

The Signpost

July-Aug
1990

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

By Chris George, PRAC President

One of the many honors a person can receive is that of being nominated and elected to the position of president within an association or organization. Being chosen for this position shows that a person is highly respected and thought of by his peers. My predecessor is one of these people.

Bill Hendricks made PRAC what it is today. Bill, through his deep devotion and love, brought PRAC from near disaster to the honored and respected organization that it is now thought of.

Bill and I first met at the annual PRAC/CSPRA Conference in Palm Springs in 1987. While there, he and I spoke on many of the issues and problems now facing park rangers. We spoke on ways PRAC and his administration were trying to possibly solve and assist the many individuals now involved within the PRAC membership. I was extremely impressed by Bill's vocation in seeing PRAC evolve into a major body throughout California. I believe, Bill—without his ever knowing it, has accomplished this desire.

Bill's experience and knowledge came from working with the Marin Municipal Water District in Northern California. While there, he became involved with PRAC and eventually worked his way to the Presidency. His term lasted two years. Toward the end of his presidency, Bill achieved another life long desire, that of becoming a teacher. Bill quickly packed up his family and belongings, and headed off to Salt Lake City. He is now currently studying to become a teacher. His goal is to be able to instruct students in the proper curriculum to become park rangers themselves.

The call from Bill to accept the nomination for president, came to me as a great surprise. I thought to myself "How in the hell am I ever going to be able to fit into this man's shoes?" I did however accept, and now I am President. I only hope that I too may have that "certain something" that Bill has. I seriously doubt however, that I will ever be the president that Bill Hendricks was. If I can do half as much, hopefully I too will be highly respected as he is.

To my friend Bill, all I can do is say **Thank You!** Thank you for all the work and strength you have given to the association and its members. You are the spirit of the Park Rangers Association of California.

Good Luck!

Changes in the Helm at the Signpost

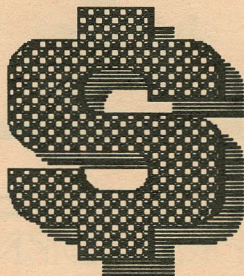
While the format still looks the same and the quality of material will undoubtedly remain outstanding, the *Signpost* is taking on a new look. After four years of fulfilling his role as the *Signpost* editor, Chris Crockett has resigned to pursue other interests. David Brooks, a park ranger with the Santa Cruz City Water Department has volunteered to perform the duties as editor of the *Signpost* in addition to his role as editor to the *Cal Ranger*.

Chris has been a great asset to PRAC, bringing the *Signpost* from near extinction to its current level of success. Editing any newsletter is a thankless job consisting of long hours and frustration, and PRAC greatly appreciates Chris' efforts over the years. Every two months Chris demonstrated his excellent writing skills and expertise as an editor, offering insights and information regarding the activities and interests of park rangers statewide.

Chris is looking forward to his marriage in November and is also involved in a new business venture. The PRAC Executive Board thanks Chris for his commitment and friendship the past four years and wishes him luck in his career with Santa Clara County and his future endeavors.

Chris, good luck and thanks!

David, welcome aboard!!



Scholarship Fund Mushrooms

In its second full year of existence, the PRAC Scholarship is well on its way to becoming a self-perpetuating fund, providing deserving students assistance in preparation for careers in parks and recreation management. The second recipient of a PRAC scholarship will be announced this fall and once again the applicants where all outstanding.

It is primarily due to the generosity of PRAC members that the scholarship has continued to prosper. Donations this year were far greater than the previous two years, indicating the sincere interest PRAC members have in supporting future professionals.

The PRAC Executive Board and the Scholarship Committee would like to thank the following individuals for their charitable offerings and support to the PRAC Scholarship Fund:

Jack Deaton
Bill Hendricks
Tom Hofsommer
Dave Lydick
Ken Miller
Bruce Pace
Mary T. Pass
Sandy Playa
Laura Raymaker
Steve Rogers
Tom Smith
Bruce Weidman

The support of these individuals will assist in assuring that future park rangers will continue to be superior quality, dedicated professionals.



