

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST

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Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent.

As the summer comes to a close, the district worked diligently to get ready for the upcoming season. Even though temperatures continued to stay high, we all knew that fall—with its cooler temperatures and excited recreationists—would soon knock at the door. I worked with core staff to get us ready for another season of facing our biggest challenge, “managing quality recreation with our resources.”

That delicate balance of recreation and resources is what has driven my career. With a high level of passion, creativity, energy, vision, and teamwork, I am excited to continue striving for this balance. Looking at Ocotillo Wells and where we have all brought the park, I believe we have arrived and have achieved this goal. Of course, it is always a challenge and each season and new program brings with it new challenges.

Ocotillo Wells, in my book, has the most incredible wealth of recreation and resources available in California. Our recreation, natural resources, cultural resources, and history are something we can all be proud to showcase and manage.

Is a visit to Ocotillo Wells the traditional park visit? You bet it is. All that and more. The average visitor to our park is a family and not just one family but several families getting together for a weekend of fun, away from the everyday difficulties they face in the world today. They come as a group and set up camp in the old wagon train style. Early mornings you find them all cooking breakfast together and putting on safety gear preparing to embark on a journey. After breakfast they hop onto their toys: bikes, ATVs, RUVs, SUVs, Jeeps, and an array of even more creative ways of maneuvering in the desert terrain. Out they go and enjoy over 85,000 acres of trails, scenic spots, interpretive displays, geocache sites, open washes, and many challenges. The families spend the day together, out doing something that they all enjoy. At night the groups can be found around the campfire, reminiscing about the excitement of the day, and sharing stories and songs. This is a familiar scene in all state parks. What we provide is a growing list of recreational opportunities in a place that is proactively managing the resulting changes.

(Continued on next page...)

Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

Speaking of changes, Ocotillo Wells also has an incredible wealth of history in the park. Last week, staff did an oral history of "The Branches." The Branch family has been recreating in the area since 1945, when Joe Branch purchased his first vehicle. In 1960 Joe started both Tierra Del Sol and the annual Safari that hopes to return to Truckhaven this year for their 47th annual event. "Bud" from CORVA also loves to tell of times in the 50s when the vehicles were like a piece of art. Both Bud and Joe still recreate in the area with their kids and grandkids.

That area was also used by the family of Carmen Lucas, several generations prior to Bud and Joe. For many years that same area was used as a WWII training area. According to Jennifer Parker, our archaeologist, we have over seven layers of history visible in the park today. Jennifer is working on documenting the many layers of landscape. Meanwhile, Steve and his staff will be working on interpreting that history to our visitors.

You have seen many past issues of our newsletter that have highlighted the incredible natural resources of our park. Wildlife abounds. In fact, on the 30th of September the Watchable Wildlife sites focused on the 11 sites recently added to the list of "Best Places to Visit and View Wildlife." Ocotillo Wells was one of the 11!

Today, these same areas, where you can see the best wildlife, as well as signs of history from WWII, Native Americans, Anza, and evidence of OHV recreation, you can now also see signs of the times. Signs of alternative energy exploration, housing development, people building fences, and 1.8 million visitors last year. Visitors come on vehicles that we never could imagine. Most of the visitors provide a great example of weekend family activities and responsible recreation. They want to protect the park and ensure that the riding opportunity that has been in the area during the lives of Joe and Bud is there for their great grandchildren and beyond. However, as in all parks and in society at large, there are people who are not responsible, and they give us our greatest challenge.

Ocotillo Wells strives to "balance quality recreation with outstanding resources." We believe in our Mission, our staff, our volunteers, our user groups, and our visitors. We are working hard to make sure that the upcoming season is a balanced one. The summer was spent busily and actively planning for the challenges this season may bring. Thank you to all of you for helping us achieve our goal.

Sadly, in September one of my closest friends, Rondy Robinson, finished her race with life. Five years ago Rondy convinced me to leave the beach and my family to come here and work for one year. Rondy fought a good fight, kept the faith and finished the race. Her race was completed with passion, excitement, adventure, and a smile. Our memories of her can be used daily as we seek to carry out the State Parks Mission. For those of you who knew Rondy and Harold Soens, we now have two angels to help us out. One in Hawaiian-style wings and one in T-shirt wings, both in sandals.

Watchable Wildlife

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

California Watchable Wildlife launched its new website at its convention in Santa Rosa on September 29th. This organization selects sites throughout the state as premier places to observe wildlife. It has just reevaluated all of its sites from previous years as well as entertaining new nominations. From the almost 300 sites under consideration, it has chosen the first 69 locations to be featured. **And Ocotillo Wells is one of them!**



The Desert Iguana is one example of the “watchable wildlife” that lives here in Ocotillo Wells.

The website, <http://www.cawatchablewildlife.org/index.php>, features maps and detailed information about each of the honored sites, selected from National Parks, State Parks, National Wildlife Refuges and other federal lands, county parks, and private preserves. Of the mere 69 sites chosen, only 11 were state parks, which makes our selection even more special. In fact, the heaviest concentration of selected sites is in central California, especially in and around San Francisco. There are only 14 sites in the southern part of the state (Los Angeles and south), of which Crystal Cove State Park, Mount San Jacinto State Park, and Ocotillo Wells SVRA are the only units in DPR.



So check out the whole website as well as our entry which highlights our abundant reptile population, (especially the flat-tailed horned lizard), and our stark, but beautiful, desert landscape. In our entry, we encourage visitation in the spring and summer when the reptiles are most active. We hope this new park honor will increase our visitation during those usually inactive months of the year.

We would like to congratulate our OHMVR companion, Oceano Dunes SVRA, which also made the final cut. This is the first time that off-road parks have been recognized and Oceano joins us in this achievement.

Geocaching

By Andy Ahlberg, Supervising Ranger

Geocaching is an outdoor recreation that involves locating hidden 'caches' or 'treasures' using a Global Positioning System device or GPS. Geocaching has been around for a relatively short time; however, in that time it has developed a world-wide following. Ocotillo Wells SVRA has become home to about one hundred geocaches.

