

THE HISTORY OF DEEP CREEK VOLUNTEERS

www.DeepCreekVolunteers.com

by Ron Mercer

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Deep Creek Volunteers was formed in October 2002 by several concerned hot springs users. At that time a group of more or less regular visitors, some of whom had been visiting the springs since the early seventies, grew more and more concerned about the land dispute and ownership issues surrounding the Bowen Ranch.

Many of these issues have evolved historically and are primarily based on statements and claims made by a person who goes by the alias "Katrina Island". Katrina Island has regularly posted these allegations on the Deep Creek Hot Springs (DCHS) Discussion Forum website.

The veracity of the allegations made was not our concern. However, these allegations and the subsequent discussions and rantings posted on the DCHS Discussion Forum represented both sides of the dispute and brought a significant amount of negative publicity towards the most recognized natural hot springs on public land in Southern California. Our fear was that all this negative publicity would discourage the family atmosphere that the springs have always had and scare away potential future visitors to the springs who may feel it's no longer safe to visit. Ultimately, we were worried this negative publicity could eventually lead to the United States Forest Service (USFS) considering closing Deep Creek Hot Springs to public access.

In order to improve the public image of the springs and to assist in keeping the springs clean, safe and open for public visitation, a small group of concerned individuals who are very familiar with the springs and the many issues surrounding it decided to form an independent group that would not include any of the persons closely involved in the land dispute arguments. As a result, a series of meetings was proposed to be conducted at the springs to discuss this idea. From these meetings it was clear that there was a good deal of skepticism regarding if we could form such a group and whether it could remain independent from the parties involved in the land dispute. As a consequence, only a few of the people that attended the initial meetings were willing to sign up for anything until they could foresee the potential viability and effectiveness of the group. However, there was a feeling that we all loved the springs and would hate to see them ruined or closed so it was worthwhile trying to do something. As a result, we decided to take things one step at a time. First we would chose a name, then we would ask people to sign up, and then with those initial members we would prepare a mission statement and a brochure that we could present to the USFS and eventually publish and distribute to visitors at the springs.

Of all these tasks, choosing the name was probably the hardest part. As we had no committed members, we utilized the DCHS Discussion Forum to reach out to regular posters and potential, initial members to determine a name for the group. We started out with about 14 names and after seven rounds of voting ended up with Deep Creek Volunteers. We then started accepting member to join and wrote up a tentative mission statement and flyer which was discussed both on the DCHS Discussion Forum and at our meetings in person. Finally, we presented our flyer to the USFS, and after about two months it was approved by them with only minor modifications. The most significant

issue was that the USFS did not want us proclaiming that there were no laws against nudity on public land, but instead wanted us to indicate that nudity was tolerated within a given area. When I asked them to define the area for allowable nudity, I expected them to respond that nudity was permissible in the immediate vicinity of the hot springs. Instead they proposed the entire Deep Creek drainage area within the San Bernardino National Forest boundary with the exception of a quarter of a mile from the area known as the T-6 crossing close to Lake Arrowhead.

As a result of this whole process and the reluctance of people to initially join, it is difficult to say with certainty who are founding members were. However, I think it would be fair to say that the members that were involved in this whole process and joined by the time the brochure was approved are our founding members. They would include in addition to myself, Laughing Bear, Wizard, Sycamore Laughing, Paul Tall Tree, AZ Mike, Paul P., Scott, Naked Man and DCR.

Shortly after we reached this point we felt that it would be beneficial to affiliate ourselves with The Naturist Society (TNS) in the event that we should we ever face the risk of DCHS losing its clothing optional tolerance or being closed to public access. We decided to invite TNS Regional Board member Allen Baylis to our next meeting, and after listening to his presentation it was decided that DCV would become a participating member in their network.

The one minor setback we had was that when we tried to update our flyer which included the TNS logo approved by the USFS, we were denied and instructed to remove our brochure box from the post at the USFS 4 wheel drive parking lot near the top of the Bowen Ranch trail leading down to the springs. New local management at the USFS applied a regulation that no material may be posted on government property if it did not comply with a series of requisites and the nature of the clothing optional custom made it highly unlikely that we could achieve this. For this reason we decided to move the location of our box to the Bowen Ranch where it has been ever since.

Thanks to the efforts and dedication of our friend Lloyd Johnson from Black Beach Bares we got our first web page link to his site. I would have liked to do it myself but did not have the knowledge or the time. Then in 2004 Ralph Maese joined our group and purchased the domain we have today (deepcreekvolunteers.com) and took over all the work that Lloyd had done. Currently, our website receives between 30-50 hits a day.

Deep Creek Volunteers has been steadily growing. Most of those people that initially were skeptical have since joined our group. Today DCV has 66 members and its presence and contribution towards the springs is recognized and appreciated by visitors and USFS alike. Our members continue to help by carrying out trash, cleaning and repairing the pools, keeping up the website, keeping our box on the Bowen Ranch supplied with flyers, educating visitors on appropriate etiquette and the clothing optional custom, answering emails regarding the current condition of the springs and being the eyes and ears for the forest service. We look forward to continually add more members to our group and to help preserve this beautiful spot to be able to pass it down to our children and grandchildren.