

**OCOTILLO WELLS
DISTRICT**

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Blowsand Reader

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JANUARY—FEBRUARY 2014

What's Going on at Main Street?

Have you noticed the bustling activity of heavy equipment and construction crews on Main Street recently? The park is excited to announce that we have broken ground on our new Ocotillo Wells Special Events Center.

Each year, several groups hold their social gatherings and fun-runs at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The new fully-accessible event center will support group sizes up to 300, and its amenities will include three large shade ramadas, group barbecues, large serving tables, picnic tables, and a 10-foot diameter central fire pit for bonfires. Included in the new event area will be a combo building with restrooms, pay showers, and dishwashing sinks.



Aerial View of the Special Event Center Project

(Continued on next page...)

What's Going on at Main Street? *continued*



These new facilities will be ideal for vendors, product showcases, concerts, presentations, raffles, award ceremonies, family gatherings, and maybe even a wedding reception or two. For more information about renting the event center, please contact the Gilbert Alvarez at (760) 767-0156. On your next visit to Ocotillo Wells, be sure to swing by and check out the new state-of-the-art event facility.



Watch for the grand opening in the fall of 2014!

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Contributors: Ocotillo Wells staff, Friends of Ocotillo Wells, and occasional outside contributors

Ocotillo Wells SVRA Dust Control Measures —

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist

YOUR HELP WANTED!!!!

As part of the required dust control measures implemented at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, we've included posted 15 MPH Speed Limit signs in selected locations and in the park rules for all camping areas and areas where multiple vehicles are parked. We've also treated some roads and trails that receive the most traffic or provide access to camping areas. Please take a look at the photos below and check the difference that only 5 mph can make with a moderately large vehicle like one of our park trucks. The first shot is on a treated section of road at 15 mph. This section of road was treated about 6 months ago. The second shot is at 20 mph on an untreated section of road. Do you see a difference in the amount of dust generated?



15 MPH



20 MPH

Please help us comply with the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District Rule 800 requirements by limiting your speed in parking areas and with your large vehicles while accessing camping areas. Thanks and Have Fun Out There!

General Plan Alternatives

THANKS for commenting on the General Plan Alternatives—we anticipate updating the General Plan website with a summary of the public input later this spring and are moving towards developing a Preferred Alternative that captures the best that Ocotillo Wells SVRA has to offer. Keep up to date by following us on Facebook or on the website—www.planocotillowells.com.

Kids Adventure Connection Weekend



By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

The first ever Ocotillo Wells “Kids Adventure Connection” was held on January 18 and 19, 2014. The weekend event was full of engaging activities that allowed parents and children to explore Ocotillo Wells’ backyard while exercising their right to have fun!

The event, which was enjoyed by 40 adults and children, was generously sponsored by Tierra Del Sol Four Wheel Drive Club. Activities were based on the California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights, which states that all children should have the opportunity to discover California’s past, splash in the water, play in a safe place, camp under the stars, explore nature, learn to swim, play in a team, follow a trail, catch a fish, and celebrate their heritage.



Counting Nature Scavenger Hunt results



Planting a seed



Getting ready for a trail ride

The Ocotillo Wells Interpretation Department took the Outdoor Bill of Rights and rewrote it to be more OHV friendly. Splash in the water was changed to explore the night sky at our Saturday night astronomy program; discover



Learning to read a compass

(Continued on next page...)

Kids Adventure Connection Weekend *continued*

California's past was changed to an off-road trail ride out to Barrel Springs to hear about Pegleg's lost gold and to learn how to read a compass. Rather than learning to swim, the children planted a mesquite tree near the Discovery Center to enhance the beauty of the walkway garden.



Ethan, Katelyn and Savannah eating dinner

Other activities included: learning about TreadLightly!® principles and trail safety while having fun with the new RC (remote control) cars, a nature scavenger hunt, BBQ dinner, campfire ghost stories and songs, s'mores, and camping under the stars.



Remote Control (RC) car in action

The children earned an awesome Kids Adventure Connection patch for participating in the weekend's festivities. All parents and children who participated said they can't wait for next year's adventure!



Alexander enjoying a hotdog



The group "thumbs up" at Barrel Springs



Heber Dunes SVRA's *Mother Nature*

By James Claar, Supervising State Park Peace Officer

Heber Dunes State Vehicular Area Interpreter Jaime Mendez, or as her students refer to her, *Mother Nature*, is making quite an impression on the youth of the El Centro School District. As part of the 2002 Proposition 49 initiative After School Safety and Education (ASES), Mendez's program has grown to include outreach to five schools within the local school district. Children line up in anticipation for their weekly visit from *Mother Nature*.



