



VIP2VIP



Season 13, Volume 3

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

December 2, 2013

Current Volunteers

Castolon

- Bill & Patti Marvin—Camphosts (4th)
- Dave Conway—Camphost (3rd)
- Bob Douat—Visitor Center (8th)
- Ron & Jane Payne—Visitor Center (6th)
- Steve & Tina Ehrman—Backcountry (8th)
- Mike Jiru—Maintenance (2nd)

Chisos Basin

- Ed Davis—Camphost (9th)
- Doug & Kay Combs—Camphosts (9th)
- Dave England—Visitor Center (1st)
- John & Cyndee Perry—Visitor Center (1st)

Panther Junction

- Elaine & John Jonker—VaRP River (7th)
- Joan Spalding— ScRM (1st)
- Riley & Karen Caton—EMS (3rd)
- Nick Lambert —Maintenance (1st)
- Larry & Julie Brabec—Maintenance (1st)

Persimmon Gap

- Mark Kirtley—Visitor Center (17th)
- Leonard & Sally Timm—Visitor Center (1st)

Rio Grande Village

- Amy Gibson—Backcountry (2nd)
- Steve Blythe—Backcountry (2nd)
- Daisy Welch—Backcountry (3rd)
- Jep Robertson & Renae Clark—Camphosts (1st)
- Wayne & Claudia Nicholson—Camphosts (1st)
- Glenda & Robert Overfelt—Visitor Center (6th)
- Terry Brackeen—Visitor Center (3rd)

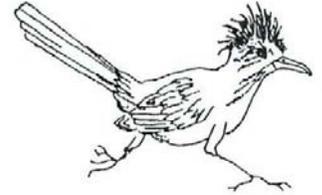
Resident and remote volunteers

- Reine Wonite— Park Videographer (11th)
- Stacy Sirotnak—SCA ScRM
- Jim Bishop-BBNHA
- Mark Williams—VaRP
- Laurie Meadows—VaRP

* Number in () indicates years of service

First Day

By John Perry



There is nothing quite like your first day. Your first day of school each year, your first paid vacation day, your first day on a new job, or, in our case just a few days ago we had our first solo day as Visitor Center Hosts in the Chisos Basin of Big Bend National Park. We are the Perry's, John and Cyndee and we are first-time visitor center hosts and, despite being native Texans, first timers in Big Bend National Park.

We attended school for a week and received top notch training from a long line of some of the most knowledgeable people we have ever met. Then there were two days of on-the-job training with our supervising ranger which was once again an inspiring level of knowledge and expertise with heaps of patience. We were fired up and ready to go, confident that we had the tools and skill to get our visitors' questions answered and their permits written so they could embark on their Big Bend back country adventures.

We had one day off between our last day of OJT and our first solo day. During that time we would ask each other questions as if we were visitors to see how we would do at fielding questions. Many times we would not know the answer but from our training we knew where to look for the answer or who to call. One thing we could not do was practice writing backcountry permits. That one worried us the most, not because we thought we could not do it but because we did not have a good grasp of all the names of the trails, campgrounds and zones. All those zone enter and exit possibilities over 1,200 square miles were a formidable challenge for us to assemble in our newbie brains.

Thursday came and it was time for us to do it for real, alone. Our fallback guy/supervisor had deftly planned some long overdue vacation leave to begin the same day as our first day. Whatever happened, good or bad was ours and ours alone. Now do not misunderstand, we knew we were not doing heart transplants or something like that but we did want the people we helped to have a good experience and come away with a positive impression of the NPS. That was enough pressure for us.

(Continued on page 2)

“First Day” by John Perry (continued from

The Basin Visitor Center opens at 8:30 am. With our anxiety about getting the registers open for the first time and logging in on El Campo we decided to get to our station early so we would have all the time we needed to be sure everything was right. The alarm went off at 5:15 am and by 6:30 we were ready for the day, had our lunch packed and were at PJ checking out Willy for the drive to the basin. By 7:00 we were trying to crack the safe so we can open the registers. By the time we finally turned the dial properly it felt like an episode of Mission Impossible. The clock was ticking, sweat was forming on the brow, heart was beginning to pump a little harder but, success at last, now, just a little walk around the corner to the counter where we can count the money and open the register. But wait, what’s this?

Through the filtered light of a sunrise that had not yet made its way into the basin we could see the white commercial-size bus sprawled across six parking spots. A hiking club from Dallas had engaged a charter bus to drive 32 of them all night to get to the basin for a three-day weekend of backcountry camping. Its cargo doors agape with people scurrying about like ants, picking out heavily laden backpacks. And those ants had a trail of bodies that lead right up to the door of the visitor center. We do not know how long they had been there but it was long enough that they were already looking anxious to get inside. One person we learned when we went to open the door had actually written “I’m first in line” on a piece of paper and left it on the ground in front of the door.

Whoever wrote that note had not returned to assume their place in line by the time we unlocked the door, but she came running when she saw the group start to compress forward as we got the deadbolts loose and the doors swung open. Picking up her sign and frantically waving it as she entered the visitor center, her amused hiking club mates allowed her to move to the first of the line for permits.

