



## First Quarter 2022

### President's Message

The decision to reschedule our 2022 California Parks Training Conference at the Rush Creek Lodge to March 2023 was difficult. It was made after taking into consideration that many of our member agencies and some of our speaker's agencies had travel or training restrictions due to the latest Covid surge. Other considerations included protecting the health of our members, speakers, and the staff at the lodge. The final consideration was the financial health of our conference fund: anytime a conference is held there is a monetary requirement that must be met. Most of these costs are normally met by room bookings and food and beverage purchases, but with lagging bookings and conference registrations it was likely our conference fund would have faced a significant bill. Luckily, we had a clause that allowed us to reschedule, and the Rush Creek Lodge worked closely with us to make this happen.

The new dates of the now 2022-23 California Parks Training Conference will be March 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at the Rush Creek Lodge. We are planning to keep as many of our previously scheduled speakers and events as possible, but there will also be a few surprises, which we will announce in the coming months. The room rate will be \$125 a night. It will be a great event and I look forward to seeing many of you there.



This March, we will have a virtual conference again with multiple sessions and a keynote speech over Zoom. All the presentations will be available afterwards on PRAC's YouTube channel. Look for announcements on a virtual conference on PRACnet soon. We will also have a virtual General Membership Meeting in March; this will include the rollout of PRAC's revised Ranger Certification.

The last two years have been challenging for all of us. The parks we all protect and preserve have provided solace for many of our visitors. We have seen significant increases in use at our parks and many new visitors. This at times has presented challenges, but also highlights the importance of what we do as Park Rangers. I believe we have risen to the challenge and our parks and park rangers are resilient.

Matt Cerkel





# 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rancho San Rafael Regional Park



By Celia Walker, Washoe County Park Ranger

On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1982, Rancho San Rafael Regional Park in Reno, Nevada opened to the public. With enthusiasm and pride, Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space will celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rancho San Rafael Regional Park this year, with a celebration planned the end of June. Events planned include a park history exhibit during the entire month of June in the Wilbur D May Museum, followed by a fun-filled day of live music, park stories, guided walks, mural art exhibit, farmed animals, food, games, and volunteer park cleanup.

## **History of the park**

The land of the original Park was a 420-acre working ranch considered an oasis in the desert. Seasonal creeks flowed through the ranch and the highland ditch diverted water from the Truckee River, irrigating pastures that provided green spaces amongst the brown hills of the high desert. A long history of agriculture was associated with the land, including sheep grazing and Hereford cows. Dr. Raphael Herman, a wealthy Beverly Hills businessman, and his brother Norman obtained the land in 1935 from widow Hulda Jenson. The Herman's never lived in Reno but would visit during the summer.

The Herman's hired ranch foreman Art Cerfoglio to run operations, and over the years several families acted as ranch caretakers. In the mid-1970's, Norman's wife Marianna Herman was the sole owner and decided to put the ranch up for sale.



Fortunately, Marianna was a stubborn seller, or this highly sought-after land could have easily fallen to urbanization. Another defining factor for establishing a park was the foresight of key individuals in government and Nevada Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) investment to purchase the ranch by outbidding competitive private developers and the University of Nevada for the property. PERS purchased the ranch and allowed Washoe County a 5-year window to find funds to secure and develop Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. A parks bond was needed, and passionate citizens of Reno rallied! Battle cries of “pass the bond for the park,” “preserve quality of life,” and “save something for the children” spread throughout Reno and Washoe County. The battle born cries were heard, the bond passed, and Washoe County Regional Parks purchased the ranch to create the park we enjoy today.

