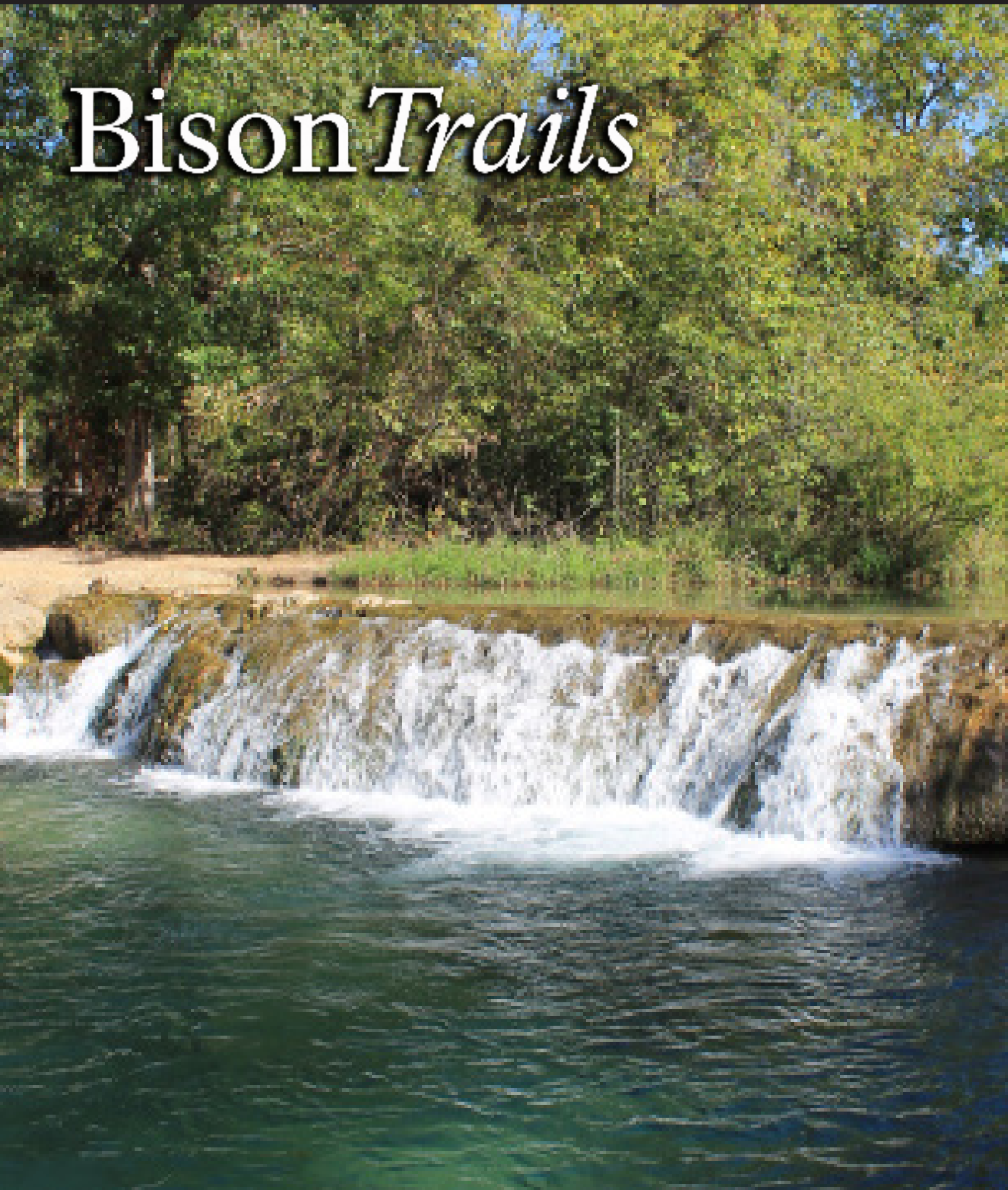




# Bison Trails



# From the Oklahoma State Coordinator

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## Bill Wright Oklahoma State Coordinator

We have been striving over the last 4 years or so, to get the Bison Trails out twice a year. We shoot for a Spring and Fall issue. The theory was that we wouldn't be trying to get an issue together during the Summer season, which for many of us is the busiest season. I am embarrassed when that schedule is delayed on my account. I take full responsibility for the delay in the Spring issue this year. I am not sure I can claim writer's block when I only write two articles a year, but I struggled with what to address in my short column.. So, I decided to focus on a little praise.

