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## Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

We broke new ground in March with the grand opening of the Truckhaven 4x4 Area on the north end of Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Assemblyman Brian Jones and OHV Commissioner Eric Lueder joined us at the grand opening. Both men are great supporters of Ocotillo Wells and OHV recreation statewide. It was great to have them with us for the memorable day.

For me, this obstacle course exemplifies why we come to work each day. It was yet another dream that we were able to make come true—one that will provide great experiences and memories for our visitors for years to come.

Looking across my desk at the poster on the wall, I see a proud eagle and the caption VISION. **VISION is what this accomplishment represents: "A clear vision will help you achieve your goals. With determination and commitment visions can become reality."** This unique project began with a vision, and, together, we made it a reality.



"Vision, Teamwork, Partnerships—the dream becomes reality."  
Brian Jones and Eric Lueder cut the ribbon, surrounded by OHV staff, TDS members, volunteers, and visitors.

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## Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

This 4x4 project encompassed our basic core values of *teamwork* and *partnership*. Park staff from all services, Division trail team members, TDS members, Friends of OW, and the W.E. Rock company all worked together to plan and build the incredible 4x4 area. Many long hours were spent ensuring that all aspects of the project were covered and that we could produce something for everyone. Donations were made and the OHV Trust fund covered the rest of the material costs for the project. Thank you to *all* who made the dream a reality.

The new Truckhaven 4x4 area is a great example of the quality recreation to which the OHV Mission is devoted. The area includes cultural and natural resource areas, interpretation, restoration, and active and passive recreation. Now on weekends you will find volunteers from the OHV groups providing information to the public, patrolling the area, and holding 4x4 training. What more could you ask for at a State Park? Of course—visitors to use the park! They are coming in large numbers and they are having a blast. Tune in to YouTube and watch the excitement on the faces of the people attending, and the exciting videos of the vehicles maneuvering the obstacles. You will also see strong active teamwork. Whenever a vehicle is stuck, everyone stops and hooks up lines, working together until they have gotten the vehicle out and on to another challenge. The visitors work together to make the experience a good one for everyone. Incredible!

Thank you again!!!!

## Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...



Which creepy crawly at Ocotillo Wells can **make tunnels up to 20' in desert soil to stay cool** during the hottest parts of summer?

*Answer:* The Harvester Ant! The underground chambers that adult harvester ants create are vital to protecting their young and their food supply (which they travel amazing distances to obtain). While life underground is fairly safe, when harvester ants do surface, they are appetizing prey for the flat-tailed horned lizard. Flat-tails are specialists who can eat up to 200 harvester ants a day!

# Admin Ledger

By Charles Rennie, Management Services Tech

The rains have ended and Ocotillo Wells is hanging on to the last of the wild flowers. While the wild flowers fade, the activity for the Administration Group continues to be brisk as we prepare for closing out 2010-11.

The Administration Group continues to see action even though our park is moving into its summer siesta, recovering from the busy riding season. Delane, Melony and Linda continue working **on contracts, Cal Cards, invoices and PAPO's (a big thanks to those who help us with the processing of these documents)**; while we prepare to close the books for another year. Kitty has begun to process the number of seasonal employees who will be leaving us for the summer. Charlie, Leda and Linda are also involved with preparing to close the books, and are also looking forward as they start to prepare the 2011-12 Budget.

Along with our normal duties we have seen several training opportunities:

- Linda, with the assistance of Sharon from SAC, conducted training on SPI CAMP.
- Charlie conducted our first in-house training on Outlook; this is the beginning of our in-house training program.
- We began the coordination of training to educate computer users on the roll-out of Windows 2010.
- On April 12, 2011 the Admin staff hit the road and traveled to Sacramento to meet with Department of Parks, Deputy Director of Administration Manuel Lopez and members of his Administrative Team. The meeting was intended to provide us and them with a better understanding of how the various organizations function. The visit was very successful with everyone gaining a better understanding of how we can work better together. We were introduced to so many great people in each department that it is impossible to name everyone but we would like recognize all of you.
- After a day of meetings, in the evening we did get to enjoy visiting the Railroad Museum, Old Town Sacramento, the Stanford **Mansion, the Women's Museum** and a dinner on the Delta King.



The Delta King, located in Old Town Sacramento.

# TDS 2011 Truckhaven Challenge

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

Every year at the beginning of March, the north end of Ocotillo Wells transforms into a mecca for all things related to Jeep and 4x4 recreation. More than 10,000 visitors come to participate in or observe the Tierra Del Sol (TDS) Truckhaven Challenge. Once again, the Ocotillo Wells interpretive team, with assistance from other OW departments and TDS, was there to provide the visitors with great information about the desert.