Approximately, 100 children receive core-based curriculum with a State Park twist. She uses much of the State Park Junior Ranger material, including the Jr. Ranger Promise, but also includes the Afterschool Investigators Nature Detective series from Cornell University Lab of Ornithology, and the Gains in the Education of Mathematics and Science (GEMS). Mendez says that the program is a work in progress and therefore dynamic and driven by the needs and interests of the individual schools that it serves. Classroom, lab work, field studies, and reports create a complete

package. As you can imagine, she is constantly coming up with creative ways to keep her audience engaged and make learning fun.

Her programs include learning about food chains, desert plants and animals, and decomposition. Learning that even snakes have rules, dancing the turkey trot, and making bird seed ornaments are also a big hit in the classroom. Lab activities allow the kids to dig deeper as they conduct soil investigations, dissect owl pellets, and experiment with bottle biology. "It doesn't stop there," she says. Field studies are a must for any young scientist. Spiders and webs, ant behavior, and the Lost Lady Bug study are favorites with the kids. Reporting their findings in a Nature Journal scrapbook provides a school year's worth of memories of learning and fun. Just when you think she is done, Mendez ends the school year by constructing solar ovens with the kids. What do they cook? S'mores!!



On behalf of the children, educators, OHMVR Division, and California State Parks, thank you *Mother Nature* for all you do.

Heber Happenings

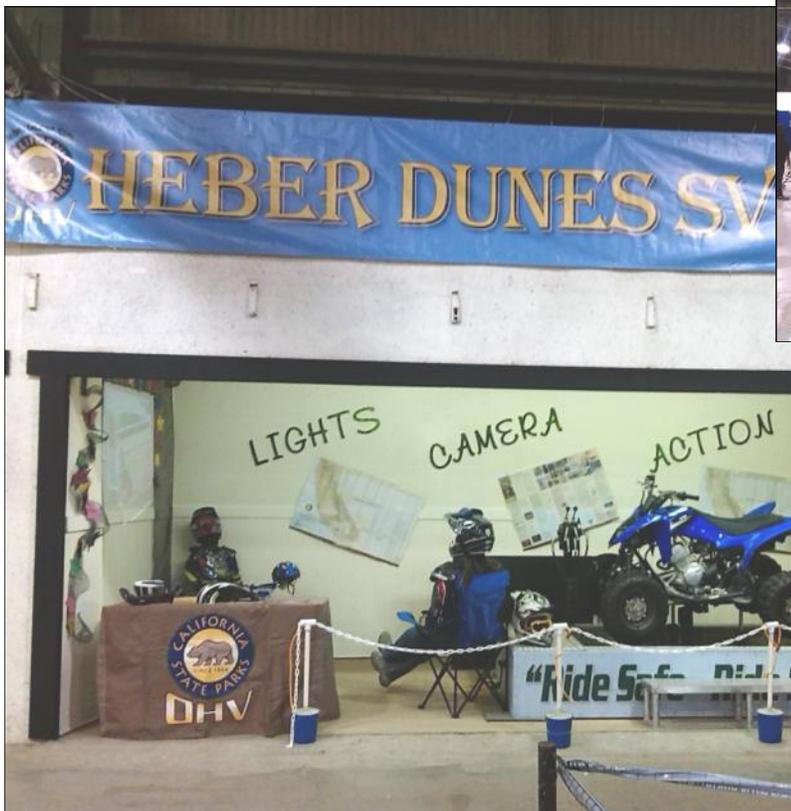
By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

What will you discover at Heber Dunes today?

LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION

Now Showing in the Imperial Valley—The IV Mid Winter Fair and Expo—and Heber Dunes was right there on opening night with a cast of ATV Safety Stars lighting up the center stage!

Don't let all that glitter fool you. The Heber crew—Ranger James, Interpreter Jaime, Maintenance Aides Luis and Cesar, and Volunteer Lee Mendez—had a lot of work to do long before, during, and after all those cameras began to roll.



The most frequently asked question at the fair booth, "Is she real?"

