

The Signpost

May-June, 2011



From the Bedside Table Read It and Weep by Patrick Boyle

Well it did bring a small tear to my eye as I envisioned a California from not so long ago. I am talking about the book *California Grizzly* by Tracy Storer and Lloyd Tevis. Anyone who is interested or does programs involving California History will find instant gratification inside. It chronicles the history of the “griz,” from their relationship with Native Americans, the Spanish, the Mexicans, and finally the Americans. It was published over 50 years ago and although some of the biological information is out of date, it is a comprehensive research on the history of the grizzly and its impact on California.

It chronicles stories of the bear shamans, the vaqueros lassoing bears for the bear and bull fights on Sundays, the exploits of the real “Grizzly Adams”, why the bear men raised the bear flag and how the bear came to be placed on the California State Seal. Even though the last California grizzly was killed almost 90 years ago, it still lives on as an image of strength and a symbol of California today. I am always surprised when people ask if we have any grizzly bears in the park. But if you look around, the grizzly bear is everywhere. Its’ namesake lives on in places like Grizzly Lake, Grizzly Bluff, and Grizzly Peak. Schools have adopted it as their mascot and even state parks use it as a symbol for the parks. No wonder some people think we still have this California bruin wandering around in the wild.

I know I am no “Smitty” but I enjoyed his reading list immensely and still have a stack of books on my bedside table. I hope y’all get a chance to do a little reading and don’t forget to sign the petition to reintroduce the Grizzly Bear.....Now if we could only find a park to let him run loose in.....any volunteers?

For more books about grizzly bears I suggest *Grizzly Years* and *In the Presence of Grizzlies* by Doug Peacock. Both are worth your time and sent me into the backcountry of Yellowstone with a greater understanding and awe of these majestic animals.

The Park Rangers Association of California is now on Facebook. Please “like” our page and contribute content. You can find ranger related news, articles, training, links and stories and so much more on the PRAC Facebook. In it’s first month we’ve had 25 people like the page! Let’s build on that. Please contribute your ranger related photos (especially rangers in action, patches and badges), stories, training opportunities, job postings or other ranger related items. This is your Facebook page and you can help make it better.

Be This “Guy” Not That “Guy”

by Patrick Boyle

Last year I took a trip to Florida instead of going to the conference in San Francisco. I know, where do my loyalties lie? Dan and I made our way down to the Keys to spend a few days out on Dry Tortugas National Park. Three days on the island with only a handful of campers and two large boatloads of tourists that arrived around 10:30 and left around 3:00pm every day. I was surprised to learn that the tour boats provided the interpreters and not the NPS. The island has a rich history of being a fort during the civil war and housing the Lincoln conspirators. Dan is a birder, and part of the reason we came to the island was for the migrating birds that stop and rest here and drink from the fountain in the middle of the fort.

As we were ambling along the pier a lady asked the ranger what are those large oversized birds flying around the fort? He turned and looked at her and said “Sorry I am not that kind of ranger” and walked away. We were a little shocked at this response and his abrupt attitude. I could almost understand if it was one of those LFBB’s that were migrating through. But this was a year round resident, a frigate bird. Of course my friend Dan, who is also a ranger, quickly told the lady what it was, and what it ate, and how often it reproduced, and how the immature birds have a white streak in their plumage, and a number of other facts....did I mention Dan is a birder.....Our next encounter was even more strange as we discovered the fountain was not working and it did not have any water in it. When we asked if we could put some water in the fountain and try to get it working? A different ranger said if you want to waste your time and water go ahead. Dan explained that this was a great source of fresh water for the birds on their migration and it is even featured on the NPS website for Dry Tortugas. He reluctantly said he would

contact maintenance to look at the fountain the next time they were on the island if they had time. Needless to say we went out and filled the fountain with water, cleaned the pump and got it running. Boy, were those birds happy.

Our next ranger encounters at Everglades National Park were awesome. The staff was knowledgeable and fun and the programs were memorable. One of our best informative sessions was conducted by Darryl a maintenance worker at the Anhinga Trail. He gave us great tips on what to see, when to see it, and even areas outside the park that were worth the time and effort to explore. He obviously loved his job and had some great stories about the park and his encounters with the wildlife. He would have made the NIA proud. Just to note, he did all this while still sweeping and emptying the garbage and getting the bathrooms prepped to be cleaned. Be this “Guy!”

