

# The South Swell

Doheny State Beach Interpretive Association

## Where Are They Now?

**Mike Dippel (Park Aide, Summer 2007):** After leaving Doheny, Mike enjoyed a month-long surf trip in Mexico. He then worked as an instructor at the Ocean Institute and at the Lazy W Ranch (off Ortega Highway), educating students about the outdoors. During this time, Mike was going through the lengthy



State Park Ranger-Cadet hiring process.

Mike was thrilled to be hired as a Ranger-Cadet, starting the academy in October 2008. In a recent email, Mike wrote, "I am so

## Do Snakes Get Nine Lives Too?

The runner must have jumped 20 feet in the air as we drove by. My steel trap of a mind told me that he was trying to avoid something. What it was, I wasn't sure, but I had a good guess: a snake. Here at Doheny we don't see many of these slithering serpents, but every now and then one shows up. We made a quick U-turn,

stoked to be up here at the academy, I'm just taking it day by day, and enjoying every minute of it." Mike will graduate, along with 40 other cadets, in May 2009. His first assignment will be at Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, a new park in the Los Angeles area, which is scheduled to open in March 2009. Mike said the park will have a spanking-new interpretive center and ranger station. Way to go and good luck, Mike!

### Elaine (Murray) DeSon: (Aquarium Park Aide, 1994-1995):

Elaine is known as our first "Aquarium Girl" – a Park Aide whose primary responsibility was to care for our visitor center's tide pool and aquariums. Elaine proved to be a great

heading back to the area where we had just seen the jogger make the Olympic-sized leap. Once we got there, I saw the culprit that caused his hurdle. It was a three to four foot gopher snake lying across the jogger's trail, sunning itself in the afternoon rays. This was my first encounter with this beautiful animal but not my last. Several

By Ranger Brad Barker



Elaine and friends on the set of "George of the Jungle"

success, leading to a long line of distinguished aquarists at Doheny.

After leaving Doheny, Elaine, a Veterinary Technician, moved to the Los Angeles area, where she worked for the American Humane Association to monitor "animal action" for films and television. Her knowledge of horses got her hired on the spot, and allowed her to work in the hills of South Dakota on the film "Crazy Horse." She also traveled to Costa Rica for 5 weeks for the film "Jungle Book." Her favorite sets were for "Born Free" and "George of the Jungle." *cont. page 2*

By Supervising Ranger Jim Serpa

months later I was in a meeting by the creek when I heard....SNAKE! This time Sammy (as Senior Park Aide Rachel Hammer has dubbed the snake) seemed to be sunning itself right next to the bike trail along the creek. Sammy was very shiny with beautiful browns, oranges and cream colors, appearing to have just molted. I quickly

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DSBIA  
Winter 2009 Newsletter



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### 2009

#### Dates to Remember

Feb 14	Beach Clean-up
April 11	Grunion Night
April 18	Earth Day Clean-up
April 25	Earth Day Planting
June 13	Surf a Rama
Sept. 19	Coastal Clean-up
Oct 3,4	"Battle of the Paddle" Race
Oct 24	Halloween Haunt
Nov 21	Beach Clean-up



### *Nine Lives (cont.)*

and carefully gopher snakes can, and do, bite) picked it up and placed it under a nearby bush, much to the appreciation of the women.

Several months later I got a call from Rachel. She said that a snake was being attacked by a squadron of birds in San Juan Creek. I headed out to the tower and was on scene in a matter of minutes. *That made easy, being that I work in what Superintendent Rich Haydon affectionately refers to as, the 62 acre wood, aka Pooh Corner/Doheny.* I raced down to the river mouth to see if it was Sammy and sure enough there was this four foot gopher snake just swimming ashore from the creek. The snake had a puncture wound along his back and appeared to need my help once again. There were several aggressive birds hanging out nearby looking to possibly finish off what they had started. For the third time in a year I picked the snake up to place him away from harm, in some nearby shrubbery. Before I released the snake I carried it over to show Rachel in the gift shop. After all, she had helped to save it by alerting me. I thought she was going to be happy to see it up close, but, boy was I mistaken. She wanted no part of poor injured Sammy. Rachel made it plain to me that she needed no "up close and personal encounter" with this snake or any snake for that matter. Oops, fearing that Rachel might finish off what the birds had started, I retreated swiftly. I then remembered that Lori Coble had similar snake phobias while working here a few years back. I was a little worried, however, that the snake's injuries might cause him problems, and that this might be our last encounter.