**With the now classic games of “Jeopardy” and “Whose Scat is That?” anchoring a small portion of our 80’ booth, we kicked off the event on Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup> with throngs of people arriving for an early visit to the vendors and the registration tables. Visitors who stopped by our booth were “wowed” by the story of Ocotillo Wells as told through games, activities, hands-on displays and live animals. In addition to our regular features, we incorporated many new activities for the crowds this year.**



There is so much to learn!

One new activity was the flash flood exhibit, which was set up in front of the unfortunate Jeep caught in just such a flood several years ago. In this activity participants were able to simulate a flash flood on a small scale and witness the power of water as it obliterated their mini Ocotillo Wells in a matter of seconds! With such a vivid reminder of the power that flash floods can possess, no doubt the visitors who participated will be that much wiser when it comes to respecting the power of water in their desert!

A growing part of **OW’s interpretive program this year has been due to the huge** increase of participants in our ASI program. Since this is a program that promotes safe and responsible off-highway recreation, we decided to showcase the program with its own section of the booth—and a new game! Visitors had a blast trying to figure out which piece of protective gear to use to protect a certain part of the body. When they thought they



Kara prepares the flash flood display.

*(Continued on next page...)*

## TDS 2011 Truckhaven Challenge *continued...*

had a right answer, they threw a beanbag through a hole in a panel depicting a rider with proper safety gear. If they managed to get the beanbag in the right hole, then they were allowed to go on to the next clue; if not, they could try again! Participants who completed the entire game were given a safety sticker and a prize! Many enjoyed the **game, and many more signed up for Cheryl Gillott's ASI classes!**

Another exciting activity was offered just for the **kids! The "Leapin Lizards" Discovery Zone let kids explore the amazing world of Ocotillo Wells' lizards!** It started with a painting project in which all participants painted their own desert banded gecko! Many children, and their parents, said that being able to take something home that was created at the park was a great way to reinforce what they learned about the geckos. Another part of the Discovery Zone was the memory game. Participants flipped over a card to reveal the image of one of the lizards of Ocotillo Wells. Then they tried to find the matching pictures on the other cards! This game was



The new gnarly beasts exhibit was a popular attraction!



Visitors visiting the interpretive exhibit.

spiced up with some interesting facts and trivia and was a great hit! Winning the game meant **they received the "Leapin Lizard" sticker!**

With all these activities and displays, we managed to interact with more than 5,000 people over that single weekend! Without the help of the many OW staff, this amazing feat would not have occurred. Thank you to everyone involved with our outreach efforts at the 2011 TDS Truckhaven Challenge!

# Ron Cooksy Retires!

On April 20<sup>th</sup> the staff of Ocotillo Wells and friends of Ron Cooksy held a potluck lunch to celebrate **Ron's upcoming retirement.**



**“Ron has now given over fifty years of his life to state and federal public service. His drive, dedication, integrity, passion, professionalism, wisdom, and kind heart have touched more lives and projects in our state than I can imagine. He has been a rock at Ocotillo Wells for so many years. While he is officially retiring from state service next October, we know that we will again see him and Nanda pulling into the park, beets in the truck, and smiles on their faces. They will still be wintering in the area, attending our gatherings, and we hope volunteering, because they both will always be part of our family, part of our team, and close to our hearts. **We love you, Ron.**”**

Kathy Dolinar



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## Ron Cooksy Retires! *continued...*

“When I arrived at Ocotillo Wells back in the spring of 2007, from the frozen hills of Sierra District, Ron had already been working here for longer than a decade. With his sun-browned skin and white beard and hair, he had appeared to have materialized from the heat mirage to which I was uncomfortably trying to acclimate. He had been out in the park, by himself, fixing and repairing signs that had been damaged by vandals. I thought to myself, my gosh, where does the desert end and Ron begin? Back then not only was our staff a lot smaller in number but compared to today, our sign budget was **diminutive as well. Ron took care to “rescue” the signs** that were brought back in pretty bad condition. Not only did he pound and straighten them (if they needed it), but he spent hours using a brush painstakingly painting the signs that he was repairing—touching them up so that he could use them in the park again. Ron has been a steady individual able to work alongside and with anyone. He will be missed by many, and we wish him well in his future **endeavors wherever they may take him.”**



Brian Woodson

### On behalf of all of us at Ocotillo Wells...

Thank you for all your hard work and dedication over the years.

You are a true friend and we will miss you!

We wish you only the best.



# If You Build It, They Will Come!

By Norb Ruhmke, State Park Superintendent II

In late 2009, Ocotillo Wells SVRA was approached by Tierra Del Sol Jeep Club about the possibility of building a 4x4 area for off-highway enthusiasts. **We listened to the group's idea and Kathy said, "Build it!"** I had just promoted in from Lake Perris SRA. **And after dealing with boaters**

for 10 plus years, and suddenly going to off-highway vehicles, I had no idea what I was getting myself into.



