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Blowsand Reader

Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

I was recently talking with someone who said that all “park value land” should be classified as a State Park, and that only whatever land was *not* considered valuable should then become an SVRA. Wow! To say the least, I was shocked at the statement. Having spent over 30 years in parks, I see the inherent value in *all* parks and would argue that our park, Ocotillo Wells SVRA, exemplifies what I would call “park value.”

For me the real value of our park is in the people—the people who work as part of the park team, as well as the people who fight that team—because they constantly challenge us to do the right thing. Our partners: Tierra Del Sol, Corva, and San Diego Off Road Coalition, the families that recreate at Ocotillo Wells, the volunteers who help because they believe in what we do—all these people and what they provide are *high* “value.” *Parks, after all, are for people.*

The idea that because we are an SVRA (State Vehicular Recreation Area), we should only have land that is not park value shows a basic misunderstanding of what we are about. The Park system has many classifications that offer opportunities stretching across diverse boundaries and interests. Parks provide a place for *all* people to go and enjoy their passion. The diversity of Ocotillo Wells SVRA itself reaches into many park classifications. It is, first of all, a recreation area. Over a million people a year come to the park to spend time on their off-road vehicles with their families. They ride by day and enjoy the campfire with friends and family by night. Some experience world-class jeeping, and others are pro jumpers in “The Playground.” The riding can be enjoyed by all ages and abilities. It especially appeals to the upcoming generation, who while they may march to a different drum than traditional park users, are our future.

However, the park is also a cultural preserve and harbors many incredible cultural sites—sites that require protection and monitoring, and represent some of the most intact cultural resources in the state. The cultural history teaches people about the uses of land and its evolution over time. Native American sites, World War II training grounds, locations for historic movies, mineral development, and geothermal exploration—all are part of the cultural landscape of our park. Of course, this mix of incredible resources and world-class recreation

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Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

must be balanced if we are to fulfill our state park mission—a mission that is constantly challenged by people who believe that we can fulfill our mission only if we limit access. Yet, if our goal is to educate people, provide quality recreation, and preserve resources, it is impossible to achieve that goal *without* people. The people have to come to parks in order for us to get our message across. It is all about the people and their experience. It is about their leaving with an interest in the environment and an understanding that the future of our parks is up to them.

Resource protection is an inherent part of SVRAs. No other classification is mandated by legislation to do annual monitoring of resources in order to continue operating. Yet, often the assumption is that if there are resources, it cannot be an SVRA. Ocotillo Wells, like other SVRAs, has many areas set aside for resource protection. These areas are closed to motorized recreation and interpretive panels are there to explain why. Interpretation, in fact, is alive and well at Ocotillo Wells. During the busy months, we are now offering up to 35 formal interpretive programs a month. Again, it is about the people. The people are really excited about this new opportunity. During the Tierra Del Sol event alone, the interpretive booth was visited by over 1000 people daily. Visitors to OWSVRA can now participate in everything from coffee with an interpreter to an ATV geology tour.

People, resources, interpretation, *and* world-class recreation—millions of people coming to enjoy the outdoors, getting some exercise, learning about the park, and spending time with family and friends. Isn't that value? In my opinion, Ocotillo Wells SVRA is over 85,000 acres of value, has something for everyone, and is a place where we can teach future leaders about *real* value—and about what they must do to ensure that the value of parks continues into the future...

Meet Cole and Cooper...

Twins Cooper and Cole Varga of Chicago, Illinois, stopped by the Ocotillo Wells District Office in March “to see tarantulas and snakes.” Interpreter I Jeff Price showed them a tarantula, a scorpion, a gecko and other reptiles during their visit.

Right: Cole and Jeff compare snakes while Cooper watches.



Above: Jeff Price shows twins Cole (left) and Cooper a tarantula.

Antique Airplane Boneyard Tour

By Cheryl Gillott, Office Assistant

On March 5th OWSVRA employees were invited to take a private two-hour tour through the Antique Airplane Boneyard located in the town of Ocotillo Wells. This area is not open to the public, and the many curious visitors can only view it from outside the fences.

Many thanks go out to Bill Van Dale, a local resident of Ocotillo Wells and caretaker of the property, who gave us this very informative tour. The tour included timelines, artifacts, and historical facts about flying machines from World War II, the Korean War, and other events of the past.

We viewed B-17's (there are only 43 in existence), B-25's, a Howard Hughes private plane, planes used in the movie "Pearl Harbor" and in Disney Studios productions, other movie props, as well as the remnants of plane crashes. We learned about the history and preservation of some of the crashes.

Between the collection at Ocotillo Wells and the collection housed at the parent shop in Chino, CA, the company maintains the largest inventory of B-25 airframes and parts in the world. These parts will be used for future restoration projects.

One of the highlights of our tour was viewing the collection of old off-road water pumper buggies from the '70s and antique vehicles that were once part of our everyday transportation in Ocotillo Wells.



Ocotillo Wells staff pose in front of a few of the antique planes.

Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari



By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

This spring, the interpretive staff packed up the mobile ranger station and all its interpretive goodies and headed for the 47th Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari. For nearly 50 years, the TDS Jeep Club has been holding its annual safari in the area. The event has grown to be the second largest jeep event in the western United States, second only to Moab. A traditional part of the Desert Safari

is a large vendor display area. This year, for the first time ever, the interpretive department joined the event by setting up their own booth. At first the plans were to set up a 10 x 10 EZ up... But by the time our staff finished planning for the event, the booth ended up to be 20' wide and 40' long.

