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Recent Staff Changes

Mike Green was appointed Gold Sector Superintendent in September. He was promoted from the Alpine Mono Sector of the Sierra District, where he managed Mono Lake, Bodie and Grover Hot Springs State Parks.

James Carey, recently assigned to Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, has transferred to South Yuba River as a Ranger.

Don Schmidt is now Supervising Ranger for Empire Mine (as well as South Yuba River and Malakoff Diggins) due to retirement of Susan Chase.

Pam Armas transferred to Headquarters in Sacramento to work on the Prop. 21 response team.

Jennifer McCallan transferred to Lake Tahoe State Parks (see page 4 article).

Mike Smittle retired (see page 2 article).

Fall Festival Features a Haunted Bridge

This year’s Fall Festival is going to be different! Did you know that the Covered Bridge at Bridgeport is “Haunted?” Well you can take it from me that it is, and you can experience this fascinating phenomenon on Halloween, when all good ghosts appear. Groups will be ushered into the shrouded bridge, and they will tell you of their lives here in the 1800s. They will bring the “old days” back to life. I think they come back to the Covered Bridge, as it was a central part of their lives here. These kindly ghosts want you to know about them and their world. Mark Lyon, the Ghost Tour guy from Nevada City and Grass Valley will be at the Festival and will call forth the spirits of former residents who lived, loved, laughed and worked in this wonderful part of the world. So come down to Bridgeport on Halloween, Sunday, October 31 for the return of the Ghosts of Bridgeport and a wonderful Fall Festival for the whole family. We will have music, wildflower crafts, pumpkin painting, face painting, vintage cars at the Gas Station, gold panning, a mountain man encampment, Barn tours, kids games, wagon rides, blacksmith demos, spinning and basket weaving demos, a raffle, food vendors and a worm composting exhibit (Where do the worms go, anyway?). Hope to see you there from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the 31st for a ghostly good time! Jean Wilson, Co-chair

Children’s Book Signing at the Festival

Penn Valley author Carol Malnor will sign copies of her book The Blues Go Birding Across America at the Fall Festival. The story relates how five avian siblings go bird-watching across the United States to find the perfect song to sing at the White House Fourth of July celebration.
President’s Message

The busy summer swimming season on the South Yuba River at Bridgeport is nearly at an end. We are happy to report that it was a very safe season with few calls to local emergency assistance providers. Your Park Association and volunteers have worked hard to maintain and improve the Park. Regular visitors to the Park will have noticed the progress in the conversion of the old gas station into a beautifully restored building. The goal of the project is to restore the building into a late 1920’s Shell gas station. From 1927 to the early 1930’s the building served as a gas station and a small store to cater to the needs of visitors to the Bridgeport Swimming Resort. As today, summer visitors were drawn to Bridgeport to enjoy the beautiful natural swimming holes in the river. The success of the resort was cut short due to the fouling of the swimming holes by upstream hydraulic mining debris.

The gas station building is an important of the history of Bridgeport. The South Yuba River Park Association along with the California State Parks Department is committed to complete the restoration project. Phase I is nearly completed. Labor for the restoration was provided by State Parks employees and your Park volunteers. Financing of the project is provided by SYRPA. A talented and hard-working committee of volunteers is in the process of completing the plans for the remaining phases of this project. The plans will be submitted to State Parks for review and final approval.

Ron Ernst

Ranger Mike Smittle Retires

Mike Smittle retired in September after 21 years at South Yuba River State Park. He joined State Parks in 1987, transferred to SYR in 1989 and became a Canine Officer in 1991. At that time, the SYR Project had an unruly “party” reputation due to alcohol, fights and uncontrolled camping. Mike recalls responding to several calls for fights each week and that 19 beer kegs were removed from along the river during his first summer. He helped document the conditions which led to the glass and alcohol bans now in effect. Mike says “My most satisfying times were when people later told me how they now enjoy a park that was too risky to visit earlier.”

His three German Shepherd dogs, Bessy, Kahn and Ali were born, raised and trained in Germany. Mike thinks the dogs demand respect, leading to better visitor behavior and more family usage. Mike relates a favorite story from his years at the Park: “Kahn and I were patrolling on the North side of the river and witnessed a man on the opposite shore empty a can of Budweiser into a Sprite can and settle down to satisfy his thirst. We crossed the river, approached the man, and Kahn sniffed the can and the man. I then asked for the can of beer, and the man, wide-eyed, said 'I've heard about these dogs that can sniff and tell if it's beer.' I then said that the dog also told me ‘it’s Budweiser.’ To this day, the guy must be a believer in supernatural dogs.”

