



Bent's Fort Ledger

Winter
2008



“Ratcheting Up” Our Historic Representation

The Holiday Celebration provided over 800 visitors a glimpse of how Christmas was celebrated on the frontier. We received many visitor compliments about how well the volunteers illustrated 19th century life. We also received constructive comment from volunteers, park staff and visitors about the use of modern slang and conversations and the use of non-period eyewear, clothing and articles. Further comments included tour size, accommodations, and need for diverse representation.

Nothing can “kill” a vivid history moment faster than a verbal or non-verbal reminder of modern times. A seemingly innocent contemporary conversation between living history interpreters can wreck a visitor’s living history experience. A first person verbal portrayal can take a “nose dive” the second the visitor hears modern slang, words and connotations. Participation in the park’s “Living History Encampment” on June 4-7 will provide anyone practice at developing a historically accurate representation. You will leave training feeling much more confident in your living history portrayal.

You can do a lot on your own to prepare for living history events. You can never read enough original diaries, newspapers and journals to feel fully adequate for the task. New dependable sources of information come along all the time, especially with the internet. One good site is the “Mountain Men and the Fur Trade” site at www.xmission.com. Work, religion, past times, clothing, tools, work techniques, politics, family life, conversations, debates, hair styles, technological advances, science, geography, medicine, diseases, and holidays are a few of the many aspects of life for study for good living history representation.

Mention was made about how some scenarios seemed “stilted” and less than believable. Words and actions did not flow as they would in a normal situation. What may help us is to use our imagination and “**feel**” the moment. Imagine yourself doing what you are doing as if you are there. Ask yourself, “how would I feel?” Ask yourself “why am I doing this and what can I do to make it more real for me so that I can be more convincing”? We can be ourselves and **embrace** the moment. Realistically, we speak in a normal voice and act and react in ways you normally would if faced with the same situation today. Conceptualize and practice your part of the program before you come to the event. Practice can be done while facing a mirror, in front of your spouse, in the car on the way to the event or in front of a camcorder.

Some volunteers mentioned that visitors were not always treated as it is 1846. For instance, when visitors asked questions, some received a contemporary answer. Another occasion, two volunteers were overheard talking about boyfriends in contemporary terms which would be alright if done in period. With just a little bit of “fancywork”, these conversations could have been

made into period talk with words and idea accuracy. Non-period words can enter into our own words by accident or by ignorance all the time. Read original diaries and journals for use of phrases and descriptive words. Look up words and connotations on the internet to learn their originations and derivatives.

Wrist watches, non-period eyewear or modern long john underwear were noticed by some. We have period watches and reading glasses available for loan. Prescription glasses and bifocals can be accommodated if we have the time. We have used your prescription and our frames to produce eyewear, but we have to have more of a commitment for your time since it can be fairly expensive. Underwear can be non-period, but it must not show. We have some period underwear and socks available for loan. Ladies should wear white cotton tights and they are available at Vermont Country Store. White tights could cover up non-period underwear.

Some issues were evident from past events and have been solved to some degree in management meetings:

Problems: *Modern kitchen and dining room overcrowded, Saturday dinner confusion, slow evening bookstore sales, spillage of cider in fort rooms, meeting space limited, first table needs, lack of enough food.*

Solution: *We plan to use the wagon shed and set up the folding tables there for Friday and Saturday dinner, for use as a break area, visitor refreshments area, and volunteer check-in. This would allow the cooks full access to the modern kitchen. We will leave the folding tables up for the duration of the event and have coffee and water there during the day. Visitors getting their after tour refreshments there will more likely shop the store and the cleanup will be easier on a concrete rather than adobe floor. We will have more pre-cooked food for Saturday night so the domestics can serve first table in the dining room earlier for visitor viewing while the rest of us eat later in the wagon shed after fort closes.*

Problem: *Tours were too large*

Solution: *We will try to have more tour guides available next year to make up for any tour guide absences. We will have backup tour guides available who are usually used in the fort rooms. We will keep to the same number of rooms and work towards condensing each room's*

scenario into a shorter presentation. We plan to limit tour signup to 20 persons per tour.

Problem: *Need for more Hispanic and Plains Tribes representation*

Solution: *Seek recruitment and funding support from the newly reforming Bent's Old Fort Historical Association.*

The Holiday Celebration was certainly well-received even in its 22nd year. One visitor remarked that it was the seventh time he came to the event and it was as good as ever. Some of the Boy Scouts have grown up with the event and "wouldn't miss it for the world." One group is coming back this winter to relive some of their experience. Volunteers like you are what make the event so special. With a few "touches" here and there, it can even be better!