Cyndee had already sized up the situation and had made a decision on the division of duties. She said; “John, you type faster. You’re doing permits, I’ll do everything else.” Marching orders received. Let’s do this.

The sign lady exasperated and in a rush, started reciting a backcountry permit worksheet number. “Uh, okay, but there are no worksheets to reference, when did you create this worksheet?” “Yesterday, before we got on the bus to come here” was the reply. “I’m sorry but the system resets itself every day at 6:00am, all worksheets unpermitted from the previous day are deleted.” There was a brief moment of silence and then a groan arose from the 15 people standing in front of the counter.

“Okay everybody, we can get through this. We will recreate your worksheets right here, issue your permits and get you on the trail as quickly as we can.” We both looked at each other and held our breath, wondering how the hiking mob, I mean club, would take this. To everybody’s credit everything proceeded in an orderly fashion, no rioting and setting cars on fire in the parking lot or anything like that.

Driver licenses were transcribed, itineraries were noted and alternate campsites were chosen because first choices were already occupied. The keyboard on the El Campo computer was getting a workout, paper had to be added to the printer and receipt tape had to be replaced on the fees register. But in just under an hour a bus-load of campers with multi-night itineraries had permits in hand and were on their way. Our first day was not the easing in we had hoped for but on the bright side we are no longer apprehensive about creating permits, pushing buttons on either of the registers or afraid of making a mistake. We got very comfortable with making lots of mistakes, and fixing them. Since we got all this out of our system in about the first two hours of our tour of duty we should be able to just relax and enjoy the next several months. Somehow it is unlikely it will work that way.

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

Footnote:

There has been a suggestion that the volunteers get together for an evening of viewing travel photos of **the summer adventures**. If anyone is interested, we could consider adding it to the agenda on the Dec. 23 potluck and use the big screen in the Community Room. However, we don't want to **force** folks to watch long-winded travelogues. Let me know if you are interested in this entertainment option. We had some great journeys this past year! Perhaps a time limit of 15 minutes per person? Another date would also be a possibility.



Riley and Karen Caton—From BIBE we crossed the Deep South to visit with Ken and Ginny Kopperl near Apalachicola, FL. Then traveled south to Key West, and north to the Everglades, spending nearly a month in FL. Then we traveled north through GA, SC, TN, KY, NC, VA, to a friend's farm in WV. Parked the motorhome and flew to Paris on May 2nd, meeting Ron and Jane Payne there a few days later. Then flew to Edinburgh, Scotland and toured the Highlands, Wales, the Cotswolds, and London. Then we flew to Lisbon, Portugal and spent June visiting a friend and touring the country. We took a day trip to Santiago, Spain and then flew back to Paris. We returned to the US on July 4th, picked up the motorhome the next day, and spent the next 19 days zigzagging across the Mid-West in route to the Northwest. We stopped in Ohio for another visit with the Payne's. Spent August and part of Sept in the NW, eventually circling back South to Big Bend. Whew!

Ron & Jane Payne—After leaving the Park on February 10, 2103, we slushed our way back to Ohio to begin our preparations to visit the Irish Republic with our son, an attorney with clients in Dublin. A week before our flight, son, Sean, phoned to say he couldn't accompany us. Not to be denied a good time simply because the guy who made the plans could not go, we flew to Dublin and had a great few days there and then traveled by bus to Galway for several more days of 'fish 'n chips 'n mushy peas.' Next stop was Carcassonne, France, where we were met by Danish friends who reside half the year in Montpelier. They provided us with the vacant apartment of another Dane who was away. One day our Danish hosts had golf plans, so we toured Montpelier on our own. Our remaining four days in Languedoc were spent with Niels Erik and Lilli, engaged in cultural tours and night after night of enjoying the produce of the region's endless vineyards.

A very fast train took us from Montpelier to Paris, where we met up with Riley and Karen Caton (VIPs too), who had reserved a very nice hotel in a non-tourist neighborhood. The next three days, Riley and Karen grabbed us by the hand and showed us nearly every site one can manage in so short a time. We did not at all mind their re-tracing familiar haunts for our benefit; probably the best way to see what's important in limited time. From Paris, we flew to Belfast for a two-day look at the counties in Northern Ireland of Ron's immigrant ancestors. So, if Rick Steves and his tour guidebooks are not to your liking, let one of your kids, old friends from Europe and fellow VIPs help you have a really great adventure in Ireland and France. It is not the only way to go, but certainly one of the best ways!

Dave Conway—I left BIBE earlier this year on February 1st and spent a month in Alpine at the Lost Alaskan. It was a good time exploring the area, especially Ft. Davis and the McDonald Observatory. It's a nice place to spend time and kick back. After Alpine I traveled to Flagstaff, AZ where I stayed ten days exploring and stocking up on supplies. There are some great sights to see on day trips there and if you're a big kid it's fun to watch the trains.

