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Superintendent's Notes

Few visitors ventured into the heat of the desert this past summer, but staff, as always, kept hard at work completing projects, planning, and getting ready for the cool weather and return of the visitors. Several long anticipated projects broke ground, and others were completed. (I am always amazed at how hard staff can work in the heat, and how hot it really does feel during those months!)

Along with management staff I spent a good portion of the summer on long-term planning. The district is in the process of completing an Ocotillo Wells General Plan and a Heber Dunes General Plan. These plans will set the stage and focus for the parks for the next twenty years. The plans are expected to be completed in 2011-2013. Through this process we are trying to ensure that the park mission will be carried well into the future. We will be moving ahead with the plans and continuing our public input process. We are looking to staff and visitors alike to help us guide the future of the park.

It is with great pride that I can say I participated again in making history at the park. With the passage of the budget, a trailer bill brought forward by Senator Denise Duchaney and Senator Dennis Hollingsworth, divided the Freeman property and by exempting the acquisition from CEQA, ensured that OHV trust funds would not be wasted on duplicate efforts for environmental review. This was the first time in history that such an exemption was granted in any state park.

The process was a joint effort by OHV, Conservation, Anza -Borrego, Ocotillo Wells, and Jerry VanDeWeghe from Senator Hollingsworth's office and Jonathon Hardy, from Senator Duchaney's office. It involved both teamwork and compromise. Together we were able to reach a solution, that no one would have thought possible. The results are a reminder to us all that "no way" is not the answer. There is always a way, as long as we broaden our vision, focus, and dig deep into our imaginations. Thank you to all for your efforts on this and every star you reach for here at Ocotillo Wells.

Like each season that passes, summer again seemed to fly by. We survived the heat and the pressures of the job, and are anxiously awaiting the return of the masses, who like the swallows, never let us down by even thinking of going elsewhere. We are here for our visitors and look forward to sharing the fruits of our labors with them soon!

Admin Ledger

By Charles Rennie, Management Services Tech

The dust has settled from the hot summer winds and Ocotillo Wells is starting to see activity pick up again—and increased activity means more work for the Administration Group. Linda will see more activity with Cal Cards, Invoices and PAPO's; Kitty will see an increase in new-and-returning hires and the volume of timesheets continuing to grow; Charles (returning from his summer volunteer assignment at our sister park, D. L. Bliss in the Sierra District at Lake Tahoe) will get back to finalizing our 2010-11 Budget, analyzing our financial data, and providing Management reports; Delane has begun the work—for OW and Heber Dunes—to complete a number of contracts for this year's projects; and Melony is dividing her time between Admin and the Auto Shop, where she provides administrative assistance to Leda, Linda, Glyne and David. Leda has been involved with the overall administration process providing the group with guidance, direction, and assistance to ensure we provide the necessary support to move OW forward.

Over the summer and into the fall, several members of the Admin group were involved with the process of remodeling our facilities and moving of employees into their new buildings. (Thanks to all for their help and patience!) Admin is now together in the District Office. (It is nice for all of us to be in one place!) If that weren't enough, several of the Admin group were also involved with the establishment of new housing (the Dorms), including furnishing the Dorms and coordinating activities.

In addition to our normal duties, we have also had several training/outing opportunities:

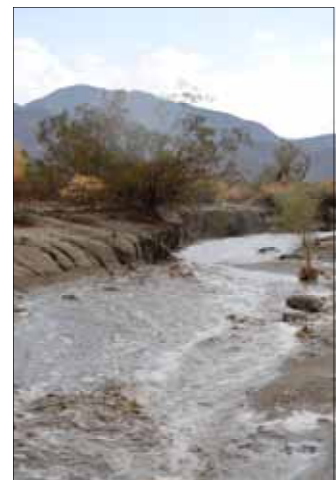
- The Admin group prepared and presented to the Supervisors and the Supervisors' Administrative Assistants a How-to Guide for their administrative tasks (Oct. 7 & 13).
- Charles attended a course on Microsoft Outlook.
- Leda and Kitty participated in the Super Sport Sand Show at the Orange County Fair Grounds (Sept. 17-19).

Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact..

Did you know...

...that the washes in Ocotillo Wells are *not* always dry and sandy?

When a storm drops enormous amounts of rain in a very short time, the washes in Ocotillo Wells can run with water, even if it is not raining overhead. **Never** try to cross a flooded wash or road!



Shell Reef Past and Present

By Andy Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

Though much else has changed in the past 78 years, Shell Reef has stayed pretty much the same and continues to draw all types of people to the top of its striking ridgeline. On February 11, 2011, Mr. Doyle will again be bringing both visitors and potential investors to Shell Reef and OW's other petroleum history sites for another tour of this fascinating episode from our past. Come one and all...and bring your checkbooks! You'll want to get in on the ground floor of this investment with Doyle Petroleum & Exploration.

THEN...



Geologist R. E. Vandruff, 1932



Wildcatter oilman Mr. Doyle, 2010.

...and NOW

Cultural Resources

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist, Ocotillo Wells SVRA, and Kelly Long, Associate State Archaeologist, OHMVR Division Headquarters



Margaret and Julie at Hollister Hills

The first priority of a cultural resource program is to know what you manage. The second would be to go find it. It is the main goal of the cultural resource program at the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division to have current inventories and geodatabases for all of the cultural resources they manage. Clay Pit SVRA, Prairie City SVRA, and Carnegie SVRA were all updated within the first two years of the program's implementation.



Using an established trail to access archaeological sites



Alicia and Kelly walking through the tall grasses

Alicia Perez and Kelly Long, Associate State Archaeologists from the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Headquarters, continued their cultural resource inventory survey of Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) this summer. The cultural resource inventory for Hollister Hills SVRA began in 2009. There were previously recorded sites in the park

(Continued on next page...)

Cultural Resources *continued...*

that needed site record updates, as well as areas that had never before been surveyed. With so much land to be surveyed, they called the archaeologists at Ocotillo Wells District for help. Escaping the heat of the desert, Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist, and Julie Leiser, Archaeological Specialist, joined Alicia and Kelly for a week of surveying in Hollister.



Kelly recording a grafted walnut tree

were able to locate some of the previously recorded sites—both historic and prehistoric. Some of the historic sites included a homestead (with only some fencing left to mark its original boundary), a small dam, and a scattering of English walnut trees that had been grafted onto naturally growing black walnut trees. The prehistoric sites included artifacts such as cores (a cobble or small rock from which flakes are removed), flakes, and manos (stones used for



This beautiful butterfly followed us on our survey before landing for some food

During this time of year, Hollister is covered in foliage and wildlife that, while beautiful to look at, made surveying the land very difficult. It was a challenge looking for small artifacts on ground which is covered by tall grasses. By following established trails in the park, the archaeologists



One of the historic sites contained many of these caterpillars eating the foliage

(Continued on next page...)

Cultural Resources *continued...*



A core made from chert

grinding on metates, which are made from slabs of stone)—most likely part of temporary camps where tool manufacturing and food processing occurred. Other sites currently remain hidden by the dense ground cover.

The survey of Hollister Hills SVRA is now almost complete, except for a few areas that are more difficult to access and which will require using ATVs before hiking in the rest of the way. All sites were updated and Archaeological Site Condition Assessment Records (ASCAR) were prepared. Additionally, all sites were updated in the park's geodatabase.

The final cultural resources inventory for Hollister Hills SVRA will be completed this fall. John Fraser, State Historian I with the Archaeology,

History & Museums Division has actively been researching and evaluating both the Vineyard Schoolhouse and the Steadman Cabin at the park. The final report will discuss other aspects of the Cultural Resource Program at OHMVR Division, including preliminary evaluations, protection and



Turkeys and their babies resting in the shade

(Continued on next page...)

