



# VIP2VIP



Season 8, Volume 3

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

January 2, 2009

## Current Volunteers

### Persimmon Gap

Mark Kirtley—VC (13th)  
Teresa & Gary Cowan—VC (New)

### Castolon

Ron & Jane Payne—VC (New)  
Bob Douat—VC (3rd)  
Joan & Ray Kane—Camp Host (3rd)  
Steve & Tina Ehrman—Camp Host (3rd)

### Rio Grande Village

Jim & Jan Allen—VC (New)  
Robert & Glenda Overfelt—VC (3rd)  
Royann & Royce Brockett—Camp Host (10th)  
Doug & Kay Combs—Backcountry (5th)  
John Welsh & Diana Warner—Backcountry (new)  
Ed & Nancy Bump—Backcountry (3rd)  
Kenn & Linda Sutton—Special Projects (3rd)

### Chisos Basin

Steve & Toka Smith—Visitor Center (new)  
Ed Davis—Camp Host (4th)  
Wolcott—Camp Host (new)

### Panther Junction

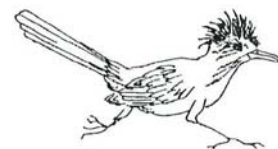
Diane Flynn—Pre-K teacher (new)  
John & Elaine Jonker—River Patrol (2nd)  
David Sheedy & Lori Dillon—ADA Survey (new)

### Part-time

Jim Bishop—BBNHA  
Kim Cutler—Horses  
David Ewing—RGV Backcountry  
Steve Harper—Resource Management  
Steve Wick—Resource Management  
Reine Wonite—Administration  
\*Number in ( ) indicates years of service at BBNP

## Volunteers Go Into the Wild

New York Times—October 23, 2008



VISITORS to Great Smoky Mountains National Park can rest easier this fall: John and Betsy Crawford have their backs.

Together, Mr. Crawford, a retired United States postal inspector, and Ms. Crawford, a retired nurse, make up one of the park's two Visitor Assistance Patrols, roving teams that crisscross the area in specially marked Toyota Priuses to help those in need.

During their eight-hour shifts, the Crawfords provide jump-starts to cars with dead batteries and jimmy car doors for visitors who have locked their keys inside. They also carry flares and flashing lights to direct traffic in the event of a "bear jam," rubbernecking caused by the sighting of a black bear.

Some days, they even deliver interoffice mail from park headquarters in North Carolina to a drop-off point near another outpost in Tennessee.

"You'd be amazed how many different kinds of dramas we see in a given day," said Mr. Crawford, who was eligible for patrol duties because he is a retired law enforcement official. "With the size of the park and the number of rangers, our contributions are critical."

Across the country, 50-, 60- and 70-somethings are increasingly opting to volunteer in state and national parks after careers often spent in hectic jobs.

Many of these retirees have traded the cubicle culture for a full-time lifestyle that often requires hiking, spartan accommodations and interaction with the general public. Others work half time, spending winters at home and summers volunteering outdoors.

Volunteers in national parks are not a new phenomenon. Between 1973 and 2007, their ranks grew from about 8,500 to more than 163,000. The National Park Service expects numbers for 2008 to climb to 168,000, and Kathy Kupper, a parks spokeswoman, estimated that at least 41,000 of those - roughly 25 percent - would be retirees.

Retirees "are great volunteers because they've got all of this life experience to share," Ms. Kupper said. "It's a win-win for everybody; they get to spend time in the national parks, and we get engaging, knowledgeable people to work for us and interact with the public."

(continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

Richard Bray is one volunteer who has made a difference. Mr. Bray retired from a career in the commercial florist industry in 1995 and started volunteering in the summer as part of a biological survey team in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado.

The survey began formally in 1996 as an attempt to catalog the butterfly species in the park. Since then, Mr. Bray has volunteered more than 12,000 hours, identified 140 species, overseen dozens of other biologists and helped care for refurbished buildings on McGraw Research Ranch, one of the park's most historic spots.