Mike says he’s drawn to the great outdoors and wilderness character of Alaska and will enjoy his hunting and fishing there. Initially, Mike will be on the security staff for an oil company on Alaska’s North Slope, possibly out of Prudhoe Bay. The schedule will be two weeks on and two weeks off, allowing him to return home frequently. His daughter, Nellie, is a freshman at Santa Barbara City College and is in a pre-medical program. Mike's son, Garrett, will enroll later this year at Montana State University to pursue training in wildlife management. On learning of Mike's departure for the frozen north, the SYRPA board voted to provide suitable headgear (presented at the September 16 Docent Appreciation Dinner).
Ranger Report

We had a great summer, even with the staffing challenges in the Sector. I’d like to give a big “thanks” to all the volunteers and staff that made it work. Our weather was fantastic, with few really hot days. We all know Ranger Mike announced his retirement in late June, but was able to help out all summer as a retired annuitant. Ranger Jennifer decided to transfer to a cooler climate, and has started her new job at D.L. Bliss SP. At Empire Mine, Susan Chase has also decided to retire as of Labor Day. On October 1, James Carey will start as a new Bridgeport ranger, coming to us from North Coast Redwoods. We hope to fill the rest of our vacant positions once the state budget issues are resolved. Many of you had the opportunity to meet our new Sector Superintendent, Matt Green, at the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. He comes to us from the other end of the Sierra District, having managed Grover Hot Springs, Bodie and Mono Lake. Matt, his wife Michele (also a ranger) and their two children will be living at Empire Mine.

I’d like to thank all the staff and volunteers that made our Nevada County Fair booth a success. We’ve just had the annual River Clean Up Day, with a culminating celebration at Bridgeport. Also, the Calling Back the Salmon event will take place on October 9 at Bridgeport from 10 am to 3 pm. Lastly, we’ll be looking forward to wrapping up the summer season with our Fall Festival and Ghosts of Bridgeport on October 31. Thank you to everyone who welcomed me here and helped make this a very enjoyable summer!

Don Schmidt

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Over 100 volunteers turned out for the annual dinner September 16. This was an opportunity for Park staff to serve the food, pour the wine and thank the attendees for their contributions to the Park. During the social hour, Avanguardia Wines of Nevada City poured tastes of their red and white wines. The food included barbequed steak and chicken kabobs, baked beans, salads and French bread. The meal was planned, prepared and cooked by Glenn Fuller and Bev Morgan. The crowd was treated to two cakes honoring Ranger Mike Smittle on his retirement. Several speakers gave tributes to Mike including Jennifer McCallan, Don Schmidt, Matt Green, Marlene Linstadt, Don Denton and Donna Brown. Donna read her “Ode to Mike,” and the Board read “The Top Ten Reasons Why Mike Is Going to Alaska.”

Recent Contributors

- Prudential Insurance Company made a donation in honor of former employee Don Denton’s service to the Park
- Steve Pauly and Ardie Obert made a donation in memory of Becky Quigley
- Ron and Susie Ernst made a donation in memory of Earl Bilton, Kay Carius’ father
- Dan and Toni Halloran made a donation in memory of Becky Quigley
New Educational Books and Games at the Visitor Center

The visitor center at the Park has gone through a make over; it’s educational, fun and visitor friendly. In May of this year a group of dedicated docents researched the sales items in the State Park visitor center. All items were reviewed to comply with the goals of the Department of Parks and Recreation. They selected many new items emphasizing education and local history. The four docents, Patricia Stein, Ardie Obert, Sharon Anderson and Beverly Morgan looked at each sales item and made a decision to keep those that are educational and of interest to park visitors. One of their priorities was to provide children books and activities. Bev Morgan commented “Many parents and grandparents want books or gifts that teach kids about the gold rush era and our natural environment. We now have an excellent selection; come down to Bridgeport see our new visitor center items.”

The center is open Thursday through Sunday, 11:00 AM until 4:00 PM from Labor Day through Memorial Day. Sales within the visitor center go directly to SYRPA to support the Park. Some of the Park activities supported by the Association are guided wildflower walks, gold panning, interpretive talks in the historic bridge and barn and many other park programs and docent activities.