As 2010 arrived, the planning meetings began, and it became a team effort between State Parks (Ocotillo Wells SVRA), Tierra Del Sol Jeep Club, and W.E. Rock. In the planning meetings we discussed site locations, obstacles, and needed materials. We knew we wanted the 4x4 site area near the TDS event area, so

choosing the site would be simple. The area we picked out for the 4x4 area was approximately 30 acres in size and located on the north side of the park, in the area between Holly Road and the Crossover Trail camping area off State Route 22. Tierra Del Sol and W.E. Rock brought in pictures of the Miller Motorsport Park in Utah,

**Cow's Mountain OHV Park in Ukiah,** and Hollister Hills SVRA

for obstacle ideas. We considered tires, a side hill, **a stair stepper, up's and & down's, a sluice box, a frame twister, and logs.** The CEQA documents were submitted to the Resources Division, and construction began the week of December 15<sup>th</sup>. We scheduled the grand opening for the 2011 TDS event weekend.



Tierra Del Sol scoured Southern California for donations of materials for the obstacles. They needed chain link fencing, boulders, heavy equipment tires, concrete tubes, rip-rap, blocksbogs—and **the list went on.** Kathy Dolinar worked with OHV Division and solicited the OHV Division's Trail

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# If You Build It, They Will Come! *continued...*

Crew to assist Ocotillo Wells with construction. I would get emails and phone calls from Bo Neece from Tierra Del Sol saying, **“We got the boulders. You need to coordinate and have them picked up and delivered to the site.”** **“We got the concrete tubes. You need to coordinate and have them picked up and delivered to the site.”** **“We got the chain link fencing...”** You get the idea. Bo and TDS were on a roll. With a lot of hard work, Bo got most of the materials through donations. The Truckhaven 4x4 Training Area was becoming a reality!

During the first phase of construction, the fence that surrounds the 4x4 area was installed by the Ocotillo Wells Trails Crew with assistance from Cal Fire Inmate Labor Crews. The Trail Crew and the Cal Fire inmates had the fence that surrounded the 30 acres of the 4x4 area installed within a week. They also fenced an additional three and a half acres that is closed to the public and riders in order to protect cultural resources. A pedestrian area was created on the south side of the 4x4 area to watch the action within the 4x4 area—and to protect the habitat of the flat-tailed horned lizard.

TDS, W. E. Rock, and the OHV Trail Crew arrived and construction was ready to begin. We walked the 4x4 area and laid out the sites for the obstacles. The boulders, rip-rap, tires, concrete tubes were starting to be delivered. Dirt was being moved and cement trucks were rolling in to deliver Shot-Crete to a concrete pumper used to spray the obstacles. Everything seemed to be going smoothly—until the vandals arrived. During construction, the 4x4 area was closed to the public for safety concerns and was clearly posted. There was equipment like bobcats, skip loaders, cement trucks. Some members of the public apparently did not like the fence and wanted access to their favorite motorcycle hill and



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# If You Build It, They Will Come! *continued...*

decided to cut large sections of surrounding fence to get access to the hill. As the obstacles started to take shape, and become more recognizable, and the public was educated regarding what was going on, the vandalism decreased. As the first two week of construction came to a close, approximately 10 out of the 21 obstacles were nearly complete.



The second phase of construction began the week **after New Year's Day. Materials continued to arrive and progress was made on the obstacles and on choosing their names.** For example, the crew had some left over concrete tubes, blocks, and tires. They constructed an **obstacle that wasn't really planned for the 4x4 area, so that obstacle was named "Leftovers."** Kathy Dolinar did a test ride with Bo Neece from Tierra Del Sol on an obstacle with concrete tubes. She had such a wonderful experience on that test ride that we named the obstacle



KCHP Hill. (If you want to hear the story of her test drive, go give her a visit at her office.) We continued naming the obstacles as they were constructed. Here is **a list: Bo's Bowl, Dollar Drop, Chutes & Ladders, Little Sluice, Game of Life, Gate Keeper, Rocker Knocker, Lizards Lair,**



**Leftovers, Winch Training Area, Flex Test, Little Wupdido, Log Jam, Get-Er-Done Gulch, Little Twister, \$1000 Dollar Hill, Tank Trap, Little Rubicon, Get Tired, KCHP Hill, and Tubular.**



All crews continued to work hard that **week, and by week's end all the obstacles were completed.** During the construction of the 4x4 area, we were wondering how we were going to rate the obstacles. Kathy had heard that Prairie

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# If You Build It, They Will Come! *continued...*

City was using a rating system for their 4x4 area obstacles, so we called Prairie City and asked how they were rating their obstacles. They told us that they were using a color coding system like for ski runs: a green circle for easy/beginner, a blue square for intermediate/more difficult, and a black diamond for extreme/expert. What a great idea!—so we adopted it.

