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## Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

The past summer season was made up of hot...hotter...and the hottest days—just what we expect when we think of summer at Ocotillo Wells. However, the most difficult part of summer for me, besides the heat, is the lack of people. The familiar hum of visitors recreating at OW, as well as the employees who ensure that the visitors are safely having fun, was missing.

This summer, many of our employees helped in parks that needed summer assistance, including Lake Tahoe, North Coast Redwoods, San Diego, and Oceano Dunes. Other employees enjoyed well-needed time off. Those who endured the heat were busy preparing the park for the upcoming season.

The management team worked on long-term planning efforts, and attempted to develop strategies for providing services to our visitors despite the pending budget cuts and threats to OHV funding. In many ways, the discussions were heated, and in my 32 years of park work, our park, along with all the state parks, are looking at the biggest “fire” ever. I would like to tell you that the budget “fire” is over, but it is not. I can only say that at Ocotillo Wells, we never give up the fight.

As temperatures started to drop, the visitors and employees returned—reminding me of migrating birds seeking a place of refuge. Once again, it started to feel like all the heat and hard work were for a good cause—so people have a place to recreate, the staff is able to protect the resources, and for us all to continue to move the park ahead.

During the official start of the season—Halloween weekend—you could actually feel the park coming back to life. As I spent time in the park that weekend with visitors, I was able to see the joy in their spirit. They were back riding; we were here to serve them; and the new restrooms were the best thing yet, especially the one at Pumpkin Patch.

Welcome back one and all. We missed you and look forward to creating lasting memories with you this season.

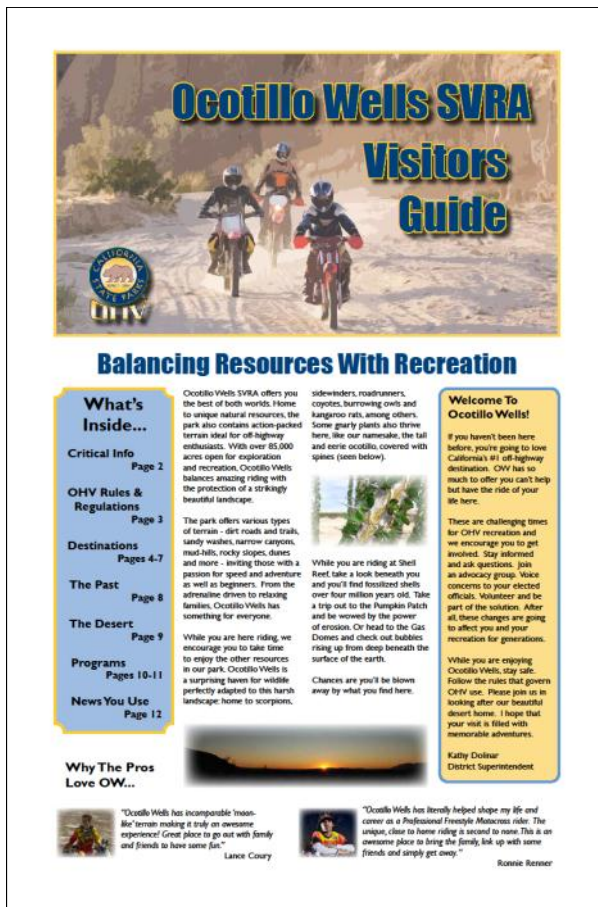
# Visitors Guide Heads to the Printer

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

For those of us who live and work within the park, the destinations, regulations and opportunities for recreation at Ocotillo Wells can seem like an old, well-worn hat—but for many of our weekend visitors, information about California’s #1 OHV destination can seem a bit out of reach.

With this dilemma in mind, Interpretation planned to develop a newspaper-style visitors guide to fill in the details about our corner of the desert for both OHV enthusiasts and assorted passers-by. Results from recent surveys of our adoring public added fuel to the fire for the creation of our *Visitors Guide*: an overwhelming majority of respondents (91+ %) wanted this publication.

Armed with this knowledge and our unofficial motto (“Go Big...or Go Home”), we inked our pens, fired up our computers and dove head-first into Adobe design programs. The overarching concept was to provide as much useful information as possible to our visitors while at the same time keeping the “fast, fun” flavor for which OW is known far and wide. Divided into intuitive sections such “Critical Info” and “The Past,” the new *Visitors Guide* will allow our public to peel back the layers of Ocotillo Wells, as one would peel the layers of a big informational onion (minus the tears). By emphasizing images and edgy blurbs over endless columns of unappealing text, we expect it will be an engaging medium that entices visitors to explore our park while also understanding the reasons for our regulations and policies.



