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THE SIGNPOST

Fourth Quarter, 2018



Dear Members and Supporters of the Park Rangers Association of California,

Please enjoy this issue of *The Signpost*. Use the hyperlinks below to jump to a specific article, or scroll through and read the whole newsletter whenever and wherever is convenient for you.

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2019 PRAC Conference Update

March 4 - 7, Ventura Beach

Next year's conference is right around the corner, and it is shaping up nicely. For the first time, we will have a Color Guard at the opening of the conference!

[Professor Kerry Plemmons](#) from the University of Denver will start us off with a keynote



address on Public Safety Leadership. Professor Plemmons will also offer an all-day class in Public Safety Leadership under the Park Law Enforcement Track. Anyone taking this class will get a certificate from the University of Denver.

Some of the other courses that will be offered in the PRAC tracks include:

- Initial Response to Missing Persons in Park Settings
- Drug Recognition-West Coast Trends
- Homeless Liaison-Legal Update in Park Environments
- Crisis Intervention in Parks
- Hazmat Awareness
- Ventura Fire Overview-Lessons Learned
- CSI in Park Environments
- Surviving Storm Season
- The Impacts of Encampments on Park Operations
- Tips and Techniques to Building Sustainable Trails
- Oakland Trails Program
- The Ecology of the Santa Monica Mountain Lions
- Roving Interpretation
- Connecting Trail Maintenance to Interpretation

There will be more courses to come, so stay tuned. The Ventura County Sheriff's Department has invited us to visit the Camarillo Airport on Monday for a variety of classes at no cost. Lunch will be provided. If you decide to stay through Thursday, consider joining us for

a boat trip to the Channel Islands.

Conference registration should be available soon. The hotel link is <https://book.passkey.com/e/49657006?mode=find-res> You can also call the group reservation department at 1-888-233-9527 and tell them you're part of the Park Rangers Association of California. If anyone would like to offer a course in natural resource management or interpretation at the conference, please contact us at region5@calranger.org or region4@calranger.org . We also welcome any volunteers who would like to help with the registration table.

Candi Hubert

PRAC Vice President/Region 5 Director

Under the Flat Hat

Notes from PRAC President Matt Cerkel

Recently, there has been a concerning development with the management of one state park unit. China Camp State Park, managed by the Friends of China Camp (FOCC) group, has replaced its only park ranger with private security guards! Even worse, the state park rangers in the Marin Sector have been told by state park management



NOT to respond to ANY calls at China Camp. Since this change there have been calls for medical aid, rescues, searches for lost hikers, and even an armed robbery at China Camp! To make matters worse, evidently no one at state parks or FOCC bothered to inform the Marin

County Sheriff's Office or other allied first responders of the change in ranger staffing!

Public safety and protection of park resources in China Camp State Park are greatly reduced. There is a significant delay in responding to any emergency call. The workload for allied first responders has increased. There is little or no protection of the natural or cultural resources in the park. I wonder if any private security guards responded to any of the calls listed above. Do they do anything to protect the park's natural or cultural resources?

Despite the risks to public safety and resource protection, State Park administrators portray China Camp and a few other parks run by private interests or friends/nonprofit groups as the model for successful reform of California state parks. Significant problems within these parks, including out-of-control illegal trail building, lack of compliance with state park regulations, gang issues, failure to protect resources, decreased public safety, and even illegal acts by the non-state park management firms or their employees, are apparently overlooked. If these are models of success, I hate to think what a failure would look like. Replacing park rangers who have hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of training with a single private security guard is grossly negligent. Imagine what would happen if CHP or CDFW stated they would not respond to emergencies or enforce laws in a portion of their respective jurisdictions, or that they would replace their trained officers with private security firm employees in some areas.

I hope the next governor replaces the current director of State Parks with someone who is passionate about parks, has a background in park management and park protection, views parks as something more than a source of revenue, and would either provide proper oversight when private interests run parks, or end this practice entirely. An ideal director would end or heavily revise the program that allows private interests or non-profits to run state parks, and provide proper staffing, including rangers, to ALL California state parks. Any director of state parks could learn from the National Park Service's first director, Stephen Mather, who stated, "It is believed, however, that no efficient protection can be given to the parks without the support of a well-organized and disciplined police force of some description." It's time for California state parks to support their park police force, the rangers, again.

In other news, since the last Signpost, I've learned of two new ranger programs. The first is the new waterfront ranger for the Eureka Police Department. This is a sworn [position](#) that requires a POST Basic Certificate and is armed. There is also up to \$20,000 signing bonus for lateral transfers! The second is the new park ranger program in the City of Napa Parks and Recreation. Those rangers are currently part-time and are non-sworn. I welcome both programs to the ranger profession in California. There is value in ranger programs, and I'm glad to see the list of agencies employing rangers growing again.

