

SPECIAL POINTS
OF INTEREST

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 2

MARCH - APRIL 2012

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Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

March and April are traditionally months of rebirth in the desert as the rains bring alive the most beautiful flowers in the world. This spring at Ocotillo Wells was unlike any I have seen in my time with parks. The bright colors that signify something new and great were not visible in the park. What normally would have been a time of celebrating "all things wonderful" was not to be found as far as the eye could see.

Despite the lack of visible beauty, and the struggles to get through a season absent of any sign of new life, or the breath of fresh air and colorful aroma, people continued to come with smiles on their faces. The park and its spirit, while under challenging disturbances in its rhythm and seasons, continued to provide a place for people to enjoy that which they love: family, friends, education, recreation, and the inspiration that while they may not see all the beauty with their eyes, if they dig deep enough, the beauty is there.

So, please continue to dig deep and see all that Ocotillo Wells has to offer. The vision that team members share—to provide our visitors a special place that they can always call home—is one that is vital to keeping the park alive. What is truly important is what *each* of you—staff or visitors—feel in your heart when you are able to enjoy the park.

Daily, we are challenged by those who cannot see the benefits the park provides, cannot understand what the park spirit is all about, and do not comprehend why our visitors feel it is such a beautiful and special place.

The educational and recreational opportunities, along with the beauty of Ocotillo Wells, make up the essence of the park. This is why OW is considered a second home by many, and should remain a place of enjoyment and beauty for years to come.

Hot Stars and Heavenly Nights Weekend

By Ken Conway, Park Interpreter

Stargazing at Ocotillo Wells will never be the same. “Hot Stars and Heavenly Nights” was held on March 23rd and 24th. Guest astronomers Paul Maag, Steve Kennedy, and John Frazier brought their stable



Steve Kennedy with his 28-inch Dobsonian Telescope



Paul Magg at the control of his 22-inch Dobsonian Telescope

of telescopes and shared them with visitors on Friday and Saturday night. OW staff

interpreters

Ali Barnes and Ken Conway shared the park’s 11” telescope, projected educational astronomy videos on the big screen, and helped visitors find their favorite constellations with the laser pointer.

Visitors got wonderful deep space views of galaxies, nebula, and planets. Over 300 visitors came away with a new appreciation of the dark skies and how important that resource is during their visit to Ocotillo Wells SVRA.



Ken Conway, John Frazier, Steve Kennedy and Paul Maag



John Frazier with his Sunscope

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 Contributors: Ocotillo Wells staff, Friends of Ocotillo Wells, and occasional outside contributors

Roughneck Rendezvous IV

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

The planning for Roughneck Rendezvous IV is starting! This event will be held, as always, the last weekend in January—the 26th and 27th. Our theme will focus on the film history of Ocotillo Wells with “Lights! Camera! Action! Ocotillo Wells Cast of Characters Starring in an Off-Highway Geocaching Adventure!”

Here’s a quick teaser and competition! Look at the characters and props used in the movies filmed at Ocotillo Wells over the years (see poster on right). The first person who can correctly identify who, and in which movie, the coyote, the kangaroo rat and the (well-fed) flat-tailed horned lizard are supposed to be portraying will win a fabulous prize! (Members of the OW Interpretive staff are not eligible.) Please send your questions and answers to: JLPrice@parks.ca.gov.

Thank you for playing, and stay tuned for more Roughneck Rendezvous IV updates in the next edition of the *Blowsand Reader*!

Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area Presents

Roughneck Rendezvous IV

LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

Featuring the Ocotillo Wells' Cast of Characters
Starring in an Off-Highway Geocaching Adventure!

