



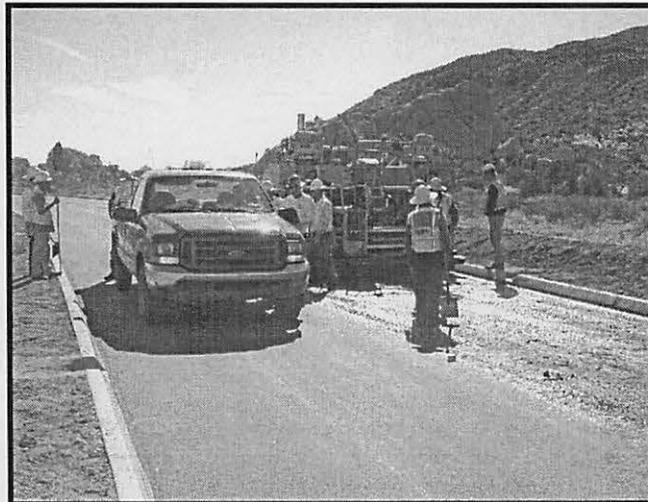
Superintendent's Quarterly Report *January - March, 2004*

Highway Rehabilitation - A Collaborative Project

The most visible activity in Joshua Tree National Park in the last three months has been the roadway reconstruction project. Two such projects have been taking place simultaneously. Project 291 is the reconstruction of 5.5 miles of Route 12 from the Keys View Road intersection to the Geology Tour Road Junction. Project 294 is the rehabilitation of 4.5 miles of Route 12 from the North Entrance to Pinto Wye. This road is the main thoroughfare through the park and now receives a daily average of 600 vehicles. Like most existing park roads, this was laid over original mining and grazing access roads and thinly paved in the 1950s. Increased traffic and wider, heavier vehicles challenged the narrow road width and caused pavement and road edge deterioration. Parking areas simply "grew" into the desert as people pulled off the road at convenient stopping places and attempts to delineate acceptable parking lots with fencing, berms or ditches were not entirely successful. Thus, both visitor safety and resource protection became paramount issues and Projects 291 and 294 effectively addressed both concerns.

Along both project areas, road width has been expanded from previously varying widths to a standardized 24 feet. On the Keys View Road to Geology Tour section, the entire length has been curbed with tortoise trots (breaks in the curbing for tortoise crossing) added as mandated. Heavily used areas are delineated with paved pullouts and curbing to control roadside parking and resulting encroachment on vegetation. In keeping with the Park Service's commitment to integrate native materials and encourage sustainability whenever possible, on both projects existing asphalt pavement was pulverized and reused as base material, and readily-available local materials were often

used. These two projects are funded by the Federal Lands Highway Program (\$5,741,890) and will be completed in April, 2004. Preliminary work has already begun on Project 292, resurfacing 5.6 miles to Keys View.



Highway Project 291

Resources Management has been very involved in the road rehabilitation projects from collecting data for environmental impact statements before construction began to revegetating disturbed landscapes and monitoring use of tortoise trots after construction completion. A total of 853 plants were transplanted for Project 291 alone with 198 of those coming from JOTR's own arid lands nursery. All replanted vegetation was placed as close to their original location as possible. In addition, vertical mulching was used to rehabilitate the disturbed ground by putting down dead plant material and rocks so that it looks as natural as possible, promoting natural revegetation and use by rodents and ants.

The resources staff continues to perform the federally mandated on-site monitoring of the desert tortoise during Project 291 construc-

tion. To date, no tortoises have been injured or harassed. Although Highway Project 292 (Keys View Road) has not begun construction, the division conducted small mammal and small bird population surveys in January to provide the contractor with information for Environmental Assessment Statements. In March, tortoise presence/absence surveys of the area were begun.

The interpretation division also has been involved in these projects, re-designing all existing wayside exhibits in the park and developing new ones. They have worked closely with both maintenance and resources management in determining the pull-off designations and exhibit placements. This involved at least five exhibits along each stretch of rehabilitated roadway.