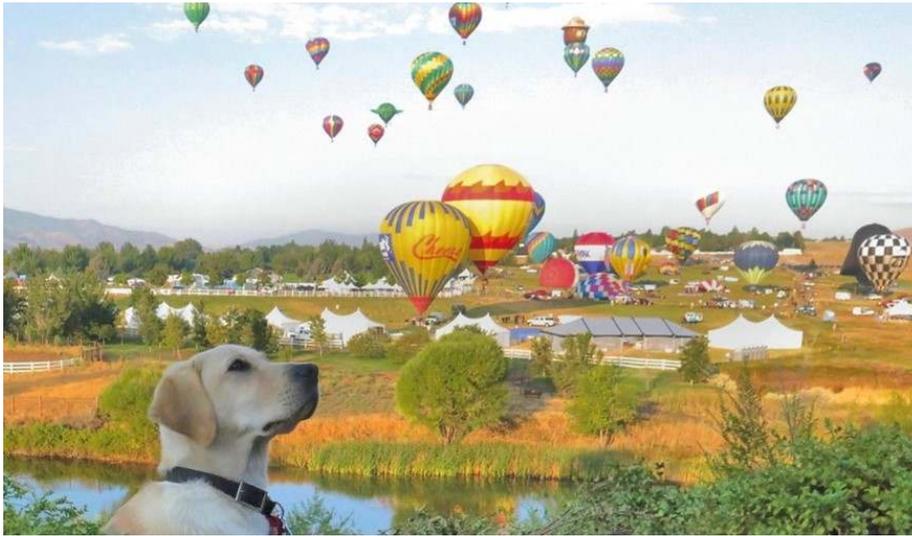


### **Rancho San Rafael Regional Park today**

Rancho San Rafael, enjoyed by over 2.5 million visitors annually, is voted “Reno’s Best Park” year after year. The 567-acre mixture of developed and natural environments offers opportunities for children and adults alike to connect with nature while exploring open space, ponds, and wetlands. Park amenities include covered picnic pavilions, unique playgrounds, mature trees, large open turf areas for play, a farm area with barns, chicken coops, and a community garden. A children’s Discovery Room (nature center) offers environmental education and activities. The Wilbur D May Museum offers a standing collection and different exhibits throughout the year, and the 30-acre Arboretum offers beautiful pathways to wander while enjoying hundreds of different species of plants and trees. Numerous Park trails are enjoyed by walkers, joggers, birdwatchers, and photographers. The park is also a starting point for the Peavine Trail system, popular among mountain



bikers of all skill levels with its single track and flow trails.



Rancho San Rafael Park, considered the “Central Park of Reno,” is close to the city center, allowing easy access for National and Local events throughout the years. In 2005, ESPN Great Outdoor Games took place in the park. Music series and festivals have filled lawn chairs on the park’s grass fields. Presidential candidates visit during campaign years, and National championship AAU cross-country and cyclocross races are held in the park. The long-standing Great Reno Balloon Races (held every 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend of September) has been a marquee event for the City of Reno, drawing thousands of visitors from around the country as they watch hundreds of hot-air balloons launch from the park. The Great Reno Balloon Race hot-air balloon launch site is Rancho San Rafael’s 30-acre multi-use pasture, which is a working pasture open to off-leash dogs since the 1990s. The park has become one of the top places to visit in the Truckee Meadows and is truly a unique and special place to be. We hope to see you at our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in June! Please visit [www.washoecountyparks.com](http://www.washoecountyparks.com) for more information.





## Under the Flat Hat



PRAC President Matt Cerkel

By now many of you know I am very fond of this statement - “Park rangers are ‘protectors, explainers, hosts, caretakers, people who are expected to be knowledgeable, helpful, courteous and professional: people who find you when you’re lost, help you when you’re hurt, rescue you when you’re stuck, and enforce the law when you or others can’t abide by it.’” In past Under the Flat Hat articles, I’ve written about the public safety and customer service aspects of this statement. In this quarter’s article, I will look at the roles of explainer, caretaker, and person ‘knowledgeable about the park’ aspects of the vision. These elements combined could be summarized as “rangers are storytellers” or “rangers tell the stories of the park.” These are the human elements of the parks, and the stories of the people who came before us, including Indigenous peoples, settlers, loggers, ranchers, farmers, those who fought to protect the area, those who donated the land to become a park, and many other intriguing human interest stories connected to the parks. Some of the stories may be well-known while some stories are almost forgotten. As rangers we should learn and tell all these stories, to help connect visitors to the parks and in turn help protect them from the park.

In the park I have worked in since 1991, Mount Tamalpais, in Marin County, there are countless stories to tell. Long before this land became a protected area, its redwood forests” were used to build and rebuild San Francisco. While most of the old-growth was logged, the forests regrew and in many trees are over 150 years old now. But you can still find traces of the loggers and their stories. Many redwood stumps from the logging period remain and if you look carefully you can find springboard notches the loggers made to stand on while they cut the trees down.



