



Teacher's Notes

Teacher-Rangers Connecting Children to Nature

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The Teacher to Ranger to Teacher Experience

Chip Littlefield
Park Ranger at Saguaro National Park

Students at Esperanza Elementary School and Sierra Middle School in Tucson are the real winners as a result of the Teacher to Ranger to Teacher (TRT) program. I have seen the impact first hand; the excitement on their faces as they explore a trail, the posters, photos, and drawings on the classroom wall, and the wonder that 70 family members experienced as they toured the park on the first Esperanza Family Fun Night. The program works.

Middle school teacher Mike Barr told me that when he retires from teaching in two years, he



Teacher Ranger Mike Barr reveals the mysteries of the gila monster during National Park Week 2006.

Teacher's Notes
National Park Service
Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program
<http://www.nps.gov/wupa/forteachers/trt.htm>

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will seek a position as a seasonal park ranger. The enthusiasm, creativity, and excitement he brings to the program are the same qualities we all have seen in the young seasonal rangers just out of college. This special blend of thirty-two years of teaching experience and new-found inspiration for the parks and nature is a joy to watch.

The program works.

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Now let's explore the Saguaro TRT Experience from another perspective;

Mike Barr
Sierra Middle School, Tucson, Arizona
Teacher-Ranger Saguaro National Park



As a direct result of the Teacher to Ranger to Teacher experience I have changed my classroom curriculum and my students have benefited tremendously. I have added more nature-related projects including the "Interpretive Ranger Touch" to my lesson plans on insects, animals, and environment.

I have also adopted some of the teaching strategies I practiced while guiding children in the Junior Ranger Camps and incorporated them into my classroom lessons as well. Drawing and painting animals is always a popular activity in an art class. I use not only the animals of Saguaro

National Park as the subject matter for my classes but also the intriguing plants that exist in the magical landforms that I have seen on my hikes in the park. As the students are doing their class work, I weave in stories about the behaviors and the special adaptations I have observed during my ranger experience.



I have taken photographs of the mountains, hills, and creek beds and share those land forms with my classes. Students also invent a landscape using environmentally correct details that they have seen in photographs taken of Saguaro National Park or other national parks. They also invent fantasy environmental landscapes with creatures or vegetation from another world. Students learn about adaptations of desert creatures and can expand on that knowledge by creating a fantasy environment using various media and art forms.

The most important aspect of my Teacher to Ranger to Teacher experience was working with the people. I became a part of a supportive family who was always there to help, encourage, and guide.

The program works!



Be a Teacher Ranger in 2008!

What would you think about working in a National Park this summer? Whether you are new to TRT or a returning TRT, please take a minute and check out the website for summer employment in 2008. The season runs about eight to ten weeks. If selected for the program, your supplemental compensation of about \$300 per week is provided through an Intergovernmental Personnel Act Agreement (IPA).



TRT Program
List of parks
participating in the
Teacher Ranger
Teacher Program
[more...](#)

*Click on the **more** link to access the list of parks still needing TRT's for this summer.*

How the IPA functions

The IPA creates a link between the National Park Service (NPS) and the school district where you are currently employed. The details and process of getting an IPA in place will be handled initially by your upcoming NPS supervisor with assistance from the regional office in Denver. Some districts already have current IPAs. Basically, the IPA allows you to be detailed to the NPS, to learn and work as a ranger, all while remaining an employee of your school district.

What will I do at the park?

During your time at the park, you will experience the thrill of connecting visitors to natural and cultural resources that are part of America's heritage. In addition to developing your ranger skills, you will be given the opportunity to go out in the park with a resource management specialist to experience current projects first-hand. Your supervisor will work with you to identify a curriculum-based product that will connect students in your school district to the resources of

“your” national park. Time for research and development will be part of your summer schedule at the park during the second half of the summer.

How does this connect to my classroom?

When you return to the classroom in the fall, there will be many opportunities and teachable moments where your NPS experience will suggest an example or answer a question facing your students. During National Park Week (April 19-27, 2008) you will once again put on your NPS uniform and present programs about your park experience and the resources preserved in the National Park System.

So how can I apply?

The NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/wupa/forteachers/trt.htm> is the clearinghouse for TRT information. Click on the **more** link to go to the



Teacher-Ranger Leah Peeler at Rocky Mountain National Park, summer 2007.

page with instructions about how to apply for that TRT job. Each park with a current vacancy will be listed. This posting will describe the duties, housing availability, park location and who to contact for further details. The application period is roughly December through April, so check it out right away.