Every organization goes through tough times. Last year, we all went through those times. It was a challenging year on a lot of levels, but I won't recap all of that here. What I did see was many people pulling together to try and keep moving forward. I certainly saw that with my staff. I saw creativity, inspiration, dedication, and a lot of hard work during really trying times. It was impressive! I never once felt we were not meeting our public obligations. There were times our services were reduced, but it was not for a lack of effort on everyone's part. In the face of a global pandemic, which forced a lot of changes to how we lived and worked, people came together to find ways to continue to get the job done. I could not have been prouder of NPS staff around the state, but it wasn't just us. Organizations stepped up and found ways to stay relevant and provide necessary services everywhere.

I was in a meeting the other day of a particular service organization that I am a part of, and we discussed a leadership award that it usually gives out every year to a local individual that demonstrates outstanding leadership in their community. There was a recommendation that we do not give out that award for this past year because it was such a strange year and no one really had the ability to do much on the leadership front. If ever a year presented people with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, it was 2020! I was adamant that we would have no problem finding someone deserving. Off the top of my head, I could think of numerous individuals that stepped up and lead the way through the challenges of a pandemic driven year. It made me reflect on how difficult it was for folks on many levels to continue to push programs forward. When I looked around my community, I found numerous examples of leaders taking the initiative to lead. We all saw it. We saw it from partners, businesses, organizations, schools, universities, and certainly from first responders and health care workers. I applaud the success that they had last year.

I am proud to be associated with the community leaders that I work with on a daily basis. I am proud of the partnerships and relationships we have built over the years. Building relationships, and maintaining those relationships, is what gets us through the tough times. I am thankful to people that we work with every day, who always strive to find a way to make it work. You all did great. I have hope for the future. A lot of folks have heard me say "Hope is not a Strategy". I always think we should have a plan. Hope is, however, a human condition and a choice, so thank you to all for helping me choose to have hope!



# Partnering for Public Health

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Park Ranger

2020 was a unique and challenging year for the National Park Service. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted many changes across the national park system, including park closures and reduced visitor services. Park managers had to make difficult decisions to ensure the protection of park resources, visitors, and staff. To help with these decisions, and to ensure that the most up-to-date and accurate scientific information was available, the National Park Service relied on its century-old partnership with the United States Public Health Service (USPHS).

The NPS Office of Public Health (OPH) serves as the primary liaison of the U.S. Surgeon General and is the personnel office for all USPHS officers assigned to the Department of the Interior (DOI). While focusing on a multitude of health-related issues, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken center stage for the USPHS officers.

During the pandemic, the OPH has worked with park managers by providing guidance on COVID-19 transmission and consulting on how to operationalize the guidance in Parks, staying up-to-date with the latest scientific information on COVID-19, providing quarantine and isolation recommendations on a case-by-case basis, and holding townhall meetings with parks and other NPS staff to provide updates and answer questions.

As we have entered 2021, parks are re-opening, and visitor services are once again increasing. The National Park Service is committed to the preservation and protection of our nation's heritage. Part of that heritage is our visitors and our employees. The NPS will continue to partner with the USPHS and continually monitor guidance from the Center for Disease Control to make informed decisions for our parks to remain as accessible as possible as we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to see you at a National Park soon!

## The Eagle Has Landed

Sarah Puckette, Park Guide

An American icon has taken up residence at Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Park rangers are pleased to report the first confirmed bald eagle nest in the park. A bald eagle pair has built their nest in a large sycamore tree at Lake of the Arbuckles. The Murray County game warden and park staff first observed the nest at the end of March. At that time, the eagle pair had successfully hatched two healthy-looking eaglets.

No animal symbolizes the United States more than the bald eagle. Found only in North America, this brilliant white and dark brown raptor was once common across the continent, from sea to shining sea. In 1782, the bald eagle was included in the design of the Great Seal of the young United States and chosen to serve as the national bird.

