



## TRTs: Stretching the Mind Through Experience



*The National Park Service is arguably the largest informal educational institution in the country, second only to the public school system in total clients served. It seems only fitting that the two organizations cooperate, sharing the best of both institutions.*

The Teacher-Ranger-Teacher (TRT) program allows teachers from the public school systems across the country to spend a summer working and living as a ranger with the National Park Service (NPS). Some TRT volunteers live within the park itself and some do not. Some volunteers serve in urban areas and some in rural areas. Each TRT experience is as special and unique as the park site itself.

Participating in the TRT program gave me a different perspective on the National Park Service. This experience allowed me to see and work behind the scenes with scientists and resource technicians at the monument as they worked to inventory, record, and preserve the natural and cultural objects that make White Sands special and unique.

My experiences at the visitor center and with park guides and other park rangers let me see with new eyes how other educational professionals

balance the interlocking needs of safety, education, and preservation. I cooperated with other colleagues as we ensured the safety of park visitors, while at the same time interpreting the meaning of the park through ranger-led programs.

White Sands National Monument has been an interesting experience but at the end of the summer, I will go back to Nebraska and begin another year as a public school teacher. Taking with me the memories and experiences of being a ranger, I will incorporate some of them in my lessons for my students in the classroom. Because of this experience, I will be a different sort of teacher than I was before it. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.”

More information about this exciting and rewarding experience as well as other teacher resources at different national park sites can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/teachers>

—Courtney Monroe, Teacher-Ranger-Teacher



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