Cultural Resources *continued...*

preservation measures, and interpretation themes. The guidelines created in the inventory report will help to streamline the project review process and help cultural staff evaluate potential threats and impacts, both natural and project-related.

Being able to hike the trails of Hollister Hills SVRA made it possible to not only look for archaeological sites, but to also enjoy the amazing views from the hilltops and the plentiful flora and fauna. It was certainly a nice change from the desert! The archaeologists from OHMVR Headquarters and Ocotillo Wells District look forward to working together on future projects not only in this park, but in some of our other SVRA parks as well.



Some wildflowers along a trail



One of the many hilltop views throughout the park

Visitor Services—Rubicon Trail

By Sasha Wessitch, State Park Peace Officer



This summer many of the visitor services staff along with Rangers from all of the OHV's in California was fortunate enough to work a special detail from the end of June to the end of September at the famous Rubicon Trail. For those of you who have never heard of the Rubicon Trail, it has a long esteemed history dating back to the early twentieth century. It is located in the Sierra Nevadas, due west of Lake Tahoe. Needless to say, it made for a nice change for us during the 115 degree summers of Ocotillo Wells. Originally it was a state route that was rough and yet

you could regularly see the Studebakers of the day driving through. Seeing the trail today you would never guess that a standard sedan would once have been able to travel on it. Today if you don't have at the very least a Jeep and a lot of skill, you might as well turn around!

The trail is very technical. Being a newbie, I was amazed that anyone or any

vehicle could traverse this terrain. I was also very

nervous driving our Jeep through the trail—and even more nervous guiding others. I got a crash course, no pun intended, and even had to drive part of the way in the dark on my first shot behind the wheel.



The trail has a huge number of visitors during the summer and fall months when the snow is melted. It is in a very rural location which does not have any outdoor facilities. With the large number of visitors, traffic, and camping comes certain issues. The state water

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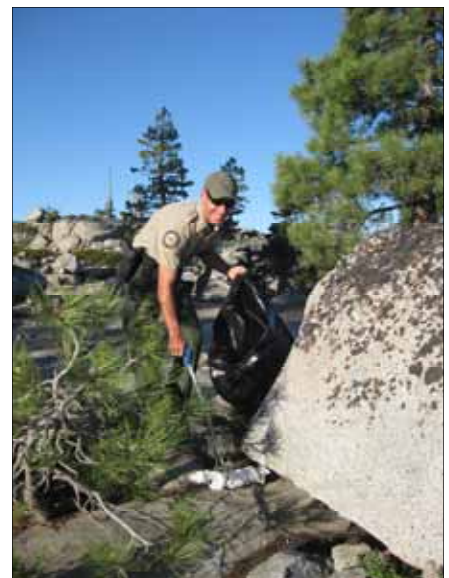
Visitor Services—Rubicon Trail *continued...*

board has therefore mandated the county and federal government to make some changes along the trail. In the past years there has been a large amount of littering, oil spills and drinking and driving. One of the education methods that we were utilizing is the “Eradicate the White Flowers” campaign, which included yellow bandannas with that message imprinted on them. The bandannas were handed to visitors. (White flowers are the toilet paper which visitors had been leaving behind!) Along with the bandannas we provided wag bags and spill kits to all the visitors,



encouraging them to clean up after themselves. We informed hundreds of visitors that if they weren't responsible, the trail might be closed.

Initially, the crowds were a bit rowdy and a few people received tickets and DUI's. Many people asked what we were doing there since they had never seen law enforcement on the trail before. When we told them, they usually responded by saying something like, “Yeah it's been getting kind of crazy out here. We're glad you guys are here to keep us safe and keep the trail open.”



The Rubicon Trail has a long history and, like Ocotillo Wells, it has many visitors that have been experiencing the trail their whole life, passing the tradition down from grandpa to son to grandson. Being there was a phenomenal experience for the Rangers and we are proud to have assisted this year.