The booth was themed *The Wild World of Ocotillo Wells*, and it had numerous individual exhibits ranging from hands-on activities to live animals. Overall, the event could not have been a greater success. We conservatively estimate

that our booth alone had over 3,000 visitors each of whom spent at least 10-15 minutes checking out the displays and playing the games. I feel confident saying that our booth was the most-visited booth in the event. Many times kids would bring back their friends and parents to show them all the "cool stuff" on display!

The live animal displays, as always, were a big hit! They included two species of scorpions, a tarantula, a banded gecko, a Sonoran gopher snake, a black widow, sphinx moth caterpillars and a carpenter ant farm. In addition to these live animals, we also had taxidermy mounts of a badger and a roadrunner. Coyote, bobcat and badger pelts were also on display.

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Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari *continued...*



One of our more interesting displays, which visitors often commented about, was our sphinx moth exhibit. At first glance, this exhibit appeared to be an aquarium filled with brown-eyed evening primrose (a common desert wildflower), but closer examination of the display revealed it was actually filled with giant sphinx moth caterpillars chowing down on the plants. The visitors were amazed at the ferocious appetite of the caterpillars, and got a close-up view of the relationship between the plants and herbivores.

Also on display were illustrations of the lifecycle of the moth as well as mounted specimens of the adult moth. Many kids noted that the moth had visited their camp lights the night before.

Not only were live animals on display, but there were also various hands-on activities in which kids, young and old, could participate. Kids were able to test their knowledge about desert animals, make take-home casts of their favorite desert animal tracks, and even make banded geckos using modeling clay.

The most popular game was “The Scoop on Poop” trivia game. Samples of poop were on display and contestants got a chance to guess... “Who’s poop is that?” It was a great hit! Interpreters Andy Fitzpatrick and Carleen Roberts could often be heard during the event breaking out with Andy’s scat rap song. It is sure to become a classic!

In addition to the displays, visitors to the booth were also treated to a variety of publications including our new trading cards, wildflower guides, reptile guides, various word searches about each animal on display, as well as the California State Park and Ocotillo Wells maps.

Overall, our visit to the TDS Jeep rally was a *FANTASTIC* success and we look forward to participating next year with an even larger exhibit!



Biological Resources

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

This February and March we started new projects, started anew on old projects, started with old and new employees, and started the new survey season...

In February, Mac MacNair and Karin Vickars, officially designated Trackers by the San Diego Tracking Team (SDTT) and co-leaders of the newly-formed Anza-Borrego Tracking Team (ABTT), visited various locations in OW to determine their suitability for transects. Environmental Scientist Joe Hopkins and Park Interpreter Beth Shugan, both volunteers with the ABTT, showed them potential sites at Barrel Springs, at the Cove, in Tule Wash, and near the Blu Inn. The choice for the initial transect will be Barrel Springs, the results of which will augment the habitat monitoring that is already done there. The transects will be conducted quarterly with the first one taking place in April. However, just scouting the location has yielded results already. Bobcat tracks and pocket gopher mounds revealed the presence of these two species, neither of which had been documented there previously. (Just before going to press, Joe received his official designation as Tracker from SDTT and will be allowed to be leader of the Barrel Springs transect, SDTT #61.)

In February, OWSVRA became an official sponsor of the Borrego Valley Hawkwatch. (Please see the separate article on this year's migration.) This was a natural outgrowth of our park becoming a Watchable Wildlife Site, which designation we have enjoyed since September but has not been fully recognized as Joe tries monthly to get our binocular signs from Caltrans.

In March we welcomed back Senior Park Aide Steve Wilcox and met new employee, Park Aide Joni Bye. Both are long-time residents of the area. Steve's desert knowledge and experience have already been an asset to the department over the last two survey seasons, and Joni should be a great addition as well. (By the time you read this, we will also have brought on board Park Aide Carole Pepito who officially started April 1. While new to the area, her knowledge of nature and computers will be most helpful.)



This series of dirt mounds are the excavations of the Botta's pocket gopher, a species never verified at Barrel Springs, or in all of OW for that matter, prior to this discovery by ABTT members.

(Continued on next page...)

Biological Resources *continued...*

Steve and Joni arrived in time to join resident plant specialist, ES Gary Slattery, on this season's vegetation surveys. Gary and Steve continue to amaze everyone with their ability to recognize vegetation, whether the tiniest shoot emerging from the ground or a withered remnant of some long-gone flower. ES Karen Feldheim from headquarters visited us for a couple of plant surveys and commended them for their precision. This year's surveys have shown us that Sahara mustard, the scourge of many of Anza-Borrego's wildflower areas, has achieved a serious foothold in areas of our park as well. Cooperative weather in the form of cooler temperatures and minimal strong winds has kept the surveys on schedule where they should be completed by early April.

Senior ES Eric Hollenbeck represented the Department at the Freeman Resources Monitoring meetings where protocols were established for how monitoring will be done after the initial contracted surveys are completed. For Biological Resources, we will tier off the sites and transects established by our contractors except for botany which will be done by photo monitoring. Also regarding Freeman, the bighorn contractor's team surveyed several sections on its visits in February and March. More importantly, these initial surveys helped iron out some of the wrinkles in the elaborate GIS system being used. GIS Analyst Don Solleder, a recent addition to the team, was most helpful in this regard.



A Barrel Springs site in 2008 where many flowers had dried up, but no mustard can be found.
(See the picture on the next page.)