All the while, he hasn't earned a dime. "As a volunteer, I'm out there every single summer hiking trails, looking at wildflowers and chasing butterflies in the most beautiful spot I've ever been," said Mr. Bray, 72, who spends winters in Bethesda, Md. "I can't think of a better way of spending my retirement."

Apparently, there are more volunteers to come. The Bush administration has said that it wants 11,000 more volunteers working an additional one million hours by 2011, and the National Park Service recently hired 25 volunteer coordinators nationwide.

Even on the state level, volunteerism among retirees is on the rise. Sheryl Watson, a spokeswoman for the California State Parks, estimated that of the more than 15,000 volunteers who contributed almost a million hours of service in 2007, a "decent percentage" were people who had recently retired, and the number appears to be steadily increasing.

Although she said the state did not track volunteers by age, Ms. Watson, who works at state park headquarters in Sacramento, said she had heard of retirees who had waited years to become eligible to train as docents.

Louis Leal, a retired special education teacher, is doing his best to track all this interest. Mr. Leal, 74, has been a volunteer docent at the Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen, Calif., since 1996, and now spends five to seven hours working there every week. When he's not taking visitors on tours of the grounds and historic buildings, Mr. Leal leads mentoring programs for the park's newer docents.

"People get very excited about this place," he said. "Especially if you like literature and history, it is a great place to be."

Not everyone is keen on retirees volunteering in parks. Rangers in places like Olympic National Park in Washington and Glacier National Park in Montana have privately questioned the ability of older volunteers to aid visitors in a crisis. Randy Erwin, legislative director for the National Federation of Federal Employees, has said publicly that volunteers take away jobs from paid workers.

Ms. Kupper, the Park Service spokeswoman, disagreed. While Ms. Kupper acknowledged the difficulties associated with tightening budgets and limited resources, she defended the increase in volunteers, saying, "Without them, many visitor programs might not be there" eventually.

Politics aside, volunteerism has been good for Phyllis Hassinger, 84. Ms. Hassinger, a retired dairy farmer who lives in Wasilla, Alaska, has spent the last 19 summers as a volunteer host at Wonder Lake Campground in nearby Denali National Park and Preserve. Her role, as she puts it, is simply "being friendly." This can mean welcoming visitors or dinners with strangers. "My time here gives me the satisfaction of making new friends and meeting new people from all over the world," said Ms. Hassinger, who was widowed last year. "Without it, to be frank, I don't know how I would pass a whole summer in my home alone."

-article by Matt Villano

## Hiking Club Excursions have been Fun!

By Jane Brown



**Paula Jampsa and Diane Flynn admire the clear water and lush vegetation at Mule Ears Spring**

**January 3** Saturday 8:00 am The Great Dodson Key Exchange has been cancelled due to lack of interest (may not have been a lack of interest...more that the spirit was willing but the body was weak!) In its place a hike to Pine Canyon has been substituted. Meet in the PJ back parking lot at 8:00 am. See email.

**January 20** Tuesday 2:00 pm **Grapevine Hills** Please note the time of day!! Easy 2.2 miles round trip. Meet at Panther Junction HQ at 1:15 pm if you want to ride together or at the trailhead at 2:00 pm. The road is passable for Honda Civics if you go slowly. Pleasant easy walk through the land of giant red boulders with an uphill climb and a little scrambling at the end.

## Angelina and family receive snowy welcome to Las Vegas

by Jane Brown

On December 19, Lake Mead was covered with snow during a historic snowstorm that brought as much as eight inches of snow to the Las Vegas Valley on Thursday. The area hasn't seen such a snowfall since 1979. Road closures lead to highway traffic being diverted through the recreation area. For about half a day, the route through Lake Mead was the only link between southern



Nevada and northwest Arizona to Las Vegas. Angelina started work on December 17 and reported to me that they arrived tired but safe and that **everything** was harder than she had anticipated. However the children did great on the trip. The adults are the ones that are worn out!