2 EXCITING DAYS! January 26 & 27, 2013

January 25th	January 26th	January 27th
12:00PM-4:00PM: Pre-Registration at the Discovery Center.	7:00AM-9:30AM: Registration	7:00AM-11:00AM: Join us for our Cache In Trash Out event and help keep Ocotillo Wells a clean and safe place to play!
CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS SUPPORTS EQUAL ACCESS. PRIOR TO ARRIVAL, VISITORS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED ASSISTANCE SHOULD CONTACT (760) 767-5772	7:00AM-5:00PM: Roughneck Rendezvous Geocache Scavenger Hunt!	11:00AM-12:30PM: Join us for a FREE BBQ lunch!!
	6:00PM-8:00PM: Event awards and raffle!	

California State Parks logo and DHV logo are also present.

Tierra del Sol Desert Safari

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

Every year during the first week in March, the north end of Ocotillo Wells comes alive with every type of off-highway vehicle you can imagine! Tens of thousands of off-highway enthusiasts congregated this year near the new 4X4 Training Area for the 50th Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari. The largest jeep event west of the Mississippi River, TDS had many things to offer those who stopped by. From the hundreds of off-road-oriented vendors to the \$150,000 dollars in raffle prizes, there was definitely something for everyone. One booth, in particular, has stood out the past four years—at this booth everything is free!

The OWSVRA Interpretation Team pulled out all the stops with an 80' booth full of the latest educational displays, and some old ones with a new twist. Our old standby, the Scat Game, had some new “specimens” to identify in order to win the coveted “Golden Scat Award.” We displayed some Gnarly Beasts of the Past, including the skull of a Short-faced Bear and the teeth of the 60' long Megalodon shark! A binder and trading card tour showed some of the first off-highway vehicles



Photo courtesy Kelly McCague



(Continued on next page...)

Tierra del Sol Desert Safari *continued...*

that ever recreated in our park and also some of the vehicles still in use today. Another very popular section of the display, the Leapin Lizard Discovery Zone, was meant for “kids only” but the parents had a great time learning about our park’s reptiles right along with their children. The display was brought together by one of our most popular and classic games, Jeep-ardy! With five categories that had five questions each, and daily doubles scattered around, it was a fun and informational game for everyone.



All said and done, the more than 6,000 visitors who visited our booth over the TDS weekend had a great time, and we are already looking forward to a repeat performance next year! Thank you to the Interpretation team for all of their hard work during the event. And a big thank you to all the other park staff who assisted the interpretive team to make this event come together. See you all out there next year!





PRESS RELEASE: 8-March-2012

RE: 50th Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari Wrap Up

The members, families, sponsors and vendors for the 50th Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari would like to extend their deepest appreciation and special thanks to all of our guests who attended this year's event. The turnout was tremendous as we registered 1768 guests this year, which greatly exceeds last year's attendance (1127) and was the largest number of registered guests in the history of our event. This year we broke another record in that 1170 guests registered online prior to the event, double from any previous year and we have 598 guests register onsite. All we can say is a huge THANK YOU to everyone who attended.

We were lucky and the weather was beautiful for the entire event and during the Saturday night raffle the temperature was pleasant and there was no wind, which as many of you know has not always been the case. The raffle this year was also the largest in the club's history. Thanks to our many generous sponsors we had over \$165,000 worth of prizes in our general raffle and the bucket raffles. The raffle went smoothly starting with the pledge of allegiance which starts any TDS club meeting or event, a pre-registration raffle, ORW's active duty military raffle, some sponsors and officials we asked to speak to the guests and one HUGE announcement from MOPAR. At the 50th Safari, TDS was presented with a brand new Jeep that the club will be selling raffle tickets for over the next several months, culminating in a presentation to the winner during the International Auto Show held later this year in San Diego. There will be more to follow on that very special jeep in the coming days and weeks.

Last year during the Desert Safari, we had the grand opening of the Truckhaven 4x4 Training facility. The idea for the training facility was presented to State Parks management by Tierra Del Sol and once accepted, State Parks trail crews, Tierra Del Sol and W.E. Rock combined forces to collect donations of materials and with over 2500 man hours of hard physical labor built the obstacles in a 34 acre section of Ocotillo Wells, very near to where TDS has their headquarters for Desert Safari. This year a couple of new obstacles had been added and the facility was well used and appreciated by so many guests and participants whose positive comments and continued support truly show that this initiative was well worth the effort.

