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Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

January and February were times of uncertainty. The questions that filled the air varied, but the common thread was of one of anticipation and of change. Was there enough rain? Would the wildflowers bloom? When would the brown landscape give way to bright greens and brilliant colors? And what about the future of parks? What about the future of the OHV program? How, despite all the possible scenarios, could we continue to provide quality service to the visitors at Ocotillo Wells SVRA?

The rain did come. The flowers did bloom, but some could not withstand the extreme, cold temperatures that accompanied the start of the bloom. The result was a somewhat brown desert with wildflowers. Like last year, despite efforts to reduce the population of mustard, that invasive species choked out some of the beauty.

The budget and future of the OHV program and the principles upon which it was founded followed a similar path—partly pretty, partly ugly. An “invasive species,” in a fight to benefit itself despite the harm to others, swooped in and did some damage to the OWSVRA “landscape.”

The invasive species was a proposal to strip funding from the OHV Trust funds—funds that the public had legislatively set aside to manage an off-highway recreation program. The threat to the program elicited protests from visitors determined “to educate legislators who were making this critical decision—a decision which could result in the end of the program as we know it today. Many sent letters, made phone calls, and spent time trying to ensure that the decision makers had the facts. Obviously, the OHV program is valued and people *will* fight to save it.



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Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

Due to those efforts and with the help of our legislators, we have a mixed result from this year's budget "bloom." We did not end up with the worst-case scenario. There will be cuts. However, we hope that these cuts will be something through which we can navigate together, in order to have minimal impact on the services we provide at Ocotillo Wells SVRA.



Will the rain and temperatures affect our landscape? Yes. Will the desert always be a mix of green and brown, along with brilliant colors? Yes. Will the wildflowers *and* the budget always face uncertainty? Yes. But, despite all this, will our program and the services we are able to offer our visitors and the people of California remain important enough for us to put aside differences and work together? *Absolutely!* The strength and influence of the people who care about managed recreation, and who speak up and fight despite hard times, was evident the past two months.

Working together, we are strong. You have made a difference!

Ocotillo Wells District EEO Counselor

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

California State Park's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy is designed to promote a healthy, harmonious, and fair work environment. Many of you attended *With All Due Respect*, a training held last spring, to acquaint employees with the Department's EEO framework. One element of that framework is that each district should have an EEO counselor—a person with whom you can consult if you feel that something is happening on the job that does not conform to EEO guidelines. Environmental Scientist Joe Hopkins has been that person for the past three years. He just completed his refresher class at the Marconi Training Center. Please feel free to consult him—even if you are not sure that your concern is an EEO issue. If it is an EEO issue, he can advise you of your rights; if it is not, he can possibly recommend other resources to assist you. Any consultation with him is confidential. Please remember, too, that you may talk with any EEO counselor from any district (a complete list is available on the Human Rights Office website) just as Joe could be consulted by employees from other districts.

Discovery Center Awaits OW Visitors

By Andy Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

There are changes aplenty on the eastern side of the Borrego Valley. A new electronic sign and the fun, fast-paced radio service of AM 1620 Radio Rock-otillo are two of the new features at Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area. While they light up both the airwaves and landscape, they are really intended to highlight another addition.

On January 28, OWSVRA hosted the grand opening of its new Discovery Center. This long-awaited structure has been a goal of Ocotillo Wells' fledgling Interpretation Department since its inception. Located just north of Highway 78 on Ranger Station Road, this new structure is at the forefront of the complex of district offices. Ample parking, ocotillo-inspired shade ramadas, and an extensive deck beckon visitors to stop in and check out what is inside.

Once inside, the diverse world of Ocotillo Wells opens up to visitors. Live desert animals mingle with stuffed mounts of others, and geology, botany, native culture, military and oil history exhibits illustrate the past and present through hands-on activities. Responsible riding and safety messages are emphasized. The Discovery Center also serves as a front-line information center for OWSVRA, dispensing maps, local weather reports, trail conditions, off-highway regulations, and occasionally handling emergencies. At the center of the Discovery Center's interior lies a huge three-dimensional map of southern California—a favorite for tourists planning their short vacations and snowbirds strategizing longer winter migrations to the Sun Belt.

A network of ADA-accessible cement walkways links the Discovery Center with the OWSVRA's Amphitheatre. This outdoor stage hosts stargazing programs most weekend nights, as well as special events. The last special event held here was the unveiling ceremony for the second annual Roughneck Rendezvous geocaching event on Friday evening, January 28. This once-in-a-lifetime program consisted of an introduction to the event, a slideshow detailing all the pieces of Ocotillo Wells by local oilman Mr. Doyle, followed by a chance to view the night skies through an 11-inch telescope.