GPS, or Global Positioning System, was developed by the US Department of Defense. This satellite navigation system was intended for military use and, therefore, its signals were once scrambled, limiting accuracy for civilian use to a distance of about 100 meters. On May 1, 2000, President Clinton announced that this scrambling, known as Selective Availability (SA), would be turned off. Civilians were then able to enjoy accuracy on the order of 10 meters.

On May 3, 2000, Dave Ulmer proposed a way to celebrate the demise of SA. He hid a bucket of trinkets in the woods outside Portland, Oregon and announced its location in an internet posting. This announcement is remarkable for laying out the essence of the hobby as it is today. Dave Ulmer invented geocaching in one fell swoop in that newsgroup posting!



Todd, Margaret and Sarah are in search of a cache.



Geocaching is an activity that can be enjoyed by all ages.

Within a day, the original stash had been found. Within days, more stashes had been hidden in California, Kansas, and Illinois. Within a month, a stash had been hidden as far away as Australia. The hobby was fast on its way to becoming a worldwide phenomenon. Since its inception, literally hundreds of thousands of caches have been hidden all over the world, from the Antarctic to the Sahara Desert. This hobby has introduced thousands of people to outdoor recreation and is enjoyed by young and old alike.

Since the activity's inception, many government agencies have not been supportive of the hobby. This is in part due to not understanding geocaching, but can also be explained by irresponsible cache seekers and cache hidiers. I once heard a story of a small cache, also called a "micro cache," that was hidden in an ancient redwood tree after the person hiding it had used a hand drill to make a hole in the tree! This is not the policy of geocaching. Since geocaching is growing as a hobby, responsible management becomes even more important.

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Geocaching *continued...*

Ocotillo Wells SVRA is leading the way with the proactive management of geocaching. Earlier last year Supervising Ranger Andrew Ahlberg authored the Ocotillo Wells Geocaching Policy, which was shortly thereafter approved by District Superintendent Kathy Dolinar. The policy is well balanced; it protects resources and visitors, but also allows cachers to continue with their hobby.

I spent time reviewing all existing caches within Ocotillo Wells and contacted the owners of caches that were too large or in violation of the cachers' rules and regulations. In reviewing caches within the park, I also insured that each cache was in line with our departmental mission and values, and I made sure that the current cache placements did not compromise natural or cultural resources.

I spent time establishing an open dialogue with our regional geocache moderator. The moderator is the one who approves or disapproves caches being posted to the geocache website. This communication will assist us in the management of caches within Ocotillo Wells for future placement of caches.

At this time, Ocotillo Wells SVRA has four park-sponsored interpretive geocaches hidden within the boundaries of the State Vehicular Recreation Area.



Employees participate in a geocaching exercise during a recent staff meeting.

'Welcome to OW' Cache – N 33 Deg. 09.297 / W 116 Deg. 10.145

'Peg Leg Smith's' Cache – N 33 Deg. 10.815 / W 116 Deg. 08.092

'De Anza Trail' Cache – N 33 Deg. 09.914 / W 116 Deg. 05.546

'Legend of Aztlan' Cache – N 33 Deg. 08.046 / W 116 Deg. 01.787

These and other caches can be found at the free geocache website at www.geocaching.com.

All in all, how can you go wrong with using responsible management practices in order to support families and friends in their enjoyment of everything that our park has to offer while having fun with their hobby? Thank you for your support and remember Ocotillo Wells SVRA is a supporter of responsible outdoor recreation, including geocaching.

Halloween at Ocotillo Wells SVRA

By Aaron Freitas, OHMVR Division

As the summer heat starts to cool and gives way to the milder fall temperatures, OHV enthusiasts begin to flock to the desert environment of Ocotillo Wells for its winter climate and OHV opportunities. The State Vehicular Recreation Area kicked off its winter season on Halloween night, with an open house featuring the spooky side of the desert. Terrariums were on display with a tarantula, a scorpion, and a sidewinder, three of the park's more common creepy critters.



Above: What a surprise when a side-blotched lizard crept out of the log that had been placed in the aquarium. Our tarantula received an unexpected Halloween treat!



Left: Oblivious to our Halloween celebration, our sidewinder rests quietly.

Right: The star attraction of the exhibit was the scorpion's fluorescing exoskeleton, which glowed as ultraviolet light was applied through the blackness of the night.



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Halloween *continued...*

We heard a lot of “WOW!” and “AWESOME!”



Many visitors were impressed when the sidewinder got into the strike position and shook his infamous rattles. The interpreters were kept busy throughout the weekend answering questions, passing out maps, interpretive literature and Halloween candy.



Families, kids, couples, guys and gals came by on every type of vehicle imaginable to marvel at the park’s miniature residents.



We estimated between 200 and 300 people stopped by from Friday night through Saturday afternoon. The turnout and response was so positive that District Superintendent, Kathy Dolinar said, “we plan to do this again next year, but really put the word out in advance and see if we can expand the experience.”

Anza Expedition

By Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist



Did you know ... Juan Bautista de Anza used San Felipe Wash as he led 300 settlers up the California coast in 1775?

Who is Juan Bautista de Anza, you ask?

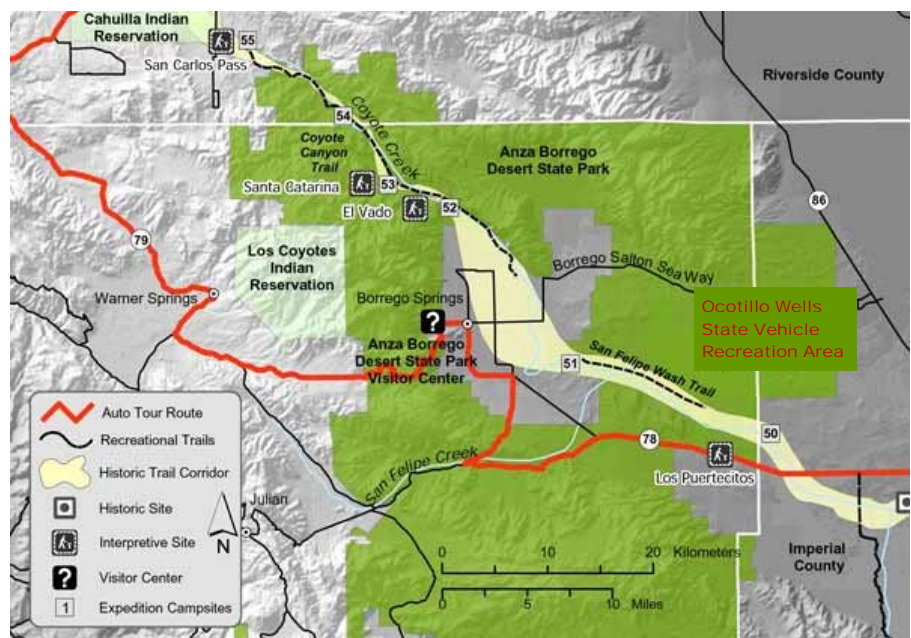
He was a Spaniard born in Fronteras, Sonora into a military family on the northern frontier of New Spain in what is now Mexico. In 1752 he enlisted in the army at the Presidio of Fronteras. He advanced rapidly and was a captain by 1760. He married in 1761. His wife was the daughter of Spanish mine owner Perez de Serrano and they never had children.