Despite its status as a national symbol, the eagle population started to decline in the 1800s due to habitat loss and direct killing. Some eagles were hunted as trophies while others were killed because people mistakenly believed them to be a threat to livestock. Another danger came at the end of WWII: the widespread use of the pesticide DDT. After feeding on prey contaminated with DDT, the eagles produced eggshells that were too thin to withstand incubation. DDT poisoning led to a decline in bald eagle, peregrine falcon, brown pelican, osprey, and other bird populations. By 1963, only 417 breeding pairs of bald eagles remained in the lower 48 states, and they were declared an endangered species in 1967. The United States stopped using DDT in 1972 (though this pesticide continues to be used in other countries). Thanks to the banning of DDT, protective legislation, and captive breeding programs, the bald eagle recovered over the next decades. A recent report from U.S. Fish and Wildlife found that the population of bald eagles in the United States has quadrupled since 2009.



An adult and a juvenile bald eagle in a nest/ NPS Photo

In Oklahoma, the bald eagle population greatly increases during the winter months. Migrating eagles spend the winter on the state's open waters but return farther north to breed. Historically, bald eagles would have nested mostly near Oklahoma's larger rivers, including the Arkansas, Red, Canadian, and Washita Rivers. Now, with Oklahoma's many man-made reservoirs, including Lake of the Arbuckles, the recovering eagle population is finding new waterside habitat suitable for nesting. According to

the Sutton Center, there were over 160 bald eagle nests in Oklahoma in 2018.

The bald eagle's recovery is among the country's greatest conservation success stories, and it confirms that collective efforts can help save wildlife. In Oklahoma, the number of nesting bald eagle pairs continues to rise annually. We welcome this eagle family to Chickasaw National Recreation Area and look forward to observing them for years to come.

# Let's Go Fishing

Ed Standefer, Park Guide



Let's Go Fishing trailer at Chickasaw NRA / NPS Photo

Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA) will roll out a new Junior Angler trailer this summer. The trailer is almost ready to go and will hold fishing rods, tackle, junior angler books, and any other gear needed for hands-on programs to learn to fish. Programs will be held primarily at Eagle Bay pond.

CNRA received a \$5000 grant from the National Park foundation in FY 2020 specifically earmarked for park related fishing activities. Park staff used these funds to purchase a utility trailer to store and transport fishing equipment,

as well as the rods and reels for up to twenty-five participants at a time. Before this grant, the park did not own its own fishing gear and had to borrow equipment from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) to conduct any programs of this type. Having park owned gear easily accessible will allow staff to conduct regular programs several times a year where in the past they were once a year "special events." CNRA staff will continue to work closely with ODWC to stock fish for the clinics.

For the 2021 summer season, the park will offer several two-hour youth focused fishing clinics. Those attending clinics should expect a brief introductory message regarding fishing and water safety, followed by instruction in the use of fishing rods and reels. Participants will then fish for the remainder of the scheduled time. At the end of the program, park rangers will demonstrate cleaning fish and provide tips on how to best store and cook them.



# Spring at Chickasaw NRA





# Washita Battlefield

National Historic Site

## SWOSU Student Interns Assist at Washita Battlefield

Kevin Mohr, Chief of Interpretation



Clayton Kilgore repairing a gate and setting up a tipi/ NPS Photo

Born and raised in Sayre, Oklahoma, Clayton Kilgore is a Junior at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Majoring in Parks and Wildlife Law Enforcement, he completed a 120-hour internship from October to December as part of the program.

Clayton has always loved nature and wishes to help preserve wildlife for future generations. “Although I am committed to becoming a game warden,” Clayton told Washita staff, “I will keep my options open. Being a park ranger would be a cool job, too.”

Since October, Clayton helped with a variety of tasks. An internship is meant to show the full spectrum of managing a National Park Service site. Within the interpretive program, Clayton evaluated products for the bookstore, he helped set up a tipi, and was the guest speaker for the Genealogy Club in Cheyenne, OK. In Natural Resources, he planted flowers and trees in the native garden and removed invasive Eastern red cedar