Stop in and look around the Discovery Center when you are in the area!

Roughneck Rendezvous II

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

Once again, the Ocotillo Wells team held a successful Roughneck Rendezvous Off-Highway Geocaching Adventure at the end of January. This year's theme was "Putting the Pieces Together" focusing on the different pieces of OW, from the plants and the animals to off-highway recreation, that, when put together, form a complete picture of this unique California landscape.



Lightfoot® (the Tread Lightly!® mascot), Mr. Doyle, and Signal the Frog (the Geocaching.com mascot) smile for the camera!

therefore, more attractive to the geocachers that might attend the event. Still others filled a crucial role on Saturday when they accompanied Interpretive and Administrative staff out into the park to staff the Interpretive Exhibit Caches. Without them, we would not have been able to provide these extremely popular exhibits. Finally, we had quite a few brave volunteers who operated the registration booth and the waypoint download booth on Saturday morning. These volunteers gave up precious time caching with friends to serve the

Planning for this event started in February of 2010 and included members from every team at Ocotillo Wells. The staff of Maintenance, Resources, GIS, Visitor Services, Administration, Trails, Interpretation and, of course, the volunteers all worked together to make this wonderful event possible. Thank you!

Volunteers played a critical role and deserve special recognition. Volunteering over 100 hours, they helped fill in the gaps. Camouflaging and filling each cache with the requisite trading cards, stamps, welcome message, glue sticks, puzzle pieces and logbooks was a task that could not be accomplished by staff alone and we had many volunteers make it possible. Several volunteers were also crucial in placing the caches, driving hundreds of miles on the trails within the park to put them at exactly the right place. Other volunteers spent weeks working with geocaching.com to make caches loggable and,



Registration opened early.

(Continued on next page...)

Roughneck Rendezvous II *continued...*

greater good and make the registration and download process smoother than ever! So **thank you** to all the volunteers who worked, not for pay, but because of their love of our park and the people who recreate here!



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Roughneck Rendezvous II *continued...*

With all of the planning and preparation done, the activities got started on Friday night, when participants of the Roughneck Rendezvous campfire program got a special treat right at the gates! Signal the Frog (the Geocaching.com mascot) and Lightfoot® (the Tread Lightly!® mascot) greeted everyone as they arrived at the amphitheater. Once inside the amphitheater, participants were handed a puzzle piece and were sent to find participants that had the matching pieces. After a brief flurry of excitement, winners were recognized, and we sat down to hear about some exciting investment opportunities from a local legend—Mr. Doyle. As an oilman, and captain of industry in oil-related products, Mr. Doyle was the perfect sales person to sell the participants on the natural and cultural history of the area. That night he led us on a journey through the history of Ocotillo Wells and highlighted many of the natural wonders that he discovered when he first came to the region. When all was said and done, Mr. Doyle had us all convinced that OW was well worth investing our time and effort. (Fortunately, he did not receive any monetary investments, as, scoundrel that he was, he would most likely have absconded with them!) The



(Continued on next page...)

Roughneck Rendezvous II *continued...*

evening was topped off by an exploration of the night sky, with views of Jupiter’s moons, constellations, nebula and much more!

Saturday’s activities started at 7 a.m. with a traditional cannon blast from our friends at Fort Tejon State Historic Park. Sean Mallis and his crew of historic dragoon reenactors from Fort Tejon were at the Roughneck Rendezvous to celebrate some of the first off-highway vehicles to traverse the area—the mule-drawn cannon. They set up an extremely realistic historical camp that helped you imagine what life would be like for someone out in our desert without motorized transportation. Letting off cannon blasts at opportune times, they definitely added their voice to the event and could not be ignored! As all who attended the event will tell you, ignoring a blast from a mountain howitzer would take a lot of skill!

With the help of the Administration and Interpretation staff and volunteers, 267 people registered and downloaded the cache coordinates into their GPS units. Once the geocachers received the coordinates, they were free to pursue the particular piece of Ocotillo Wells that interested them. We had ten different themes, with nine caches for each theme. Each cache contained a trading card relating to that theme, along with a puzzle piece and an authentication stamp. The participants logged their cache by filling in their logbook with a puzzle piece, stamping it, and answering a question using the trading card. Once the cachers completed a full puzzle, they were able to use the information collected during the process to answer a final question and receive raffle tickets! In addition to the traditional caches, we also included some of our own exhibit caches. Located at Devils Slide, Shell Reef, Pumpkin Patch, Gas Domes and at the



(Continued on next page...)