In 1772 he proposed an expedition to Alta California to the Viceroy of New Spain. His plan was to bring soldiers and their families along to establish a land route to connect New Spain to the California coast. By doing so, he also planned to create a settlement at the port of San Francisco to keep the English and Russians at bay.

After recruiting soldiers and families, he set off from Tubac, south of present day Tucson, Arizona. The expedition took a southern route along the Santa Cruz River then followed the Gila River to the Colorado River and crossed near Yuma in Quechan Territory.

Crossing the desert proved challenging for the expedition. In order to provide water for everyone, Anza split the group into three, each walking a day apart from the other. This allowed for the water in the springs to refill.

The three groups reassembled at the San Sebastian Marsh located directly across the highway from Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Once the group had rested and restocked some supplies, they set off on what is known as the San Felipe Wash. The wash led Anza and his expedition through Ocotillo Wells and into and across Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.



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Anza Expedition *continued...*

Anza continued, reaching Mission San Gabriel Arcángel on January 4, 1776. From there they followed known trails through Indian villages along the coast of California, visiting Mission San Luís Obispo de Toloso and San Antonio de Padúa, to arrive at Monterey and nearby mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo on March 10th.

From Monterey, Anza then took a small group to explore San Francisco Bay. Once in San Francisco he chose sites for the presidio and the mission. Following orders to explore the “River of Saint Francis,” he traveled the east side of San Francisco Bay before turning south to return to Monterey and back down to Mexico.

The next time you ride down San Felipe wash, take a moment and imagine yourself trekking on foot while leading a mule with all of your worldly possessions mounted on the mule’s back!

Teamwork Results in a Safe Rescue...



By Adam Borello, State Park Ranger

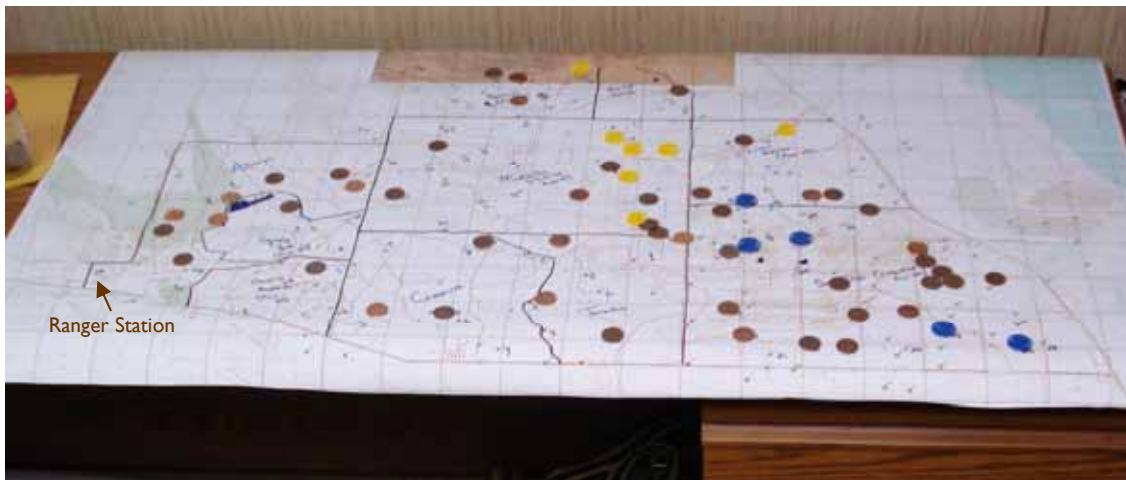
In mid-September a call was put through to State Parks dispatch regarding an overdue, experienced OHV recreationist. At 0400 hours, Ranger Borello was called out from his residence to assist and search for the 50-year-old male. As Ranger Borello gathered information from the reporting party, he realized that it was highly likely this overdue individual was in a very bad situation. Ranger Borello called upon his trusty resource in Ocotillo Wells Fire Dept. and together the two agencies soon had Imperial County Sheriffs, ASTREA (Aerial Support To Regional Enforcement Agencies, a unit of the San Diego Sheriff’s department), Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Rangers and De Anza SAR (Search and Rescue) mobilized and on scene.

The overdue individual’s OHV was located near Shell Reef at approximately 0600 hours, but there was no sign of the individual. Ranger Reisman, from Anza-Borrego, and several members of the De Anza SAR located the individual’s footprints nearby and tracked him successfully for over a mile. This provided the air units with a general direction of travel and after another two hours of grid pattern searching, the individual was located from the air near Tule Wash. He was evaluated and treated for minor heat exposure and spent the rest of his day recovering from his ordeal. The moral of this story: **STAY WITH YOUR VEHICLE!** A stalled vehicle is much easier to see than a person walking through the desert.

Biological Resources—September

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

In September we finished up our Occupancy Survey for Flat-tailed Horned Lizards. Our results are not completely comparable to last year's due to some inaccurate selection of plots last year; however, that said, we had 40% positive plots (48 out of 120) with 69 total flat-tails versus last year when only 25.7% were positive (27 out of 105) with 31 total flat-tails. Needless to say, we are thrilled with the numbers. (If you want to know why we would be thrilled with a success rate that low, please see the other article in this issue, "The Mathematics of Finding Flat-tails.") Adding to our optimism is the fact that so many young were found compared to last year when only adults were seen. (The previous *Blowsand Reader* had a picture of some of the crew who sweated out the survey. We also thank for their participation: Volunteers Robin Halford, Arun Balakrishnan, Donna Ghosh, and John Konecny; Environmental Services Intern Donna Hopkins; Ranger Vic Herrick; and Park Aide Bruce Edley.)