The event opened a noon on Friday with safety, registration and t-shirt, and info booths all staffed with TDS volunteers. ORW led an active duty military run Friday afternoon. Saturday

(Continued on next page...)

morning the trail ride started promptly at 8AM followed by a side-by-side run at 9AM. Saturday night the raffle started promptly at 7PM and Sunday morning both an SUV run and Rough Run started at 9AM. The very special event this year was the FIREWORKS show that started immediately after the raffle Saturday night. TDS in concert with several very special vendors and one great fireworks company worked with State Parks and obtained permission to have a fireworks show and the presentation was choreographed with excellent music and everyone was truly amazed at the quality of the show that lasted nearly 20 minutes with two finales and at the conclusion the crowd roared with their approval.

Let me share a few fun stats from this year's event. On Sunday morning the West Shores Senior Citizen Center served 462 scrumptious breakfast plates to some very hungry guests, which is up over 100 plates from last year. Our friends at Casanova Fish Tacos served 1300 fish taco's onsite. Our friend, affectionately known as the Empanada Lady, served 2,229 of those tasty little jewels over the weekend. The folks at Beachin' Boba sold 800 drinks, 20 gallons of ice cream, 300 churros, and 120 pretzels. The SDORC crew sold 10 gallons of chili, 1200 hot dogs, 192 breakfast burro's, 25 cases of soda and 20 cases of water. And those are not all the food vendors, but fun facts nonetheless.

We also had 90,000 gallons of water spread over the HQ area to help control the dust and to ensure we stayed within the EPA standards for air quality and dust control.

Due to the overwhelming demand for the very collectible 50th Desert Safari t-shirts we will be opening up the website to take another round of orders so that we can ensure everyone has the chance to get one, or two or more. Please check www.tds4x4.com for details on the additional shirt offering and for more info on the jeep raffle.

We hope that everyone had a great time at least as good as the member, families and friends of TDS that worked the event. Once again our sincerest THANK YOU to all of you who attended....and for those of you who did not please check our Facebook page and Youtube for all the pics and videos that are being shared from this momentous event.

Tierra Del Sol is a not-for-profit family oriented 4x4 club located in San Diego, CA that continues to use proceeds from the Desert Safari to fight land closures and keep trails open.

For more information on Tierra Del Sol and the 50th Annual Desert Safari, please visit www.TDS4x4.com and www.TDSDESERTSAFARI.com.

Bob Alexander
Public Relations Director
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Heber Dunes Report

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

The Journal—Heber Dunes, Spring 2012

Friday, 2/24

“My dad and I picked up the still exhibit at Heber Dunes and met the rest of the group at the fairgrounds to put it up for display.” Brett Thomason

“I helped with painting of the background and gluing of glass to accent the palm tree.” John Pacheco

Sunday, 3/11

Imperial County ATV Group Project
– Grand Champion – Special Display Honors
or awards earned – 4-H Project Report
form



The Grand Champion exhibit in the IV 4H ATV Safety category at the IV Expo Fair and Fiesta.



Left to right: Kallie and Brett Thomason, Joaquin Matus, and Andrew and John Pacheco with their award-winning exhibit. Congratulations to all!

Sunday, 4/8

The park is packed. 40 people hopped on over to the training track for the Easter Island Jr. Ranger activities. Everyone was surprised to discover that a rabbit and a hare were not the same animal!

