

# Partners in Parks: 1988–2006

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AFTER 18 YEARS OF WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL PARKS, Partners in Parks came to a close in March 2006. We have greatly enjoyed creating educational opportunities in national parks for volunteers and students. We have worked with numerous National Park Service professionals, who have engaged our interest in and support for their work. Our volunteer and internship projects are notable. Several of our interns now work for the Park Service. We have achieved our mission to show national park managers how to engage students and volunteers in research and preservation projects. In the following pages is our history and a tutorial on how we developed and managed internships, our most important contribution to national parks. We hope you will benefit from our experience.

## **Part One: A brief history of Partners in Parks**

I have had a passion for national parks since 1967. I joined and eventually became president of the Cave Research Foundation, which was exploring, mapping, and conducting research in Mammoth Cave National Park and four other cave parks under a national agreement signed by the NPS director. This was a sweet deal for the all-volunteer foundation and for the parks. We cavers got to work in some of the most exceptional caves in the country; the managers of the parks received excellent maps, credible research reports, and other assistance. This partnership model should work in other parks.

**The concept of Partners in Parks.** In September 1987, I met with NPS Director William Penn Mott to present Partners in Parks. The initial concept was to create a small office at NPS headquarters to develop private-sector partnerships with individual parks in support of natural resource research and management projects. After consulting with other NPS managers, I decided that making Partners in Parks a private non-

profit organization was more practicable.

In January 1988, I presented Director Mott with a new vision of Partners in Parks. Working in partnership with the Park Service, it would meet special needs of the national parks and objectives of private-sector professionals by: (1) establishing long-term partnerships in specific parks involving multiple projects, (2) establishing short-term projects, (3) assisting existing volunteer organizations, (4) organizing volunteer groups to work on major NPS objectives, and (5) encouraging donation of professional services. Director Mott turned to Carol Aten, director of the NPS Policy Office, who was part of our meeting, and said, “Help this lady become successful.” And she did, in many ways.

**Getting started.** During our first three years, we met with numerous park managers, searching for a common understanding of research and resource management needs that would attract competent volunteers. At the same time, we were challenging these same managers to be comfortable with the concept of someone outside their staff doing serious work in their park. Partners

for resource management seemed attractive. The concept of research partners was not.

Our initial objective was to develop an enthusiasm among park managers for partnerships. Then we could introduce resource management partnerships with supervised volunteers at receptive parks.

Our first product was a manual about creating partnerships, which we presented at an NPS training workshop. We published a revised version for resource managers on military installations. We presented workshops based on these manuals six times between 1991 and 1995. Other publications included case studies on biosphere reserves, a videotape and handbook on archaeological site monitoring, another videotape and manual on using volunteers for exotic plant control, and guidelines for helping park staff and friends groups work well together.

For a few years we engaged members of the Arnold Air Society, the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps honor society, in resource management projects in six national parks. Some groups were more productive than others. We were beginning to learn how to help parks form good partnerships.

The year 1994 saw the beginning of our relationship with the NPS American Battlefield Protection Program. (See below for more details.) Again, some projects were more successful than others and so we learned more about appropriate ways to assist national parks.

**Developing our abilities.** We capitalized on what had worked best in developing partnerships. We applied that knowledge to new projects in different subject areas and locations. We increased the size of our Board of Directors, developed new sponsors, and moved the main Partners in Parks

office to Colorado. In 1997, we elected Carol Aten as chair of the Board. She and her successors, Michele Frome, David Kikel, Peter Brinkley, and Elliot Gruber, gave the organization good, independent leadership, allowing me, the president, and my staff to focus on building our programs and projects.

Our most productive years began with the new century. Two grants allowed us to explore fund-raising and marketing practices. The NPS continued to support our battlefield program. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and two other foundations awarded grants for a new project at Zion National Park. Several local organizations supported herpetological studies and other volunteer projects in Rock Creek Park and at other sites in the National Capital Region. We had projects in a sufficient number of states to be eligible for Combined Federal Campaign support.