Pennies on this map represent where flat-tails were found this summer. The colored disks indicate plots where flat-tails were found in previous years, but not this year.

As soon as our flat-tail work was done, we proceeded to our fall reptile survey, 22 pitfall arrays monitored for three weeks. While the results were not quite as good as those of last spring, we did have some noteworthy events. The first noteworthy result: after team members walked miles during four months in the summer and found only 69 flat-tails, these three weeks of pitfalls captured 35 flat-tails with two sites, Eastridge and Eriogonum, accounting for just over half of the total. Our best overall plot was the Gas Dome Dune Plot which had eleven captures with seven different species.

Some captures of individual animals are also worth noting. There are a few areas in the park where we have the desert horned lizard, but one had never been captured in a pitfall trap.

Also a rare catch for us was a coachwhip, often referred to as a red racer by locals. This snake is so long that it will usually climb its way out of the pitfall; however, this juvenile had apparently not explored "up" yet and was still in the bucket when we got to it!

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Biological Resources *continued...*



Left: This desert horned lizard was captured in the northwest corner of our park. Note low back pattern and arrangement of the horns differs from the flat-tailed horned lizards you have seen.

Another unusual snake catch was a shovel-nose that was only exclusively black and white with none of the usual red/orange tint between the black stripes. This color variation occurs in a fairly small percentage of the population, at least in this area.

Right: A young coachwhip captured at our plot out by the dump. Gloves were used, fortunately, as this snake bit about 15 to 20 times while we were weighing and measuring it!



Senior Environmental Scientist Eric Hollenbeck spent a major part of the month developing the data base that will be used with the GPS units by the Freeman contractors, by our department in future surveys, and by other parks throughout the state. Eric, Environmental Scientist Joe Hopkins, and Colorado

District ES Kim Marsden—the project managers for the contract work on the

Freeman Property—met with personnel from the San Diego Natural History Museum, which won six of the Freeman contracts, to introduce them to the data base and discuss the start of their work. (There will be a later kickoff meeting with the two other contractors who were awarded the bird and bighorn contracts.)



Left: The seldom-encountered black-and-white-only shovel-nose is leaving the characteristic shovel-nose sine-wave shaped track in the sand as it slides away. This type of track was seen often by our crews while doing our flat-tail surveys this summer.

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Biological Resources—October

October is a transition month. We finished up our reptile pitfall traps on October 3rd—as reported on the previous page. We did have a chance to look at our totals and review last year's report. Quoting from October 2007: "The new protocol of additional pitfalls monitored over a longer time period did not yield as much as we had hoped for this year, but we are hopeful that it will be more productive and useful as we continue through the years." Those words turned out to be prophetic. Last fall we had 40 reptile captures. In spring 2008, we had 118 and this fall, 106.

We have also brought in the remote wildlife cameras that produced the Critter Cam pictures that ran through the summer issues of *The Blowsand Reader*. These cameras recorded over 800 jackrabbit pictures and almost 250 coyote pictures. Other mammals caught "on film" were badger (14 pictures) and kit fox (almost 70). There were over 250 bird pictures with (surprise!) ravens making up 180 of those. Our prairie falcon confirmed his residency in the northeast portion of the park by being photographed almost 50 times. Vultures, doves, and an owl comprised the remainder of the pictures.

During the first full week of October, we started our bird and mammal surveys which are still in progress. The abnormally hot fall weather may have delayed migration because we have not seen as many of the migrant warblers and swallows as we might have expected. Highlights of the bird survey so far have been another roadrunner officially seen on a survey (only the fourth in all of the years of surveying); seeing the prairie falcon during the Tule Wash survey; and, at Heber, Steve Wilcox spotted the first osprey ever recorded on a bird survey.

How many cattle egrets do you see in this picture?



We usually get a fair number of cattle egrets when we do our Heber survey, but not as many as were roosting along Forrester Road just south of Westmorland.

(Continued on next page...)

Biological Resources *continued...*

The mammal surveys (mice, rats, and ground squirrels) have taken us aback. Last year's results had been pretty poor; however, some rainfall and the resulting production of annual plants had led us to hope that we would see some rebound in the population. Our first three weeks, covering eight sites, resulted in a pathetic 13 captures representing 8 different animals. Then we went to Heber with its equivalent of three sites. Heber routinely outperforms OW. For example, last year Heber had almost as many captures as all 17 of the OW sites combined (31 vs. 35). Our expectations were met with 26 captures on the first day. But then on the second day, we had 57 captures of which 43 were new animals. Day 3 produced 75 captures with 52 new animals. Day 4's capture was up to 84 animals with 49 still being new ones! One of the Heber sites had only had 8 animals total in fall surveys, and this fall there were 25 different individuals. We will attempt to analyze this phenomenon in the next issue after all of our mammal surveys have been completed.

A desert pocket mouse bides its time in a plastic bag waiting till he can unload all of that seed in its cheeks into its underground depository.



Watch for their tracks when you are out in the desert.



More progress was made on the Freeman contracts. The San Diego Natural History Museum personnel conducted their first three weeks of small mammal and reptile surveys and will return next spring for the next round. The kickoff meeting was held for the bird and bighorn contractors. The bird surveys will begin in December. The bighorn contractor's start date is still undetermined because he is having permit problems with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which has jurisdiction because the peninsular bighorn sheep is officially listed as an endangered species.

We sadly bid farewell to Cheryl Gillott who left her position in resources for the glamour of the front office. We wish her well, but we do wonder who will be responsible for finding all of our sidewinders next spring!

Brittlebush

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance Assistant

This is the time of year that illustrates the reasoning behind the name of the brittlebush. Its dry, silvery-white papery leaves and brittle stems are an indicator of the arid summer that has passed. If it becomes too hot and dry for too long, the plant is drought deciduous and will drop its leaves completely. The barren branches may look dead, but will leaf out given enough water. With irrigation, brittlebush can be an evergreen shrub and is an excellent choice for a native plant butterfly garden.