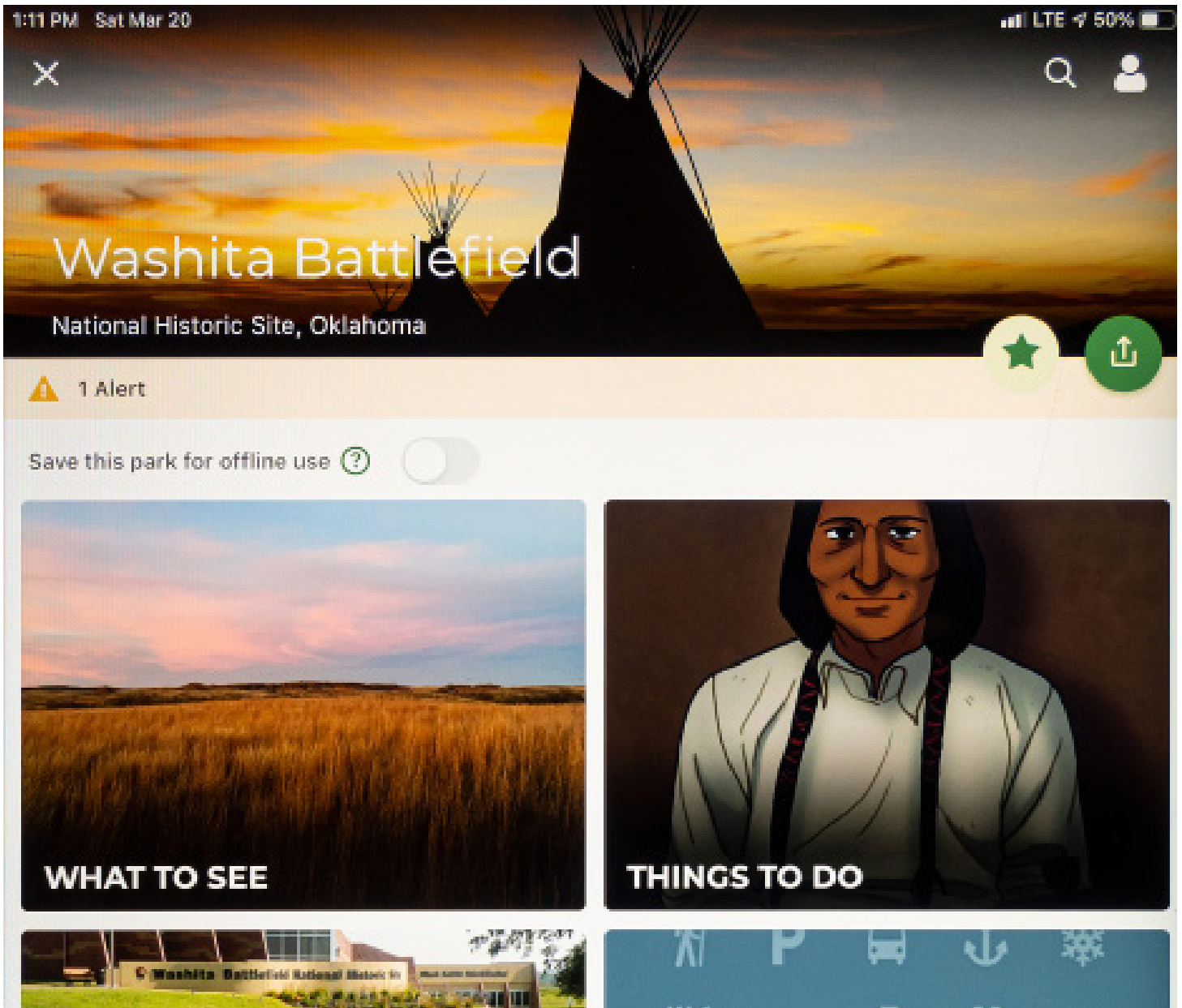
from the battlefield site. For Cultural Resources, he assisted with a museum inventory and protected paintings while the Visitor Center was undergoing some renovations. Finally, he carried out some maintenance tasks like installing gate latches, painting yellow stripes near fire sprinkler equipment to follow fire codes, and replaced faded and damaged signs along the park’s trail. And maybe to his dislike, he did attend many meetings to help him see the behind the scenes work by park management.

Clayton said, “They have done an excellent job keeping my internship fun and enjoyable. They have also made the internship a good learning experience for me by showing me how a National Park Service site operates. So far, I have enjoyed my internship and would recommend anyone to volunteer at Washita.”

