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Out-of-this-World Astronomy Programs at Ocotillo Wells SVRA!

By Kerry Soltis, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area is known as an off-roading mecca for OHV enthusiasts. But the park's location in the open desert, far from any major cities, also provides a great opportunity for a wide variety of astronomy programs that are quickly gaining popularity with our visitors.

Ocotillo Wells park interpreters offer a weekly astronomy program, featuring afternoon solar viewing and nighttime stargazing. Visitors are able to peer into a solar telescope to see black sunspots and fiery orange flares on our closest star. They are also given a free pair of solar eclipse glasses to keep for future eclipses and solar events. The nighttime portion of the program features a powerful 11-inch telescope that can zoom into the planets, nebulae, and galaxies that fill our night sky. Park interpreters use a combination of telescope viewing, NASA-produced videos, planetarium software, green laser constellation tours, and colorful retellings of classic mythology to improve visitors' understanding and appreciation for the mysteries of the cosmos. Visitors can also enjoy a complimentary cup of hot cocoa while they marvel at the night sky. Giveaways of solar glasses and hot cocoa are becoming financially sustainable through visitor donations at each portion of the astronomy program.



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Out-of-this-World Astronomy Programs *continued...*

Another astronomy program that has become a regular feature of Ocotillo Wells interpretation is the Astrogeology field exhibit. Several geologic features in the park are popular riding destinations, and park interpreters set up exhibits at these locations to engage with visitors. The Astrogeology exhibit allows visitors to learn about the geology of other planets and moons in our solar system and compare them to similar features and processes on Earth, specifically in and around Ocotillo Wells. Hands-on activities allow visitors of all ages to discover what real moon rocks are like (using Earth rock analogs), and just how far away our natural satellite really is. They can even practice driving a working model of the Curiosity rover across a Martian landscape.

Many parks offer guided walks along their hiking trails, but at Ocotillo Wells we offer guided off-roading tours along our riding trails, two of which focus exclusively on astronomy themes. Our newest 4x4 tour turns the entire park into a scale model of the solar system, beginning with a 14-foot Sun at the park's Discovery Center. Visitors then drive through the park, stopping at each planet's

location and gaining a sense of the truly astronomical distances in our solar system. The full moon 4x4 tour is a crowd pleaser for our more adventurous night riders. While the full moon rises over the desert mountains, park interpreters discuss everything from lunar geology and exploration, to nocturnal animal behavior and human folklore.



Once a year Ocotillo Wells holds a very special event, the Hot Stars and Heavenly Bodies astronomy festival. This two-day event features all-day solar viewing and two nights of

stellar stargazing. Guest astronomers are invited to bring huge telescopes up to 30 inches in diameter, and special presenters from such places as Palomar Observatory and the Jet Propulsion

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Out-of-this-World Astronomy Programs *continued...*

Laboratory give talks on cutting-edge astronomy research and ongoing NASA missions. The Discovery Center stays open extra late, and kids are able to participate in astronomy-themed Junior Ranger activities such as games, crafts, and model rockets.

Ocotillo Wells also does a variety of outreach and education with the surrounding community. Throughout the season, park interpreters periodically load up a truck with telescopes and equipment and take the astronomy show on the road to the town of Borrego Springs and nearby elementary schools. Park interpreters also reach out to our visitors with special astronomy posts on the park's Facebook page, collectible trading cards that feature different astronomical objects, and educational packets with sky maps, viewing guides, and current information about outer space events.

So while Ocotillo Wells SVRA will always be first and foremost an off-roading park, our unique location and dedicated interpretive staff have created a fantastic place for viewing and learning about the night sky. The park and its programs are always changing and evolving, but whatever happens, you can be sure that Ocotillo Wells is looking up!

Meet Jennifer...