Park Tech: Wildlife-Friendly Vault Restrooms for the Civilized

by Andy Brown

That's right - I'm about to give insight into how to make the dreaded primitive restroom near you a more inhabitable place for park visitors and less hazardous for the local critters – on the cheap.

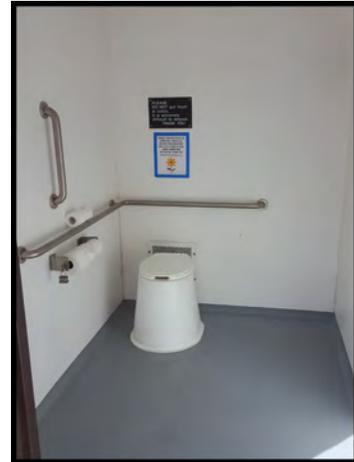


For those of you out there like yours truly who manage parks, trailheads, open spaces, beaches, campgrounds, or other remote areas with vault restrooms, maintenance can be a pretty rough chore. They are often gross, dingy, smelly, and disgusting – which contributes to the negative public perception of these facilities.

There are, however, a few things that can help to fight that perception while enhancing the experience of your visitors. Think of it in terms of the broken window effect but in reverse – cleaner, nicer facilities are treated better by the public, who are more inclined to keep them cleaner for the next

person. It has worked in my park, and it will likely work in yours. Who knows? You may even get a few compliments.

Keep it clean and free of vandalism and bugs! The restrooms in your park say a lot about it, since they are often one of the first places people visit upon arrival. For the commuter or family on a road trip, a visit to the restroom may be the extent of their experience in your park before they continue on their way. Keeping up on maintenance will help to convey your presence, and maybe even prevent unsanctioned behavior, even if staffing levels prevent it from being higher priority for patrols. It is reassuring to many visitors to see that the facility is well cared for, and that someone may be along any minute to tidy it up.



We all know that people read every sign that is out there, right? All things considered, this notice has had its desired effect. Most people get this concept and follow suit, which seems to help. I've also found that a little humor on signage like this can be more effective than "don't do this or that."

Another little trick that makes a difference is the use of an inconspicuously placed car air freshener. They last a few months, work just as well any other option, and are relatively inexpensive for the service that they provide in keeping the room smelling surprisingly pleasant. Taping one to the back side of the riser will keep it hidden if you need a different placement.



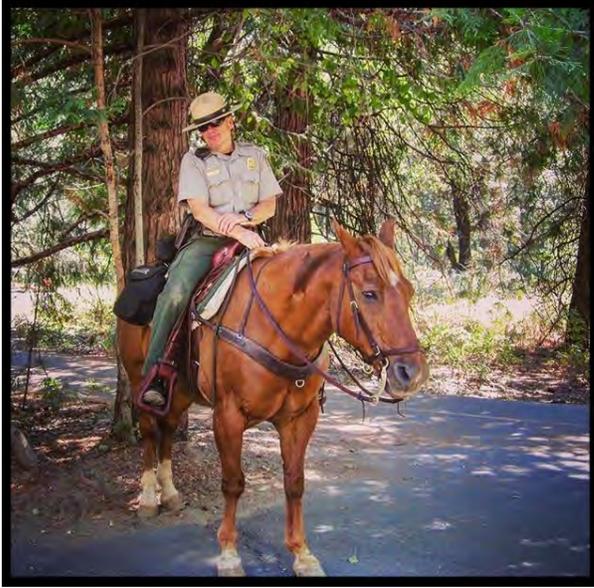
Most vault restrooms (and most portables for that matter) can actually present a hazard to cavity nesting birds, especially owls and smaller raptors. Placing a cover over the vent can prevent them from flying into the vents and becoming trapped. One option is to purchase a custom-made cover, such as this one produced by the Teton Raptor Center <http://tetonraptorcenter.org/our-work/poo-poo-project/> for \$29.99. [Editor's note: The photos of owls rescued from toilet vaults make this a worthwhile link to click!]

A budget-friendly option is to spend about \$5 to make your own vent. Going with this option gives the added benefit of reducing or eliminating any flying insect issues inside of the vault. This DIY version was built using a piece of aluminum window screen cut from a 36"x8' roll and two 10-12" stainless steel hose clamps.



A Visitor's Perspective on Park Rangers by Matt and Karen Smith

Having visited hundreds of parks in the last decade, we've had countless interactions with Park Rangers. From the rangers who've guided us through spectacular parks like Glacier Bay, Carlsbad Caverns, and Mesa Verde, to the rangers staffing the information desks who've given us invaluable hiking advice, and the ones we've met building and maintaining the trails so that the parks are safe for visitors, every ranger plays an integral role in the experiences that park-goers have. A park ranger is



the face and the voice of the park.

