

Bison Trails

9:03



From the Oklahoma State Coordinator

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

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Early in my career, I had a supervisor express to me “perception is reality”. Since that time, I have used that phrase many times. I liken it to the fact that we all see the world through different eyes and our reality of any given situation is based on the totality of our experiences. Our perception can, in fact, alter our own reality, as well as others. How we present ourselves can have a large influence on others’ perceptions of us. To coin another phrase “image is everything”, or is it? If we appear to be confident does that make it so? How many of us associate actors and actresses with the roles they have played, the perceptions of themselves that they presented to us.

We strive in public service to maintain a positive image. We do not want our actions to reflect poorly on our agency, our workplace, our families, or on ourselves. It is hard, at times, to walk that line and not put our proverbial foot in our mouth. So, we are working with perceptions based on our actions or our image. In this day and age, it is even more difficult to maintain that positive image with all the different social media platforms. Everyone that has access to the internet has an opportunity to affect our image. Even the press sometimes can work against us.

To make the image conscious issue even more difficult is the concept that our actions and the perception of us individually can have an impact on

the perception of the collective. In other words, our actions, or lack thereof, can certainly reflect positively, or negatively on everyone around us. We see it all the time in the media. When the actions of one person make everyone in that organization look bad. We have seen it over the years on college campuses, fraternities and hazing, college coaches doing something that reflects poorly on their university. We have even seen it in our own agency when the actions of a few put us all in a negative light.

This is nothing new for us or society in general. We stereotype groups based on perceptions and affiliations. We alter our reality based on something we read or heard. We were unpacking some boxes at home, because five years later that is still what we do, and I found an old Chickasaw National Recreation Area newsletter from 1984. For some reason I had saved it all these years, probably because I am a packrat at heart. There was a short article in the newsletter that was as meaningful then as it is today. It read as follows:

Good Image Can be Damaged

“Townsppeople think the world of us most of the time; our success with Veterans Lake has certainly enhanced that positive image. But, other actions can hurt; even those by individuals off duty. An employee was observed speeding down the main drag and throwing an object out; another was observed wearing the uniform with arrowhead even after he was through with work for the season. True. But not helpful for our collective image. One dumb action can neutralize one thousand attaboys; they say.”

The more things change, the more they stay the same. 35 years later and we are still faced with the same pitfalls. We should be mindful of our collective influence in our communities. We should strive to maintain that positive image and keep the reality that people perceive of us to be not only accurate and true, but positive also.

-Bill Wright

25 Years Later: One Ranger's Perspective

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Ranger



Sunburst Through the Field of Empty Chairs / Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum Photo

April 19, 1995.

It seems like a lifetime ago. At the same time, it feels like it was yesterday. 25 years have passed since that fateful morning, but many of us can vividly remember where we were and what we were doing when we heard news of the explosion in downtown Oklahoma City that killed 168 persons.

For me, I was still young. A sophomore in high school in Ponca City, OK. Four days removed from my 16th birthday. I would have been on my way to my second hour algebra class at the time. The spread of news was a little bit slower in 1995. I did not find out what had happened until lunch, and it was not until early afternoon when our class was able to watch media coverage on one of the school's televisions. Our class sat in that room and watched the news coverage. Hardly anyone made a sound, and some of my classmates even had tears in their eyes. While we didn't feel or hear the bomb in Ponca City, we felt the impact in our community.

I did not know any of those who were killed in the bombing, but I knew family members who lost their loved ones. I remember their grief and the pain. I remember the prayer services, the blue ribbons, and the outpouring of

support and donations. Coming together and lifting each other up was never something new. It was always we did when we saw our friends, families, and neighbors in need. When the world was watching, they saw us doing what we have always done. Today, we know that as the Oklahoma Standard.

A quarter of a century later, our next generations are growing up in a world where the Oklahoma City bombing has become a distant memory, a historical event, or even something that they've never heard of. It can be very difficult for these visitors to be able to know how they have been forever changed by terrorism.