Saturday, 4/21

“Last meeting and party.” Joaquin Matus

“This is a fun year!” Kallie Thomason

“End of year meeting/party. Planning ideas for next year and getting record books signed off. I can’t wait to do it again!” Andrew Pacheco

Heber Dunes Report *continued...*

Saturday, 4/28

It's our first time at the Children's Fair in El Centro. 25,000 people attended this year, and I think they all wanted to do sand paintings at the Heber Dune booth – or so it seemed! I will definitely need to research Heber prehistory for next year. The kids all loved the animal tracks game but were disappointed when they couldn't find any dinosaur bones. Many parents asked about the ASI safety course and took home Lightfoot's Tread Lightly Safety tips. A big thank you to Alfredo, Luis, and Vic for help with transportation and set up and tear down.



At the Children's Fair in El Centro

Thursday 5/10

It's been busy these past two months with events and training, but I really feel like we've accomplished a lot this season at the park and within the local communities. Our visitors like the improvements at Heber and don't hesitate to tell us so. It's a good feeling and makes all the hard work worthwhile.

Until September –

The Heber Dunes SVRA Staff and volunteers

Visitor Services

By Andrew Ahlberg, Supervising Peace Officer

Congratulations and Good Luck to Two of Our Own!!

On May 15th, two of our Desert Lifeguards will be heading off on a new adventure. Eric Buss and Stuart Tyson have been working at Ocotillo Wells SVRA since 2008, and they have helped countless injured or lost persons, and ultimately saved many lives.

Eric Buss started with California State Parks in 2003 as a Seasonal Lifeguard at Orange Coast. In 2008, Eric interviewed and was offered a position as a Desert Lifeguard at Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

Eric stood out as a hard worker and always kept everyone in a good mood with his great sense of humor. I was always impressed that I was able to say that one of the Desert Lifeguards was a Rocket Scientist, since Eric studied Rocket Engineering at UCLA while working at OWSVRA.



When Eric graduated from UCLA, he decided to serve his county. After speaking with a Navy recruiter, Eric joined the Navy. His contract specifies that after Basic Training in Illinois, he will go directly to BUDS (Basic Underwater and SEAL Training). Being in Naval Special Warfare will be right up Eric's alley since he spends so much time in the water.



Stuart Tyson started with California State Parks in 2004 as a Seasonal Lifeguard at Orange Coast. In 2008, Stuart interviewed and was offered a position as a Desert Lifeguard at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Two years later, Stuart received his Paramedic certificate from Saddleback College. His experience as a Paramedic was extremely helpful at OWSVRA and he surely saved many lives. In 2012, Stuart graduated from the Fire Academy at Palomar College.

(Continued on next page...)

Visitor Services *continued...*

Stuart, also looking for bigger and better things, signed a contract with the United States Military's version of an Elite Lifeguard, called the PJ's. The PJ's are a part of the US Air Force. They are Pararescue Operators who act as the Elite Search and Rescue Operators whenever any military service member is in need of help. The PJ's are all Paramedics and are also part of US Special Operations, created originally to rescue downed pilots in hostile areas; their motto is 'So others may live.'



Thank you to Eric and Stuart for their dedication to Ocotillo Wells SVRA during their time here, and we wish them both the best of luck on their new adventures!!



Eric and Stuart taking care of a patient at OWSVRA

Resource Fencing

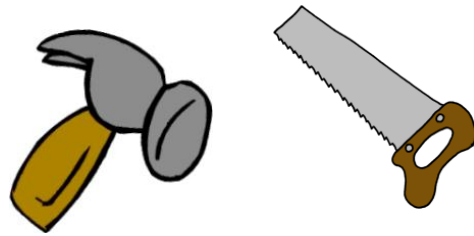
By Steve Chaney, Senior Park Aide, Resources

If you have spent time in the Park, you have probably seen at least one of our resource fences. We have been erecting fences around the more environmentally-sensitive areas, i.e., water sources, dune and mesquite habitats, exposed Paleolithic geology sites and areas of overuse, such as The Cove. This may seem like a lot of fencing, but less than .08 percent of the Park is currently fenced, and that number has decreased with the acquisition of the Freeman property. In an effort to make the fenced areas more accessible to Park staff, we have been installing pedestrian gates with locks. This will eliminate the necessity for climbing over the fence and running the risk of personal injury or torn uniforms. We now have gates at Barrel Springs, Poquito, Tule Wash and Ghost Road. These are some of our camera trap locations. These areas are entered on a daily basis during the summer. Eventually, all the resource fences will have gates.



