Miss Sharon favorite planet is earth. My personal favorite planet is Jupiter.

In our Jr. Ranger classes, Miss Sharon has taught us numerous different things like: Astronomy, geology, birds, bugs, colorful people that have passed through the desert, reptiles, flash floods, history of the desert, mammals, plants, tread lightly, the 3R's and I'm sure I have left out a few.

During astronomy weekend, we talked about the planets. She had us use a marshmallow, hard candy, and chocolate to make a model earth. Not only did we make it we got to eat it too. During geological weekend she showed us how mountains may have been formed. She explains Tectonic plates are always moving. Sometimes they even have collision. Miss Sharon demonstrates this by using graham crackers and frosting. Crackers are used for tectonic plates, and frosting is the magma. She showed how tectonic plates and magma collide together making mountains or volcanoes. Another class we learn about the scorpion. Did you know that they glow in the dark with a black light? Miss Sharon shows how mudslides are created and the damage that they can cause. We take a board and slant it like the side of the mountain. At which point, we start to build a mountain with sand, big rock, plastic tree and even fake little people. When we finished with building the mountain we go and get some water. Miss Sharon takes the large pitcher of water and pours it on the top of that fake mountain. Therefore, creating a land slide down our fake mountain, everything rushed down to the base of this mountain like one big mess. Making our experiment AWESOME!

There is so many things that I have learned with Miss Sharon's help. This is why I feel that Miss Sharon is an AWESOME person and has made an impact to my life! Thank You Miss Sharon and all the interrupters in Ocotillo Wells for the knowledge they have bestowed on me. This is how Miss Sharon ends every class. So I figured that this is a fitting way to end my paper.

Junior Ranger Pledge

I Izak promise to:

*Treat the earth and all living things
with care and respect.*

*Be thoughtful about what I do
and how it affects others*

*Learn about the importance of nature
and our heritage*

OW Astronomy Festival

By Kerry Soltis, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

Another great season has come to a close here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, and with it another stellar Hot Stars and Heavenly Bodies astronomy festival has come to pass. And despite the wind that kicked up halfway through, our visitors were only figuratively blown away as they marveled at the night sky. The festivities kicked off on the evening of Friday, March 20th, with a presentation by Steve Matousek of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Matousek enthralled visitors with a history of robotic missions to Mars and stirred their imaginations with a glimpse of future unmanned explorations of the Red Planet.



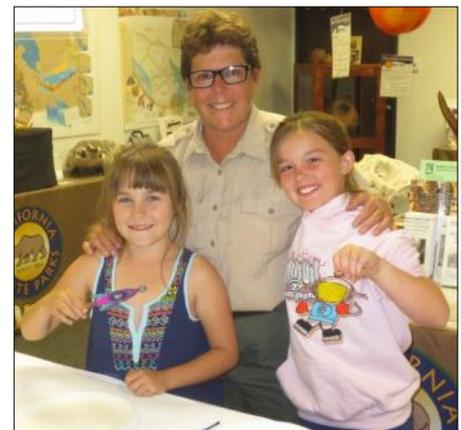
A filament on the surface of the sun, as shown by astronomer Woody Schlom.

sky halfway through Allen's presentation. It wasn't a UFO, as some visitors were undoubtedly thinking, but an iridium flare—a satellite that flashes briefly with reflected sunlight before fading again. Young space enthusiasts showed off their creativity by painting planet-shaped sun catchers in the Discovery Center amongst hanging displays of the solar system. And of course, free hot chocolate was provided in abundance.

Saturday's events began with special space-themed Junior Ranger activities in the morning, followed by an afternoon of solar viewing. Visitors first used the park's own solar telescope to see the sun as an entire disc. Then they moved on to Frazier's sun-filtered binoculars for a closer view of different areas of our star. Finally, they zoomed into individual flares, filaments, and sunspots with Schlom's imaging screen. Solar eclipse glasses were also provided.