Visitor Services

By Jesse Adams, State Park Peace Officer

The summer, although not a blistering one, was fairly quiet in Ocotillo Wells, giving the Rangers a chance to catch up on some training. The ranger staff spent most Wednesdays during the summer doing defensive tactics training, and many of the rangers were also able to take a three-day class on DUI investigation. In addition, Ranger Wessitsh completed an EMT course at Mott, and Ranger Collins completed a fire arms instructor course, also at Mott. Ranger McLaughlin has been approved for a temporary supervisor position and has helped to hire twelve Desert Lifeguards who will be true lifesavers during the 2010-2011 riding season. Three of the “DLs” are first timers here at Ocotillo—R. Coats, J. Hernandez, and S. Smithmatungol.

As of October 31, also known as Halloween, the 2010-2011 riding season has now officially begun and it has gotten off to an overall good start. It is obvious that park attendance is up drastically compared to a month ago. Of course, with park attendance going up the number of injuries and law enforcement contacts has gone up as well.

There is Always Something ...

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

On a hot July day, Heber Dunes SVRA Supervising Ranger V. Herrick was traveling northbound towards Ocotillo Wells headquarters, when suddenly a woman in a fancy sports car began tailgating him. She pulled alongside him and began waving at him excitedly. Before long she pulled ahead of Herrick and came to a sudden stop—right in the traffic lane! Herrick was concerned and, though he encountered a severe language barrier, he finally figured out that she wanted to show him something in her car—because she recognized he was a Ranger. To his surprise, lying in her trunk was a large, very active soft-shell turtle which she had apparently found crossing the

highway. Herrick took the turtle—with the sport car driver’s encouragement—and released it in suitable aquatic habitat. Herrick notes that soft-shell turtles (*Apalone s. emoryi*) are not native to California, but are now well established in the Imperial Valley and Colorado River drainage, and that they probably (like several other animals) came from Texas, expanding westward through formerly impassable deserts by following the irrigation canals. In fact, they are now a common sight along canals, basking on the banks in the early morning sun.



© William Flaxington

The Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

Heber Dunes, of course, baked in the summer sun...but the peaceful mornings accompanied by the melancholy cooing of doves delighted the soul and prepared one for the hot day to follow.

The long-awaited youth track to the north of the office building showed solid progress, and is expected to open for public use in the late fall or early winter. Maintenance worker I Alfredo Jacobo and seasonal Park Aide Luis Martin labored in the early morning hours, making the best of the relative cool to dig hundreds of post holes, build the fence, and string the wires...tough hombres for sure.

Ranger Vic Herrick reports an unexpected power outage. Investigation of the source revealed a great horned owl which had, sadly, come to its end when it stretched its wings after alighting, and touched exposed voltage wires. Curiously, the large owl was found with the rear quarter of a rabbit—its last meal—still clutched tightly in its talon. Vic contacted the power company, who insulated the offending wires in hopes that no other birds of prey will lose their lives in this peculiar fashion.

Summertime visitors are a hardy lot, but most days even they can be counted on one hand, usually stopping in for a quick ride about sundown. For those who can tolerate the sometimes oppressive heat, summer riding offers solitude while gliding across trackless dunes. Occasionally, summertime users are inexperienced and each season a few find themselves stuck in the sand, usually in dad's borrowed pickup truck. They sheepishly arrive at the Ranger's home seeking assistance—deliverance from the dilemma in which they put themselves. No shovel, no water, no tow straps, no plan, and no excuse...often they get locked in the park when the gates close at 9:00 p.m. Of course, this is all part of the summer season, and one really cannot blame them for wanting to take a cruise after sundown—but we do urge them to come better prepared!

Another visitor who makes an appearance in the summer is the “endurance runner,” superb athletes who run on foot over and through the searing sand dunes. Judging from their cauliflower ears, rawhide-tough and ripped bodies, these few runners appear to be serious martial arts enthusiasts, who apparently enjoy the challenge of this torrid environment.