(Continued on next page...)

Biological Resources *continued...*



The same Barrel Springs site in 2009—and there was even more mustard that didn't make the photograph.

Eric has also been drawing up the Programmatic Restoration Plan for Ocotillo Wells Habitats. As part of this plan, Gary has been doing cost estimates for revegetation projects, and Don has been creating GIS layers for trail ratings and inventory.

At the end of March, Eric hosted a job-walk for potential bidders for a tamarisk removal contract. The number of contractors who showed up may be a record for OW; even after some who were ineligible due to licensing restrictions left, the number was still most impressive.

Joe, Eric, and Gary participated in a conference call with the director of research for the Interagency Coordinating Committee for Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management (ICC) where it was agreed that OW will be changing some of its protocols this May. Details of changes will be featured in an article for the next issue of *The Blowsand Reader*. They also attended the one meeting each year where the ICC meets with the Management Oversight Group (MOG). This combined ICC/MOG meeting provides the scientists and field staff of the ICC a chance to share their concerns in person with the directors and superintendents of the agencies for whom they work.

Joe has **finally** finished data entry and completed most of the first draft of the 2008 Annual Report, a project first mentioned back in December's issue. With the 2009 surveys already underway, it's about time to close the book on 2008—maybe soon?

Historic Plane Crashes in Ocotillo Wells SVRA

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist

Earlier in the month, Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist, and Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist, went on a quest to find a possible World War II plane crash that had been stumbled upon nearly a year ago. With a few GPS coordinates and some pictures, they headed out to find this alleged crash. After a little investigating, they found that there was indeed a crash site consisting of small pieces of aluminum and plastic, pressure glass, gears, control panel pieces, and many other pieces of a historic plane. Many of the pieces of aluminum had green paint on them, a sign that this could, indeed, be an army plane.

In order to get the most information about it possible, Jennifer and Margaret invited G. Pat Macha (aviation archaeologist and author) and his wife, Mary Jane, to come and tell us what he could about our plane crash. Pat has a made a living of finding and investigating plane

crashes all over the United States and has even worked on a program called Broken Wings for the History Channel. Along with Ranger Jordan Fenwick and Interpreter Jeffrey Price, they headed out to the plane crash to see what they could find. Unfortunately, there are not very many indicators of what kind of plane it is, but Pat has an idea of what it might be. One possibility is that the plane is a North American T28 Trojan from the 1950s. This was a training aircraft used by the Navy and which became the transition for pilots to jet aircraft. We're hoping that after a little more investigating, Pat will be able to get the resource team a clearer picture of the history behind our mystery aircraft.



Jordan Fenwick and Pat Macha



Pat Macha and Margaret Kress looking at some smaller pieces from the aircraft.

That same day, Pat informed us that he knew of at least two other plane crashes within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. After a lot of searching, one of them was located. This one revealed much more about itself. By a stroke of luck, a small identification tag from the plane was spotted, and from that we learned that this plane was an F-8 used by the military, but much more recently than the plane from the first crash. This one will take a little more investigating as well, but soon we will have a history of plane crashes right here in our own park.



Above: An identification tag from the F-8.



Above: One of the larger pieces from the F-8



Left: Fuel drain cover from the F-8

Hawkwatch 2009

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist



For the Borrego Valley Hawkwatch 2009, Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area joined its neighboring park, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, as an official sponsor. Environmental Scientist Joe Hopkins was allotted one morning a week to serve as Official Counter for that day as personnel from ABDSP have been doing for several years. Our participation was a natural progression from our park designation as a Watchable Wildlife Site. Even though our nomination stressed the abundant, and sometimes rare, reptiles of our park, a number of our bird species, including the large numbers of Swainson's hawks and turkey vultures that migrate through, were also a factor in our designation.



A perched Swainson's hawk waiting for the morning heat to create a thermal that will carry it on its lengthy migration.

It was in 2003 that Hal Cohen, a retired biology professor and veteran hawkwatcher, and Paul Jorgensen, Environmental Scientist for ABDSP, discovered that Swainson's hawks migrate through Borrego Valley in substantial numbers. Previous reports dating back many years had been treated as hawks that had accidentally strayed through the area. Until Hal and Paul's concerted effort in 2003, no one realized that large groups, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, were "straying" through almost every day for several weeks. While the official count site is located on private property in Borrego Springs, the flight path of these hawks and a smaller number of turkey vultures (two of the four North American raptor species that do a communal migration) takes them directly over OW and ABDSP. Of further significance is that Swainson's hawks are classified as a species of special concern and, therefore, the new data being gathered may be important in future research and monitoring efforts.

Hawkwatch 2009 *continued...*



The 2009 Hawkwatch, which started February 15 and will end April 15, has been a disappointing one numbers-wise. After a record year last year for Swainson's hawks (5378), turkey vultures (1411), and total raptors (6872— on average about 1% per year are other raptors), this year will probably be second lowest in all categories. This is understandable, though, since Borrego Valley represents just one corridor that these birds can follow.

The small numbers hindered our ability to find the routes through OW. Joe had seen a couple of Swainson's last year over Quarry Road, and Cris Sanguino and Brian Woodson saw a small kettle (the name for the groups of communal raptors as they ride the thermals) of hawks and vultures this year against Borrego Mountain. However, we are yet to determine if there are any preferred flight paths over the park.



We didn't see enough kettles of this size this year. Can you spot the one turkey vulture amongst the hawks?