As partners with the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum, the National Park Service takes great pride in working together to remember the stories of April 19, 1995. Our focus as Park Rangers is to be available on the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial to answer visitor questions, and present formal interpretive programs to visitors and groups.

In 2016, the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum received the Every Kid in a Park grant from the National Park Foundation. The grant provides funding for

cont. on pg 6

Oklahoma City National Memorial

Knowing the Names

John Buchkoski, Park Guide



The Field of Empty Chairs at Night / Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum Photo

“Lucio Aleman Jr. . . Cheryl Hammon. . . W. Stephen Williams. . .”

Each day at the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum, voices read the names of each of the 168 victims of the Oklahoma City bombing in the Gallery of Honor. Those 168 names correspond with one chair out in the Field of Empty Chairs where the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building once stood. For the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, the memorial dedicated one day to each of the victims leading up to April 19, 2020.

Each morning, National Park Rangers spend time together as an office learning more about one person to honor his or her memory. On each person’s day, rangers make it a goal to share with visitors something special about each person. Many of those who were killed traveled, loved their families, were dedicated employees, enjoyed hobbies, or were avid sports fans.

Each person becomes more relatable as we learn about their lives. We realize that they were just like us and so valuable to their families, friends, and coworkers. We, the rangers and the visitors, can come to realize more intimately what each chair represents and reflect on the loss that so many people experienced on that tragic day twenty-five years ago.

This event will not be forgotten, and an even more important aspect is that we do not forget those who passed away on that tragic day. At the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum, the first words of the Mission Statement are “We come here to remember those who were killed,” and the NPS and Memorial Foundation strive to remember by learning more about each person so we can ensure that their memory is preserved and will endure for generations to come.

Survivor Tree

Hailey Franks, Park Guide

On April 19th 1995, there was an attack on the heartland. A Ryder truck filled with a 4,800 pound bomb was parked in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and when it detonated it killed 168 people and wounded hundreds more. Counted amongst those who survived is an American Elm Tree; our Survivor Tree.

In 1995, it sat in the middle of a parking lot across the street from the Murrah Building, and now 25 years later it still stands.

The Survivor Tree has had a long past, having been planted in that spot in the early 1900s. The tree watched as Oklahoma City grew up around it, and it watched as a Ryder truck was parked in front of the federal building on that fateful day. The tree was almost completely destroyed. The initial blast ripped off most of the limbs, burned



The Survivor Tree / Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum Photo

the leaves and charred the bark of the tree. Despite all this damage, it survived.

Twenty-five years later, we continue to come back to this American Elm that, despite the odds, survived the attack. It

stands as a testament to the resilience of Oklahomans and the strength that can be found within all of us. When faced with hatred and violence, we should all stand strong, just like the Survivor Tree has for the last 25 years.

Memorial Marathon Rescheduled

Due to public health precautions, the 2020 Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon has been postponed to Sunday, October 4, 2020.

All race registrations will automatically transfer to the fall date.

For more information, or to register for the *Run to Remember*, please visit okcmarathon.com.



Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum, 620 N. Harvey Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73102

25 Years later *(cont. from pg 3)*

4th grade students to visit the memorial and learn about the Oklahoma City bombing. Following their visit to the memorial, a park ranger visits the class at their school for more learning about the bombing. Since 2016, over 4,034 students have participated in the program, now known, as Every Kid Outdoors.

When I joined the National Park Service, I was unaware of the affiliation that the NPS shared with the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. In 2009, I was given the opportunity to become a student park guide with the NPS at the Memorial. It was moving to be able to share the story and symbolism of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial to visitors, and to listen to those who share their thoughts and feelings from that morning.

I will never forget talking with a school group from Blanchard, OK. Following the program, a father came up to me and thanked me for talking about the healing process. He had just lost his wife and he and his son, who was also there, had been struggling. For weeks, his son kept asking him when they were going to be happy again. The father explained to me that he couldn't answer his son's question, but during the program, his son was listening to every word I said. Following the program, his son gave him a hug and said that they are



Park Ranger Presenting Every Kid Outdoors / NPS Photo

going to make it one day at a time. We never know who we are going to meet when visitors come to the memorial. A simple answer to a question may even help a visitor with their own healing process.