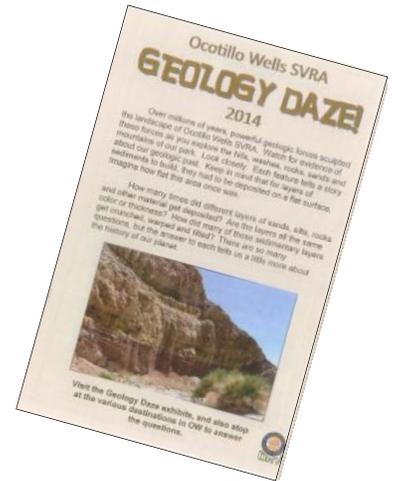
From reserving and transporting the simulator, to cleaning, scraping, and painting the booth, not to mention rallying 100 Afterschool Jr. Rangers to create stars, only to reverse the process 101,359 visitors and 10 days later, was truly a team effort and a lot of hard work!

But even as the lights dim, plans are already in the works for an even better show next year.

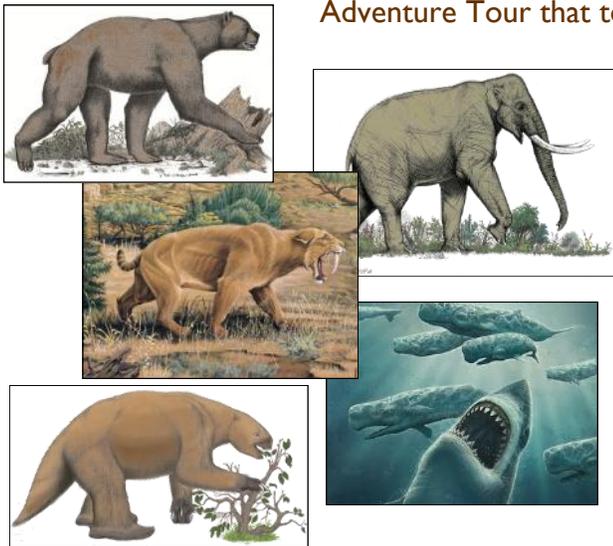
Geology Daze

By Steve Quartieri, State Park Interpreter III

On Presidents Day Weekend, tens of thousands of visitors flocked to Ocotillo Wells to celebrate a traditional weekend of off-road recreation, family bonding, and to “rock out” at our annual Geology Daze festival. This year’s festival focused on the powerful geologic forces that have sculpted the landscape of Ocotillo Wells over millions of years. From Gas Domes to Pumpkin Patch, the Badlands to Shell Reef, and Devils Slide to Blowsand Hill—Ocotillo Wells SVRA is home to many intriguing geological features. Our programs explored how the geological forces created these legendary OW icons.



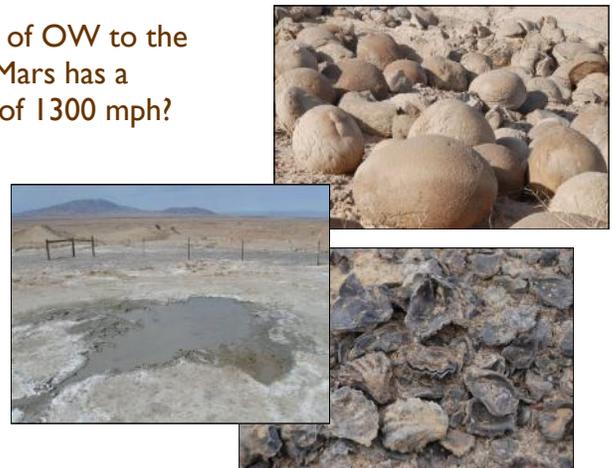
How better to start the weekend’s festivities than a four-hour 4x4 Adventure Tour that took visitors on a trip back in time. Tour participants used their off-highway vehicles as time machines, visiting sites in the park where walrus once basked on the shoreline, and short-faced bears once fed on the carcasses of Columbian mammoths... Oh my, how things have changed!



A key component of this year’s festival was the many interpretive exhibits that were set up at the iconic destinations in the park. These displays looked closely at the geological forces that are in play at OW, including the rock cycle, plate tectonics, faults, as well as wind and water erosion. The exhibits included specimens, posters, hands-on activities, and games—all designed to reinforce our message.

There was even a display comparing the geology of OW to the geology our neighboring planets... Did you know that Mars has a “blueberry patch” or that Neptune has winds in excess of 1300 mph? The exhibit even looked at how scientists are exploring the geology of these planets by using some of the most advanced off-highway vehicles of today—moon buggies and rovers!