Desert Wildflowers

By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

This spring, nature again treated us to an incredible display of its splendor and beauty. The perfect mix of deep soaking rains, mild temperatures and bright sunshine produced a magnificent display of desert wildflowers throughout our park. Desert wildflowers are a rare occurrence in the desert; therefore, when you are treated to such a spectacular display as we were this year... you have to seize the moment while they are around.

And seize the moment is what our interpretive department did. Over the course of the short 6-week wildflower season, the interpretive department conducted 23 wildflower programs including guided wildflower walks, Junior Ranger programs, off-road tours to Ocotillo Wells SVRA and the Freeman Property, as well as impromptu wildflower talks for visitors as they dropped into the visitor center.

Park Interpreter Carleen Roberts spearheaded our wildflower program this season and she did a fantastic job introducing our visitors to the amazing diversity of desert wildflowers found in our park. In addition to conducting programs, Carleen also conducted weekly flower surveys and reported her findings to the Theodore Payne Foundation, Desert USA, the Anza-Borrego Natural History Association and the Borrego Chamber of Commerce. This information was directly responsible for getting visitors to our park to see the wildflower display. Another hugely successful component of our wildflower program this season was the revision of our Wildflower Guide by Park Interpreter Beth Shugan. This



What better way to see the flowers than to get right down on their level!



Park Interpreter Carleen Roberts enthusiastically shows off the flowers!

(Continued on next page...)

Desert Wildflowers *continued...*

season, we distributed over 800 free copies of our guide to park visitors. Thanks to the efforts of these two fine interpreters, there are a whole lot more budding amateur botanists in the world today!

Our wildflower programs this season were a tremendous success in several ways. First, our programs successfully introduced many of our usual park visitors to one of the wonders of the desert. When visitors are lying on the ground looking at wildflowers, you done good! Secondly, our programs attracted an entirely new group of visitors to our park—a visitor group who had never been to Ocotillo Wells SVRA but who chose to visit our park due to the availability of our wildflower interpretive programs. And lastly, our wildflower programs and publications allowed us to continue to gain respect as a quality interpretive program.



It truly was an incredible spring!

Many of our visitors took advantage of our desert wildflower walks this season.



The Sphinx Moth... Our Critter of the Month

By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

Attack of the Caterpillars!

If plants read newspapers, that would have been the headline for the middle two weeks in March. In a show of gluttony that you normally see at a hotdog eating festival, the caterpillars of the white-lined sphinx moth ate their way through literally tons of our beloved desert wildflowers. This caused much distress for everyone that saw our flowers being reduced to a small and neat pellet of frass (insect excrement or debris), but was also cause for great excitement for those of us who are fascinated by the intricate lives of insects.



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Above: White-lined sphinx moth caterpillar looking for a snack.

Right: White-lined sphinx moth pupa

The white-lined sphinx moth starts its life as a pupa buried 2-3 inches beneath the soil. When certain conditions involving temperature and rainfall occur and reach the pupa, it will work its way to the surface using its still movable posterior, where it will break out of the pupa and emerge as an adult. The adult sphinx moth will then fill the veins of its wings with blood, wait for them to dry, and fly off in search of its first meal since the wildflowers of the year before. And what does it eat? Well, it goes to those same flowers, but instead of devouring the leaves, stems and petals, it is in search of the nectar. In fact, it is probably one of the more bizarre sights that you will ever see from a moth, since instead of landing on the flower and feeding as normal moths and butterflies do, it hovers and flies just like a

hummingbird! With a wingspan of up to three inches, this moth can and will fool you into thinking it is indeed a hummingbird unless you are lucky enough to get a good look before it zooms away in search of more nectar.



(Continued on next page...)

The Sphinx Moth *continued...*

Using pheromones, the female will then attract a mate. The male will use his slightly more feathered antennae to pick up this unique chemical signature, find the female, mate, and fly off again in search of more females. The newly fertilized female, however, will look for a suitable host plant in which to lay her eggs. In our park it seems that the brown-eyed primrose is the plant of choice, but in other parts of the moth's range they will utilize other members of the primrose family and many members of the rose family as well. Once the eggs are laid on the undersides of leaves and stems of several plants, the female will die, her body decomposing and returning nutrients to the soil for plants to use, and in time, for her caterpillars to eat. Once her eggs hatch, in about two weeks, the caterpillars are on a mission—to eat as much as they can, as fast as they can, while trying to avoid being eaten by



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Adult white-lined sphinx moth hovering as it gathers nectar



Copyright David Scriven

Adult white-lined sphinx moth

predators. The predators that we witnessed eating or harvesting the caterpillars were diverse. Solitary wasps were seen dragging stung and paralyzed caterpillars twice their size into burrows to feed their soon-to-come larvae. Roadrunners were seen with multiple caterpillars in their mouth at the same time, gorging on the bounty of the season. Someone even witnessed a desert iguana taking advantage of an unfortunate caterpillar wandering a little too close to its basking spot.

So, as you can see, the life of a caterpillar is not all fun and games. Yet if they survive all the predators, the angry gardeners, car tires and stomping feet, they will continue on their journey—burrowing down below the ground, and awaiting next year's crop of food to sprout out of the desert soil. Meanwhile, the roadrunners, wasps, lizards and humans await their return as well with varying degrees of excitement, or in some cases, trepidation.