We plan on distributing the *Visitors Guide* through a variety of means. Naturally, they will be available at the Discovery Center and at our Traveling Park Exhibits. Copies will also be added to the Welcome Kits left at each shade ramada every weekend. Local businesses and neighboring parks will also be receiving copies of the *Visitors Guide* and, of course, we can mail copies to anyone who would want one.

We would be remiss not to mention the generous support we received from the other departments at OWSVRA. From our legion of proof-readers and photo-hunters to the patient map makers in the GIS Department, this *Visitors Guide* would not have been possible without your help.

# Administration News

By Kitty Gravett, Management Services Technician



In May the Administrative Department once again wrapped up the season by closing out the fiscal year's finances. Linda and Charles devoted most of their time to closing out the budget for 2010 / 2011, and at the same time started on the budget for the new fiscal year. Melony worked on keeping all the bills paid, and at the same time she trained Delane, who took over her duties for the summer. Kitty worked on separating the last remaining seasonal employees, and Caitlin, our seasonal Senior Park Aide, helped everyone in the office wherever she was needed.

June brought some changes to the Administrative Department as Melony, Caitlin and Charles left our group for the summer months. Just about that time, Leda Seals, our Administrative Officer, accepted the responsibility of leading our District in the largest property audit we have ever done. Linda and Karen Sypniewski from the Maintenance Department worked for weeks preparing for the audit, and making forms for the Audit Teams to use during the actual audit.

When July came around, it was time for the audit to move ahead. Employees from every department spent their days going through every piece of equipment at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. We had to account for everything from vehicles, radios, copiers and computers, right down to the wrenches and drills used by the Auto Shop and Maintenance Department. Then the big job began as Linda and Karen sifted through the audit reports and verified we had accounted for all of our equipment.

Once August rolled around, it was time for our SPI audit of all buildings, training tracks, amphitheater and employee housing. Measurements were taken and reports were completed for all of the repairs. Linda and Karen had the task of entering this information into CAMP and preparing reports that went to our Maintenance Chief and Maintenance Supervisors to be used for scheduling repairs in preparation for the new season.

In September everyone was ready for a rest, so we all left the desert for a break. After their "summer breaks," Linda and Kitty traveled to Lake Tahoe to assist the Sierra District Administrative Department because they had a staff shortage. Linda spent a week there and worked with the Accounting Department. Kitty assisted in the Personnel Department for two weeks. Lake Tahoe was beautiful and was a great change from the summer heat here in the desert. The Sierra District staff was fantastic and took great care of us during our trip; this included tours of some of Sierra District's great treasures.

In October we were all back in our offices doing a little catch up and preparing for the opening of our riding season. Melony, Charles and Caitlin have all returned for the season, and the Administrative Department is back in full swing.

# Notes From the Tractor Seat

By Dan Christensen, State Park Equipment Operator

As we grade trails and perform other work throughout the park, State Park Equipment Operators Adam Asche, Len Perris and I, Dan Christensen, often make contact with our park visitors who are usually very thankful for what we are doing, and they ask all sorts of questions.

Some ask for directions to a park feature, some ask for maps, some ask for things that we cannot do, such as towing out a stuck vehicle or jump-starting a stalled vehicle. But most of the time they ask, "Where is the nearest rest room?" and "Why do you not have more rest rooms?"



At the end of last season when Kathy Dolinar asked all of us for suggestions on what we needed to do to improve the park for our visitors and for ourselves, we passed on the most frequently-asked question that we hear from our visitors. She must have taken it to heart.



There are no less than 9 new CXT restrooms being installed in the park this year! Some are being installed by a contractor, and some we have installed ourselves, but they will all be

in place and operational by the end of the season.



Thanks go to Curt Linse, Maintenance Chief at Oceano Dunes SVRA, who started this whole project when he offered OW three CXTs that Oceano Dunes was unable to use. With prompt support from Tina Robinson and the Resources team, the necessary paperwork was processed and the required monitoring performed

prior to the start of any installations. In the meantime, Lou Vieira, owner of Gold Land Building, arranged for transportation to move the three CXTs from Oceano Dunes to OWSVRA. He also arranged the crane service, as well as providing the crew to install the three CXTs. Of course, without the holes dug by the OW crews, there would be no place to set the CXTs.

*(Continued on next page...)*

# Notes From the Tractor Seat *continued...*

Pumpkin Patch was the most challenging installation of all since it is located in a remote section of Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Jim from White’s Crane Service, very patiently and expertly traversed 6 ½ miles down sandy Tule Wash to the Pumpkin Patch site and only got stuck twice in the soft sand. The pictures show us installing the CXT at Pumpkin Patch on a bright and beautiful October day. It is no small task installing one of these. As you can see, it takes a lot of manpower and machine work.

Other new restrooms already in place are located at the 4X4 obstacle course, on Benson Lake Loop near the shade ramadas north of the airport, and at the Roy Denner ATV training track on the Toner property. By the end of the season five more CXTs will be installed—two along Poleline Road (one of which will be near Gas Dome Trail), one on County Line Road, and one each at Hidden Valley and Shell Reef.