Finally, the protection and administration divisions have provided much needed support during these projects. Entrance fee collectors have answered thousands of questions and passed on information to visitors; rangers have furnished invaluable NPS presence in the park and judiciously exercised control when needed; and administration has efficiently managed the accumulation of paperwork associated with such projects. Although many park projects are collaborative efforts, these two road rehabilitation projects clearly illustrate the interrelatedness of such efforts. JOTR's dual mission of "preserving and protecting a representative sample of the Colorado and Mojave Deserts and their natural and cultural resources while providing for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" is a challenging responsibility. It is only through teamwork efforts such as these that the park is able to bring together its various areas of expertise and achieve the goals of its stated mission.

TEAMWORK

"The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined efforts of each individual."

Vince Lombardi

Administration

A new telephone system at the Black Rock complex was installed and included an upgrade to their internet access and park network. Phone access between headquarters and the Black Rock area (nature center, education office, maintenance building and interagency fire center) is merely a 4-digit phone call. Black Rock users now have a more reliable connectivity with the internet (via headquarters) and can connect to the JOTR network with the ability to access SHARE files. Division chief Monica Rapp reported that this will reduce costs as the park will be terminating unused telephone lines into the Black Rock area and system maintenance will be easier. Also, communication between park divisions and staff will be quicker and more efficient. The Regional Equipment Replacement Fund provided the financing for this project.

Interpretation

The interpretation division is especially busy during the first quarter of each year as several annual events take place during those months. Seasonal interpreter training took place in January, as new public programs were developed and recent park information incorporated into existing ones to insure accurate presentations. The park maintains a booth at the annual Riverside County Date Festival in February and the interpretation division is charged with designing and installing the exhibit as well as staffing the booth. This outreach program reaches a large audience that lives near the park's borders but is not a customary visitor.

Maintaining the park website is another interpretation division responsibility. The website is updated constantly by Sandra Kaye. For a number of years, the JOTR website was among the 40th-50th visited NPS website but is now consistently between 5th and 15th service wide. In addition, Sandy produced another edition of the *Park Guide* and, with Elize Van Zandt as editor, produced a semi-annual issue of *Green Voice*, the regional sustainable practices newsletter.

Staffing the visitor centers' desks, presenting ranger-guided walks, giving evening campground programs and furnishing programs to organizations outside the park kept the interpretation staff busy during March, particularly this year with the spring flower bloom. Cindy Von Halle reported nearly 8000 visitor contacts during the first quarter, in addition to visitor center attendance. Oasis Visitor Center had nearly 30,000 visitors in the first quarter.

The redesign of old wayside exhibits and development of new exhibits is in its final stage of production. The last graphics have been submitted to the Harpers Ferry Design Center and fabrication will begin soon. John Teichert (project manager/architect from the Pacific West Region) visited with Anne Staley in March and assisted with final placement decisions. Anne is coordinating an ongoing photographic slide collection project to catalog, handle acquisitions, and digitize the park's collection. This is an important resource as the park receives numerous requests for photographic images from both national and international sources.

Another outreach approach is by means of radio announcements. Four different topics are addressed monthly. These public service announcements (PSAs) are recorded at three different locations (Radio Central, Z107.7 and Desert Radio Group) and each message is broadcast frequently during the week. The first quarter messages emphasized park safety and resource education.

The interpretation division administers the NPS Volunteers-In-Parks Program (VIP). On March 13th, ninety-three volunteers were honored at a BBQ dinner at Black Rock, organized by volunteer coordinator Lauren Lentz. During FY03, JOTR volunteers contributed 16,879 hours in all park divisions. An example of how large groups contribute to the park is the recent Unilever-WalMart Volunteer Day when 111 people worked on two projects, plus a \$3000 from Unilever.



Volunteer Appreciation BBQ Dinner

Secondary education programs are presented by the education department of the interpretation division, headed by Lorna Lange-Daggs. That staff presents programs both in the park and in the classroom. Lorna reported 7369 student contacts during the first quarter. The education department also presented six teacher workshops to 191 participants.