If you have an interest in volunteering, gaining valuable work experience, or are required to do an internship, please contact the park today.

# An App for the NPS

Christian Schroll, Park Guide



The Washita Battlefield page on the NPS App/ NPS Photo

One of the big projects that the National Park Service has been working on is the development of a service-wide app, providing information for all National Park Service sites in one app. Our goal is to provide an easy way that you can take and access information on visiting any National Park Service site with you on your phone or tablet. Here at Washita Battlefield, we have been busy preparing information and content for app users. This will provide a new avenue for people to learn about the park and plan a visit to Washita Battlefield. So far, we have added information on places within the park and things to do during your visit. Ultimately,

we aim to roll our cell phone tour for the park trail into the app to make it easier to learn about the attack during your visit.

The National Park Service App is available for free in the Apple and Google Play stores. The app has been designed so that all of the information for each park resides on the web to keep it small to download and install. Additionally, you can save individual parks to your device before visiting so that you can take the information with you when visiting sites with little to no cell coverage.



# Learning from History

Joel Shockley, Park Guide

Starting in 1909, U.S. Army War College students in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, made day trips from their campus to the surrounding battlefields. Called Staff Rides, these trips are an educational tool used to further the professional development of U.S. Army leaders. Students compare past battles and events with current-day wartime operations.

One hundred years later, similar staff rides are visiting Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, providing a unique opportunity for military staff to experience the Indian Wars from a close-up, on the ground perspective. Washita receives Captains from the Air Defense Artillery and the Field Artillery career courses at Ft. Sill. Washita also welcomes the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center staff from Fort Leavenworth, KS, and the 27th Special Operations Wing from the Cannon Air Force Base, NM.

These soldiers walk the park's trail, visit the museum, watch the park's film, and pick the brains of Rangers. As an added benefit, and in partnership with the private landowners north of the park's boundary, Rangers guide the soldiers in the footsteps of Lt. Col. George A. Custer and the 7th U.S. Cavalry as they approached the Washita River and where they split into four battalions to surround Chief Black Kettle's camp.



US Army Soldiers at Washita Battlefield / NPS Photo

The purpose is to understand historical military tactics and strategies and apply them to current events. For example, in the 19th Century the U.S. Army engaged in combat with the Plains Indians who knew the terrain, fought in a very unconventional manner, and sometimes had non-combatants nearby, namely women and children. Similarly, the Global War on Terrorism has the U.S. Army engaging in guerilla warfare and fighting combatants among civilians.

History is useful and important. It's why Washita Battlefield National Historic Site preserves and protects the site of the "Battle of the Washita" and promotes the public understanding of the attack.

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## New Educational Programs

Kate Roesch, Park Ranger

Washita Battlefield has new educational opportunities that brings the battlefield to you! We now have a Traveling Trunk, as well as new distance learning programs. Both programs can be adapted to meet a wide range of audiences and age groups.

The Traveling Trunk explores the impact of the Battle of Washita in the Plains Indian Wars. Through lesson plans, hands-on activities, and items representing the Cheyenne and the 7th Cavalry, teachers and students can feel, see, and learn what life was like on the prairie and engage with the story of the Washita. Teachers who pilot-tested the trunk found it to be a valuable resource to further enrich their lessons on Plains Indian tribes and Western Oklahoma history.

Live too far away to visit or borrow the Traveling Trunk? Explore our new distance learning programs and meet with a Ranger in real time. There are four programs ranging from an overview of the battle, an examination of the role horses played in the conflict, and the opportunity to ask a park ranger any of those burning questions about Washita, the National Park Service, and the natural resources of the mixed grass prairie.

And did we mention that all the programs are free? What are you waiting for? Adventures and learning are waiting to happen! We are very excited to offer these new educational programs and cannot wait to be a part of those new adventures! If interested, contact Katherine\_Roesch@nps.gov, call 580-497-2742, or visit [www.nps.gov/waba](http://www.nps.gov/waba).