Hi, for those who don't know me, I'm Jennifer Morales. I work in the District Office, offering support to the Administrative staff. After 3 years of my other half commuting back and forth for his job here at the park, our kids and I joined him from El Cajon a year ago, to finally all be in one place. Leaving the city has made for lots of change in my life, including a complete career change from nursing to administrative work. Being a mom of two kids ages 7 and 13 as well as two doggies tends to keep things busy around my house. We all love playing on our desert toys, traveling to sister parks, as well as road trips to visit family that are spread from here to the east coast. I enjoy going to church, cooking, reading and doing DIY projects (usually from Pinterest!). Since moving here and starting work at the park, the strong feeling of family and friendship is what stands out to me most and I'm looking forward to many more seasons of the same.



Ocotillo Wells SVRA Holidays

By Wanda Freeman, Administrative Officer II

The holiday spirit was in full swing during the Ocotillo Wells 2014 Christmas Party. Staff enjoyed a traditional dinner with all the trimmings, a caroling contest and a stealing optional gift exchange that made for a great time with lots of laughs. The event kicked off the 2nd Annual Holiday Door Competition, where each department decorated a door in holiday theme, using only items from their work stations. The friendly competition evolved into some very thoughtful, multidimensional, creative works. Staff visited each department and cast their votes by making donations to their favorite door. We collected \$210.00. Visitor Services raised the most money (\$61.75) and was awarded a pizza party. The donated proceeds were used to brighten the season of a staff member, anonymously nominated by staff. We were able to purchase gifts for a young child and gift cards for the family.



Auto Shop



Visitor Services



Administration

(Continued on next page...)

Ocotillo Wells SVRA Holidays *continued...*



GIS



Maintenance



Interpretation

Meet Branden...

Hello! My name is Branden Wallace and I am new here at Ocotillo Wells. I grew up in Borrego Springs and lived there almost my entire life. I am currently a student at Grossmont Community College completing my general studies while I narrow down a major. In my free time you can catch me fishing, playing golf, or just spending time with friends and family. I have always enjoyed visiting the park, so working here as a Park Aide in the GIS Department is something that I am very fortunate to be doing.



General Plan Update—Draft Preferred Alternative Input Wanted



www.planocotillowells.com

The next step in the planning process for the Ocotillo Wells General Plan update has arrived. The Draft Preferred Alternative and environmental scoping process began February 9th with the release of a Federal Register Notice of Intention and will soon be followed by a state Notice of Preparation and the release of the Draft Preferred Alternative packet in the State Parks General Plan process. Public scoping workshops are going to be held at the following times and locations and the website will be updated in March with the Draft Preferred Alternative for public participation and comment.

Wednesday, March 18, 2015
3:30pm – 8:30pm
Temecula Conference Center
41000 Main Street
Temecula, CA 92590

Saturday, March 21, 2015
12:00pm – 4:00pm
Ocotillo Wells SVRA Visitor Center
Discovery Center Building
5172 Highway 78
Borrego Springs, CA 92004

Please come in person or participate online – we need your thoughts on this!

Desert Animal School Program Gets Underway

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

The Ocotillo Wells Interpretation Department’s school outreach program got underway in November/December with visits to 3rd grade elementary classes in Indio, Lakeside, Salton City, Warner Springs, San Diego and Thermal. The desert animal program was enjoyed by over 700 students.

Several teachers have expressed that they appreciate how the program enhances other subject matter taught in the classroom such as art, computer sciences and English. One teacher recently wrote, “All of the activities were very educational and interesting for my students. They came back to class wanting to write and learn more about the animals.”



Booklet of Thank You letters from Sea View Elementary School

The Interpretive team continues to look forward to their other upcoming school visits and the opportunity to bring the desert to the students who appreciate all it has to offers!

Hoover school
12-12-14

Dear Rangers,
Thank you for coming to our school. I liked playing the footprint game. Some of the vocabulary was interesting like carnivore and omnivore. I also liked feeling the stuffed animals fur and teeth and playing the animal scat game. It was interesting seeing some of the insects like the tarantula and scorpion. I loved feeling and seeing different animals.