When hot and dry, the brittlebush drops its leaves.

When not desiccated, the soft woolly leaves of the brittlebush are a grayish green. Covered with fine fuzz, the hairs on the leaves deflect light to conserve water. In springtime, insects are often seen feeding on the daisy-like yellow flowers that hover above the foliage on branched stalks. Bighorn sheep also browse on the shrub.



With water, the brittlebush grows leaves.

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Brittlebush *continued...*

Brittlebush, or *Encelia farinosa*, is a common medium-sized shrub found throughout the southwest. Caltrans has recognized the value of this member of the sunflower family for erosion control and is including it in some hydroseeding mixtures, thereby increasing its distribution into areas where it is not normally found.

The brittlebush prefers rocky slopes and alluvial fans. They are known as “goldenhills” in some parts of the southwest because whole hillsides can bloom at once, creating a spectacular wildflower display visible for miles.

Another common name for *Encelia farinosa* is incienso. The

brittlebush exudes a fragrant resin that was used for incense in churches of Baja California. The Native Americans chewed the resin, like gum, and used it as glue. A close look at the stems of the plant may reveal some nuggets of the amber-colored resin.



Though the brittlebush is dry and drab in autumn, it will become a hemisphere of brilliant yellow come spring. Meanwhile, try to find resin on the brittle branches that give this plant its common name and enjoy the sharp fragrance that has been enjoyed throughout history.

OW Maintenance—September



By Brian Woodson, Acting Maintenance Supervisor

The end of summer is near as evidenced by the subsiding temperatures. We are entering our preseason startup, and beginning the process of hiring back some of our seasonals from last season. At the time of this article the 08/09 budget is still in its infancy but we were able to get three Maintenance Aides and one Senior Maintenance Aide back on the books to help the permanent staff get the ball rolling on some of our higher priority tasks.

Chief among the tasks was the updating of some of our safety equipment. Last season we purchased housings for our fire hoses and fire extinguishers and we were finally able to get them installed throughout the compound. Julie Humann, our Safety Coordinator, also made sure that we were compliant with our safety signage and notifications as well.



Some of the other projects worked on this month were the cleaning and painting of some of our facilities. We hope this, along with an application of a new product called Graffiti Block® after the painting, will help to alleviate some of the problems that we've experienced with some of the ne'er-do-wells that visit our park.



I've also had an opportunity to flag out the new Highway Frontage Trail for our Heavy Equipment Operator to start reconstructing. The HFT is going to be a designated trail system that parallels Highway 78 and will provide our park visitors a safer alternative to (illegally) riding on the shoulder of the highway. We will be taking a specific route from among the half dozen or so volunteer trails that have been used in the past, and it will begin at the Ranger Station Road entrance and end at Pole Line Road. The project is being broken up into four phases to allow time for us to get a handle on production rates as well as to give users a chance to familiarize themselves with the newer route.

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OW Maintenance—October



Fall is in the air as our season gets underway here at OW. We welcome back some of our staff from last season. And we also take in a few new seasonals here as well. Here's a big welcome to Charles Cawood, Jeff Smith, Marco Guzman, and Todd Ramberg. Charles will be working on the housekeeping staff; Jeff and Marco will be assisting the maintenance staff and Todd will be working with Dave Edman (HEM) in the auto shop.

This month we put a lot of effort into updating our facilities. We painted the Visitor Services, Administrative, and Resource offices as well as the Maintenance office. All of our CXT

restrooms in the park had gotten tagged with graffiti quite a bit this past summer so we had the housekeeping staff paint all of the bathrooms and shower interiors. Broken hinges and door stops and other minor damages were repaired or replaced as well. Our two maintenance office bathrooms were finally completed and the reflooring of the main meeting room is drawing to a close.

Our new fuel tank came online with the construction of a new steel walkway that allows safe access to the fuel pump and nozzle. The older tank next to it was converted to diesel fuel.

The Harold Soens Youth Track was cleaned up as well. With hay bales pulled out of the way, our HEO Dan Christensen made quick work of the track, resurfacing with his grader. Dan also completed the first section of our new highway frontage trail, which runs from Ranger Station Road down to Main Street.

We also started constructing wind and sun blocking louvers on the decks of all our residences to help alleviate some of the impact that the harsh desert environment inflicts on the buildings.

That's about all for this month. Stay tuned as we continue to head into what looks like a promising start to a new desert riding season.



Special Event Season is Upon Us!

By Cris Sanguino, Sector Superintendent

Summer temperatures are down and I can feel the riding season fast approaching! As the event requests come in, I find myself buried in the paperwork and on-site meetings that these events require. So much for the “off season” I heard about when I first arrived!

One of the first events that has already occurred was the desert military training. This training was put on by the US Marine Corps and the FBI. This was a multi-day and night operation where personnel were deployed on foot to make their way to an imaginary city to take it over. The maneuver took place in extreme heat conditions and it prepared units for the hostile environment to which they will soon be deployed.

The USMC dropped by to present Kathy and me with a certificate of appreciation.

The annual Mike Sanders Fun Run took place on October 11th. This event was a fund raiser for the San Diego Hospice Society and the Multiple Sclerosis Society and, according to event coordinators, this event had a slight increase as a result of online registrations.

On October 17th and 18th, the Annual California 4 Wheel Drive Club presented “Operation Desert Fun.” Several vendors were set up on Main Street and the event had pleasant weather for the entire event. Coordinators reported that their online registrations were down slightly from last year.

To see approved special events at Ocotillo Wells, please visit the OHMVR website and follow the links to Ocotillo Wells and Special Events. This link will also be posting our park-sponsored events, thanks to Deborah Bergeson, our new webmaster at Division HQ!

Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...

Did you know ...

Kangaroo Rats can go their entire life without drinking water?

Can you discover how before our next Kangaroo Rat article is published!



The Mathematics of Finding Flat-tails

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

So how is it that a crew of six or seven people set out every morning this summer for five or six hours and only managed to find 69 flat-tailed horned lizards (that was the number officially counted on the occupancy surveys—others were found during the fifteen days we did our demographic plots or as incidentals as we hiked or drove to the official sites)? And if they only found that many, how could they be happy about it?