We would like to thank State Parks Maintenance Supervisor (and former SPEO) Dennis Raymond for his help at Pumpkin Patch, and thanks to all of his Housekeeping staff for keeping all of our facilities in top notch condition. Without the CXTs from Oceano Dunes, and the team effort of the Resources staff, Maintenance staff, the Heavy Equipment Operators, and the crews and equipment from Gold Land Building and White’s Crane Service, the CXT installations would not have happened this year.



So now, as we all make contact with the visitors who are returning to our park for another season of the best open off-highway riding available in California, we can give them a much better answer to their most frequently asked question, “Where is the nearest restroom?”

Left, the CXT installation on the Benson Lake loop.

# Heber Dunes Interpreter

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

## The Essay

The first assignment—you know the one. It's been the same every year since you were in elementary school. Sitting at your desk staring at a big blank computer screen wishing you had something really great to write about—like a Caribbean cruise or mountain climbing in Katmandu. Even a major house remodel sounds better than what you actually did with your time off in the summer.

Ah, those lazy days of summer—unless, of course, you're Alfredo Jacobo, the mainstay of Heber Dune's Maintenance Department. For him there was no time off this summer. If it could break down, it did—septic systems, water pumps, storm damage, and downed utility lines. The list goes on. At least he wasn't bored!

For Heber's interpreter, Jaime Mendez, September brought more than just the end of summer. Preparations for the 4-H ATV Safety Project Parent Orientation, training opportunities, and planning for the 2011-12 season quickly filled her calendar.

Ranger Vic looked wistfully at his fishing gear and began sorting through the numerous applications on his desk. Soon, eager applicants began lining up for interviews, and Heber Dunes

SVRA welcomed aboard two new employees—Eduardo Telemantes and Olivia Kerns (Park Aide and Senior Park Aide, respectively).

With the General Plan nearing completion, Heber is proud to be hosting the upcoming Commissioners meeting. Prior to the formal meeting to approve the Heber Dunes General Plan, the Commissioners will be touring Heber Dunes SVRA, as well as other OHV areas in the region. Watch for an upcoming article highlighting the meeting.

I guess that essay will have to wait until later!



Eduardo Telemantes, right, with Luisa and Stephanie Pimentel, winners of the pumpkin decorating contest.



Heber's mini Discovery Center before renovations; watch for the "after" photo in the next newsletter.

# Resources' Summer Surveys

By Kevin Ponce, Environmental Scientist

Over the summer, the Resources Department biologists conducted field surveys for the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard and other park wildlife. This “barren” desert is full of interesting and viable wildlife. We have documented the presence of coyotes, badgers, burrowing owls and prairie falcons, as well as many reptile species. If you see our cameras in the field—please let them continue to take photos of the Animal Kingdom’s wildlife as they show that the OWSVRA has a thriving population of wildlife.

In an ongoing effort to streamline and update our Habitat Monitoring System (HMS), the OW Resources Department will be making changes to our current biological sampling methods. Aspects of the desert environment that OW has monitored in the past include: reptiles, small mammals, birds and vegetation. Previously, these surveys were conducted in many areas scattered widely across the SVRA which made for a long day traveling to the sites.



Sherman Trap used in wildlife surveys.



Survey equipment.

To make surveys more efficient OW will be condensing the various types of biological sampling into several designated sample plots. Decreased travel times and updated survey protocols will ensure that the OW Resources Department can provide the best data possible in a timely and efficient manner. These changes will benefit both the desert environment and California OHV enthusiasts with better data about how OW’s habitat and wildlife values are functioning.

In the near future, the OW Resources Department will be taking its restoration capabilities to a new level by employing techniques learned from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Student Conservation Association (SCA). The SCA uses techniques called “pitting” and “vertical mulch,” which will be used to restore OHV trails and prevent accelerated erosion. Pitting helps to loosen compacted soil and create favorable microclimates for seed germination. Vertical mulch helps to collect wind-blown debris and creates structure in heavily-eroded areas. Together, these techniques are capable of retaining surface soil and revegetating large areas of desert, ensuring OHV recreation opportunities will be available for many years to come.



Pitfalls for catching wildlife.

# Trail News

By Brian Woodson, Maintenance Supervisor, Trails

Welcome back Readers! This edition covers events in the Trails Department from May through October 2011.

Last May we performed the usual routine of repairing signs and picking up litter along the trailside, and we continued to make progress on our carsonite post and trail marker project. Our crew also worked with the Heavy Equipment Operators (HEO's) to refill some of the more dangerous "donut holes" out by a few of our campsites. These "donut holes" are frequently created by riders enjoying the age-old practice of having fun turning circles and getting dizzy. The circles cause ever-increasing berms and ultimately, drop-offs that an unsuspecting rider coming from the outside edge might discover. We enlisted the aid of the HEO's, as well as the GIS Department, to locate, track and remove them.