We initiated a senior scientists' program in the National Capital Region and placed talented folks in several parks. Their work was outstanding and highly praised, but our program was short-lived. A new organization, the Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement (EASI), was created with significant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency. Partners in Parks turned its attention to opportunities for other age groups.

**Gaining focus.** From these developments, two new ventures emerged: a long-term volunteer partnership at Zion, and an internship program to expand our battlefield program.

**A model volunteer partnership.** Beginning in 1999, we planned and raised funds for an exotic plant control and public education project at Zion. We hired a project manager to recruit and organize Zion

Partners, a volunteer group, and to manage the project until Zion Partners was able to do that on its own. The volunteers set to work collecting and propagating native seed, managing the greenhouse, removing non-native plants, restoring native habitats, developing native plant gardens at local schools, helping develop and present a native plant curriculum for fourth graders, and participating in joint ventures with local conservation groups on adjacent public lands. Of particular note is the Children's Garden at the Kiln Heritage site on the Dixie National Forest. Zion Partners helped elementary students draw and mount illustrations of native plants along a nature trail at the site (Figure 1).

This was the ideal volunteer partnership. Funding was adequate to get it started. The local project manager worked well with park staff (the superintendent was his neighbor) and successfully recruited volunteers of all ages and capabilities. Park staff established projects that needed to be done

Figure 1. Trail sign in Children's Garden, Dixie National Forest—a Zion Partners project.



and taught propagation methodology. A teacher who joined Zion Partners persuaded her principal to have the group create a native plant garden at the school and develop a curriculum around it. Many volunteers participated in projects just a few times, while a core group continues to manage the park's greenhouse and native plant nursery.

**An introduction to internships.** In 1998 we teamed up with the National Parks Conservation Association to design and manage the first two years of a battlefield internship program. Our first 12 college-level interns were mentored by park staff at four Civil War sites and one Revolutionary War site in Virginia and North Carolina. Although our volunteer projects were successful and satisfying, it soon became clear that Partners in Parks' greatest contribution to national parks would be through its internship programs. While personal reasons brought Partners in Parks to the town of Paonia in western Colorado, the opportunity to focus on park needs in the very diverse Intermountain Region was extremely attractive. It ultimately proved most fortuitous in developing our successful internship models.

**Focus on internships.** As a small non-profit, Partners in Parks either had to become larger to maintain a diversity of programs, or concentrate in one area. We decided to concentrate our programs and projects in the Intermountain Region, with a preferred focus on developing intern projects. We maintained a national presence with our battlefield interns program. Partners in Parks intern programs were designed to appeal to a culturally diverse student population. We recruited from colleges and universities that supported many different types of students. We insisted that all our interns receive a stipend, modest

though it may be, so that students of lesser economic means would have an opportunity to participate.

### **Battlefield internships program.**

Partners in Parks had a 12-year partnership with the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). We started out helping park friends groups and then moved on to managing interns. During the final two years of our most satisfying relationship, we operated as a national partner under a cooperative agreement. While the ABPP grants and subsequent cooperative agreement precluded our working inside national parks, we found lots of opportunities to work on adjacent lands of importance to the parks.

Partners in Parks placed highly skilled interns at significant battlefield sites across the country. By the end of 2005, Partners in Parks had supported 31 interns at 18 battlefield sites in 12 states. Intern projects included producing nine National Register nominations, statements of significance, or related research; three community outreach projects; two interpretation-related projects; and surveys of boundaries, natural features, cultural/historic features, adjacent lands, and species. All but one of the projects were completed and considered highly successful.

**Mesa Verde National Park internships.** In 2001, Partners in Parks established an internship program with Fort Lewis College and Mesa Verde National Park. Four interns were placed in the park in 2002. By the end of 2005, the program had supported 30 interns in four years. Partners in Parks' internship program provided exceptional educational opportunities for Fort Lewis College's most talented students, while helping Mesa Verde meet unmet needs in its archaeological site con-

servations program and related programs through professionally supervised internships. We were particularly interested in recruiting Native American students whose cultural connection with the park may enrich both their experience and that of their park mentors.

