

National Park Service History  
Superintendent's Annual Report (1990)

DeSoto National Memorial  
P.O.Box 15390  
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SUMMARY:

Major items for the year were:

1. Fee collection ceased as of COB 8/31/90.-see last page.
2. Our Pk Rgr L.E. position remains vacant--no money!!
3. Visitation went up 27% to 147,675 for an increase of 30,961. I believe the increase ties directly into the cessation of fee collection.
4. The state is still working on the purchase of the Emerson Point property. It has now reached a point where the lawyers are arguing over the wording of the contract.
5. The Living History Camp/Program continues to be our best interpretive activit. .
6. Law enforcement incidents increased this year but it is probably due to better record keeping.
7. The new automated irrigation system continues to function well and does save us a considerable amount of time which is devoted to other work projects.
8. We have been allotted \$239,000 in cyclic money for F.Y.91.
9. Park Ranger Ramirez-Diaz returned from extended sick leave in March.
10. Threats: We are fighting another proposed dock near our west boundary.

My staff continues to amaze me in that they accomplish an astounding amount of work/projects etc. when considering the limited resources we have. I am extremely proud of these dedicated employees.

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GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

**Personnel:**

All personnel performed satisfactorily.

**(Maintenance)**

Farrell Saunders continues to wear two hats i.e. he is Chief of Maintenance and Chief of I & R M.. His work is superb!

Maintenance Worker Rieley is still with us and continues to do an excellent job.

We still have a vacant WG-9 maintenance worker position that we can't fill because of lack of funds.

**(Interpretation)**

After being on extended sick leave, Park Ranger Elias Ramirez-Diaz returned to duty in March. He was sorely missed and everyone is happy to see him back.

We are still shorthanded in that the Park Ranger L.E./Interp. position is still vacant. We just don't have enough money to fill it.

**(Administration)**

Admin Trainee Mary Baldwin continues to perform in an outstanding manner. I shudder to think about the time when her training is finished and she moves to another park and we have to start the process all over again. We must find a way to get someone to help her and to serve as backup and to provide some continuity to our operations!!!!!! We have been able to utilize some seasonal help and a VIP who have both helped Mary a lot. Mary has been with us nearly two and one-half years and we could lose her at any time. The admin workload continues to grow. We need a minimum of two to three days of clerical help in addition to Mary!!

**Budget and Finance:**

3/4 F.Y. 90	\$167,850
1/4 F.Y. 91	59,925
Cyclic	15,000
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	\$242,775

**Donations:**

We received a total of \$3,834 in donations from two locations i.e. V.C. (\$2,969) and the living history camp (\$865).

**Awards:**

Five special achievement awards (totaling \$2,068) and one quality increase were given this year.

**EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY:**

Two E.E.O. committee meetings were held during the year.

Staffing as of 12/31/90.

**Permanent full-time:**

Superintendent	GS-11	1ea	White Male
Supv. Pk. Rgr.	GS-9	1ea	White Male
Admin Asst Trainee	GS-7	1ea	White Female
Park Ranger	GS-5	1ea	Disabled Vet Spanish Male
Park Ranger	GS-5	1ea	Vacant
Maintenance Worker	WG-7	1ea	White Male
Maintenance Worker	WG-9	1ea	Vacant

**Temporary Seasonals:**

Park Ranger	GS-5	1ea	Native American Female
Park Ranger	GS-3	1ea	White Female (college student)
Park Ranger	GS-4	4ea	White Males (2 vets)

**Fee Collectors:**

Park Ranger	GS-3	4ea	White Males (2 vets)
Park Ranger	GS-3	3ea	White Females

Note: Six out of seven are senior citizens!

**Regular VIP'S:**

Six White Males and Four White Females.

All are senior citizens. We also had some 72 other VIPS who helped us during the year and the total number hours donated was 1,701.

**RESEARCH:**

No change - we still need research on the culture of the 16th century Spanish conquistadors.

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

Erosion of the north shoreline continues to be the most pressing problem. The SER Resource Mgt. plan team has worked with us and we hope to have our updated Resource Management Plan finalized by April or May of 91. The swamp tidal flow ditches were again cleaned and cleared and exotic plants removed. The major task of cleaning the main tidal canal was completed as an Eagle Scout project and was done in a superior fashion. These cleaning tasks help us keep the mangroves healthy and greatly reduce the mosquito population.

#### **Fire Prevention and Suppression:**

The Westside Fire Dept. conducted the annual fire and safety hazard inspection in January. No major problems were found.

Fire extinguishers were also inspected/serviced by a commercial firm. No extinguishers needed to be replaced.

#### **Threats:**

The property on Emerson Point still has not been purchased by the State but appraisals have been completed. Negotiations with the property owners began in December and are now basically complete. Apparently the lawyers are now arguing over the wording of the contract. Things are still moving and I am optimistic that the area will eventually become a County Park. However, when so many politicians and lawyers are involved in a project, I won't feel confident until the deeds and agreements are all signed, sealed and delivered!!

Construction on the new house on the lot directly adjacent to our west boundary is nearing completion and will have a direct negative effect on the Memorial. The long dock and boathouse that go with the 7th lot to the west of us is also nearing completion and will be an eyesore to our visitors.

We are besieged by docks. Another one which is even longer and will even be more of an eyesore if built, is proposed for the 4th lot to the west of us. Needless to

say, I am fighting against it tooth and nail!!!!!! The Corps of Engineers is completely ignoring us and not even notifying us of these permit applications.