Dennis Raymond preparing to move a new bench for the Amphitheater trail

In June we had our annual Equipment Property Management (EPM) audit. The district, as a whole, spent a few days tracking down and verifying the large and small inventory of our tools and equipment. Minor trail grooming, sign repair and litter removal rounded out the rest of the month's activities. We wrapped up the 2010 season with some final carsonite post installations. The Harold Soens Youth training track located on Ranger Station Road was watered, graded and the track was closed for the summer.

In July, we moved on to the State Property Inventory (SPI), and we included ourselves as part of the team responsible for going through our facilities and ensuring that the Computerized Asset Management Program (CAMP) had current information regarding the annual Condition Assessments. We took measurements and made notations of possible issues or repairs that were found during our site visits and reported them back to our CAMP SPI liaisons. They, in turn, entered that data into CAMP to show the latest information. Minor trail grooming, sign repair and litter removal rounded out the rest of the month's activities.

In August we increased our attention to the preseason build-up of supplies and materials. Signs, and the posts on which to place them, were ordered. Tools were purchased to replace those worn out during last season; others were maintained, sharpened or repaired.



Left to right, Ryan Walasek, Shay McGhee and Josh McCue move one of the benches along the Amphitheater Trail

*(Continued on next page...)*



## Trail News *continued...*

For the sign shop, we ordered new storage drawers to help maintain cleaner and more organized inventories of our signs.

By September most of our supplies had arrived, and we began to redesign our sign shop layout, as well as our trail equipment storage shed, to accommodate more efficient use of the space. Thanks to the Maintenance Department for sending us a couple of qualified individuals to run additional electrical service in our sign shop. This allows us to use our new tools in a safe manner.

The season start up began in October. Everyone was returning for the season and ready to get back out in the field after a long summer break. The Trails team performed trail maintenance, repaired signs, removed litter, and made plans to pick up where we left off last May. We developed schedules for our crew this season, which include additional new carsonite posts and markers to be installed along our trails. This will help us to finish our goal of getting each trail marked at every 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile to help our visitors know where they are in the park. A few of the crew were involved in assisting with transporting and placing the concrete benches at the ramadas along the campfire center pathway.



Ryan Walasek (left) and Josh McCue perform maintenance on the Pumpkin Patch trail

## Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...

### Did you know...

Often feared, tarantulas are actually quite docile. Although they rarely bite and their venom isn't considered deadly to humans, never handle them! One of their primary defenses is their "urticating hairs," barbed hairs on the spider's abdomen that irritate the skin or eyes of predators. In the fall the male tarantula comes out of his burrow, and may be seen walking around the desert looking for a female.



# Cultural Resources

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist and Joanne Collier, Archaeological Project Leader

Over the summer, the Ocotillo Wells SVRA archaeologists, Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist, Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist, and Joanna Collier, Archaeological Project Leader, worked on reconciling previous archaeological data, conducted new research, and believe it or not, did field surveys. In August, Alicia Perez and Kelly Long, Associate State Archaeologists from OHMVR Division headquarters, showed their devotion by coming to Ocotillo Wells to help with cultural surveys for a time-sensitive project on secondary trails. We expect them back early next year for more survey help. The OW archaeologists also traveled to other districts to help with surveys. Because of our limited resources, all of the OHMVRD archaeologists help each other with various projects across the state.

Now that the season is underway, the OW archaeologists are busy with surveys and monitoring projects in the park. You may have seen them “wandering around” the desert close to the District Office while they survey from Main Street over to the western park boundary. This is part of a larger survey of the park’s many high-use areas, to determine what cultural sites are in danger of inadvertent impacts. Main Street was chosen as the starting point of this season’s surveys because a proposed project is being discussed for the area. With this kind of advance notice, archaeologists will be able to have the project area surveyed early in the planning process so that cultural sites can be avoided when it is time to build.

In conjunction with the high-use survey, archaeologists are investigating secondary trails as part of a review process that helps determine which trails within Ocotillo Wells should be signed and maintained. In the big picture, both of these projects fit into a much larger inventory survey of the entire park. Section by section, Ocotillo Wells SVRA will eventually be completely surveyed and all cultural sites will be documented.



The Toner Phone Hearth, a possible WWII training campfire.