Dyeweed

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance Assistant

I tend to like plants that surprise me. Nondescript plants that burst into color in the spring or have an interesting secret are especially appealing. While dyeweed doesn't exactly burst, it does have lovely dark purple blossoms that hang in round clusters on dense spikes. The name of the plant and the color of the petals originally made me guess that the plant would produce a lavender shade of dye, but that is where the bush becomes interesting. Numerous small red-orange glands dot the leaves and underside of the flower heads and produce a saffron-yellow stain on your fingers. This dye was used by Native Americans in their artwork.



Dyeweed flower cluster.

This gray-green shrub is in the same family as the smoke tree and the Fremont's indigo bush. In fact, one of the common names for this plant is Emory's indigo bush, along with "dune pea bush," "dye plant," "dye bush" and "white dalea." This is why I originally

While researching this plant for this article, I came across another strange fact about dyeweed. Though I could not find it on any nearby plants, there is a parasitic plant (*Pilostyles thurberi*) that can grow inside the dyeweed's stem, eventually erupting into tiny red flowers. These flowers are as small as the head of a pin and are described as appearing like an aphid infestation. (If you are interested in reading more or seeing some incredible photos of *Pilostyles*, look at the website waynesword.palomar.edu/ploct98.htm.)



The purple protrusions of the parasitic plant *Pilostyles thurberi*.

(Continued on next page...)

Dyeweed *continued...*

wanted to learn some of the Latin names...to avoid this confusion! I have always heard it called dyeweed in this area, but common names change with locations. Preferring low sandy flats and washes and found below 1000 feet elevation in the Colorado Desert, it also grows in Baja California and into Sonora—and who knows what it is called there.



Dyeweed bush...

there are several dyeweed specimens blossoming around the district office now. Now can you understand why I find this plant so appealing? Run your fingers around the flower heads and perhaps this interesting shrub will rub off on you, too!

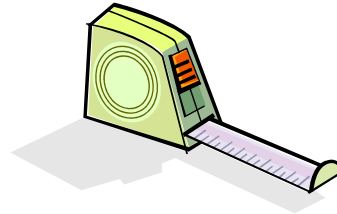


Dyeweed bush in bloom.

The fact that it is named after cartographer Major W.H. Emory—who directed the Mexican Boundary Survey—and related to the other local members of the pea family helps to explain its name--*Psorothamnus emoryi*. (Did you remember that the smoke tree is known as *Psorothamnus spinosus* from a previous article?) This short shrub is often wider than it is tall and has a powdery surface on its stems and leaves. It blooms March through May, and

OW Maintenance

By Chris Sanguino, Sector Superintendent



January, February and March have been busy months for the maintenance team. On top of all of the housekeeping chores that are done on a routine basis, we have completed an amazing number of outdoor projects. Completing the outdoor projects is especially important this time of year because the rising temperatures in the desert will soon cause us to do the majority of facility maintenance work indoors.

Charlie, Leon and Jeff completed the gas pump shade structure as well as the shade structures for the pipe storage area and one employee trailer. Norb, Jeff and Chris have diligently worked to move our “bone yard” to the Toner Property. This was very much like cleaning out a huge garage packed with many items to recycle. It also gave us an opportunity to organize our on-hand stock of fencing supplies.

Charlie, Norb and the CDC crew have finished the fencing on the east side and near Desert Ironwoods. This fencing was crucial for the protection of resources and to clearly define the boundary between ABDSP and OWSVRA.



Leon and Jeff work on a metal shade structure.

All of the wooden tables in OW have been replaced, as have several shade structures. I never expected termites in the desert region, but I am learning how fast underground wood can turn to Swiss cheese because of these little bugs! The metal replacements should take care of this issue and reduce future repair and maintenance costs.

Other ongoing maintenance projects include the remodeling and insulation of the auto shop and the installation of T-8 energy-efficient florescent lights. The auto shop was long overdue for upgrades. Now it's a more efficient workplace with adequate office space for record keeping.

(Continued on next page...)

OW Maintenance *continued...*



One very important project was completed, and I think anyone who is ever last out of the district office will agree with me on this subject! The gate securing the main yard has been replaced and no longer has the privacy slats in the chain links. What this means for us is that we never have to wrestle the gate against the high winds when we close the gate again. Hurrah!

All of this work was done in record time, and I am truly honored to be working with such a productive and knowledgeable maintenance team.

Meet Andrew...

The OW Interpretive staff welcomes Andrew Fitzpatrick to its team of interpreters. Andy is a Midwestern transplant to the desert. Originally from the great state of Wisconsin, he studied American history at the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities. Having worked for a variety of national and state parks, Andrew is enjoying his stint at Ocotillo Wells after working at Lava Beds National Monument in northern California this past summer. Needless to say, he enjoyed his winter here much more than back in Minne-**snow**-ta. Go Packers!



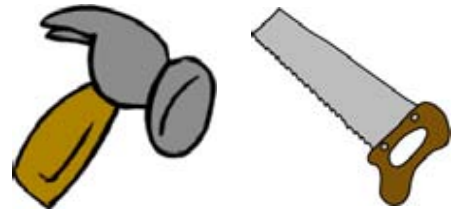
OW Birthdays...