The new resource fence and gate at the Tule Wash water source

OW Maintenance



Leon Jordan and Jeff Smith worked many hours to build the concrete retaining wall by maintenance.

Great job!!



Leon Jordan cutting concrete blocks



Jeff Smith checking the rebar

Antlion... Critter of the Month

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation



Antlion larva

The antlion, a member of the *Myrmeleontidae* family, is neither an ant nor a lion! The larvae form of this insect, also known as a “doodlebug,” gets its name from its voracious appetite for ants!

To capture ants, the antlion larva digs a shallow cone-shaped pit in sandy soils and waits at the bottom for ants to fall in. During the digging process, it frequently makes patterns, or “doodles,” in the sand, thus the name “doodlebug.” If an ant should be lucky enough to stop itself from falling in, the antlion will toss sand at it, which frequently causes the ant to lose its grip and drop in.



Antlion pit



Adult antlion

After being deposited in the sand, the larva remains underground from one to three years. It builds a cocoon under the sand, and after about a month, an adult emerges. Once the adult's wings have dried, it flies off in search for a mate to repeat the process. Adults only live about 30-45 days.

Watch for antlion pits during the late spring and summer when they are most active!

Catclaw... Plant of the Month

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

If you have walked through the dry washes of the desert Southwest, perhaps you have been suddenly stopped by this plant! The *Acacia greggii*, a member of the Fabaceae family, is commonly called the Catclaw Acacia or “Wait-a-minute” bush, among others. It gets its name from the numerous hooked “claw-like” thorns.



Photo by Stan Shebs

Like other desert plants, the catclaw has adapted to the desert by dropping its leaves for much of the year, depending upon moisture. During the spring, two-inch spikes of fragrant flowers develop, which attract butterflies and other insects.

(Continued on next page...)

Catclaw *continued...*



Photo © CFFA

The fruit resembles a flattened string bean and contains several brown, hard seeds. In order for the seeds to germinate, the catclaw relies on flash floods to scarify the soil and to provide enough water for the seedlings to survive.



Photo by Stan Shebs

Native Americans ate the young, unripe beans, but avoided the mature seeds that contain a potential poisonous substance. The dried pods were ground into flour. Twigs were used in basket making, construction and tool making. In addition, they used various parts of the plant for medicinal purposes.



Photo by Steve Hurst, USDA

Friends of Ocotillo Wells



Polaris Trails Grant

Friends of Ocotillo Wells is pleased to announce that we were recently awarded a \$10,000 grant through the Polaris Trails Grant Program. The money will be used to offset the cost of trail signage and kiosk installations east of Pole Line road. This area is BLM property but is managed by Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

For helping me prepare this grant, I want to thank Brian Woodson and his staff for taking the time to answer my questions about material pricing and vendor information. Secondly, I want to thank Jim Hurkman, of North County Yamaha, for the influence he has with the Polaris Grant Foundation. I am sure this grant would not have been awarded without his help. Jim is a valued member of Friends of Ocotillo Wells and has helped out the park for many years.

I hope this will be the first of many grants awarded to Friends of Ocotillo Wells. In these times of fiscal instability, it is very important for State Parks to have a cooperating organization onboard.

Steve Chaney, Vice President, Friends of Ocotillo Wells
 Ocotillo Wells Senior Park Aide

Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.



Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA

Upcoming OW Events

Mark your calendars!

ROUGHNECK RENDEZVOUS IV
January 26 and 27, 2013

Watch for upcoming events for the 2012-2013 season in the next *Blowsand Reader* scheduled to be published in November.



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