

**OCOTILLO WELLS
DISTRICT**

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OF INTEREST**

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Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 4 NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2010



Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

Once again fall arrived in the desert, but this season, unlike any other during my time at OW, the ocotillos turned a shade of orange and yellow. With the change of season, people began their migration back to Ocotillo Wells. Visitors anxiously brought out their off-highway vehicles, which had been tucked away during the heat of summer. Employees returned to provide services to the visitors, but sadly, we have lost two staff members—Todd Ramberg, Mechanic, and Gary Slattery, Environmental Scientist. Both Todd and Gary left this life far too soon and will be greatly missed by everyone. We will, however, carry on with the same passion and dedication that they showed—the passion and dedication for which the team stands, the same passion and dedication visitors feel as they return to their desert home.

In December we had our annual all-employee meeting and holiday gathering. It was one of the most productive ever held. As a manager of a now large district, I realized that I had lost touch with some of the issues that are important to staff. I am a “people” person, and as most of you know, I enjoy and prefer talking face-to-face with people instead of attending meetings. As a result of this realization—and the obvious need for me, and all managers, to reconnect with staff—we focused the meeting on gathering input from all employees about the challenges they encounter while performing their jobs, and working together to find solutions. Everyone was assigned to a team and a topic to discuss. Once possible solutions were defined, each team brought the ideas back to the whole group.



(Continued on next page...)

Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

As with most of our issues, it comes down to communication, or lack thereof. We are now having more regular meetings, a once-a-quarter meeting with the superintendent, and once-a-quarter gatherings to celebrate accomplishments. The suggestion box is always available, and its contents are reviewed by core staff once a month. I hope that these steps will help to improve communication and help the team—staff, visitors, volunteers, and partners—to work more efficiently and stay focused on problem solving. We are in the process of posting staff photos in the district office, and managers are making a point of visiting the offices of different services regularly to keep in touch with what is really going on.

The year ended with a frenzy of interviews after we were given news that we had just three days to hire before an anticipated hiring freeze. The hiring was an example of the teamwork we exemplify at OW. The management team—and others—cancelled their vacations, and by 8:30 pm New Year's Eve we had hired nine new team members. Some of these positions, such as the equipment operators, had been in process for over two years. As it turned out, the hiring freeze has not yet occurred, but it just goes to show that when called upon, the OW team always rises to the occasion. We are thrilled to have these new team members on board and look forward to the added services they'll provide for our visitors. Everyone should notice changes in our trail maintenance and signs following the addition of two operators and one trail crew member.

This week I read an article in the *Borrego Sun*, which talked about our “outside-the-box” way of doing business, and our focus on knowing our visitors. At the end of the meeting and the close of 2010, we have lived up to this motto. We have completed tasks because we know who our staff and visitors are, and we know how we can creatively work within the process to provide the things that are important to them, working through challenges and finding solutions together along the way.

Meet Kevin...

My name is Kevin Ponce and I am the new Environmental Scientist for Ocotillo Wells SVRA. I moved down here from northern California where I received my degree in wildlife biology from Humboldt State University in Arcata, so this will be a big change for me. I have worked on many different projects with many different animals but never in the desert, and I am excited to explore and learn about a new ecosystem. I enjoy studying herpetology and botany so I think this area will be a great fit for me. If you see me wandering the park, feel free to ask any questions. Resources welcomes Kevin to their team!



Radio Rock-otillo Is On The Air

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

Travelers on Highway 78 may have noticed a bright new resident near Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area. Since Thanksgiving, OWSVRA has been advertising its naturalist programs and policies with the help of an electronic message board sign. While this sign is having a visible and positive influence on the park's visitors, a new and invisible addition will hopefully have an even greater effect.

Ocotillo Wells unwrapped its new public information radio station just in time for Christmas. Located on AM 1620, "Radio Rock-otillo" will broadcast interpretive program advertising, natural resource messages, visitor information, and safety advice for the rest of the riding season.

Even a brief listen to Radio Rock-otillo will highlight one fact: this is not your traditional park radio station. But then, Ocotillo Wells SVRA is not your traditional park. "Know your visitors" is a popular proverb in the world of Parks & Recreation. With this adage in mind, Ocotillo Wells sought a fast, fun-filled format designed to sustain the continued interest of our visitors. Music samples, sound-bytes, and a DJ-like atmosphere are combined with teasers of upcoming tours, fun facts about park wildlife, and reminders of park policy. This content is randomly mixed to avoid repetition so Radio Rock-otillo sounds like a real radio station.

The infrastructure and digital framework of Radio Rock-otillo has been provided by InfoGuys, a small tech company out of Phoenix, AZ. Their creative radio savvy meshed well with our "outside-of-the-box" concept to produce the station's on-air content. Their mobile broadcast system was also perfect for a park setting. Solar-powered and sanitized against invasive species, it has a range of about 5 miles in every direction.



For a recreational group that has never really been approached with naturalist programs, OHV enthusiasts have responded overwhelmingly with "thumbs up" to our new interpretation campaign. With the addition of Radio Rock-otillo, we are sure visitors to our beautiful Borrego valley will now leave even happier, safer, and better informed.

Oily Development For Interp

By Andy Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

Interpretation at Ocotillo Wells has reached an oily new development with the long-awaited installation of our Oil Well Tour panels. With help from our skilled Trails crew and talented OW archaeologists, nine panels now await visitors as they ride to sites associated with our past petroleum exploration. Illustrated with old photographs, a newspaper



clipping, oil culture memorabilia and schematics created

in-house, this series introduces visitors to the intriguing stories of the search for black gold in OW. The panels are located at Shell Reef, along Cahuilla Trail, on Pole Line Road, and at Artesian Well. A self-guided tour gives visitors who cannot attend our guided tours a chance to experience this fascinating historic period.