Vic Herrick	April 1 st	Gary Walker	May 2 nd
Ryan Dolinar	April 4 th	Kevin Dolinar	May 5 th
Joni Bye	April 6 th	Cesar Casillas	May 6 th
Norbert Moeller	April 11 th	Julio Casillas	May 6 th
Leda Seals	April 18 th	Ron Cooksy	May 8 th
Margaret Kress	April 30 th	Cheryl Gillott	May 8 th
		Charlie Spratt	May 20 th
		Donna Hopkins	May 26 th
		Jennifer Parker	May 29 th



The Heber Dunes Report

By Brandon Ide, Maintenance Aide



The sun beats brightly upon the dunes. The days are warm and long. Farmers in surrounding fields harvest their crops as riders within the park bask in the sunshine. The cool breezes that gently blow during the day often gain speed and fury during the night, shifting the dunes, leaving them smooth and trackless in the morning. The first riders out feel as though they are riding through powder.

As these winds of change blow, the Heber staff would like to bid a fond farewell to our diligent and faithful Park Hosts who will be catching their own breeze home to Canada until next season.

Dale and Jean have spent the past seven winters in the park enjoying both the weather and the satisfaction that comes from exercising their sense of stewardship in the maintenance of the grounds.



Heber Dune Camp Hosts Dale and Jean

They can be seen early in the mornings picking up trash throughout the dunes, keeping the picnic areas clean, and aiding park employees in their endeavors. Their contribution to the park is evident on a daily basis. It is, in fact, this very consistency that was noticed by a previous park Ranger who then requested that they accept the full responsibility and honor of becoming our Park Hosts.

When considering their history in Heber Dunes, it is evident that many improvements have been made. Indeed, an understanding of where the park has been in times past is necessary to appreciate fully the fine condition it is in today.

As an Imperial Valley local, I remember the first time I visited this mysterious “Heber Beach.” I was about eight years old when Dad and I came out with a group of guys from our church for a paintball war. I can still picture men in camouflage emerging from the tamarisk trees with bright orange splotches on their chests, hands held high in surrender. Yet, what enraptured my imagination even more were the tamarisk trees themselves. Dad and I spent hours crawling through the trees, exploring every cavity. We even created a name for these uncanny hollows: we called them “indubigle” caves.

What Dale, Jean, and I have in common is a glimpse of the old park longing for the stability that has been provided by the State Park system. Although the park has always been a place for fun and recreation, it has not always had the means to remain safe and well maintained. Surely it has

(Continued on next page...)

The Heber Dunes Report *continued...*



endured a degree of mischief. Legends of old tell of a time when parties would rage all night long, campers would linger in the park for weeks because it was “free,” and dumpsites would multiply like pimples that would fester and not go away. As Dale and Jean merrily strove to lend a helping hand, a little extra push was still wanting.



Left: Brandon sits in the middle of one of the few remaining dump sites at Heber Dunes.

Since the acquisition of Heber Dunes by the State Park system, these challenges have by no means disappeared, but do seem to be subsiding. The public often compliments the changes that have been made in several areas: the tidy appearance of the park, the restoration of areas that were once dangerous and/or overgrown, the new bathrooms open for public use, and an overall sense of safety that is the nature of a park that is well cared for and monitored.



Heber employees marvel at how nature renews herself. Here, this former dumpsite now displays a verdant growth of sand verbena.

Employees and Hosts alike are proud to report that Heber Dunes is not only fit for use, but is also in the best condition that it has been in years. Even our clientele are responding by falling in line with our efforts. Dale and Jean report that the amount of trash left in the dunes has decreased by about half when compared to last year. Riders are getting the message that unsafe behaviors are not tolerated, and we have made it another month without any injuries. Even the park itself appears to be happy—in place of derelict trash and debris, we now see patches of purple sand verbena that are much more pleasant to the eye.

Visitor Services

By Adam Borello, State Park Ranger



Both February and March stayed relatively busy, but declining visitation reminded us all that the end of the season was near. Rangers and contracted sheriffs ramped up for Presidents' Day weekend, but gusty winds kept people from coming out. Those that were in the park were mostly hunkered down in their trailers. For whatever reason, the end of February and beginning of March brought out the "wee-hour" riders. Rangers and Desert Lifeguards responded to at least a half dozen call-outs between the hours of one and five in the morning over the course of a few weeks.

Often our Ranger staff and Desert Lifeguards receive thank you letters from rescued individuals and their family members for their efforts and professionalism during medical responses. Usually these letters address our team as a group. We received one such letter from an individual whose daughter rolled a pickup ½ mile east of Holmes Camp in early March. In the incident the two occupants sustained moderate injuries that required airship transport. An excerpt from the letter reads:

It is very hard for me to describe the feeling I had when I heard the first siren just minutes after extracting the two from the wreckage. I laid them both on the ground and before I could go to work, EMT's and Rangers began to arrive on scene. We now know why Ocotillo Wells is our favorite ride spot and has been for going on 33 years now. You all have our gratitude for a job well done.



Rangers transfer a patient to a waiting medical airship.

Occasionally, however, a letter will arrive that singles out an individual Ranger involved in a medical response. Ranger Sasha Wessitsh was the recipient of just such a letter as a result of the excellent service provided during a response in mid-February. The medical involved a male juvenile who crashed his motorcycle and was injured. Ranger Wessitsh and Desert Lifeguards Seth Long, Matthew Dawson, and Scott McClung quickly assessed the situation, treated the patient and deployed an airship for evacuation.

(Continued on next page...)

Visitor Services *continued...*

Ranger Wessitsh and the Desert Lifeguards were commended in the following letter:

Words cannot express how grateful we are for the rapid response and excellent care that [our son] received while on the ground. I understand that Sasha Wessitsh was the lead individual on the crew that tended to my son. I truly believe that without such amazing care my son may not have been as fortunate.