Monitoring is another major aspect of the archaeologists’ job here at Ocotillo Wells. With the placement of new restrooms and picnic areas around the park, sign installation and trail rehabilitation, as well as various construction projects at the District Office and Toner, it is important that all of these ground-disturbing activities be monitored by a district archaeologist in the event that any cultural materials are disturbed. Since the majority of OW has never been surveyed, it is possible to come across a site during monitoring that no one has ever seen before. One

*(Continued on next page...)*

## Cultural Resources *continued...*

example of this is the Toner Phone Hearth, discovered during trenching for the Toner phone line in March. Although unexpected, this discovery only delayed work for a few hours while archaeologists excavated and recorded the historic hearth, possibly from World War II training near Benson Dry Lake.

All of the surveying that occurs throughout the park leads to research and analysis of the data district archaeologists collect in the field. Earlier this summer, Joanna and Margaret collected charcoal samples from three different sites in the eastern side of the park and sent them to a lab for radiocarbon testing. The results show one site to be AD 1030 to 1200 (the time of the Middle Ages in Europe and the First Crusade). The second site dates to AD 1200-1270 (the time of the Spanish Inquisition and the Magna Carta). The third site has a wider range of dates with AD 1660-1710 (when Isaac Newton wrote *Mathematic Principles of Natural Philosophy*), AD 1710-1880 (the time of the Anza Expedition, the French and Indian War, and the American Revolution), and AD 1910-1950 (the time of WWI and WWII). This could mean there were



Joanna excavating and mapping the Toner Phone Hearth.

multiple uses of the third site, or that the charcoal sample was contaminated.

Ocotillo Wells archaeologists are constantly working towards putting together a more complete picture of our park's past. In turn, this contributes to a better understanding of our state's long and complex history.

Fish bone and charcoal that was collected from a site for radiocarbon dating.



# Travels of a Backboard

By Andrew Ahlberg, Supervising State Park Peace Officer

While performing the typical duties of Law Enforcement and Emergency Services, we go through a lot of equipment. The biggest amount of equipment that we consume is that which is associated with saving lives. The process of locating, treating, and packaging an injured rider for transport to a trauma center uses up an enormous amount of supplies, much of which we cannot recover. For example, a typical downed rider takes a minimum of a backboard, C-collar, head bed, straps, oxygen bottle, and oxygen delivery system. If the rider has any additional injuries, the list of equipment grows. A significant amount of items are one use only; if these are used, we try to replace it with equipment from the ambulance. Some of the equipment is reusable, such as backboards. Whenever we purchase backboards, we have "OWSVRA" labeled on them and some even have our phone number in hopes that we can get them back. Some of our backboards cost extra because they are designed to fold and fit in the rear of SUV's. This is the story of one such backboard.....



In mid-August, while working on paperwork at the Ranger Station, I overheard radio traffic on the Fire Channels advising Cal Fire that there was a medical call at the Ranger Station. I stuck my head outside and looked around; I saw nothing. I asked Callan McLaughlin if he knew of a medical aid call and he responded that he did not. I started to walk to the District Office when I noticed a truck racing up the road. I waved the truck down expecting an injured person inside, but there was none. The truck occupants advised me that they had been camped along Quarry Road and that three of their friends went for a motorcycle drive down to Superstition Mountain and that there had been a wreck. Two of the friends had been ejected from their motorcycles, had been unconscious, and one was still unconscious and the other was awake but unable to move. I asked how they got the information, and they told me that the one person that was uninjured had called from his cell. The reporting party provided me with the location coordinates of the injured people.

After getting the basic information, I called BLM Dispatch directly on the radio and advised them of the situation. The BLM Dispatch told me that they did not have anyone available to respond and that the closest available was more than an hour and a half away. BLM then requested that I respond as a mutual aid. Because of the seriousness of the situation, I agreed and started a response. I talked to Cal Fire and advised them about the specifics. They returned to their station for a 4x4 pickup truck.

*(Continued on next page...)*

## Travels of a Backboard *continued...*

While in route, I requested an air ambulance and provided the coordinates. REACH Air responded and was able to land about ten minutes before I arrived on scene. After I got to the area, I could see the aircraft but could not locate the crew. I parked and followed their tracks about 100 yards and found them treating the two injured people. The crew advised me that they did not have enough room to transport both patients, so I requested a second air ambulance; Mercy Air was responding. The air ambulances do not carry a lot of the basic supplies, so my folding backboard was needed and used.

After over an hour in the 110 degree heat, both patients had been transported and the one uninjured rider and I were left to ourselves. Both of us were feeling the effects of the heat, especially the rider. The rider and I made it to my vehicle, sat in the air-conditioning and drank water until we had cooled down. I agreed to give the rider a ride back to the camp on Quarry Road. As I started driving out, I found West Shores Ambulance in their pickup truck, I had them evaluate and take charge of the last rider.

After returning to the Ranger Station, I called REACH Air and found out that the patient we packaged on the folding backboard from my vehicle had been transported to the UCSD Trauma Center. I contacted the security at the UCSD Trauma Center and asked them to keep an eye out for the backboard and if they found it to hold onto it.

