

Current Volunteers**Castolon**

Bill & Patti Marvin—Camphosts (3rd)
 Dave Conway—Camphost (2nd)
 Bob Douat—Visitor Center (7th)
 Larry & Martha Head—Visitor Center (2nd)
 Steve & Tina Ehrman—Backcountry (7th)

Chisos Basin

Ed Davis—Camphost (8th)
 Doug & Kay Combs—Camphosts (8th)
 Lew & Susan McCool—Visitor Center (2nd)
 Ann Wildermuth—Visitor Center (1st)

Panther Junction

Elaine & John Jonker—River Rangers (6th)
 Alexander Brachman (SCA)
 Henry Ring— (SCA)
 Genna Mason—SCA (ScRM)
 Riley & Karen Caton—Emergency Services (2nd)
 Skip Jiru —Maintenance (2nd)
 Bud Frankenberger—ScRM (10th)
 Madelyn Morey—ScRM (2nd)
 Ron & Jane Payne—ScRM (5th)

Persimmon Gap

Mark Kirtley—Visitor Center (17th)
 Gary Karasick—Visitor Center (1st)

Rio Grande Village

Gary & Diane Frable—Backcountry (6th)
 Steve Blythe—Maintenance (1st)
 Royann & Royce Brockett—Camphosts (14th)
 Bill & Jane Berry—Camphosts (3rd)
 Daisy Welch—Visitor Center (2nd)
 Terry Brackeen—Visitor Center (2nd)

Resident and remote volunteers

Reine Wonite— Park Videographer (11th)
 Stacy Duckett—ScRM
 Jim Bishop—BBNHA
 Bob Wirt—ScRM (11th)

* Number in () indicates years of service

*Forget the Vistas**By Henry Ring*

I graduated from college last May with a degree in creative writing, and I owned just enough stuff to fill two suitcases and a backpack. Before I graduated, my professors made certain that I understood one thing: it was of critical importance to my continuing development as a human being that I bum around for a while. Waiting tables, fighting fires, driving taxis, and welding on the Alaskan pipeline were just the first in a long, long string of possibilities professors suggested. Anything where I'd get a story. Anything where I'd travel. Anything at all as long as it got me moving and thinking. My favorite teacher would tell me repeatedly, "Just get on a steamboat and go." To which I always bit back the response, "Go where?"

The answer came from a family friend. He said that it was simple. I should just go to Alaska. And the way to do it was the Student Conservation Association. Paid travel, food, and housing, an education award, and the whole thing would definitely qualify as a resume builder. Plus, there was the added benefit of traveling to some of the most scenic and remote terrain in the United States for free. Desperate to escape Manhattan, I submitted a slew of applications.

Three days after my graduation, I was on a plane to Anchorage to join the rest of the interns on the Alaska Exotic Plant Management Team. During my brief training period, I was dunked head-first into federal, weapons-grade bureaucracy for the first time. By the end of the week I had learned and forgotten so many invasive species rankings, park codes, and group acronyms that it felt like someone was flossing between the lobes of my brain. And then I got on the train to Denali National Park.

Denali, if you've never been, is a strange and beautiful park. Green tour buses crawl along the single 92-mile park road, stopping for bears, foxes, and caribou. Scree slopes, glaciers, and permafrost are big obstacles for the off-trail hikers, though they pale in comparison to the mighty dwarf birch, a dense, nigh-indestructible shrub that grows to chest height and blankets the wetter areas of the park.

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Mount McKinley itself is breath-taking, and draws in enough air traffic that the park has begun monitoring backcountry sound levels for fear that all the plane tours will affect the wildlife. There was less hustle and bustle in Denali, but the constant stream of planes did remind me fondly of New York.

It was just after my third week in the park that I realized that I really liked the National Park Service. In fact, I like-liked the NPS. Growing up in Montana I had been a visitor often enough to Yellowstone, Glacier, and Arches to be even a little jaded about scenery and wild terrain. Denali did impress me, but after a summer in Alaska, magical vistas are not why I re-upped for a second SCA position. They're really not even why I enjoyed my time in Denali, and they're not why I'm enjoying my time in Big Bend.

You see, the landscape is only important for me insofar as the landscape attracts strange, good people. That's what the Park Service really has to offer for volunteers like me. The people who look at remote, isolated terrain with few amenities and little to no pay and say, "Yes, this is the thing for me," who come together in these wild places, who volunteer their time, who spend their lives working to protect and share these incredible locations. That's where the good stories are.