Roughneck Rendezvous II *continued...*

main event area on Main Street, these exhibit caches were a favorite of the participants. From Gnarly Beasts of the Past to Native Uses of Desert Plants, the exhibits allowed participants to interact with park staff and volunteers while learning new things and earning raffle tickets. A typical geocacher approached the exhibit and engaged the exhibit staff in conversation about the topic highlighted. Once the cachers heard the information, they were able to answer the question for that exhibit cache in their logbook and receive credit for the cache! Again, we would like to thank the volunteers, archeologists, Administration staff and Interpretation staff for all of their hard work making these caches so successful!



We also had our ever-popular walking caches. These caches were placed on the new hiking trail behind the Discovery Center and focused on the plants of Ocotillo Wells. With these caches, we successfully catered to geocachers who did not have access to off-highway vehicles but still wanted to participate. We also had several other activities for non-OHV users and OHV enthusiasts alike! The first was a scavenger hunt and grand opening of our brand new Discovery Center! Participants of the scavenger hunt were given a sheet of paper with 20 questions that could only be answered by exploring the Discovery Center's many interactive and educational displays.



Once the cachers were done with the scavenger hunt, they could go down to the youth track to test their skills with a handheld compass. Norman Ritter set up a compass course that educated cachers on the use of a handheld compass and sent them through a course designed to test their new skills. Once the course was completed, they received a stamp that was good for the Roughneck Raffle. Many geocachers commented that they are excited to learn some

compass skills because it is always good not to rely on the batteries in your GPS unit! The geocaching scavenger hunt ended at 5 p.m. giving participants time to visit one of the several off-highway gear vendors that attended. We also had food vendors available for those who wanted to get some great food at good prices. The huge Roughneck Raffle promptly followed the break! With almost \$10,000

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Roughneck Rendezvous II *continued...*

in prizes, Lightfoot and Signal providing entertainment, and our very own Kara L. rapping about Treading Lightly, we are confident that all 600 people who attended the event had a great time!

Sunday morning showed us the effectiveness of Mr. Doyle's presentation on Friday night. Despite winds strong enough to blow over Porta Potties (we don't know of anyone inside, though we didn't get too close to check), we had over 80 people show up for the Cache In Trash Out event! At the end of four hours of picking up—and sometimes chasing—trash in the wind, the participants gathered a respectable pile, though many complained that they had to travel “everywhere” in order to find any trash at all! The day was topped off with a BBQ provided by BURRTEC Waste Industries. BURRTEC has been an instrumental supporter of the Roughneck Rendezvous from day one. They donated both time and money toward this event—providing clean restrooms, trash receptacles, raffle prizes and, of course, funding the Trash In Trash Out luncheon! Without their support, the Rendezvous would not be the great success that it is today! During lunch, Mr. Doyle quizzed the participants on various pieces of the Ocotillo Wells puzzle and handed out prizes to the winners. The big winner of the day was Kawakiturn and his two children who collected the most trash and won a Trasheroo spare tire trash bag!

Events like this are only possible due to the collaborative work of the whole Ocotillo Wells team. The Interpretation staff, the off-highway community, and the geocaching community would like to thank each Ocotillo Wells employee, volunteer, and event donor for their contributions, no matter how small, all of which made this event possible. One major piece was left out of the public puzzles that were out in the park that weekend—and that was the people of Ocotillo Wells SVRA working behind the scenes to make this park the unique, world class and professional recreational area it is today. Therefore, thank you and we will see you next year at Roughneck Rendezvous III!



Trail News

By Brian Woodson, Maintenance Supervisor, Trails

Well folks, here we are again with an exciting update on the trails of Ocotillo Wells.

First, I'd like to take a moment and thank my crew, who made all of this possible. I'd also like to welcome Anthony "Shay" McGhee to the crew. Shay is our new Park Maintenance Worker I (Permanent) who started with us just after the beginning of the year and has stepped up to take the lead of the crew.



Martin Rubalcava and Cesar Casillas carefully hand dig around wires that crossed the new Toner phone line utility ditch.

marker every 2/10th of a mile (additional ones will be added at the other 1/10th when budget allows) so that visitors will have a better sense of their location on the trails. Once the installation of all the trail markers is complete, we will begin the process of numbering them with either latitude/longitude or UTM identifiers. This will assist with tracking progress on a trail map, establishing meeting points for group riders or for locating downed riders or medical emergencies.