## Remembering OKC, 26 Years Later

Katie Sloan, Park Guide

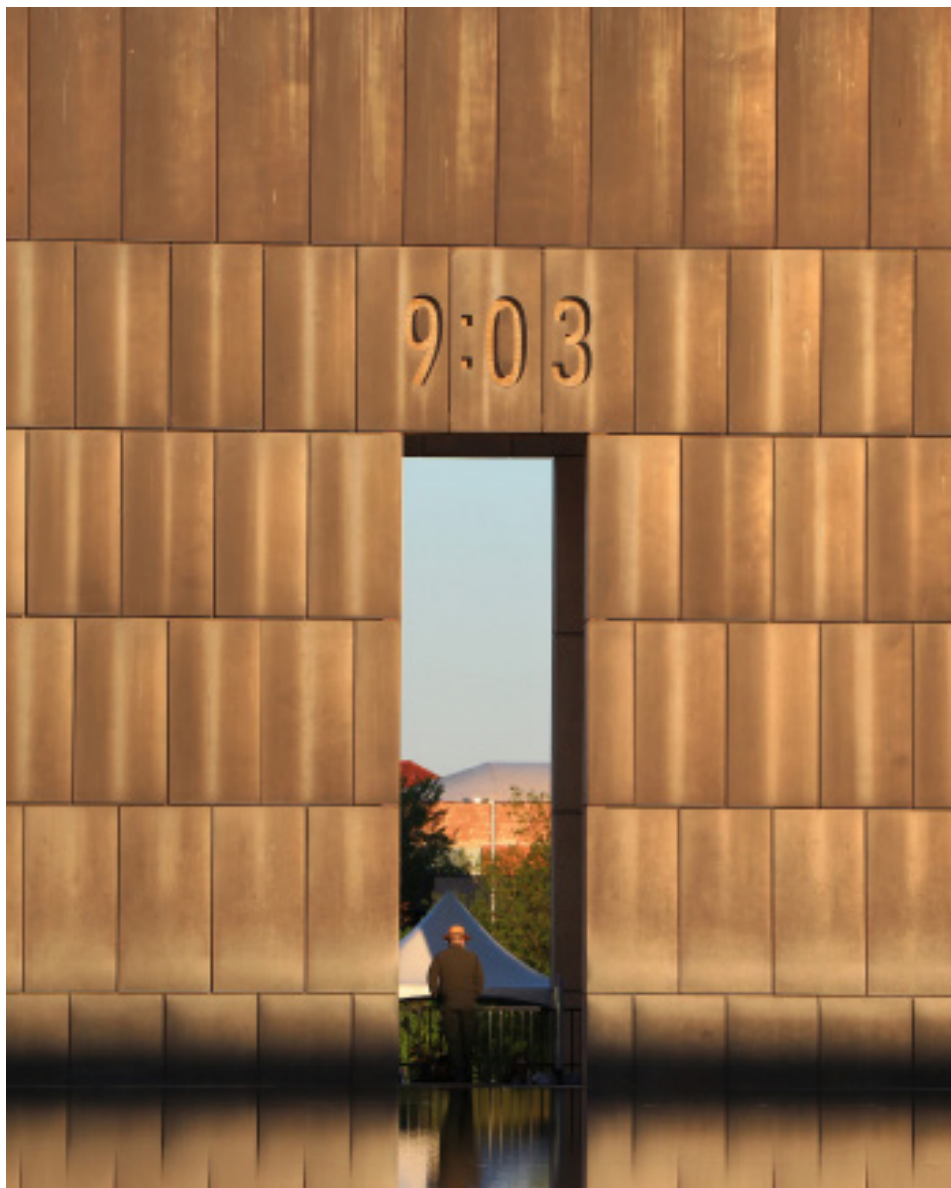
April 19th is a day of significance not only for citizens of Oklahoma City, but the entire state and country. It changed everything. Annually on this day, we come together to remember the lives of the 168 people who were killed by a senseless act. We also come to remember survivors, rescue workers, and those who were changed forever.

Following the closures enacted by COVID-19 last year, we were safely able to gather on this sacred ground once again and remember together. We sat together in 168 seconds of silence, and we spoke their names aloud, to ensure they are never forgotten. Most importantly, we shared our thoughts and emotions in this safe space.

During this year's ceremony, Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt spoke. He shared reflections on the past year, and how it's changed our sense of community and healing. What I took away from his remarks was one simple word: love. We can combat a world of hate with love for one another, and not being afraid to show it. That is the Oklahoma Standard.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland was also present at this year's remembrance ceremony. This was a sort of homecoming, as he was actively involved with the events here in 1995. Attorney General Garland was directly involved with the prosecution of the perpetrators and shared his experience of finding justice for these families. I appreciated that he was able to express emotions in the words he spoke, and it shows just how much this tragedy changed him as well.