How can this cute face be so cunningly elusive?

First, the 120 sites were randomly selected throughout the park. The crews do not get the luxury of searching only optimal locations. Random GPS coordinates are generated each representing the NW corner of a ten acre plot. In fact, sometimes getting to the plot is a big challenge because they can be anywhere! All 120 plots represent only about 1.5% of Ocotillo Wells.

Second, each plot is ten acres which is 40,000 square meters. An adult flat-tail—babies are even

smaller—is only about 25 square centimeters. That means that if the plot were completely flat, it would take 16 million flat-tails to cover the plot. Of course the plots never are flat which means there is even more surface area. So each person has one hour to cover 10 acres with maybe a 1 in 20,000,000 chance of finding a flat-tail!

Third, the flat-tail has had hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of years evolving coloration, markings, and shape that camouflage its presence—and that's if it is in the open, not partially buried in the sand, under a bush, or behind a rock.

And all of this is going on while each searcher is trying not to break an ankle, not to fall in a ravine or off a cliff, and not get bitten by a sidewinder (over three dozen were found out on the plots).

The Resources Department hopes that this helps to explain why it is so happy on any given day to even find one of these lizards that have become a symbol of our park.

Critter Cam

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

SAY CHEESE!



Left: The camera at Eriogonum has attracted a lot of birds. Here we are up close and personal with a turkey vulture, very possibly passing through on migration.

Right: Could these doves be using the park as a haven during the hunting season?



Left: The water yields a perfect reflection of a jackrabbit including the characteristic nighttime eye-shine.

(Continued on next page...)

Critter Cam *continued...*



The purpose of the remote cameras is to survey our larger mammals. The birds have been an interesting sidelight as was the following discovery about the hydrology of our oases. The following pictures are excerpted from a longer sequence. Please note the variations in the pool size.



Photo #1—September 8 at 11:14 PM
MONDAY...11:14 PM



Photo #2—3 hours after #1
TUESDAY...2:14 AM



Photo #3—26 hours after #2
WEDNESDAY... 4:14 AM



Photo #4—Less than 16 hours after #3
WEDNESDAY... 8:14 PM

Meet Jeff...

Welcome to Jeff Smith, who joins the Ocotillo Wells maintenance staff this season. Jeff is originally from San Marcos, CA. He has lived with his wife Joy in Borrego Springs for the last 15 years. He has two grown daughters (Kristin and Jennifer). Prior to working for the state park, he was a self-employed floor covering installer for 25 years. Jeff's hobbies include off-roading, boating and the Colorado River.



Meet Marco...

We welcome Marco Guzman, who is also joining the maintenance staff this season. Marco was born in Santa Barbara, CA, and grew up in Imperial Valley. He is the oldest of all his brothers and sisters. Marco loves spending time with family, working on his cars, and traveling to see different places. He is always up for new experiences. He's been working since he was 16 in landscaping at his grandfather's company. After high school, he moved back to Santa Barbara to work at a car dealership, but missed his home so much that he moved back to the Imperial Valley.



Meet Todd...

Todd Ramberg joins the Ocotillo Wells District as a Sr. Maintenance Aide and will be working in the auto shop. He is the father of two boys, TJ and Nathan, Todd loves his computer and enjoys playing video games. His favorite hobby is car maintenance and repairs. Originally from Orange county, he lived in Oregon for a number of years before returning to California. He currently resides in Hemet. Prior to joining OW, Todd assisted mentally-disabled adults with both their work and home environments.



Rare Bird in Tule Wash...

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist



September 17, 2008, was a special day here at OW for several reasons (see other articles in this issue). One reason was the documenting of a burrowing owl in Tule Wash, only the second burrowing owl reported in the park. The first one was observed in Bank Wash several years ago when Steve Bier was still a ranger here. Burrowing owls have that same cute and captivating look that our flat-tailed horned lizards do, which makes them instant favorites with people who are lucky enough to see them. The burrowing owl is a “species of concern” in California and throughout its entire range in North America. In fact, the only thriving population appears to be in Imperial County where it is estimated that 70-90% of the entire California population may reside.

A burrowing owl seems to stand sentinel duty atop one of the cliff banks in Tule Wash.

OW Birthdays...

Beth Shugan	November 19 th
Alfredo Jacobo	November 23 rd
Cris Sanguino	November 25 th
Kitty Gravett	November 30 th
Sasha Wessitsh	December 1 st
Brian Woodson	December 24 th
Charlie Eversole	December 31 st



Cultural Resource Management

By Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist

Now that the weather is cooling off, the cultural resource team is preparing for a busy field season. There are three main projects the team plans on accomplishing this season.

The first is the excavation of the Toner Property to prepare it for new park development. The second is to establish a Scope of Collections Statement for our district. And the third is to complete the existing Historical and Archaeological Index for the Ocotillo Wells District. Every year the Archaeology, History and Museum (AHM) division is responsible for reporting to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) all of the completed work and accomplishments of the Statewide Cultural Resource Staff. This includes all of the PEF reviews, 5024 reports, survey reports, excavation reports, updated artifact catalogues, site records, and so on.

Part of the PRC 5024 law requires us to keep an updated inventory of all of the cultural resources within our park units. Fortunately, Margaret came on board as our newest team member back in July and was able to avoid the summer heat by entering existing information in regards to the cultural resources into an Excel spreadsheet. From there, I was able to import the information into the ArchMap program. Now I can create maps showing where previous work has been done in the parks and create systematic survey plans to identify unknown resources.

Since all of the known archaeological site records are over five years old, relocation surveys can also be planned. These allow for a reexamination of the sites and will provide more in-depth information in regards to the site condition, integrity, and significance.

If you are interested in learning more about archaeological excavations, we will be conducting several at the Toner Property over the next two months. With your supervisor's approval, contact me for the dates and come by and learn what we do. If you really want, we'll even give you a chance to get dirty and try a little excavation for yourself!

The Sunshine Boys... Starring Joe Hopkins

You don't want to miss Joe Hopkins, Hal Cohen and Connie George starring in *The Sunshine Boys* at the Borrego Springs Performing Arts Center. The play is about a vaudevillian team, which performed for 43 years together and then had an unfriendly break-up, and tries to reunite eleven years later for a TV special.

