Volunteers in Parks (VIPS) are Very Important People

By Jan Harper, Park Guide

Tonto National Monument is a small park with a small staff so it often relies on volunteers to help provide visitor services and to help complete maintenance and cultural resource projects within the park. Dedicated volunteers return year after year to help spruce up the trails and “man” their posts along the trails and at the cliff dwellings during our busy Open House weekends. Occasionally, a volunteer with unique skills comes along to update our bird list or build a scale model of the cliff dwellings for a museum exhibit. Here is a short list of just some of the more recent projects that they have helped complete:

In 2003, volunteers helped our rattlesnake researchers monitor the movement and behavior of rattlesnakes in the park. They also helped with some emergency trail work after a heavy rainfall destroyed much of the trail to the Upper Cliff Dwelling.

In 2004, volunteer graduate students from the University of Arizona and Arizona State University spent a long weekend capturing, weighing, measuring, photographing and pit-tagging (for tracking) gila monsters and rattlesnakes for the ongoing reptile research in the park. A resource management volunteer also participated in the March Open House weekend by giving demonstrations on how captured rattlesnakes are processed for the project and helping visitors to learn more about these animals. Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns helped greet and orient visitors to the park. An SCA intern also assisted the park archeologist by compiling and organizing ruins preservation compliance documents and helping with a laser scanning and mapping project of the cliff dwellings.

In 2005, volunteers participated in three cultural resources projects. The first project involved performing backcountry condition assessments for thirteen archeological sites. The volunteers helped match and replicate photographs taken in 1985. Photographic comparisons were used to determine changes in condition over a twenty year period. The second project included scanning nearly thirty cultural resources reports and placing this information into a digital database. The third project involved helping with the removal of cultural material (artifacts) from a slope below the Lower Cliff Dwelling in preparation for the building of a retaining wall to control erosion of the slope.

In March 2006, the monument received a surprisingly heavy accumulation of snow that caused significant damage to many mesquite and palo verde trees throughout the park. Staff and volunteers trimmed and removed many truck loads of damaged tree limbs and other vegetation. They also thinned areas of heavy vegetation within the developed areas of the park to reduce fire hazards.

In 2007, volunteers participated in a four month backcountry archeological sites preservation project. Along with cultural resources staff, they removed and thinned vegetation from a total of 47 prehistoric sites. Work also included erosion control by constructing diversion features and stabilizing slopes at a number of sites.

In 2008, a trained library sciences volunteer reorganized and converted the park library to a more efficient and effective cataloguing system. Volunteers also removed and thinned vegetation in order to reduce the threat of fire to developed areas of the park. Working with maintenance and cultural resources staff, the viewing deck at the Visitor Center was converted back to its as-built status of 1964. The deck had been partially enclosed to create a theater space in 1994. Returning the deck to its original configuration may enable the park to obtain historic building status for the Visitor Center on the National Register.

Tonto National Monument Gets A Facelift

By Jan Harper, Park Guide

If its been awhile since you’ve visited the park, we’re busy sprucing things up around here. All the park roads have recently been paved, including the picnic area which has never been paved before. The Visitor Center is getting a fresh coat of paint as well as some of the other infrastructure around the park. There are new signs both along North Arizona Highway 188 as well as in the park that are much more visible, particularly at night. Construction of the new administrative building is well underway. The much needed office space should be completed and occupied sometime early next year. Another project that will be completed over the winter months is to mortar some retaining wall rockwork along the trail to the Lower Cliff Dwellings. So, the next time you stop by the park, we’ll be ready for you!

For those with hearing or visual impairments, be sure and check out our new assisted visual and listening equipment for our video presentation about the ancient Salado Indians, builders of the cliff dwellings.

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.
After thirty years of owning our own photography business, we wanted to do more than sit in a rocking chair and watch the grass grow after we retired. We have always enjoyed visiting state and national parks across the country and had talked many times with volunteers in parks along the way. The enthusiasm those volunteers shared with us for the parks they served in and the value of the work they were doing made us want to learn more about volunteering opportunities. Those conversations motivated us to try it for ourselves when we were able to commit at least a few months a year to the program. After all, we knew we wanted to see more of the country and what better way than to get free camping along the way?