Bent's Old Fort Requests Volunteer Sign-up for 2009

Volunteers will be needed to perform living history, shuttle service, visitor orientation, camp setup and take down, the Trails and Rails program, bookstore sales, resource management, and maintenance this year. Special events dates are below. The Fur Trade Encampment is advertised as a one day event, but volunteers will setup the day before and break down the day after. Contact Greg Holt at 719-383-5023 or at greg_holt@nps.gov to let him know what you would like to do.

May 11- September 8: Trails and Rails Trips
Volunteers provide narration aboard Amtrak's Southwest Chief between La Junta and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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May 9: Santa Fe Trail Caravan

Volunteers assist with trail life demonstration on the Santa Fe Trail.

June 4 - 7: Living History Encampment

Four days, 3 night's hands-on living history training for living history volunteers.

July 11: Kids' Quarters

Volunteers instruct seven to eleven year-old children in frontier life.

September 19: Hispanic Heritage Day

Volunteers perform adobe work, music, dance, trading, cooking, storytelling, and livestock demonstrations and other special programs.

October 10: Fur Trade Encampment

Volunteers portray the life of the trappers, traders, tribes and Fort employees in camp and at the fort.

December 4-5: Holiday Celebration

Volunteers demonstrate frontier holiday season celebrations and perform candle light tour vignettes.



Interpretive Plaza at Visitor Parking Lot

Chief's Update

Progress is slow, but the end is coming into sight for the two big interpretive projects we have been planning here for years now: the Orientation/Interpretive Plaza at the Visitor Parking Area and the 1 3/4 mile hiking trail along the Arkansas River.

This past fall, Advanced Environmental Systems of New Mexico did the grading and concrete work for the plaza. Our own maintenance staff is now at work preparing all the wood members for the shade shelter and will begin construction on the shelter soon. We are awaiting final drafts of the interpretive panels to go into the structure from Stephen F. Austin University.

Also this fall, a Public Lands Corps crew made up of Colorado Range Riders spent several weeks building boardwalks for the hiking trail. Another crew will be here next spring to finish off the trail work. In the meantime, we are working with Advanced Resource Management on the interpretive panels for the trail to be installed prior to a 4th of July dedication of the trail.

Rick



Trail crew on one of the hiking trail boardwalk sections



The Geese Are Flying At BEOL

Large flocks of snow geese have been flying over Bent's Old Fort recently as the birds make their annual return to the fields of the Arkansas Valley on their way north. This photo was taken in the field directly across Highway 194 from the Fort on January 23.

Lamar, Colorado celebrates each February with the High Plains Snow Goose Festival. This year's festival takes place February 19 - 22, "Celebrating Watchable Wildlife and Heritage History in Southeast Colorado."

Come visit the Bent's Fort booth, take in a program on medical practice on the Santa Fe Trail (courtesy of Doctor Headlee) or tour Sand Creek.

For more information log on to www.highplainssnowgoose.com

National Parks Valuable during Economic Downturn

A study by the National Park Service and Michigan State University has shown that the country's national parks are a valuable asset during the current recession, drawing thousands of visitors and propping up local economies.

Visitors to National Park Service sites last year helped support more than 200,000 jobs and spent \$11.8 billion in gift shops and nearby businesses such as hotels, restaurants and gas stations, according to the study.

Locally, Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site is a large contributor to the region's economy, attracting over 25,000 visitors each year.

According to the National Park Service study, visitors to Bent's Old Fort in 2007 spent over \$975,000 and supported 18 jobs. The Park Service payroll spending at the site amounted to over \$850,000 and supported 24 more jobs.

All told, Bent's Old Fort generated \$1,767,000 in spending and supported 42 jobs in the community.

"Besides the obvious mission of preserving our natural and cultural heritage, parks do provide a nice boost to the local economy," said Park Superintendent Alexa Roberts. "We believe tourism has an important role to play here in Southeast Colorado with park sites like Bent's Old Fort and Sand Creek Massacre as well as other historic treasures such as Boggsville, Camp Amache and the Koshare Indian Museum."

"We are big supporters of groups like the Southeast Colorado Regional Heritage Taskforce working to attract even more visitors to the area," said Roberts.

Despite high fuel prices, 2008 visitation to Bent's Old Fort was up 4.4% over the previous year.