“BBQ Time”

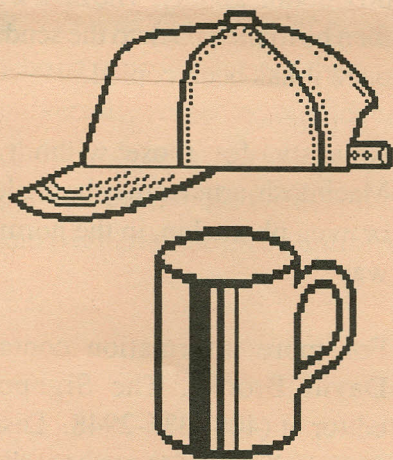
The date has been set, the location has been confirmed, all we need is **You**, to join the fun. This year PRAC and Santa Clara County Parks are cosponsoring the annual Ranger Games BBQ (formerly known as Ranger Olympics). It's our turn to relax in one of our own parks. Renew old friendships, strike-up new ones, play softball or volleyball, and have fun. This years event will be September 20th at Vasona Lake Park in Los Gatos. See enclosed flyer for further information. Any questions, please call Judy Morris at (415) 791-4340.

See ya September 20th.

THE MERCHANDISE COUNTER

Prac Polo Shirts Still Available

PRAC is offering its members a high quality, buff colored polo-type shirt (100% cotton mesh with knit collars and sleeves) with the Association logo emblazoned on the left breast area. These attractive shirts are ideal for casual recreation outings, social activities, tennis, and golf. And, best of all, you'll be letting others know you belong to PRAC. Each shirt is only \$17.00 (including shipping and handling). Be sure to specify your size when ordering.



Mugs & Caps

You may have already read about the great shirts PRAC is offering its members, but that's not all! PRAC is also making high quality baseball caps (green or brown twill-type, \$7.00 each) and coffee mugs (blue and white glazed ceramic, \$5.00 each).

PRAC Agency Directory

The PRAC Ranger Directory is now available. It lists 80 agencies with "ranger personnel" throughout California. The cost

for this resource is \$4.00.

To purchase any of the above items, send a check, payable to: PRAC, P.O. Box 28366, Sacramento, CA., 95828-0366. Please indicate number of items re-

The Problem By Christopher W. George

California, — Southern California, land of sunshine, movie stars, Disneyland and adventure. Southern California also has a vast array of parks. There are the beautiful national parks such as Santa Monica National Recreation Area, where the famous show "M*A*S*H" was filmed. There are also the pristine Channel Islands, home to both rare terrestrial and marine life. Then there is the wide variety of state parks and beaches. Each different and elegant in their own right. Along with this list are the abundant county parks throughout the Southern California state area. And in many neighborhoods are located the urban city parks so easily located and used by the general public.

The park ranger comes from each of these settings. Each as different and unique as the park or agency they work for. A Southern California Park

Ranger may only be required to do law enforcement, where another may be a public relations representative, or be a naturalist discussing the natural wonders of his or her park. Park rangers may be involved in maintenance, clerical work or even be entrance gate attendants. Each role being important to the smooth function of his or her park system. Southern California Park Rangers may be involved in just one, or all of the above mentioned.

"The Problem" however, is that there should be a very wide and different concept for what a park ranger should be for each of these concepts. Park rangers in the "Southland" vary, and rarely interact with one another. In most cases, they are not even aware of the others existence.

In the minds of the public there seems to be a standard concept of what a park ranger is. They often see the park ranger as having a glamorous job, working outside in beautiful settings with no problems at all. (Continued on pg. 4)

The Problem

(cont. from pg. 3)

However, as we all know, this is not often true. We park rangers are often confronted with a wide variety of problems, many of which can be and are serious.

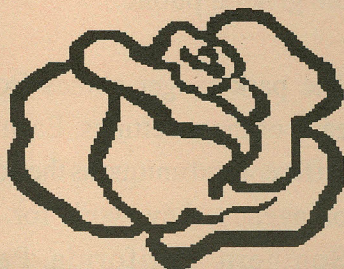
As a Southern California Park Ranger, I have had the opportunity to work with a variety of different programs. For nearly seven years I worked as both a naturalist and a law enforcement ranger. As an interpreter it is the function of a park ranger to be a historian, a loud talker and a good actor. We are required to act and perform to a vast audience in our position as naturalists. In law enforcement, I was required to deal with the negative aspect of the parks. Crime in the way of gangs is predominant in urban city parks. Often these gang members would carry higher caliber weapons than I did (a 357 magnum). I also had to deal with the vast amount of homeless so prevalent to the southern area because of the climate.