The loggers also built skid roads to haul out the felled trees, and today some of these skid roads have evolved into beloved hiking trails.



The loss of most of Mount Tam's old-growth redwood forests eventually led public efforts to protect what was left. This conservation movement led in part to the creation of the Marin Municipal Water District (Marin Water), the agency I work for, which took ownership of more than 10,000 acres in 1916-1917 and opened Mount Tamalpais as a public park in 1917. Today, Marin Water owns over 18,000 acres of Mount Tam.

Decades later, in the 1940s, my employer purchased a large area of the Lagunitas Creek Canyon area from Stanford University. Until then, the university leased the area to a hunting club, which built a hunting lodge in one of the last old-growth redwood groves in the area, in a spot still known as Big Trees.

Before the land purchase, Stanford University had also allowed a logging company to harvest in the area. The company knew the land would be soon transferred to public ownership. So, one day the loggers showed up at Big Trees to harvest the grove. They soon learned this special grove had an unexpected protector, the caretaker of the hunting lodge, who drove the loggers out of the grove at rifle point. The actions of that caretaker saved Big Trees and with this legacy, visitors can still enjoy this grove today.



Beyond the trees, part of the history of this land includes access roads that now allow the public to visit Mount Tam. The first road to the top of the mountain, Eldridge Grade is one of those important stories. The road was financed by John Eldridge, who envisioned it as a carriage road for tourists. It was built by Chinese laborers over five months, just two years after the racist Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This was one of the first major laws restricting immigration into the United States. Chinese immigrants played a major role in developing California and its infrastructure, but instead of being recognized for their contribution they faced hostility, violence, persecution, and discrimination.

This story is not known to most park visitors, even though Eldridge Grade is now a very popular route for hikers and mountain bikers. But it should be. An object found in the late 1980s can help bring the story to life. In 1989, a park ranger and local historians were investigating the site of one of the workers' camps dating back to the building of Eldridge Grade. While investigating the site, a silver item was found that appeared to be a scaled-down letter opener with Chinese characters on it. The item was brought to the Asian Art Museum and identified as tongue scraper and tooth cleaner commonly used in Chinese culture at the time. The Chinese characters were Cantonese and included the name of the manufacturing shop where the objects were made. Interestingly, the design work was not typical of mainland China, and it had certain Malaysian influences.

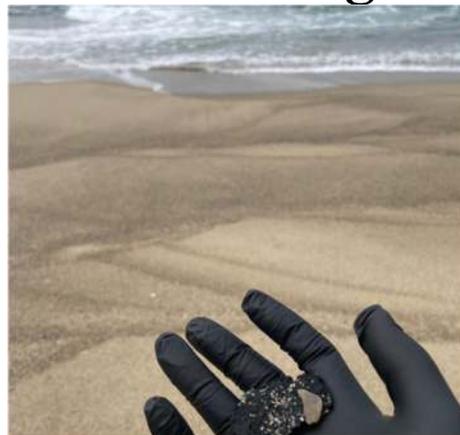




Using the tooth cleaner, we can tell a story of a Chinese immigrant who came to “Golden Mountain” (California) for a better life but was not welcomed with open arms. The immigrant’s journey eventually led to Mount Tamalpais, where he found work building a tourist road. At some point during this period, he lost the silver tooth cleaner, which he likely brought with him during the long journey to America. We may never know the name of this immigrant, but through the tooth cleaner we can acknowledge he was here, and that he helped contribute to the story of the park by building a road that connected people to this place.

There are so many more stories about this park. I plan on working with a group of local historians to produce a second edition of Mount Tamalpais: A History to ensure these stories are documented and remembered. I will also continue to share these stories with park visitors with the hope to deepen their understanding and connection to the place. What are the stories of your parks and are you telling them?

