



Bent's Fort Ledger

Fall
2008

Chief's Update

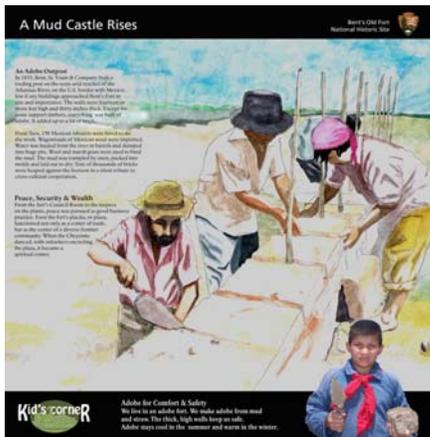
It only seems like we have been working on two big interpretive projects here at BEOL forever. But things are finally coming to fruition for the Orientation/Interpretive Plaza at the Visitor Parking Lot and the 1 3/4 mile hiking trail along the Arkansas River.

On the front for the former, a contract was just awarded to Advanced Environmental Systems of New Mexico for the grading and concrete work for the plaza (our own maintenance staff will build the shade structure on top of it). Construction should begin in a few weeks.

About the same time, a Public Lands Corps crew will arrive on site to begin construction of the hiking trail. Another crew will be here early next summer to finish off the trail work. We are working with Colorado Preservation, Inc. to award a contract for the interpretive panels for that trail, to be installed next June.

Come summer 2009, visitors to Bent's Old Fort will have access to a whole new interpretive experience OUTSIDE of the walls of the Fort.

--- Rick



One of the Interpretive Panels for the new Plaza at the Visitor Parking Lot.

Fur Trade Encampment Survives a "Perfect Storm"

Most of the Fur Trade Encampment weather October 10-12th was pleasant, but by late Saturday and through the night, a narrow band of storms dumped over 3 1/2 inches of rain on the fort and camps. A very peculiar rotating cloud circled the area reminding many of us of what travelers wrote about in their journals. The total count of visitors for the weekend was over 600.



The Friday evening program featured John Carson as Kit Carson in his early years. John wore a jacket he had made from an original owned by Kit with all its intricate beading and decorations. Author- historian Michael Moore gave a power point presentation about the Quintessential Mountain Man - Thomas Fitzpatrick. His expose' revealed him as a man bent on survival in a harsh world surrounded by the unknown. The park's new sound and lighting systems contributed to the effectiveness of the programs. Fifty-two visitors enjoyed the evening program.



Saturday's activities included the skinning of a beaver, trade vignettes, work in the shops and kitchen, adobe work, packing, wagon driving, and camp life demonstrations in the Fremont, Indian, trapper and trader camps. We had 43 volunteers performing living history with two new volunteers here for the first time. The new nature trail cuts across the marsh and saves walking the road, cutting the distance in half. The layout of the camps allowed distance between creating a better effect.



The Old Fashion Fandango was promoted widely throughout the Arkansas Valley and the park was expecting to have a large crowd show up. The rains came and the large crowd did not. The alternate plan of using the dining room instead of the plaza worked well for the 45 volunteers and 14 visitors. Dr. Lorenzo Trujillo's instruction on Hispanic dance and music was enjoyed by all. The music and laughter echoed off the walls giving the look and feel of fandangos past.



The storm made for a very memorable experience. Those who dared spent the night in the camps amidst the downpour and hard wind Saturday night to protect their equipment. The winds pulled up some the 16 inch tent stakes and blew till dawn. Sunday morning the campfires did not happen. Leather clothes dried into a new shape and the ground soaked up most of the rain. Some of the tent peg loops were ripped, tin ware rusted and the brass tarnished. The camp volunteers are to be commended for their patience in dealing with the elements and their dedication to preserving the past through what they have and do. Everyone pitched in to help others and this, most of all, is what volunteering is all about.

Bent's Old Booth at State Fair

Staff and volunteers from Bent's Old Fort again greeted Colorado State Fair visitors at a booth in the Kitchen Craft Hall this year. The booth nestled between a health products vendor and the Army Corps of Engineers (John Martin Reservoir) attracted over 4,700 fairgoers. Free fans, pencils, pens, erasers and rulers were given out, along with lots of information about the Fort and Southeast Colorado. Thanks to all those who helped staff the booth!



Trails and Rails 2008 Wrap Up

This was the seventh year of Trails & Rails trips aboard Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* managed out of Bent's Old Fort NHS. Training for volunteers took place in April. **Seven** new volunteers came aboard this year. Again, experienced volunteers did a great job of helping to train those new to the program.



Programs began on May 5 and continued through September 2. Four programs were offered each week: La Junta to Albuquerque each Friday; Albuquerque to La Junta each Saturday; La Junta to Albuquerque each Monday; and Albuquerque to La Junta each Tuesday. Trains ran quite late in June due to the flooding in the Midwest, but nevertheless, all programs did run.

As usual, the program was extremely well received by passengers and we had great support and assistance from Amtrak staff. On-board procedures ran smoothly as the volunteers and train staffs have grown accustomed to working together. Virtually every trip included sightings of herds of antelope and elk. Fox, coyote, bald and golden eagles, bison, deer and bear were also spotted over the course of the summer.

Final figures for the 2008 season show a total of 70 programs, with just over 16,000 passengers contacted. Thirty-two active volunteers provided 1,742 hours of volunteer service. Based on national volunteer value figures, that volunteers

time up to over \$33,000 worth of service to the National Park Service!

A hearty THANKS to all the Trails and Rails volunteers who carry the NPS message to many who would otherwise be missed!

If you would like to join the cadre, training for new volunteers will again take place in April 2009. Contact Rick Wallner to sign up.

NPS Maintenance Staff Assists Forest Service

Over Labor Day weekend 2008, Bent's Old Fort staffers Ed Aragon, Mike Nicholl and Danette Ulloa assisted the U.S. Forest Service, Comanche National Grasslands, with a work project at the historic Rourke Ranch in Picketwire Canyon. Ed, Mike and Danette worked with volunteers to repair the ranch house and the garage and to reconstruct an adobe doghouse originally constructed nearly 100 hundred years ago. Aragon lived in the bunkhouse at the ranch for over 25 years. He remembers when the Rourkes collected dirt to make adobe bricks. "We used flat grasses. Straw has tubes and bugs get inside," he said. The Picketwire Canyon site was listed on Colorado's Most Endangered Places List in 2007. Many buildings need stabilization and repair according to Forest Service Heritage and Recreation Program Manager Michelle Stevens. "It will take a lot of work," she said, "but it is not a lost cause."



Park Service and Forest Service personnel at the Rourke Ranch work project in Picketwire Canyon.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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