However, there will be one more “Oil Exploration at Ocotillo Wells” tour this season—scheduled for Friday, February 11, and guided by the ornery *wildcat* oilman Mr. Doyle. Another historically-themed tour—and a new addition to this series—is scheduled for Friday, March 25. The “Colorful Characters of OW” will explore some of the interesting

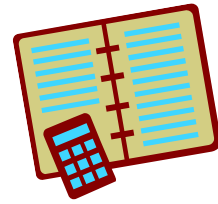
folk who have passed through this desert. Like most of OW’s Off-Highway Tour series, these tours meet at 9:00 am in front of the new Discovery Center.

So far, the response from visitors toward the new oil panels has been overwhelmingly positive. With enthusiasm building and so much progress made towards bringing the oil history of Ocotillo Wells alive, it is only natural that we might wonder, “Is a replica wooden oil derrick itself soon to follow?”



Admin Ledger

By Delane Hurley, Staff Services Analyst



The winter months encircled us with beautiful desert rainbows and much needed rain for the park landscape. Ocotillo Wells has seen a few changes in desert design caused by the rain, as well as changes in the Administrative group's design. The newest member to our team, Melony Light, is learning CAL-Cards, Access and various other support functions from our experienced veteran, Linda VanStaaveren. Melony first began her career at OW by managing loads of paperwork in the Auto Shop. Our Contract Manager, Delane Hurley, has completed her first full season with the park and has finished a contract or two during that time. Other areas of Admin—such as budget, payroll and new hires—continue to run smoothly at the hand of Kitty Gravett, our MST who manages timesheets as if she did them in her sleep. Our Administrative Officer Leda Seals leads the way to a new year by keeping her staff well informed as to what is happening at Headquarters. When asked what new events have taken place for Charles Rennie, our Management Services Technician, he simply stated that, "No new news is good news." Lastly, thanks go out to all the OW staff for working diligently to learn new procedures and to turn in paperwork just a little more promptly.

Meet Melony...

Melony Light has enjoyed exploring the desert in this area for more than 25 years. She hikes and off-roads in her leisure time with friends and family. Melony has lived in Borrego Springs for 14 years, raised three children here, and has been a local business owner for over 13 years. She is a full-time evening (on-line) student working towards her MBA in Sustainable Enterprises. Melony is currently working for the Administrative team approving and processing PAPO's, CALCards, Voyager, and American Express payables. She looks forward to working with everyone and supporting OW purchasing.



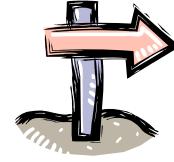
Did 2010 Get Your Goat?

Meet **Chompy**—our newest off-highway enthusiast! He recently "buted" his owners into bringing him camping in Ocotillo Wells. Chompy certainly enjoyed the latest park information passed along by our roving interpreters!



Photo by Sharon Weil

Trails News



By Brian Woodson, Maintenance Supervisor, Trails

Trail staff has been busy the last couple of months playing catch-up on some much needed work. Between special projects and routine maintenance, it seems there's never enough time in the day to get everything done.

In December, we were tasked with constructing a fence that would surround the new Truckhaven 4x4 Training area on the north side of the park, the area between Holly Road and the Crossover Trail camping area off of State Route 22. With the assistance of inmate labor crews, we were able to get the fence installed within a week's time. The project included approximately three and a half acres that was completely closed to riding for the protection of cultural resources.



Working with Andy Fitzpatrick, Park Interpreter I, we were also involved in the installation of nine different interpretive panels that reflect the history of oil exploration in our

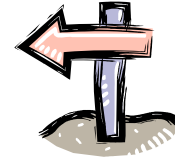


park. Thanks to Andy, we were able to complete the field aspect of the project in relatively short order (and learn a good deal about oil exploration at the same time)!

In between, we continued the usual sign work and trail grooming and maintenance throughout our park. What with high winds, harsh desert sun, and occasional rider

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*



inattentiveness, our signs need a constant looking after to maintain public safety and information. In grooming/maintenance of the trails, one of our methods mirrors that of the U.S. Border Patrol. The Border Patrol uses a tire drag as a means to “clean the slate” as it were. When driving along Highway 78, it’s not uncommon to pass a BP vehicle driving along the road shoulder at 5 mph and dragging a line of four or five tires behind them. This creates a smooth track-free lane of dirt as they drive. The BP uses this method to check for illegal immigration or human trafficking tracks crossing the highway. Since the end result of their method is so clean and smooth, we decided to adopt it as one method of trail maintenance here in our park. We have used it with moderate success on Roadrunner Trail as well as some of the other secondary access roads. Our primary method, by way of our Heavy Equipment Operator, is to use the motor grader to perform this same function on our primary access and emergency roads.



We are looking forward to an exciting new year, as we diligently perform all that’s expected of us and more. With any luck and a bit of perseverance, the new Park Maintenance Worker I and new Heavy Equipment Operators that we hope to hire prior to the end of this year, will soon have been brought aboard and be ready to hit the ground running.

See you all next year!

Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

Heber Dunes SVRA continues to provide quality recreation to a diverse group of users. In addition to the very popular use of quads and various off-highway vehicles here, we sometimes see something a bit different.



Recently we were amused and amazed to witness a husband (on the ATV) and his wife, riding the horse, as they recreated here at Heber Dunes SVRA. Both the horse and the ATV benefit from the soft Heber Dunes sand.

Contrary to what western lore may lead you to believe, the use of ATVs is well established in the world of modern day ranching. Of course, there will always be a place for horses in cattle roundups, but increasingly, ATVs are used—and most anyone who

owns horses will tell you ATVs are probably less expensive to operate—though not as nostalgic.



The equestrian explained to me that she often rides with her husband, and that her well-trained and competitive barrel racing rodeo horse has become comfortable and tolerant of off-highway vehicles and engine sounds. Here is a great example of two people with differing hobbies who have found a way to be together and a way to fill their stock trailer. Readers are reminded that this horse has been trained to tolerate ATVs and engine noise; please be

cautious and respectful of livestock and equestrians when you are sharing the trails.



Sand lot baseball?

