



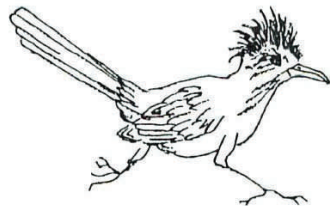
VIP2VIP



Season 5, Volume 3

Big Bend National Park's Volunteer Newsletter

January 4, 2006



It is with mixed emotions that we begin our individual journeys for 2006. The fall season volunteers are leaving. We have all made new friends, and enjoyed connecting with our old friends. Hopefully we will see one another again, possibly right back here next year!

A Sad "Good Bye" to departing VIP's:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Nancy Bauer | Sally & Bob Jones |
| Cathy Bell | Cara Lovell |
| Marty & Howard Benham | Susan & Lewis McCool |
| Barbara Bracken | Glenda & Robert Overfelt |
| Royann & Royce Brockett | Richard Ranc |
| George Bruzenak | Becky Reiger |
| Kay & Doug Combs | Ronnie Riner |
| Sam & Erv Drabek | Maaike Schotborgh |
| Lynda & Bob Fanning | Ross Weissman |

Fall 2005 Volunteers

Persimmon Gap

- Mark Kirtley- Visitor Center
- Sally & Bob Jones- Visitor Center

Castolon

- Nancy Bauer- Visitor Center
- George Bruzenak- new- Visitor Center
- Tina & Steve Ehrman- Camp Host & Backcountry

Rio Grande Village

- Sam & Erv Drabek- Backcountry
- Samantha Schroeder- Backcountry
- Barbara & Bill Baldwin- Camp Hosts
- Royann & Royce Brockett- Camp Hosts
- Glenda & Robert Overfelt- new- Visitor Center
- Lynda & Bob Fanning- Visitor Center

Chisos Basin

- Marty & Howard Benham- new- Visitor Center
- Kay & Doug Combs- Camp Host

Panther Junction

- Diane & Gary Frable- River
- Becky Reiger- Volunteer Program Assistant
- Bud Frankenberger- Resource Management
- Bob Wirt- Resource Management
- Richard Ranc- new- SCA Interpretation
- Cara Lovell- new- SCA Interpretation
- Cathy Bell- new- SCA Interpretation
- Ross Weissman- new- SCA Interpretation

Part-time

- Judy Brinkerhoff- Resource Management
- John Davies- Visitor Protection
- Steve Harper- Resource Management
- Maaike Schotborgh- new- Resource Management
- Steve Wick- Resource Management
- Reine Wonite- Emergency Services



River Volunteers

To those of us that love the river, the job of river volunteer sounds captivating. Our vision might be lazy days slowly moving between the enormous canyon walls of Santa Elena Canyon, or exciting runs through the Lower Canyons. I had such visions, but those images were dispelled after I

learned what **Diane & Gary Frable** really do. A river volunteer, just like all other volunteers, works hard! It's true that they do get to enjoy the times mentioned, but a great deal of the job takes place on dry land. To start with, it takes a special person to be able to do this job. They do not work on a schedule, and they do not have set day's off. Their duties require them to be available for support whenever a river trip or incident occurs.

In preparation for any river trip they get all the gear together, which entails knowing how many extra of things like life vests and paddles need to be available. They base that figure on the number of canoes scheduled to go on the trip. They are also in charge of the logistics of the trip, which Gary says can sometimes be quite tricky. They either provide the shuttle service themselves, or they arrange for drivers, making sure everyone has all the necessary directions, vehicle and gate keys. Once the trip is completed, the gear is checked out to be sure it's all still in working order, then it is cleaned and put away where it belongs in anticipation of the next trip.

Special projects are an important part of Diane & Gary's job. They recently completed construction of a wonderful canoe rack, which will hold 12 canoes. Their new project is doing an inventory of everything in the river cache. Each item will be numbered, labeled, and entered on an Excel spread sheet. Diane has located all the tools in the cache, and a centralized work bench was set up. Gary is a "fix-it" guy, and loves being able to use all the "stuff" available for the various jobs they do.

Of course, they do get to spend time on the river. As they meet and greet visitors they make sure they have all the required items for a river outing. They watch for any problems, like an overturned canoe. On one trip they looked for hot springs and cleared the cane so that the areas so they would be more accessible.

Gary & Diane enjoy the flexible schedule. They both love being on the river and meeting all the people they assist on river trips. Most of all they relish working for Marcos Paredes and Michael Ryan, two very unique people who are well suited to working with one another.