Joe Zarki, chief of interpretation, continues to be actively involved in the Desert Managers Group (DMG). He has assisted the director with the preparation of a grant application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to finance a Desert Tortoise Outreach Plan. If funded, numerous educational programs will reach communities and schools across the California deserts. A wide variety of state and government agencies are involved with the DMG including the Department of the Interior, Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, California State Parks, and California Department of Transportation.

A call for proposals for a mural on the Oasis Visitor Center building has been issued. The theme is to commemorate the people and history behind the founding of the park, centering on Minerva Hamilton Hoyt who led the lengthy campaign to have the high desert preserved as a NPS unit. This project is a partnership with the Action Council for 29 Palms, Inc., which commissions and administers the town murals. The winning artist will be announced on April 30th with the mural to be completed by October 30th.

Maintenance

In addition to the road rehabilitation projects and ongoing maintenance functions, chief of maintenance Harry Carpenter reported that the division hosted a Contracting Officers Technical Representative (COTR) Training Seminar for 32 participants including employees from Great Basin National Park, Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve. Twelve JOTR employees received certification to serve as federal COTRs on governmental contracts.

Construction is progressing on the new Protection Division building. The 2000 square foot structure will replace the two portable 1960's trailers, a modular building and shed presently used by that division. The units have deteriorated to the point that it is impossible to maintain comfortable temperature ranges. Structures are not weather tight, resulting in wasted energy output in all seasons. As well as increasing efficiency and communication within the division, the removal of the old structures and addition of the new building will greatly improve the professional appearance of the headquarters complex.

Protection

Nightly camping fees were initiated in the five topside campgrounds in February. The first month collections resulted in \$16,000 in revenues, according to Erin Trombley, head of fee collection. Public reaction has been very positive with many campers expressing appreciation for the increased NPS presence in the campgrounds, the variety of camping opportunities now available through the enforcement of maximum length of stay limits and improved trash collection management.

Don Roberts, JOTR's special use ranger, is writing the special use policy for Mojave National

Preserve and generating the documents to accompany the policy. Funded by the Preserve, this policy will cover all aspects of special use activities within its boundaries and is an opportunity for JOTR to assist another NPS sites.

Due to spring flooding and vandalism, Thermal Canyon received illegal off road vehicle (ORV) use. Jeff Ohlfs reported that the area has been re-secured to prevent any continued unlawful motorized activity.

BOULDER CLEAN is a climbers' organization formed to provide a forum and resource for boulderers to get involved and help educate others about climbers' impacts and responsibilities. Issues being raised at Joshua Tree National Park resulted in the formation of this group. It now receives financial backing from Access Fund, a national, non-profit climbing organization. Both organizations have websites with the BOULDER CLEAN website featuring JOTR. Scott Fisher and researcher Eric Murdock met during the first quarter with BOULDER CLEAN representatives.

In early March, a total of 23 people participated in the clean-up of a dump site within the park boundary on Bullion Avenue. Organized by Erin Mackin, representatives from protection, resources management, fee collection, and maintenance joined with members of the BLMs fire crew, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's department, B&B Towing and the 29 Palms Water District to remove 4,340 pounds of debris, including two vehicles. The site was then revegetated. Chief Ranger Judy Bartzatt thanked all who participated and made this such a successful endeavor.



Bullion Avenue Clean-Up Crew

Recognition

Two park employees at Joshua Tree National Park recently received awards for their professional achievements. Wildlife biologist Amy Fesnock received the 2003 Director's Award for Professional Excellence in Natural Resources for her outstanding work with the science and natural resources management program while employed at Pinnacles National Monument. In addition to creating a top-notch wildlife program, she led the campaign to have Pinnacles chosen as a condor release site and was responsible for initiating the first recovery action taken for the California Red-Legged Frog.

Recognition (cont.)

Ranger Scott Fisher received the 2004 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award from the Morongo Basin Chapter of the International Footprint Association for his numerous contributions to the law enforcement program at Joshua Tree National Park. As JOTR's "climbing ranger," Fisher developed a proactive community-policing program with one of the park's most important user-groups. He developed relationships with climbing groups and individuals that resulted in decreased resource impacts and fewer visitor conflicts.