As always, our Junior Ranger programs were a hit with visitors young and old. This year, Junior Rangers discovered the power of flashfloods by creating their own model of a flooded wash; they



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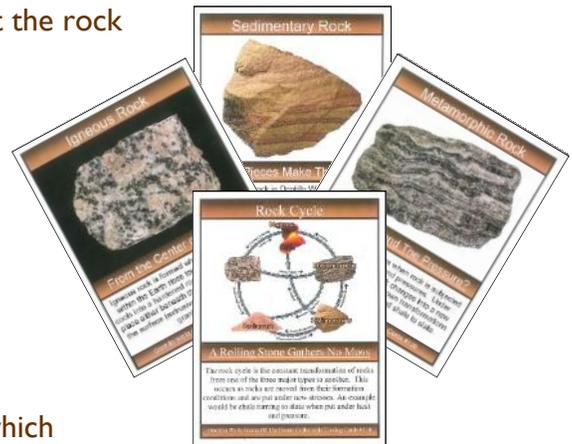
Geology Daze *continued*

rocked out with Iggy, Sed and Morph as they learned about the rock cycle; and they even did their own fossil dig to learn about the gnarly beasts that inhabited the area long ago.

Our friends at the Borrego Rock and Gem Club also made a special appearance again this year. They set up displays featuring many incredible mineral specimens, cut geodes for kids, and even polished a few rocks for visitors to take home.

To aid in the visitors' geological discovery, the interpretive team created a 16-page Geology Daze guide which contained information and diagrams explaining the geologic forces in action. And, of course, visitors were also able to collect the highly-coveted geology trading cards that were distributed at the various activities.

It was an action-packed weekend, and visitors left with a better understanding of the forces behind the park's striking landscape.



Trails News

By Shay McGhee, Park Maintenance Worker I

The Trails team installs metal sign kiosks for the Interpretation Department next to the CXTs on Main Street, Benson Lake Loop, Pumpkin Patch, Shell Reef, Gas Dome, County Line and the 4x4 Training Area.



Martin Rubalcava is breaking up hard sandstone ground with a jack hammer so that we can get the required depth for sign placement.



Greg Bingham, Ryan Walasek, Martin Rubalcava and Pete Coy are cleaning out the holes in preparation for installing the kiosks.



Starting to assemble the Kiosks

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*



Maribel and Chuck are installing the last roof panel before the kiosks get raised into position.



Pete transports the bags of concrete while Greg and Ryan mix the concrete to pour around the legs.



The finished product

Thank you, Dispatcher Kari Cotton!

By Gilbert Alvarez, State Park Superintendent II

The Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari took place on February 28, March 1, and March 2, 2014, at the 4x4 track area, on the north side of Ocotillo Wells SVRA. This event draws tens of thousands of people who keep our Law Enforcement team and Desert Lifeguards extremely busy. During this three-day event, officers made numerous vehicle stops, safety contacts, first aids/critical incidents, DUI's and other arrests. The radio traffic continued non-stop as officers responded from one call to another. Thankfully, on the other side of the radio receiving the brunt of this traffic was SurCom Dispatcher Kari Cotton.

Kari was simply amazing! Much like the officers in the field, Kari received one call after another from approximately 22 officers and 8 Desert Lifeguards. Some calls were critical incidents which required communication with outside agencies for ambulance and airlifts, while others were officers on vehicle stops requesting timely returns for driver license and registration information. Every officer I talked to, who worked Friday and Saturday night, was astonished by how quickly and thoroughly she came back with the information. Ocotillo Wells District Superintendent Garratt Aitchison was listening to his portable radio on Friday night of the event. Garratt made the comment to me Saturday morning asking, "Did you hear the radio traffic last night? Oh my gosh! That dispatcher was awesome! She took one call after another and never missed a beat."

Being a dispatcher in this situation can be extremely stressful and unforgiving. The dispatcher feels the stress of the officer through the officer's voice inflection. The dispatcher does everything he/she can do to make the officer's job easier and safer. But unlike officers in the field, often times, dispatchers don't get closure on some of the more critical incidents in which they aid service. They are often left wondering, what happened to the patient we air lifted? Did they survive? We are extremely thankful to have such an extraordinary dispatcher working alongside us. Kari began working as a Dispatcher in February 2006 for State Parks. She expresses how much she loves dispatching, especially when it is busy. She looks forward to helping the officers in the field do their jobs. Kari has earned a great deal of respect from her fellow dispatchers and is one of the Trainers for new dispatchers. The staff at Ocotillo Wells sincerely appreciates Kari's continuous contributions and selfless acts such as foregoing her vacation to help us with the Tierra Del Sol event.