People who've read our books often ask us what they should do on their upcoming trip to a particular park. Our first, and usually only advice is, "Ask a ranger." In fact, there are very few questions we get about the parks that we don't eventually respond with the same answer, "Ask a ranger."

Even frequent visitors would have a hard time accumulating the depth of experience about a park that a ranger has. There are so many variables to consider - weather, time of year, recent wildlife activity, and trail conditions, to name a few. Rangers see the park on a daily basis. Many live in the park, and they have the benefit of experiencing the area in a variety of situations. They've also seen what happens when visitors try to do an activity for which they're not prepared. Rangers can give more accurate and relevant advice about their park than any guidebook and most experts.

If everyone were to follow this suggestion, it would turn every ranger, regardless of what he or she is doing at that moment, into an information desk. It doesn't matter if he's in the middle of cleaning a pit toilet, the ranger must be prepared for the inevitable questions. "Sorry to bother you, but we just saw a skunk walking through our campsite, and we were wondering if it was a Western hog-nosed skunk or an American hog-nosed skunk." This is good, though - the more likely the public is to seek a ranger's advice, the less likely the ranger will have to drop what he or she is doing in the middle of the day (or night) and join the rescue crew (or worse, the recovery crew).

Training the public to seek a ranger's advice requires that visitors have positive experiences when interacting with rangers. While not easy to do, rangers must learn that invaluable customer service trick of hitting the reset button after every

visitor interaction regardless of how bizarre, strange, unpleasant, or just plain whacky the last one was. Anyone who has worked with the public for any length of time has gotten to the point at least once in their career (or day) when they would rather not deal with the next visitor/customer. It would be understandable if they took a break and resorted to one-word answers or avoided interactions altogether.

But consider this when feeling that way - you never know who you're talking to. This doesn't mean you should flash a fake smile because the next visitor might be someone important, or your boss's boss. That person standing in front of you may very well be going through something that you know nothing about, and their visit to your park could be a trip they've looked forward to for a lifetime. Or, their visit to your park could be the experience that brings them joy as they look back on it for a lifetime.

One of the things we've learned by talking with readers of our books is how important parks are to people from all walks of life. We've received countless messages from people going through difficult, sometimes terminal, situations who are comforted by their memories of the great outdoors. And for some, their single motivation to get through their difficult time might be the thought of one day experiencing those incredible places, sometimes knowing it will be their last or only time.

And, there's another critical reason to strive to make every visitor's experience a positive one - the parks' survival depends on visitors' experiences. Extremely rare is the park that has more money in its budget than they know what to do with. More often, the administrators have to make difficult decisions about which programs or staff positions to cut because of limited budgets.

We cannot expect politicians or government officials to allocate money to places no one visits, regardless of how important those places may be to future generations. What decision-makers understand is popularity. It's difficult to cut funding to a place that has a huge fan base. A park can become too popular, for sure - over-crowding creates other challenges. But, a park has a chance at surviving—and thriving—when the public appreciates it and visits it. Visitation is affected by the quality of experiences people have when in the park, and rangers are key in determining those experiences.

Biography:

Matt and Karen have been married for over 35 years and live in the Seattle, Washington area. Both grew up in the Midwest. They met at the University of Kansas and have been together ever since. They are the authors of the bestselling book titled [Dear Bob and Sue](#), a story of their travels to all 59 of the

“national park” national parks in the U.S. They authored and published [Dories, Ho!](#) in October 2017, also a travel memoir, about their float trip on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

A Quiet World

by Tom “Smitty” Smith



After reading Douglas Brinkley’s book, [The Quiet World](#), about the creation of wilderness areas in Alaska, it came to me that there is another reason for natural parks and wildlands. Areas set aside as wildland parks are places of quiet. Most modern park planners today set aside a grove of trees in urban parks for that very purpose: a place

where people can have some quiet reflection, away from the rat race that sometimes defines urban life. It is also an effort to give an urban population a taste of nature.

An escape to quietness is certainly one reason we set parks aside. After spending a summer in Yosemite’s backcountry, my mind became tuned to the silence. I only heard the birds sing, or the gurgle of a stream, or the wind in the trees – so much so, that when I came back to an urban area, any noise, like a car passing by our house, drew my attention.

After returning from spending a summer as a wilderness ranger, I was standing at a gas station in our local town. Heavy traffic was whizzing by in large numbers. I asked the station attendant how he could withstand all the noise. His answer was “What noise?”

Colorado State University biologist George Wittemeyer has determined that people in parks today hear only half the sounds that they would hear in natural silence. Scientists measured sound level in 492 places, from city parks to remote national parks, and found that in nearly two thirds of the lower 48 states’ parks, noise from human activities is twice as loud as natural background noises [[source](#)]. Noise, like light, can upset the normal habits of wildlife such as seeking food, seeking mates, or staying safe. As humans in this modern era, we get to the point where we can tune out noise.