The next week, after dropping off some evidence at the San Diego Crime Lab, a couple of Rangers stopped by the UCSD Trauma Center and looked and looked, but could not find the backboard. After this, I realized that we would probably never see that backboard again.

Last week, while at the Ranger Station, one of the West Shores Ambulance EMT's came by with the missing backboard, which he found at Desert Regional Hospital near Palm Springs. I was amazed; I thought for sure that we would never see it again, but there it was. I have no idea what type of adventures that backboard had during the months it was gone, but I bet it did its job well!



Emergency personnel using a backboard to transport a patient.

# Stargazing at Ocotillo Wells

By Ken Conway, Interpretation Senior Park Aide



**Join us for stargazing on Saturday night  
Increase your **WOW** factor at Ocotillo Wells SVRA—  
When was the last time you saw something new and said **WOW**?**

After a day of off-highway adventure, join us for an evening of exploration. One of the best features of Ocotillo Wells is the dark desert skies. These dark skies allow us to explore and learn about the universe around us. Come look through OW's humongous 11" Celestron telescope, or take one of our tabletop user-friendly Astroscans for a spin around the Milky Way neighborhood—it's easy and fun. We'll open a window to view the planets in our solar system, distant galaxies, and deep space nebulas. **WOW!**



Ali Barnes with the Celestron telescope



Orion Nebula photographed by the Hubble Telescope

***Do you know what light pollution is? Find out how unique the dark skies of Ocotillo Wells are. Find out what you can do to preserve dark skies in your neighborhood.***

***Do you the difference between a Galaxy and a Nebula?***

***Do you know where stars are born?***

***Do you know how big, and how different Jupiter is? Ginormous! Go big or go home!***

***Do you know how powerful the storms on Jupiter are?***

***Do you know how many moons Jupiter has?***

***Do you know Jupiter was and is important to life on earth?***

***Do you know how to find Polaris in the sky? What's the importance of the North Star for navigation?***

***Do you know why we only see the planets Mercury and Venus at sunrise or sunset?***

***Do you know where NASA is exploring right now?***

*(Continued on next page...)*

# Stargazing at Ocotillo Wells *continued...*

Answer all these questions and more on most Saturday nights at the OW Amphitheater located off Ranger Station Road near the Discovery Center. Follow the red footlights out to the theater. Come for the hot chocolate, come for stars, come and learn how special Ocotillo Wells is! **WOW!**



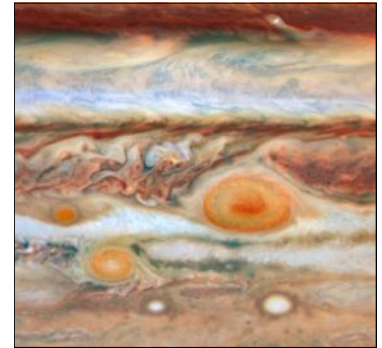
Barred spiral galaxy

exploring with Stellarium; this software makes finding and learning about the constellations easy and fun. Stellarium is a free open-source planetarium for your home computer. It shows a realistic sky in 3D, just like what you see in your backyard. Just set your local home coordinates and go exploring the night sky. Find Stellarium on the internet at <http://www.stellarium.org/> **WOW!**



Stellarium screen shot

Join Ocotillo Wells' night sky interpreters Ali Barnes and Ken Conway on Saturday evenings during the riding season and learn your way around the Milky Way galaxy. On cloudy nights Ali and Ken make presentations about far out places inside the Discovery Center. We love



Storms generated from internal planet heat

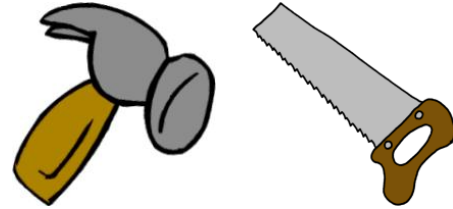


Star trails over the desert

Find out about dates and times for this program in our weekly interpretive schedule guide. Receive your guide by email—drop us a note at [owinterpretation@parks.ca.gov](mailto:owinterpretation@parks.ca.gov). Come join us at Ocotillo Wells where astronomy is the ultimate in off-highway fun. **WOW!**

# OW Maintenance

By Karen Sypniewski, Office Technician



The heat didn't stop them! As usual the Maintenance staff stayed very busy but with few employees. Our skeleton crew worked hard to keep all buildings and 85,000 acres clean and safe for both employees and Ocotillo Wells visitors to enjoy. Although busy maintaining landscaping, fixing minor repairs and assisting with housekeeping duties, summer staff was able to squeeze in a few new projects. A couple of their accomplishments are the remodel of the Auto Shop kitchen and construction of a Camp Host Pad at the 4x4 Track. This consisted of pouring 30 yards of concrete in 120 degree weather!

