Volunteering at Mount Diablo State Park • Carl Nielson, State Park Peace Officer

A gorgeous view from the “office,” fresh air, exercise, like-minded coworkers…. What more can you ask for?

Volunteers provide a valuable service in parks throughout the California State Park System. In 2014, 40,000 volunteers contributed over one million hours in California State Parks. Here at Mount Diablo State Park, we have a very active, dedicated, and enthusiastic group of volunteers who work in multiple aspects of park operations. Nearly 200 long-term volunteers perform work under the Volunteer in Parks (VIP) Program. Mount Diablo State Park volunteers donated over 15,000 hours this past year! Let’s look at the kinds of work in which volunteers are involved.

Trails and Facilities Maintenance

The park has a large network of trails. Much of the work to maintain these trails is performed by volunteers: clearing trails, removing overhang, and improving trail drainage. Our volunteer trail maintenance crew meets on the second Saturday of every month. Trail work is also performed on Earth Day in April, National Trails Day in June, and National Public Lands Day in September. One-day volunteers are welcome—they just need to complete some paperwork.

Several volunteers are constructing a trail of rock steps in Rock City that connects Grotto Picnic Area and the Wind Caves. Others have provided needed repairs to park facilities, particularly those damaged by the 2013 Morgan Fire. The small but active Maintenance Volunteer Group welcomes additional volunteers with maintenance experience (carpentry, painting, etc.); enthusiasm is a plus.

Backcountry Patrols

Volunteers on foot, on bike, and on horse assist hikers, trail runners, mountain bicyclists, and equestrians while on patrol in the backcountry of the park. They advise visitors on wise use, rules, and regulations. They report on trail conditions and backcountry activity. Official vests or jerseys identify these volunteers.

Public Contact

On weekends and some holidays, volunteers exclusively staff the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center, located on the north side of the park near Clayton. Many volunteers lead interpretive programs such as wildflower hikes and the popular Tarantula Treks that take place in late summer/early autumn. Volunteers also assist visitors at the Summit Visitor Center.

(Continued on page 8)
As stewards of Mount Diablo State Park and champions of its natural inhabitants, we want to inform you of a program we have implemented to protect a natural resource in the park. The area known as "Castle Rock" in Mount Diablo State Park is closed to visitors from February 1 to July 31 to help protect the peregrine falcon during its nesting season. This is an annual closure, as the peregrine falcon is listed as a "Fully Protected Species" in California. This raptor is territorial and highly sensitive to disturbance during nesting season.

California State Parks has partnered with East Bay Regional Park District, the operator of the Diablo Foothills Regional Park, which neighbors the closed area, to educate rock climbers and the general public of this closure and the importance of protecting the falcon. Signs and educational panels are placed in the area to advise and educate users about the closure. Violators are subject to penalty by fine. Rock climbers are encouraged to use an alternate climbing area of the area to advise and educate users about the closure.

In support of Ranger Carl Nielson’s description of volunteering in the park, I encourage everyone to consider the benefits, both to the park and to individuals giving their time. As an example, after many months of planning, a bridge in Dan Cook Canyon was replaced with a new steel structure that will last far longer than the previous bridge. Park staff, volunteers, and generous donors came together to accomplish this major project. The Rock City stone steps, painstakingly chiseled and positioned by a small group of dedicated volunteers, will be a lasting piece of work that their grandchildren can point to as an example of what their family of volunteers contributed to the park.

Welcome to Mount Diablo State Park. Almost 20,000 acres and 175 miles dedicated to hiking, biking, and equestrian trail opportunities await you. In this wilderness, you are surrounded by rare plants, scenic vistas, and rocks galore. Please don't hesitate to ask park staff or volunteers for help in planning or improving your visit.

Walk a quarter mile up Mitchell Canyon from the visitor center, where the canyon narrows and the trail becomes steep for a short uphill climb, and there you will encounter the Mitchell Creek restoration project on the right. In the fall of 2013, a 100 yard plus section of creek with high banks and old dams was reshaped for improvement with flood plains and a series of pools. In the spring of 2014, the area was planted with native plants that grew on site before the construction. (See related article in the Spring/Summer 2014 Mount Diablo Review.) The 1,100 gallon water tank marks the spot where visitors can get a view of the project.

The California State Parks Bay Area District resource team, based in Petaluma and led by Natural Resource Program Manager Cyndy Shafer, planned the project. Go Native, of Montara, was contracted to do the planting and irrigation. Native Here Nursery in Berkeley has been propagating the plants from seeds and cuttings collected directly from Mitchell Creek. Great Tree Tenders, based in Ukiah, has done weed control. Local park volunteers salvaged plants from the site before construction and continue to be stewards of the planting and ongoing maintenance effort. Skilled help is welcome from others who might be interested.

More plant identification talent would be appreciated for improving your visit.

In addition, native grass seed, specific to the area, has been sown in sections. The project’s goal is to have a minimum of 50 percent coverage of native plants after three years, and 75 percent after five years. It may take a human generation or a lifetime to restore this habitat to be like it once was for the endangered red-legged frog, Alameda whipsnake, or rainbow trout.

