



VIP2VIP



Season 10, Volume 6

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

April 1, 2011

Current Volunteers

Castolon

Ron & Jane Payne—Visitor Center (3rd)
 Danny & Diana Edwards—Visitor Center (3rd)
 Phil & Margaret Hodgens—Camphosts (2nd)
 Bob & Ruthine Hennessy—Camphosts (5th)

Chisos Basin

Jim & Mary Lynn Murrell—Camphost (new)
 Bill & Patti Marvin—Camphosts (new)
 Jim & Jan Allen—Visitor Center (3rd)

Persimmon Gap

Jim & Marlene Hufford—Visitor Center (new)
 Mark Kirtley—Visitor Center (15th)

Panther Junction

Elaine & John Jonker—River Rangers (4th)
 Rick Bradbury—ScRM (1st)
 Dana Crites (SCA)
 Jennifer Goucher (SCA)
 Barney Ghim & Paula Jampsa—Backcountry
 Mark Schuler—Maintenance

Rio Grande Village

Roy & Aletha Ellis—Camphosts (5th)
 Bill & Jane Berry—Camphosts (2nd)
 Linda Sutton—Visitor Center (5th)
 Mick & Linda Comstock—Visitor Center (new)
 Kenn Sutton—Backcountry (5th)
 Mike & Nancy Coe—Backcountry (2nd)

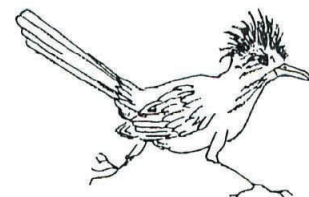
Part-time

Jim Bishop—BBNHA
 Reine Wonite— Interpretation
 Georganne Bradbury—Admin (new)
 Joey Cain—Maintenance

*Number in () indicates years of service at BBNP

Volunteer Voices in Interpretation

by Jim Covel



April is National Volunteer Month and a good time to take stock of all the contributions volunteers make as interpreters. I would wager that much of the time when you hear the voice of an interpreter in a park, visitor center, zoo, aquarium, or museum, that is the voice of a volunteer. At my site, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, we have over 1,200 volunteers who serve in almost every department from divers to engineers to husbandry and administrative volunteers. Over 500 of these volunteers are docents that provide personal interpretation of our exhibits and galleries.

I have the utmost respect for volunteers. These individuals are so passionate about the missions of our respective organizations as to donate their time and energy to support us. Time is perhaps the most valuable resource each of us has, and I consider it the supreme compliment when someone donates their time. The passion that volunteers bring is also a vital ingredient in effective interpretation, and they provide it in abundance to share with our guests.



Scene from the Monterey Aquarium. (I really put this photo in so that we could look at something wet.)

Working with volunteers also bears a serious responsibility. We have a responsibility to respect the time they contribute and make it as productive and rewarding as we can.

(Continued on page 2)

(Volunteer Voices in Interpretation continued.....)

We have a responsibility to select the right volunteers for each job and provide them with the tools and training to be successful in their endeavors. We have a responsibility to set clear expectations for our volunteers, provide regular feedback, and recognize their good work. And our volunteers have a right to expect these things from us.

That list of responsibilities probably sounds a lot like the same responsibilities we have for paid staff members, and it is. That's where I'm going with this. I would like to suggest that we do away with the label of volunteer—at least in our minds. At the aquarium, we have a paid staff of 450 and an unpaid staff of 1,200. If we view our volunteers as unpaid professional staff, we start to break down that we/them boundary that still exists in many settings. Many of us started as volunteers at some interpretive site to gain experience and it made a difference if we were treated with respect as fellow interpreters. I look at our unpaid staff as peers and a great pool of candidates for paid positions. If we are meeting those professional development responsibilities for our volunteers, they should be some of the top candidates for paid openings.

Reprinted from Legacy Magazine—house publication of NAI (National Association for Interpretation). NAI's president Jim Covell is the senior manager of guest experience at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey, California. Reach Jim at jcovell@mbayaq.org.

The Great Fox Rescue

by Mike Coe

On Saturday, March 12 calls began coming into the Communications Center at Big Bend National Park concerning reports of a grey fox stranded on a small ledge inside Ernst Tinaja. These calls were relayed to Rio Grande Village Ranger Station and Ranger Sean Marick went out to investigate. Sure enough, there was a grey fox on the ledge and no visible means of rescue at hand. The deadly combination of extremely slick walls and very low water levels in the tinaja made unassisted exit by animals or humans almost impossible.

On Sunday, more visitor reports came in. Around dark thirty, Ranger Alyssa Van Schmus and volunteers Kenn Sutton and Mike Coe devised a rescue plan that involved setting a ladder of sorts into the tinaja in hopes that the fox would climb to safety. Working by moonlight and headlamp, they constructed the ladder out of 2X4s, tarp material, and climbing rope. The rescue crew hiked out to the tinaja, confirmed that the fox was still stranded, and placed the ladder into the tinaja, securing it to a small tree. They put tuna on the ladder in hopes it would lure the fox onto the ladder.