Leaving Flagstaff I drove to Kanab, UT with hopes of hiking the Wave. After four attempts I won the lottery and hiked the Wave. It was a spectacular hike and well worth the stay in Kanab. From there I drove directly to Bryce Canyon NP to begin six months in the North campground. It was a great group of people to work with and some also liked to target shoot. A highlight was the three and a half day Advanced Technical Rescue Refresher. The shutdown was unfortunate for some employees and those wanting to visit the park but being the only one in the campground was pretty nice. Shortly after that it was time to head back to BIBE and Cottonwood Campground.

Steve Blythe—Aside from the usual R & R stuff (fishing, playing volleyball & visiting petroglyph sites), I volunteered with Habitat for Humanity in Silver City, NM for several weeks in May helping to complete a SIPs-panel home and with Habitat for Humanity in Taos, NM for 3 months helping to complete a stick-frame home, start an adobe home and construct a new office building for the affiliate.

Robert & Glenda Overfelt—The last time we were in Big Bend was in January of 2011. Since then, I did "Mimi's Day Care" for two new grandbabies in the fall of 2011 and 2012. As far as travels, we went on the Alaskan Inner Passage cruise in Spring of 2013.

Jane Brown—Even though I am not a volunteer, the volunteers are always interested in my travels, so here goes. When I left Big Bend last May I meandered across the United States visiting family members in Dallas, Little Rock, Saint Louis, Indianapolis, Ohio and North Carolina until the end of June. I also had a chance to stop in to see Ron and Jane Payne in Ohio. Former volunteer Linda Richardson (2008) and I then flew to Milan, Italy and spent six weeks camping and hiking in the Dolomites (near Bolzano), southern Switzerland (Poschiavo) and Val d'Aosta. It was a great journey, mostly in the countryside with excellent weather. Then it was time to go back to Texas!

Bob Douat - I spent 4 months on a road trip to the Pacific NW, Canada and Alaska. Highlights were visiting with VIP friends Bill and Patti Marvin in Bend, OR, Daisy Welch at Heron Lake, NM, Steve and Toka Smith on Whidbey Island, WA, Jim and Jan Allen near Wasilla, AK looking for views of Russia and Christina Rinas in Anchorage. Spent time in Denali NP, Barrow, Fairbanks, Homer, Seward, Anchorage, Portland, OR, Willets, CA and San Jose, CA. A fun trip with lots of wondrous sights.

Hiking Club meets on Wednesday, December 20!

We had a great time hiking Strawhouse Canyon Loop in November! 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 short 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.

This month's hike will be up near Persimmon Gap. More details will follow via email around Dec. 16.

VIPs pretending that they hiked Marufo Vega



The volunteers took a few moments after the Strawhouse Canyon hike to lift a glass (of sparkling grape juice!) in celebration of the new laundry room at the Rio Grande Village VIP RV sites ... many years in the making.

\$\$ Money \$\$ Money

If you have submitted requests for reimbursement, Claudia Arnberger asked me to tell you that due to budget uncertainties, it may be awhile before these reimbursements are paid. There is a delay in the release of money into the various accounts, including the volunteer account. Do not despair...they will be honored, it might just take a while.

Events in the Area

Tuesday, December 3—Casa Grande Holiday Auction, PJ Community Room. Viewing begins at 6 pm, bidding starts at 6:30 pm. Call Claudia at 477-1108 or sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board by the back door at Panther Junction if you want to make a donation.

December 7—Big Bend's 3rd Annual Triathlon— Hot Springs/Rio Grande Village area. Entry fee of \$10 for Casa Grande members, and \$12 for non-members. Prizes awarded. Open only to Big Bend residents and employees (including volunteers), not the public.

Canoe: *Hot Springs to Daniels Ranch (2.5 miles)*

Bike: *Daniels Ranch to Boquillas Canyon and Return (11 miles)*

Run: *Daniels Ranch to Hot Springs (3 miles)*

You can be part of a relay team . Race starts at 9:30 am at the Hot Springs. Call Allen Etheridge at 477-1185 to register. Volunteers are also needed for shuttles, water stops and cheering squad.

December 9 and 10 - CPR/First Aid—This one day course will be offered each day from 9 am– 4 pm at the PJ Community Room. All the spots are taken for Monday, Dec. 9 but you can still get a place on Tuesday, Dec. 10. Reservations are required so call or email Jane Brown at 477-1106 / Jane_Brown@nps.gov if you are interested.

Wednesday, December 11— Holiday Social in the PJ Community Room 8 pm This is the Christmas event of the season. A Casa Grande sponsored event, everyone is invited to this evening of free food and good cheer.

Monday, December 16— Santa will make a stop at the Community Room at 6 pm. If this event doesn't get you in the Christmas spirit, nothing will!



Thursday December 19—San Vicente School Christmas Program, San Vicente gym from 6 pm-8pm. Get in the Christmas spirit by attending the Christmas program at the school and support our local school community!

Friday December 20 Hiking Club—See page 5

Monday, December 23 VIP Christmas Potluck—Bring a covered dish to share for an evening event at the Panther Junction Community Room. We will begin serving at 6:30, but you are welcome to come at 6:00 pm to mingle. Iced tea will be provided.

Every Wednesday at 7 PM there is basketball at the court next to San Vicente School at Panther Junction. Everyone is welcome and cheerleaders are needed.