In addition to off-highway activity, some of our visitors find other ways to have fun while awaiting their turn to ride. Recently, a baseball game took place, and playing on sand probably adds a new dimension to the game for those who have only played on well-groomed grass.

(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes Report *continued...*

We sometimes see soccer games as well. Even cross-country teams come out and train here. At least one large family even has a tradition of playing volleyball each season here on Easter.

Heber Dunes SVRA, or “Heber Beach” as it is known to old timers and locals, has a long history of recreation in addition to the growing popularity of off-highway vehicle riding.

Meet Jaime...

As the new Interpreter I at Heber Dunes, I am excited to be joining such a creative and dynamic OHMVR interpretive team. I am new to the Imperial Valley, but not to the desert environment. I began my career with state parks as a park aide in Anza-Borrego. My interest in interpretation took me to Hearst Castle as a guide I and then on to Palomar Outdoor School as an environmental education paraeducator. When not working on the challenges of creating a new interpretive program for Heber Dunes, I spend my leisure time with my husband, 3 dogs, 2 cats, and an assortment of livestock at my home on the La Jolla Indian Reservation on Palomar Mountain.



Meet Maya...

Heber Dunes welcomes Maya Rodriguez, our new Office Assistant to our staff! She writes, “I was raised in El Centro and I have been lucky enough to see a transition of Heber Dunes into a state park. I graduated from Southwest High School in 2002. Since then I have moved around southern California but I somehow always came back to the Imperial Valley. I previously worked for Caltrans in San Bernardino as an office technician. I am really enjoying my time working for state parks. It has already given me a chance to visit a few parks I wouldn’t have normally. During my free time I enjoy spending time with my dogs or karaoke.”



All-Staff Meeting

By Delane Hurley, Staff Services Analyst



Twas the night before Christmas and across the desert floor,
Not a creature was stirring, thanks to a windy downpour.
Our boots were all polished with uniforms aglow,
Waiting for Santa's desert reindeer to show.

The Kangaroo rats; warm and tucked safe in their homes,
While the sidewinder and badger hoped they would roam.
Rangers in their best and me in my cap,
Had just settled down for a short office nap.

When out in the dust there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my office to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew in a fright,
Checked the alarm, then flipped on a light.



Orion's belt twinkled and stars shown bright,
Bringing the ocotillos and desert flowers to life.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
What looked like Santa leading coyote reindeer?



I put on my glasses, then knew without doubt,
It was Kathy Dolinar after a yoga workout!
Like a comet in the vast night sky,
She led the staff to a party with bags of supplies.



Now, Dasher, now Dancer, now Prancer and Vixen
On, Comet, on Cupid, on Donner and Blitzen!
Merry Desert Christmas to all!

After much work and a very busy season building a better park, the staff at Ocotillo Wells gathered for an all-staff team training and celebration to close the year. Interdepartmental teams were established and each presented a topic to share with park staff. Themes of communication, uniforms, visitor needs, programs, safety, and even vehicle care, were shared and a few new ideas surfaced to assist in making the park an even better place. Each group dealt with challenges that the topics presented and worked on solutions to present to the rest of the OW staff. Our sister park—Heber Dunes—was also in attendance and joined in on brainstorming session.

Holiday seasons are a great time for staff to share, learn about other departments and various jobs, and get to know each other a bit better; this year was no different. Everyone pitched in with new ideas, ways to improve what we are already doing and, most importantly, wonderful holiday food!

(Continued on next page...)

All-Staff Meeting *continued...*



Bringing great bites to share, such as ham and turkey, as well as salads, cookies, and even home-made apple crisp, food was in abundance! Kudos to Dennis, our Maintenance Supervisor, for his barbecuing talent. After everyone had their fill, a very active game of Gift Grab ensued. One poor chap ended up with nothing more than coal, while another lucky lad went home with a gift certificate for nine rounds of golf!

In the end, everyone went home happy and stuffed, ready to take on the new season. From all the staff at Ocotillo Wells District, Happy New Year!

Meet Adam...

Adam Asche has been married to Jean for nine years, and they have six children together. He has been a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers for ten years, and prior to that he was a member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters for seven years while working for Sysco food services of San Francisco. Adam says, "I'm an avid dirt bike rider and have always loved Ocotillo Wells. I am very excited to be working as a heavy equipment operator for OWSVRA!"



Meet Jeremy...

My name is Jeremy Collins. I live in Borrego Springs with my wife and little boy, and I am the new Worker II in the Resources Department at Ocotillo Wells District. I have been off-roading in this park for over 30 years, which makes me proud to be part of a team that focuses on protecting the beauty and fun that this park has to offer. Some of the things that I'll be in charge of include resource maintenance and exotic (and invasive) plant removal such as Tamarisk bush and Sahara mustard. Having this job for me is a great way to give back to a park that has brought many years of joy to my family and me. And, I'm looking forward to seeing the joy it brings for many other families as well. So, until we meet on the trail, ride safe and have fun!



Lifeguards? In the Desert? Where's the Water?

By Eric Buss and Stuart Tyson, Desert Lifeguards

“Desert Lifeguard? What’s that? Where’s the water?” As Desert Lifeguards at Ocotillo Wells, we have grown accustomed to hearing these questions on a daily basis. Although a lifeguard may seem like an unlikely candidate for employment in an off-highway park, there is a method to the madness.

During the early 1990s, freestyle motocross grew exponentially and Ocotillo Wells was at the forefront of the off-highway movement. As OHV enthusiasm increased, so did the number of injuries occurring within the park. In order to meet the growing demand for emergency medical care, additional resources were required to assist the rangers during the busy winter months. Lifeguards from the state beaches and lakes, having rigorous emergency medical training and field experience, were brought in to fill this demand. Fortunately, the ocean lifeguard season slows down following the summer months, allowing lifeguards to serve both parks.

When we began our careers as lifeguards, few of us imagined that we would eventually be working in the desert. However, as we gained first-hand field experience in emergency medical care, we were encouraged to extend our passion for helping others. All of the desert lifeguards out here furthered their medical education and qualifications above what is required to work at the beaches and lakes. Our 12-man team this season is comprised entirely of licensed EMTs and Paramedics.