### **Master's degree fellowship program.**

In 2003, with Partners in Parks' assistance, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area received Department of the Interior Community Conservation Initiative (CCI) funding. The park received a project continuation grant in 2004 before the CCI program lost its appropriation. These funds supported thesis work for two master's degree fellows at Northern Arizona University. For Partners in Parks, supporting fellowships was a logical extension of supporting internships.

## **Part Two: Tutorial on successful internships**

Partners in Parks has designed and managed three models for internships. The battlefield internship model featured many parks working with interns from many schools. Usually one intern was placed with one park. A few parks managed several interns over time. The Mesa Verde internship model involves one school located near the park with a group of interns working in the park. The internship program is now beginning its fifth season. The master's degree fellowship model supports a student conducting thesis research over a period of 18 months in the park.

**Battlefield internship program.** The program goal is to provide career-enhancing internship opportunities to talented graduate and upper-level undergraduate students in national parks and related areas with battlefield themes. They are paid posi-

tions, for which interns are strongly encouraged to seek academic credit. Students are selected through a competitive process. They are mentored by park staff during the course of their internships, and report to a faculty advisor for academic requirements. The program was funded under a cooperative agreement with the ABPP.

Partners in Parks' battlefield internship program placed students with course work in the area of the internship project at battlefield sites around the country. Park staff prepared project descriptions that included student eligibility criteria, such as academic level, major, specific courses taken, physical challenges, and any other special requirements. The intern project stated a goal that could be completed within a single 400-hour internship. If it was an on-going project, then specific objectives were established that could be met in one internship. We looked for a staff member who was available, capable and willing to mentor the intern. Because of their academic level, and the nature of the projects, most interns needed little supervision.

We prepared a job announcement and advertised our internship positions through our website, elsewhere on the Internet, and through college and university departments and intern placement offices. We recruited at colleges and universities with majors in the internship subject area that were located near the project. Interested students applied to Partners in Parks.

We reviewed the applications and sent the best qualified to the park for selection. Partners in Parks hired the intern with an employment agreement that was signed by all concerned parties. It describes the project, the intern's relationship with the park and Partners in Parks, arrangements for payment of stipends and expenses, and

worker's compensation and tort liability insurance coverage.

We strongly encouraged all our interns to seek academic credit for their work. The interns are responsible for making the appropriate arrangements with their college or university. The park mentors assure the credit-worthiness of the project and that the intern's work was well done.

Under our cooperative agreement with ABPP, we encouraged more parks to submit project ideas than we had funds to support. With a high probability of a yearly obligation of new funds, we were confident we would eventually meet everyone's needs, which we did.

Our interns worked full- or part-time for 400 hours over a period of 10 to 20 weeks, and received a \$3,400 stipend. We also provided housing and travel allowances as may needed and as funds allowed. Any other project expenses or needs, such as copying or postage, access to computers, etc., were supported by the park or by us. We paid the stipend and expenses in three installments upon receipt of progress and expense reports and time logs. As each internship was completed, Partners in Parks provided a copy of the final report and other products to ABPP, along with a financial summary.

**Mesa Verde internship program.** The program goal is to provide career-enhancing internship opportunities to talented upper-level undergraduate students from Fort Lewis College at Mesa Verde National Park. The internships are regarded as the capstone of a student's academic program. These internships are paid summer positions, which receive academic credit. Students are selected through a competitive process. They are mentored by park staff during the course of their internships, and

report to a faculty advisor for academic requirements. The program was funded by the Colorado State Historical Fund, Fort Lewis College Foundation, Mesa Verde National Park, the Mesa Verde Museum Association, and others.

The first step in pursuing this type of internship program is to secure funding. Partners in Parks successfully competed for Colorado State Historical Fund matching grants over a period of three years. The park's summer-hire funds and support from the college's foundation provide the majority of the required match.

