

PARK RANGERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT
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"SOONER OR LATER EACH VISITOR MEETS A RANGER...AND HE IS ONE OF THE KEY MEN IN THE PARK SERVICE. HE IS THE VISITOR'S FRIEND. HE MEETS THE GUEST, SHOWS HIM HOW TO REACH THE INTERESTING PLACES, WARNS HIM AGAINST FEEDING THE BEARS, FINDS HIM WHEN HE IS LOST AND DEALS FIRMLY WITH HIM WHEN HE VIOLATES THE REGULATIONS, WHICH ARE FEW AND REASONABLE."

This statement, made in 1958 by Conrad Wirth, then Director of the National Park Service summed up, until quite recently the image of the ranger-the park law enforcement officer. Historically, the ranger's role in law enforcement has been a low-profile type of authority. The image that the ranger projected was one of the dedicated resource-oriented individual, caring for animals and "warning against feeding the bears."

The Hanna-Barbera image of the Ranger in Jellystone Park was both widespread and, in its own way, admired. The development of this image, historically, is well-detailed. The ranger's uniform was developed from the time when the military protected the parks. Rugged individuality was added to the image when nearly all rangers were hired for their backcountry skills. Later as parks grew in popularity, and when major environmental causes were still not a critical level, the ranger did seem to spend as much of his time protecting the public from the bears as the bears from the public. The image of the Park Ranger as a unique public servant protecting great outdoor areas grew in a positive sense. One negative connotation that went along with this generally positive image was that of a rather bumbling animal caretaker.

These images and impressions were created, and then developed at a time when attendance in parks was low, and therefore, resource damage practically nil. Crime in parks was inconsequential. In many respects, this image and the times dictated the role of the ranger.

The, parks became more urban, and even the great wilderness of Yellowstone and Yosemite became urban extensions of the people who visited them. New urban parks were, and are, being created. Recreation areas became a large portion of National and State Park holdings. "Parks" became "Parks and Recreation." The terms "parks" and "recreation" became, if not synonymous, at least closely associated and administratively similar. And the role of the ranger began to change. In many respects, however, the image did not.

The "people pressures" currently in parks, brought about by both urbanization and the recreation demands of a public with increasing leisure time, dictated a role change more rapid than the ranger and the park administration were prepared to cope with. Crime soared. Different crimes than had been experienced previously in parks such as burglary, rape and assault increased and the ranger had to deal with them. Caught unprepared, administrators and the individual

ranger had to adjust to the park law enforcement officer's reluctant new role: that of the full-fledged peace officer, while attempting to maintain the workload and image of a resource protector and interpreter. "Enforcement," to use a harsh but accurate term, was always part of a ranger's work; but the type, magnitude and pressures of his peace officer role changed.

1958 vs. 1968 - a change in attitude by the visitors; a change in role for the park law enforcement officer. The ranger still had to deal with resource protection, but his over-all role changed with the addition of major, significant amounts of enforcement problems, many of which were not directly environmental or resource related.

In 1970, California State Park Rangers were perceived by themselves, for the most part, as resource protectors and interpreters. In 1971, rangers were "armed" in twelve high-crime locations and trained in an extensive Basic Peace Officer Course conforming to the Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission's (P.O.S.T.) standards. Controversy raged through the ranks of field rangers and administrators over both the need to be armed, and the consequences such a change toward a "high profile" image would have. There was a split within the ranger ranks with one faction arguing that such a change was a "professionalization," and the other countering that it was loss of a positive, traditional image.

Soon all rangers were armed and trained to minimum peace officer standards established by P.O.S.T. The personnel selection process also changed through this period. Where once we sought "handyman-naturalists," we now demanded college-educated individuals who would not mind carrying a weapon, enforcing laws, not necessarily environmental in nature, and at the same time, who would possess the skills required to handle the traditional aspects of a ranger's duties. Some rangers could not cope with what they perceived to be a negative change in their image. Some were eager to accept the new role - perhaps too eager. And, others accepted their new function reluctantly, but realized its purported necessity.