Sincerely,
Mariaelena

Hoover School
12/12/14

Dear Rangers, Thank you for bringing the animals. I learned a lot of tarantula and scorpion that was really cool. My favorite thing was seeing the scorpion because it was glowing. I really enjoyed playing with the scat. I liked putting steps on my paper. I liked seeing the insects a lot. I learned about a lot of tracks. I lerned a lot about animals thank you.

Sincerely,
Nadia Perez

Hoover School
12/12/14

Dear Rangers,
Thank you for letting us see all those things. My favorite thing was seeing the scorpion. The vocabulary I learned was camouflage, adaptation, nocturnal, carnivore, herbivore and omnivore. I liked it when we got to stamp pictures onto the paper. It was awesome when I learned about the animals like the bobcat, badger and coyote. I liked when I learned about the insects. I hope all the animals stay safe.

Sincerely,
Roman

Thank you letters typed by students in their computer classes at Hoover School

Why is That Fence There?!!!

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist



Managers at Ocotillo Wells SVRA place fences and barricades in locations throughout the park for different reasons. Some are placed for operational or safety reasons—such as the fences enclosing the Toner Property, the Truckhaven 4x4 area, and near San Felipe wash. Others are placed to help the park comply with resource management directives, policy, and law. Ocotillo Wells SVRA reports its progress in complying with the OHMVR Act and other guidelines to Division and other interested parties. Compliance with these guidelines is not an option. Did you know that a fence or barricade is often the last resort for achieving compliance for these policies? Fences and barricades are costly to construct and maintain, especially in our challenging desert environment which is subject to wind and water erosional change. Your management uses adaptive management approaches to help sustain the natural and cultural environment at Ocotillo Wells SVRA and protect its resources. As you know, one of the park regulations prevents the damaging of plants. This is noticed on the Visitor Guide, on many interpretive panels throughout the park, and on the park map. We are also responsible for protecting water sources, sustaining wildlife, meeting air quality and soil standards, and protecting cultural sites throughout the park. Our resource team monitors and surveys Ocotillo Wells to determine where we need to make improvements and starts with a vertical mulching and planting program which restores impacted areas—most of you don't notice because it looks so natural. The next step in our adaptive management program is to provide signage to let our visitors know where vehicles are prohibited. Recently we approved and are installing a series of barricades to provide a limited impact on the viewshed but direct vehicle traffic away from sensitive areas. In the short few months that these barricades have been up, there have been many tracks around them, and, in one case, the barricade was pulled out of the ground by a visitor. Please respect the barricades and

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Why is That Fence There?!!! *continued...*

do not enter the areas that they are protecting. Ocotillo Wells SVRA is your park, but it is required to meet sustainable goals and we can't meet them without your help. Please help us keep Ocotillo Wells a special place for OHV Recreation and camping for years to come!



Multiple tracks going around barricade



The barrier was removed by a visitor



Track around barricade and damage to the root structure of the plant

Ocotillo Wells SVRA Weather

By Mike Dippel, State Park Peace Officer K9 Unit

Summer: (May-September)

The weather at Ocotillo Wells SVRA is typical of many desert regions throughout the state. In the summertime, Ocotillo Wells can experience temperatures well over 100 degrees on a normal basis, with temperatures dropping into the 70s and 80s at night. Please make sure to bring enough water to hydrate yourself and plan ahead before visiting the Ocotillo Wells area during the summer months.



Monsoon Season: (July-October)

Unlike many areas in California, Ocotillo Wells can experience a mild monsoon-type season in the late summer and early fall. These monsoons are usually associated with tropical storm remnants coming up from Baja

California and retaining their moisture from the Sea of Cortez and Pacific Ocean. These monsoons can be further enhanced by occasional storms joining from the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. It is not uncommon for dangerous flash floods in the region during this time. It is very important to check weather conditions prior to visiting the region during a monsoon. These storms have been known to blow out roadways and form temporary rivers throughout the park.



