

An “Enviably Career”... Deputy Supt. Doyle Nelson retires

by Management Assistant Bill Halainen

Doyle Nelson, deputy superintendent of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, closed out 35 years of federal service on Friday, June 2, 2006 with a retirement party at Shawnee Inn & Resort PA.

Following a tour in the Army as a lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in Vietnam, then as a captain in the Special Forces, Doyle went on to the University of Washington and obtained a degree in engineering.

In 1973, he became a seasonal backcountry and climbing ranger at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. “What a great job that was,” he remembers. “Backcountry and mountain patrol, rescuing people and saving lives. A crusty district ranger told me to enjoy the job as best I could, because it would probably be the best job I ever had with the Park Service. At the time I didn’t believe him, but those turned out to be five of the best years of my life. Still to this day, my favorite memory is skiing to a remote backcountry cabin, providing, of course, that the bottle of Old Yellowstone that was carefully stashed there the previous summer hadn’t been liberated by the trail crew.”

In 1977 Doyle was accepted into a permanent ranger intake program and moved on to Grand Canyon for two years. “The park was figuring out how to deal with the wild burros at that time,” he recalls, “and I was leaning out the side of a helicopter shooting darts into burros at full gallop. I also learned how to pack a mule, and for six wonderful months I was stationed at Phantom Ranch [in the bottom of the canyon], packing in for 10 days at a time. I had a great little cabin down by the river, which was also inhabited by squirrels, scorpions, and a king snake who kept the rattlesnakes away.”

In 1979, Doyle moved on to Yosemite and became an assistant district ranger in the Wawona District, “a dream job in a great park.” The district includes the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoia trees, the historic Wawona Hotel, the Badger Pass ski area, and Mariposa Point, which overlooks Yosemite Valley. “In April, you

Beginning days at
Grand Teton National Park
(The beard came off soon after.)



Rookie on the Grand Teton, 1973.

could play a round of golf in the morning, then go to Badger Pass and ski in the afternoon,” he says. “I was involved in bear management. Trapping, tagging, and relocating problem bears was ‘real ranger work’ and one of my favorite assignments. I also did weekly interpretive programs about the bears.”

Doyle returned to Grand Teton in 1987, this time as the district ranger for the North District. “Winter patrol on Jackson Lake with the 1930s-era snow planes was unforgettable. Also, the era of big wildland fires was just beginning then, and I was part of the huge 1988 fire suppression efforts in Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and the adjacent forests. One of my more memorable experiences was the 1989 [Ministerial] Meeting between Secretary of State James A. Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze [held at Jackson Hole WY] -- there’s nothing quite like having a handful of KGB agents running around in your ranger district. As it turned out, though, they were less trouble than the State Department.”

Doyle came to Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area in 1992, serving as chief ranger for nine years and deputy superintendent for another five years. “Although the scale of this park is different, the complexity and intensity of the work matches that of any other park I’ve worked in,” he says. Doyle was a member of the regional emergency management team, then of the national team as logistics chief, working on Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Yosemite floods in 1997, the Gettysburg tower demolition in 2000, and a sprinkling of high-level dignitary visits at various park sites.

“Although we tend to talk about the *places* we have worked, it’s the *people* that make the Park Service special,” Doyle said looking back on his time as a ranger. “It has been an honor to work with so many dedicated professionals over the years. I’ve had an enviable career. Although I will miss it, I go with no regrets.” ■



Farewell week at
Delaware Water Gap
National Recreation Area