

The Signpost

July-August, 2011



Calling All Region!

I know that crazy time is upon us where time is precious but if you get a moment can you drop me a line. I will send this out over the net after the Signpost comes out as a reminder.

Training topics for an October /November Session. What can we provide you that your agency can not? What do you need for your PRAC certificate? CEU's with Pesticide / POST / Education or maybe some personal enrichment?

Other Agencies that you work with or know of in your area so we can work on bringing them into the PRAC Family and Network.

Thoughts on a Region 1 and or PRAC get together, I was looking at renting the BBQ are / Booth / or group tickets for an A's Game in September. Figure we should try and support the other green collar workers.

Region 1 consists of Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Lake, Napa, Marin, Sonoma, and Alameda Counties. However we are not exclusive and will include any other regions or PRAC members at large.

Thanks gang,

Patrick Boyle

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707-768-3898 Work and Home

Are Park Rangers Everywhere?

Have you ever wondered how far reaching our profession is? I have.

I know there are park rangers on every continent. Yes, even Antarctica. As for every country, well let's say of the 192 countries recognized by the United Nations, 29 do not have national parks.

But what about the United States? We know we have national parks and all fifty states have a state park system. But unlike California, not every state has park rangers at the city or county level. After many inquiries, I learned nine states do not have park rangers at the local level. Can you guess which ones? They are: Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

Okay there's some trivia at the next California Parks Conference happy hour!

Jeff Ohlfs
North American Rep, IRF

Search and Rescue Training “Human Tracking” by Richard Weiner

On June 15, Region 5 and the San Diego County Park Rangers held a training on human tracking at Mt. Gower in San Diego. After some date cancelations due to weather and other items it finally came to fruition. When we started planning this training we figured we would get about 35 rangers participating. We had around 75 rangers attend of which 16 were PRAC members.

Our training began at 9:00 AM with an hour and a half of orientation given to us by the San Diego Mountain Rescue Team. This information included: first responder actions for missing person, protecting the PLS, tracking description, tracking teams, signs along the way, using the sun, to name a few. After our quick learning session, we broke into teams of 5 and were given a tracking path to follow. We were given only the shoe print of the person we were tracking and direction, and off we went. We trekked through waist high brush and dried streambeds. For us novices, it was quite a challenge. An hour later we came across a little pink note on a tree that said “The End.” We had found our way to our lost imaginary camper, and we were happy trackers!

The information we learned gave us a better insight of what has to be done in the event a person is lost in our parks. I would like to thank Roger Covalt (S.D. Co. Parks) for helping arrange this valuable training.



Helping Hands; Eyes and Ears

by Shane Romain, Park Ranger

In these challenging times of layoffs, diminishing budgets, limited staffing and on it goes, we as park professionals can really use all the help we can get. There are quite a few volunteer-based organizations that are out there to help parks. With a little research, a person could find any number of “friends of” type organizations or if in or near a college town, several fraternities and sororities that want to contribute to their communities. Those are just a couple avenues someone could take in order to find additional help. There are several other options out there. However, much of the time the help is temporary and as a result long lasting relationships with involved members are difficult to establish. To solve that problem why not create an “in house” volunteer program?

The City of Chico is home to one of the largest municipal parks in the nation, Bidwell Park. Bidwell Park is nearly 4,000 acres of park patron bliss. The diverse landscape offers something for just about anyone. Additionally, Chico also has large expanses of greenway areas and several smaller parks scattered throughout the town. There are 4 park rangers who are tasked to look after all of these places. That does not mean 4 rangers at once, usually only one per shift. It is impossible for one ranger to effectively visit all the areas of responsibility in a shift. Good thing that there are dedicated volunteers to help!

Park Watch is the City of Chico Parks Division’s longest running organized volunteer program. Since its inception in 1994, Park Watch membership has grown into 135 dedicated volunteers. Park Watch volunteers work for the benefit of the visitors, wildlife and trails of Chico’s parks and greenways. They act as ambassadors to the parks by providing visitors with information and advising park staff about damage, hazards, vandalism and any other concerns they encounter while in the park. The main idea of Park

Watch is that these enthusiastic volunteers are highly visible.

Park Watch is self-governed with a steering committee comprised of elected members and organized by a park ranger liaison. Yearly training sessions are held in the spring to welcome aboard people that are interested in becoming Park Watch volunteers. After a potential Park Watch volunteer goes through his or her training sessions, submits the necessary forms and successfully completes a criminal background check they will receive their ID badge and Park Watch tee shirt.

Park Watch volunteers are required to spend at least 4 hours a month in the parks to maintain active membership. This is not a problem at all because these same people are in the park anyway. While volunteering, Park Watchers may bike, walk, run, ride horseback or just sit at their favorite spot. Again, the idea is for the volunteers to be visible and with their green shirts and bright yellow letters that spell out Park Watch, there is no mistaking they are a City of Chico volunteer.