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Ocotillo Wells SVRA Weather *continued...*

Winter (November-April)

Winter is our “busy season” here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA! While many regions throughout the state are experiencing rain or snow, Ocotillo Wells can be 72 degrees and sunny with great riding conditions. It is rare that the rainfall actually makes it out to the desert during this time of year, however, it happens from time to time. There is also a myth that many years ago it actually snowed at Ocotillo Wells SVRA!



One thing to remember about the weather during the winter at Ocotillo Wells...it can be beautiful during the day with perfect riding conditions and FREEZING at night (literally freezing). This is due to the lack of moisture in the air which causes heat to dissipate rapidly after sunset. So please make sure to bring warm clothes and firewood for your camp during these months.

I hope this helps better plan your next trip to Ocotillo Wells SVRA! We look forward to seeing you soon.



Photo Gallery—From Snow to Rain to Sunrise!



Photo by Kitty Gravett



Photo by Kitty Gravett

Snow in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park—our sister park!



Photo by Sharon Weil



Photo by Sharon Weil



Photo by Sharon Weil



Photo by Sharon Weil

(Continued on next page...)

From Snow to Rain to Sunrise! *continued...*



Reflections from Wolfe Well Road

Photos by Pam Williams



(Continued on next page...)

From Snow to Rain to Sunrise! *continued...*



Meet Ramiro...

Hello my name is Ramiro Mandujano. I am a new employee with the Trails Department. I have lived in the Salton City area quite a while now. I enjoy fishing with my buddies and riding in the park during my free time. I am excited to start my career with Ocotillo Wells State Park and I cannot wait to learn all the new things the park has to offer.



Kids Adventure Connection Weekend Comments

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

Ocotillo Wells recently held its Second Annual Kids Adventure Connection—watch for a complete article in the next issue of the *Blowsand Reader*!

In the meantime, here are a couple of quotes heard following the KAC weekend.

“Thank you so much for a wonderful weekend. We really enjoyed it, you and your staff did an amazing job. Count us in for next year .”

“Thank you so much for all the effort you [Sharon] and Jennifer put into the Kids Connection Weekend. The kids had a great time.....Next connection event I told the kids that we should pitch tents and be more integrated in the program. Both were more than content with that option....Also let the astronomy girls know that their presentation was great. So again, thank you for your effort...”

Meet Carlos...

My name is Carlos Gales. I was born in Pittsburgh, PA, 23 years ago and raised in Brawley, CA. I am currently living in Salton City. I worked for the California Conservation Corps for a year. Through CCC I learned how to become a leader, hike mountains, build fences, maintained trails and have fun learning new techniques with Corps members. After a year with the CCC, I graduated from the program. Since I wanted to better myself through schooling, I took classes at Riverside County Office of Education to become a Medical Assistant. I learned how to work with patients, check vitals, and give an EKG test. When I completed the Medical Assistant training, I enrolled and completed the Firefighter I program and subsequently, the Emergency Medical Technician program. Presently, I am an employee for the State Parks in Ocotillo Wells working with Trails. I find my new job, enjoyable and challenging.



2015 Off-Highway Adventure Series

By Amanda Allen, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

What do bobcat latrines, X-Files set locations, casts of mammoth femurs, and glow-in-the-dark scorpions have in common? They can all be spotted during Off-Highway Adventure Tours at Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area, of course! The 2015 Off-Highway Adventure Tour Series is officially underway just a few miles down the road from the town of Borrego Springs. While the themes and locations vary, each tour promises to be a uniquely memorable journey.

Whether your interests lie in local history, the surprising complexities of desert geology, night-time off-roading under the full moon, or in the ancient (and surprisingly water-filled) history of the Borrego Valley, we've got a tour to fit the bill. Along the way you'll have an opportunity to test your off-roading skills in some of the more seldom-visited locations the park has to offer.