Then as darkness descended over the desert, telescopes began popping up like mushrooms, giving people a chance to view planets, nebulas, galaxies, and much more. Ocotillo Wells' park astronomers Amanda Allen and Kerry Soltis were joined by guest astronomers John Frazier and Woody Schlom. The wide field of view of Frazier's massive Vixen binoculars demonstrated why two eyepieces can sometimes be better than one. Meanwhile, Schlom used camera and imaging equipment to project detailed images of space objects from his telescope onto a large screen.

In addition to telescope viewing, visitors also participated in an interactive discussion on the search for alien life in our galaxy, led by Allen. In an exciting cosmic coincidence, a bright light appeared in the



Young space enthusiasts show off their freshly-painted sun catchers

(Continued on next page...)

OW Astronomy Festival *continued...*

Young visitors also got to blast off on Saturday afternoon with a special session of model rockets. Under the supervision of the park’s “rocket technicians” (and helpful parents), kids assembled and decorated their very own model rockets. Once the rockets passed inspection, they



were each given a fuel packet and sent to the launch pad. After a countdown, each rocket was launched to the heavens, and thanks to a parachute, recovered by their respective rocketeers and taken home.



The wind that cropped up on Saturday evening wasn’t enough to frighten anyone away, and the telescopes returned for more night sky viewing. Park astronomer Soltis led a discussion on how to

stop a killer asteroid from destroying the Earth, and another iridium flare graced the darkened sky. Inside the Discovery Center visitors made more space-themed crafts while watching a selection of astronomical videos. And of course, there was more hot chocolate.



A big thank you goes to everyone who contributed to the success of this year’s Hot Stars and Heavenly Bodies festival. As our park astronomers would say, things at Ocotillo Wells are looking up!

OW Hosts Thousands During TDS Safari

By Andy Ahlberg, Sector Superintendent, and Eric Christiansen, State Park Peace Officer

Ocotillo Wells SVRA was host recently to the 53rd Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari event. What started out as a small group of friends getting together to drive their Jeeps in the challenges of the desert has turned into one of the largest OHV events in the United States. OHV recreationalists from all over the west coast attend the event, some bringing spectacular examples of 'not so stock' off-highway vehicles.

The preparation for this event starts months ahead of time and includes the permit review process, scheduling of additional staff, development of the Incident Action Plan, interpretive displays and staffing, temporary measures to protect resources, and coordination with outside agencies. Every aspect of the parks' operation is intricately involved in this event including interpretation, maintenance, public safety and resource staff.

About a week prior to the event Ocotillo Wells was hit with heavy rainfall. It was unknown whether the storm would continue until the event weekend or what damages would occur. In the end the park was affected by lots of mud and some erosion but nothing that impacted the plans for the event.

This year's event may have been the largest, with over 20,000 in attendance each day. Although more than 1,000 vehicles participated in the "Safari ride," a majority of the crowd showed up to enjoy the 60 vendors and fireworks show.

As with any large event, public safety is a primary concern. This year, Ocotillo Wells SVRA received assistance from staff at Lake Perris State Recreation Area, Hungry Valley and Oceano Dunes SVRAs and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. With this additional assistance, the Law Enforcement and Emergency Services team was able to maintain a noticeable presence and keep the event safe and peaceful. In addition to assistance from other Districts within the Department, the Imperial County Sheriff's Department also had an increased presence to help deal with the large crowds that impacted the small town of Salton City.



Green Stickered Tracked Vehicle

The Peace Officers and Lifeguards were split up into different teams and assigned patrol responsibilities. Thanks to Hungry Valley and Oceano Dunes, personnel were able to patrol not only by

(Continued on next page...)

OW Hosts Thousands During TDS Safari *continued...*

4x4 patrol vehicle, but by motorcycle and ROV. The specialty vehicles allowed for staff to patrol and respond to remote areas as well as patrol the event course in an efficient manner.