25 years ago, I had no idea how involved my life would become with the events that unfolded that April morning. Part of the mission of the National Park Service is to preserve for *“this and future generations.”* We may not know the next twenty-five years will bring, but it has been an a privilege to help keep the story relevant, and to work with the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum to honor *“those who were killed, those who survived, and those changed forever.”*

Walking in a New Year

Matt Whitney, Community Outreach Ranger

On January 1, 2020, National Park Rangers in Oklahoma City partnered with the Greater Oklahoma City Parks & Trails Foundation, REI, OKC Parks, and Scissortail Park to host the 1st Annual “First Day Walk” in Oklahoma City.

Marsha Funk, Director of the Greater Oklahoma City Parks & Trails Foundation, got things started by welcoming over 250 participants and wishing everyone a Happy New Year. In addition, Melinda McMillan-Miller from OKC Parks and Matt Whitney from the National Park Service delivered remarks and encouraged all participants to continue to engage with their parks and public spaces during 2020 to improve their overall health and wellness. The participants then walked a lap around Scissortail Park to ring in the new year.

“We were thrilled with the turnout (just under 300) and hope it will be an annual event. It was a great example of what can be accomplished when groups work together,” said Marsha Funk.



Participants at the First Day Walk/ Greater OKC Parks and Trails Photo

The First Day Walk is patterned after the popular First Day Hikes that take place at many State Parks around the United States. Beginning in 1992 in Massachusetts, the First Day Hikes have grown to over 62,000 participants hiking over 110,000 miles. In 2012, First Day Hikes became a nationwide event.

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

EKO and Fishing Derby

Kate Roesch, Park Ranger

Federal Lands have a plethora of activities in which to participate. However, sometimes transportation to these amazing places can be deterrents to visiting. This spring and summer, Washita Battlefield will mitigate that problem for some students. As recipients of two National Park Foundation grants, local students will be able to participate in a day-long emersion experience at Washita Battlefield and at a Let's Go Fishing Camp followed by a Kids Fishing Derby.

The Open Outdoors for Kids Transportation Grant will bring over 350 4th and 9th grade students from Elk City to Washita Battlefield for a field trip like no other. Students will spend the day engaging in Cheyenne language lessons and experiencing the difficulty of signing treaties in a foreign language, hearing stories from 7th Cavalry living history soldiers, and walking in the footsteps of history by exploring the battlefield trail with Rangers.

The Junior Ranger Angler Grant will bring about 30 local Cheyenne students the opportunity to participate in a great



Jr. Ranger Anglers at the Fishing Derby / USFS Photo

American pastime, fishing. Washita Battlefield will partner with Black Kettle National Grassland to host a Let's Go Fishing Camp followed by the 31st Annual Kids Fishing Derby. Campers will learn about fishing regulations, fish biology, ecosystems, fishing basics, and historical facts related to fishing. By the end of camp, students will have gained enough knowledge to become Junior

Ranger Anglers. The new Junior Ranger Anglers will have the ability to put their new knowledge to the test by fishing in the Kids Fishing Derby at Skipout Lake.

As future stewards of Federal Lands, Washita Battlefield hopes that through these experiences, students will start that lifelong relationship to appreciate the nature around them.



7th Cavalry and Students / NPS Photo



Jr Ranger with Fish / USFS Photo

Find Your Place

Christian Schroll, Park Guide



Boy Scouts removing debris/ NPS Photo

Everybody has some place special that they love. Many times that place is in a National Park; whether it is next to towering rock formations, under the shade of a tree, or listening to the sway of grasses in a battlefield. National Parks have a place for all people. Across the country, every year, parks host a variety of activities and programs in some of those special places people love. Many of these programs would not be possible without the help of volunteers.

This past year at Washita Battlefield, many young people found their place volunteering at the park. Cheyenne School has a community service day each fall, where students volunteer at different sites in the area. The park had a group of 23 hardworking students and teachers who weeded, winterized, trimmed, and painted their way through the trails and the new overlook at the park. The trails looked completely transformed by the end the day!

