

VISITOR SERVICES

Providing For Public Enjoyment

The national parks commemorate those historical and cultural events, social movements, and people from which the American people derive their collective national heritage, and by which visitors to this country gain understanding of this nation. Individual experiences help people gain a sense of place and a stronger sense of history and national identity. Equally as important is the sanctuary that the parks provide for the mind and spirit.

The most advanced science and research, the most efficient park management, and the best resource conservation will not guarantee the preservation of the parks. Rather, by making the stories and scenic wonders of the parks available to the public and by creating emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and recreational bonds people will assume greater responsibility for the protection of their natural and cultural heritage and ensure their preservation for generations to come. To this end, the Service strives to provide high quality visitor experiences.

National park areas have long been a favorite destination for millions of Americans as well as people from around the world. To ensure that adequate opportunities are available for public enjoyment and that a park experience be a safe one, the NPS provides a variety of visitor services, interpretation and education programs, information and orientation services, and commercial concession operations. Park Rangers and the U.S. Park Police work to ensure the health, safety and security of the visiting public and National Park Service staff.

Interpretation and Education

The protection and preservation of national parks is dependent upon an informed and engaged public. In 1998 the “Connecting People to Parks” 5-Year Plan (1998-2003) was created to meet the challenges of resource preservation and visitor enjoyment through interpretation and

education. Using the plan as a guide, work has been accomplished in the writing of park comprehensive interpretive plans, the training of park staff, and the replacement of outdated exhibits. Through these efforts the NPS is improving the opportunities for the public to have memorable experiences in their national parks. It is most important that park visitors, potential visitors, and the general public understand the purpose and significance of parks. This understanding is intended to encourage everyone to become involved with the preservation of parks and the heritage that they represent.

Each national park represents a window to meanings. Parks symbolize multiple ideas and feelings, and represent different things to different people. Visitors come to parks on their own time, some on pilgrimages, others for education, and many just for fun. The interpretation and education program is meant to provide visitors with something of personal value. The vast majority of visitors are not after information, they are after something for themselves.

Successful interpretation and education programs achieve meaning by linking specific tangible artifacts, buildings, and places with intangible ideas and events. The job is to help individuals discover their own relationship to and understanding of parks. When we succeed, we facilitate a connection between the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the parks. The result is the audience’s raised sensitivity, a greater degree of care, and an often gentle but valuable movement along the continuum toward stewardship. Our chief goal is not to fill visitors with information but to enable visitors to care.

In FY 1999, the Park Service was appropriated \$123,106,000 for park interpretation and education programs. Systemwide, 685,098 opportunities to participate in interpretation and education programs were offered. Over 168 million visitors participated in some way in these programs. For example, 119 million visitors were served in visitor centers, 16 million

participated in guided tours, 1.5 million participated in education programs and 271,000 children became junior rangers.

Interpretation and Education Highlights

Visitor services and interpretive programs vary with the nature of the parks. The following descriptions of programs offered in FY 1999 are just a sampling of the professionalism, creativity, and enthusiasm that are a standard part of NPS interpretive and educational programs.

Adams National Historic Site has the “Picture Yourself in the Past Program” in which students learn about the challenges that were met and overcome by John Adams and his family. More than 6,000 students have participated in the program. Students learn, in this inclusive program which crosses national, cultural, and gender lines, of the challenges that were met and overcome by John Adams and his family. The curriculum-based program has three parts: Families in the Revolution: Patriots in the Countryside, The Boston Massacre: John Adams to the Defense, and Pen and Parchment: From Penn’s Hill to Pennsylvania. Each program engages the public in the importance of the park and provides an opportunity to use primary source documents. Participants assume the identities of historical characters in order to gain a greater appreciation of the relevancy and



Teenagers participate in NPS sponsored Chihuahuan Desert Lab Course.

significance of the John Adam’s family story and the historical backdrop against which their lives were played out. Several local schoolteachers have developed companion programs using the park resources to enhance overall curriculum goals. The increased awareness prompted by this program has caused several local organizations and institutions to approach park management to explore other collaborative efforts.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park offers the “Resource Well: A Comprehensive Outreach Program” as a source from which many things can be drawn as needed. The Resource Well creates the opportunity for teachers and students to participate in educational opportunities which engage the participants in fostering stewardship for cultural and natural resources. The Resource Well contains *The Chihuahuan Desert Lab*, and the *About Bats, Caves, and Deserts* teacher’s activity book, and the “ParKids Productions Presents Carlsbad Caverns National Park” video which engages children teaching other children about the park.

Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve has the “Cultural Connections at Glacier Bay and Beyond Program” which recognizes the Alaska Native people’s connection to the landscape and the value of traditional knowledge. This local outreach program includes the Hoonah School Boat Trip for 3rd-6th graders, educators, and Tlingit elders. The highlight of this program is a Tlingit elder sharing a Hoonah Tlingit traditional Glacier Bay story that is woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. Another part of the program, CAMP WATERS creates opportunities for native students to utilize traditional knowledge and western science. Both of these programs provide the Tlingit people with an opportunity to return to their ancestral homelands and to share their knowledge with schools and community members. Assisting the Yakutat Tlingit has allowed native cultural interpreters to share their stories of the surrounding landscape with the public.

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore offers the “Connecting People to Parks Junior Ranger Program” which offers young people “hands-on” activities to develop a sense of personal ownership and responsibility for the



Participants in the CAMP WATERS Program at Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

preservation of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. This program differs from traditional junior ranger programs in that it is not a one-time activity, but rather involves 7-13 year-olds in a series of weekly programs during the summer and for periodic weekend programs during the rest of the year. The activities include curriculum-based education programs, along with opportunities to work on resource management projects, help with chores on a historic farm, and help create and present seasonal programs to other children. Many of the participants return to the park with parents, siblings and friends to show them where they worked. The program is based on the principle that children need frequent exposure to environmental messages. The junior ranger program provides multiple opportunities to positively influence the attitudes and behaviors of the participating children

Rock Creek Park has created the “Meeting the Challenge: A Curriculum-based Urban Environmental Education Program” which uses all five senses to explore the park. Working cooperatively in groups the students use all five senses in hands-on activities to understand the Rock Creek environment. This program has helped the urban students of the area to develop a love for the park and an understanding of their impact on and place in the environment. For many urban students their experience at Rock Creek Park is their first exposure to the National Park System.

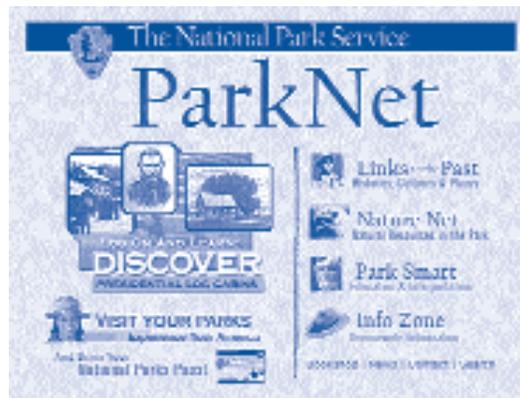
San Juan Island National Historical Park demonstrates through a variety of part-

nership initiatives and outreach programs the powerful message of “conflict resolution through peaceful means.” Programs offered include the creation of an expanded park web site, the development of a traveling trunk, and a new publication “The Pig War: Stand-off at Griffin Bay.” In a partnership with the British Consulate in Seattle funds were raised for a new flagpole for the English Camp. The dedication ceremony of the new flagpole reaffirmed the strong ties of friendship between the United States and Canada

and attracted international interest that promises to foster future interpretive and research opportunities between the park, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The National Park Service Place on the Web—ParkNet: www.nps.gov

The National Park Service’s website is the single busiest visitor contact center in the entire National Park System. With over 700,000 hits each day, the NPS website now provides accurate, timely information to millions of electronic visitors. During FY 1999, more than eighty percent of the parks and offices throughout the National Park System began actively maintaining their own part of the ParkNet. ParkNet was



You can reach the National Park Service place on the web at www.nps.gov.

recognized by USA Today, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal as a leader in providing excellent information via the Web.