The letter went on to say that their son had suffered serious injuries but has recovered and is not expected to have any long-term issues. These letters are the icing on the cake for our staff. We love this job and don't expect any praise from the people we assist, but it's always nice to be recognized.

Job well done!

Supervising Ranger Andrew Ahlberg's K-9 Urban was retired at the end of February. Urban served his co-workers well at OW and at his previous parks as well. He will be missed, but will certainly enjoy less stressful days at the Ahlberg homestead, keeping the kids in line. Urban's successor's name is Artez. He is a young K-9 with lots of training ahead of him, but one month (all of March) behind him. He and Supervising Ranger Ahlberg are now P.O.S.T. certified and will be back in OW in early April. Keep a look out for and say hello to the newest member of the OW law enforcement staff.

On a final note, the OW Rangers got a late Christmas present as Ranger Mike Howard rejoined the crew. Ranger Howard actually began his career with CA State Parks at OW in the winter of 2004. He transferred to Lake Perris SRA in the summer of 2007 and made his return to OW on Presidents' Day weekend. Ranger Howard brings an enormous amount of law enforcement experience and knowledge to the staff. He is also a Field Training Officer for the department and will be a key member of our training staff. As expected, Ranger Howard hit the ground running at OW and almost immediately assisted with training of an Anza-Borrego Ranger just out of the academy.



Supervising Ranger Andy Ahlberg with his new K-9 partner Artez.

The Search for Black Gold at OW... The First Rush

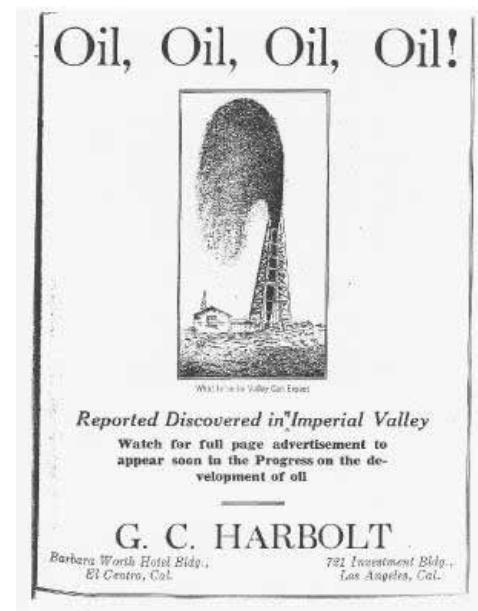
By Andrew Fitzpatrick, Interpretive Specialist

The story of Ocotillo Wells has always been linked to fuel. Today OW is a place where fuel is strictly burned, generally in the roaring engine of an off-road vehicle. But not so long ago, what is now our park was a place where it seemed fuel could be found underground and in far greater quantities than could be found in all the gas tanks here on a busy weekend combined. Throughout most of the last century many had a strong feeling that there might be oceans of oil thousands of feet beneath our creosote and sand. The desert here looked so profitable that for over fifty years a series of pioneering “wildcat” oil prospectors, local investors, and massive corporations all sank small fortunes into the search for black gold right under our feet. In fact, it was the search for petroleum that seems to have put the “Wells” in “Ocotillo Wells.”

Many new details to this intriguing story have been recently uncovered in a collection of letters, reports, newspaper clippings, and early photographs kept in the archives of the Imperial County Historical Society. This large set of records was likely collected by one of the many investors in the long-running oil explorations in Imperial County. Whoever the collector was, his or her diligence now allows us to better tell this chapter in the unusual history of Ocotillo Wells, a history that may repeat itself, albeit with a profitable liquid other than petroleum.

In the early years of the 1900s, petroleum prospectors canvassed the Colorado Desert much as gold prospectors had decades before. But while the lonely gold hunters generally stuck to mountains, those searching for oil kept to the desert valleys. Indeed, all indications pointed to the likelihood of a huge field of petroleum under Ocotillo Wells; it's a basin once covered by an ocean teeming with life (think Shell Reef) that decomposed and pressure-cooked under impermeable sedimentary rocks, such as shale (itself pressure-cooked clay) which trapped the final product – oil – from escaping upwards. There were even places here where oil had risen to the surface and left coagulated petroleum residue (called “asphaltum”) like a natural blacktop. Expectations were so high, one early oil expert declared in 1901 that the Salton Basin area was “the best and largest oil field in the world.” This promise of buried wealth for those who could find it became the attraction of Ocotillo Wells for much of the 20th century.

The first of the oil pioneers here was the Diamond Bar outfit during the years of the First World War. A closely-knit group of investors, they purchased just over 60,000 acres of the Colorado Desert from the Southern Pacific Railroad before anyone else had taken the initiative to



This investment advertisement captures the early excitement oil prospecting in the Imperial Valley.

(Continued on next page...)

The Search for Black Gold at OW *continued...*

search here for oil on such a large scale. Their impressive holdings seem to have been centered on the Ocotillo Wells region. Their top test well became known as the “Routhe” Well for U.S. District



Cables that were used to hold down the oil derrick at the Routhe Well.