As for myself, I am not from Oklahoma, and was too young to remember when



A park ranger standing inside of the 9:03 Gate/ NPS Photo

this happened. However, that does not mean I cannot share in the pain and loss here too. This is part of the human experience. We all understand the feeling of loss, and of love. While at the ceremony, I felt both. My heart ached for everyone changed by this, while feeling an overwhelming sense to set the example by doing good.

Time goes on, but we ensure that the lives lost and changed here do not fade away. Helping to make this sacred ground into common ground ensures those lives will be preserved for future generations.

- NPS-



# Celebrating with Kids

Mary Collins, Park Ranger

The National Park Service and the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum have been partners for more than twenty years. A partnership born out of tragedy and fortified by a common goal: to provide support and strength to communities in Oklahoma and beyond. In 2019 we set out on another collaborative adventure. This endeavor would stretch us as employees and ambassadors.

The story of the Oklahoma City bombing is one of people and places. Of course, the trees, plants, and landscape were also affected, but we had never really approached the story from the environmental perspective. Together we applied for and were awarded a grant offered by the National Environmental Education Foundation. The Greening STEM 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant was designed to provide funds for National Park Service sites, their partners, and local after-school programs to work together to better their communities through environmental education.

Since the Fall of 2020, the NPS and Oklahoma City National Memorial have been working with 5th-8th grade students at Macomb Public Schools made possible by this grant. The students have learned how to identify different plants and trees and the importance of planting native species to maintain a healthy ecosystem. When able, the students have traveled to the Memorial to learn about the bombing and the response afterward. Memorial and NPS staff, along with an urban conservationist and a local nursery owner have also traveled to the school in Macomb, Oklahoma to work with the students and staff in person.

The culmination of this partnership will be the creation of a community peace garden and outdoor classroom where everyone is welcome to spend time reflecting and enjoying the outdoors.

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# Ready for any Weather

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Park Ranger

The National Park Service in Oklahoma City has been selected as a Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador™. The Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador™ initiative is an effort to formally recognize National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) partners who are improving the nation's readiness against extreme weather, water, and climate events.

As part of this initiative, the National Park Service will collaborate with NOAA to share Weather-Ready Nation themes with stakeholders, share stories of readiness and resiliency, and educate employees on workplace readiness. Already, the National Park Service in Oklahoma City has incorporated weather safety monthly trainings for employees.

@NPSOklahoma social media accounts have also published severe weather safety messaging, including participating in the annual #SafePlaceSelfie campaign aimed at raising awareness for taking safety precautions when extreme weather threatens.



Currently, there are over 11,000 Ambassadors across the United States including businesses, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and all levels of government. The National Park Service in Oklahoma City is excited to join these Ambassadors and encourage everybody to be Weather-Ready!



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

National Park Service  
 Office of the Oklahoma State Coordinator  
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 Oklahoma City, OK 73102

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## **BisonTrails**

**Volume 5, Number 1**  
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*BisonTrails* is the official newsletter of the units of the national park system located in the State of Oklahoma.

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## *Support Your Parks*

### **Friends of Chickasaw NRA**

The purpose of the Friends of Chickasaw National Recreation Area is to promote public appreciation of and support for Chickasaw National Recreation Area. This support includes conducting interpretive programs, increasing public awareness regarding the park and its mission, fundraising, and other volunteer activities. The IRS has certified this group as a private non-profit organization (501c3) and membership fees for joining are tax deductible. Anyone interested in receiving a membership application can send an email to: [chic\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:chic_superintendent@nps.gov), or call 580-622-7220.

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### **Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum**

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is a private non-profit organization, and does not receive any annual operating funds from the federal, state or local government. Museum admissions, store sales, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, earnings from an endowment and private fundraising allow the Memorial and Museum to be self-sustaining.

Valuable gifts of time, talent and treasure to the Memorial help change lives each and every day. Make your donation to the Memorial and volunteer your time. If you would like to help, write to PO Box 323, Oklahoma City, OK, 73101, or call toll-free at 1-888-542-HOPE.