This past December, 21 Boy Scouts and their Troop Leaders volunteered at the park to earn the latter. They participated in 10 hours of learning and service at the park to earn

the coveted Resource Stewardship Patch. Part of their experience included a special program put on by another volunteer group, the Star Creek Astronomical Society. They learned about the many things they could see in the night sky. Afterwards, participants had the opportunity to apply what they learned to the sky by using telescopes and binoculars to gaze at the stars.

Not a young person, maybe more young at heart? That's ok! We love all volunteers! Join us this upcoming year in one (or all) of the many opportunities to volunteer at Washita Battlefield. During National Park Week, on Volunteer Day April 19, join us to help plant pollinator habitat and have tons of fun while doing it!

Who doesn't love a walk down a beautiful trail in a National Park? Join us on June 7, in honor of National Trails Day, to spruce up our brand-new spiffy accessible battlefield trail, by replacing trail markers and signage. And if that's not enough for you, join us on October 3, to commemorate Federal Lands Day for a park-wide clean-up day.

Descending from a Survivor

Joel Shockley, Park Guide

They stand quietly together just off the west parking lot. Tall, sturdy and dancing in the southern breeze that blows around them. You almost hear the wind sing as it makes its way through their branches. They are a gift from a sister park from where their Mother keeps her steadfast post shading and protecting her visitors. They are American Elms, four fourteen-year-old trees, descendants of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Survivor Tree.

Cheyenne Chief Lawrence Hart, while addressing the Congressional Committee on the proposed Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in 1996, eloquently compared the tragedy of the Oklahoma City bombing with the brutal attack on Chief Black Kettle's village along the Washita in 1868. "Only then," Hart said, "did Congress understand this concept of sacred ground." Both are tragic events and part of our national history. On April 19, 2007, Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal members, U.S. Forest Service staff, and National Park Service officials planted four Survivor Tree saplings as



Washita Battlefield's Survivor Trees/ NPS Photo

part of the Open House ceremony for the new Visitor Center. Each tree is a living tribute to the 168 killed in the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, and a living memorial for those who died at the Washita.

There are four trees to represent the sacred number four in Cheyenne and Arapaho culture. The four seasons, the four cardinal directions, and even including their leadership, the 44 chiefs. Though 127 years apart, these trees remind visitors of two unfortunate events, and to seek out strength, solace and courage to face the future.

Media Update

Christian Schroll, Park Guide

Park rangers at Washita Battlefield are working to create new displays and publications to provide visitors with new ways to learn about the park. Our first new publication that we are in the process of rolling out is a new Junior Ranger Book. This will provide young and young at heart visitors with a fun and up to date method to learn about and explore the park.

Our next project is making a new display on smudging and smudge bowls for the overlook. With the completion of the new overlook and paved trail, we have installed a smudge bowl. Smudge bowls are used with the burning of different plants and herbs as a form of purification and prayer. We hope that this display will provide visitors with a new view into the Plains Indian culture to increase their understanding of the site.

To truly understand the events that happened at the Washita it is necessary to tie them to the much wider story of the Plains Indian Wars that we seek to share with our visitors with these new offerings.



Smudge Bowl / NPS Photo

Come to the park and take the Junior Ranger challenge, walk the new trail and see the smudge bowl, or pick up a site bulletin to learn more.

Chickasaw National Recreation Area

Watching for Eagles

Megan Wilkins, Park Ranger



Chickasaw NRA visitors looking for eagles/ NPS Photo

Chickasaw National Recreation Area held its annual Eagle Watch on the mornings of January 18 and January 25, 2020. Despite cold, blustery weather on the first weekend, over seventy people attended. Beautiful, sunny weather and warm temperatures on the second weekend resulted in another well attended program, with another seventy visitors attending. Park visitors met at the Travertine Nature Center and attended a 30 minute ranger led presentation about the American bald eagle, followed by field sessions at the Buckhorn area on Lake of the Arbuckles. At the lake, a team of rangers used spotting scopes to locate bald eagles in flight and roosting around the lake shoreline. After bald eagles were found, visitors observed the eagles through the scopes, sometimes from over a half-mile distant.