Over the years the Park Watch program has had ups and downs and has gone through some changes. Just as any volunteer program or organization there does need to be room for improvement and change. If your agency is interested in starting a similar program or has one in place, I would like to hear from you. (region3@calranger.org) I would be happy to supply any information that would help start a program or compare notes with an existing program. The City of Chico Park Watch volunteers have been very helpful to both the visitors of the parks and to park staff. With our limited resources these volunteers have proved to be a very valuable asset to helping keep our parks clean, safe and fun places to visit.



Thought for the Day

by Pam Helmke

Just a thought for the day. Many of us are stressed and unsure of what is happening in our lives and our chosen careers. We feel unappreciated, and unvalued by our management or Government Leaders and some of the public we serve. Being a Ranger has never been easy. It does not matter if you are a National, State or local Ranger we all serve for the similar reasons in similar conditions. The job we do is important, even if many short sighted leaders don't see it. I've noticed over my 20 plus year career that Rangers are not ones to brag about what they do. We just do our jobs. But in this time of budget cuts it's time for us to put on our hats, hold our heads high and let the people know what we do and why

The text below contains some of the most heartfelt words about our profession I have ever seen, They were spoken during the funeral service for Jeff Christensen an NPS Ranger who died in the line of duty in July of 2005 while on solo back county patrol in Rocky Mountain National Park. I've kept this on my desk top since then to remind me why I do this. I find the last paragraph the most important. I hope these words inspire you and help you continue to fight the good fight.

WE ARE RANGERS

"We are rangers. We walk the last of the wild lands, patrolling the interface between man and nature. Ours is the world of the sun and sky, cloud and storm. Ours is the world of flower and tree, rock and mountain. We rest by the waterfall and cool our feet in the deep pools of the glen. The elk and deer, the coyote and fox, our silent companions. The hawk and eagle follow us by day, the owl leads us by night.

"We are rangers. We travel alone, silent caretakers of a world fast disappearing. It is not our job, rather it is our honor, to behold that which nature has bestowed upon us. It is not our job, rather it is our privilege, to play some small part in preserving this beauty for our children and their children beyond them. We travel alone, there are few of us, and the task which lays before us is enormous. Some say we face risk, even unnecessary risk, but in our hearts we know that it is nothing compared to the loss of the wilderness. It is nothing compared to the loss of the bear, the cougar, and the wolf. We risk all to protect that which endures beyond our individual selves, that which we love beyond all else.

"We are rangers. We treat our fellow man with respect. We understand those who seek solitude in the wild places. We are teachers, to those who wish to tread for the first time on ground made of dirt rather than concrete. We watch in delight at the smile of the visitor who first substitutes the canyons of skyscrapers for that of massive cliffs.

"We feel the excitement of the family who first hears the bugle of the elk, the child who sees the bighorn ram, and the grandmother who reviews her life while sitting by the flowing stream.

"We are rangers. We keep those who would harm the land as well as those who would harm their fellow man at bay. We care for the sick, search for the lost, assist those who cannot assist themselves. Sometimes we bring home those who would not otherwise return."

Remarks from the memorial service
for Jeff Christensen, NPS Park Ranger,
Rocky Mountain National Park

Mark Magnuson, Chief Ranger,
Rocky Mountain National Park

The “S” Word

by Patrick Boyle, Region 1

Yes it's that time of year again. Time for people to shake off that cabin fever, and get out to the park. Yes I am talking “*summer*”. Although we seem off to a slow start, we all know it will be here with an appetite to make even the most patient ranger roll his eyes, yank out the last of their hair, and dream of fall.

It's difficult repeating yourself all day. I always have to remind myself that even though I have said it 20 times today, this may be the first time this visitor has heard it. Maybe they can't read ...or did not understand the sign. Maybe they just think they are “special.” Maybe they are! One day as I was passing some folks on my way to deal with yet another off leash issue. I guess I was talking to myself out loud. I kept repeating “It's not the dogs fault, he can't read the signs.” After my contact the visitors I passed stopped me and we had a good chuckle over the ranger talking to himself about dogs who can't read, and the number of times I had said that this week.

Visitor issues are always a juggling act. Are they ignorant or just an ignoramus? Do they pass the attitude test? Do they just need a little education, an interpretive moment, or do they need to pay a little tuition for this education? A gentle nudge to behave or do you give them the boot? Do you get to use your quiet voice, or the ranger baritone “can I have your attention please” prompt?

All of this goes through your mind as you make first contact with your individual or group. We also have our pet peeves, things that are more likely to get our dander up and set up a singular response. Do not fall into this trap. While the outcome may be predetermined, the journey to that point can take many divergent paths. I know of a sheriff who actually gets most people to thank him even though they are getting a citation. People skills are the hardest won set of skills a person can master. Some people have it, others just never get it. When a contact goes bad it is important to take some time to go back over the situation and asses it. Not only to lower your BP and stop grinding your teeth, but to look at it objectively and see if you could have handled the situation a little differently for a more positive outcome. Sometimes there is no positive outcome other than coming out of it with your skin still in tact, and getting to go home and spend time with your dog. ok family. But my dog is always happy to see me.