February came around and all the obstacles were completed. But there was still plenty to do before the grand opening. The Ranger staff was busy patrolling the area to keep visitors out of the 4x4 area. Maintenance was painting winch posts yellow for stuck vehicles. They were also painting the concrete blocks that were placed around creosote bushes to protect them from being run over and to prevent people from entering other obstacles. (They managed to paint a few rocks yellow as well!) Maintenance was installing the shade ramadas in the pedestrian area. The Resources Fence Crew, with help from the Cal Fire Inmate Crews, was installing fencing inside the 4x4 area to protect habitat for native plants and animals. They also installed the fence for the pedestrian area. The Trail Crew was working signage, including the new rating system signs. GIS was GISing all the obstacles, the fencing, and the signs. Heavy Equipment Operators were hard at work moving mounds of dirt. The Interpretation Crew was creating interpretation panels on the history of OHV use and flyers for the District grand opening.

On March 2, 2011, the construction for the Truckhaven 4x4 area was (except for a few minor details) complete, and ready for the public.

**On March 3, 2011, District had a “soft” grand opening for the Truckhaven 4x4 Training Area.** Only Ocotillo Wells District Staff and OHV Division Staff were in attendance. District staff said a few



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## If You Build It, They Will Come! *continued...*

words, had a ribbon cutting ceremony and afterwards, John Freaner, Jan Chaney, and Steve Chaney cooked and handed out hotdogs, brats, and sodas provided by the Friends of Ocotillo Wells and Tierra Del Sol Jeep Club. After lunch, Tierra Del Sol Jeep Club members, OHV Trail Crew staff, and W.E. Rock gave demonstrations with their vehicles on the obstacles.



On March 4, 2011, Truckhaven 4x4 Training Area held its Grand Opening with Tierra Del Sol, Ocotillo Wells District and Division Staff, OHV Commissioner Eric Lueder, State Assemblyman Brian Jones, Tierra Del Sol members and the public all in attendance. After the opening presentation and the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the vehicles began to line up to enter into the 4x4 area. As the 4x4 area was opened to vehicles, and the vehicles went to try out the obstacles, spectators lined up to watch.

You would hear cheers from the crowd when a vehicle conquered an obstacle or became stuck or, in fact, did anything out of the ordinary. Seeing the crowd encourage, help, and cheer on their fellow off-roaders was an awesome sight. It was a pretty intense afternoon—and weekend. I, for one, kept thinking the worst—that we would have a fatality on the opening. But, fortunately, that did not happen.

Begun as a project idea brought to us by a stakeholder just a little over a year ago, the Truckhaven 4x4 Training Area became a true team effort involving Tierra Del Sol, W.E. Rock and State Parks. It was also a great accomplishment for the District. As a team we built a state-of-the-art



4x4 area of which we can all be proud. I want to thank Maintenance, the Auto Shop, Resources/GIS, Visitor Services, Trails, and Interpretation for their help and support on this project. The final product for the Truckhaven 4x4 area is approximately 30 acres in size with 21 different obstacles rated from beginner to expert and a pedestrian area with 6 shade ramadas. Within the 30 acres, a large portion of the 4x4 area was set aside for resource protection for the flat-tailed horned lizard and protective habitat for native plants and animals.

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# If You Build It, They Will Come! *continued...*



# Trail News

By Brian Woodson, Maintenance Supervisor, Trails

Welcome back, fans! We are back with the March/April edition of Trail News at Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

**We have had quite a bit of fun these two months finishing off this season's addition to our trail marker project.** We placed carsonite markers every 2/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile along our trails to aid in

distinguishing our mapped designated trails from some of the volunteer trails that are prevalent throughout our park. On a select few trails—**limited by the allowable amount of this year's material inventory**—we were able to install markers every 1/10<sup>th</sup> to more accurately judge mileage on those trails. Our goal next season is to complete the 1/10<sup>th</sup> marking distance for all the trails. This will also include the Truckhaven area



Anthony Beepath, Lee Kearney and Ron Cooksy pose to show off their handiwork—one of three new signs installed near the play area of Shell Reef.



Ryan Walasek digs out the second post hole while Krystal Friel stands by as Josh McCue checks the concrete tube for level.



Cesar Casillas finishes the clean up around one of the newly installed Ocotillo Wells SVRA entrance signs.

to the north of State Route 22. There, we confined the markers to just the washes as those are the main routes of travel for our visitors.

We made continued progress on a few of our trails with our newly acquired tow-behind grooming rake. This unit allows us, with the use of a pick-up truck, to drive along our trails and put a

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## Trail News *continued...*

groomed surface on them. It articulates not unlike a motor grader but instead of a blade, it has 47 spring-steel teeth designed so that no matter the angle of the rake, the teeth always face forward to keep their cutting edges exposed. It allows us to perform minor trail maintenance functions such as **removing small “whoops” sections**, or washboards, or even loose rocks from the trail surface.