Despite the obvious paradox and the lack of water, our role as Desert Lifeguards has a surprisingly large number of similarities to our job at the beach. Our main focus continues to be park visitor safety. This includes making preventative contacts. At the beach we constantly scan the water and shoreline, working to prevent a situation from becoming a rescue. Likewise, while out in the desert, we strive to inform the public of laws and regulations which serve to promote a safer recreational experience. One cause of preventable accidents is jumping without a spotter. By reminding people of the risks of jumping without knowing if someone is riding on the other side, we help avoid potential injuries. Another major concern is children riding alone. They will sometimes pay little attention to where their camp is and where the main roads are. We help minors locate their camps and speak with their parents about the safety concerns. Weather in the park can also be unpredictable, which is why we will advise campers not to set up in washes where flash floods can occur. Other preventative contacts are made with riders without a helmet or



Accidents can happen when there is no spotter.

(Continued on next page...)

Lifeguards? In the Desert? *continued...*



whip-and-flag, and people riding double on ATVs. Additionally, we offer interpretive information to visitors including the history, geology and wildlife of the park. We also serve as a Search & Rescue team, offer directions, perform sound tests on dirt bikes and ATVs, among many other duties.

Even with these other tasks, our most important responsibility is responding to injured riders. One of the best parts of the job is being able to take what we've learned in the classroom and put it into practice. Unlike many EMS positions, the majority of our calls deal with significant trauma and we are generally the first on scene. As a result, our team specializes in traumatic injuries. Additionally, an intimate knowledge of the terrain is required in order to respond as quickly as possible to medical emergencies. This matters in remote areas with sparse resources, where many of our calls truly can become life or death situations. Working with Reach and Mercy air ambulances, and local fire departments and law enforcement agencies, we successfully treat hundreds of patients each season.



Stu and Dawson

People often ask us, "What is the craziest thing you have seen out here?" Having responded to an extremely wide array of different injuries, this is a difficult question for us to answer. However, the most memorable incidents are those when we know our response made a difference. We regularly follow up with patients by speaking with their families and the various hospitals. Oftentimes, we will receive letters or phone calls thanking us for our help. We can recall an incident where a young girl suffered severe head trauma from an ATV accident. Later, we learned that she made a full recovery with no long-term damage. On another call, a teenager nearly lost her entire hand. Due to a quick response and transport to a trauma center, her hand was reattached and regained full mobility. Although these incidents may not be the most significant that we have dealt with, they are the ones that remind us of why we work in the field.

Working as Desert Lifeguards is not only an exciting job, but also offers unparalleled experience that benefits our future careers. Many Desert Lifeguards go on to become firefighters, paramedics, peace officers, and even doctors. We know that we will still be asked what lifeguards are doing out in the desert, but we are happy to answer the question. We take a lot of pride in our job and will continue to make the long commute from the coast and lakes to be out here. The desert lifeguard program is unique and special, and we hope it continues long into the future.

Botta's Pocket Gopher... Critter of the Month

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

The Botta's Pocket Gopher (species *Thomomys bottae*) spends most of its life underground in a system of burrows and tunnels and remains active year round. Weighing up to half a pound, this pocket gopher has a sturdy body, small eyes and ears, and a tail with no fur on the tip. The color of its smooth, soft fur depends upon the surrounding soils. The male grows throughout its life, but the female stops growing after its first pregnancy.

Native to California, the Botta's pocket gopher has adapted extremely well to its desert habitat. The long claws found on the small, strong front legs of the gopher are designed for digging,



Photo © 1997Lee Dittmann

which is perfect since it loves to dig tunnels and burrows! It uses both its claws and teeth to dig into a variety of soils—from loose sand to hard-packed clay—and leaves a fan-shaped mound of dirt at the side of the entrances. It also keeps the entrances blocked with soil. To keep the dirt out of its mouth while digging, the gopher's lips close *behind* its orange front teeth. As with other rodents, the pocket gopher's teeth continually grow, so it has to constantly gnaw in order to wear them down. If the teeth were not worn down, they would soon interfere with eating.

A true herbivore, the Botta's pocket gopher will eat plant material on the surface next to its burrow. But more often, it pulls the entire plant by the roots into its underground tunnel system where it chops the plant into pieces for storage. The Botta's pocket gopher has deep fur-lined, external cheek pouches into which it packs pieces of vegetation before carrying it to storage or eating areas within the system of tunnels. This adaptation is especially important during drought when there is not a lot of vegetation available. The Botta's pocket gopher does not drink water; instead, it gets its needed moisture from the vegetation.

The badger, another underground dweller, is the main predator of gophers, but coyotes and foxes will also dig them out of their burrows—and owls will hunt them at night.





**2010
Happy
Holidays!**



*From all of us at
Ocotillo Wells*

CORE STAFF...



Left to Right: Glyne Johnson, Norb Ruhmke, Kathy Dolinar, Leda Seals, Tina Robinson, Kirk Shea, Steve Quartieri
Not shown: Don Solleder

ADMINISTRATION...

Left to Right: Delane Hurley, Kitty Gravett, Melony Light, Leda Seals, Charles Rennie
Not shown: Linda VanStaaveren



AUTO SHOP...



Left to Right: Melony Light, Glyne Johnson, Dave Edman, Janice Omdalen
Not Shown: Adam Asche, Dan Christensen, Len Paris, Brenda Raether



Left to Right: Helen Boek, Don Solleder, Tien Tran

GIS...



INTERPRETATION...



Kneeling: Ken Conway
Front Rows: Caitlin Raymond, Beth Shugan, Ali Barnes
Back Rows: Andy Fitzpatrick, Jeff Price (hidden), Angela Trnka, Steve Quartieri, Kara Lewandowski, Cheryl Gillott, Louise Phillips
Not shown: Jim Cooper, Lesley Manent, Lesley Nuno, Carleen Roberts, Sharon Weil

MAINTENANCE...