Over the last couple of months, the crew has been busy applying themselves to several different projects throughout the district. We have been making steady progress in redesigning the look of our trail markers and are currently in the process of installing them throughout the park. We have changed the layout plan to facilitate a more uniform approach. We are installing a



Dirt flies from the post hole as Joshua McCue and Anthony Beepath use a two-man auger to install a sign at the new Truckhaven 4x4 Obstacle Training Area.

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Trail News *continued...*

The crew has also been busy working on sign installation and fence construction in Truckhaven at the location of our new Truckhaven 4x4 Obstacle Course Training Area which opens in March of 2011.

We even had a chance to help the Interpretation Department by installing the Radio Rock-otillo signs that advertise our new radio station, which showers park visitors with all the information they need to enjoy our park to the fullest.

After a few incidents of wet weather, a substantial amount of water remained on some of our trails long after the clouds cleared. The crew was quick to get out to several low-lying sections of trail to get them pumped out so that the heavy equipment operators would have an easier time getting those sections repaired.



Catch up with us again in the next issue.

Cesar Casillas and Ryan Walasek put the finishing touches on one of the obstacle signs at the Truckhaven 4x4 Area.

Who Is New in Resources?

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

The Resources Department welcomes Jeremy Collins, who transfers over from Maintenance to become our PMW II handling fencing and coordinating exotic plant removal. Jeremy started the first week of January. On February 1, Kevin Ponce reported as the new Environmental Scientist, coming to us from the Department of Fish and Game. The attempt to fill the Senior ES position failed when no applications were received for the spate of hiring we did at the end of December. When the anticipated hiring freeze did not materialize, the position was announced a second time; those applications never made it to the District as the freeze was then imposed at a later date.

On March 2, Senior Park Aides Joni Bye and Steve Wilcox reported back, but the freeze prevented the rehiring of PA Henry Hernandez because he had been officially separated.

Writing Our Own OHV History

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

Too often, the past is not considered “real history” until all those who experienced it have passed on. By then, the souvenirs, mementos, newspaper clippings, old photographs and other materials have been sadly forgotten in attics, tossed out in spring cleanings, sold at garage sales, or otherwise scattered to the winds of time. Thus, invaluable stories, perspectives, and information are lost forever.

But such regrettable loss of history is avoidable! Reminding people that their past experiences and the items they have collected have value is a start. The next step is to set about preserving and collecting historic materials that illustrate a time and place or even symbolize an era. With such precautions, the changes, trials and triumphs of the past can, in a sense, live forever. New generations can then experience the past through these old photographs, newspaper clippings, oral histories, and other resources—then use them to better understand how the world around them came to be.



This, in a nutshell, is the goal of Ocotillo Wells’ *Let’s Write Our Own History* campaign, which has been slowly building over the past two years. Because our corner of the desert is one of the birthplaces of off-highway recreation, the park has launched a concerted effort to preserve and interpret this history. While it may be a more off-beat chapter of the past to many (without perhaps the glory of oil exploration or the adventure of Anza’s expedition), it has immense value to the park’s visitors and local residents. Many of the pioneers of this form of recreation still come to Ocotillo Wells to ride and have brought up their

families here. Often, three or four generations use this park together during traditional family outings on holidays. For many, the history of “off-roading” is the history of their family.

Generations of riders means generations of memories, keepsakes, and photo albums. We have an opportunity at OW to gather an impressive collection of pieces of off-highway recreation history. Not only is preserving and interpreting our OHV past important, this effort will undoubtedly net huge returns—as it already has with a variety of donated photos and magazines. In fact, since very little about this subject has ever been written down or studied, the park will in a sense be “pioneering” this history just as the early explorers here pioneered the backcountry.

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Writing Our Own OHV History *continued...*

With such an important mission and its exciting potential, Ocotillo Wells SVRA is continuing to encourage visitors, local residents, and employees alike to share their piece of the past with us. We are seeking everything from old stories to antique riding equipment—all will help us to tell the story of our park and the birth and growth of OHV recreation through a variety of media from exhibits to books. For more information, please contact Andrew Fitzpatrick at 760-767-5068 or the Discovery Center at 760-767-5393.

Life's A Beach at Heber Dunes

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

“Yes, Virginia there really is a beach at Heber Dunes.” As certainly as there is sand in the desert, there are dunes there as well—but a beach? Somehow, a beach was not exactly what I had imagined I would find when I finally reached my new assignment as the Interpreter I at Heber Dunes SVRA. So what had I expected?

Time has flown by so quickly that this is really the first opportunity I've had to reflect on this new adventure. The desert winds could not have swept me away any faster than the speed at which the staff at OW hired me, processed the paperwork, and sent me on my way.