During FY 1999, NPS also unveiled a new service on the Internet called Recreation Opportunities on Federal Lands (www.recreation.gov) which provides one stop service for people interested in recreational opportunities on Federal lands. Through this ongoing partnership with six other Federal resource management agencies, the Service continues to lead the way in providing excellent customer service through the Web.

Interpretive and Educational Media

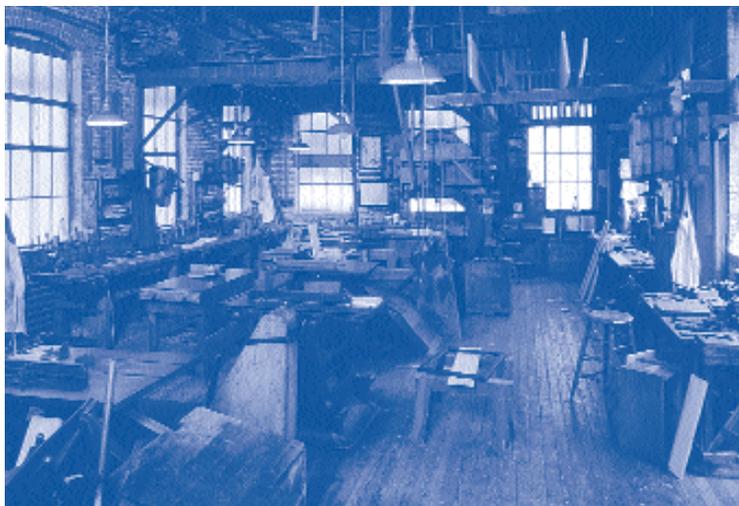
Interpretive exhibits, along with personal service presentations, audiovisual programs, wayside panels, and publications help a park tell its stories. The most effective exhibits are those that deal with the particular component of a park's stories that lend themselves to the use of objects that are contextual to the park. These objects, whether they are natural history specimens, historical artifacts, or models, should connect with the visitor personally and intellectually and cause a greater understanding of the park's significance and value. This understanding is fur-

ther increased through the appropriate use of graphics and text.

Every one of the National Park Service's park units has at least one exhibit, and many have several. The Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) is responsible for providing the parks with the interpretive and educational media that allows them to meet their interpretive and educational goals. Media include video productions, museum and visitor center exhibits, outdoor, or "wayside" exhibits, and publications along with artifact conservation assistance and interpretive plans.

In FY 1999, HFC produced 15 video productions, including the "Breath of Life" for Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument which won the Chicago International Film Festival Golden Hugo award, the Cine Golden Eagle award from the Council on International Non-Theatrical Events, a Best Video Documentary at the 8th annual Saguaro Film Festival and a Gold Award at the 32nd annual Worldfest in Houston. The HFC video, "Those Who Wait," produced for Andersonville National Historic Site garnered a first place media award at the 1999 National Association for Interpretation conference held in Syracuse, New York.

In FY 1999, HFC printed and delivered more than 26 million park brochures and reprinted thirteen handbooks including the well received Underground Railroad which has gone through three reprintings. By June 1999, more than 81,000 copies were in print. The center produced and installed thirteen major museum and visitor center exhibits including the Jefferson Memorial "Light and Liberty" exhibit that focuses on the chapters of Jefferson's life as a writer, diplomat, scholar, and President. HFC also installed six historically furnished areas at four parks in FY 1999, including the extremely complex Edison's Workshop structure at Edison National Historic Site. In addition, HFC served 96 parks in the planning, designing, and production of 237 new



Harpers Ferry Center, which is responsible for providing parks with interpretive and educational media, installed the extremely complex historically furnished areas at Edison's workshop at Edison National Historic Site.

outdoor exhibit panels and 491 replacement panels. In doing so, HFC has been able to engineer dramatic reductions in the costs of wayside exhibits, as much as 30 percent for porcelain ceramic panels and 20 percent for embedded fiberglass panels. HFC also completed twenty interpretive plans while continuing or starting work on 94 additional ones.