The Hoh Rain Forest in Olympic National Park is pretty remote. It is far from the hustle and bustle caused by development and road use, and it is a pretty quiet place. For the past 35 years, acoustic ecologist [Gordon Hempton](#) has been documenting the sounds of the forest, including sounds caused by humans, sounds from overhead aircraft, and sounds that are part of nature. His tests have caused Hempton to believe that silence is on the verge of extinction.

To some people, parks are like temples. Places like Yosemite National Park, the cathedral redwoods, and oak woodlands that are found in my own county fill people with such awe that just visiting there is a religious experience. When I was a ranger at Merced Lake in Yosemite, a good friend who spent summers at the High Sierra Camp showed me fern grottos and secret meadows where shafts of light shone down upon wildflowers. They were awesome! Several of the regional parks in the San Francisco Bay Area have such fern grottos, and wildflowers are abundant in the springtime. The citizens need to know how lucky they are to live in a state like California that cherishes public open space.

There is a growing field of medicine called “ecotherapy” – nature-based programs that can help patients cope with mental and physical illnesses [[source](#)]. Instead of giving pills, doctors are increasingly prescribing a walk in a park as a part of a person’s daily routine. Patients are told to listen to the chirping of birds and the sounds of lakes and streams, and to visualize the trees and leaves. This only works, of course, if those sounds can be heard.

The above is an excerpt from the updated third edition of [A Ranger Pure and Simple](#) written by the author and published in 2018. Tom "Smitty" Smith is a retired instructor and Coordinator of Park Management at West Valley College and a former NPS Seasonal Ranger in Yosemite.

Getting to Know You: Headwaters Forest Reserve by Mike Warner, Region 1, Director

In late April I got the opportunity to visit the Headwaters Forest Reserve in the northern reaches of Region 1 up in Fortuna, CA with a colleague of mine. The Headwaters Forest Reserve is a 7472-acre reserve that was established by congress in 1999 and is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The rich history of the reserve covers everything from late 1800s, early 1900s logging to Political activism and corporate corruption. Establishing the reserve was the culmination of a nearly a



decade-long grass roots environmental struggle to protect old growth redwoods in the area. This tract of land was owned by the Pacific Lumber Company until it was protected in 1999. Now it is home to several endangered species, including Coho Salmon, the Northern Spotted Owl, and the

Marbled Murrelet.

There are two hiking trailheads within the reserve. The first, is the Elk River Trail on the northern end of the reserve. This trail follows the Elk River for three miles before heading uphill for another two miles to a loop in an old growth redwood grove. The second trailhead is at Salmon Pass, and is accessible by reservation only between May 15th and November 15th. The trailhead is not accessible to the public, as you must cross private logging company lands to reach it.



We met Ranger Julie Clark in town and followed her out to the reserve. Julie attended Humboldt State University and has worked for the Bureau of Land Management since 1999. Julie started working at the Headwaters Forest Reserve shortly after it was officially protected. She leads educational programs, maintains the trails, and currently is part of an incident management team for the Bureau of Land Management.



We started our hike from the Salmon Pass Trailhead. The trail follows an old logging road through a couple of former clear-cut areas. At a creek crossing, the trail splits to form a loop. We headed up through an old growth stand of redwoods. Many of these trees are over 1,000 years old, and are at

least 5' in diameter. These giants also bear a similar mark, a blue slash spray painted across their trunks. The slash was left by workers of the Pacific Logging

Company as they cruised the redwood grove marking trees to fell for lumber production.

We continued up and out of the forest to a ridgeline where we stopped at a salamander study site that is a project between a local school and the reserve's biologist. We ate lunch and then headed back down towards the creek crossing, getting a good look at a more recent clear-cut area. Julie explained the natural progression of recovery in a redwood forest, and pointed out the Red Alders growing up in the place of the Redwoods. The Alders help put nitrogen back into the soil and provide shade that allows the Redwoods to sprout.

Before long we were back at the trailhead. The guided hike was about two hours total, and not very strenuous. If you happen to find yourself in Fortuna in the future I recommend checking out the Headwaters Forest Reserve. Amazing old growth redwood stands, and great examples of forest regeneration make this an excellent place to visit.

If you are interested in a "Getting to Know You" article highlighting your agency for the Signpost, please email the [newsletter editor](#).

Letter to the Editor

It has been several years since PRAC has had a joint conference with our colleagues in CSPRA. This joint conference was an institution for over 30 years and added to the experience. We have a part of us missing without CSPRA. I for one want a return to the joint conference. I am asking any candidate for PRAC office to please include in their profile if they support returning to a joint conference. I ask my fellow members to please make sure their PRAC officers and representatives know their wishes on returning to a joint conference. Thank you and see you in Ventura.

Jeff Ohlfs
Retired

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Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.



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