On that first day as I surveyed my new surroundings, I realized that I was definitely not in Kansas anymore. I had accepted a position with a lot of responsibility and some very high expectations. Had I bitten off more than I could chew? As the new kid on the block, would I fit in? Well, if you are going to go the beach, the best way to get accustomed to the water is to jump right in. So I did!

Was it what I had expected? Not really—it's been more. I hadn't realized until now how much I had missed being a part of the state park family and what a pleasure it has been making new friends and reconnecting with friends from days of yore. OHV is different in some ways, but the dedicated people part is still the same. My new co-workers are proud of their SVRA, and I'm glad that they saved me a spot on the beach at Heber Dunes.

From Heber Beach – Having a great time! Wish you were here!



Admin Ledger—January

By Kitty Gravett, MST

On January 10, 2011, Leda Seals, Charles Rennie and Kitty Gravett hit the road and traveled to Oceano Dunes SVRA in Pismo Beach for personnel training. All OHV Parks were represented by their Administrative Officers and their Personnel MSTs, along with Maria Mowrey and Sara Fontanos from Division. On the day of our arrival, we were given a tour of the Oceano Dunes District Office by our hosts—Administrative Officer Marilyn Knollenberg, Administrative Officer Wanda Freeman and Management Services Technician Patty Garrison. That evening the entire group got together for dinner at a local restaurant for a little pre-meeting networking.

Day two consisted of a teleconference with representatives from the Personnel departments in Sacramento led by Staff Services Manager Paris Jackson. We touched on issues regarding payroll and time sheets, the hiring process (including the 81 package process), benefits, worker's compensation, uniform allowance and the cadet hiring process. It was a great way for us to work with Sacramento on issues that each of us deal with daily and to learn ways to streamline a few of the processes currently in place.

Day three started with a short meeting, then a presentation by the Oceano Dunes Senior Environmental Scientist Ronnie Glick. His presentation showed how their restoration program works and the amount of time and effort that goes into preserving the wildlife on their beaches. After the presentation, we were off to a tour of the beach and dunes, directed by Superintendent Rey Monge and Environmental Scientist Stephanie Little.



After lunch the group travelled to the Monarch Grove for a personal tour to view the butterflies. We were led by State Park Interpreter Jenna Scimeca. After the butterflies, we had a quick tour of the Oceano Dunes Ranger Station. Then Maintenance Supervisor Kathy Holt provided us with a tour of their amazing Maintenance facility.

We want to thank the Oceano Dunes Staff for their fantastic hospitality during our visit to their facility.

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Admin Ledger—February

By Linda Van Staaveren, MST

Leda Seals and Linda Van Staaveren travelled to the Mott Training Center, February 16th through the 18th, to attend the 2011 Administrative Conference.

The first day was spent learning about “enhancing communication, connection and collaboration during a time of constraints.” We also learned about “How to lead employees with our particular leadership style.”

The second day we heard from Mr. Lopez and Mr. Perez on the “Future Projections and the State of State Parks.” In addition, several State Park Superintendents presented a panel discussion of “Today’s Administrative Officer.” After lunch we had discussions on “Progressive discipline trends and tips from another perspective.”

On the final day, and new to the conference this year, we had to give team presentations. Each team was assigned a specific issue before the conference and was tasked to create and present a 30-45 minute presentation of the team’s findings. Our topic was Labor Relations. To make things more engaging, we used a Jeopardy game. There were three categories—Bargaining Unit 7, Bargaining Unit 12, and Bargaining Unit 13—and the answers pertained to how to handle Post and Bid when there is a pending Adverse Action.

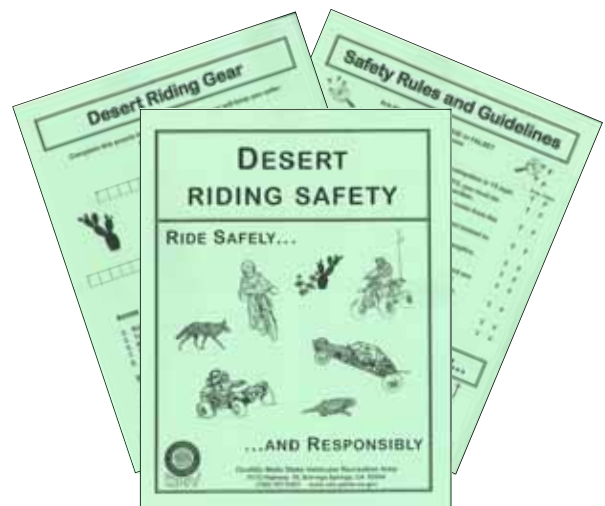
Friday afternoon we loaded up the vehicle and began our trek back to OW.