Harpers Ferry has striven to implement and utilize innovation in its acquisition processes. One of the most effective tools is the Indefinite Quantity Contract. HFC now works with 164 contractors along with 394 subcontractors through the Indefinite Quantity process.

These contracts are Servicewide in nature, which means that parks can take advantage of this streamlined contracting process under HFC auspices. The complete list of HFC Indefinite Quantity contractors can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.nps.gov/hfc/support/idiq.htm>.

Parks as Classrooms

The National Park Service is dedicated to providing high quality educational experiences to diverse audiences. The NPS Parks as Classrooms program strives to provide curriculum-based activities that meet the needs of local schools while providing educational opportunities for a national constituency. This was the ninth year for the NPS Parks as Classrooms program. Since its beginning in 1991, the program has served more than 4 million students and 75,000 teachers.

In FY 1999, the NPS distributed \$758,000 to fund 65 projects that included electronic field trips, curriculum guides, teacher workshops, traveling trunks, student materials, classroom visits, field trips, video tapes, and interactive CD-ROMs. Over 250,000 students and more than 6,000 teachers participated in 1999 programs that included studying cultural and natural resources, archeology, science, math, reading, art, and social studies. In addition the Fee Demonstration Funds provided \$242,000 for the creation of 23 park



Big Bend National Park ranger Rhonda Terry works with students from Boquillas, Coahuila, Mexico in their classroom.

projects for students and teachers. Examples of Parks as Classrooms programs include:

Western Arctic National Parklands produced an interactive multi-media CD-ROM which provides educational information on the natural and cultural resources of the Northwest Alaska Arctic region and the four national park sites associated with the region.

Ocmulgee National Monument developed the *Muscogee (Creek) Ambassadors* program which brought seven educators, scholars, and other leaders from the Muscogee Nation and the three independent tribal towns in Oklahoma to visit teachers and fourth graders at local schools to give their own perspective to the history, traditions and current status of Middle Georgia's indigenous people. This was part of a larger *Georgia's Heartland Heritage Education Project*.

Gateway National Recreation Area created a teaching module designed to introduce students from New York's inner city to the National Park System. The module is designed for use at any park area.

George Washington Carver National Monument developed a series of lesson plans on the life of George Washington Carver. They included *Carver's Love for Nature*, with emphasis on ecosystems, food web, recycling, and composting; *Carver's Secret Garden*, looking at scientific research with plants; and *The Man and Inter-Racial Harmony*, a study in prejudice, discrimination and cultural diversity.

George Washington Birthplace National Monument's *How Math Changed George Washington's Life* program targets middle school math students teaching them basic surveying, mapping, and real math skills while relating the importance math played in the development of the country.

Volunteers in Parks Program

During FY 1999, 115,300 volunteers contributed over 4.2 million hours of service. Using a nationally accepted private sector value figure of \$14.30 per volunteer hour, the NPS realized a \$60.5 million gross return on investment. The VIP program continues to be a major force in accomplishing the NPS mission. FY 1999 figures show a 3 percent growth in volunteer hours over FY 1998. On average, each volunteer contributes 37 hours towards the agency's mission. Volunteer work contributions to the National Park Service during FY 1999 are equivalent to 2,028 FTE.

Cooperating Associations

In FY 1999, the 64 cooperating associations working with NPS continue to provide literature sales which in turn provide support for research, interpretation and education program assistance. Gross receipts for 1998 sales of educational materials reached nearly \$100,000,000.

The resulting donation to the Service was valued at \$22,500,000 which was an increase of \$3,500,000 over FY 97. Examples of the service and support provided by the cooperating associations which supplement the Service's ability to serve the public include such things as the Alcatraz Island tour in San Francisco Bay that is staffed and managed by the Golden Gate National Parks Association. Another is the extensive offerings in educational seminars provided by the Yellowstone Association, or the more modest program at the small but effective Great Basin Natural History Association. Partnerships with cooperating associations are essential to enable the NPS to meet the needs of the public in understanding the complex and fascinating stories of the National Park System. All indications point to an excellent year for 1999 when the association reports are received in January 2000.