Little did we know at the time just how much more volunteering in parks would be for us than a free campsite. We are still relative newcomers to volunteer life as we begin our third year/season, but already we have found a full list of reasons to continue enjoying the volunteer program. Just to start off, it has proven to be a truly positive use of our retirement time. As one fellow volunteer stated, “You can only play so much golf and drink so many Margueritas, then what?”

As volunteers, we feel a sense of value and satisfaction in what we contribute to the park. The services we provide free up rangers and other paid staff to do more technical or difficult duties that might go undone if we were not there to provide visitor services. It seems only natural to want to learn as much as possible about the history, culture and natural environment of the park we are involved with, and the staff have always shared their knowledge and expertise freely with us. We in turn gain a sense of “belonging” when we are able to share that information with park visitors.

We also benefit from the variety of duties and experiences we have had in different parks. We get the opportunity to live in a place long enough to get a true feeling for the climate, geography and unique characteristics of the location. What other program gives people a chance to literally live in a place long enough to get a true feeling for the natural resources of “our” park. It is no accident that we feel a sense of ownership and responsibility to each park we volunteer with and want to treat it as our own. We have maintained contact with both staff and volunteers and returning to a park a second time is very much like coming home.

One of the benefits we never really anticipated, but it has been a great plus for both of us, has been the active and healthy lifestyle that is just naturally encouraged by hiking and exploring in our beautiful surroundings. We just plain feel better without actually dieting or doing a regular workout program. We just get out and do more because it’s there and it feels good!

We have been able to teach through interpretive programs for both visitors and staff, record artifacts and archeological sites for the park, provide slide presentations to promote and encourage visitation to the parks and develop our own “Photo Walk” tours to the Upper Cliff Dwellings for both amateur and professional photographers here at Tonto National Monument.

Speaking of “feels good,” we never realized that so many people would just come up and say, “Thank you for volunteering!” The staff and managers, visitors, local residents and business people all make us feel appreciated more than we ever expected. Sometimes we feel a little guilty to have a visitor see our volunteer patch on our uniform and give us such a heartfelt “thank you,” when really we are having such a great time doing what we are doing! It usually ends up starting a conversation about volunteering in the parks and how easy it is to get involved.

Not the least of the positive opportunities of volunteering is the chance we get to “give back” a little of our own expertise. Each park we have applied to work with has provided a space on the application to list professional expertise or hobbies that might be of interest to park visitors or that could be of benefit to the park. In our case, our hobby of astronomy and a lifetime of professional photography experience has opened several interesting and enjoyable doors, if we choose to pass through them. In every instance park personnel have prefaced asking us if we would be interested in a photography-oriented project with some type of comment like, “would you enjoy,” “if you would be interested,” or some other invitation to decline if a photographic project would be imposing on our professional skills or something that for some reason we are not interested in doing. In every case we have jumped at the chance to lend a hand on something that used to be our work and now finally can be our hobby without the pressures and responsibilities.

Finally, one of the “little things” that volunteering has provided us is a way to satisfy a lifelong curiosity about what it would be like to be a Park Ranger, without having to take on the responsibilities and requirements of the real job. You don’t always get to live out your childhood fantasies, but now we can!

So, all in all, volunteering involves a little work, many wonderful people, beautiful surroundings, feeling good and sharing a lot of good times. It truly is much more than a free campsite!
In cooperation with the interpretive staff of Tonto National Monument, volunteers Rex and Peg Lavoie launched a new visitor program last Spring. The goal of the three photo walks was to provide a way for professional and serious amateur photographers to photograph along the Upper Cliff Dwelling trail as well as at the ruin itself without having to disrupt the regular ranger guided tours. The photo walks were planned to allow the participants not only the time to compose images, but timed to provide them with the best lighting conditions. Group size was limited to 5-7 visitors to make it easier to photograph in the dwelling without getting in each others way. A total of 16 photographers participated in the program. Here is a small sample of just some of their work:

“Thanks again, Rex and Peg for the memorable experience and photo tips! You both made the trip a great one!” Bob Rehder

Photo Walk Schedule for 2009-2010

November 11th (Wed.)  
December 15th (Tues.)  
January 13th (Wed.) & 28th (Thurs.)  
February 10th (Wed.) & 25th (Thurs.)  
March 9th (Tues.), 18th (Thurs.) & 24th (Wed.)  
April 7th (Wed.), 13th (Tues.) & 22nd (Thurs.)