First Row: Julie Humann, Charles Cawood, Leon Jordan, John Frenner, Peggy Hurley
Second Row: Vernon Gringrich, Terra Tuggles, Allison Boyle, Mike Krechmar, Jeff Smith, Chad Van Doren
Third Row: Jeremy Collins, Jenica Light, Debbie Rollins, Norb Moeller, Chris Perez, Gary Walker, Norb Ruhmke
Back Row: Chris Dahl
Not shown: Maribel Bonillas, Rickey Lizasuain, Dennis Raymond, Karen Sypniewski, Sarah Young





RESOURCES...



Left to Right: Tien Tran, Steve Chaney, Julie Leiser, Joe Hopkins, Margaret Kress, Joanna Collier, Tina Robinson, Joni Bye, Helen Boek, Steve Wilcox

Not shown: Jeremy Collins, Kevin Dolinar, Ryan Dolinar, Robin Halford, Henry Hernandez, Donna Hopkins, Jennifer Parker, Kevin Ponce, Don Solleder

TRAILS...

Front: Ryan Walasek, Krystal Friel, Josh McCue, Brian Woodson

Back: Martin Rubalcava, Lee Kearney, Cesar Casillas, Anthony Beepath

Not shown: Ron Cooksy, Shay McGhee



VISITOR SERVICES...



Kneeling: Adam Borello, Jesse Adams, Kathy Dolinar

Standing: Vic Herrick, Kirk Shea, Mike Howard, Laura Molina, Callan McLaughlin, Andy Ahlberg, Norb Ruhmke

Not shown: Dale Adama, Jim Collins, David Hart, Sasha Wessitsh, Ocotillo Wells Desert Lifeguards, Brittany Veater

HEBER DUNES...

Left to Right: Maya Rodriguez, Kirk Shea, Julio Valadez, Vic Herrick, Alfredo Jacobo

Not shown: Jaime Mendez



OW Maintenance

By John Freaner, Park Maintenance Worker II



As 2010 came to a close, the OW Maintenance staff was busy with various projects and everyday work right through the holidays. The new maintenance shop hosted this year's holiday party at which everyone had a good time. As usual, Dennis did an amazing job cooking the turkeys for the potluck.



Our Maintenance Mascot

Housekeeping Maintenance welcomes its new employees—Jenica Light and Maribel Bonillas. They, in addition to our seasoned staff—Mike Krechmar, Gary Walker, Debbie Rollins, Terra Tuggles, Charles Cawood, and Allison Boyle—have been busy keeping this large park clean and free of litter.

We also welcome Sarah Young, who will be assisting Peggy Hurley with landscaping and gardening. Both have been repairing, maintaining, and adding to our irrigation system around the new walkways, as well as the district offices and other buildings.

Chris Dahl and Vernon Gingrich have been working on a few projects around OW. They continue to build decks around our new residences as well as creating more office space in the auto shop. Jeff Smith, Chris Perez and Leon Jordan are working on many of the new block walls in OW. Currently, they are

preparing the footing for a huge new wall up by the maintenance shop to make room for our sea containers. Jeremy Collins and Norb Moeller have been handling all of our day-to-day repairs and emergencies. Julie Humann has been working on repairing and installing solar light systems on all of our concrete CXTs. Chad Van Doren has been working on bringing our new tank and pump system online for the Toner Property. Karen Sypniewski did a fantastic job keeping all of us in line on the administrative front, and the entire maintenance staff did a great job with our part in creating the Roy Denner ATV Training Track.

As we go into the New Year, we will continue to work hard to make sure that Ocotillo Wells remains *the* best park in the State Parks system.



Roy Denner Training Track, Hwy 78 Entrance

Meet Brenda...

Brenda Raether has been enjoying Ocotillo Wells SVRA on the weekends with her family for over a decade. Brenda is excited that now she can claim OW as her home after joining the OW staff as Senior Park Aide. She is assisting both Dave in the auto shop and Glyne, the Park Maintenance Chief. Brenda likes to ride her warrior quad with her daughters and dune buggy with her husband. Brenda is extremely impressed on how much the park has to offer riders and is proud to be a part of the future plans for the off-highway and desert enthusiasts.



Meet Dale...

Hi all, my name is Dale C. Adama. I have been a State Park Peace Officer Lifeguard for 24 years, and now retired. I work at Ocotillo Wells as a part-time Peace Officer Lifeguard Supervisor, and I am also an EMT. My goal at Ocotillo Wells is to make it an enjoyable and safe place to work for all employees. When I'm on duty, I follow our California State Park Mission statement; I think it is a great statement for our employees to follow when working with the public. I'm married with three children. I enjoy all water sports. In my free time I help coach boys' and girls' water polo.



Meet Steve...

My name is Steve Chaney and I was hired as a Senior Park Aide to help out in the Resource Department. I will be working on the eradication of invasive species, repair and restoration, and conducting wildlife surveys. I was born in Mississippi and raised in San Diego's east county. The Colorado Desert has always been my destination for weekend fun whether, fishing in the canals or the Colorado River, hiking, ATV riding, jeeping or just relaxing around a campfire. My wife Jan and I created this park's first cooperative organization—the Friends of Ocotillo Wells—and have logged well over a thousand hours of volunteer time.



Meet Len...

My name is Len Paris I am very happy to be one of the newest family members to Ocotillo Wells S.V.R.A. I have a very diverse background, which I hope to use for the benefit of the park and our organization. I live in a great small town named Phelan, located in San Bernardino County about 180 miles from Ocotillo Wells S.V.R.A. On my off time, I can be found driving my Rubicon or racing in the AMA races in the high desert. The OW staff welcomes Len as one of our new heavy equipment operators!



Meet Rickey...