Concessions

Concessioners provide a variety of necessary and appropriate visitor services including accommodations, restaurants, transportation, and merchandise facilities. Currently, there are 630 concessioners operating in approximately 130 parks in the National Park System. Concession operations are monitored by NPS concession management specialists to ensure that they do not conflict with the protection of natural and cultural resources, and that quality visitor services are available at reasonable rates.

On November 13, 1998, the Concessions Policies Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-249) was reformed with the passage of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998, Public Law 105-391. This legislation reduces the number of concessioners that will receive a preferential right of contract renewal, replaces sound value possessory interest with a leasehold surrender interest,

NPS Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) Time Volunteered



provides for franchise fees to be returned to the National Park Service, encourages the promotion of Native American handcrafts and establishes a Concessions Management Advisory Board to the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service.

In FY 1998, concessioners deposited \$14,160,797 in franchise fees to the General Fund of the U.S. Treasury and \$26,287,831 to special accounts for improvements to concession service facilities without their accruing possessory interest. In calendar year 1998, concessioners provided \$9,787,000 in possessory interest extinguishment and other benefits. Beginning in FY 1999 as provided in Public Law 105-391, all franchise fees paid by concessioners to the United States are deposited into a special account established in the U.S. Treasury Department. Twenty-percent (20%) of the funds are available without further appropriations to support activities throughout the National Park System. An estimated \$2.2 million was deposited in FY 1999. Eighty percent (80%) of the franchise fees collected at a park are available without further appropriations, for use at the park for visitor services and for funding high priority resource management programs and operations. Highest priorities are given for concession related projects.

Revised concession regulations were published in the Federal Register for public comment on June 30, 1999 and approximately 125 comments were received. Upon complete analysis and review of all comments, appropriate revisions will be made and published in final in the Federal Register. The projected date for publication of final regulations is March 2000. Revised concession standard contract language was published on September 3, 1999 for a 60-day public comment period. After analysis and changes, final concession contract language is projected in March 2000. A backlog of expired concession authorizations has developed as a result of a



The National Park Service ensures that quality visitor services are available at park sites.

freeze on concession contracting while administrative contracting reforms are developed to conform to the new concession legislation.

Each year over 4,500 individual inspections are conducted to evaluate concession operations to ensure that park visitors are provided safe, sanitary, attractive, and high quality services. Over 20 operational standards have been developed for specific types of concession operations/services. The NPS Public Health standard has been revised to meet the U.S. Public Health Service Food Code requirements, a new risk management program has been developed, and new environmental compliance standards and sustainable practice standards are being developed as part of the NPS Concession Evaluation Program.

As part of the National Park Service Environmental Leadership Strategy, a Concessions Environmental Management Program (CEMP) is being developed. The overarching missions of this program are fostering public education and concessioner awareness of environmental issues and providing a program that exemplifies Environmental Leadership, serving as a model for other Federal agencies. As a way to implement the CEMP, the new proposed concession regulations make the quality of the concessions applicant's proposed environmental management practices a co-equal factor for ranking and awarding concessions contracts and requires

best management practices in this arena from our partners in providing visitor services. CEMP intends to facilitate concessioner compliance with environmental regulatory requirements, promote environmental awareness and accountability, and encourage the integration of sustainability and pollution prevention strategies in concessioner activities and operations.

Park Protection

Visitor and employee safety is a priority function within parks and integral to fulfilling the National Park Service's mission to provide for the public enjoyment of the national parks. Protection of park resources is also of the essence. In addition, as a mandate of its authority and jurisdiction, NPS is required to enforce all Federal laws and regulations within park units. NPS park rangers and, in a few parks in major metropolitan areas, the United States Park Police, play a major role in the promotion of visitor safety, resource protection, and law enforcement. Duties include ranger patrols, rescues and emergency response actions, education about safe visits to parks, advice to the public on environmental risks, natural disaster assistance and other visitor use management activities.