Flash forward about six months to me coming out of our lifeguard tower, only to spot what appeared to be Sammy right next to the bike rack, heading over the curb to cross the path. I figured all the work on my part was not going to do any good if

he got squashed by a group of bikers as they came off the trail. So, I picked him up again and redirected him back toward the relative safety of the creek's bushes. I was thrilled that he healed and was still alive and kicking (can snakes kick?) I am currently looking forward to seeing Sammy again some day soon.

One note: I am not sure that all these snake encounters were with the same snake (since snakes don't wear collars or the like), but it seems highly unlikely that I would run into the same-size gopher snake in the same basic area of the park four times. I'd like to think it was Sammy each time.

A few gopher snake facts before I finish: Gopher snakes can live in almost all parts of California and have been observed actually climbing trees from time to time. They can grow to over eight feet in length and have markings somewhat similar to a rattlesnake's. They also have the ability to hiss loudly and vibrate their tail onto the ground. This part is really cool: they fill pockets in the back part of their skull with air to alter the shape of the head. Kind of like the Lon Chaney of snakes. All of these traits can cause them to be mistaken for their venomous cousins. This often results in a not so pleasant encounter with a shovel. Gopher snakes have no venom, although they will bite, and they kill by constriction. They eat rodents, lizards and insects along with small birds and their eggs. The gopher snakes in our area do not hibernate, so they can be seen year-round, if you are lucky.

Dave Barry once wrote that *All of us are born with a set of instinctive fears—of falling, of the dark, of snakes, of falling on snakes in the dark, and speaking at the Rotary club*" I believe that if you get to know these animals you will be fascinated by them and hopefully less afraid. Maybe even get to like them a bit. What do you think Rachel and Lori?

### *Where are they Now ? (cont.)*

of the Jungle." She said there was "never a dull moment" in her 4 years of monitoring. Elaine returned to Orange County, where she worked at the Irvine Animal Shelter and the Lake Forest Animal Clinic, where she has worked part-time for over 20 years.

In 2002, Elaine married her "sweetheart from the past," Chip DeSon, whom Elaine had dated back in 1984. With Chip came an "instant family" for Elaine – 3 step kids (2 boys and a girl)! During this time, Elaine started her own business, where she makes custom home-care visits for animals, specializing in sick and injured animals. She rides her palomino "Crackerjack" several times a week.

***We forget the water cycle and the life cycle are one***

***Jacques Cousteau***



**Gene and Sheila Hollaway receive the 2008 DSBIA Porter Pelican Award**

### ***Aquarium Update***

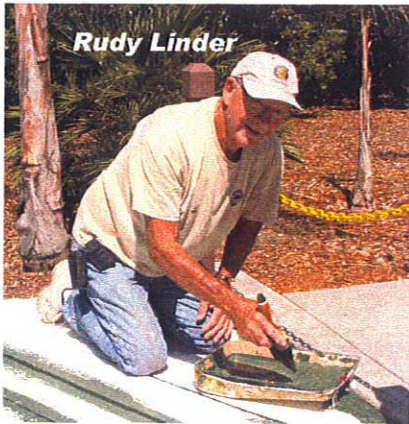
Bob Scholfield and his crew have been working on the re-hab of the Visitor Center the last few months. The tide pool has been taken out and new framing studs have been replacing damaged ones inside the building. The process may seem slow, due to our anticipation of getting back into our building, but Bob and his crew work hard and only get to work when they have the time away from any urgent matters that our ongoing in the park.

***Do not tell fish stories where people know you, but particularly, don't tell them where they know the fish.***

***Mark Twain***

## Let's step a few paces back before we move forward to 2009 by Vicki Wiker

Doheny's campfire center has always been an evolutionary process, with an array of painting projects, new lighting, displays and accessories, including an authentic-looking campfire ring that is powered by propane. Camphost Rudy Linder has been like a



Rudy Linder

whirlwind, adding this and that to make the place warmly inviting for interpretive programs. His latest project, with assistance from Doho's grounds crew, was to update the irrigation system. They were successful and they added a lot of colorful shrubbery as well. My hope is to continue with native plants through a grant from the California State Parks Foundation. Cross your muddy fingers for grant monies. Mark your calendars for April 25th when you can grab those work gloves and your favorite shovel to join us as part of an Earth Day project. A special token of thanks to Doheny volunteer Mike Peck and the Tower 12 family of volunteers who helped prep and paint the campfire center. The place looks beautiful!