Glenn Fuller

Ranger Jennifer Transfers to Lake Tahoe State Parks

Jennifer McCallan transferred to Lake Tahoe State Parks in September and is a Ranger in the Lake Sector. The Lake Sector includes Sugar Pine, D.L. Bliss and Emerald Bay State Parks plus Tahoe Recreation Area and several day-use parks. She will be supporting all of these parks plus, she expects, a heavy dose of bear aversion. During her three years at South Yuba River, Jennifer has been an EMR instructor for the Sierra Gold Sector, assisted Ranger Mike with the docent program, created the SYRPA website, functioned as the SYRPA webmaster, and created graphics and posters for Park events. Jennifer is living in a state house at D.L. Bliss State Park with husband Ric, their dog and three cats. She commented “I’ve always wanted to live at Lake Tahoe, and availability of a state house makes that affordable. I’ve had more than an hour commute to SYR from Carmichael, and that ride has been reduced to almost zero. I like the cold weather and snow sports including downhill and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. I’m dealing mainly with campgrounds and bear aversion. And there are night time call-outs as well! I will miss the beauty of the South Yuba River and the friendliness of the SYR visitors, staff, volunteers and members of the Association.” The Association thanks Jennifer for her contributions to the Park and for the artistic and technical talents she brought to bear on the Association website.

New for 2011--Summer Bridge, Barn & Gas Station Tours

An Exciting New Opportunity for Interpretation

The public’s “Bridgeport Experience” will be expanded for June through August next year with one-hour “B B & G” tours each weekend starting at 10 am and ending just prior to the popular 11 am to 1 pm Gold Panning. Several docents already have expressed interest in leading these tours next summer. We will need a dozen or so trained tour guides. The April 2011 training will include historic facts and presentation ideas. The training will be part of our continuing education program and open to as many SYRPA members as can be seated in the Visitor Center. The training classes will be given by members familiar with these three historic structures. In addition to the classroom time, the class will be treated to tours by several docents to contrast different presentation styles. The Bridge, of course, is always “open,” but the Barn and Gas Station doors will be open to the public during the scheduled tours. If you wish to be a part of this new opportunity, please contact Don Denton at 432-1888 or ddgobears@aol.com.
Meet Our Business Sponsors

Charmia’s Hair & Nails

Charmia Nielsen has owned and operated her own hair and nail salon in Penn Valley in its present location on Penn Valley Road for 18 years and worked in the Lake Wildwood shopping center for 10 years previously. She has lived in Penn Valley for 18 years and has been a resident of Nevada County for 50 years. She raised two daughters in the community and participated in many local activities over the years. The clientele at Charmia’s Hair & Nails mostly are local residents, and she considers them trusted friends as well as clients. On most weekends Charmia teaches a motorcycle safety class at Yuba College in Marysville. She is an avid Sacramento Kings fan, and in her spare time she can be seen with her dog Harley, walking the trails at Bridgeport.

In Remembrance of Becky Quigley

Former Park Aide Becky Quigley passed away July 21 after a battle with cancer. She was a beloved contributor to the Visitor Center and volunteer activities at Bridgeport and will be remembered fondly by all who knew her. She was born in Fresno, California, graduated from Encina High School in Sacramento and attended the University of California at Berkeley where she was a member of Alpha Delta Pi sorority. In 2002, Becky worked on the Sierra Front Incident Command Team and during the winter was assistant manager at Heavenly Sports at Heavenly Ski Resort. She volunteered at the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s Silver Saddle Ranch in Carson City and at the Off-highway Vehicle Park at Sand Mountain, Nevada. In 2003, she worked for the BLM in Carson City, where she was a fire administration clerk, and the ramp manager at the Minden Air Tanker Base. She also attended the strenuous Carlin Fire Academy for wild land firefighters. In 2005, she moved to Grass Valley, and worked for Cal Fire at the Grass Valley Air Attack Base as a firefighter. While in Grass Valley she volunteered at Empire Mine State Park and South Yuba River State Park at Bridgeport and soon became employed by the Parks Department as a senior park aide. At Bridgeport, Becky coordinated volunteer activities and took an active part in management of the Visitor Center sales center. Becky enjoyed exploring, snow and water skiing, hiking, boating and searching for vintage treasures. She is survived by her daughters, Christina Lauren Quigley, a firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service, Megan Elizabeth Quigley, a student at the University of Nevada, Reno, and brother Rodney Borges.