Thank you Kari!
We appreciate all you do for us.

The Ocotillo Wells Staff



Tamarisk/Salt Cedar Contract Update

By Steve Chaney, Park Maintenance Worker I

Our pest control contractor (RPW) has finished the final phase of their contract to remove tamarisk/salt cedar from Ocotillo Well SVRA. This contract was initiated to substantially reduce the prevalence of tamarisk/salt cedar in Ocotillo Wells because the intensive root system robs water

from native plants that support more wildlife and lowers the water table overall. Park staff and/or ECORP Consulting have been monitoring RPW for the duration of the contract. Now that the contract is completed, it will be our responsibility to try and keep this invasive plant under control.



Tule Wash Tamarisk Infestation

eradicate. This past August we had a major rain event in the eastern portion of the park, and I have been finding a lot of new seedlings coming up. I have hand pulled salt cedar in both Tarantula Wash and Oil Well Wash and hope to start spraying other infested areas soon.

While this contract has been very successful, both the amount of seeds distributed in the past and the pervasiveness of this species and its root structure make it difficult to



Oil Well Wash



Lakeshore

RPW has done an impressive job, but as you can see from these photos, it does not take long for an area to get reinfested. Our goal is to save money in the future by using a park crew to remove existing and future infestations of salt cedar both by hand pulling and with herbicide applications.

Desert Water Sources

By Aimee Roach, Environmental Scientist, and Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist

When you think of a desert, images of flowing water likely do not come to mind. But if you know where to look, there are numerous springs and seeps within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Beneath the ground lie aquifers in which groundwater is stored. An aquifer is an underground layer of permeable, unconsolidated rock that holds water. The water table is the point where an aquifer becomes saturated, and this is often tapped for use by humans for municipal wells or agriculture.



Springs or seeps, unlike underground aquifers, are places where the water table exceeds the ground level and naturally flows onto the surface. Springs usually have a higher flow rate than seeps, have a single point of origin, and can be the source of a small trickle or even a stream. Seeps, in contrast, have a lower flow rate, emerge over a larger area, and generally simply form a wet area with little or no flow. Desert springs and seeps are usually recharged by precipitation or snow melt. The number of seeps and springs in Ocotillo Wells varies throughout the year and may change due to differences in the amount of rain that occurs.

Springs and seeps provide important water, habitat, minerals and nutrients for many species of animals and plants. In the desert they are particularly important as they often provide the only available source of water to desert animals and plants. Many springs and seeps in the park occur along washes. Around these water sources, you may find vegetation growing that you are unlikely to see in other locations in the park, such as California Fan Palm trees or Tule reeds. If you are lucky, you might also catch a glimpse of a coyote or desert cottontail stopping for a drink. Tracks are often found around water sources, and monitoring cameras in the park have captured many different animals utilizing the water provided by the springs and seeps of Ocotillo Wells.

Water is also essential for the survival of man. The human race has been occupying the Colorado Desert for over 1,000 years utilizing water from various springs, wells and at one time, Ancient Lake Cahuilla. Ancient Lake Cahuilla occupied the eastern portion of



(Continued on next page...)

Desert Water Sources *continued*

Ocotillo Wells SVRA from prehistoric times until the 17th century. During this time, numerous Native Americans would live in the desert exploiting the natural resources made available by the fresh water lake. Those who didn't have access to the lake and those traveling across the land would utilize local springs, such as those found throughout the park, for their survival. Later, European travelers and explorers, including Juan Batista de Anza, relied on the springs the same way the Native Americans had as they crossed the great deserts of southern California. If it wasn't for the San Sebastian Marsh located just to the south of OWSVRA, the Anza Expedition group would likely have perished.



Eventually, cattlemen and homesteaders arrived, adapting the springs for their modern use and drilling wells to tap into the aquifer. One local resident, Loney Smith, who homesteaded the land where the Discovery Center is located, was famous for being a water witch. Her claim to fame was that she always struck water even when the professional companies came up dry. Neighbors would hire her to find locations to place their wells, some of which can still be seen as you drive through the park.



Today, water is vital to the continual use of this desert land we have all come to love. Since the springs and seeps depend on precipitation, they are particularly sensitive to drought, water hogging invasive species like tamarisk/salt cedar, or other activities which could cause them to dry up. With typically little or sporadic rainfall, and a current state of drought in California, the importance of precious water sources in the desert is prominent. We can all do our part to ensure the continuation of desert springs and seeps by respecting their place in the landscape and reducing water usage and conserving resources both in the park and at home.