New... Desert Riding Safety Activity Booklet

The Interpretive staff announces the latest activity guide for kids—**Desert Riding Safety**.

While showing Lightfoot® (the Tread Lightly!® mascot) the way back to his campsite through a maze, or unscrambling words, filling in the blanks, selecting true or false answers, or doing a word search, the kids can learn and reinforce the various safety tips for safe and responsible riding in the desert!

Stop by the Discovery Center to pick up your copy of *Desert Riding Safety*.



OW Maintenance

By John Freaner, Park Maintenance Worker II



The first part of the New Year has kept the Maintenance Department busy, as usual. We have been working on a number projects as well as our repair requests. Karen Sypniewski has been doing a terrific job taking care of all of our timesheets, paperwork and questions, and Dennis Raymond has had his hands full leading us.

One of our biggest priorities is to finish the block wall behind our shop. Jeff Smith and Vernon Gingrich are working hard on this. Once the wall is in place, the sea containers will be set and then we will have our permanent storage areas. Leon Jordan and Chris Perez have been working



on sheds and ramadas, as well as various smaller projects. Chris Dahl and Rick Lizasuain have continued working on the Toner decks and storage sheds. Norb Moeller has been busy organizing shop items, getting them ready for a permanent home in the sea containers. Julie Humann is working her way through the Park, fixing all of the solar lighting on the CXTs. Chad Van Doren continues to work on all our water and sewer systems as the park's new Maintenance Mechanic.



Housekeeping has also been busy. Debbie Rollins and Terra Tuggles have been doing a great job with the increased activity on the North Side because of the new 4x4 Training Track. Allison Boyle and



Jenica Light have been busy keeping Holmes Camp and Main Street clean for all of our Park guests. Mike Krechmar, Maribel Bonillas, and Charles Cawood have been taking care of all of our offices, as well as the 300 building. Gary Walker has continued his crusade against any trash and debris left behind.

Peggy Hurley and Sarah Young have been working on our landscaping with the help of the inmate crews from Puerta La Cruz.

Heber Maintenance

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I



The same fascinating phenomena that have shaped the most striking features of our parks and recreation areas also present our maintenance staff with some of the most challenging tasks. Downed trees, flooded campgrounds, and piles of debris all must be dealt with by our maintenance crews on a regular basis. Not only cleaning up the messes, but doing so in a safe manner has taken center stage every Saturday morning for all of the staff at Heber Dunes. Topics presented by Alfredo Jacobo, Maintenance I, have ranged from safe ways to collect all those nails and pieces of glass that the shifting sands uncover on a daily basis in the park to earthquake preparedness and Africanized bee protection. Considering Heber's proximity to a major earthquake fault and the presence of active bee hives in the neighboring agricultural areas, these meetings are taken very seriously by all park staff. The anniversary of last year's Mexicali earthquake will soon be upon us, along with fire season, and with all of the recent rains, flooding in our washes and low lying areas. Are you prepared?

Because the maintenance team has been so busy, I was asked to help lighten the load by writing an article for them for *The Blowsand Reader*. I found the following story included in the thank you letters from a group of second graders who had visited the park. It pretty much says it all...

Where in the park is Alfredo Heber Dunes?

Is he in the office double checking his PAPOS or reviewing bid requests for the latest Heber maintenance project? Perhaps he's cleaning the restrooms or repairing a leaky pipe. Dale and Chuck, the volunteers, swear they just saw him loading boxes of brochures into the storage unit.



"No," says Ranger Vic. "He's putting together those interpretive panel kiosks. I know because I found the completed PEF in my inbox this morning."

"That can't be," replies Interpreter Jaime. "I just saw him drive by Ramada #10 on a backhoe. The bucket was full of gravel."

Volunteers Jean and Janice drive up on their ATVs. Each is pulling a small trailer filled with the trash that they've collected from the ramada trash containers. "Where's Alfredo?" everyone asks.

"Why, we last saw him demonstrating to Park Aide Luis the safest way to trim the tamarisk trees," answers Jean.

"I just saw him in the Kubota hauling off tree trimmings," chimes in Janice.

Everyone agrees that Alfredo is a very busy man.

So where in the park is Alfredo Heber Dunes? He could be just about anywhere. What we do know is that no matter how large or small a job it is, Alfredo will be doing a good job—and everyone on the park staff appreciates all of the hard work that he does. **Thank you, Alfredo!**

Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

Iron Mining at Heber Dunes...?