On Monday morning Mike and Nancy Coe and Kenn Sutton returned to find the fox was still on the ledge. Disappointed but not defeated, they repositioned the ladder and left a note to visitors asking them not to disturb the ladder or the fox.

On Tuesday morning, Kenn and Mike returned to find that the fox had eaten the tuna, part of the tarp and had made its escape from the tinaja. It is assumed that the fox somehow managed to climb the ladder to safety.

Everyone involved was elated. Job well done by all.

The following is an excerpt from the Liason Notes published by Gail Abend.

ALL IT TAKES IS ONE SPARK

Given the extremely dry conditions this fall and spring, and the on-going drought conditions of the southwest, fire management needs to be a high priority for everyone. We've received less than one inch of precipitation since September. The "La Nina" oscillation in the Pacific Ocean has contributed to a generally warm dry winter. So what do we do?

All employees of Big Bend NP need to emphasize to our visitors that there are absolutely NO wood fires, and NO ground fires allowed in the front and back country at any time. We've had a number of RED FLAG warning days. Red Flag criteria occurs whenever a geographical area has been in a dry spell for a week or two, or for a shorter period, if before spring green-up or after fall color, and the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) is high to extreme and the following weather parameters are forecasted to be met:

- 1) a sustained wind average 15 mph or greater
- 2) relative humidity less than or equal to 25 percent and
- 3) a temperature of greater than 75 degrees F.

The La Nina condition is forecast to persist through the spring. That means normal to above normal temperatures and little if any precipitation. *Thanks to Chief Ranger, Allen Etheridge*

PARK RESOURCES IN CRISIS

So how does all this dry weather affect wildlife? It's heartbreaking to see our birds trying to find seeds where there are none, or the javelinas chomping on dried brush. The other day I saw one attempting to get some nourishment and moisture from an agave outside the Superintendent's home. However, when asked about this situation Joe Sirotnak answered: "One thing to keep in mind is that episodic very dry conditions, as well as the occasional episode of extreme cold, is what keeps the Chihuahuan Desert, the Chihuahuan Desert. Without these events, there would be a long term shift in plant and animals communities away from the assemblages that define the park and harbor such a great diversity of species. Drought happens, and it is a normal thing, even though it seems harsh when it is happening. that while we generally prefer a lush spring-time profusion of flowers and greenery, without years like this, there wouldn't be even a desert here to appreciate when it does bloom."

And what's wrong with all those droopy prickly pears? That's from the freeze and it will be interesting to see just how much damage was done, how many actually die, and how many make a comeback.

Thanks to Joe Sirotnak, Science and Resource Management

WHEN THE SCRAWNY EARS OF CORN ATE THE HEALTHY EARS OF CORN

The regional climate goes in cycles, times of plenty and times of scarcity. We are presently in a time of scarcity when it comes to food sources for wild life. Unlike the Egyptians in Genesis, our wildlife cannot store food for a time of famine. For some animals such as javalina that reproduce all year long, they are better equipped to handle the present situation. Bears have had an historic die off. It remains to be seen whether this drought will affect the large plants such as oaks and madrones that provide food for them. They could just migrate back to the del Carmen's and may not return. Big Bend NP has no other source of bears as they presently are not found at least in any large numbers in the surrounding mountains. Carnivores are also affected as their source of food may diminish with the reduction of healthy vegetation.

We do not conduct monitoring of these events, i.e. there is no data, but just long term observations.

Thanks to Ray Skiles, Science and Resource Management

And the next stop is.....?



Mike and Nancy Coe responded to the volunteer call from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. They have accepted the position and will be patrolling the South Rim trails, which should make for an interesting May and June.

Kenn and Linda Sutton are headed back to Spring Branch, Texas to regain control of their house after an absence of about three years. That should be a big change, but a nice one too!

Jane and Bill Berry will be heading eastward to visit family...NC, MA, CT, VT...no real plans other than to catch up with everyone.

Mick and Linda Comstock will be heading back to Massachusetts where Mick will be hopefully resuming his ministerial duties. It has been a pleasure to have them and I hope they will consider a return volunteer visit !

Roy and Aletha Ellis will be taking off for Yellowstone National Park for the summer. Roy took a position at the Marina General Store on Lake Yellowstone for the summer. I want to go!

Bob and Ruthine Hennessy's "great adventure #122" is about to begin as they head off for Alaska in their truck camper. They will be leaving their trailer behind and really "hitting the road". We hope that they have a great time! Some volunteering is involved in Alaska, but a lot of sightseeing too!

Ron and Jane Payne's plans are as follows: "We'll stop in Kansas City to visit friends who've recently become US citizens from Zimbabwe on our way back to Ohio, arriving there by about Mother's Day. We're looking forward to a visit from fellow VIPs, Margaret & Phil Hodgens at the end of May. Planting and harvesting a small garden and showing up amidst the lives of our 6 grandchildren and their parents will take a good deal of time until we join friends from Ontario at the Midwest Birding Symposium at Lakeside on Lake Erie, Ohio, in mid-September. After that we'll just shuffle around restlessly until the winter holidays are past and we can return to Paisano Paradise."