150th Anniversary of California State Parks

There is nothing so American as our parks. Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, “the fundamental idea behind parks is that the country belongs to the people.”

In 2014, California State Parks is commemorating our 150th Anniversary. Our theme for this commemoration is “A Gift from the People to the People.” On June 30, 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant Act, protecting Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove and ceding them to the State of California as the nation's first State Park. This landmark act, the first instance of park land being set aside specifically for preservation and public use by action of the federal government, created a legacy for California and our nation.



This is a unique opportunity to share the Department's historic milestones, diversity and role they play in California's history and identity. While Yosemite is now a national park, it did mark the beginning of our State Parks movement.

In 1928, there were only 17 state parks. Currently, there are 280 parks across the State, more than any other in the country, and the parks are both diverse and unique, from beaches, to redwoods, to state historic parks, recreation areas, off-highway vehicle, and more. We represent the beauty and legacy of California, and as stewards of this movement, we strive to both serve our visitors, and preserve our natural and cultural resources so that the future generation can continue to enjoy them.



Photograph courtesy of Pritchard Family in loving memory of Alvin "Gene" Pritchard.

Blowsand Hill, 1968

The 150th Anniversary is a unique opportunity to share the Department's historic milestones, diversity and role our parks play in California's history and identity. It is also an opportunity to highlight the importance of parks in every community. From Mexico to Oregon, we offer people the opportunity to explore the world, by providing various types of recreation, and along the way, educating our visitors.

In 1971, avid off-roader Gene Chappie worked with dedicated conservationist Ed Z'berg to create the Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) program. Since its inception, the program's education, conservation and enforcement efforts balance resource protection with responsible recreation. The program also ensures that quality statewide recreation remains available for future generations.

(Continued on next page...)

150th Anniversary of California State Parks *continued*

In 1976, Ocotillo Wells SVRA was formed with 14,000 acres. Since that time, OWSVRA has increased in size to almost 85,000 acres.

Ocotillo Wells has been inhabited by people for thousands of years. Native people trapped fish in ancient freshwater Lake Cahuilla, made pottery, baskets, stone tools, clothing and everything else they needed to survive.

During the California Gold Rush, prospectors passed through the area. The best known legend is

Pegleg Smith, who reportedly found and gathered a few strange, heavy black rocks (which turned out to be gold nuggets) only to lose the location of his find. In the early 1900s prospectors searched Devil's Slide (then known as Black Butte) for traces of gold. No gold was ever discovered, but several legends were spawned.



Photo Courtesy of San Diego History Center

Gold Prospector Pegleg Smith



Photograph courtesy of Einertson Family Trust
Sheran Well, December 1939

As the demand for oil increased following World War I, a number of test oil wells were drilled in the Ocotillo Wells area, but they never produced the oil the wildcat oil prospectors were seeking. Then, during World War II, the military used the Ocotillo Wells area for military maneuvers and bombing practice. More recently, Hollywood has used the Ocotillo Wells area as a backdrop for a number of movies.

Plan to visit a State Park in 2014 and experience firsthand the impact we have had, and will continue to have, in the lives of the millions of Californians that

visit us every year. Visit our website to look for recreation opportunities, and tell us about your unique experience on our Facebook and Twitter pages. Since establishing of the first park, California State Parks has grown to be the largest state park system in the United States with 280 park units and almost 70 million visitors annually.

What is *your* favorite State Park?



Photograph courtesy of Einertson Family Trust

Military planes on Benson's Dry Lake

Holy Echolocation, Batman!

By Craig Fischer, Environmental Services Intern

Ocotillo Wells is home to a myriad of fascinating desert creatures, from lizards and snakes to coyotes and badgers. One trait many of these animals share is nocturnal behavior; they emerge from their daytime hiding spots to search for food and water. Bats are of the most unique nocturnal critters that call OW home. Bats roost and nest in the caves in the walls of OW's washes and canyons and flutter through the night sky in search of insects to munch. Most bats are insectivores, meaning they subsist mainly on... you guessed it... insects! Although we've yet to catalogue many bats in the park, the likely species represented are little brown myotis, hoary bats, and/or Mexican free-tailed bats. The biologists at OW hope to identify these bats and, hopefully, other bat species— but how can they do it?