Judge A. Clarence Routhe who ran the on-site drilling operations. In 1916 this area was still deep in the wilderness, so the huge steam engine needed for drilling had to be dragged in by a team of 24 mules – no doubt a grueling and especially noisy undertaking! The brackish water to fill this iron monster, and the men who worked it, then had to be hauled miles from McCain Spring by wagon. With this laborious steam power, the well was drilled to over 3,000 feet and layers of oil sands were struck at about 1,800 and 2,500 feet down. Though the company bragged “we could have brought a well in at either of the two previous depths” (probably touted for the sake of encouraging further investment), in 1921 they were still searching for a viable third layer of oil. But hard bedrock was struck before this

phantom third layer, killing the Routhe Well, though not the hopes of its namesake. Judge Routhe stayed active for years exploring Ocotillo Wells for oil, assisting not only visiting geologists but also the new Borrego State Park staff, before retiring along the coast in San Diego County. The ruins of the Diamond Bar outfit’s Routhe Well can still be found near the junction of the Cahuilla and Gas Dome Trails. Despite being the oldest drill site in OWSVRA, it is still the most intact.

With the Diamond Bar exploration making waves, in 1919 a well-connected group of some 200 Imperial County politicians and business leaders formed the Imperial Oil & Development Company and began drilling for petroleum near the head of Oil Well Wash, which they apparently used as a natural access road. Included in this community enterprise were many influential men including District Attorney E.R. Simon, future Congressman Howard Shares of Brawley, and State Assemblyman W.J. Beal for whom the well was



Large segment of pipe used by Routhe Well’s massive steam engine.

(Continued on next page...)

The Search for Black Gold at OW *continued...*

named. A massive derrick was constructed and thousands of feet drilled over the course of two years with a huge outlay of capital – over \$200,000 worth, no small sum in 1919. Like at the Routh Well, occasional layers of oil sands were hit, but they were too thin to produce a gusher. But at nearly 4,000 feet down, the “Beal Well” hit hot water, which flowed with such consistency that the project was abandoned. While oil refused to flow from these depths, the hot water that gurgled to the surface became a local landmark and is appropriately known today as Artesian Well.

After the failure of these first two drilling operations, there was a lull in the exploration for the hidden oceans of oil beneath Ocotillo Wells. There was a glut of fuel on the market after the oil boom of the First World War, especially in California. This lull became a virtual freeze with the crash of the stock market on October 29, 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression, yet the search for oil here would eventually continue and reach a new importance with the need to fuel another World War....

Meet Don...

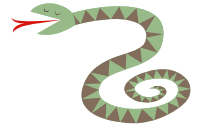
Hello everyone; my name is Don Solleder and I am the new GIS specialist here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. So what is a GIS specialist you ask? GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems and I do a variety of things, from using GPS and other technologies to locate and map park resources to setting up databases for data storage and more. I am here to help with mapping sensitive resources, maintenance infrastructure, project planning, enforcement maps, roads and trails or anything else for which you may need a map.



My career with State Parks began in 1988 at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park where I worked as a maintenance park aide for two seasons before taking a full-time firefighting position with Cal Fire. After ten years as a firefighter, I returned to State Parks and worked in maintenance at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park before taking a promotion as maintenance chief at Channel Coast District. Three years later, in 2004, I returned to Anza-Borrego as GIS specialist. I am an active member of the State Parks fire management team and help to conduct prescribed fire operations and protect park resources from wildfires and other emergency events all over the state. As a GIS specialist I work with the EGIS help desk to implement GIS in State Parks and provide technical GIS assistance to others. I stay busy with green energy projects, traveling and spending time with my daughter Tai.



REPTILES OF OCOTILLO WELLS



These snakes and lizards are found in and around Ocotillo Wells.
 These reptile names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

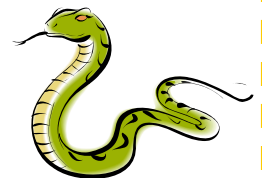
Z O C S D E S Z J H S I D J O G
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 F Q B C S T O V E F N I W H K H
 B R R E O N H C L D D Q E G U Q
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 I T P H A E M L E I Y T U A S I
 Z S O F N S E R T D B R O F D D
 L E A S P O S E D I U C C L B E

Lizards...

Snakes...

- SIDE-BLOTCHED
- CHUCKWALLA
- LEOPARD
- DESERT IGUANA
- FLAT-TAILED HORNED
- ZEBRA-TAILED
- BANDED GECKO
- FRINGE-TOED
- LONG-TAILED BRUSH
- WESTERN WHIPTAIL

- SIDEWINDER
- SHOVEL-NOSED
- LEAF-NOSED
- COACHWHIP
- GOPHER
- PATCH-NOSED



The Weather Log...



February

March

High Temperature	Feb 23 rd	84.7 degrees	Mar 18 th	90.5 degrees
Low Temperature	Feb 11 th	39.6 degrees	Mar 10 th	47.3 degrees
Average High Temperature		70.4 degrees		78.8 degrees
Average Low Temperature		50.8 degrees		57.3 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Feb 9 th & 11 th	32 mph	Mar 22 nd	51 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.57 inches		0.00 inches

Data recorded at the Ocotillo Wells Ranger Station, Ocotillo Wells, California.

A Big Thank You from Borrego Elementary!

Borrego Springs Elementary School sends a big smile and an even bigger **Thank You** for all of the recycled toner cartridges. Any cartridges, black or color, from copiers, faxes, and printers are welcome. Please place the empty cartridge into the packaging from the new cartridge going in and write USED or Joe on the outside. Please leave the cartridge in the main office or in the Resources Building. Again, a big thanks for all of the cartridges already recycled and for those to be recycled in the future.



Ocotillo Wells District

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