Housekeeping staff also worked hard at enhancing the appearance of park restrooms. This included painting walls and floors, installing solar lights, replacing windows and painting handicap emblems on designated parking spaces.



The renovated Auto Shop kitchen is ready to use.

On the administrative side, much time and effort was put into cleaning up and updating our CAMP database. Leda Seals headed the project, selecting employees from each department to perform an internal audit, locating each piece of park property—this was quite a task! When the audit was complete, administrative and clerical staff made over 600 changes to the CAMP database.

Dennis and his crew, under supervision of Norb Ruhmke, have numerous upcoming projects planned to beautify and improve our park. These will be completed through out the season as staffing and budget permits.

## Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...

### Did you know...

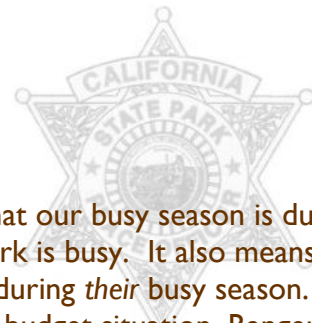
Flat-tailed horned lizards capture ants with their sticky tongue—not by grabbing them with their jaws! They have been known to eat up to 200 ants in one day!





# Visitor Services

By Callan McLaughlin, State Park Peace Officer



One of the many perks of working at Ocotillo Wells SVRA is that our busy season is during the winter months. This makes for great work conditions when the park is busy. It also means that during our off season (summer), park staff can help out at other parks during *their* busy season. With many parks understaffed and unable to fill vacancies due to the current budget situation, Rangers from Visitor Services assisted those California parks in dire need of help this past summer.

For the first part of the summer Rangers assisted the “North” Sector of San Diego Coast. The Ocotillo Wells Rangers worked shifts that needed to be filled. This provided the OW Rangers an opportunity to work “beach” park units and to experience campground operations that come with it. The Rangers also had the opportunity to get out of the desert heat for a little bit and experience the fog. Over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend, Supervising Ranger M. Howard and Ranger S. Wessitsh worked at Oceano Dunes SVRA. This gave Oceano Dunes the much needed extra Peace Officer help they needed for the weekend. At around the same time, in early July, North Coast Redwoods asked for help from Ocotillo Wells to assist with shift coverage in their district.

Rangers A. Borello, C. McLaughlin, and B. Veater each spent about three weeks at various times working in the Redwoods, and they worked at several different types of parks. They covered shifts at Sinkyone State Wilderness, which is mostly primitive camping, and contains The Lost Coast Trail. Ranger Veater was able to take pictures of the Roosevelt Elk, which live in the park. They also worked at Richardson Grove State Park, in the heart of the Redwoods, and Benbow Lake SRA, which is along the Eel River. Working at these parks provided the Rangers an opportunity to work in a more “traditional park.” They also were able to explore the area on their days off—hiking, camping, rafting and exploring some of the local towns. These parks appreciated the help, and the Rangers appreciated the opportunity to experience these parks.

Most of the Visitor Services staff also helped the OW Resources Department with the annual Flat-tailed Horned Lizard surveys. This gives the Rangers an opportunity to work with other departments in the District and allows them to get other “generalist” experience besides law enforcement and medical incident. The Rangers went out with the Resource crew at “O dark 30” and checked various plots throughout the park for the Flat-tailed Horned Lizards. Some days, the score for finding the lizards would be: Rangers 3 and Resources 0. This project gave the Ranger staff a chance to learn more about Flat-tailed Horned Lizards and the other reptiles that inhabit our park, but also it gave them the opportunity learn about what Resources does.

With the current budget situation, it was great to see Visitor Services assist other services in District, as well as those park units outside the District. By helping during our off season, Ocotillo Wells Rangers can lessen the stress load on other OW departments and in other park units. We can also help with the wear and tear that comes with the busy season, and we can still provide a great experience for the park visitor.

# 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.

## 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.



# The Darkling Beetle... Our Critter of the Month

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I



Darkling beetles, also known as stinkbugs, are one of the most recognizable and often seen insects of the desert southwest. Like other desert wildlife, they do not need to drink water because they obtain water from their food. Their fused wings also prevent water loss.

These odd-looking black beetles can be seen moving through the desert with the most arrogant of attitudes. Their arrogance comes from their ability to drop a stink bomb like no

other. When disturbed, the darkling beetle buries its head in the sand, and elevates its rear end high in the air as if to say, "I'm warning you..." When antagonized further, they discharge a foul-smelling black fluid from their



rear end. This powerful chemical compound renders the beetles unpalatable to most predators.

But don't hate the stinkbug for its unattractive smell. They play an important role in the desert ecosystem because they are a recycler. They feed on decaying leaves, sticks and grasses, dead insects, and even poop. They take this waste and break it down into

## The Darkling Beetle... *continued*

nutrients that can then be used by other organisms, like desert wildflowers. I told you these beetles were important.