Holy echolocation Batman! Did you know that bats don't always vocalize like other mammals? When a bat is hunting or navigating, it uses echolocation, which is similar to the sonar that whales and dolphins use to communicate. Echolocation is the process by which bats "see" their environment. To echolocate a bat opens its mouth and emits a series of super-fast clicking noises. The sound waves move from the bat's mouth, then bounce off nearby objects and back to the bat's ears. The longer it takes for the sound waves to come back to the bat's ears, the farther away the object is.

Sound waves are emitted at certain frequencies, and frequency is what makes sound have high and low pitches. The human ear registers notes under 20 kHz, and most speech registers at about 5

kHz. Some bats echolocate in a frequency that humans can hear, but most bats click so fast and so high that it is silent to humans. Sound in this frequency is called Ultrasonic! The resources team at Ocotillo Wells has a special recording device and microphone to pick up ultrasound, and record these echolocation calls. When we locate an area that may be good hunting ground for bats, such as near trees or water where insects hang out, we bring the microphone and recorder into the field. The recorder is left overnight, and in the morning the audio data is analyzed by special software to help identify each bat by its call! The biologists at OW are working hard to discover what kinds of bats are around, and soon we will have a better idea of exactly what kinds of bats call Ocotillo Wells home.



Desert Ironwood

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance Assistant

The desert Ironwood is appropriately named. This tree has some of the densest wood in the world. It is so heavy that it will not float. Still, historically it was used for tool handles by the Native Americans. It is used now by the Seri of Mexico who carve it by hand into plant and animal shapes for commercial purposes. According to tradition, these ironwood carvings bring good fortune and long life to their owners.

The thorny ironwoods are one of the largest and longest living trees in the Sonoran Desert and can live to be over 1,500 years old, though that is rare. They grow almost exclusively in the Sonoran Desert with their range being nearly identical to the boundary of the Sonoran Desert. Growing fifteen to twenty five feet tall, they can be found below 2500 ft. elevation in dry, ephemeral washes.

The Desert Ironwood's Latin name is *Olneya tesota* and it is the only member of this genus. It is in the pea family and its nitrogen-fixing nodules on the roots and nutrient-rich leaf litter help to fertilize the soil. The tree creates its own microhabitat by providing dense shade and enriching the soil. Because of this, the ironwood is especially important as a "nurse plant" to saguaro seedlings in Arizona.



Native Americans used the Desert Ironwood flowers as medicine, and the seeds were roasted or ground into flour.



Pink to white flowers cover the tree in the late spring. Brown bean-like pods follow with one to eight seeds inside. The Native Americans used

the flowers as medicine and the seeds can be roasted and eaten or ground into flour. Animals feast on the seeds and rely on the tree's shade during the summer.

Desert ironwoods line Quarry Wash, making it one of the "shadiest" areas in the park. Because of these trees, visitors often utilize the wash for camping. While the ironwood is an important habitat tree for the desert animals, it is also appreciated by the desert humans.



Visitor Services

By Jason Fincher, State Parks Peace Officer

When you live and work at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, the community depends on everyone to pitch in and do their part. A perfect example included the park staff that was called into action on February 27, 2014, by the local fire department to assist with a trailer fire at Ironwoods RV park located about ½ mile west of Ocotillo Wells, along Hwy 78. California State Park Rangers Andrew Ahlberg, Mike Dippel, Sasha Wessitsh, Eric Christiansen, Jason Fincher and Heavy Equipment Operator Dan Christensen spotted smoke in the area, initiated a response and were called into action.



(Continued on next page...)

Visitor Services *continued*

Every first weekend of March, off-roaders come from all over the southwest United States to attend the Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari, commonly referred to as TDS, located in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. TDS started in 1962 when a group of jeepers went to the desert for some off-roading. The event was so much fun that the jeepers decided to make it an annual event. This year marked the 52nd annual TDS. Usually March is a perfect time of the year to camp and off-road in Ocotillo Wells SVRA, however, this year Mother Nature had other plans. The weekend of TDS brought high winds, dust storms and rain, causing almost zero visibility at times. Rangers from all over the state assisted Ocotillo Wells staff in law enforcement and medical duties. Rangers and medical staff had their hands full with a variety of calls for service.

