

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks News Release



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia and Kings
Canyon National Parks

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Close Call in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks swift rivers pose danger to unprepared visitors

Sequoia National Park—Last week a man in his 50's from Alabama counted himself very lucky after experiencing a close call at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

On Friday, March 14, the gentleman was walking on boulders in the Kaweah River near Hospital Rock when he fell in and found himself swept away by the fast, cold water. He tumbled for almost 75 feet through rapids before pulling himself to safety. It took eight trained swift water rescue personnel to extract the man from the opposite side of the river and reunite him with his waiting family.

This situation could easily have turned deadly. Visitors planning to come to the parks before July should take note: This year's heavy snow pack is already melting and raising streams and rivers throughout the Sierra Nevada. As the weather warms up, local residents and visitors alike may be drawn to these dangerous waters. Drowning is the leading cause of visitor deaths in these parks, and rangers are very concerned about the potential for river accidents during the next few months.

The National Park Service operates an on-site volunteer program to talk with visitors along foothills waterways in hopes of preventing drownings. The volunteers in this important visitor-safety program, called River Rovers, donate a few hours one day per week. Supervised by a park ranger, they are provided with training, uniforms, backpacks, 2-way radios, and other necessary equipment. During one-on-one visitor contacts, they educate visitors about river hazards and encourage responsible use of park lands and facilities. They are *not* trained rescue personnel, and are not involved in swift-water rescue.

There are now openings for a limited number of new volunteers to join this special group. If you love the outdoors and enjoy helping people, consider becoming a River Rover at Sequoia National Park. The benefits are many: Working outdoors in a beautiful setting, getting to know the park and meeting visitors from all over the world and, most important, knowing that you have made a difference in the lives of visitors by helping to prevent a tragedy. River Rover candidates should be comfortable outdoors, have good people skills, and be able to walk a few miles on uneven terrain in high temperatures. Anyone with language skills in addition to English is especially needed. For a volunteer application or for more information contact: Park Ranger Tim Barrett at 559 565-4212 or 559 565-4211 or email him at Tim_Barrett@nps.gov.

If you are planning to visit the mid-elevations to the high country (6000' and up), take note: Snow depths at Lodgepole in Sequoia National Park stood at 6 feet as of this morning, while at Grant Grove in Kings Canyon National Park it was almost 4 feet. Snow accumulations vary with elevation and exposure but generally begin above 6,000 feet at this time. Winter conditions still exist throughout the parks in both the sequoia groves and on high-elevation trails and roads. Snow tires or tire chains may be required at anytime conditions necessitate them. Please be prepared for the weather at the location you plan to visit.

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