Each season has something great to offer, but I must admit I'm looking forward to the cooler days of the busier fall and winter off-highway season. So please visit us.



Interpreter's Corner



By Steve Quartieri, State Park Interpreter III

The closing of the 2009/2010 riding season...

At the OHV Commission Meeting in the late summer of 2009, the Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Department set the ambitious goal of reaching 50,000 visitors with its programs during the 2009/2010 riding season. Amazingly, through the hard work and commitment of our entire interpretive team, our goal was accomplished.

Over the course of the season, the OW Interpretive Department presented a total of 338 programs and exhibits to over 53,000 visitors! A monumental task when you realize the riding season in our park is primarily weekends between late October and early April. But even with the limited season, the interpretive team was still able to attain its attendance goal by offering a variety of programs and exhibits. During the past season, the interpretive team put on a highly successful, geocache event, the first-ever in CA State Parks. They set up weekend exhibits at major riding destinations in the park, conducted Junior Ranger programs for over 300 kids, certified 188 ATV riders in the ASI Safety program, held evening campfire programs for both astronomy and creepy crawler enthusiasts, set up major exhibits at 8 special events/trade shows, and led a series of 9 off-highway tours through the park. It was a very successful year, once again, thanks to the passion, hard work and commitment of our entire team.

	Number of Programs	Attendance	Average
SPECIAL EVENTS	15	27,303	1,820
DESERT ANIMAL EXTRAVAGANZA	45	12,566	279
ROVING EZ-UP EXHIBITS	58	8,826	152
VISITOR CENTER	56	1,926	34
WILDFLOWER PROGRAMS	26	695	27
SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAMS	8	438	55
ASTRONOMY	14	427	31
JUNIOR RANGERS	31	325	10
OFF-ROAD TOURS	9	236	26
COFFEE WITH THE NATURALIST	7	220	31
ASI - ATV SAFETY CLASSES	51	188	4
ATV TOURS	15	52	3
INTERPRETIVE TALKS	1	34	34
CREEPY CRAWLERS OF THE NIGHT	2	33	17
Totals	338	53,269	158

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Interpreter's Corner *continued...*



The close of one season signifies the start of another—Season 2010/2011.

As is the case in ALL departments here at Ocotillo Wells, the celebration of the past season's accomplishments is short lived. Soon after our seasonal staff began their migrations northward to their summer positions at Wrangell St. Elias NP, Katmai NP, Yellowstone NP, Voyagers NP and Great Basin NP, the remaining interpretive staff busily went to work planning, developing, and refining our interpretive program for the upcoming season. Collectively, we took a long look at the many facets of our department. We used our current operational plan as a starting point and then incorporated the knowledge we had gained in past seasons to write a series of formal operational plans outlining how each component of our program would operate this upcoming season.

One of the challenges we face at Ocotillo Wells SVRA is the delivery of information to our visitors. This is in part due to the park's overall size (over 85,000 acres) and its numerous points of entry (17). To address this challenge, the Interp Department has developed an aggressive advertising program. This year's advertising plan includes the development of an informational radio station, the placement of an electronic message board along the major highway leading through the park, and the development of a new "Welcome Kit" that will be placed at each campsite prior to guests' arrival.

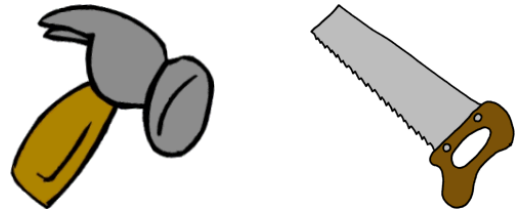
Another component of our off-season planning session was the development of our first-ever, two-week interpretive training program for both employees and volunteers. This year's training program will be conducted in early November and it is designed to better inform and educate park staff about the park, its resources, and our interpretive program. The comprehensive training program will include modules on all of the major resources in the park (biological, cultural, historical, geological, and paleontological) as well as modules on the procedural aspects of our department's day-to-day operations. I feel confident that we have put together a quality training program that will benefit our staff and, most importantly, our park guests.