My name is Rickey Lizasuain. I'm from Rancho Cucamonga, CA, and live with my girlfriend Renee and her daughter Giana (14). My oldest daughter, Kristen, her husband Cory and my granddaughter Riley have just moved back to California. I also have a daughter Rishell, 14, who lives in Wyoming. We love to camp in our motor home and drive in the hills in our VW THING. The Maintenance Department welcomes Rickey!



Meet Sarah...

Artist, Designer, Naturalist, Storyteller, Entrepreneur—the vibrancy of nature is my passion! In 2003 I moved to the desert from Orange County. Last season I worked in the Interpretive Department as a full-time artist drawing animals, birds, reptiles and insects for multiple uses. My first project was designing the logo for the geocaching event. This season it's joyous to be outdoors all day working with plants, dirt and rocks! I love coming to work in the predawn splendor and being out in the park working as the sun rises—OW Gold! Desert living and working is a climate of rich extremes. I am happy to be part of this diverse, hard-working, enthusiastic team.



Meet Kara...

The Interpretation team welcomes Kara Lewandowski to their staff. Kara hails from Waukesha, Wisconsin. At the ripe age of 20, she went through NAI's Certified Interpretive Guide training and fell in love with interpretation. She was a Naturalist in Vail, CO and a Cave Guide on Prince of Wales Island, AK. Returning to the Last Frontier as an Interpretive Ranger at Katmai National Park and Preserve, Kara ate a lot of salmon and managed people around large concentrations of brown bears. Her favorite activities include hiking, wearing flannel, playing ukulele on her lunch break and "living the dream."



Shredding It Up...

Rapping at the Roughneck Rendezvous, singing at campfire programs, and now shredding the drums at Carlee's are ALL on our new interpreter Kara's resume.

This year, the time-old tradition of the interpretive staff bringing in the New Year at Carlee's was taken to another level. During the band's jam session leading up to midnight, the band called out our very own Kara Lewandowski to play a set with them. Kara wowed the standing-room-only crowd by playing a variety of rock-n-roll classics including "Old Time Rock 'n Roll." Upon conclusion of the band's final set, the entire crowd erupted in celebration and began chanting, "Kara, Kara, Kara..." It was a night to remember!



Meet Maribel...

My name is Maribel T. Bonillas. I live in Brawley and I am really happy to work for Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area. Thank you for the opportunity. The Maintenance Housekeeping staff welcomes Maribel to their team.



Meet Angela...

Angela Trnka comes to us from her “other home” in Yellowstone National Park where she also works as an Interpretive Park Ranger. With her bachelor’s in Conservation Biology, along with being a teacher of science, math, and environmental education for the past ten years in a diversity of schools, national parks, county parks, and state parks, her passion for the outdoors is apparent! On her off time, you’ll find her exploring new places, camping, kayaking, and still awestruck star gazing. Angela is enjoying her work with the Interpretation Department.



Meet Sharon...

My hobbies include four-wheeling, ATV riding and camping. My favorite plant is the Ocotillo. I am fascinated by the coyote, the night sky and Native American history. I love telling stories especially to children and always strive to make a difference in someone’s life. My work history has included Community Services, Recreation, and Customer Service, and I volunteer with an animal rescue organization. My newest passion is the Ocotillo Wells Junior Rangers Program, which gives me the opportunity to do everything I love and to spark enthusiasm for life in others! The Interpretation team welcomes Sharon Weil!



Meet Shay...

Hi, I’m Anthony Shay McGhee; my family and friends call me Shay. My lady Jennifer and I have 2 children, Carli 3 and Lucas 9, as well as Nolo, our black lab/shepherd mix. We attend Foothills Christian Church in El Cajon. My family and I like to camp and ride quads and just be together. My hobbies include fishing, hunting, hiking, and just about anything active and outdoors. After growing up in Moneta, a small town in Virginia, I spent 5 years in the Navy, a few years in construction (part of which I had my own business), and for the last year have been a reserve fire fighter for San Diego County. I look forward to this new adventure and can’t wait to get started. The Trails crew welcomes Shay!



Stories From OW Emergency Services

By Andrew Ahlberg, Supervising Ranger

This fall, as usual, the Ocotillo Wells SVRA Emergency Services (made up of Rangers and Desert Lifeguards) responded to many calls for service. The calls have ranged from lost riders, to traffic collisions, from people who are fighting or intoxicated, to those destroying resources. Most calls are nothing out of the ordinary, but some calls do stand out—the weird and unusual.

In mid October, while taking a theft report on Pole Line Road, Rangers and Desert Lifeguards were approached by a middle-aged lady who reported that her friend had rolled her quad and needed help. Desert Lifeguards jumped to action and began following the lady to her injured friend. Usually during an emergency people tend to drive quickly in order to provide help as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the Desert Lifeguards were only able to follow the lady at about 10 mph because she did not know how to drive an ATV and was unable to shift out of first gear. After finally arriving on scene, less than three miles away but after a full 15 minutes, the DL's were able to provide care for the injured rider and assist in getting her transported to the hospital. As far as we know, no permanent damage was caused to the ATV that the reporting party drove, despite its being pinned out in first gear.

In late October we were dispatched to a call for a female victim whose “face was smashed in” as a result of a motor vehicle collision. This is one of those calls that we all dread. A thousand gruesome images undoubtedly were racing through all of the responders’ minds. We arrived on scene of the camp and were directed into a trailer to find a female patient in her mid 50’s. Fortunately, her face was not smashed in, but she did have a rather large bump on her forehead the size of a plum. No one seemed to be really clear about where the involved parties were and where the vehicle was. After a thorough assessment,



Kneeling: Jesse Adams, DL Stuart Tyson, Adam Borello, Andy Ahlberg
Standing: DL Scott McClung, Callan McLaughlin, Norb Ruhmke, Jim Collins, DL Seth Long, Mike Howard, Sasha Wessitch

(Continued on next page...)