In recent years I was given the opportunity to create my own park ranger program. This being a real challenge in deciding the proper direction to take with the area needing service. I was given a basic direction; create a public relations program with no police powers. A challenge which was difficult in the beginning but can work. The only problem that rangers face in a program such as this is that they are left to confront problems that can be very serious if not handled correctly. Park rangers are often required to depend upon local

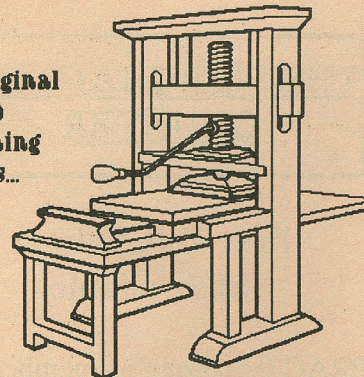
law enforcement or must depend on their training and ability to get them through a possible "sticky situation".

Are there answers to all the problems? I don't know. However, as president of PRAC, I have been hearing from a variety of park ranger programs in Southern California all looking for some type of direction. Many have problems with program structure and safety. Others have been having conflicts with their administrations and the departments they work for. As park rangers, we are aware of "What goes on out there," while often our administrators see only day camps, picnics, happy people and **No Problems!** Because of this often clouded image, we are at times given inadequate equipment and budgets that are below needed standards. If we complain, we often hear; "Is it practical?" or "We don't have the money or resources, keep it going as best you can."

So what is the answer? The answer is—we work together and support each other. If we are willing to work together as a state, both northern and southern California, we may be able to confront the problems or gangs, the homeless and the administrative crunch. All we have to do is seek out the answers, they are there and hopefully "the problem" may be solved.



**The original
desktop
publishing
systems...**

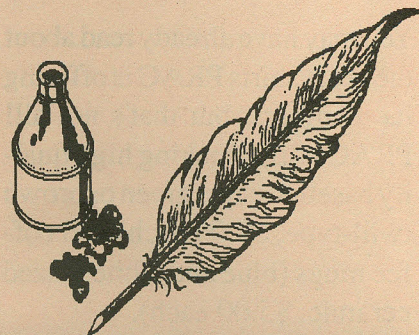


HOW TO SEND ARTICLES FOR SUBMISSIONS

PRAC members having access to a Macintosh computer with Microsoft Word/Write/Works, MacWrite or WriteNow Programming can write their article on the computer and mail the disk to The Signpost Editor for use in future issues of the PRAC newsletter. This will speed up production greatly. The disk will then be mailed back to the sender once it has been copied.

Naturally, for those without a Macintosh, articles may be mailed or even phoned in, in the normal way.

For more information contact David Brooks, The Signpost editor at (408) 336-2948. Disks or any other articles can be mailed to: David Brooks, 560 Hillcrest Drive, Ben Lomond, CA 95005.



Endangered Rangers

by

Harold Gilliam

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Editors Note: the following article is reprinted from the Sunday San Francisco Chronicle, "This World" section; 7/8/90. I felt it would be interesting to learn about our fellow rangers in the National Park Service. I have friends with the NPS and know this is all to true.

There's a first-magnitude scandal in the National Park Service, much more shocking than the flap over the tidy profits being made by some corporations running concessions in the parks.

It concerns the group of people who have probably been the most universally respected employees of the federal government—the park rangers, those friendly men and woman in the green uniforms

who take care of the parks and give walks and talks on the wonders of nature and history. Former Senator Barry Goldwater once said that the National Park Service staff represented the finest type of public servants.

The scandal is that these dedicated rangers are being exploited unmercifully; they must work for unbelievably low wages that cannot for most of them to support a family in decent fashion.