Group Promotes Heritage Preservation And Tourism in Southeast Colorado

The National Park Service and Bent's Old Fort NHS are founding members of the Southeast Colorado Regional Heritage Taskforce (SECORHT), a partnership of entities from six counties "working together to preserve and promote our heritage, culture and natural resources."

Officially formed as a non-profit corporation in 2007, SECORHT has roots back to 2003. The group obtained Preserve America status for the six counties in Southeast Colorado (Baca, Bent, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero and Prowers) and has secured over \$500,000 in grants for heritage tourism development.

In February, SECORHT will receive the National Park Service Intermountain Region Partnership Award at the 2009 Saving Places Conference in Denver. The award comes along with \$40,000 in Federal funding for administration and research.

If you would like to be a part of this on the ground effort to preserve and promote sites such as Bent's Old Fort, Sand Creek Massacre, Boggsville, Camp Amache and Bent's New Fort, contact Rick Wallner at Bent's Fort for membership information. Levels of support start at \$25 annually.



Dan the Mule at Yellowstone National Park with Bob Kisthart

Another Good Honest Mule

As many of you know, long time fort resident, Jeremy the mule died last April after an illustrious career at Bent's Fort. From parades, to packing demonstrations, to just giving the fort an historical ambience, he always performed like a good steady hand.

Flash forward to the summer of 2008 where I work as a back country ranger in Yellowstone National Park. Upon picking up the two horses and mule assigned to me for summer use, I discovered my usual mule was retired and I was given a new one. Head of Yellowstone corral operations, Wally Wines asked me if I knew anyone that wanted my old mule. I immediately thought of the mule void at Bent's Fort and contacted Greg Holt.

Before the summer ended, government red tape and logistics were worked out and Bent Park Ranger, Dave Newell and Eva Jepson traveled to Yellowstone, horse trailer in tow. They pick up the retired mule who now finds a new home at Bent's Old Fort.

If you haven't met the new mule, make a point to do just that. His name is Dan and he is a friendly one. He is big, twice as big as Jeremy, and gentle. According to Wally Wines, Yellowstone's livestock manager, "Dan the mule, a face only a mother could love. He walks, packs, rides, drives, and he'll crawl on his belly like a snake." In Yellowstone we used him several times to rescue hikers with sprained or broken body parts. That sure beat carrying them out on wheeled litters.

Over the five or six summers I worked with Dan the mule, I only had a few occasions to refer to him as "damn the mule". He was a good steady companion over the hundreds of miles we shared on the trails of Yellowstone. Now when I arrive at the fort each morning, it is good to see my old trail companion Dan waiting to be fed. It is just like old times in Yellowstone.

Dan has some good years left in him and he has already become a welcomed member of the Bent Fort menagerie. He has an endearing quality about him so be sure to acquaint yourself with Dan if you haven't already. It is always a treat to meet a good, honest mule.

Living History Encampment, A Great Way for Volunteers to Learn Living History

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site will host an instructional "Living History Encampment" June 4-7, 2009. Participants will be immersed in the role of trader, trapper-hunter, laborer, blacksmith, carpenter, Army Topographical Engineer, Plains Indian or domestic cook. You will gain a much deeper understanding of the realities of fur trade era life in the American West.

Participants will be provided study materials and lectures on history, living history, and interpretive skills. Living historians will teach and direct participants in use of 19th century work techniques and social skills. Lectures will take place through the first day with an overnight on the Santa Fe Trail that evening. On Friday, those who are to work for Bent, St. Vrain and Company will travel to the fort and sign on with the company. From that moment on, you are living a 19th century life 24 hours a day. The Army and trappers will spend most of their time at their camps along the Arkansas River.

There is a participant fee of \$200 for this 4-day, 3-night event which includes all instruction, food, accommodations, and necessary equipment. Two hours graduate level credit will be available and college tuition fees apply. Applications are available at www.nps.gov/beol. Contact Greg at (719) 383-5023 for more information.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Bent's Fort Volunteer Newsletter is a non-profit publication free to any active Bent's Old Fort volunteer. All rights are not reserved.

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Join Bent's Old Fort Historical Association to Help Promote and Support the Fort!

You are invited to join the Bent's Old Fort Historical Association and help promote, protect and honor the natural and cultural heritage the fort represents by increasing public awareness and attracting supplemental financial assistance.

Membership benefits include:

- Free admission to the fort.
- A quarterly newsletter
- Membership card acknowledging your interest in history
- Bent's Old Fort Historical Association tee shirt to the first 15 new members.

Through your support, you will be helping to preserve a vital part of America's past.

Call Lee Keyser at 719-598-5990 for more information!