Several visitors expressed their appreciation for the professionalism of our State Parks team. Over the weekend there were about ten arrests, primarily for Driving Under the Influence. Additionally, ten medical aids, one undocumented immigrant that was handed over to Border Patrol, and one Search and Rescue (SAR) kept our officers busy.

The SAR took place towards the end of the event and involved an elderly couple that was several hours overdue, and both had medical issues. The Peace Officers and Desert Lifeguards began a hasty search with the assistance of a CHP helicopter. After several more hours, the couple was located and assisted to safety. The couple had become helplessly stuck and had no way of contacting anyone for assistance, but they did the right thing and remained with their vehicle and waited for help.



Air Ambulance on the ground waiting for a patient

Meet Cody River McCue...

Sara and Josh welcomed their son Cody River McCue on April 1st at 6:14 pm. He weighed in at 6 pounds 13 ounces and is 20 inches long! All are healthy and doing well.

Congratulations, Sara and Josh!



Roughneck Rendezvous VI

By Amanda Allen, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

Each winter, Ocotillo Wells SVRA hosts its annual geocache adventure which combines a high-tech treasure hunt with off-highway vehicle recreation. This year's event focused on our park's tagline, *Ride... Explore... Experience... Ocotillo Wells*. It was chosen as a celebration of our long tradition of family based off-highway recreation and our visitors' sense of adventure (exploration).



The festival kicked-off with a Friday Night Sky Meet and Greet, followed by an evening of solar system-themed night-caching. After caching until the wee hours of the morning, participants were up early searching the park in Jeeps, ATVs, side-by-sides and any other imaginable vehicle trying to find as many of the

116 specially-placed caches as they could. There were a variety of cache types for participants to capture in their event logbook. There were caches placed along the park's 4x4 trails, hiking caches that were accessible to anyone who did not have an off-highway vehicle, ADA-accessible path caches, interpretive exhibit caches set up at the iconic destinations in the park, a Discovery Center scavenger hunt, mind-teasing puzzle caches, and even an orienteering course that showed our tech-savvy visitors how to navigate when the batteries in the GPS run out! Overall, it was a great day filled with a lot of fun and excitement, which culminated with the famous Roughneck Rendezvous



Raffle. This year's raffle had over \$4,000 worth of goodies, including concert tickets, golf packages, and even a set of HD lights. In true Roughneck Rendezvous tradition, the festival concluded on Sunday with attendees giving back to the desert that supports geocache recreation—a Cache In Trash Out cleanup event followed by an old-fashioned hot dog barbeque. A special thank you to all of the volunteers, donors, and the park team who made this event memorable for park guests!

Indigo Bush

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

A member of the legume—or pea—family, the indigo bush is a native shrub of southern California, southern Arizona, and northern Mexico. Also known as Schott's dalea, the indigo bush grows in dry washes and on slopes at lower desert altitudes and typically reaches between 6 and 8 feet in height. Its highly-branched, twisted stems are grayish green and spiny-tipped. The one-inch long, narrow leaves sparsely cover the branches, and as with many desert plants, the leaves are covered with fine hairs that help conserve water. Even in extreme drought, the leaves do not drop off the bush. The thick, twisted branches provide shelter and shade for desert wildlife.



In late spring the indigo bush is covered with small, aromatic, deep purple-blue, pea-like flowers that create a splash of color against the light-colored bark. The flowers grow in four-inch clusters along the twigs, and were used by the local Native Americans to make a yellow-brown dye used to color their baskets. The stems of the bush were used for the base, or foundation, material for the basket itself. In addition, the plant was also used medicinally.

The fruit of the indigo bush is a single-seeded pod that is only about 3/8-inch long. Covered with dark red glands, the seed pod is egg-shaped with a pointed end. The fruit remains behind when the flowers fall off in late spring.



Watch for this desert beauty while riding the trails of OW.

Tracey Slotta @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.



Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA

Upcoming Events

Sand Sports Super Show in Costa Mesa in September
Lucas Oil Off-Road Expo in Pomona in October

Watch for other special event weekends and OW interpretive programs beginning again in late October!



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