## **Oil Spill Response at Orange County Beaches**



By Mason Gannaway, Supervising Park Ranger, OC Parks and PRAC Region 4 Director

On Sunday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, I was on my morning patrol with my partner in our South Coastal Operations division. Our patrol area consists of almost 10 miles of shoreline from South Laguna Beach along the Pacific Coast Highway to the northern part of the city of San Clemente. The rocky bluffs and shore break beaches are very popular for surfing and skimboarding, especially in the off-season months. That Sunday was a nice sunny fall day with tides predicted to be around 7 feet that week. I happened to look at my phone around 7:00 am and saw a new article about



a massive oil spill that had occurred overnight in Huntington Beach, a beach town about 17 miles north of Aliso Creek Beach, the most northern beach we patrol. According to the news, a passing cargo ship had its anchor too low and dragged the anchor over an underwater oil pipeline.

After seeing the notification, I quickly texted my supervisors who then sent it up to our director of parks. Soon after, the director sent out communication that the county was opening its emergency operations center (EOC) and that Huntington Beach State Beach was already experiencing black tar balls, oily sheen in the water, and a strong smell like gasoline on their beaches. At that time, I notified our lifeguards and park maintenance staff to start preparing for possible beach closures. With incoming high tides and a strong swell coming from the north, it was a matter of hours before the plume of oil was due to hit our beaches. We printed out about 100 paper signs stating, “Beaches Closed Due to Oil Spill” and prepared snow fencing, barricades, and A-frame signs.



It was then that United States Coast Guard and every local state and municipal fire, police, lifeguard, and parks agency joined in unified command. All were receiving updated emails every couple of hours. Eventually, we got the call to hard close all our beaches and stairway accesses with snow fencing and signage, a process that took over 20 staff members about 6 hours to complete. We then had to patrol each area and educate the public with a standard message that came straight from the EOC.



Within a day or so, we started seeing the first signs of oil on the beaches. Large slick tar balls began appearing on the shoreline and we had a few oiled seabirds as well. Local animal control agencies were overwhelmed with the number of calls from the public, so the EOC activated the statewide “Oiled Wildlife Network,” who were called out through the OWCN Response Hotline at 1-877-UCD-OWCN (823-6926).

Throughout the ordeal, I had to attend many Zoom meetings for daily Briefings on the incident, which usually lasted about an hour. Each agency had to give a short report on how much oil they were seeing and any other pertinent things they saw, as well as any needs from the EOC. My agency needed to have inflatable booms installed as we have several small creek mouths that empty into the ocean. Those creek mouths are home to a few fish species that survive in the brackish water. A team came out and installed 2-3 layers of booms and had workers stay on-site 24/7 to watch for influxes of oil against the booms.

About a week into the incident, I was contacted by the EOC about creating a staging area for clean-up in the south part of Orange County at one of our beaches. The location needed to host a clean-up company with about 300 volunteers who were activated and trained to clean up tar balls from all the beaches from Newport Harbor to the San Diego county line. I met with a representative from the clean up company and they decided to use our Aliso Beach Parking lots (two 150-space lots) to house several huge 40-yard dumpsters, two tractor-trailers of trash bags and personal protective equipment, portable toilets, a makeshift kitchen, and parking for volunteers.

Once on-site, the volunteers walked miles of shoreline wearing Tyvek suits, hard helmets, and gloves and used rakes to pick up tar balls and other trash from the beaches. There was not a single piece of trash after they combed miles of beaches in south Orange County.

After about 2 weeks of volunteers on our beaches every day, the EOC stated we could open the sand, but asked that all agencies try to keep people out of the water and advise that shore-fishing was prohibited in the whole region. California Fish



and Wildlife (CDFW) officers were patrolling heavily to keep fishermen from taking possibly contaminated sea life.



After 6 weeks of closures, the water reopened for public use, but fishing was still closed. It was only after 9 weeks of continuous phone calls and emails and trying to keep eager fishermen out of the water, that I met with an Oil Spill Response specialist from CDFW and walked every foot of our beaches to see if there were still tar balls washing up. The gentleman was very knowledgeable and could tell the difference between the natural seeping tar balls that we had year-round in the area and the ones produced from the spill. At the end of the several hours of walking, he signed off the beaches my agency handles and within a few days, fishing reopened in the area.

This was a very long incident and officially closed as of January 9, 2022. Luckily, overall this incident was relatively small compared to some previous spills in the northern and central part of the state several years ago. It was an eye-opening experience and not something I was expecting to respond to in my role as a Park Ranger; I also think I've seen enough tar balls now for one career!





Park Rangers Association of California-The Signpost



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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*.

