

Grand Canyon National Park Podcast for the Week of June 9, 2008
Park Ranger David Smith interviews Park Superintendent, Steve Martin

Ranger David Smith: Good morning, and it's another podcast from Grand Canyon National Park, this week of June 9. The weather has been crazy at the park this week. We've gone from snow two weeks ago - to temperatures on top of the canyon in the low 90s - and 110 down at Phantom Ranch - to last night, we had some pretty incredible rainstorms - and this morning, it was a little bit above freezing - does not seem to be keeping the visitors away though.

Another interesting thing inside the park this week are just the number of flowers that are coming up, right now, as well. The penstamen up here at the 7000 feet elevation range is stunning. Go down into the inner Canyon you're going to see lots of encilia blooming as well. It's a great time for flowers and a great time for temperature at the Canyon - so summer is here.

We've also started our new summer schedule of interpretive programs as well. So, evening campfire programs at the campground, for folks to check out. Also the evening programs are now outside at the amphitheater, at the Mather Amphitheater, which is located right next to the headquarters area. During the daytime we have about 20 to 25 different activities, all of which are free, that folks can enjoy and have the kids on, and it's a good time to be at the Canyon.

Well today, we're in for a special treat, our Superintendent, Steve Martin, has been working in his job as Superintendent of the Park for the last year or so, he's accomplished a lot here, and we're going to be talking about some of those things and some of the challenges that he's going to be facing over the next four or five years. Steve welcome.

Park Superintendent Steve Martin: Well, thanks for having me.

Smith: It's great that you can take time out, I know you have a pretty busy schedule. Steve, you have a long history with the National Park Service, you work in many different National Parks, you worked in the regional offices, you've worked in the Washington office. You have a great vision of the Park. Over the last year, what are some of your big impressions about Grand Canyon that are maybe different than what you've seen in other parks, or things that really strike out.

Martin: Well, Grand Canyon, I think, is perhaps the most significant of the National Parks on an international scale. It's truly a world park and I think that all of our management actions are; the way we prepare ourselves for every day, needs to be on that scale. And so, it's like every day, playing in the Super Bowl or being in the NBA finals. It's just - our jobs are so significant and important. The other thing is, as you know, I actually started my career here in 1975, and spent six years working at Grand Canyon on the rims, on the river and in the backcountry. And the other thing that strikes me coming back, is that, it's one of those places when you come back to you actually think, this is better than I remember.

Smith: Will that says a lot right there. I know that we just had a delegation from our sister park in China inside Grand Canyon, they were here for awhile. Some of their rangers were training as well, with our interpretive staff. There's been some talk about other sister park relationships. Is that something that you're exploring as well?

Martin: Yes, it's very important for the National Parks in the United States, that are well developed, have a long history of learning how to run protected areas, share that with countries around the world. So we're working with Mexico, with China, we're going to participate in Australia, in an international conference on protected areas. Not only for us to share what we know, but it's remarkable what people are doing around the world to protect areas and to open them for visitors, and to make them part of local and regional economies, so that they're sustainable. So we can learn a lot too.

Smith: Well, that's great. We're going to be learning and they're going to be learning, so it sounds pretty win-win to me. For most people around the world Grand Canyon is, if not the, one of the crown jewels of the National Park system. What are some of the big challenges you're going to have to deal with at Grand Canyon during the next few years?

Martin: Well, like many jobs, our's here is never done - because, things are always changing and I think we need to continue to learn how to take care of an international population; the change in demographics within the United States as we become multicultural. I also think that it's really important that we become even better at interpreting and providing opportunities for visitors. In saying that, I think Grand Canyon is an absolutely tremendous place to visit - for people of all ages, all abilities. There's everything from short walks to wonderful interpretive programs, to great indoor activities, to the wonderful, wonderful things that you talked about in the run-up to this - where we have elk and condors, and the most tremendous geologic display in the world. But that said, we have to continue to learn how to communicate and to provide opportunities that

truly inspire people; though it's hard to top just walking up to the rim and gazing at the Canyon at sunset and not being pretty darn inspired.

Smith: You know I walk along the canyon rim every single day I'm here, and every time after 2 1/2 years, I'm still inspired. So, it's a great place to be at. So, dealing with the sheer number of visitors at this park has to be one of the really big challenges that you and all the Rangers here face. The new shuttle system, between Tusayan, our sister town, just on our southern border and the park seems to be successful. I've seen on the buses, a fair number of people both from inhabitants in the park, and visitors, going between the local hotels and the park which I hope is alleviating a fair amount of the car traffic. What else is the park trying to do to help make navigating this park a little bit easier?