I've heard stories about parks from all over the US, spanning decades of history. There's the one about shooting thirteen-foot snakes in the Everglades, or the one about bush plane engine failure coming over a pass in the Alaska Range, or the one about the befuddled visitor asking why the Wright brothers didn't hire a pilot to fly their plane. None of these stories are epic in scope, none of them contain in them the triumph of good over evil or the real definition of true love. But they are entertaining. And that's what a good story does, entertain. And more than a good story, that's what a good life does.

Like any interpreter worth his salt, I'm more than happy to steal other people's stories, to tap that human resource, but volunteering has started me building my own repertoire of stories. I've picked up human poop and some rather unfortunately-soiled fleece gloves on a high mountain trail, dug a submerged tire out of the Rio Grande and tried to convince a group of teens that "manually controlling invasive species" is a solid resume building activity. Consider my portfolio a work in progress.



On Christmas Day this year, a small group of employees and volunteers came to our housing unit, a double-wide trailer, for a Christmas potluck. The outpouring of food and holiday cheer was fantastic, but towards the end of the dinner the big guns came out. One of the volunteers asked the group what they would do differently in their lives if they had a chance. The near-unanimous response was, "Start working for the Park Service earlier."

I'm glad I've gotten the chance to start out so early. And to meet so many people with good stories. The Park Service is about a lot of things. And volunteering in it is a major commitment that takes a lot of time, energy, and freedom to pull off. But it is a pretty good way to bum around and pick up some good stories. More importantly, it's a good way to get started on your own.

SCAs Henry Ring and Alex Brachman during the Rio River Cleanup

Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site

by Daisy Welch

Seminole Canyon, just east of the Pecos River, holds some of the region's most famous rock art. The canyon is a smooth chute carved in limestone, and contains a number of shelters formed where the river sweeps around a corner. In these shelters are wonderful, mysterious paintings, some recognizable as animals or humans, and some strange and abstract.

To see these pictographs, Jane Brown, Ann Wildermuth, Steve Blythe, and I signed up for two guided hikes: a seven mile one to Presa Canyon on Saturday, November 17, and a three mile hike to the Upper Canyon on Sunday the 18th. Since it is over four hour drive, we camped there for two nights.

It was pretty windy and chilly at the exposed campground, but once in the canyon, it was a great hike and we climbed up to six different shelters. Our guide, a volunteer from the Rock Art Foundation, was amusing and full of information, including handouts that showed what Forest Kirkland painted when he explored Texas rock art back in the 1930's. She also told about the railroad line built through here, an early route of the Southern Pacific, with stories about the rowdy workers, and about the African-American Seminole Scouts who often regrouped here after a campaign against the Comanche.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the hikes and seeing the rock art that we have been reading about for a long time. The weather wasn't the greatest for sitting out in the evening, but that's West Texas in the wind.

If you are planning to go and see the paintings at Seminole Canyon, the long hikes that we took are only offered a couple of times a year, and you need to make reservations for them. They offer short hikes to the Fate Bell Shelter most days during the winter. Although we had the primitive area to ourselves, you might want to make camping reservations just in case. Here's the website for more details:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/seminole-canyon>

and the Rock Art Foundation :

<http://www.rockart.org/>

Although Jane and Ann headed straight back, Steve and I went the 40 miles to Del Rio and cleaned out both Walmart and HEB. How we got everything in Steve's car, which was already full of camping gear, is a mystery.



New volunteers arrive in January

Around the middle of January, there will be many new faces in Panther Junction. First on the scene will be **Mike Lovell** from Mastic Beach, New York. He arrives to assist Joe Sirotnak in vegetation management. Mr. Lovell has been in the landscape and horticulture business for 38 years. A second volunteer for Joe will be **Mary Ann Harrison** who has worked seasonally for NPS as a biological technician at the Carl Sandburg Home NHS in North Carolina. She also worked as a hazardous tree removal intern with the American Conservation Experience at Grand Canyon National Park in April of this year and at Cape Hatteras National Seashore as a Beach Access Information Ranger this past summer.