Something new for us this month has been the Team Building Days initiated at one of our core/supervisor staff meetings. This essentially allows our employees an



Linda VanStaaveren helps mix concrete during her shadow day.



State Park Peace Officer Jesse Adams winds into a big swing during a sign installation project as he shadows the trail crew on a team-building day

**opportunity to “shadow,” or work** on a different crew for a day to get a chance to experience different types of work environments. By the end of this calendar year, we hope to give everyone the chance to work alongside us on our projects. So far, a handful of employees have helped us with some of the trail grooming and sign installation projects these last couple of months.

Next month, we will wrap up any unfinished projects and start **planning for next season’s work** schedule. We look forward to having you join us again in the fall. Have a wonderfully warm and toasty summer!

# Expanded 4x4 Series Offers In-Depth Insights

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

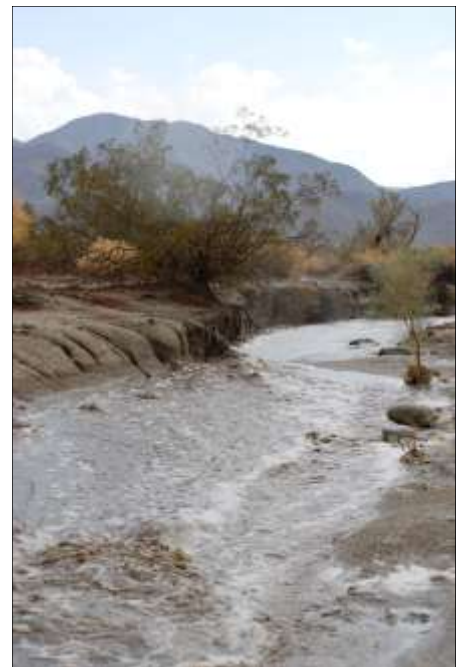
When visitors really want to understand an area or topic in detail, nothing beats a guided tour. Recognizing this, the dedicated interpreters of Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area set the **bar even higher this season with an expansion of the park's 4x4 Off-Highway Tour Series.**



Since the inaugural tour in the spring of 2008, we have continued to develop these popular outings into the sublime backcountry of Ocotillo Wells. Between December 2010 and April 2011, Ocotillo Wells SVRA offered twelve 4x4 tours. The number of visitors enjoying these unique, in-depth, and free programs reached 221.

Pure numbers aside, we also succeeded in diversifying the types of programs being offered. New tours on the itinerary this season:

- The Colorful Characters of Ocotillo Wells examined some of the more eccentric desert dwellers here, as well as other historic personages who passed through.
- A Water in the Desert Tour visited some of the waterholes in the park, explored why they exist, and investigated what formed them and how they continue to exist in such a harsh landscape.
- The Full Moon Tour set out at twilight for an adventurous night-time trail ride to observe the moon and discuss lunar impacts on both human culture and desert ecology.
- Creepy Crawlers of the Desert Night Tour was another opportunity for visitors to experience the thrill of night-driving at OW with an intellectual detour featuring nocturnal animals and their behavior.



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## Expanded 4x4 Series *continued...*

These new additions were exciting and joined the ranks of much-loved, time-honored 4x4 **Tours. Making return appearances for this season were the “old work-horses” of the Off-Highway Tour series:**

- The Coral Wash Tour, offered some exciting driving experiences and stunning canyon scenery while exploring the Truckhaven addition north of S-22.
- **Geology of OW Tour led “rock-jocks” out into the fascinating landscape of our corner of the desert with one of the park’s resident geologists.**
- The Desert Habitats Tour took **visitors into each of the park’s seven distinct habitats, where our naturalists explained the flora and fauna that thrive there...and just how these life forms do it.**
- Bugs & Flowers Tour offered visitors a double-whammy witnessing the beautiful array of spring wildflowers and then taking a closer look to see the fascinating insects that call them dinner.
- Oil In Ocotillo Wells tour was again led by the rascally oilman Mr. Doyle, always as eager **to share his knowledge of the exploratory “wildcat” wells here at OW, as he is to entice new investors.**



As this season progressed, we began to receive requests for even more tours than the two we were already offering per month. Thrilled with the response, we began offering **repeat “encore” tours for those who had not** been able to attend the originals. Based on the eager participation and positive feedback of local residents, snow-birds and weekend visitors alike, we foresee our next season to include even more time-honored standards and provocative new experiences that make the 4x4 Off-Highway **Tour Series a cornerstone of OWSVRA’s** interpretive lineup.