As lakes freeze over in the northern states, bald eagles move south to waters that are not frozen to find prey fish. The Eagle

Watch program at Chickasaw National Recreation Area began after the American bald eagle conservation status moved from “endangered” to “threatened” in 1995, and wintering bald eagles became more common in the area. Over the years Eagle Watch has become a favorite with visitors at Chickasaw National Recreation Area. In 2007 the conservation status of the bird had improved to the point it was removed from listing all together, and eagle numbers continue to rise. Many park visitors see a bald eagle for the first time while attending Eagle Watch.

The ranger presentation and the field trip were just the first half of Eagle Watch. Visitors were also invited by the Chickasaw Nation to attend activities at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in the afternoon, including a free viewing of the PBS Nature special American Eagle at the Anoli theater, as well as other special activities.

The People who Built Platt

Megan Wilkins, Park Ranger

Who are the people that built the park? Were they ranchers? Governors? Superintendents? Rangers? Architects? Laborers? Visitors?

On December 6 and 7, 2019, Chickasaw National Recreation Area and community partners presented the 14th Historic Candlelight Tour. Over 450 people attended the two day event.

Over a thousand candle luminaries lit Flower Park as actors presented scenes from the park's history. This year's program theme examined the people who shaped the park in its early days.

Individual contributions to the success of the park have and continue to come from a variety of sources. Many times those important contributions come from less recognized roles. Tour participants were probably surprised to learn that a young woman was designated the Acting Superintendent in the 1920's, a time when such leadership roles were assumed to go to a man. Another scene told the story of a young CCC worker who was also an exceptional athlete, and how his efforts would build features of Platt National Park that are enjoyed today. Eight additional scenes examined other interesting, noteworthy, and critical moments from the park's past.

About 100 volunteers and paid staff from a variety of organizations contributed their time and effort in this year's candlelight tour, including the Chickasaw Nation, Sulphur High School, Sulphur Rotary Club, Sulphur Chamber of Commerce, and Crossway Church, as well as many individuals.

Park staff looks forward to working with its partners and volunteers to present the next candlelight tour in 2020, which



Actor at the Candlelight Tour 2019/ NPS Photo

will move to the fall. This should allow for the weather to be more favorable for both visitors and volunteers.

The fifteenth Historic Candlelight Tour will be on October 16th and 17th, 2020, and the theme will be, "The Roaring '20s." There currently is a need for historically accurate living history attire,

as well as volunteer seamstresses, tailors, knitters, and milliners to help create living history clothing.

Reservations for the 2020 Candlelight Tour will be available beginning September 1, 2020 by calling the Travertine Nature Center at 580.622.7234.



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U.S. Department of the Interior

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#FindYourPark

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BisonTrails

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BisonTrails is the official newsletter of the units of the national park system located in the State of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma State Coordinator
 Bill Wright

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Cover Photo
 9:03 Gate at the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum / OKCNM Photo

Support Your Parks

Friends of Chickasaw NRA

The purpose of the Friends of Chickasaw National Recreation Area is to promote public appreciation of and support for Chickasaw National Recreation Area. This support includes conducting interpretive programs, increasing public awareness regarding the park and its mission, fundraising, and other volunteer activities. The IRS has certified this group as a private non-profit organization (501c3) and membership fees for joining are tax deductible. Anyone interested in receiving a membership application can call 580-622-7220.

Friends of Chickasaw NRA
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 Sulphur, OK 73086

Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is a private non-profit organization, and does not receive any annual operating funds from the federal, state, or local government. Museum admissions, store sales, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, earnings from an endowment, and private fundraising allow the Memorial and Museum to be self-sustaining.

Donations to the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum help change lives each and every day. If you would like to make a donation, write to PO Box 323, Oklahoma City, OK, 73101, or call 405-235-3313.