Spring Orientation begins on January 21 and new volunteers will be arriving for this event. Castolon Visitor Center will have a new lineup the spring. **Paul and Judy Tarr** from West Falmouth, Massachusetts, talked to Ron and Jane Payne about volunteering during a previous visit to the park. Paul taught high school with former Castolon volunteer Ted Rowan. The Tarrs are first time NPS volunteers. They will be joined at Castolon by **Lee Tarvin** from Indianapolis, Indiana. In 2010, he volunteered with the National Forest Service at Mt. Rogers NRA in Marion, Virginia. Last year found him at Black Bayou NWR in Monroe, Louisiana from May through October and he is currently at Fort Sumter NHS in South Carolina.

For a change of scenery, **Terry Brackeen** will be moving from Rio Grande Village Visitor Center to the Cottonwood Campground where she will be co-hosting with returning volunteers **Phil and Margaret Hodgens**. Likewise, **Gary Karasick** will be relocating to Rio Grande Village Visitor Center for the spring session and leaving Persimmon Gap Visitor Center to Mark Kirtley and **Jim and Marlene Hufford**. As an aside, you may have seen the Huffords around Panther Junction. They agreed to come early to assist the Maintenance Division with a special project here at PJ in advance of the renovation of the Maintenance Building this summer.

Phil and Peggy Spruell from Humble, Texas are first time volunteers at Big Bend but have visited the park many times. They are recently retired from careers in accounting and medical technology and have been volunteering at Lake Houston Park in their free time. They are Texas Master Naturalists and will be working at the Chisos Basin Visitor Center for the spring session. **Jim and Mary Lynn Murrell** will be returning to the Chisos Basin Campground for the spring session.

Another place that can expect a new change of faces is the Rio Grande Village campground. **Jane Shepard** will be joining us for orientation and then moving to the RGV camphost position for the spring. She is currently camphosting at St. Andrew State Park in Panama City, Florida and has volunteered for two summers at Avalanche Campground at Glacier National Park. Jane has extensive experience as an American Red Cross volunteer and would be interested in teaching a watercolor workshop while here at Big Bend. Assisting her in the campground will be **Amy Gibson** who recently retired from the Safety Management field where she worked for an engineering company. Since her retirement, she has visited 42 of 58 national parks, including working this past summer for Aramark in Denali. Amy will be heading on to a volunteer spot at Gila Cliff Dwelling when she leaves Big Bend.

Earl and Joy McFarland from Las Cruces, New Mexico will be volunteering at the Rio Grande Village Visitor Center. They have taken a long break from volunteering. In 1993 they worked at Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery on Lake Sacajawea in North Dakota and have worked seasonally at Yellowstone NP. Earl and Joy are retired teachers and Joy is an avid birder. They have visited Big Bend about six times, have hiked most of the trails and explored many historical sites.

Getting to know the Ybarra family

by Ron and Jane Payne

A couple of years ago when I ventured out of doors at the Castolon Visitor Center, a car pulled into the driveway and I recognized a young woman whom I had encountered working at a pharmacy in Alpine. When I greeted her and another woman getting out of the car with, "Hi, I see you've ventured down from Alpine to visit Big Bend," the woman answered with "Yes, we've come to see Grandpa's house." Muffling a gasp that would have let on like I had just discovered an archaeological treasure, I said, "You mean you are Alvino Ybarra's granddaughter?" "Yes," she said, "and this is his great-granddaughter."

So, by a happenstance meeting with a visitor, we were introduced to the Ybarra family. Although the Alvino House was under rehabilitation at that time, I secured permission from our supervisor, Ranger J. Jurado, to take the two women into the Alvino House. I should add that I asked for permission by calling Ranger Jennette at home on her day off only after my wife insisted that this time I was to get permission rather than ask for forgiveness after the fact.

The walk down the hill to the Alvino House was exciting for Alma Ybarra Betancourt and her daughter. The anticipation was but a faint glimpse at the emotion-filled experience of their walking through the house with exclamations like, "You mean Grandpa actually touched this doorknob?" Tears moistened eyes as hands reached out to caress the old newspapers that had served as wall-paper to cover the cracks of plank doors.

Conversation after the tour revealed that Alvino and Teofila Ybarra's last living child had a home in Marathon. With Alma's help we arranged for an oral history interview with Concepcion "Concha" Ybarra Gonzales at her home with Alma as our translator. At the end of a delightfully informative interview, Concha responded to my question as to whether she would like to visit the house again with, "Yes, right now!" in English.