# CalPAL ASI Classes 2010/2011

By Cheryl Gillott, OA and ASI Instructor

COUNTDOWN—2 days... 1 day... 12 hours... 3 hours... 1 hour... *whoopi, they are here!!!*

The California Police Activities League (CalPAL) youth arrived in the PAL van at the Roy Denner training track on the north side of 78, just east of the Ocotillo Wells airport. On November 14, 2010, Ocotillo Wells staff, friends, and volunteers dedicated the new ATV training track in memory of Roy Denner, who devoted the last 15+ years fighting legal battles on behalf of off-highway enthusiasts. He would have been extremely proud of the tribute to his many efforts on behalf of the OHV community.

Upon their arrival, the students are eager to put on all required protective safety gear so they can participate in the ATV Safety Institute (ASI) certification class. With huge smiles and lots of energetic enthusiasm, they are ready for a desert outdoor experience. What better way to spend quality time with devoted State Parks employees and the Sheriff Officers who participate in the mentoring portion of the PAL program.

**The students' smiles and enthusiastic facial expressions as they receive their certificates of completion for the program is very rewarding—but the best reward is knowing that the students leave the class with more riding confidence and safety awareness.**



Mrs. Roy Denner and her family attended the dedication of the Roy Denner training track.



The Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki Corporations founded the ASI/SVIA All Terrain Vehicle training program in 1983. These companies saw the need to foster and promote safe and responsible use of specialty vehicles, including off-highway vehicles.

An ASI course covers protective gear, environmental concerns, local laws and safety techniques. Training includes how to inspect the ATV prior to riding, how to start, stop or turn, and how to ride on hills and over obstacles. These classes are available to the public, as well as within the Off-Highway PALs program. The curriculum is focused on teaching riding skills. The students attend a ½-day course and then they return for trail rides offering different experiences. The youth are

*(Continued on next page...)*

## CalPAL ASI Classes 2010/2011 *continued...*

given information about the safe and responsible use of the land in accordance with the Tread Lightly!® program, and learn off-highway quad riding in an environmentally-responsible manner. We want to provide a true desert experience that will instill within our youth a sense of pride, accomplishment, and responsibility.

The Police Athletic League (PAL) started in the 1910s when a lieutenant in the New York City Police Department had the insight to offer inner-city youth some positive experiences that involved law enforcement.

Off-Highway PALs is a recreation and mentoring partnership between the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation division and the California Police Activities League (CalPALS). The program uses All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to introduce California youth to responsible, safe, and exciting recreational opportunities that will be a positive influence on their lives as individuals and members of society. The program promotes knowledge and appreciation of the environment and responsible OHV driving behavior.

The Off-Highway PALs program in OWSVRA began in 1995. The American Honda Association donated the first ATVs. Don and Flo Leedy, along with many other local volunteers from Ocotillo Wells, ran the program for approximately ten years strictly as a volunteer program.

**Don states, “The original quads were donated by Honda** because they had an abundance of Honda 90s left over from **a movie set.”** Since this program began, thousands of kids have successfully passed the course and received positive, life-changing experiences.

For the 2010/2011 season, we trained 28 new PAL youth, and took sixteen previously certified youth for additional trail rides. The Temecula/Murrieta PALs Chapter made eight trips to Ocotillo Wells—three were overnight camping trips and a great deal of fun. During the trail rides, we also provided information on geology, animal tracking, water sources, and GPS instruction, among other topics. All new riders take their first trail ride to the Discovery Center, where they experience

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## CaIPAL ASI Classes 2010/2011 *continued...*

first-hand, and frequently for the first time, what the desert is all about. They also visit with one or two Ocotillo Wells Rangers for an open-topic discussion, with a focus on safety, career counseling, laws, and first-hand experiences. Most of the youth have never before had the opportunity to go on a camping trip, so everything becomes a major event for them. They are so proud when they leave as **“campers,” as well as certified ATV trail riders. The outdoor challenges are a catalyst for deeper** discussions about life, attitude and the choices they make.

**One student said at the end of the class, “I hope that all riders I see in the future out in the desert have taken this course to ensure *my safety 100%.*”**

There is nothing as rewarding as helping young people and keeping them on the right path—and it just may be an off-highway path they take.

## The Kangaroo Rat... Our Critter of the Month

By Steve Quartieri, Interpreter III

The kangaroo rat is another incredible member of the desert southwest. They are one of the most highly adapted animals to live in our desert. In fact, kangaroo rats are so adapted to life in the **desert that they are able to survive their entire life without drinking water! That’s right. They obtain** all the water they need from the seeds they eat and from the metabolism of their food (which produces water as a by-product).



Kangaroo rats are also very effective in retaining the water they produce. Primarily, they conserve water by living in burrows and being nocturnal. By only being active at night, kangaroo rats are able to escape the extreme daytime temperatures and low humidity. Kangaroo rats also have several physiological adaptations to conserve water. They have highly specialized kidneys which reabsorb much of the water from their waste, they do not sweat as other mammals do, and they do not use panting as a method of cooling their body down. This is one incredible critter!