Stories From OW Emergency Services *continued...*

we realized that she had an altered level of consciousness, pain in her head, normal vital signs and a strong smell of alcohol. But we failed to get an important piece of the puzzle until much later in the call. We had all assumed that she was involved in some kind of vehicle crash, as was reported. It wasn't until the life flight helicopter was on scene that we learned the patient had not been involved in any kind of vehicle crash after all. She had been drinking too much—way too much—and had rolled out of bed in her toy hauler. Not exactly the typical method of injury we usually see out here. The best part was the expression of the flight crew when we explained how the patient really was hurt.

During Halloween, the desert riding season unofficial opening weekend, Ranger Ahlberg responded to a report of an ATV accident in San Felipe Wash near Highway 78. After arriving on scene, Ahlberg found an adult male lying on his back in a campsite. The male was in a lot of pain and told how he had crashed his quad nearby. While speaking with the patient, Ahlberg noticed the odor of an alcoholic beverage and asked the patient how much he had been drinking. The patient told him he had not been drinking at all. Ahlberg asked again, adding that he could smell the odor of what he thought was beer; again the man denied having consumed any alcohol at all. Ahlberg then, while the EMT's were treating the man, explained to the patient "This ain't my first rodeo. I can smell the beer on your breath; did you want to be honest?" The patient then took a deep breath and admitted he had been drinking beer and apologized profusely, over and over, for lying about it, stating that he just didn't want to get in trouble. Fortunately, the patient didn't have much alcohol in his system and didn't have to worry about a DUI charge after he left with the air ambulance.



REACH AIR provides valuable support to the Ocotillo Wells Emergency Services team.

During the Thanksgiving weekend, one of the Rangers was fueling at the Red Earth Casino, just north of Truckhaven on Highway 86, when a small car started driving up to use the pump on the opposite side. It was interesting that the driver picked the pump on the opposite side of a marked patrol vehicle when no one else was using any of the other dozen or so gas pumps. The driver, a male, looked extremely friendly as he smiled and waved at the Ranger. The man parked and got out of his car and started talking to the Ranger about how wonderful the desert is. The Ranger noted that the man smelled like beer and was staggering around. When asked how much he had been

(Continued on next page...)

Stories From OW Emergency Services *continued...*

drinking, the man responded “a lot, a whole lot.” After checking with CHP and Imperial County Sheriffs, neither of whom would respond to take over the apparent DUI, the Ranger began his investigation. While doing the Finger to Nose investigative test, the man poked himself in the eye so hard that he began screaming “It hurts! It hurts!” so loud that people from the casino came out to watch. The man was ultimately arrested for DUI and after thanking the Ranger for getting him off the road, he began telling stories of how Mike Tyson had told him he had the hardest punch of anyone he had ever fought and that his employer, the CIA, was going to be upset at him for getting arrested....again.

Another funny story comes from a really slow weekend in December when the only the call we had was for a guy that broke his lower leg near the ankle. The initial report came out as a rider down, broken ankle. After arriving on scene, Ranger Andy Ahlberg and Desert Lifeguard Stuart Tyson found a male adult dressed in riding gear sitting on the ground at his campsite being tended to by family and friends. While questioning the man about how the injury occurred, they quickly realized that he was not hurt while riding, but while dancing. That’s right, dancing! The man was celebrating his 50th birthday with friends and family and had just returned from a ride about 30 minutes earlier. After having a few celebratory alcoholic beverages, he began doing the Happy Birthday Dance, when he tripped on a log, and a loud “snap” was heard by everyone in his camp. When we got to him, he was in a lot of pain—but still singing the lyrics to the rap music he was listening to when he fell. At least he was in good spirits on his very special day.

In late December Ranger Howard and Lifeguard Ryan Coats were called out to a 17-year-old boy who had fallen out of bed and thought he had a broken shoulder. They arrived and found the boy lying on the floor of a trailer in a great deal of pain. He explained that he had fallen out of bed and motioned toward the bed that was over the “garage” which was about 7 feet above the floor. He then explained that he was having a dream that he and his friend were under his car working on it but they were very small, like two inches tall. The dream turned into a nightmare when they were suddenly attacked by spiders, which would be really bad if you were two inches tall. At this point he started thrashing around in bed and his friend, who was actually sleeping next to him, woke up and tried to pin him down on the bed to keep him from falling. His friend’s efforts, however, were not enough and the victim had one last dream—that he fell off of a ladder!

Just recently, the Rangers got the funniest case they have had in awhile. Just before going out of service, dispatch called and advised that someone was reporting two males in a truck acting suspiciously in the area of Pole Line Road. Ranger Howard arrived in the area and contacted the reporting parties—off-duty Los Angeles PD officers—who told him that two men in a truck had pulled up to their camp and politely asked if they were interested in smoking crack with them—yep I said crack cocaine. One almost feels sorry for them—what were the odds of their picking a campsite full of off-duty Law Enforcement officers?! After fleeing from the Rangers, the two men were taken into custody and took a one-way trip to the gray-bar hotel.

Meet Brittany...

Hi, my name is Brittany Veater. I am very excited to be working at Ocotillo Wells, and look forward to the new challenges that it holds. I have been riding ATVs and dirt bikes most of my life and am eager to patrol the park on an ATV. Most recently, I worked as a Peace Officer at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, where I mostly patrolled the Buttes and Badlands. Prior to Anza-Borrego, I attended the Ben Clark Sheriff's Academy in Riverside. During my time at Ben Clark, I spent many weekends in the park exploring. I enjoy photography and almost always have a camera in my pack ready to click away.



Meet Jenica...

My name is Jenica Saylor-Light; I am twenty-one years old. Born in Duarte, CA, I grew up in Borrego Springs, but I graduated from Civic Memorial High School in Illinois while I lived with my dad for a few years. Recently, I moved back to the area and am attending the University of Phoenix Online—only a few months from receiving my associate's degree. I am majoring in psychology and am still undecided which field I want to pursue. When I'm not working for California State Parks, I ride off-highway with friends, or visit Palm Springs with my mother where we go to see a movie or to shop.



Meet Joanna...