#### PUBLIC USE STATISTICS:

Visitation in 1990 was up 27% to 147,675 for an increase of 30,961 visitors. I am convinced that the cessation of the collection of entrance fees was the cause of the increase. In addition, a new traffic counter with an accurate in-pavement loop was installed and is giving reliable readings.

#### INTERPRETATION/COMMUNITY RELATIONS SPECIAL EVENTS, ETC.:

##### **Visitor center Activities:**

51,207 visitors used the visitor center in 1990. The interpretive film "DeSoto, The Legacy of a Legend" was shown 3,109 times to 25,477 visitors. 101 talks were presented to 1,060 visitors in the visitor center. Staff members made 5,475 roving contacts in 1990.

##### **Cooperative Association Activities:**

DeSoto's ENP&MA Agency had gross sales for FY 90 of \$15,164.32 as compared to \$14,146.17 for FY 89 or an increase of 7%. Thirty nine new items were added to our sales list during 90. Our donation account approved for FY90 was \$2,692.12 and the amount spent was \$555.50 leaving a balance of \$2,136.62.

##### **Living History Program:**

The 1990 Living History Program was operated with 3 seasonal positions. There were 18,001 persons who visited the camp and 15,047 of them saw one of the formal presentations. It was an excellent season with good employees. This program continues to be the backbone of our interpretive programs. We did receive many favorable comments concerning this activity.

##### **Florida's Historic DeSoto Trail:**

In October, Congress passed an act called "De Soto Expedition Trail Commission Act of 1990". In general it establishes a 19 member Commission to study the DeSoto

Expedition and the Supt. of DeSoto N.M. shall be a member. One million dollars is appropriated to be used as follows: \$250,000 for carrying out the functions of the Commission and \$750,000 to be used for research projects. Hopefully this will eventually provide us with a wealth of new material to be used in our interpretive programs.

#### **Schools and other groups:**

In 1990 there were 70 educational and other groups totalling 3,017 persons that visited the park. In addition to our regular interpretive programs they participated in other activities which included special films, conducted walks, and talks.

#### **Off-site Activities:**

There were 12 off-site programs conducted by the park staff which were attended by 1,347 persons.

#### **Special Events:**

There were numerous weddings and church services conducted in the park during the year.

Easter Sunrise Service, conducted by the Manatee County Ministerial Association and De Soto Celebration, Inc. brought approximately 800 visitors to the park. The program was well received.

The De Soto Landing reenactment was performed by De Soto Celebration, Inc. 1,200 persons viewed the activities including 22 bus loads of 5th grade students. Protestors from the Peace and Justice Center and the American Indian Issues in Action handed out literature or talked with visitors. One individual from the American Indian group was heard taunting a De Soto Celebration conquistador but there was no serious confrontation.

Manatee County Parks and Recreation Dept. held their 4th annual Triathlon (this year called Manatee River Strength Triathlon) with all activities beginning and ending in the park. The event was a success with 877 persons in attendance.

## **Public Relations:**

Our relationships with all public officials, agencies, etc., continue on an excellent plane. The park has strong support within the community as evidenced by the continued positive comments and actions of area residents.

Even though I have personally met and expressed our concern over the permitting process involving docks and residences adjacent to and near our park boundaries, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to issue permits without letting us know.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT:**

In 1990 there were 33 incidents reported compared to 17 in 1989. There were 6 cases of vandalism compared to 4 last year but the damage costs decreased from \$350 to \$280 due to the nature of the vandalism. There was one car clouting incident in the park this year with \$245 in property and money stolen. There was only one minor theft of Government property valued at \$27.

## **MAINTENANCE:**

### **Buildings:**

Routine maintenance was performed on all buildings.

Because a visible new home is being built next to our Living History Camp, the camp had to be completely reoriented. This required the construction of two main chiques (Indian huts) and a wooden palisade. Over 4,000 palm fronds, furnished and brought to the park by Manatee County Parks and Recreation Department, were needed for the project.

### **Grounds:**

Eleven of the 33 specimen trees were pruned and succored as part of the 3 year cyclic program.

We had to treat the lawn twice for chinch bugs using dureban.

The new irrigation system worked quite well this year with minimal problems. This system saves many man hours

per year of maintenance.

**Sewer/Water/Signs: No Problems.**

Note: The trailside interpretive signs, designed by Supv. Pk. Rgr. Saunders several years ago continue to remain vandal resistant. This is nearly four years without damage and is a major accomplishment which will be shared with others in the near future!

#### **Roads and Trails:**

The 600ft section of the old nature trail along the north shoreline has now been permanently closed and native vegetation planted. It simply washed away and thank heavens we were able to replace it with the new elevated boardwalk.

The seawall on the northeast section of the nature trail is in bad condition. The trail in this area needs to be relocated and the seawall removed.

#### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT:**

In F.Y.91 we have \$100,000 in cyclic funds with which to build a new maintenance building. Also there is \$139,000 to remodel the V. C. restrooms (bring up to handicapped standards) and perhaps do some other needed things such as expansion of the museum area. At this time I frankly don't know what is going to happen with these projects.

#### **FEE COLLECTION:**

In early August, it was clear there was no way in which we could change our fee collection procedures so that we could make a profit. I made the decision to recommend cessation of fee collection activities. SERO and WASO agreed and the operation was terminated COB August 31, 1990. Fee collection was directly responsible for a dramatic decline in visitation. We went from an average yearly visitation (previous five years before fee collection) of 212,000 to 107,000 in 1989. We are now seeing a dramatic increase in visitation and we are taking in a lot more dollars in our donation boxes. And that all goes into our operations!!