Martin: We've just finished a plan for transportation and visitors experience on the South Rim, and we feel that that will help improve our visitor services, improve transportation with our new clean, green buses that are here, so that it's very seamless for the visitors. We also, I think, need to really be a model of sustainability, and over the next couple of years we are going to be continuing to improve our foot trails, provide opportunities for bicyclists. Along with the shuttle system we hope that it's a really wonderful and very sustainable experience for people. At Grand Canyon, people think of the South crowded South Rim, but we have tremendous opportunities along the road out to Hermit's Rest or the road out to Desert View, North Rim, Tuweep... it's a remarkable place. 277 miles long, the Park, and so you can have a quick and wonderful experience on the South Rim, stay for several days in a hotel, camp in the campgrounds or go to one of the more remote places in the park, if you're looking for solitude.

Smith: You mentioned the Hermit Rest road; I know there's the road project going on right now, where the road is being repaved. It's getting nice sides where bicycles can actually be on that road, or they can be on the separate trail that is going to be there as well. When do you expect the Hermit Rest project to be done, so folks can actually navigate out there in their own vehicles or on a bus?

Martin: Well, we hope no later than the first of November, but if we have good weather and depending upon the work that the contractor does, it may be a little bit before that. We are optimistic at this point - we will have it wrapped up this fall. That will include, as you mentioned, not only a better road, but it's going to include a trail all the way out to Hermit that people can walk pieces of, and also ride the buses, and then, a bike path for part of the way as well.

Smith: Well, it sounds like it's definitely going to complement what we have

right now and make transportation a little bit easier for folks inside the park. Well, you probably know better than anyone when you live inside of the National Park, all of your friends and family are calling you up, they plan on visiting you; they want to come out here and do things. What kind of recommendations do you give when you have friends and family coming to the Park; what do you tell them to do?

Martin: Well, certainly to get out, and to at least walk a little bit. You don't have to walk down into the canyon, but if you can, and if you take your time, almost anyone can go a short distance into the canyon, on either the Bright Angel or the Kaibab Trails; there are shuttle systems that run to those trailheads, even if you go a couple of hundred yards down, it gives you an appreciation for the magnitude of Grand Canyon. There are also wonderful, wonderful trails along the rim. I also recommend that they go to at least one or more of the interpretive programs, as well as visit places like the Desert View Watchtower, the Yavapai Observation Station, Lookout Studio... Take a look at the El Tovar, which is our historic hotel, or, the Lodge on the North rim. We offer so many great opportunities with our tremendous staff here. We really encourage people to at least take in one of those, or stop into the visitor center and talk to someone, because they can tell you what's happening right now.

Smith: Okay, well it sounds like I have a good idea: get down into the Canyon just a little bit, get a taste of it, check out one of the ranger programs, check out some of the incredible historic buildings inside the Park.

One final question for you... In your capacity as Superintendent, it's almost like being mayor of a small city. We've got over 500 park service employees living here, working here, with their families, we've got all the folks that work for our concessions, our partners like the (Grand Canyon) Association, here. So, in the summertime, there's a community of maybe 3,000 people living here on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, some living down in the Canyon, some living up at the North Rim. What do you do to make sure that their needs are being addressed - inside the Park?

Martin: Well, it's something that's incredibly important to us, and yes, people think about the scenic wonders and the wildlife but they don't realize that Grand Canyon has over a billion dollars worth of infrastructure that the park service is responsible for. To take care of all of their needs, you have to have everything a city would have from police to maintenance, to utilities systems, and we managed that for people. But, I think the key is, we have a fantastic staff, and you have to, like anyplace else, set goals and communicate with people. But, really, we rely on those 500 employees that you just mentioned, who provide the multitude of services to take care of visitors. I think that the people who come to the Park will see how well

taken care of they really are, and that's thanks to our incredible staff, and that's the most important thing that I can do, is support them.

Smith: Sounds good to me, Steve. I'm looking out the window right now, it's blue skies, it's a little bit crisp, but the flowers are blooming. Folks are walking along the rim of the canyon, right now. It's a good day to be outside and not sitting in an office being interviewed, so, I appreciate your time, and hope to see you in the park; both Steve and the rest of the folks who are going to be coming here.

So, this is been Ranger Dave Smith with Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, Steve Martin, speaking to you on this podcast for the second week in June, year 2008. We look forward to seeing you in the park this year. Thanks a lot.