## Where have you been since your last volunteer experience in Big Bend.....

**Ed Davis** (Chisos Basin Camphost) was volunteering at Big Bend last winter when he got a call from home informing him that there had been a big ice storm. Upon hearing this news, he chuckled to himself, "well, I missed that one!" When he returned home to Missouri in the spring he realized that he had not in fact missed the ice storm. His entire pasture was "all torn up." So he spent most of the summer cleaning up the debris. About the time he finished, Hurricane Ike came through so he got to do it again. And that about sums up his summer! Ed is glad to be back at Big Bend where he can rest up!



Bud Frankenberger is returning for his 6<sup>th</sup> year as a park volunteer, and his 46<sup>th</sup> consecutive year as a park visitor at Big Bend. He is working in Science and Resource Management to complete the historic landscape photo re-take project that he began with park botanist, Joe Sirotnak, in the winter of 2004-5. Following his last VIP appointment here in the winter of 2006-7, Bud skipped last winter to spend a year pursuing his love of hiking in such various places as the

Gila Wilderness (NM), Chiricahua National Monument (AZ), Santa Fe National Forest (NM), Daniel Boone National Forest (KY), Shawnee National Forest (IL), and the Ozark National Forest (AR).

When he is not hiking, Bud renovates older homes in Northwest Michigan, where he has a cottage in the woods, spends time kayaking Michigan rivers with friends, and plays tennis as much as possible.

- Tim Wolcott is starting as Chisos Basin Campground Hosts January 1, 2009.
- David Sheedy and Lori Dillon are volunteering with the Maintenance Division performing an Accessibility Assessment of all structures in the Park. They began this work in November and will be in Big Bend until February. They are residing at Panther Junction.

- When you turn in reimbursement forms, please staple the original receipt to the form. Claudia or Jane will be happy to make a copy of the originals for your personal records.
- Any purchases that you make [for supplies, for instance] need to be approved **ahead of time** by Jane Brown (Volunteer account), Jim Hines (Reservation system account), or your supervisor (whatever account they operate out of).

## **Spotlight on Jim and Jan Allen**

by Jane Brown

Big Bend is fortunate to have Jim and Jan Allen as volunteers this fall. They arrived well armed with skills and information and immediately put both to good use.

Jan is an archaeologist whose area of expertise is the Mayan culture of Mexico and Guatemala. During her professional career she was a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She has been able to apply her background in archaeology at all three parks where she has volunteered by performing site condition assessments. This involves visiting the known archeological sites in the park, photographing them and noting changes due to erosion or other factors.



As a student, she participated in an Earthwatch project. The Earthwatch Institute “engages people worldwide in scientific field research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment.” One of the ways that Earthwatch achieves their goals is by sponsoring work expeditions like the one that Jan helped to supervise in the Yucatan peninsula at Sayil. Earthwatch volunteers pay a considerable sum of money for the privilege of working at an archaeological site where they dig, haul, sift dirt and squat all day searching for clues that will solve the mysteries of past civilizations.

One of the interesting aspects of her archaeological work at Bryce Canyon National Park is the site assessment of dendroglyphs, which are the initials and dates that bored sheepherders carved into aspen trees 80 to 100 years ago. They are now considered archaeological treasures and are therefore monitored. The site condition assessment work at Big Bend, Chaco Canyon and Bryce Canyon is a valuable sideline to her work at the Rio Grande Village Visitor Center.

Jan has developed an interpretive talk here at Big Bend which has nothing to do with archaeology. She is an avid birder and her program focuses on vultures and other carrion eaters and is titled “Roadkill Clean-up Crew”.

Jim Allen’s background is in the field of biochemistry where he was an entrepreneur in the medical technology field. His company developed drugs and devices used in the cardiovascular area of the health industry. Jim has been presenting several interesting interpretive programs while at Big Bend. One program is about snakes. Toxicity issues with snakes from a biochemical point of view are what lead to his interest in this area. He also has a program on “The Agave Connection or how could the loss of a bat impact the production of tequila?”