The sad part of this is that I know all of you who are reading this are this “Guy.” Those other “Guys” are not involved in PRAC and don’t read the *Signpost*. Our challenge is to bring those guys out of the darkness and into the light. You do not have to know everything but you should know the basics. Keep a set of field guides in the truck and at the kiosk to reference. If you do not know the answer tell the visitor you are unsure, and try to get the info to the visitor before they leave or at least have the information at hand for the next time the question arises. People expect us to be the “expert” on all things in our park. It also goes to show that every encounter whether it is on a walk, a talk, or even cleaning the bathrooms is a chance for us to connect with our visitors and share our knowledge and experiences. Be memorable, not a bad memory.

A day In the life of a Ranger

Submitted by Pam Helmke, Park Ranger

Those of you who attended the California Parks Conference at Tenaya Lodge realized how close we came to being snowed in to Tenaya Lodge. Three days after our folks left the Lodge the following incident occurred. Remember the last day of the Conference was March 17th.

From the National Park Service Morning Report, Yosemite National Park

Life Saved During Severe Winter Storm

A winter storm that began on the night of Friday, March 18th, continued into the following week, dropping heavy snow throughout the park. By the following Monday morning, the Wawona District and nearby community of Fish Camp had received between two and three feet of snow. Highway 41, the only road leading into the park's South Entrance, was closed and impassible due to power line and tree failures outside of the park, leaving Fish Camp residents and guests at the Tenaya Lodge stranded.

Around 11 a.m., dispatch received a 911 call from the Tenaya Lodge, reporting that a 61-year-old man was experiencing chest pain. Because county responders could not get to the hotel, ranger/paramedic Heidi Schlichting responded from Wawona. She reached the man about 15 minutes later, along with a Cal Fire paramedic from Fish Camp, Mark Spencer. An assessment of the patient revealed that he had a history of heart problems and that, due to the nature of his symptoms, he was likely having another cardiac event. Immediate transport was warranted, but weather conditions made this an extremely difficult option. An air evacuation was accordingly ordered. A CHP helicopter flew to the area, but was unable to find an adequate landing zone due to the terrain and inclement weather.

While the helicopter was circling, Schlichting and Spencer began transporting the patient in her patrol car, hoping to somehow meet up with an ambulance. Pushing through over two feet

of snow and maneuvering around stuck motorists, Schlichting drove until she encountered a tree across the road. Using hand and chain saws to clear trees and debris, she slowly made her way down the road, while still maintaining patient care, which included administration of emergency cardiac medications. She was assisted by NPS forestry tech Brian Mattos and NPS fire personnel Taro Pusina and Eric Neiswanger, whose sawyer expertise was invaluable in clearing approximately fifteen trees in very difficult conditions.

It took about an hour-and-a-half for the party to travel approximately two miles, where they encountered power lines down across the road, making it impossible to continue. While waiting for a PG&E utilities crew to reach them to clear the lines, they began devising a plan to extricate the patient over the snow. A Madera County Search and Rescue snow cat arrived on the opposite side of the downed lines and assisted with transporting the man to a waiting ambulance.

It took four hours to reach the ambulance. The man was then transported by ambulance to Oakhurst and flown to St. Agnes Hospital in Fresno, where he subsequently underwent triple bypass surgery. Dispatchers Ansley Rothell and Nancy Bissmeyer played a key role in maintaining communications and coordinating efforts of all involved personnel.

Without the efforts and coordination between the involved agencies, including the NPS, Cal Fire MMU, Sierra National Forest, Mariposa County, Madera County, CHP, and CAL Trans, the man would likely not have survived. [Submitted by Eric Scott, Wawona District Ranger]

Snowshoeing in the Woods

by Richard Weiner

Park Ranger, City of Claremont.

Last month while up in Yosemite for the annual conference we had an opportunity to go to the Badger Pass Ski Area to try a little snowshoeing. Four rangers from the conference went to try this invigorating sport. Meeting at the park ranger station the National Park Ranger gave us a little history and demonstration of the evolution of the snowshoe. After a short briefing, a group of twenty-five of us headed out into the woods. We quickly learned how to use our new means of transportation. About every 15–20 minutes we stopped to catch our breath and listen to a nature talk about what happens to the forest animals when you have 12–14 feet of snow on the ground. About 45 minutes into our walk we stopped at the bottom of a slope that had about a quarter of a mile uphill path. The ranger explained that at the top we would see the Yosemite Valley and its entire splendor. He said “Take your time, it’s worth it.” So we hearty soles started our climb. The few young folks wanted to see how fast they could climb this challenge and made it to the



top quickly. The rest of us took our time and eventually all made it to the top. It was a magnificent view. After spending some time at the top we started our decent. We stopped a few more times and returned about two and a half hours later, tired but feeling good.