Science and Resource Management

ScRm, as we affectionately call Science and Resource Management, hires a large number of volunteers each year. Although not visible to visitors, these VIP's contribute a great deal to Big Bend.

Throughout the year many groups give time and energy in various aspects. Big Bend is fortunate to receive the assistance of groups like the Boy Scouts, Americorps, Sierra Club, American Hiking Society, and various school groups. There are also several volunteers working part-time for Resource Management: Steve Harper works for Archeologist Tom Alex, Judy Brinkerhoff works for GIS Specialist Betty Alex, Steve Wick hunts for dinosaur bones under the direction of Paleontologist Don Corrick, and Maaik Schotborgh assists Hydrologist Jeff Bennett. Presently there are two full-time volunteers: Bud Frankenberger working for Botanist Joe Sirotnak and Bob Wirt who works for a number of different specialists. These volunteers tirelessly gather information and offer their unique skills to help preserve this beautiful area for future generations.

In order to better understand the workings of this vast department and what our volunteers do, I spent time with the following ScRm VIP's. I appreciate the time they freely gave me, so that I could attempt to share the interesting jobs they do.

Bob Wirt wears several different hats for his work in Science and Resource Management. His main focus this year is the re-vegetation project under the direction of Hydrologist Jeff Bennett. Most of the sites they are working on are on the old Harte Ranch, a portion of the park acquired in the 1980's. The objective is to get enough vegetation started to slow down the erosion. These areas are barren due to overgrazing and diversion. It was common for ranchers to divert water into earthen tanks to give livestock access to water. Once the diversion is created, the downstream desert receives little or no water. Another noticeable area is on the east side of the Persimmon Gap road. Barren areas along the road are caused from rainwater run-off being diverted into culverts.



Several different re-vegetation attempts have been made, however the one they are currently having some success with, originated in Australia. This process is completed in several stages:

1. Brush is collected from various areas of the park, mainly the RGV area, and piled next to the site.
2. Seeding is done by use of a hydro mulcher. A mixture of water, wood fiber mulch, and seed is sprayed onto the strip being worked on.
3. The strip is covered with a biodegradable mat.
4. The mat is then covered by the collected brush. The brush acts as a shield protecting the new plants from the sun.
5. The area is then monitored. Rain gauges have been located at each site.

I accompanied Bob to several sites on the old Harte Ranch. This truly is a barren section of the park! Signs of erosion are definitely present. We stopped first at the Santiago Site. Each site has

2 types of rain gauges: the old fashioned bucket in which you measure the collected water with a ruler, and a battery operated recording device. We measured the bucket with the ruler and received a reading of .34 inches from the rain last week. As water drips into the recording device it triggers a lever which tips with a pre-set amount of water pressure. Each tip is recorded as an event. Bob connects his lap top computer to the recording device and downloads the number of events recorded. That reading showed .39 events, which translates into .39 inches of rain. The measurement difference between the two devices could be explained by evaporation, since the water in the bucket came from the rain several days ago. Bob then makes sure both gauges are empty and re-set.

We checked the seeded strips. New grasses and other plants are growing beneath the brush in various levels of success. It will take some time to really evaluate this system, however it looks promising. We continued on to the Mile Long Diversion Site, the Go Between Site, and the Texas Tech Site measuring the levels of rain received and checking the seeded strips.

Bob also has many secondary jobs. One of his secondary jobs is following up on a well survey he did several years. At that time he located and documented information on wells at Big Bend. This year he is beginning the process of plugging the wells that could be hazardous to visitors (and animals). Another secondary job is working as a back-up for air and water quality. Most of the equipment is at K Bar, and when needed he is available to do the servicing. He checks the equipment that monitors the ozone and solar radiation. The other instruments that require Bob's attention are the park's nephelometer and a transmissiometer, both of which examine visibility.

Bob takes pleasure in seeing the success of the re-vegetation and has satisfaction in knowing that, most likely, this project would not be proceeding at this pace without his efforts. Thank you, Bob, for the hours you give trying to remedy man's negative impact on the land.