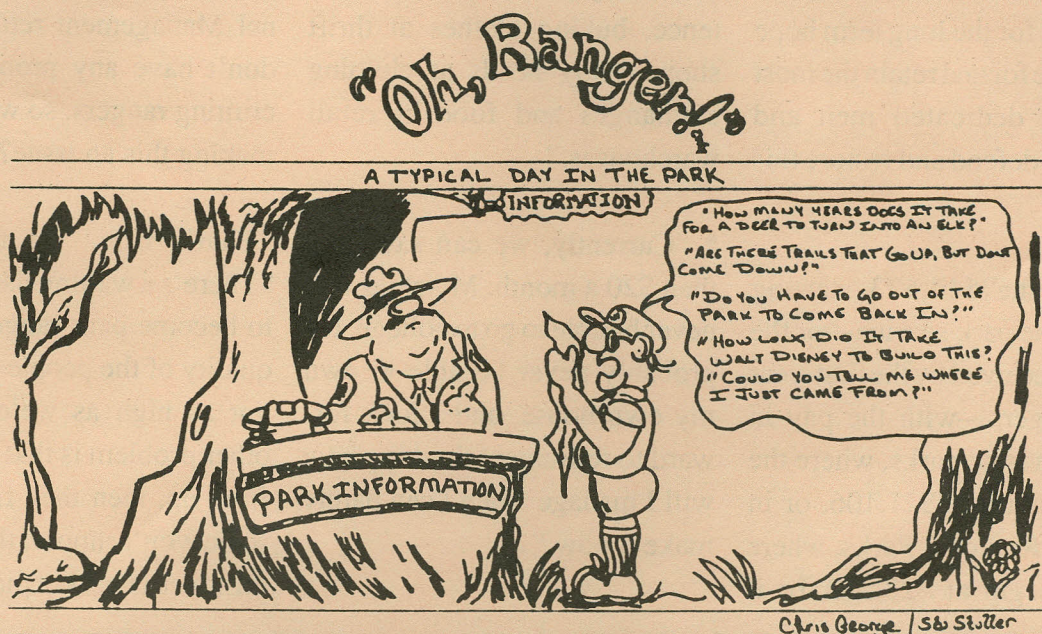
Look at the figures. Park rangers usually begin their jobs at what the government calls grade GS-4, which pays \$14,573 a year, or \$7 an hour. By comparison, an average unskilled manual laborer in San Francisco, without training, background or experience, receives close to \$9 hour—roughly \$4,000 a year more than a ranger.

If rangers can survive on that

handsome wage, they may eventually make a little more. Most rangers are GS-5 or GS-7, with a starting pay at \$16,305 and \$20,195 respectively. After about 20 years on the job, they might get as much as \$21,201 to \$26,252. The latter is less than half of what a bricklayer makes in New York City. A national park ranger—supervisor receives less than an average truck driver.

Fringe benefits are minimal. Even in government housing, much of it dilapidated, the rents are as high as in the private market. Permanent employees have medical insurance (dental not included), but their skimpy salary is docked for part of the costs.

About half of the National Park Service rangers are seasonal; on an hourly basis they make about the same as an entry level GS-5 employees, but they have no medical insurance or pension



benefits and cannot receive pay increases, no matter how long they have been on the job.

Ranger George Durkee, for example, has worked for 20 years as a seasonal back-country ranger in Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon, where he puts in 12 hours a day seven days a week with no overtime pay. He gets \$8,000 for about five months' work supplemented by some \$5,000 he is able to earn in the snow season at Yosemite's Ostrander ski hut.

In a recent San Francisco speech to the Commonwealth, executive director Martin J. Rosen of the Trust for Public Land cited the miserable pay scales and said: "Maybe the rangers' children never need their teeth straightened or need tutoring or music lessons. I would hope not because the park service aren't much help. I am troubled by this exploitation because it means that we cannot for the long term hope to compete for and retain the most qualified, dedicated men and woman to defend and restore this land."

Contrast the \$14,573 starting wage in the park service—or the \$16,305 received by the first-year GS-5 rangers—with the pay in California state parks, where the starting salary is \$21,106, or in East Bay Regional Parks, where rangers begin at \$28,332, or if

law-enforcement activities are involved, \$31,572.

Law enforcement has come to be an increasing burden on the rangers. "One of the most critical law enforcement problems facing us" says Durkee, "is the increase of poaching, where illegal hunters are stripping parks of wildlife. In 1988 serious crimes such as poaching, possession of stolen property, assault and drugs account for more than 80,000 investigations and 9,000 arrests. There were 68 assaults on rangers. In our spare time we also look for lost Boy Scouts and rescue the climbers dangling off sheer cliffs."

Last year the Association of National Park Rangers surveyed its members and reported these comments:

* "I have to work many hours of overtime just to eke out an existence, buying clothes at thrift shops, baby needs at clothing exchanges and food at retail warehouses."

* "Currently, we can save less than \$20 a month. My child will never be able to go to college. I'll probably never be able to own my own house, and I look forward to retirement thinking how will I manage when I can barely make it now."

* "Living here, I have run through my life savings in a matter of two years."

* "My wife works part-time at two or three different jobs in order for me to afford my expensive hobby of being a park ranger."