The Paradox (or pair of doctors...both Jim and Jan hold doctoral degrees) have travelled extensively and their upcoming plans will take them back to continue their work at Chaco Canyon in the spring and Bryce Canyon this summer.

## Events in the Area

**Jan. 3, 8:00 am – Saturday** Hiking Club Hike- Pine Canyon. See page 3

**Jan. 13 Time TBD Stitch & Bitch;** email forthcoming.

**Jan. 13, 6:30 pm—VIP Awards Ceremony—**Mark your calendar now to attend this special dinner in honor of the volunteers. Community Room at Panther Junction. All food, etc. is provided.

**Jan. 15-18** Sheepdog Trials, Ft. Stockton; see bottom right

**Jan. 20 2:00 pm** - Hiking Club Hike to Grapevine Hills

**Jan. 30-31**-Terrell County Fair, Sanderson, TX Includes arts & crafts, a 4-H livestock show, auction, barbecue lunch, pet parade, dance, live band, and more.

*This poem recounts a true story that occurred several years ago at Big Bend and will be forever commemorated in this ballad. A race was being held along the River Road which explains the porta-potty delivery. I thought that the new volunteers here in the park might enjoy hearing this tale, as we could all use a good laugh right now!*

### The Saga of the Brockett's Jeep

Come and listen to my story 'bout a man named Royce,  
And that day at Big Bend he made a fateful choice.  
On a lonely stretch of road he parked his trusty Jeep.  
But who would ever figure a commode would take a leap?

While Royce walked in the desert for a quiet daytime hike,  
He left the Jeep well off the road as legal as you like.  
He couldn't see the coming doom about to visit there;  
That a flying porta potty would be soaring through the air.

Oh, the trailer had the potties charged with chemicals so blue,  
When a gust came by, the driver said, and then one potty flew.

The only car along the road was Brockett's jeep so pretty  
'Til the flying porta potty made its back seat kind of  
\*\*\*\*\*

Its back was cracked, its roof was bent; it wasn't vey neat;  
Its inside now the resting place of a porta potty seat.  
The L.E.'s came and checked the mess. The potties went away.  
And Royce, he drove that smelly jeep on down to RGV.

The tale, it will so long be told about that premier race;  
Of the runners and the volunteers; about the grueling pace.  
But the highlight of the story and the essence of the race  
Is the flying porta potty and the Jeep's perfumed disgrace.

By Gayle Kamaris, RGV Visitor Center volunteer

### Ongoing Activities

**Yoga** – Thurs. nights, 6-7:15 pm at San Vicente School Gym. Drop-in class \$10 or monthly \$30. Instructor: Cynthia Hood (432-371-2877 or cynthiahood1@hotmail.com).

**Real Life Fellowship Telecast** - 223 Bobcat Loop, Panther Junction, Sat. 7 pm.

### NON-DENOMINATIONAL ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Every Sunday from 10:00-11:00 am  
in the school meeting room

For more info please contact Rhonda Binion 477-2423

We are looking for a few good stories!

There is now a blog on the Volunteer Page of the BIBE website and we are looking for stories, reminiscences and personal narratives about your volunteer experience at Big Bend. Email any contributions to me at Jane\_Brown@nps.gov and I will post your musings and a photo.

### Sheepdog Trials at Fort Stockton

I emailed Mr. Holmes and he said, "the sheep dog trial runs from 8-5 and are free and open to the public. Location is a the Gun Club, located south off the southside service road just east of town." If you are interested in attending on Jan. 17, email me at Jane\_Brown@nps.gov. I would like to go and would love some company.

**SUGGESTION:** To save time, please submit your paperwork for reimbursement to Jane at least two weeks before you plan to leave the park. Once your paperwork has been submitted, please wait a week, then call Karen Gilmore at 477- 1101 to see if your check is ready. You will need to see Karen in person, in the Administration Office, Mon.-Friday., 8-5 to sign for your check. If you wait to submit on the day you leave or until after you leave, you may be waiting awhile for your reimbursement to catch up with you.