**Next time you’re out in the desert at night, keep your eyes open for these small, furry rodents scampering around the desert floor.**

# Nature Turned Inside Out

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

It was a sunny April morning and no child was left inside—at least not any of Ms. Plourd’s Imperial Valley Innovation Home School Academy students! That was the day that Mother Nature and Bwana Joya (Jaime Mendez, Heber Dunes Interpreter, and Joya Szalwinski, BLM El Centro Field Office Interpreter, respectively) led eight second- through fifth-grade Academy students on the first leg of an Inside-out Safari.

Inside the classroom students heard safari defined as a Swahili word meaning journey or hunting expedition. They discovered that even though the purpose of their journey was to find an **answer to the question “What is an ecosystem?”** they would begin their hunting expedition by first **exploring an ecosystem’s components.** Working as teams the class sorted, classified, and successfully reached a consensus on what things an organism needed to survive. This was followed by a **rousing game of “Whose habitat is that?”** The class was now ready to take the safari outside.



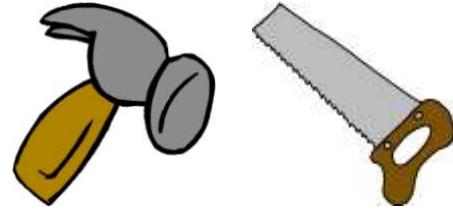
Clipboards and pencils in hand, the students chose a partner and began exploring their “school yard” habitat writing down every organism or sign of an organism that they found. Ms. Plourd and Mr. Sanchez (science coordinator) were surprised when the students identified forty-three (43) organisms within thirty minutes! The class ended their safari by comparing organism lists and explaining to the group what each organism needed in order to survive.



Each student took home a California State Park Nature Journal Observation Sheet with instructions to spend fifteen minutes observing nature in their own backyard habitat then note their observations on their nature sheet, and bring the completed sheets back to class to share. Mother Nature promised to be back the next week to lead the class on the second half of their Inside-out Safari when the class would be taking a closer look at the Imperial Valley’s desert habitat and the role habitats play in ecosystems. After a big group “thank you” and a wave goodbye, Mother Nature and Bwana Joya walked out of the classroom and back into the then sunny April afternoon.

# OW Maintenance

By John Freaner, Park Maintenance Worker II



Another season is coming to an end here at OW. The Maintenance Staff will continue working through the summer, though with fewer people. Our Supervisor, Dennis, has been working hard keeping all of us moving forward on our ever-increasing list of projects. Karen has been very busy running the office and helping us all with our personnel questions.



Julie Humann and Mike Krechmar have been **replacing windows on the CXT's and will continue through** the summer in order to have them ready for next season. Leon and Chris P. have been working their way through OW one work order at a time. Rick and Chris D. have been setting concrete forms and completing many of our carpentry projects as well as

our smaller electrical projects. Vernon and Jeff have been very busy building block wall and helping to finish concrete. Norb M. has been out on disability after having rotator cuff surgery. One of the biggest projects that our department has been working on is putting all of our sea containers into position and getting them ready to be stocked with materials and supplies.



The housekeeping crew here at OW has also been busy organizing *their* supplies now that they have a permanent home in one of the sea containers. Allison and Debbie have done an outstanding job of organizing and categorizing all of the housekeeping supplies. Terra and Jenica continued to do a great job keeping the north side and south side clean for the public. Maribel also has done an outstanding job of keeping the 300 Bldg., as well as all of the District offices, clean and stocked. Gary has been making his way through the desert picking up trash and helping to keep OW clean for everyone.



Maintenance recently sent three people to training at Mott. The attendees were Chris D., Mike, and Peggy.

Sarah has been working on the landscaping around the Discovery Center and the Amphitheater. The crews from Puerta La Cruz have also been a huge help. The landscaping is really starting to look good.

# Burying Water Lines...

The inmate crews from Puerta La Cruz bury the water lines for the Discovery Center landscaping.



# Visitor Services

By Sasha Wessitsh, State Park Peace Officer



For the past few months all the OW staff has been hard at work finishing the new 4x4 track in time for **Tierra Del Sol (TDS)**, one of the nation's largest 4x4 events, which takes place right here in Ocotillo Wells SVRA at the beginning of March every year. As usual, the staff did not let the visitors down. Everything was complete just in time for an awesome grand opening and the unveiling of a monumental state-of-the-art rock crawler's paradise. **This 4x4 track rivals famous trails such as the Rubicon and Moab.**

For Visitor Services, TDS means two things—an exciting, busy weekend, and the last big event of the season. The build up for TDS can be nerve-racking thinking about upwards of 45,000 visitors off-highway riding all day- and night-long and only nine or so Rangers to keep everyone safe. (And **that's nine for 24-hour coverage**, so just two to four Rangers per shift!) This season, as in the past, we received some much needed and appreciated help from Rangers visiting from Lake Perris and Silverwood Lake, and, of course, our Desert Lifeguards. Their help made the weekend much more manageable. For one of the few times in the last four years, we were able have Rangers on 24-hours a day during the event.