Without a doubt, one of the most important tasks our team tackled this summer was the recruitment of new interpreters to augment our returning team of veterans. As we all are aware, a program is only as good as its people; therefore, hiring quality people is vital to our program's success. Each year, our team sends out numerous recruitment packages to various national and state parks across the country. In addition to our mailings, our veteran interpreters scour the country in search of the next great interpreter to join our team. Time has proven that each year our team gets stronger here at Ocotillo Wells, and this year is definitely no different! Watch for our "Meet the Interpreters" article in the upcoming issue of the *Blowsand Reader*.

Whew, it has been a busy *off-season*! Stay tuned for more details about our new radio station, the opening of our new Discovery Center, and the kick-off of the 2010/2011 interpretive programming season.

OW Maintenance

By John Freaner, Park Maintenance Worker II



It has been a very busy summer for the Maintenance Staff here at OW. In addition to ongoing projects, numerous small repairs were performed—as well as preventative maintenance.

The Discovery Center finally has its new shade structure, and will soon have a new parking lot and interpretive path as well. GIS and the trails crew have taken over the newly remodeled blockhouse. We took possession of our new maintenance shop in October, and now have the huge task of organizing all of the fasteners, parts, pieces, and tools. Norb Mueller and Jeremy Collins are working hard to do just that all the while keeping up with the maintenance repair requests!

Chris Dahl, Vernon Gingrich, Chris Perez, Jeff Smith and Leon Jordan have been very busy with construction of new decks, ramps and walls in the residential area.



Julie Humann has been busy maintaining all of the CXT's and other outbuildings. Meanwhile, we owe a big thank you to the housekeeping crew—Mike K., Debbie, Allison, Charles and Gary Walker for all they have done both during all of the construction and in preparation for our new season. And Karen has kept all of us moving right along by doing an outstanding job of running our office.

Be on the lookout for upcoming maintenance news in future issues.



REPTILES OF OCOTILLO WELLS



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

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

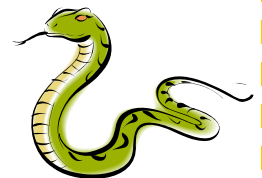
Lizards...

Snakes...



- SIDE-BLOTCHED
- CHUCKWALLA
- LEOPARD
- DESERT IGUANA
- FLAT-TAILED HORNED
- ZEBRA-TAILED
- BANDED GECKO
- FRINGE-TOED
- LONG-TAILED BRUSH
- WESTERN WHIPTAIL

- SIDEWINDER
- SHOVEL-NOSED
- LEAF-NOSED
- COACHWHIP
- GOPHER
- PATCH-NOSED



Weather Log for May through October ...



	MAY		JUNE		JULY	
High Temperature	31 st	100.7°	30 th	112.9°	25 th	116.3°
Low Temperature	23 rd	55.4°	11 th	65.3°	5 th & 6 th	73.5°
Average High Temperature		88.9°		102.1°		108.6°
Average Low Temperature		64.7°		76.4°		84.1°
Maximum Wind Gust	9 th	45 mph	10 th	38 mph	2 nd & 15 th	33 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00"		0.00"		0.08"

	AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER	
High Temperature	24 th	116.3°	3 rd	113.8°	13 th	99.9°
Low Temperature	30 th	68.3°	9 th	66.6°	28 th	58.4°
Average High Temperature		107.0°		103.7°		85.8°
Average Low Temperature		82.9°		79.7°		67.0°
Maximum Wind Gust	29 th	32 mph	22 nd	32 mph	4 th	38 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00"		0.25"		2.39"

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



Ocotillo Wells District

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