While these changes were occurring, the general visitor's view of the ranger, their "image" of him, did not radically change. The public could not see the controversy through the ranger's eyes. And when administrators stood back and viewed the situation, little actually had changed from the visitor's vantage point. When the public needed help, it was still the ranger who took care of that need. Resource information were still meted out by the ranger in doses sufficient for the positive image re-enforcement. There was, undoubtedly, a change in attitude toward the ranger by those visitors violating the law. For now, that segment of the park population noticed, and was received by, a trained peace officer in ranger's uniform, enforcing the law in a professional and well-equipped manner. There was little difference to the violator between regular enforcement officers and the park law enforcement officer as the new terms, "Pine Swine, Tree Fuzz, and Parky Pig" illustrate. The ranger's actions had earned him new titles.

Once the new role was accepted, training, re-training and proper equipment were demanded by rangers, as well as recognition of new, expanded duties by the park administration. This caused some consternation within the administration, as one would have expected, since those rangers who at first reluctantly accepted expanded peace officer duties now demanded one further step. For recognition implies salary, training, benefits and equipment commensurate with the required duties. The public had also come to expect professional peace officer aid when it was required or requested. And, the ranger had, for the most part, accepted that responsibility.

A circumstance of the current situation worth noting is that the public perceives the ranger in different ways depending on the actual type of unit at which the ranger works. For instance, the traditional "Smokey the Bear" image still dominates at natural and historic areas; even those with extraordinary crime statistics. An enforcement image persists at highly urbanized beach and recreation areas. The ranger's role and actual duties, are often similar at both locations but the image itself differs depending on what the public expects, what it sees, and what it perceives the park law enforcement officer's role to be.

The self-image of the ranger also may vary depending on the assigned unit. Most enjoy duties at traditional parks, rather than heavily used recreation areas and beaches. This is partially based on the public image of a ranger. Image feedback, for most rangers, is positive at natural and historic areas, and less so at beaches and recreation areas. Thus job satisfaction is usually greater at traditional units.

So, what of the role of today's park law enforcement officers? What is his performance as compared to actual needs? Is agency policy realistic when compared with needs? What are the ramifications of increased enforcement posture on the part of park law enforcement officers?

Today's California State Park Ranger, to use the model with which I am most familiar, is selected, in general, on the basis of ability to communicate with the public in a positive manner. A "standard profile" would also show an individual who possesses a strong resource-oriented background and convictions, a college degree, and one who shows at least the willingness to perform law enforcement duties.

Formal training emphasizes enforcement duties for several reasons. All California State Park Rangers are armed. The mandatory minimum length of time required in California for certification from the P.O.S.T. Commission is 400 hours (10 weeks). The mandatory refresher course required every three years is 80 hours, and instructor level courses in defensive tactics and in firearms training require even further commitments from those chosen. Supervisory and Management Courses for park peace officers at the appropriate level are also part of a mandatory curriculum in an ongoing career training program.

Thus, at the end of a training cycle, we have trained an individual to perform law enforcement duties at a professional level. A major benefit of the high level of training and performance now demanded of the park law enforcement officer, is the equally high level of respect gained from other enforcement agencies. Whether aid is solicited from, or offered to other local, county, state or national agencies, it is imperative that park and recreation administrations have a positive mutual relationship with those "outside" agencies upon whom we must all, from time to time, rely. Training, equipment and professional performance insure credibility.

The types of crimes committed in parks today is reflective of the urban population which visit parks. Vehicle violations, muggings, rape, burglaries--in short, all manner of crime is up and many are not resource-oriented violations. In California

State Parks in 1978, 35,000 crimes were reported over 30,000 citations were issued, and over 500 physical arrests were made. Not to belabor a point, but to illustrate the fact that performance and training is based on actual need and not an overreaction to a temporary situation, is the example served by a recent incident in a major national park.