This next year, on February 9, 2013, the Park will welcome the Ybarra Family to gather at Castolon for a third annual reunion. Archaeologist Tom Alex or his designee will escort the family through their ancestral homestead. Conversation *en espanol y en ingles* will be heard above the delights of a picnic lunch.

Their reunion date was projected at the Fiesta de Cumpleanos de ochenta y cinco (85th birthday celebration) for Concha on December 8, 2012, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the day of her birth and the source of her name. We were invited guests at this fiesta, Mass, family banquet and Mariachi Band celebration at St. Mary Roman Catholic Church in Marathon. Volunteering has dimensions that no one can predict and few other experiences can match.

Keeping up with the news!

All NPS employees have made the change to BisonConnect as their default email program within the last month or so. I am a big fan and hope that I am not stuffing your inboxes with too much information. I have been trying to remember to pass along information to the "volunteer group list" concerning closures, rabies vaccines, parties, meetings and all the other things that come up in this very large place we live. If the particular bit of information isn't pertinent to your job, just delete! If you have some news that needs to be broadcast to the volunteers, send it along. I have the group list set up and can pass it along at the click of a button. Unfortunately, the weekends are a big gap in this informational pipeline. All we can do is try!

Events in the Area

January 1 Pea Off— *(this is not what it sounds like!)* Annual Black-eyed Pea Cookoff and fund raiser for the Last Minute Low Budget Productions. This event takes place on the porch at the Terlingua Ghostown. Turn in time is 2:00 pm and cooks can prepared the peas on site or deliver them from home. For \$5, you get a bowl, spoon and black-eyed peas and cornbread.

Wednesday, January 9 Recycling Awareness Event or "**Renew Year Party**" from **2-4 pm** at the **Recycling Warehouse next to Maintenance**. There will be snacks, treats, and drinks along with Big Bend recycling news, education, and a variety of recycled art and games. We will also be providing brand new 14 gallon and 13 quart blue recycling bins for the Big Bend residents for use at their homes at the event. Please remember to bring lots of your own recycling because those that bring the most and do the best in our recycling activities will be winning prizes! Hope to see everyone there.

Wednesday, January 9 **Volunteer Awards Dinner at the San Vicente School Gym-social hour at 6:00 pm, Dinner at 6:30 pm.**

Friday, January 18 **Hiking Club** (see below)

Sunday, January 20 **Big Bend Ultra Run**-go to www.bigbendfriends.org for more information.

January 21—Spring Orientation begins-Many new volunteers are attending!

January 26—Terlingua Word off at the Starlight Theatre is usually on the last Saturday night in January. This is one of my favorite events of the year in Terlingua. If you like to write poetry or stories, come and share. Or just come and listen to a great evening of local entertainment!

Terlingua Home tour—January 27—Information is not yet available for this event....it usually takes place on the last Sunday of the month and is a fund-raiser for Last Minute Low Budget Productions. There are two tours, one before lunch and one after and van transportation is provided. It is a great chance to see houses that you would rarely get a chance to visit, many with solar and other "off-the-grid" features. Tickets need to be purchased in advance.

Hiking Club set for Friday, January 18!

If you are new to Big Bend, the hiking club is a chance for volunteers (and anyone else who wants to come!) to get together for a reasonable hike, visit with one another and see something that you might not see on your own. These hikes are not Olympic events, but rather moderate exercise with time to "smell the flowers" along the way. We will be taking a radio with us.

The volunteer hike for January will be in the East District, on the way to Persimmon Gap. Seasonal employee, Matthew Yarborough has agreed to lead this hike to a remote spring, as he has recently completed this hike. The hike is approximately 6 miles roundtrip and is not on an established trail.

Matt writes, "*I just looked at a topo map and it looks as though the hike is about two miles in a direct line. I would expect it to be more in the range of three miles having to navigate along the wash and around the brush that chokes it out. Just as a note, there is one point in the hike where you will have to descend down a steep embankment. I did not find it to be difficult and think that most would be able to do it taking their time. This is about a quarter of a mile from the exit of a shallow canyon where the physical spring lies.*"

I would recommend bringing a snack, lunch and water. We will be out until mid-afternoon. Meet at the front parking lot of PJ Headquarters at 8:30 am. Please call and tell me you are coming. I will need a head count - 477-2803). If you have a high-clearance 4 wheel drive vehicle and are willing to bring it, please let me know.