Kit Fox... Critter of the Month

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

What's that small animal with a foxy face and *long* ears and legs? It isn't much larger than a small housecat! Just after sunset, you might see one of our more nocturnal desert residents—the kit fox—roaming the open desert habitat in search of kangaroo rats, cottontails, jackrabbits, lizards, squirrels, mice, or maybe small invertebrates, and an occasional bird. A member of the canid family, the kit fox is the smallest, most carnivorous canine in the desert, but he will eat some fruits if the normal food supply is limited. Unlike many other canids, when the kit fox passes by, he doesn't leave tracks showing pads, toes and claws. The bottom of his feet are very furred to protect them from the hot sand—you frequently only see a “dimple” in the sand indicating he was present. The kit fox has adapted well to desert living. In addition to being primarily nocturnal, and having furred paws, he has thick fur in his ears to keep out sand. His very large ears act as a cooling system enabling him to reduce his body temperature. Like many desert animals, the kit fox gets most of his water from the food he eats, and his digestive tract has adapted to remove as much moisture as possible from his food. Watch for this small, long-eared canine just after dusk around dunes and open flats.



Lights...Camera...Action at Ocotillo Wells

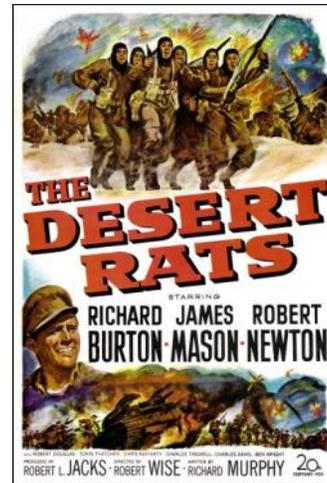
By Andy Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

The panels for the movies filmed in Ocotillo Wells, as well as a popular television series finale, have been installed. Do you know the five feature-length films that were filmed in the park, or which very popular television series finale was also filmed here? As you are out riding, watch for the interpretive panels that will provide you with more information about the individual movies.



Sahara (1943) The Second World War hung in the balance as this film was shot in eastern OWSVRA. Made to bolster the war effort, it was the first movie filmed in what is now our park, which looks very similar to the deserts of North Africa where the war was then being fought.

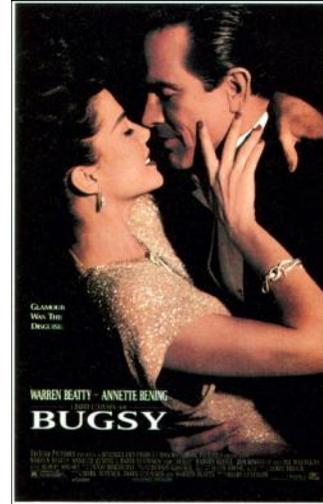
The Desert Rats (1953) This film also pretended our area was WWII-era North Africa. The movie dramatizes the defense of Tobruk by Australian troops against a German and Italian army. Local landmarks such as Devil's Slide and Borrego Mountain are easily recognizable in the film.



The Young Lions (1958) Ocotillo Wells area again stands in for North Africa in this flick, although only briefly. The short scene filmed in our park was a bombing attack against German forces, including Marlon Brando's character. Other scenes were filmed in nearby Texas Dip.

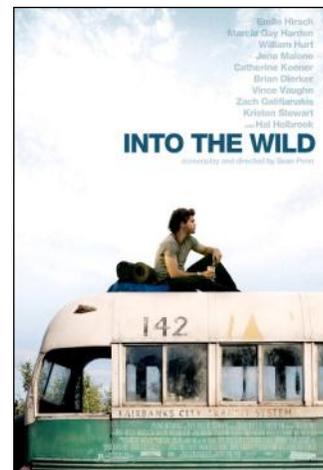
Lights...Camera...Action at Ocotillo Wells *continued*

Bugsy (1991) Ben “Bugsy” Siegel was a mobster credited with creating the modern glamorous Las Vegas, and this movie uses our corner of the desert to portray that region before it was developed. To do so, the filmmakers recreated the famous Flamingo Hotel right next to the Blue Inn.



The X-Files series finale (2002) For the last episode of this popular science fiction television series, an action scene was filmed in OWSVRA’s Tectonic Gorge. Here, the set builders recreated an ancient Indian cliff dwelling and simulated its destruction with a series of special effects explosions.

Into The Wild (2007) The only movie filmed in our park that depicts a place actually in our park. The adventurous young Chris McCandless stayed for some time at Oh My God Hot Springs, which used to flow near S-22. Another scene was shot on the slope of Borrego Mountain.



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Upcoming Events at OW



Special Ocotillo Wells Event Weekends

Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies Astronomical Nights

March 28-29

4x4 Adventure Tours

Truckhaven's Treasures

April 4

Moon Over Ocotillo Wells

April 14

Gnarly Beasts of the Past

April 7

Creepy Crawlers of the Night

April 18

Alien Invaders!

April 11



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