Off-Highway Adventure Tour participants frequently become regular guests at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. When asked about the experience, one happy visitor responded, "I had a GREAT day of



adventure. I learned so much about the composition of the desert that I had never known. Great fun and excellent info!" Tour leaders strive to make every experience rewarding for a wide variety of folks, regardless of skill level. Whether you're a curious beginner, a seasoned off-roader, or a somewhere in-between, the Off-Highway Adventure series at Ocotillo Wells is sure to provide a unique way of experiencing the desert to the fullest.

such, participants are required to have a high-clearance 4-wheel drive vehicle, snacks and water, a willingness to carpool, and—perhaps most importantly—a sense of adventure! Tours meet at a variety of locations throughout Ocotillo Wells SVRA, most frequently right at the Discovery Center off Highway 78.

Tours take place on Mondays and Fridays nearly every week of the winter season. For more detailed information regarding specific tours, give us a call at (760)767-5393. Brochures highlighting each tour can be obtained at Ocotillo Wells SVRA Discovery Center any day of the week, from 8am to 4:30pm. We hope you'll join us this winter for what promises to be a fun, excitement-filled adventure series!

Meet Rob...

My name is Robert Speicher. I was born in San Diego and lived here most of my life. After graduating from Mt. Carmel High School in 1988 and Arizona Automotive Institute in 1990, I enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 1991 and separated in 1999 with an honorable discharge. I worked as a certified arborist, real-estate developer and in construction, building many multimillion dollar mansions. My hobbies are gold prospecting and dirt bike riding. I am very happy serving the public by working with State Parks. [Rob is working for the Trails Department and will be assisting the Interpretation Department one day a week.]



Meet Danny...

Danny McCamish, is a new transplant to OW, and can best be described in this famous quote from Abraham Lincoln, “Danny? He’s pretty awesome, I would say more about him but I’m the President and I have more important matters to deal with...” (1861). Needless to say, if that is what ol’ Honest Abe had to say about him, what else is there to say? Strangely enough, the connection to Honest Abe grows from there. Danny is from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, in Hardin County, where, historically, before the state split the county in two, a young Abraham Lincoln grew up and learned to chop wood. Danny also learned to split wood, less than fifteen miles from where the sixteenth president grew up. From there, the connection grows slim. Danny joined the Resources team this past December fresh out of the Utah Conservation Corps (UCC), where he served as a backcountry restoration crew leader.

While in Utah, Danny was able to work on multiple conservation and restoration projects including: invasive tree removal (Tamarisk and Russian Olive), trail building (hiking and off-road), and wildfire suppression. Corps life gave Danny the opportunity to explore the west working in multiple national parks, including: Dinosaur and Cedar Breaks National Monuments, and Arches and Zion National Parks. Before joining the UCC, Danny also worked in the Pacific Islands for US Fish and Wildlife on Johnston Atoll, and the US Geologic Survey at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. On Johnston and Hawaii island, Danny worked on ecologic restoration and survey, specifically focusing on the invasive species Yellow Crazy Ant, and the Western American Yellow Jacket Wasp. Before moving to the islands, Danny graduated from the University of Kentucky in 2012 with a B.S. in Natural Resource Conservation and Management. This is now the third desert ecosystem Danny has worked in, and although a far cry from the rolling bluegrass of Kentucky, he looks forward to working hard and making OW his new home.



Desert Archaeologist Goes Underwater

By Tricia Dodds, Associate State Archaeologist

When Associate State Archaeologist Tricia Dodds is not working to protect the cultural resources at Ocotillo Wells, she is often taking a break from the desert to make use of her archaeological skills underwater. Recently, she participated in the State Parks Dive Team Recertification and Skills Training course at Crystal Cove State Park. During the week-long training, Tricia and 15 other State Park scuba divers practiced skills and accomplished several tasks to assist State Parks in underwater ecology, marine ecosystems/environmental diving, and underwater archaeology. Tricia assisted in both classroom instruction and field project activities for the underwater archaeological portion.