Call the monument for times and to make reservations: (928) 467-2241 ext. 25
Management of Africanized bees at Tonto National Monument is a consistent recurring issue that has impacted the park for decades. During the 1930s, park staff observed active bees in the cliff dwellings that were potentially dangerous to visitors. It is important to note that at that time, there were only European bees occupying the monument.

Many bee removal methods have been attempted since the 1930s, including several that involved tremendous risk to the safety of staff and contracted pest control company workers and to the cliff dwellings below the hives. Photos from the 1970s show hives being treated from ladders or using extension poles at both the Lower (LCD) and Upper Cliff Dwellings (UCD).

Beehives found on the ground have occasionally been removed by wild bee collectors, although these hives are easily treatable. In the 1990s, analysis confirmed that at least some of the bees at Tonto were Africanized.

Why are Africanized Bees Dangerous?

By Susan Hughes, Chief Ranger

The Africanized honey bee has been in Arizona for well over a decade and has now become one of the top three resource issues in the monument. The other two important issues include management of rodents, mostly squirrels that like to dig under the walls in the cliff dwellings, and the eradication of invasive weeds in the monument.

The sting from a single Africanized honey bee is no more harmful than one from the European bee. But, Africanized honey bees are known as “killer bees” because they defend their nests more readily, with less provocation, and in larger numbers than the European honey bees, so there is a greater chance of receiving multiple stings. There have been numerous cases throughout the United States of people and animals being stung upwards of 400-500 times by Africanized bees. An Africanized honey bee’s definition of their “home turf” is also much larger than the European honey bee’s definition. Africanized honey bees can become highly defensive in order to protect their hives. In order to protect both staff and visitors, park managers are monitoring bee activity during times of increased activity and making decisions daily as to whether or not to open the dwellings. Due to the unpredictable nature of the bees, these assessments must be done at least on a daily basis.

Historically, both the European and Africanized honey bees have used crevices and cracks as nesting locations in and around the lower and upper cliff dwellings. On a few occasions, visitors and park staff have been stung in the Lower Cliff Dwelling without provocation. The park has experienced particularly active bee seasons during the past two springs and summers.

Park management at Tonto National Monument believes it is better to exercise caution with respect to the bee activity occurring at the lower and upper cliff dwellings. Bees encountered on the trails to the dwellings usually do not display defensive behaviors since they are engaged in foraging activities. Because of the protective nature of the bees near their hives, the best policy is to allow ample physical distance from known hives — at least 100 feet is recommended by the Carl Hayden Bee Research Center’s guidelines.

Resource management staff continues to work with bee research experts to mitigate bee activity or remove bees from the areas near the cliff dwellings. The inaccessible locations of the hives, the necessity to preserve the resources (cliff dwellings) and the safety of those trying to treat the bees remain of paramount concern to park management.

Why are Africanized Bees Dangerous?

By Duane Hubbard, Chief of Resource Management

and Jenny Shrum, Natural Resources Specialist

Africanized Bees at Tonto National Monument

By Duane Hubbard, Chief of Resource Management

and Jenny Shrum, Natural Resources Specialist

A new method of treatment was attempted by the park superintendent in 1996. Firefighters from nearby Tonto Basin ran a fire hose up the LCD trail and shot a water/soap mixture at large hives in the dwelling. Although effective in removing honeycombs and eventually the bees from the hives, this method may have had adverse impacts on the dwellings and will not be used in the future.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious bee eradication efforts conducted included rappelling from above the Lower Cliff Dwelling to fill crevices where bees create hives with cement. This endeavor was quite dangerous as the person dangling from the rope was anchored into unconsolidated bedrock. He also would have to come within a few feet of an angry Africanized bee hive containing as many as 40,000 bees! Unfortunately, erosion from weather and tunneling by determined bees have since reopened many of these cemented areas creating an even larger problem for staff. We now have no idea how large the hives are behind these areas.

WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU:

1. Wear light-colored clothing.
2. Avoid perfumes and scented sunscreens.
3. Avoid carrying sugary drinks or snacks on the trail or near the dwellings.
4. Avoid rapid movements or making loud noises near the dwellings.
5. Remove sunglasses before entering the dwellings (if it is open).

IF ATTACKED:

1. Run ... keep moving!
2. Do not swat at the bees.
3. Cover your nose and mouth with clothing.
4. Remove sunglasses.

DANGEROUS BEE BEHAVIOR:

1. Bee pelting ... this is their way of saying “You're too close!”
2. A pile of bees just outside a hive entrance indicates an overcrowded hive. This makes for a restless bunch of bees that may display aggressive behavior.
Becoming a Junior Ranger is a great way to explore your national parks while learning how you can help take care of them for the future. Pick up your activity sheet at the Visitor Center or go online to:

www.nps.gov/tont

Click on “For Kids” and then “Junior Web Ranger.”

Complete the activities for your age group and return your activity sheet to the Visitor Center (or by mail) to earn a Tonto National Monument Junior Ranger badge!

Kids Making a Difference!

Junior Rangers Ruby Kauffman of Tonopah and Sydney Smith of Wittman are great examples of the next generation of park stewards. Ruby and Sydney help their parents band birds at Hassayampa River Preserve. Both girls have also recently completed the Arizona State Parks kids program as well as participated in Junior Ranger activities at many National Park units. Way to go girls!
Plan Your Visit

Tonto National Monument is located 30 miles northwest of Globe on Highway 188. Driving time from Phoenix, Scottsdale or Mesa is approximately 2 to 2 1/2 hours; from Tucson or Flagstaff, 3 to 3 1/2 hours.

The Visitor Center has a small museum, bookstore, viewing deck, and an 18 minute orientation video and is open daily (except Christmas Day) from 8 am to 5 pm. The park also has a picnic area for your enjoyment with restrooms.

Self-Guided Lower Cliff Dwelling Trail

A paved trail winds its way through the Sonoran desert to the Lower Cliff Dwelling. You will climb 350 vertical feet, so be prepared for a steep climb. Signs along the trail provide information about the desert plants, geology of the area, and lives of the ancient Salado. Sit on one of several benches along the path and enjoy the view of Roosevelt Lake. Once you arrive at the dwelling, walk through homes that were last occupied 700 years ago. On your return walk, the Cactus Patch Trail branches off the main trail and ends in the parking lot. Learn how desert plants have adapted to arid conditions and how the Salado used these plants to provide food, shelter, and clothing. Bring water, sunscreen and a hat with you. The one mile roundtrip walk takes about an hour to complete so plan to arrive at the park before 4 pm. Allow extra time to visit the museum, bookstore, and watch the video.

Upper Cliff Dwelling Tours

Early Bird tours of the Upper Cliff Dwelling are offered on Saturdays at 8:15 am in October and May. During the winter season (November through April), rangers give guided tours to the Upper Cliff Dwelling. Tours are offered every weekend. Additional weekday tours are added as visitation increases. This 3 mile roundtrip backcountry trail travels through a riparian area by way of a creekbed, then gains 600 feet in elevation via switchbacks and numerous steps. The tour lasts 3-3 1/2 hours. Full moon hikes to the Upper Cliff Dwelling for experienced hikers are offered in the winter months. Reservations are required for all Upper Cliff Dwelling tours. See page 7 for a schedule of Ranger Programs.

FOR RESERVATIONS OR INFORMATION CALL TONTO NATIONAL MONUMENT AT (928) 467-2241 ext. 25.