### Summer season

The summer season welcomes back many familiar faces to the campground, as a majority of the campers make their annual visit to

Doheny as part of their summer vacations. The Junior Rangers program is probably one of my favorite interpretive activities for that reason. I get the unique opportunity to watch the children come back year after year as they grow in body, mind, and spirit. It truly fills my heart to be a part of their camping experience! The rangers were an incredible support this year by doing a couple of campfire programs (each) which really increased our number of evening programs. The campers really enjoyed learning



Peggy Chase

about so many diversified topics while at Doheny. Long time volunteer Peggy Chase, from the Orange County Birds of Prey Center, made her annual summer visit with some live birds. Even after 10 years (plus), Peggy is still one of the camper's favorites! A big hug of gratitude to everyone who helped put on a spectacular summer show.

### City of Dana Point lends Doheny and DSBIA a helping hand

The City of Dana Point has been a local sponsor for Coastal Cleanup Day in September. Lisa Zawaski, with the Public Works Department, helps with just about everything under the sun. The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Coastal Cleanup Day was a great success again with a record 250 volunteers who cleaned the beach, both creeks, and even with bags and bags of trash collected from the jetty. We had more volunteers this year, but they

picked up less trash than last year. Perhaps education has helped...don't trash the ocean we play in! Thank you to all of the forces that helped make the day so rewarding: Brad, Lisa, and the rest of the City support team; educational outreach booth participants Eugenia and Jeanette Shue; Rudy; Dana Point Albertson's Keire and Mark for the donation of drinking water, and many others who helped.



Clean-up Volunteers

DSBIA received grant monies earmarked for the interpretive programs through the City of Dana Point's Charitable Grant program at the end of the year. DSBIA is thrilled to have received this generous grant as there was quite a pool of other local non-profit organizations requesting funding. I am certain that the money will go to good use as we embark on another year of wide-ranging interpretive programs at Doheny State Beach.

### Hobie and Rainbow Sandals help

Hobie hosted a 40-year anniversary regatta in October. They were so impressed with Doheny that they decided to help by making a donation to DSBIA targeting the restoration of the visitor center. The folks at **Rainbow Sandals** had their first annual *Gerry Lopez Battle of the Paddle* stand-up contest, also in October. They also climbed on as a team player to help generate funds to get the center up and going. On behalf of DSBIA, Doheny staff, and all of the people who love visiting the Center, thank you very much Hobie and Rainbow Sandals for helping us out. A special note of thanks to Special Events Coordinators Denise Estrada and Lori Coble for working with these groups to help make it happen!

### Stand up paddlers await race start



## Photo Gallery



Jim, Rachel and Robbie at this year's Halloween Haunt

Check us out on the web:  
[dohenystatebeach.org](http://dohenystatebeach.org)

## President's Message



DSBIA President Steve Stirrett

2008 has come and gone, but was overall a very good year at Doheny. We had some great events including the Surf-a-Rama, Stand-up paddle race, Hobie Cat 40-year anniversary regatta, and several others put on by our local Doheny Longboard Surfing Association. Of course, we did campfire programs every Saturday night all summer. The volunteers and staff have really spruced up the campfire center. Come by sometime and take a look. The Hallow-



Volunteers at the Aquarium of the Pacific reward trip



Bob Scholfield demolishing old tide pool exhibit



The Doheny Longboarders palapa roofing crew



Vicki Wiker after an educational talk with a scout group

een Haunt saw a record number of attendees.

We have a changing of the guard in the Board of Directors for the Doheny State Beach Interpretive Association. Last year longtime treasurer Wally Hamme retired, and we are sad to hear that he has been in the hospital lately. Get well soon Wally!! Nyle Schafhauser then joined us, and we now have two more board members with Ed Neely and Mario Cuevas, all fine people. Jim Lindenberg has resigned the board after serving many years and will be missed. Cecil Cowder will be stepping down as Secretary, a position which he has been in for maybe 10 years. He writes his meeting notes in shorthand, as he was previously a shorthand teacher, and then translates them later. Ed Neely has volunteered to take over Cecil's secretarial position. Thanks Ed! We honored Jim and Cecil with the Porter Pelican Award at our annual apprecia-

tion dinner, as well as camp hosts Gene and Sheila Hollaway for their assistance every year with the year-end gift store inventory and other fine work.

State Park Maintenance Supervisor Bob Scholfield is moving right along with refurbishing the visitors center. It has been a long process but things are progressing. Any monetary donations to this effort would be greatly appreciated. The gift store is now at the main life-guard tower on the beach next to San Juan Creek. They are running a sale for the next several months, so come on by and do some shopping.

My favorite times to walk at Doheny are in the winter. Most days there is a lot of water coming down the creek, the ocean is alive but the beaches are sparsely occupied, and the air is clear and crisp. In fact, think I'll go down there right now. See ya next time.

And remember the old camping adage, "leave it cleaner than you found it."