Danny and Diana Edwards have some traveling in their future. They are packing up their tent and checking out the east coast this summer. They will be headed over to Washington, D.C. to enjoy all that our nation's capitol has to offer, then heading south on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Later in August or September they will be heading up to the northern border of the United States and following the fall color south. Sounds like fun!

Phil and Margaret Hodgens will be returning to their home in the foothills of South Carolina briefly then volunteering at Beartree Campground in the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest in Virginia for the summer .

Steve and Tina Ehrman have headed back to their beautiful home place on the border of the Pecos Wilderness near Terrero, New Mexico to resume their hiking patrol for the National Forest Service.

And the next stop is.....?

Bill and Patti Marvin are returning home to Bend, Oregon for the summer, but promise me that they will return this fall to camp at Cottonwood Campground. They have done a great job at manning the Chisos Basin campground this spring and we are thrilled that they are returning in November.



Jim and Mary Lynn Murrell did a great job surviving spring break at the Basin Campground. In fact they liked it so much that they are going to come back and camp for the month of August. They are also returning next February to camp... at the Basin (spring break #2)—I think that they are hooked!

Jim and Jan Allen, in line with their love of a visitor center full of visitors, are returning to Acadia National Park for five months. Once again they will be dealing with long lines of information-seekers snaking out the door of the VC and boat-loads of camera-toting tourists from the Big Apple for every interpretive talk. We will look forward to their return to Big Bend in December, glad to once again escape to the peace and quiet of west Texas.

John Rech, who volunteered with the Maintenance Division for three months assisting Oscar with the electrical work has headed back to Bridger, Montana. After de-winterizing his house, he will be anxiously awaiting a visit from his daughter who lives in Germany. He says that he is coming back next season and we look forward to that!

John Pfistner, volunteer with the Maintenance Division (FMSS) has finished his measuring of buildings around the park. He and his wife Connie have headed back to Charleston, South Carolina to volunteer at Ft. Fort Sumter National Monument. There they will once again assist the Interpretive Division working at the visitor center, on tour boats, in the museum and with the living history program.

John and Elaine Jonker have a big river trip planned for the Colorado River/Grand Canyon this late summer (Why does that not surprise me?). Then they will be taking a quick trip down to Copper Canyon in Mexico.

Paula Jampsa and Barney Ghim have been volunteering at Big Bend since March 8th, living at Panther Junction and performing foot patrols of the High Chisos. We are glad to have them—their summer plans are a bit uncertain at the moment, but they probably will be heading up to the Pacific Northwest or Montana for a month or two.

Last I heard from Rick and Georganne Bradbury, Rick is not planning on leaving the park. He wants to go on volunteering for Jeff Bennett and Billie Brauch as he monitors the weather equipment, and the water gauges. My guess is that he really wants to see if it ever rains in Big Bend!

Jim and Marlene Hufford will be headed back to Cloquet, Minnesota where they will be camphosting very close to home at the city park campground as they spend time with their family.

April Events in the Area

VIP Awards Dinner Wednesday, April 13 6:00 PM Social 1/2 hour—6:30 pm Dinner Panther Junction Community Room

April 2—Green Scene in Terlingua—check out this eco-friendly festival, all day long at the Ghosttown. Jane will be holding court at a booth there and will welcome visitors and volunteers.

April 6—Wednesday, 11:30-2:00 pm San Vicente is sponsoring a Deli Luncheon at the school to raise money for their Washington, DC trip. Deli sandwiches, salads and desserts will be available for a donation of your choice.

Saturday, April 9 at 8 pm - La Fenice from Austin will be presenting the play “**Suitors and Tutors**”. Billed as a hilarious extravaganza of intrigue, murder and mayhem. \$10 admission at the Theatre Behind the Store in Terlingua.

April 18— Passover at Panther Junction Community Room at 6:00 pm. A kosher-style Passover meal will be provided. Come and enjoy a Christian Seder with songs, games and traditions for the whole family. Sign up on the Bulletin Board by the back door of PJ HQ or call Jeanie Greene at 477-2503

Wednesday, April 27 Beer, guacamole, and salsa tasting and judging. What more can you ask for? [chocolate??] Details to follow closer to time, but start planning, brewing, collecting recipes, preparing.

Saturday, April 30—the “Pony-Palooza “ benefiting the Davis Mountains Therapeutic Riding Center sponsored by Leadership Big Bend, Class of 2011. Watch out! Natasha Moore is going to be selling tickets to this one! It is for a good cause. All proceeds will go towards the purchase of Jack, a Norwegian Fjord Pony and scholarships for therapeutic riding. The Palooza will be held at the El Paisano Hotel in Marfa beginning at 6:30 pm. There will be music, live auction, refreshments and a live auction.

The volunteer office has daypacks, two sets of hiking poles and two sleeping bags that are available. Just come by the office and sign one out to use while you are here volunteering at Big Bend!

I found a bluebonnet!