These unique experiences that are offered before our conferences even begin, might be ones that are remembered more vividly in our minds.



Spring Brings New Life

by Shane Romain, Park Ranger

Spring has sprung! After a long wet and snowy winter, new life is emerging all around us. Everything from tender grasses, beautiful wildflowers and infant wildlife are enjoying their first season in the world. As with all young beings, this time is dangerous because of the fragility of infancy. This is especially true for young wildlife.

It is not uncommon for park visitors to come across young wildlife in the spring. There are several species of new born in the parks that can be observed from their most delicate state. The parents of the new born wildlife do their best to keep them hidden but spring storms, predators and curious human beings sometimes thwart the efforts of the nurturing parents. Humans can be of great help to exposed infant wildlife but can be a great danger as well.

Many people have heard of what is called the “Bambi Syndrome.” This is a situation where a person may be overcome with the thought that wildlife are cute, cuddly, and need to be taken care of like a pet. Sometimes people forget wild animals are just that and should be treated with the respect they deserve. A person with the best intentions of helping an animal that appears to be in distress may actually be subjecting that animal to unnecessary harm.

It is rare for a wild bird or animal to abandon their young. If a young bird or animal appears to have been left alone, there can be many explanations. Perhaps the mother has gone to forage for food, or the youngling has fallen out of a nest. For example, a doe will hide her well camouflaged and scentless fawn for a period of time while she feeds herself. Sometimes baby squirrels fall from their nest and will appear to be abandoned only to be picked up by their mother later and returned home. Whatever the case may be, it is best to observe the young creature from a distance for an extended amount of time to find out if indeed the animal is in trouble.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine when to intervene in a case where young wildlife appears to be in distress. If a park visitor has already handled the animal it would be best to take over and make sure the right course of action is followed. If an animal is too weak to escape or does not fight when it is picked up, it is already in serious trouble. If at all possible it is always best to return young wildlife to its nest or home for the mother to administer aid and let nature run its course. It is a myth that birds will abandon their young if they are handled by humans.

If it is determined that the situation constitutes intervention, be prepared. There are a few basic steps that anyone can follow to help a positive outcome in a young animal’s life. First, familiarize yourself with the species of wildlife that may reside in the park and their habits. Next, get to know the local wildlife veterinarian, wildlife rehabilitator, the folks at the local animal shelter and local Audubon Society. Finally, have some basic tools and supplies on hand if you need to get involved. The basic emergency supplies for helping troubled wildlife are both inexpensive and easily obtainable.

Many birds and wild animals have either sharp beaks, teeth or claws. Protect yourself! Do not handle any wild animal without putting on a pair of thick leather gloves. There are gloves made especially for handling wildlife but gloves such as welder’s gloves or some types of fire fighting gloves will do. Warmth is critical for young wildlife. Facial tissues work very well for making makeshift nests or tiny blankets. Use materials that can be changed or cleaned easily, do not retain moisture and do not present a danger of snagging claws or nails. Animals that are in distress may very well be dehydrated. A clean plastic medicine dropper is a good tool to administer water. Do not use metal or glass because these materials may break or injure the delicate patient. Also, do not squirt water down the animal’s throat. Gentle drops are best.

Feeding of young wildlife can be tricky and takes a little bit of homework. Hopefully by the time the patient is ready to take food, there will already be arrangements made with a professional. Sometimes the young patient may not even make it to this point.

The decision to euthanize a distressed animal should only be made by a professional wildlife caregiver. There are situations where it would be the obvious and best decision. However, sometimes agencies are quick to determine it is best to administer a “mercy killing.” This is a serious decision that should not be taken lightly.

Of course, there are many resources on the internet that can provide information on aiding distressed wildlife. If spending a lot of time surfing around is not appealing, there is an excellent book titled *Care of the Wild Feathered and Furred* by Mae Hickman and Maxine Guy, which is an wonderful resource for helping sick and injured wildlife of many species.