Independence Trail Update

Sequoya Challenge has offered to donate its property at the Independence Trail to the State. Discussions are underway. If the offer is approved and the property formally accepted by the State for inclusion into the South Yuba River State Park, SYRPA would then have an increased support role, as the Trail would then become an integral part of the Park that we support.
Changing Birds and Bird Locations at Bridgeport

Birds around the Visitor Center and the Kneebone Cemetery are changing. Canyon Wrens, always content to nest in the man-made structures have left the barn and the Visitor Center though sometimes they are found in the stone wall areas. The American Dippers have left a nesting area beneath the covered bridge after flooding washed away vegetation there and left a sandy surface instead; these spots have become more conducive to waterfront users. Most noticeable is the absence of many Acorn Woodpeckers once some of their favorite gray pines died. These changes have not left a vacuum but produced some changing patterns of usage and times of appearance. Now Phainopeplas have made nesting in the mistletoe covered live oaks their year long homes, so we see them much more regularly. A major contributor to this change has been the expansion of the State Park property because of the gift of Senator Cranston’s property north of our older limits. Also as a result, the Woodpeckers have more gray pine trees for their granaries, especially with the harvest of acorns this past year.

The wide meadow at the top of the Point Defiance Trail has many oaks and attracts more birds than were once seen at the Yuba River level. Western Kingbirds have made a habit of appearing every spring at this level, perching on the fences and building nests in the tall oak trees. Western Bluebirds are at home in the tall grasses in the meadow and the branches of oak trees. White Breasted Nuthatches are nesting in the area. Lark and Chipping Sparrows populate this area in the spring. An Olive-sided Flycatcher nested on a lower hanging branch of an oak tree. Most beautiful of all is the gorgeous nest of the Bullock’s Oriole high in a large oak tree on the edge of the meadow. Phainopeplas prefer this mistletoe infested areas over the riverside area though some still find homes for their nests at the lower elevation level.

Not everything is changing. Kingfishers still rattle up and down the Kentucky Creek area. Herons return to this area as do Killdeers. Bewick’s and House Wrens still like it closer to the river. Spotted Towhees and Wrentits like the shrub covered spots offered here. Cedar Waxwings, Western Tanagers, Audubon and Orange Crowned Warblers make their spring appearances. Two bird species have prolonged their spring stays. A pair of Bald Eagles has a nest high in a ponderosa pine by the South Yuba River. They have fledged two juveniles in 2009 and again in 2010. Their stay has been from January though June. And the Yellow-breasted Chats come through in late April to the end of June and will have one brood per pair in the Kentucky Creek area. Finding their nests is difficult! California Quail have their broods around June and July. Cliff Swallows nest from mid-March into the summer. Birding at Bridgeport is expanding. We will be doing walks each month from January through June and will continue with two or three more in the fall. Late fall and winter have become the time for the American Dippers on our stretch of the River.

Fall is a good time for various different species to show up, and the next bird walk is Saturday, October 16 at 8am. See you there!

Bill Cortright
Photos © Walt Carnahan
Students Create a Wildflower Guide Book

Fourth and fifth graders in teacher Merry Byles-Daly’s class at Grass Valley Charter School created a 30-page guide and coloring book for Bridgeport’s wildflowers as part of the adventure-and-service-based learning approach at the school. This last spring fourth grader Michaela Allen peered excitedly at a rambling pink flower peeking through grasses at South Yuba River State Park. “Oh! The Twining Snake Lily!” Michaela said. “I was really hoping we'd get to see it, and we did!” Michaela guided other students along the Buttermilk Bend Trail and pointed kindergartners and first- and second-graders to a Snake Lily illustration by her classmate, Alexandra Whittle. As students passed a fleshy-leaved succulent, fifth grader Wolfgang Porter described the “unripe strawberry flavor” of Canyon Dudleya’s leaves, but cautioned the group not to pick or eat anything in the Park. Although he doesn’t pick flowers, Wolfie knows which bulbs are edible or medicinal, how caterpillars protect themselves from predation, and just where hikers are likely to find Chinese Houses. The class produced a Student Guide to the Wonderful Wildflowers on the Buttermilk Bend Trail at Bridgeport after several visits to the Park. Herb Lindberg, who produced Spring Flowering Plants of Bridgeport, met with the class to discuss their studies and critique their guidebook design. Byles-Daly commented, "Harnessing the power of adventure and discovery field trips such as the one to Bridgeport, leads students to become motivated in their academic work and to develop perseverance and self-discipline. Publishing the wildflower guidebook, serving as docents to classes of younger children, and doing restoration work are all part of the culmination of the children's studies." Copies of the guide are available in the Visitor's Center as a free service from the children of Grass Valley Charter School. Some of the students who created the guide plan to be available in March and April to serve as student docents to families and school groups that visit the park.

Excerpted from a Union article by Barbara Roemer