Of course, whenever you get a group of people that large together, and throw alcohol and powerful machines into the mix, you can have some interesting situations. One evening we received a call for a gunshot victim, which had everyone on their toes. Upon arrival, the Rangers discovered a man who had allegedly shot himself in the hand and was in need of medical assistance. The man was removing a handgun from a safe in his trailer when the weapon went off and grazed the top of his right hand. Although he had a large gash completely across the back of his hand, he still had feeling in his fingers and could move all of them. He was not in too much pain, probably because of the few cold ones he had had prior, which may have partially led to this incident. Luckily, no one else was injured and his injury was minor. I bandaged him up while other Rangers worked on investigating what had happened. In the end the man had family members transport him to the hospital.

Overall, during TDS weekend we had over ten DUI arrests and handful of medicals with two, unfortunately, ending in fatalities—reminding us once again that although off-highway recreation is

*(Continued on next page...)*



## Visitor Services *continued...*

tons of fun, it can be dangerous and we should always be careful. Overall, we again had a great crowd who participated in OHV fun safely and responsibly. The inauguration of the 4x4 track went great with many visitors telling Rangers how much they loved the new track and how happy they were to see new attractions at a time when many other OHV locations are reducing usage areas and closing down.



With the end of TDS comes the winding down of the busy season for Visitor Services here at Ocotillo Wells. Depending on what the weather does, visitation can stay up as long as the end of May or end as early as the last weeks of April. For spring break we have had a fluctuation of temperatures from cool weather, excellent for riding, to some warm weather which was not so pleasant, the majority of time accompanied by a lot of high winds. **With the high winds, nighttime riding has been at a minimal keeping DUI's and** alcohol-related accidents down. Day shift has had days when they were going from call to call and others when they have had time to complete the stacks of paperwork that accumulated during the season. April is also the month we say goodbye to the Desert Lifeguards until the next riding season. Come May, the comfortable medical support received by our highly-trained partners will no longer be there and nervousness of completely handling medicals ourselves will start to set in. This is a good time to increase training, focus on details that have been set aside because of the activity in the park, and remind ourselves that we are the *Generalist Rangers*.



The end of spring break and the riding season brings the summer extremes of the desert and new levels of activity from the creatures that had been lying dormant, reminding us to watch out for sidewinders, stay hydrated and—as a mentor of mine said—**“do not stay thirsty, my friends!”**

# Arrow Weed

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide

Arrow weed (*Pluchea sericea*) is a tall, willowlike evergreen shrub that grows in riparian areas, and in moist, sandy washes in the lower Sonoran Desert and throughout the southwest. A member of the sunflower family, arrow weed tolerates seasonal flooding and low to moderate soil salinity. This shrub can grow in height to ten feet.



During March through July, purplish flowers grow in clusters on the ends of branches, and give the plant a splash of color. Fine white hairs covering the leaves give the arrow weed a silvery appearance. These **fine hairs aid in controlling the plant's temperature and water loss.** Arrow weed has also adapted to blowing sand and soil erosion by growing in clumps.

Native Americans used the long, straight branches of the arrow weed as shafts for arrows. The stems were also used for thatching shelters, the roots were eaten, and parts of the plant were used as an antidiarrheal and as an eyewash.

Watch for arrow weed when out recreating in Ocotillo Wells.



Photos © Br. Alfred Brousseau, Saint Mary's College



Photo by Stan Shebs

# Fossils of the Region

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

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

Anza Turkey  
 Camelops  
 Desert Tortoise  
 Gastropods  
**Gomphotheres**  
 Ground Sloth  
 Imperial Mammoth

Incredible God Wind Bird  
 Oyster Shell  
 Petrified Wood  
 Pliocene Horse  
 Saber Tooth Cat  
 Sand Dollar  
 Stego Mastodon

# The Weather Log...



March

High Temperature	Mar 31 <sup>st</sup>	100.2 degrees
Low Temperature	Mar 8 <sup>th</sup>	47.9 degrees
Average High Temperature		79.4 degrees
Average Low Temperature		58.6 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Mar 7 <sup>th</sup>	42 mph
Rainfall for the Month		.02 inches

April

High Temperature	Apr 1 <sup>st</sup>	102.0 degrees
Low Temperature	Apr 9 <sup>th</sup>	46.8 degrees
Average High Temperature		84.4 degrees
Average Low Temperature		62.3 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Apr 7 <sup>th</sup>	41 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00 inches

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



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