Resources Management

Dr. Hank McCutchen, chief of resources management, is compiling an analysis of aircraft over-flight patterns. During a month of sampling (160 total hours of daylight), an average of 8-12 over-flights per hour occurred.

Management of artificial water for wildlife (guzzlers) continues to be an ongoing project for biologist Amy Fesnock. She is working in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey's Biological Division, the western parks and the California Fish & Game Division. Also, JOTR is taking the lead in creating a position paper for those parks of the NPS Western Region that have guzzlers.

The park has started resurveying a permanent tortoise study plot (Barrow Plot) in the Pinto Basin, which has documentation dating from the 1970s. Evidence indicates a major die-off occurred in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Amy has been accepted into a program sponsored by the USGS and 29 Palms Marine Corps Base titled "Assessing Tortoise Health and Disease." She then will be able to better evaluate the causes and effects of the die-off.

Raven populations have increased significantly and the park cooperated with USGS in conducting point counts in February and March in natural areas as well as human use sites to determine how ravens use and impact the park. The results will be combined with those from the Marine base and surveys conducted in Yucca Valley to determine how ravens use the Morongo Valley.

The park's arid lands nursery continues to work in collaboration with other agencies to provide native species for revegetation of Mojave Desert environments. The park delivered 1500 plants to Fort Irwin in the first quarter of 2004. Yucca Valley Water District contacted park botanist Tasha LaDoux for advice on controlling erosion and the park is supplying native plants for revegetation of affected sites. An ongoing active volunteer project is the Invasive Plant Control program. Five groups participated in this project during the first quarter (Boy Scouts, Outward Bound, and school groups).

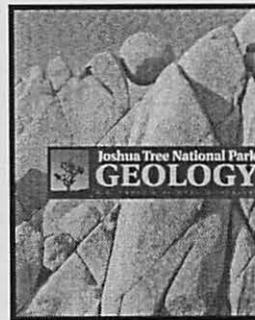
A collaborative research project underway involves Professor Jeff Johansen of John Carroll University and Nicole Pietrasiak, a student from

Germany. Comparative documentation of biological soil crust in the Wonderland of Rocks area (a high visitor use recreation area) with the Desert Queen Ranch region (a restricted area with minimal visitor use) will help to determine visitor impact.

The physical science division of resources management received a matching grant (\$14,400) from the State of California to install human barriers while allowing entry by bats as well as other wildlife into abandoned mines. Three bat gates were installed on Mine 19 during the first quarter. Luke Sabala remains actively involved with the USGS in their ongoing geologic mapping project of the park. Of major concern is JOTR's air quality. Continuous data is provided to the EPA from the park's one monitoring station at Black Rock. The park is working with Riverside County, South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Coachella Valley to fund a 2nd station to monitor that shared air space.

Cultural resources management set up an archeology site monitoring program in cooperation with the protection division. Also, in conjunction with the backcountry/wilderness project, Jan Sabala reported that social trails were surveyed behind Barker Dam and archeology sites located. Both projects utilized volunteer assistance. Staffed by a part-time librarian position that is funded by JTNPA, the library is staying open additional hours on Wednesdays into June to accommodate staff unable to use the library during normal working hours.

JTNPA



Joshua Tree National Park Association, the park's non-profit cooperating organization, was an award recipient at the annual Association of Partners for Public Lands convention in March. JTNPA's publication, *Joshua Tree National Park Geology*, took first place in the natural

history book category. All award winners were cited for their contributions in communicating, "what is special about our nations' public lands."

The association expanded its evening lecture series. In addition to the Second Friday Series at the Old Schoolhouse Museum in 29 Palms, the association now offers a second series at the Black Rock Campground Visitor Center in Yucca Valley.

JTNPA released a revised edition of *Joshua Tree Desert Reflections*, by Stephen Trimble. New sidebars complement Trimble's work by detailing key information about the park not previously included in the original edition, which was written before the passing of the California Desert Protection Act (1994), making JOTR a national park.