Dates: January 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 Showtime: 7:30 pm

Archaeological Site Stewardship Basic Training Course

December 5 and 6, 2008

Sponsored by Ocotillo Wells and Colorado Desert Districts

Presented by the California Archaeological Site Stewardship
Program (CASSP), a program of the Society for California
Archaeology



There will be classroom training, as well as field training, with emphasis on the sites in the Freeman Property lands. Successful participants will receive, in addition to official training, an extensive notebook of information, an official Site Stewardship hat, lunch, and membership for one year in CASSP (California Site Stewardship Volunteer Program). It is expected that, after training, Site Stewards will steward one of the cultural resource sites in the Freeman Property. Space is limited to 25 people. A Confidentiality Agreement must be signed to become a Site Steward.

Fee: \$25 per person

Sponsored by Ocotillo Wells and Colorado Desert Districts

For more information and to sign
up, please contact:

Jennifer Parker
OWSVRA
jparker@parks.ca.gov
760-767-1326

Joan Schneider
Colorado Desert District
jschneider@parks.ca.gov
951-205-4204

The Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

Heber Dunes SVRA has remained amazingly hot and only recently have the nights cooled down. We are seeing some changes in wildlife comings and goings. Reptiles, particularly, are responding to the changing of season, with desert spiny lizards and side-blotched lizards emerging and seen abundantly after the intense heat of summer diminished. The heat-loving desert iguanas are scarce, apparently seeking shelter underground in their winter burrows.

State Park resource scientists have been conducting mammal surveys and gathering data, partially from live catch traps. The number of trapped rodents shows a major increase over previous years' efforts, suggesting a substantial increase in rodent populations. (Many rodents have cyclic increases in population, and we may be witnessing such an event.) We notice a substantial number of birds of prey here at Heber, no doubt reaping the benefit of the increase in rodents.

Large groups of turkey vultures have been roosting here at Heber Dunes during the last few weeks. Between the thousands of sheep that spend the winter (and sometimes die...) in the Imperial Valley, the water in the adjacent canals and the relatively undisturbed roosting areas, the vultures have a pretty good deal going! Some of these groups (called "kettles") of circling vultures are quite large, well over 50 birds seen on the wing. We are happy to see these adaptive birds here in an often busy off-road vehicle park, finding refuge in the tall trees, surveying the surrounding fields and flocks and cleaning up the carrion nobody else would want to touch.

On Oct. 31st, while our neighboring off-road parks were welcoming incoming crowds of enthusiastic riders, Heber was oddly quiet, literally deserted. I made a perimeter patrol on an ATV, and I was surprised to find a 38-40" western diamondback rattlesnake at the ramada, just west of the restroom area. It was unseasonably hot, over 90°F, and late in the year to see one. It was only 20' away from the ramada, one of the most popular spots here at the park. One can only speculate how



many picnics this old rattlesnake has witnessed in this much-used area. Somehow, it has survived by "lying low" and taking advantage of the tamarisk tree tangles to hide. Wildlife shares our parks with us, and we would all do well to recognize its existence and be aware of it, and avoid an unfortunate mishap. This rattlesnake was shy and inoffensive when I saw it, only wanting to get away after I disturbed it basking in the sun. I hope it has many good days ahead and that our visitors will give it the respect it deserves. Like all wildlife within state parks, rattlesnakes are protected and we hope everyone will respect them and keep their distance.

(Continued on next page...)

The Heber Dunes Report *continued...*

The U.S. Border Patrol has been conducting ASI training classes here, and Heber Dunes is happy to provide a safe and local training ground for Border Patrol officers. Many of these officers will be working in remote and challenging desert areas, and Heber Dunes offers topography to challenge them during their training.

Construction on the new restroom continues and we look forward to it and other projects being completed. A constant parade of visiting inspectors and involved managers are keeping Heber Dunes high on their priority lists.

The Imperial and San Diego County Boy Scouts had a camporee here at Heber, having the park all to themselves that night, by virtue of its Special Event status. Heber Dunes and the off-road community benefitted from the brush clearing and opening up of a formerly much used, but overgrown trail, with maintenance worker Alfredo Jacobo working as sawyer and the Boy Scouts dragging, clearing, stacking and hauling the tangled brush/limbs. This trail is now safer and more easily accessed, and we are grateful for this worthy service project.

The Imperial Sheriff off-road enforcement officers had a training day at Heber Dunes, and Sgt Precidado took Heber Ranger Vic Herrick for a ride in the sand rail. Ranger Herrick was *amazed* at how smooth the vehicle was, landing softly off dune crests, and, in his mind, justifying the considerable cost of this cleverly engineered vehicle within the sand dune environment. The balloon type tires and superior suspension really make a difference compared to a street-legal pickup truck. So smooth was the ride that Vic speculated he could drink a cup of coffee...but maybe not *too* hot...



Halloween weekend was relatively busy but with no major accidents or mishaps, and we trust everyone had a good time.

Visitor Services

By Adam Borello, State Park Ranger

Here are the stats for September

2 Arrests

3 Traffic Collisions

2 Major Medical Assists

3 Minor Medical Assists

At least 6 assists for other local enforcement agencies



The end of summer brought “cooler” temperatures and larger crowds. Weekend visitation was consistently in the hundreds throughout the month. Though hardly comparable to our busy season, this fall, the rangers found themselves relatively busy just the same. This is likely due to what I call the “visitors helping visitors theory.” The idea is that when visitation is high, such as during our busy season, incidents that start out minor don’t always turn into potentially life-threatening incidents because someone inevitably drives by and helps out. With less visitation, the potential for a minor incident such as running out of gas, getting stuck or getting lost can quickly turn critical. Additionally, the September temperatures are still high, which can further escalate a bad situation.

Ranger Wessitsh attended a multi-agency SAR (Search and Rescue) seminar in Yuma earlier in the month. The skills and training he gleaned will serve Ranger Wessitsh and the park well. In fact, Ranger Wessitsh put some of this information to use immediately as he meticulously reorganized and streamlined all of our medical bags and equipment. This included formulating an illustrated manual that documents the proper locations and quantities for all equipment kept in our bags. Training, as I mention often, is an integral part of our success in public safety at Ocotillo Wells. The Ranger staff is extremely grateful that our administration and supervisors not only approve, but promote our attendance.