Late fall and winter are typically our busiest season. With the mild Imperial Valley weather, we attract many visitors who stay within the park and volunteer their services, assisting our staff with a wide variety of projects.

Chuck and Janice Kincaid are volunteers who live in Washington state when not down in the Imperial Valley. They, like all people, have special talents and interests—and I would call them “hunters and gatherers.” They are relentless in their quest for cleaning up the broken glass and nails and other debris that foul our high-use sand dune areas.

Chuck and Janice comb the rich areas which yield copious quantities of nails, glass, and the occasional coin or gun cartridge, just to make it interesting. They have concluded it took many decades for this trash to accumulate, and it will take several years to clean it up. However, they remain undaunted



Chuck and Janice Kincaid relentlessly hunt for nails, broken glass and other debris.



Chuck with one of approximately 10 buckets of iron nails he and Janice have gathered from Heber Dunes SVRA.

by what sometimes seems an overwhelming task. Often an area looks clean—free of glass and nails and debris—but then a strong desert wind shifts hundreds of tons of sand overnight, and we are greeted with the morning sun reflecting off thousands of shards of glass—an old covered strata of sand and debris are seeing daylight for the first time in decades. It won't be long before Chuck and Janice, buckets and pogy sticks and magnetic rakes in tow, pounce on it with the zeal of prospectors mining a rich vein. The off-highway community and Heber Dunes are lucky and grateful to have these good people, who make riding safer and more fun for everyone. Thank them and other volunteer gleaners the next time you **don't** have a flat tire.

Beavertail Cactus

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance

This spring was spectacular with wildflowers blooming throughout our desert. My backyard was not much different. I have landscaped with mostly native plants, enjoying their beauty while admiring their hardiness. One particular area in my yard especially pleases me. I have a mound of beavertail cactus that has matured into a true work of art. I have kept count of the number of blossoms on the beavertail intermittently and, depending on the weather and my sporadic watering schedule, have been both disappointed and amazed over the years. This year, however, definitely fell into the “amazing” category. While this season had a wide variety of wildflowers that peaked in several of my favorite locations, I had a hard time finding anything that I appreciated any more than my cactus mound. This rock garden is the result of a gift from a friend who gave me a cactus that was floundering under her chinaberry tree. The suffering beavertail was divided into over seventy pads which were planted individually on the mound and was then decorated with rocks, shells and tiles. Now, six years later, I am enjoying the blooms of my labor. This year, there were over 200 blossoms several days in a row!



The *Opuntia basilaris* has magenta to pink flowers and the round, flattened pads that give the beavertail cactus its common name. Should they accidentally be touched, the cactus pads have thousands of tiny, hair-like spines that are difficult to remove from the fingers because they are so hard to see. Duct tape and Elmer’s glue have both proved helpful in removing the small, barbed bristles known as “glochids”. Use the duct tape diligently or use the glue removal method, letting the glue dry on the glochids before peeling it off.

Opuntia is the genus for the prickly pear cactus. The beavertail is a variety of prickly pear. *Opuntia basilaris* is another Latin name that is easy to say. *Opuntia* makes me think it could be the name for someone’s dear, old aunt, Aunt *Opuntia*, from down South. She’s squatty and colorful, and wonderful to be around, but she can get bristly if you get too close and rub her the wrong way. Mind your manners, and you’ll enjoy being in the company of *Opuntia*!



Visitor Services

By Mike Howard, Supervising State Park Peace Officer

Over the course of the last six years, I have responded to countless calls for service in and around Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Many of these calls were similar and unremarkable, but there have been many that are burned into my memory and of those, there are a few that I think are appropriate to share.

“Surcom 1331, I’ll be clear of the vehicle pursuit. CHP has 3 in custody.”

“10-4 we have a call pending of a hand grenade in Holmes Camp.”

“Can you repeat your traffic, was that a hand grenade?”

“Affirmative.”

It was a Tuesday in spring of 2007 and I was the only Ranger on duty.



“1331 Surcom, we have 2 calls for you. One is a stuck vehicle. That individual is lost and has been separated from his group, and I just received a call from the other half of that party who is also lost and is currently being chased by bees. He also states he is allergic to bees.”

It was a Saturday in the middle of summer.

“Surcom, we will be attempting to locate a naked man hiding in the bushes in Hidden Valley.”