Sometimes people just need to vent because their trip is not working out as they envisioned it for whatever reason, and now you have stepped into

their personal drama. When that drama reaches its peak and you become the focus of their wrath, and they yell and scream, and start acting like a spoiled child, they eventually utter the words I am waiting to hear “I am never coming back here again!” At this point I always have a hard time not dropping to my knees and begging that person to come back because they are the type of individual I want to see everyday. I also just want to throw up my arms in the touchdown symbol. Score one for the good guys! Score one for me for keeping my feelings in check and not doing the above actions. Sometimes it's easy to keep your calm because they are making a fool out of themselves; sometimes they hit your button. It is hard not to take these rants personally at times.

I came across a great set of tapes many years ago by George Thompson from the Verbal Judo Institute. It was a great set of scenarios and ways of communicating and not allowing yourself to escalate the situation. Listening to the tapes helped me deal with some of my more difficult individuals much more effectively. Since then I have also been to some other workshops that have helped honed my skills. If you find yourself having more contacts that go bad than good maybe you need to step up to the plate. I know it's tough to admit that we can be part of the problem instead of being part of the solution.. Maybe it's time to do some self evaluation, ask for some critique from your peers, or be an observer as someone else handles the contact. Get some training or a refresher on handling difficult people, managing your boss, verbal judo or any other communication skills. Maybe you do just have a park full of crappy difficult visitors, and if that is the case I am truly sorry. I like to think that 99% of the people are decent folks; it's just some days I just spend 99% of my time dealing with that 1%. Some of the best advice I ever heard was from the movie “Roadhouse.” Patrick Swayze says “all those words are strung together to get a response out of you. They are just nouns and verbs....Remember just be nice.” That does not mean bending over backwards but it's about respect and that teaspoon of sugar that helps the medicine go down. Don't throw gas on the fire, keep your cool and professional attitude, get some training, and stay safe.

Good luck with your juggling act this summer. It helps if all items are equally weighted. That is one of life's many secrets.

Vacation State of Mind

When perfectly rational logical people go on vacation and forget to pack their brains.

I Did It & So Can You!

by Pam Helmke, Region 2

In 2001 PRAC established a series of Standards and Training Guidelines to help preserve and document the training required to be a Generalist Ranger. In an age of specialization PRAC looked at the skills needed for rangers to develop a minimum competency in all the key areas a generalist would use. For 10 years any PRAC member could submit their documentation to receive a Certificate of Completion in six key learning and skill domains: Law Enforcement, Interpretation, Resource Management, Fire/Rescue, Park Maintenance, and EMS. Applicants can submit their documentation for a single domain or any combination of domains with the ultimate goal of completing all the domains to receive their Generalist Ranger Certificate.

Although I participated in the development of the Training and Standards Guidelines all those years ago I realized that I had never submitted my documentation. Last year I made it my personal goal to gather and submit my packet for the full Generalist Ranger Certificate. Like many, I thought this would be a time consuming and arduous task. I found it only took me a few days to sort through my college transcripts and download a few course descriptions to document content. A quick e-mail to PRAC's continuing education coordinator, John Havicon, produced a transcript of all the CE hours I had earned at various conferences and trainings and after some time at the photocopier I had my packet ready to go. The hardest part was selecting two appropriate interpretive program outlines to include.

Over all I spent about 12 hours, (a few here, a few there) to gather all the information and list it on the downloadable form. I felt a little bit of pride as I dropped the envelope in the mail box to await the results of my peer review.

During the 2011 California Parks Conference Awards Banquets I was proud to receive my Generalist Ranger Certificate and then wondered why it had taken me 10 years to do some simple paperwork.

I hope that every member will take some time to carefully check out the Standards and Training Guidelines link on the PRAC web page. You'll probably be surprised how many domains you have completed. If you are in need of a training that your agency or local educational institution doesn't offer please contact your Region Director. If you need the training it's a good bet others do to and we can work on setting up a class. Your regional director can also help you sort through any questions you have about the application process.

I'd like to challenge each and every member to set a personal goal to complete at least one learning domain by next years conference. I'm also hopeful the board will be able to award more than one Generalist Ranger Certificate next year. Remember, it's free and not nearly as hard as it looks. I did it! I promise, it really wasn't that hard.

From the Bedside Table of Patrick Boyle

“The Last Season”

by Eric Blehm

I remember following this story as it unfolded. It happened the first year I became a full time park guy. Randy Morgenson, an 18 year veteran seasonal backcountry ranger goes missing, deploying one of the longest and largest search effort undertaken at that point for any missing individual. I first caught wind of the story on NPR and then was able to get updates from a friend over at Redwood National Park. I felt a connection to the ranger community even though I was not involved. Reading this book put me back into my early park days when I still thought about becoming a back country ranger. I still have that dream.

Eric's writing reminds me of Jon Krakauer (Into Thin Air and Into the Wild), He wraps you up in the story and weaves the tapestry of events leading up to Randy disappearance, begging the question of what really did happen to him? Randy's log book entries were impressive. They were just not lists, but insights into wilderness and the connectivity that many of us feel but so few of us can express in words. It showed the personal side of life as a backcountry ranger and how those events reach us even out there in the wild.

To find out what happened get the book. A little mystery in life makes it all that more precious. Hope you get some time to do a little reading this summer.

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