Tricia Dodds examines the historic anchor

During the training, the divers learned general information about the methodology used by underwater archaeologists, the preservation of submerged cultural sites, and specific information about the submerged cultural resources of California State Parks. For the fieldwork portion, divers carried out condition surveys of an historic anchor at Muddy Creek and the Navy F4U Corsair plane crash site at Reef Point. The divers conducted site maintenance, took measurements, recorded the sites with pictures and video, and made general observations to assist State Parks archaeologists in updating and assessing these sites to determine a management plan.

The F4U Corsair met its watery grave at Crystal Cove in 1949. Navy reserve pilot William Anderson was assigned to Los Alamitos Naval Air station to serve training duty. On July 5, he left for San Diego in the Corsair on a routine training flight. On the return trip to the naval air station, his engine failed, and Anderson readied the plane for a water landing about a half mile off Crystal Cove. The plane began to sink after it hit the water, but Anderson was able to escape the Corsair and was quickly rescued and taken to shore. The plane was rediscovered in 1960, and Navy divers investigated the discovery and confirmed that the plane was a Corsair. The Navy's diving unit salvaged the engine with a cable and salvage tug, and positively identified the plane using the plates attached to the salvaged engine.

(Continued on next page...)

Desert Archaeologist Goes Underwater *continued...*

In 2005, California State Parks partnered with the PAST (Partnering Anthropology with Science and Technology) Foundation and Indiana University to conduct a research mission to study and map the Corsair site. The underwater archaeologists observed that the wings were still largely intact, and the study identified the instrument panel outlets, rudder controls, and cockpit wiring of the Corsair. Unfortunately, the plane rests in popular fishing grounds and is frequently hooked by anchors, causing further damage to the site. During the most recent visit to the site by the Dive Team, observation of the wreck indicates that the plane is rapidly deteriorating from underwater currents that continually move remnants of the wreckage across the ocean floor.

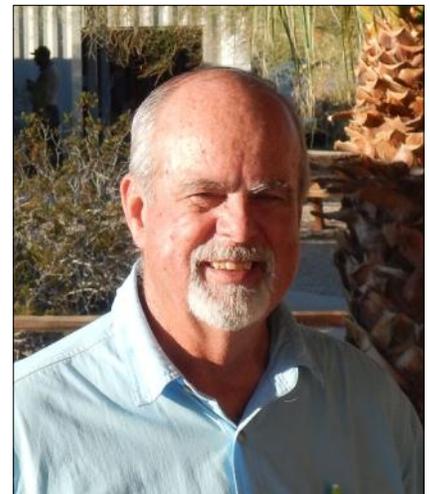


Divers on the F4U Corsair

The State Parks Dive Team assists with the submerged cultural resource efforts at California State Parks. Currently, there are 19 underwater parks, and State Parks manages almost a third of the California coastline. Through help from the Dive Team, State Park archaeologists are looking forward to managing and protecting California's underwater heritage for future generations.

Meet Jim...

Jim Cassidy was recently hired as our new Archeological Project Leader and he brings a wealth of archaeological experience to Ocotillo Wells. Dr. Cassidy has worked on many desert projects for both the Marine Corp and Navy and recently retired from Federal Civil Service as their Southwest Region's Cultural Resources Program Manager. He has lived in the Southern California deserts for over 32 years and loves the archaeology of the area. He is anxious to get back into the field and engage with the Colorado Desert cultural landscape. We are pleased to add him to our team.



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 at OW

Special Ocotillo Wells Event Weekends

Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies Astronomy Festival

March 20-21, 2015

Bug-a-Palooza Bug Festival

March 27-29, 2015

Off-Highway Adventure Tours: March 2, 9, 13, 16, 23, 27, 30 and April 3

Call (769) 767-5393 for more information



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