For some reason this year, darkling beetles have been congregating in large numbers—an occurrence not frequently seen. It is thought that this behavior is due to a good habitat—they are gathering in moist areas.

So the next time you see one, give it a little space and a whole lot of respect.



## Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...

### Did you know...

Mesquite was an important food source for Native Americans living in our park. The mesquite pods were collected each fall and stored in large basket granaries for use in winter months. The entire fruit, including the enclosed seeds, was crushed into a meal using a pestle and mortar. The meal was then mixed with water to create a mush that could be either eaten immediately or made into cakes and dried for future use. If you're interested in visiting a mesquite dune and look for their fruits... take a trip to the Barrel Springs area of our park.



# Friends of Ocotillo Wells

By Jan Chaney, President



Hello from the Friends of Ocotillo Wells. We would like to thank the staff of the Ocotillo Wells SVRA *Blowsand Reader* for inviting us to join their newsletter. Not only will you receive our news, but you will also receive information on what is happening in the park. To start, let's recap last year. The Discovery Center opened, and Friends of Ocotillo Wells is a part of it. We have books, whips and other merchandise for sale to help support the park. We assisted with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Roughneck Rendezvous last January, and it was bigger than the first year. We held two desert cleanups—one at the beginning of the season and the other after the Roughneck Rendezvous—that were great successes. After much planning and a huge team effort, the new 4x4 area on the north side of the park between

Holly Road and the Crossover Trail camping area south of State Route 22 was constructed and dedicated. Thank you TDS for all the hard work you did! With the help of Friends, we were able to donate towards its creation. We are so glad that we could help.

This year we have already had one desert cleanup. The turnout was not as large as we would have liked, but the volunteers got the desert clean. We would like to thank everyone who took time from their busy schedules to help, and we hope they enjoyed themselves. We also had some wonderful prizes to raffle. A big thank you to all the sponsors for their support of the raffle!

Our next adventure is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Roughneck Rendezvous scheduled for January 28-29, 2012. Plan to attend this two-day event, and if you are available to help, please give us a call.

Thank you to Luv 2 Camp; they donated money this year for the "Coffee with the Interp" program and the night events at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. All but two of the "Adopt a Wash" signs have been erected, and we would like to thank Patrick Curry Electric, Pennies from Heaven, Luv 2 Camp, and Desert Ironwoods Resort for their support with this project. We are still working on JD Built and Saveajack.com signs, and hope to have them up very soon.

Please don't forget to check out the Discovery Center when you are in the park. They have different events every weekend for the whole family. You can turn your car radio to AM 1620 for Radio Rock-otillo, which broadcasts the news updates and events going on in the park. Don't forget to try out the new 4x4 track on the north side of the park. Please remember to ride responsibly so that we get to see you again and again. Have a wonderful time in the park.

Jan Chaney  
President, Friends of Ocotillo Wells

# What Is Your Favorite OHV Area?

These are some of the OHV areas found in and around the State of California. Their names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

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

Carnegie  
 Clay Pit  
 El Mirage  
 Hangtown  
 Heber Dunes  
 Hollister Hills  
 Hungry Valley  
 Imperial Sand Dunes  
 Jawbone Canyon

Mammoth Bar  
 Oceano Dunes  
 Ocotillo Wells  
 Plaster City  
 Prairie City  
 Razor  
 Stoddard Valley  
 Superstition Mountain

# Weather Log for May through October ...



	MAY		JUNE		JULY	
High Temperature	6 <sup>th</sup>	103.1°	27 <sup>th</sup>	114.8°	2 <sup>nd</sup>	115.7°
Low Temperature	16 <sup>th</sup>	54.7°	9 <sup>th</sup>	63.2°	7 <sup>th</sup>	76.0°
Average High Temperature		87.7°		101.7°		106.5°
Average Low Temperature		64.1°		75.8°		82.8°
Maximum Wind Gust	15 <sup>th</sup>	39 mph	6 <sup>th</sup>	35 mph	7 <sup>th</sup>	51 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00"		0.01"		1.38"

	AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER	
High Temperature	24 <sup>th</sup>	116.7°	4 <sup>th</sup>	113.5°	2 <sup>nd</sup>	103.1°
Low Temperature	11 <sup>th</sup>	73.0°	14 <sup>th</sup>	66.8°	27 <sup>th</sup>	51.3°
Average High Temperature		110.4°		102.4°		91.5°
Average Low Temperature		85.0°		80.2°		70.0°
Maximum Wind Gust	2 <sup>nd</sup>	36 mph	23 <sup>rd</sup>	32 mph	25 <sup>th</sup>	37 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.13"		0.65"		0.00"

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



## Ocotillo Wells District

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