For more information on the "Mitchell Creek Restoration and Fish Passage Project," see the documentation in the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center. Inquiries may be directed to Project Steward Volunteer Dave Caniglia at cani@mindspring.com or to California State Parks Natural Resource Program Manager Cyndy Shafer at CyndyShafer@parks.ca.gov.

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Camping at Mount Diablo State Park

Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps:

- **Juniper Campground** (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) Located approximately 2 miles below the summit, on Summit Road. Juniper is known for its fantastic views. Three campsites meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. Reservations available.

- **Live Oak Campground** (23 sites, elevation 1,450 ft.) Located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, off South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. Reservations available.

- **Junction Campground** (6 sites, elevation 2,200 ft.) Located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. Available on a first-come, first-served basis only.

Group Camps are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary. Each campground is primitive with running water (subject to availability) and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. RVs are not allowed in the group camping areas. Reservations available.

- All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water (subject to availability) and restrooms. Showers are available at Juniper and Live Oak campgrounds at no additional charge.

- The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, but can accommodate RVs up to 20 feet in length. No hookups and dumping stations are provided.

**Camping Procedures**

Make reservations 48 hours to 7 months in advance by contacting Reserve America at 800.444.7275 or www.reserveamerica.com. Reservations can be made for a specific campground but not a specific site. Campers cannot be registered at Mitchell Canyon. Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

During the fire season (generally May to October), the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925.837.2525 or 925.837.0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

**General Rules**

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- 8 people and 2 vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent’s phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.

**Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. NO GROUND FIRES.**

- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 6).

- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.

- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate camp or picnic ground.

**Group Picnic Reservations:** Call Ranger Daniel Golde at 925.837.6129 x3
2015 Public Astronomy Programs on Mount Diablo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
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Time: Beginning about an hour before sunset. Enter the park gate at least 45 minutes before the program starts.

Where: Lower summit parking lot of Mount Diablo State Park.

Cost: The astronomy program is free; there is a park entry fee.

Bring: Kids, binoculars, warm clothes (temperature can drop significantly), snacks, water. If you bring a flashlight, please cover it with red cellophane or red cloth.

Leaving: The Park gates will be locked and visitors will be able to leave the summit and exit the park only by escorted caravans through the North Gate a few times during the evening. Caravans will be announced at various intervals during the program, and visitors should only leave with these escorts.

The Astronomy Program is presented by Mount Diablo State Park, Mount Diablo Astronomical Society (MDAS), and Mount Diablo Observatory Association. It takes place weather permitting (including “High Fire Danger”). Rain cancels.

For more details, go to Mount Diablo Astronomical Society’s website, www.mdas.net, and click on Event Calendar, or call Mount Diablo State Park at 925.837.2525.

Park Rules

You are responsible for obeying these and other Park rules:

- All Features of the Park Are Protected! Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
- Park Hours: Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at sunset. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out to sunset to avoid being locked in.
- No Alcohol: All alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- Vehicles/Bicycles Speed Limit: 15 to 25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
- Bicycles are allowed only on paved roads, fire roads and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.
- Skateboards, rollerblades, roller skates, and gravity-propelled devices are prohibited.
- Dogs: Must be on leash at all times when out of your car; must be in tent or a vehicle at night; and must stay in developed areas—they are not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- Fires: Restrictions in effect during season. Check with a Ranger. Fires must be in fire stoves or barbecues provided—no ground fires.
- Emergencies: Dial 911.
- Fireworks are prohibited.
- Firears/airguns are prohibited.
- Hunting is prohibited.

Fire Danger: How Will It Affect You?

- Maintain fires at all times in a safe condition that does not threaten any person or natural or structural feature.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Extinguish all fires prior to departure.
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Trash Removal Project
The Trash Removal Project (TRP) is the brainchild of volunteers Rich McDrew and Burt Bogardus. Through the years, Rich and Burt, along with their intrepid group of volunteers, have removed old barbed wire fence, old dumps, discarded vehicle tires, and old, no-longer-in-use water pipes throughout the park, much of which is recycled. They have contributed greatly to the beautification of the park. They have also worked with many Scouts on Eagle Projects over the years.

Natural Resource Management
Volunteers assist in the removal of non-native vegetation and the care and management of native plant and animal species. Dave Caniglia, one such volunteer, logs over 1,000 hours yearly within the park. (See story on page 3.) Natural resource volunteers are also involved in plant and animal surveys.

Star Parties
Volunteers coordinate public Star Parties once a month from March through October. A powerful permanent telescope is set up at the Lower Summit Parking Lot, and many volunteers bring their own telescopes. For more information, see page 6.

Park Host Program
Long-term volunteers in the Park Host program perform general park maintenance duties and public contact at the Mitchell Canyon Staging Area and at Live Oak Campground. In exchange, these volunteers are provided a campsite pad for a recreational vehicle. It’s a great opportunity to live and “work” in a park.

Becoming a VIP
Becoming a VIP requires some paperwork and a four-hour training session, which includes an introduction to the park and the VIP Program. Additional training is specific to the volunteering that interests you. Park system passes are awarded to volunteers based on hours served. An annual Statewide Parks Pass is earned for 200 hours in a calendar year. If you are interested, contact State Park Peace Officer Scott Poole at Scott.Poole@parks.ca.gov. Volunteering for the park is rewarding and incredibly valuable to the park. And, remember, as a volunteer, you have a really nice office!