* "I realize that my skills and talents, being average, are being squandered in a service that starts people off...for just \$1 more per hour than a clerk at McDonald's. Being roughly 28 percent behind the civilian pay scale just doesn't cut it anymore. I'm sick and tired of being paid in sunsets."

William Pen Mott, who during his long career has been director of East Bay Regional Parks, California State Parks and the National Park Service, says that his appeal for better pay for national park rangers went nowhere.

Officials at the Office of Personnel Management replied: "You don't have any problem in recruiting rangers, so why are you making this an issue?"

"That's true," he responded. "There's a waiting list for people to become park rangers, but the quality of the people applying is not as high as we'd like. The other problem is that they are all fired up, then they find the pay scale won't support them and the turnover is very rapid."

The OPM people were not impressed. "I looked into this thing," Mott says now, "and I was absolutely shocked to find that some of our rangers, particularly those working in high-rent areas, in order to make a go of it, had to go on welfare."

The present National Park Service Director, James Ridenour, told Congress: "...The Park Service is losing its ability to compete, especially for the pool of young, highly qualified recent college graduates."

The park service's chief ranger, Walter Dabney, based in Washington, D.C., comments: "We're losing dedicated people very fast because they can't afford to stay. Last year we lost 15 percent of our GS-5 people. That's a tre-

mendous turnover; it represents a lot of training, knowledge and expertise. Who do we want greeting the world at the Washington Monument, people who can't do anything else? Who do we want taking care of the nation's irreplaceable treasures, the lowest bidders or people of high caliber?

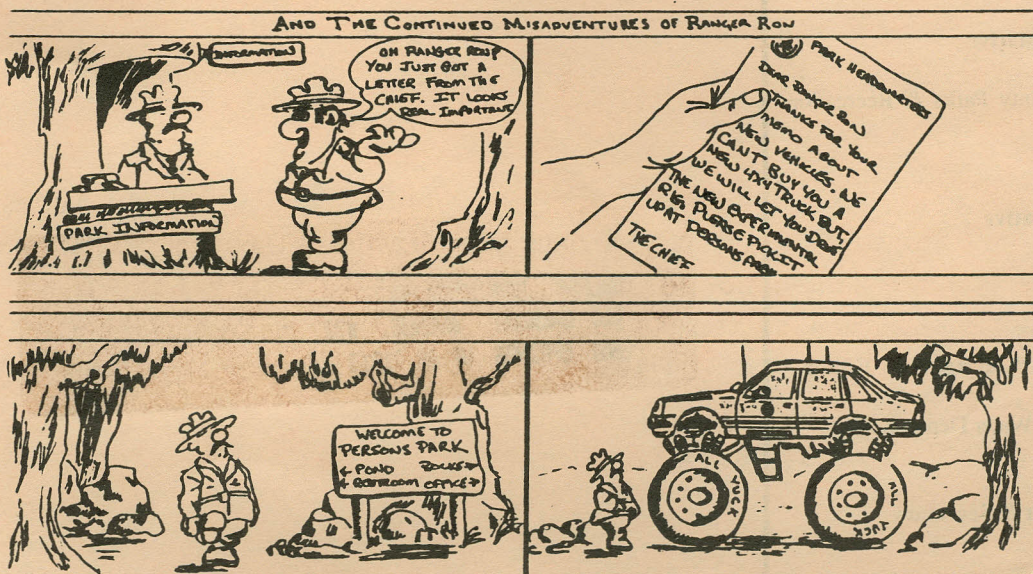
One reason for the preposterous situation of poverty among the keepers of the parks is that there are currently no powerful members in Congress who are vigorously supporting the national parks as a top priority.

Trust for Public Land's Rosen told the Commonwealth Club that national park rangers need "champions of their cause...who will step out, speak up and address the urgent and immediate

need to raise the wages and expand the ranks of our park professionals."

Otherwise, we might be confronted with something like the fantasy of P.J. Ryan, who works at Jean Lafitte National Historic Park in New Orleans and watches the perennial summer TV specials on "Our Endangered National Parks."

He dreams of the day when the park ranger who is customarily used as a prop in these specials suddenly grabs the TV announcer in a headlock and roars: "Listen, you, I'm one of the endangered species your talking about! Unless I'm paid an adequate wage and living conditions, I'm going to start vanishing like the other species."



Chris George

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CALIFORNIA**

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