Joanna Collier hails from a small town in the mountains of western North Carolina. She has been a field archaeologist working for a large soulless corporation for the past four years, and is thrilled at the prospect of helping to preserve and protect cultural resources in a park environment. She has adapted to the desert quickly and is proud to call it her new home. Most weekends she can be found hiking or camping somewhere in the area, thoroughly enjoying Southern California's apparent lack of winter. The Resource team welcomes Joanna!



Interpreter's Corner



By Steve Quartieri, State Park Interpreter III

The desert season is in full swing. Gone are the days of 110-degree heat. Now spectacular, bright, sunny, 70-degree days have replaced the unbearable heat and humidity of summer... Awe, the desert is a spectacular place this time of year! No wonder hundreds-of-thousands of OHV enthusiasts flock to Ocotillo Wells each year. The combination of world-class recreation, spectacular scenery, and unbeatable weather, form a setting where life-long memories are created. And one of our goals in the interpretive department is to enhance these memories being created by our park visitors. Based on program attendance and visitor feedback, we are reaching that goal.

With the onset of the riding season, our interpretive efforts have ramped up into full swing. This season our department is again offering a variety of weekly interpretive programs and exhibits. Junior Rangers, stargazing, coffee with the interpreter, desert animal extravaganzas, geology exhibits, wildflower programs, digital photography workshops, ATV tours, and a series of off-highway tours fill our interpretive schedule this season. We have an incredibly talented group of interpreters here at OW!

We are also extremely proud to unveil our new Discovery Center at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Our staff has been working diligently to create a center that is full of exciting and interesting displays about the desert, as well as all kinds of hands-on activities that visitors are sure to enjoy. The feedback from our visitors has been extremely positive. Here are a few of the comments we have heard about the Discovery Center...

Learning new things always makes it more interesting; preservation starts with caring.

This is great for the kids!

This is a great addition to the SVRA.

The staff does a great job! We need more of this.

Keep up the great work. The kids loved it!

Great fun for the whole family!

I have been camping in this park for over 30 years and have never had the opportunity to learn about the park; now I want to preserve it.

These comments are music to an interpreter's ears. Watch for the complete article about the Discovery Center in an upcoming Blowsand issue. Until next month, enjoy life to the fullest!

(Continued on next page...)

Interpreter's Corner *continued...*



Visitor Surveys are Underway...

One of the projects on which our department is focusing this season is visitor surveys. In the fall of 2008, the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area launched its first-ever, wide-scaled interpretive program. During the first two seasons, participation at the park's interpretive programs and exhibits has been tremendous (over 50,000 last year alone). However, a program's success cannot be measured by attendance alone. Therefore, during the 2010/2011 season, the Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Department is embarking on a comprehensive evaluation of its program. The goal of our surveys is to (1) determine how we are performing, and (2) identify ways that we can improve our program to better meet the visitors' expectations. To accomplish this task, our interpretive staff is conducting a variety of visitor surveys. One set of surveys is currently being conducted at each of our interpretive programs and exhibits. To date, we have received over 500 surveys back from park visitors. Initial results are overwhelmingly positive. At the conclusion of the season, our team will be putting together a report outlining all our results.



New Off-Highway History Trading Cards...

One of the goals of our Interpretive Department this year is to expand its interpretive efforts associated with the history off-highway recreation. Off-highway recreation has a long and storied past here at Ocotillo Wells and in an effort to tell the story of the vehicles used in the sport, the Interpretive Department has developed a series of nine trading cards. Be sure to stop by the Discovery Center to start your OHV trading card collection.



Indigo Bush

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

A member of the legume—or pea—family, the indigo bush is a native shrub of southern California, southern Arizona, and northern Mexico. Also known as Schott's dalea, the indigo bush grows in dry washes and on slopes at lower desert altitudes and typically reaches between 6 and 8 feet in height. Its highly-branched, twisted stems are grayish green and spiny-tipped. The one-inch long, narrow leaves sparsely cover the branches, and as with many desert plants, the leaves are covered with fine hairs that help conserve water. Even in extreme drought, the leaves do not drop off the bush. The thick, twisted branches provide shelter and shade for desert wildlife.



In late spring the indigo bush is covered with small, aromatic, deep purple-blue, pea-like flowers that create a splash of color against the light-colored bark. The flowers grow in four-inch clusters along the twigs, and were used by the local Native Americans to make a yellow-brown dye used to color their baskets. The stems of the bush were used for the base, or foundation, material for the

basket itself. In addition, the plant was also used medicinally.

The fruit of the indigo bush is a single-seeded pod that is only about 3/8-inch long. Covered with dark red glands, the seed pod is egg-shaped with a pointed end. The fruit remains behind when the flowers fall off in late spring.



Tracey Slotta @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

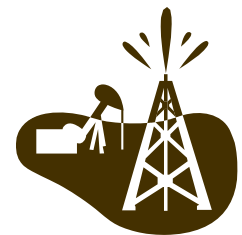
OIL HISTORY OF OCOTILLO WELLS

Oil history is an important part of Ocotillo Wells. Can you find the oil terms and associated names below? These names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

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

ARTESIAN WELL
 BLACK GOLD
 DRILL STEM
 JOHN D ROCKEFELLER
 OIL DERRICK
 OIL DRILLING
 OIL RESERVOIR

PETROLEUM WELL
 POLE LINE ROAD
 ROUGHNECKS
 STANDARD OIL
 TEXAS COMPANY
 TEXACO TRAIL
 WILLIS BEAL



Weather Log for May through October ...



November

High Temperature	Nov 3 rd	93.2 degrees
Low Temperature	Nov 30 th	34.3 degrees
Average High Temperature		75.4 degrees
Average Low Temperature		54.4 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Nov 28 th	41 mph
Rainfall for the Month		.00 inches

December

High Temperature	Dec 12 th	84.0 degrees
Low Temperature	Dec 31 st	37.3 degrees
Average High Temperature		70.4 degrees
Average Low Temperature		53.2 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Dec 29 th	42 mph
Rainfall for the Month		1.75 inches

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



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