Pt. Reyes National Seashore is situated approximately 30 miles north of San Francisco, California. It is a large wilderness-type area consisting of many thousands of acres of rolling grassland, forests, lakes, streams and rugged Pacific Ocean seascape. Essentially it is a "traditional" type park close to an urban population. From the 1960's onward, the number of visitors to the Point Reyes Peninsula made substantial jumps to today's more than two million annual attendance. And with this increase in visitation came a corresponding increase in crime.

August 5, 1973, would be an important date not only to the National Park Service, but to all park law enforcement agencies. At 5:00 a.m. Sunday morning, August 5, Ranger Ken Patrick's alarm clock beside the bed went off waking both him and his wife. It was time to go out on a poaching patrol at Pt. Reyes. He was to be done by 7:00 a.m. and when he did not appear as anticipated, another Pt. Reyes Ranger Dan Whittaker, went on patrol after him. A thick fog covered the summit of Mt. Vision as Ranger Whittaker looked for Ken Patrick. Suddenly, Whittaker saw Patrick's vehicle parked, with lights blinking and engine running. When Whittaker looked into Patrick's vehicle, it was empty; Whittaker felt uneasy. He returned to his vehicle and made a radio transmission to try to contact Ranger Patrick. There was no response. He then began walking the roadway downhill in front of Patrick's jeep. After covering about fifty feet, he noticed a dark object in a large bush just a couple of feet off of the road and directly in front of him. At first he thought it was a blanket, but after covering another step or two, he suddenly saw this dark object take shape. It was a human and it was covered with blood. (From the F.B.I. Report on the death of Ken Patrick.)

Ranger Patrick had been shot and killed by individuals from San Francisco out on a "joy ride" poaching deer. The weapons used were stolen handguns. The killers had previous records and were involved in numerous other crimes. In short, their profiles were identical to criminals more commonly associated with urban, not park, crimes. The times, for parks, had changed. The criminal element was no longer only local poachers -- some were lifelong, hardcore criminals. The Point Reyes incident illustrates that even resource violations, committed by hardcore criminals can turn into a major violation, including murder. Resource protection, public protection, and officer survival were no longer separable.

There was, of course, agency reaction to an increase in enforcement attitude and action on the part of those performing law enforcement duties. Many administrators grew up career-wise in the more traditional park era and support the necessary new roles which have been forced upon the ranger. However, the realization of the plight of the visitor, the ranger, and the parks themselves has left virtually no alternative other than a well-trained park law enforcement officer. Proper enforcement equipment was, due to beleaguered agency policy, slow in coming. But standards have now been accepted and all entering personnel are given appropriate equipment with which to do the task that the role demands. It must be pointed out that policy emphasized defensive not offensive posture and tactics. The basic role of the public servant was, is, and always will be, to serve the public.

Administration policy on a new and expanding front is actually accelerating the need for professional park law enforcement. Urban parks, a new frontier for national and state park agencies, will require park law enforcement officers who are not only well-trained in environmental matters, but who are also sensitive to social issues. The need for both a strong resource image and a professional, respected law enforcement stance will be essential as the urban park movement grows. This, for both the park peace officer and the agency will involve complex forms of discretionary decision making which will have to be addressed through training and tested, ultimately, through performance.

"Discretion" is a decision on the part of an individual officer to selectively choose which regulations to enforce and/or the degree to which a regulation will be enforced. Selective enforcement can pose many problems, but if properly utilized as a tool, can lead to a "resource image" enhancement stature. However, to enable the park laws enforcement officer to make proper discretionary decisions, strong administrative guidelines must be initiated. Administrators have a basic responsibility to decide what resources are allocated to which objectives, and what goals are organizationally important when compared and contrasted with other goals and objectives. When this is done, and an agency's objectives are clear to the park law enforcement officer, their discretionary decision making or "selective enforcement" becomes both a meaningful and desirable tool.

C.S.B.