It takes many years experience of hiking at Big Bend, to effectively do the job that **Bud Frankenberger** is doing. Bud has been hiking here for almost 40 years, and has an intimate knowledge of the park. This is a job the hiker in us envies. Bud is working under the supervision of Park Botanist, Joe Sirotnak, reproducing photographs in various locations of the park. In 1937, a vegetative study was commissioned by the State of Texas and 3 botanists came to what is now Big Bend National Park. They took 400 to 500 photographs of the area. Many were of individual plants in the attempt to document the flora and fauna of the desert. The archives are rich with this information, and Bud had pulled approximately 70 of the landscape photographs to scan into the computer. He then prints the individual photographs. The idea for this project is to re-create these old photographs and compare the foliage. In most instances, the botanist gave rough compass directions indicating the location of the shot. However, many of the place names have changed and the access roads are no longer available. Bud started this project last winter, and is continuing this year. He takes great delight in finding the exact spot the previous photographer stood to take the picture. At least 2 of the botanists enjoyed

climbing to the highest accessible spot before shooting.

Not all of the photographic locations are easy to find. I joined Bud on his 4th attempt to locate a particular scene of the desert north of Dagger Mountain. The 1937 photographer had noted that this picture was taken approximately 2 miles north of Dagger Tank. The old road to Dagger Tank is no longer available, or visible in most instances, which meant a long hike to the presumed location. Previous attempts to find the location, and a study of the 7.5 map of the area had convinced Bud that the best way to get there was from Devil's Den. We left the government vehicle at Nine Point Draw campsite and hiked across the desert to the rim of Devil's Den. A canyon wren laughed at us as I wondered why such a beautiful place had that name. I couldn't help but consider a nice cool dip in one of the many pools in the base of the canyon. Once we reached the east end of the canyon, we dropped down into the wash and headed out into Dagger Flats. This country is very broken and we struggled in and out of washes trying to avoid the mesquite, catclaw and the thorns of the lechuguilla.

We eventually arrived near the mountain Bud had determined the photographer had ascended. When hiking in the winter, it is important to keep an eye on the time, unless you enjoy hiking out of the desert in the dark. Time was getting away from us and we hadn't eaten lunch. We had no guarantee that we would find the exact location. We were deciding what to do, when we saw a curious bare spot just ahead of us. I got excited realizing this had to be the same bare spot shown in the bottom right of the picture! Recognizing that we were very close, we started climbing the mountain. The higher we got, the more our hopes were dashed that we wouldn't have to go all the way to the top. Not until we reached the top did the scene look just right, even matching the 3 rocks in the foreground. Bud marked the location with the GPS and proceeded to take the photograph. A celebration lunch and rest were in order, before starting the long hike back.



As we returned to the vehicle, the sun was setting. I considered how difficult it was to duplicate some of these photographs. Bud has spent a lifetime hiking in Big Bend, and this job gives him the opportunity to use his knowledge of the park. In the process he is discovering new places. It has been almost 70 years since the first pictures were taken. The comparison photographs will show differences in the vegetation since this area has been protected. This information can be used by numerous departments. Bud appears to have found a volunteer position that is a perfect fit for him.



Maaike Schotborgh has just finished a project for Hydrologist Jeff Bennett that utilizes and ties together many of the other ScRm volunteer efforts. She personally developed an excel spreadsheet that summarizes all the weather data from the four park weather stations, ranging from 1955 until the present. Now that this information is all together in one location, Jeff will be able to readily find temperature ranges, precipitation, and supporting information for seasonal cycles. I remembered Bob Wirt collecting the rainfall data, and understood how that information is a vital ingredient in this summary. I also reflected back to a conversation with Bud Frankenberger regarding the 1984 record bloom of Dagger Yuccas. We had wondered why that spectacular bloom had not re-occurred after the past few wet years. Did it require a series of particularly wet summers to cause it? Is it a cyclical phenomenon? The project Maaike just finished will give the scientists easy access to useful information in determining the answers to questions like these.

Maaike has a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering, and a master's degree in wildlife management and conservation ecology. This background gave her the understanding necessary to set up the programs Jeff requested. She said she learned many interesting facts while compiling this information. For instance, the longest dry period in the Basin was 135 days, in comparison to 129 dry days at PJ!

Maaike's next project will be a springs data program. She will simplify the information already available, and organize it in a useful manner. Maaike's work is of considerable value to both Jeff and the park. Readily accessible information will greatly assist in future decisions regarding protecting Big Bend's natural resources.

I am struck with the obvious realization that none of these important efforts are complete in themselves. Our volunteers individually contribute a great deal to the future of this park, and have a great time in the process! A great deal of gratitude goes to the Science and Resource Management volunteers.