Visitor and Employee Safety

With millions of park visitors seeking to enjoy the national parks each year, the responsibilities of NPS in providing a safe and secure park experience necessitates a proactive program of law enforcement and visitor education. National parks remain safe places for the majority of visitors, but crimes against persons, property, and resources, and urban gang activity within the parks has been on the rise. At the same time, visitors who participate in high risk activity is also increasing.

Park Rangers are responsible for helping to maintain a safe environment for visitors and employees. Accident prevention through patrols, contacts/communications with visitors, safety inspections, signage, and literature is a major duty of the rangers, Park Police, and emergency medical personnel. NPS has been reducing the visitor accident rate. This is accomplished through more and better technology, and more effective use of personnel and other resources.

Search and rescue duties and responses to medical emergencies are also critical activities performed by park rangers in coordination with emergency rescue personnel in park and



Park Police Helicopter lands at Lincoln Memorial.

area communities. Search and rescue missions included locating and assisting individuals lost or trapped in remote or confined spaces. Park Rangers also carry out various tasks associated with forest or structural fire control and provide other natural disaster assistance in the case of hurricanes and floodings.

Resource Protection

Parks contain a vast array of historical, cultural, and natural resources, such as wildlife, forests, lakeshores, seashores, historic buildings, battlefields, and archaeological properties. Park Rangers supervise, manage, and perform work in the conservation and use of resources in national parks and other federally managed areas. Duties includes protection of property; gathering and dissemination of natural, historical, or scientific information; and development of interpretive material for the natural, historical, or cultural features of an era.

NPS Rangers work to prevent and detect resource crimes, such as poaching of plants and animals, timber cutting and theft, and mineral extraction since resource crimes constitute a substantial portion of crimes within parks. But the every day visitor poses problems, too, especially when the volume of visitors is taken in account. A major duty of NPS is to educate visitors about the resources contained within the parks. NPS offers educational programs that reach individuals believing it to be one of the most effective tools for continued protection and preservation of cultural and natural resources.

National Park Service educational programs are exceptional opportunities available to the public. For example, environmental programs explaining ecosystems teach, in part, that damage occurs through the cumula-

tive impacts of many individuals over time. Natural history programs help visitors understand their biological surroundings. Cultural history programs increase knowledge of their heritage. All foster an understanding and appreciation of park resources so that visitors will be in a better position to make informed decisions when engaging in the resources.

Law Enforcement

The Park Service conducts a comprehensive, proactive law enforcement program through park rangers and U.S. Park Police. Law enforcement rangers strive to protect the parks from the people, the people from the parks and the people from the people. Duties include enforcement of laws and regulations; investigation of violations, complaints, trespass/encroachment, and drug enforcement, primarily interdiction activities at NPS border parks but also including activities such as eliminating marijuana fields on park property. Rangers also participate in drug prevention programs involving elementary and junior high students, including the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programs in schools across the country.

Law enforcement rangers and the U.S. Park Police are also responsible for violent



NPS Park Police and law enforcement rangers are responsible for visitor and employee safety, resource protection and law enforcement.

crime management. The NPS focuses on reducing crimes in our national parks by increasing the use of surveillance systems, information gathering, and local patrols. NPS often receives assistance from local investigators which it frequently reciprocates when criminal activity occurs near park boundaries. Crimes within parks result in a loss of millions to the government and visitors in cash and property.

Because National Parks contain national treasures and are often located along national borders, a continuing problem is the potential for terrorist activities occurring on park lands. NPS utilizes commissioned law enforcement

park rangers and other Federal, State, and local law enforcement authorities and organizations to assist in providing security and protection for park resources and the visiting public against potential terrorist activities. Ongoing park ranger anti-terrorism activities include: protection of monuments and buildings owned and managed by the National Park Service, and providing law enforcement assistance in accordance with memorandums of understanding and interagency agreements with various Federal, State, and local agencies regarding terrorist acts and threats.