The yearly process for recruiting and placing interns began in the fall. Project descriptions were presented to the designated college administrative partner (a dean at Fort Lewis College) and college faculty so that they might start developing interest among their students to participate in the program. If a project generated interest among qualified students and if funds were available to support it, it would go forward the following summer. The ideal intern is one who has completed the junior year with a high grade point average and with sufficient course work completed in the subject area of a project. Faculty encouraged younger students to plan their academic study to make them eligible later on. An intern fair was held in early February. College faculty advertised the event and encouraged student attendance. Park staff with potential projects attended and discussed their needs with and interviewed interested students. Potential interns prepared an application indicating which projects they were interested in. College faculty and the dean reviewed the applications, sending those that merited further consideration to park staff. Park staff prepared a list of students who they would like as

interns. Further interviews were arranged as necessary.

To encourage the most qualified students to apply for the internship program, two named internships have been established. The Robert and Florence Lister Internship recognizes an outstanding student who has demonstrated a strong interest in historic preservation. The Raymond Begay Internship will recognize academic excellence. To be sure these high standards are met, the named internships are awarded only when there are truly worthy students.

Partners in Parks hired the intern with an employment agreement that was signed by all concerned parties. It describes the project, the intern's relationship with the park and Partners in Parks, arrangements for payment of stipends and expenses, and worker's compensation and tort liability insurance coverage. We also prepared and updated yearly an intern handbook, which describes the overall program, its history, expectations of interns, and a description of Partners in Parks.

The interns met as a group in April at the college to orient them to what is expected of a participant in the Mesa Verde internship program. They must be registered for the summer internship course. Early in May the interns met as a group at the park to get acquainted with their mentors, talk about park rules, learn how to find their mentor or work station, and decide on travel and lodging arrangements. Two weeks of orientation—the same as is given to seasonal interpreters—are required.

Each intern had a park staff mentor. How closely the two worked together depended on the nature of the project. Interns working in backcountry survey crews were closely observed. Those who might be collecting information from the

archives for a new publication worked more on their own.

It is ideal for interns to begin and end their projects on the same schedule. Mesa Verde designated one camping area at discounted rates for volunteers and interns. The interns were encouraged to camp during the work week to save on travel costs. A very nice benefit was that the interns got to know each other better and learn about their projects. Halfway through the internship, the students presented a progress report to each other, their park mentors and other senior staff, college faculty, and the program administrator. This is probably the high point of the internship experience.

Although the program administrator is the principal administrative partner, the college and the park also have project administration responsibilities. The academic partner's primary responsibility is assuring the credit-worthiness of the park projects and the academic preparation of the prospective interns. The college faculty supervises the interns, assigns grades, and evaluates the program annually. The park selects and manages the projects and interns. Mesa Verde made clear that its responsibility was to mentor the students, not supervise them. Because the interns were not employees of the park, this distinction is probably important. Partners in Parks and Mesa Verde National Park signed a cooperative agreement that allowed the park to obligate its intern and summer-hire funds to Partners in Parks. As Partners in Parks interns, they received the same \$3,400 stipend and money for expenses, regardless of the source of funds. Neither the park nor the college were burdened with hiring the interns. Partners in Parks considered its interns independent contractors, and provided them with an Internal Revenue Ser-

vice Form 1099 as a report of earnings. Our uncomplicated approach to dealing with the economics of interns saved the other partners time and money.

As the provider of the funds that supported the internship program, Partners in Parks required assurance of the quality and completeness of the projects. The interns received partial payments twice during their project. They received their final payment when their park mentor and faculty advisor each approved the product of their internship.

When the interns completed their work, they submitted it to their mentor. The mentor reviewed and evaluated the quality and completeness of the report, asking for corrections or some further work as needed. Except for grammatical corrections, and sometimes the need for greater detail, intern final reports were usually well received. The close working relationship they had with park staff all but guaranteed a high-quality product. The mentors sent the intern reports and their evaluation to the faculty advisor and the program administrator. The faculty advisors sent their comments and approval to the program administrator and the interns received their final payment.

Partners in Parks collected program evaluations from the interns, park staff, and faculty advisors. These evaluations have proved helpful in solving logistical problems and program-related difficulties. One example was establishing a single start date for the summer internships and encouraging camping. The interns benefited from peer support. Another example was sending all the interns to the orientation training for seasonal interpreters. All had the same understanding of Mesa Verde National Park and what was expected of them.