Volunteer Corner

Sharing information with visitors comes naturally to **Glenda and Robert Overfelt**. Their entire lives have been immersed in a quest for knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge with others. Even each of their 3 children are teachers.

Robert said it was "love at first sight" when he first went out with Glenda, in Hillsboro, Texas. Glenda's family moved to Hillsboro during her senior year in high school, and Robert's friends dared him to go out with the "new" girl. They have been a couple ever since. They both attended Baylor University, where Glenda obtained a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Robert earned his Bachelor of Arts and Masters Degree in History. He acquired his Ph.D. in Fort Worth from Texas Christian University.

Robert taught history in several colleges in Texas, including TCU, Texas A&M at Kingsville, Dominican College in Houston, and in the public schools for a couple of years. In 1978 he was asked to join the faculty of Sul Ross in their Del Rio, TX, location. They have lived on the Texas-Mexico border ever since. Glenda has been fortunate to be able to teach high school science in each of the various locations they have lived. She is recently retired, however she continues to do consulting work.

Glenda and Robert both enjoy the outdoors during their time away from school. They have canoed in Montana, and love to sail and kayak. They own a mountain cabin in Montezuma, New Mexico where they enjoy spending their summers hiking, backpacking, and escaping the south Texas heat. During a "Romantic Mountain Man" phase, Robert purchased a miniature donkey, with the intention of using him for backpacking trips in the mountains. One year, a long backpacking excursion was planned and the children were excited. After the donkey, Nacho, was loaded they started down the trail, only to be foiled at the 1st of the 17 stream crossings. No amount of pushing, cajoling, or cursing would persuade Nacho to put his feet in the water. As soon as they turned back he eagerly climbed into his trailer. They removed the gear from the donkey, and repacked it into their backpacks. They could hear Nacho braying at them as they carried the heavy packs into the wilderness. From that day on, Nacho remains behind in Del Rio when the family heads to the New Mexico cabin.

In the late 1960's, the Overfelts made their first trip to Big Bend, and their love affair with this park began. Glenda has brought environmental school groups here. At each visit to Big Bend, they talked to different volunteers about the jobs they were doing. Last year they talked to VIP Terry Purvis in the Persimmon Gap Visitor Center and were referred to Angelina Yost, Volunteer Coordinator. The timing was perfect when Rob Dean, Interpretative Ranger for RGV, asked them to work in the visitor center this past fall. Robert was already scheduled to take a sabbatical from his teaching position, so they had the months available for a new experience.

Both Robert and Glenda appreciate the way volunteers are accepted by the park community. They have enjoyed seeing places in the park that they had not been to before. However, they both agree that their greatest joy has come from meeting people, both the employees and the visitors from all over the world.



Kay & Doug Combs, Chisos Basin Campground Hosts, left Big Bend earlier than planned last April, because of her father's poor health. He passed away in Cincinnati, and they helped take her mother back to her apartment in Ludington, MI. They own the apartment building, and live across the hall from her mother. Doug inherited the job of "Mr. Fit-it", so he spent the summer working on various projects. Kay helped her mother and took care of their vegetable garden.



Their home is on the shore of Lake Michigan and next to Ludington Harbor. The busy harbor activity gives them a great deal of pleasure, and they often refer to a book which identifies boats. According to Kay, they spend a lot of time helping the coast guard keep track of the shipping traffic! All of their 7 grandchildren came to visit and enjoy the beautiful area. The lake remained warm enough for Kay to take her last swim on October 17th!

Kay and Doug love their home in Michigan, but are thrilled to be back here for the winter months. The views from their large windows are magnificent, and they enjoy getting to know the different campers.

Activities & Events

VIP Award Dinner– Sun. Jan 8, 6:30 pm. Pizza party and recognition of fall 2005 volunteers. PJ Community Room.

Big Bend Ultra Run– Sun. Jan. 15, For information and registration go to the web site: www.bigbend50.com

Chili Cookoff– Thurs. Jan. 19. 6:00 pm. PJ Community Room

Doug Fagg's Retirement Party– Thurs. Feb. 23.

Kathi Hambly's Retirement Party– Sat. Feb. 25

Doug Thompson's Retirement Party– Mid-Feb.
Details to follow on the retirement parties!

Ongoing:

Big Bend Community Choir– Wednesdays, 5:30 pm, Music room at Terlingua School.
For information call Patricia 424-3208.

Crafts– Tues. nights, 6:30 pm. PJ Community room.

Check the bulletin board at PJ for details and updates!