Heritage Days

This year’s Heritage Days event will be held on March 20th and 21st. The Upper Cliff Dwelling will be open to visitors to tour on their own without a guide for an entire weekend. Uphill travel on the trail is allowed between the hours of 9 am and 2 pm. Regular fees are charged both days but there is no fee if you have an Interagency Annual Pass, Interagency Senior Pass, or Interagency Access Pass.

If you visit the ramada area during our Heritage Days weekend, you can watch Native American basketmakers, potters, and flintknappers at work. Be sure to visit the raptors and other animals from the Adobe Mountain Wildlife Center as well.
Early Bird Upper Cliff Dwelling Tours

Early Bird tours of the Upper Cliff Dwelling are offered on Saturdays in October and May. Because of the heat, we stop less often and hike a little faster.

Upper Cliff Dwelling Tours

Upper Cliff Dwelling tours are offered from November through April. Rangers lead this 3 mile roundtrip backcountry hike through a riparian area via the creekbed and then up switchbacks that have numerous steps. The trail climbs 600 vertical feet to the caves.

Cline Terrace Platform Mound Tours

The Cline Terrace Platform Mound site is similar to other sites along the Salt River but it also has several distinct characteristics. There is a massive compound wall around the complex, and many walls are faced with white gypsum. Why? The site must have been quite impressive in the moonlight!

Schoolhouse Platform Mound Tours

The Schoolhouse Platform Mound site is unique in that it was occupied for over 100 years while most other settlements in the basin were smaller and were occupied only briefly. People from neighboring villages apparently moved to the Schoolhouse Platform Mound. Why?

Photo Walks

Photo walks along the Upper Cliff Dwelling trail as well as at the ruin itself will be offered to provide a way for professional and serious amateur photographers to photograph without having to disrupt the regular ranger-guided tours.

See Page 3 for more information.

CALL THE MONUMENT FOR TIMES AND TO MAKE RESERVATIONS.

Bring plenty of water, a hat and sunscreen. Wear boots or tennis shoes, no flip flops!

Reservations required.
Call (928) 467-2241 ext. 25.

Venomous creatures may be encountered in the desert.

Program may be canceled due to foul weather or flooding.

No dogs allowed; don’t leave pets in your vehicle!

High clearance vehicle needed to get to the site.

Children must be accompanied by an adult on all programs.
The Western National Parks Association (WNPA) Bookstore
Supporting Educational and Research Programs of the National Park Service Since 1938

The WNPA nonprofit bookstore at Tonto National Monument provides educational and interpretive materials through an active publishing program. Proceeds from our retail sales are used to support educational, research and interpretive programs at Tonto National Monument as well as at other National Park Service units.

Help Us Help Tonto National Monument!

Your annual $25 membership entitles you to a 15% discount on purchases in the WNPA bookstore (20% discount for seniors). Discounts are honored at many other cooperating association bookstores in National Park Visitor Centers. Your membership contribution directly supports research and educational programs at Tonto National Monument.

You can also order by phone (928) 467-2241 extension 26 or online: www.wnpa.org

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The Prickly Pear Cookbook $14.95
The New Southwest Cookbook $17.95
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Medicinal and Edible Plants
Herbal Medicine of the American Southwest $29.95
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Plants of the Sonoran Desert $19.95
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Maps and Hiking Guides
Day & Overnight Hikes Tonto National Forest $14.95
Day Hikes & Trail Rides in Payson’s Rim Country $15.95
Superstition/Four Peaks Wilderness Map $11.95
Geologic Highway Map of Arizona $10.00
Tonto National Forest Map $9.00

Field Guides
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Local History
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Tonto $3.95 $1.00
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Apache Trail Postcard Booklet $7.99

Kids' Stuff
Alejandro's Gift $6.95
The Best Nest $8.95
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NEW!! Junior Ranger Gear:
Replica Miniature Salado Pottery $22.00-$85.00

Games
National Parks Yahtzee $16.95
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Geology
Gems and Minerals of the Southwest $14.95
Minerals, Fossils and Fluorescents of Arizona $29.00
Mineralogy of Arizona $39.95

The bookstore is open daily (except Christmas Day) from 8 am to 5 pm.