Continuing the Legacy of the Big Thicket

By Will Watkins,
Teacher-Ranger
Big Thicket National Park and Preserve

You may ask which states, or countries for that matter, do I have to visit to explore the sandy banks along a cool spring-fed creek, dark tannin-laden mysterious baygalls and sloughs, towering hardwood trees as well as



loblolly and longleaf pine, and four of the five kinds of carnivorous plants surviving in the savannah? How far and wide will I have to travel? Save your petroleum. There is no need to travel in all directions of America and beyond to view these diverse habitats. All of these habitats, and more, can be found in our own backyard – in the Big Thicket.

This unique region is made accessible to teachers and their classrooms from all over the country through the Teacher to Ranger to Teacher (TRT) program. Teachers learn about the Big Thicket and also about the environment in general. Then they take this knowledge back to the classroom and develop lesson plans to educate students. In this way, the information is recycled from the Teacher-Rangers to the students, who then as adults pass it on to the next generation. Environmental education specialists, teachers, and volunteers are all determined to pass on this knowledge to the public, especially to children, so that they can be a part of the continuing legacy of this unusual and special community.

During the summer of 2006, the Teacher-Rangers participated in several activities including attending

a Teaching Environmental Education class at Lamar University, canoeing Village Creek, Girl Scout programs, bird banding, hiking the many units of the Big Thicket, library programs, guided night hikes, Kid's Wilderness Survival, and Day Camps.

We studied the Southeast Texas Estuarine Ecosystems, endangered species, pollution prevention and wastewater treatment, riparian habitats, hazardous waste disposal, the Neches and Sabine River Watersheds. The course at Lamar University focused on environmental problems in Southeast Texas and their solutions. Using the knowledge gained, the Teacher-Rangers aim to help students understand local as well as global environmental issues better.



However, the aim of a ranger is not to “only give out information, but also to be an “Interpreter.” Interpretation relates what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor. We want the participants to relate intangible events to tangible events. In other words, children and adults, after experiencing the Big Thicket, will relate what they have learned to an internal emotion. Inner emotions are memorable and heartfelt and worthy of passing on to the next generation. The legacy is continued.



Award Applications for TRT of the Year

Do you know someone who was a fantastic TRT? It might even be you! The National Park Service would like to recognize teachers who have made significant contributions to this program. For 2007 we will consider applications for any teacher who has participated in the TRT program to date.

Application process:

The “Teacher-Ranger Teacher of the Year” award will be given to a teacher who not only has provided all their statistics and evaluations, but also created:

- 1) an outstanding NPS Week program or classroom presentation;
- 2) an excellent curriculum product for their park;
- 3) developed top quality skills as an NPS ranger.
- 4) Extra consideration will be given to those teachers who arranged field trips for students!

Anyone can make a nomination/application and there is no limit to the number of nominations an individual can make using the online application form located at:

<http://www.nps.gov/wupa/forteachers/upload/TRT%20of%20the%20Year%20Application.doc>.

Please email the completed form by April 7, 2008 to Diana Wiggam at diana_wiggam@nps.gov. Questions? Call Diana at 303-969-2404.

Awards/Recognition: A wooden NPS arrowhead traditionally routed and engraved with the winner’s name will be presented to the TRT of the Year along with a bonus of \$1,000. Second through fourth place winners in this competition will receive green fleece vests, with an embroidered TRT logo.

The decision of the judging panel will be announced on the first day of National Park Week, April 19-27, 2008. The judging panel will include the NPS TRT state coordinators. Winner photos, a short statement about the TRT experience, and the winning curriculum project will be posted on the TRT website. **Don’t be shy, apply!**



*Teacher’s Notes
Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program
Interpretation and Education
National Park Service
Intermountain Region
12795 W. Alameda Parkway
Denver, CO 80225*

*Intermountain States are:
MT, WY, CO, UT, NM, AZ, TX and OK.*

*Diana Truman Wiggam, Park Ranger
Teacher to Ranger to Teacher Coordinator
Teacher’s Notes Editor
303-969-2404
diana_wiggam@nps.gov*

*Linda Lutz-Ryan
Interpretive Specialist
Teacher to Ranger to Teacher Coordinator
303-969-2638
linda_lutz-ryan@nps.gov*

Comments and suggestions welcome.