Partners in Parks sent a final program

report to all entities that had funded the program. The final step is an early fall meeting when the program administrator, college faculty and dean, and park staff meet to review the previous internship season and plan the next year's projects.

### **Master's degree fellowship program.**

The purpose of this program is to provide a research fellowship opportunity within a national park for a master's degree student. As part of the agreement with the park, the student will accomplish a related resource management objective.

We began a fellowship project at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area with two consecutive CCI matching grants, which were obligated to Partners in Parks to administer under our NPS cooperative agreement. Partners in Parks helped draft the first application. We raised funds from Utah foundations and worked with park staff to arrange for in-kind support from volunteer groups. Other in-kind matches came from a partner university in the form of overhead foregone and the value of the fellow's faculty advisor supervisory time.

The project was to remove ravenna grass and a non-native crayfish from a side canyon as the first steps toward recovering the natural habitat. The research part of the project was to determine the appropriate methodology for accomplishing habitat restoration. Two successive master's degree students were recruited to conduct their thesis research under the supervision of a park staff member—the principal investigator—and the students' thesis advisor.

Partners in Parks advertised the initial research fellowship opportunity among the three Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units in the NPS Intermountain Region and one in the Western Region. The NPS research coordinator at Northern Arizona University

(NAU), which happens to be the closest graduate university to the park, helped us find candidates. We transferred funds to the university to pay for the students' stipend and project-related expenses, half of their tuition, health care and benefits, and partial overhead expenses of the university.

The park program officer and the faculty advisors of the candidates for the fellowship determined the eligibility and suitability of the research fellows. Partners in Parks requested a formal application from the candidates and then awarded them a fellowship to be administered by NAU.

Partners in Parks' role in the project after helping recruit the initial fellow was strictly financial. We functioned as a pass-through for the federal grant, sending the money to NAU, which was the employer of record for the student. Partners in Parks' financial agreement was with the Office of Grant and Contract Services at NAU. This office has to confirm that the agreed-upon in-kind match from the university is met. We raised funds to support our costs for being a partner in this project.

The program manager at Glen Canyon had the first-line responsibility for supervising the student's work. He ensured that park staff knew what the student was doing and when and where he was in the park. The program manager reviewed and approved all progress reports and other project products. He also served on the second student's thesis committee. The student's faculty advisor closely monitored project work from an academic point of view. He also ensured the student was paid monthly, and kept track of expenses.

The student's research report is submitted to the park program manager for approval. It forms the basis of his master's thesis, which his thesis committee



approves. The park program manager and the student's faculty advisor work together to assure the project has met agreed-upon objectives and that the resulting report meets park and academic standards. This communication is greatly facilitated when the program manager serves on the student's thesis committee. Partners in Parks has the responsibility for assuring all project funds are properly spent and all matching requirements have been met.

### Passing the Partners in Parks torch

Early on in our partnership venture with national parks, I was asked, "What are you doing that the parks cannot do for themselves?" The answer, then as now, is "Nothing." There is nothing magical about finding interns or volunteer partners to do substantive research and preservation projects in parks. It just takes a commitment to do so and a willingness to do the preparation, administration, supervision, and follow-up that will be necessary.

Look at the program and project examples above. What fits your needs? Design good projects that are not complicated. If they have multiple objectives that can be met over time, then you won't be spending all your time designing new projects. Be sure senior park managers as well as the proposed staff mentor are strong supporters of interns or volunteers. Your partners need

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Figure 2. "Most importantly, our crews gained a real morale boost from the enthusiastic responses the students had to the work we do." —*Mesa Verde National Park archaeologist*

to feel that what they are doing for the park is worthwhile, because it is.

Don't cut corners on financial support for interns. Stipends make it possible for students, who must earn money to attend college, to participate in a very valuable professional experience. Providing funds for travel or lodging expenses allows non-local students to participate.

Don't let the usual excuses stop you from starting an intern program. The rewards are too great to ignore. You get work done, the students receive invaluable professional experience, and the impact on your staff can be great (Figure 2).