In mid-September Supervising Rangers Ahlberg and Shea conducted interviews for the upcoming seasonal Desert Lifeguards. Interest was high and applicants numerous due to the quality experiences these seasonal employees know they will receive at our park. Ranger Ahlberg has spent incredible amounts of time adding to and amending the Desert Lifeguard handbook. He has now incorporated over 40 hours of training into the program for these seasonal employees that they are to attend before the season even gets underway. Previously, these seasonal lifeguards received only a bare minimum of training on ATV use and basic orientation, adding up to no more than eight hours. Though the training for these lifeguards will be a team effort by all OW Rangers, Supervising Ranger Ahlberg deserves special note for all of his hard work and thought.

For last year’s busy season the OW Ranger staff was comprised of two recent transfers, two Rangers right out of the academy, and only one returning Ranger. This year we are comprised of four returning Rangers and one Ranger right out of the academy. This combined with our highly trained Desert Lifeguard staff should make for a successful season. Ranger Fenwick, our newest addition, is getting familiar with the park throughout the month of October and will soon be off his Field Training Program as a fully competent officer and highly-valued member of our Ranger staff.

The Tarantula... Our Critter of the Month

By Charlie Eversole, Park Interpretive Specialist

The cooling weather of late October signals the start of our visitor season, and the appearance of our critter of the month—the tarantula. Present year round, tarantulas are usually seen only during this time of year. Many of us have stopped our cars to move them from the roadway. November is when we often see the males out on the prowl in search of a female.

Sometimes, we see groups of male tarantulas searching for the females, who remain safely ensconced in their burrows, which can be up to two feet deep. Once they have mated, the male spider beats a hasty retreat, some say to avoid becoming the female's next meal. Unfortunately for the males, they usually die not long after reaching sexual maturity and mating. Male tarantulas can live about 4-7 years. The female can live up to about 25 years. This beautiful and interesting spider, technically known as an *Aphonopelma chalcodes*, or Mexican blonde, has been featured in our first two OWSVRA interpretive programs.



The Interpreter's Corner

By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

Amazingly, the summer has flown by and our visitor season is underway. October and November have brought significant changes to the Interpretive Department. Over the course of the last two months, we added the front desk operations to the interpretive responsibilities, we hired three new incredible staff members, we participated in the Sand Sport Show and Off-Road Show, and we kicked off our interpretive program schedule over Halloween weekend. Whew... Just a couple of average months at OW!

Transferring the responsibilities of the district office front desk to the Interpretive Department is a natural fit because it is the primary point of contact for park visitors. With this change comes the tremendous benefit of adding incredible new staff to the interpretive team.

First, I would like to welcome Cheryl Gillott who has joined us from the Resources Department. In addition to staffing the front desk and helping park visitors, Cheryl is one of our park's ASI instructors. She is the CalPAL program coordinator, and she will also manage the CAMP system. Next, I would like to welcome our new Park Interpretive Specialist, Charlie Eversole. Charlie joins us from the Maintenance Department and his primary focus will be creating interpretive programs. Charlie is currently in the final stages of developing an astronomy program for visitors where everyone will get a chance to look through a giant Celestron telescope. Next, I would like to welcome Carleen Roberts. Carleen will be focusing her attention on helping visitors in the district office and she will be taking a leadership role in the make-over of the visitor area in the district office. Watch for the changes! Last, but not least, I would like to welcome Beth Shugan to our team. In addition to doing the computer layout work and co-editing for our legendary *Blowsand Reader*, Beth will also be working to develop various interpretive publications. We are building an incredible team here at Ocotillo Wells!

Recently, our park assisted the division by staffing the informational booth at both the Sand Sport Show in Orange County and the Off-road Show in Pomona. These shows are an excellent opportunity to provide show visitors with information about various OHV parks found in the state, safety requirements, sound regulations and other general information. Participants from our park included Kathy Dolinar, Cris Sanguino, Kitty Gravett, Peggy Hurley, Ryan Dolinar and Steve Quartieri.

And finally, over Halloween weekend our Interpretive Department conducted our first programs of the season. Park Interpretive Specialist, Charlie Eversole, set up live animal exhibits featuring a sidewinder, a tarantula, and a giant desert hairy scorpion. The program was a tremendous success. On top of the many "oohs" and "aahs" we received...we also received several comments from visitors expressing their desire to attend more of these types of activities while visiting the park. (Make sure you read the article titled, "Halloween at Ocotillo Wells SVRA" on pages 6-7.)

As I have said many times before... It is an incredible time in the Interpretive Department at OW!

OHV Safety Equipment

These are some of the pieces of safety equipment necessary for a safe, action-packed visit to Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

Their names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

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



- Helmet
- Goggles
- Shoulder Guards
- Gloves
- Knee Pads
- Shin Guards
- Riding Boots
- Elbow Pads

- Chest Protector
- Sunscreen
- Water
- Park Map
- Tow Rope**
- Emergency Kit
- Cell Phone



The Weather Log...



	September	October
High Temperature	Sept 6 th 111.6 degrees	Oct 1 st 104.1 degrees
Low Temperature	Sept 12 th 71.5 degrees	Oct 12 th 48.0 degrees
Average High Temperature	102.8 degrees	91.4 degrees
Average Low Temperature	81.1 degrees	69.9 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Sept 11 th 33.0 mph	Oct 4 th 44 mph
Rainfall for the Month	0.00 inches	0.00 inches

This Summer's Extremes...

Highest Temperature	June 21 st	117.9 degrees
Lowest Temperature	Oct 12 th	48.0 degrees
Average High Temperature		102.3 degrees
Average Low Temperature		76.8 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Oct 4 th	44.0 mph
Rainfall for the Summer		0.48 inches

Number of days
over 100 degrees
Between June 1st and
September 30th:

105

Number of days
Below 100 degrees
Between June 1st
and September 30th:

17

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



Ocotillo Wells District

P.O. Box 360
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
Phone: (760) 767-5391
www.ohv.parks.ca.gov