Stories From Behind the Redwood Curtain Or Pay No Attention to the Man Behind the Keyboard by Patrick Boyle, Region 1

I am not really sure exactly what year I became a card carrying member of PRAC. It's not as if there is a "member since" on my card like American Express. As my camp host used to say "I've got a great memory. It's just short." So I started reminiscing a bit, as we tend to when we get older. I remember attending a trails workshop at Mid Peninsula Open Space, a verbal judo class in Sacramento, and a Project Wild workshop through PRAC. I think the first conference I attended was in San Rafael, and I have been to Santa Rosa, Yosemite and twice to South Lake Tahoe. So what exactly am I doing on this trip down memory lane?

Well like any story, I better start at the beginning. Not the very beginning of course, like my earliest childhood memory, more like the middle. I started working for Humboldt County Parks in May of 1992 after spending a summer working seasonally. I was obviously much younger than I am now. (A mere child of 24) Still they handed me the keys, said good luck this summer, and don't take any bad checks. So with very little training or fanfare I inherited the job of managing a 300 acres of Old Growth Redwoods. It has a 30 site first come, first serve campground; a group reservation camp of 28 sites; and one of the most popular swimming holes in Humboldt County, along with one seasonal employee.

At the end of that first summer when the kids had finally gone back to school and life started to have some semblance of normalcy, I started to wonder what had I gotten myself into. Living on site has its advantages and disadvantages. (More on those for another article....) But what I realized is I needed some help. Professional

if it was in my health plan, of course it wasn't. Our department did a good job on maintenance training but not a lot of anything else. I think it was finally in 1996 (There is that memory thing again) that I stumbled across PRAC. That is my best guess as that is the oldest Signpost I could find in my files. Little did I know where that thread would lead....

One of the conferences I attended Lee Hickinbotham gave a little speech at the banquet dinner between his raffle ticket sales. I vividly remember the lights shining off the top of his head when he removed his pink PRAC hat. But what was even more memorable were these words. "How many of you have attended workshops and conferences sponsored by PRAC? And how many of you have sponsored these workshops? Volunteered at the conference or workshops? Or even written a letter to the *Signpost*?" These next statements, don't quote me on, but it went something like this. "This organization only works through you. It is here for you, it is about you. What has PRAC done for you and more importantly what have you done for PRAC? If you only eat from the plate the rest of us will go hungry" or some other metaphor like that..... He was talking about me. I was taking all the benefits without giving much back.

I know we all have a lot on our own plate let alone attempting to balance one more thing. (I finally went to a dinner platter with side rails; I don't tend to spill so much that way.) So I understand making the commitment to one more thing. The other excuse I always used was what did I have to offer? I am not a law enforcement type, I am not an expert. I couldn't think of what I had to give or add to this organization. Now that a few

"Involvement with these issues means you are involved with the good people. The people with the live hearts... the live eyes... the live heads.... Think of the people in your lives. Who are the people you surround yourself with? Who are the people that make your life worthwhile? Usually they are the people who are committed to something.

So in the final analysis commitment in and of itself whether you win or not, is something that truly makes your life worthwhile"

Harry Chapin speaking about Pete Seeger

Stories From Behind the Redwood Curtain

(Continued from previous page)

more years have passed, I have some younger folks looking to me for guidance. Now that is a scary thought I try not to dwell on to much. So I guess I do have some experience under my belt to offer and share.

Someone asked me recently what has PRAC done for me?. I can tell you this; it has made me a better park professional. (Replace that with your title if you like, it all applies.) It made me realize all the aspects that are encompassed in being a complete well rounded ranger type. I am of the belief that "a ranger is everything to everybody". I am supposed to be the expert, so it challenged me to expand my knowledge and keep my "A" game together. It has helped me make my agency better. But it has also shown me that I am not alone. There is an entire group of like minded individuals facing the same challenges and joys that I do on a daily basis. I can not imagine how my professional career would be without this group of dedicated individuals whom I have

learned so much from. That's you, in case I lost you somewhere in these ramblings.

So now the rest of the storyI could not let my region go without representation and I threw my name in the ring. So for better or worse, richer or poorer, I added a commitment to PRAC (to you) onto my plate. Lee, your speech did not fall on deaf ears! It just took a while to find some confidence to go for it. (I still do not think I have confidence to wear the pink hat just yet, but my wife thinks it's my color.) Thanks to all of you who went for it and took a chance on me by writing me in. I hope to prove worthy of the task and I know we can accomplish a lot together. I urge each and everyone to go for it, get involved. I know I sound like Lee here but, these programs are for you, about you, and put on by you. I love the PRAC Net Forums, I look forward to reading the *Signpost*, and I look forward to seeing you in Yosemite!

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