Calls like this one from last weekend have a certain headshaking appeal to the Rangers and Lifeguards who work here. One immediately has to wonder what had to have transpired for such a situation to be presenting itself. What we found last weekend was that a man decided to do some exercises in his camp site without clothing which bothered the neighbors to say the least. When he knew the Rangers were looking for him, he donned an elaborate robe and took off on foot. We later learned that he had made the robe himself and was very proud of it. Long story short, when Jim walked him through the doors of the Imperial County Jail, the jailers all came out from the hallways to have a look. As far as we know, he was released the next day wearing the same robe and some makeshift underwear.



Really stuck in the mud!

Somehow the desert and explosions seem to go hand in hand for some people. Back in about 2005 we received a call of a man that had burned himself in the fire. When I arrived I found a male that had been burned up to his beltline or so. When I asked him what happened, he said that he had decided to make a Sobe bomb (gasoline in a Sobe bottle usually with a lid, placed in the fire). The gasoline reaches a boiling point and suddenly explodes out of the fire. Well this guy had a change of heart and decided it wasn't safe.

Unfortunately, he came to this conclusion only *after* placing the bomb in the fire. He decided to knock it out of the fire with a shovel. The gas splattered out of the

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Visitor Services *continued...*

bottle and all over his legs and chest. Naturally, I asked what he did then. He told me that he started running around his campsite. I asked him why he didn't stop, drop and roll like they taught everybody in elementary school. He told me that he actually thought about that as he was running around his campsite on fire but just couldn't do it. So how was the fire extinguished? Several of his friends tackled him and stomped the fire out with their feet at the same time throwing dirt on him.



Oops!

Another memorable call in 2005 was of an 18-year-old male who decided to put an M-80 into a glass bottle. He intended to make some kind of grenade by lighting the M-80, placing it in the bottle, sealing the cap then throwing it. The flaw in his plan was that he was trying to do 5 seconds of actions within the 3 second time allowed by the short fuse. He only made it as far as attempting to tighten the lid down before the M-80

ignited. Imagine his surprise! By the time we arrived on scene, he had several minor lacerations on his face beginning near his nose and continuing out toward his ears, very similar to the way people paint cat whiskers on their faces at Halloween. He wasn't as injured as one would think he would be after something like that. I saw him the following day after he returned from the hospital. The lacerations were, however, still quite pronounced enhancing his cat-like looks.

To change gears a bit, we have a relatively new ranger on board. Brittany Veater transferred from Anza-Borrego to Ocotillo Wells in January. Brittany did part of her field training here at Ocotillo Wells and decided to join our team. There was a time years ago that Ocotillo Wells was not known as a place Rangers wanted to transfer to—it had more of the opposite reputation—but that has changed. When I became a supervisor, my number one priority was to create a working environment that would keep people wanting to be here and to make it an appealing place to transfer to. In the last two and a half years, four of the current Ranger staff (including me who transferred back from Lake Perris) have transferred here from other parks. We have been able to recruit people who *want* to be here and who want to be a part of our team. I can now say, with biased certainty, that we have the best Visitor Services staff in the state. All our Rangers and Lifeguards are dedicated and happy to be working here, even when escorting a man wearing nothing but a beautiful robe on his way to jail.



The Scorpion... Our Critter of the Month

Scorpions are members of a group of invertebrates called arachnids. They are nocturnal predators and consume all types of insects, including spiders, centipedes and even other scorpions. They capture their prey using a pair of large pedipalps located at the front of their body. They can also paralyze their prey, if needed, with a venomous toxin that is delivered from a stinger at the tip of its tail.

When put under a black light, scorpions will glow a greenish-blue color.



Stinger

Giant hairy scorpions are the largest scorpions found in the United States, reaching lengths of up to 6 inches. Keep your eyes open at night... These scorpions occur right here in Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes SVRAs.



Pedipalps

DESERT WILDFLOWERS

These desert wildflowers may be seen in or around our park this season. See if you can find them in this word search. Their names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

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

- Apricot Mallow
- Brittlebush
- Brown Eyed Primrose
- Desert Chicory
- Desert Lily
- Desert Poppy
- Desert Sunflower

- Dune Evening Primrose
- Lupine
- Forget Me Nots
- Orcutt's Aster
- Phacelia
- Sand Verbena
- Spanish Needles

The Weather Log...



January

High Temperature	Jan 17 th	87.8 degrees
Low Temperature	Jan 1 st	35.3 degrees
Average High Temperature		70.6 degrees
Average Low Temperature		49.2 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Jan 30 th	30 mph
Rainfall for the Month		.00 inches

February

High Temperature	Feb 7 th	79.2 degrees
Low Temperature	Feb 3 rd	28.1 degrees
Average High Temperature		67.8 degrees
Average Low Temperature		47.4 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Feb 16 th	35 mph
Rainfall for the Month		1.75 inches

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



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